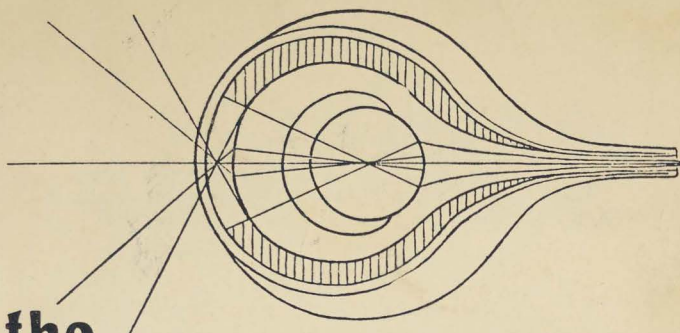


PERIODICAL SHELVED IN L-3



# **STUDIES** in the **ANTHROPOLOGY OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION**

VOLUME 2    NUMBER 2    FALL 1975

## **CONTENTS**

- 65 Introduction  
Pictures as Documents: Resources for the Study  
of North American Ethnohistory / *Joanna Cohan Scherer*
- 67 You Can't Believe Your Eyes:  
Inaccuracies in Photographs  
of North American Indians / *Joanna Cohan Scherer*
- 80 The Savage European:  
A Structural Approach to European Iconography  
of the American Indian / *Bernadette J. Bucher*
- 87 Cinéma Naïveté:  
A Study of Home Moviemaking  
as Visual Communication / *Richard Chalfen*
- 104 Is an Ethnographic Film a Filmic Ethnography? / *Jay Ruby*
- 112 The Situation and Tendencies  
of the Cinema in Africa / *Jean Rouch*

## **REVIEWS AND DISCUSSION**

- 122 Worth and Adair: *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration  
of Film Communication and Anthropology* / *Margaret Mead*
- 124 Achtenberg: *The Cable Book* / *Kay Beck*
- 126 Munn: *Walbiri Iconography* / *Mark Glazer*

## **128 NOTES AND NEWS**



# STUDIES in the ANTHROPOLOGY OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

*Editor:* SOL WORTH

Annenberg School of Communications  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA 19122

*Editorial Board:* JAY RUBY (Brief Communications)  
O. MICHAEL WATSON (Book Reviews)  
STEVE FELD  
LARRY GROSS

## A PUBLICATION OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

The purpose of the Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication (SAVICOM) is to bring together and support researchers, scholars and practitioners who are studying human behavior in context through visual means and who are interested in: the study, use and production of anthropological films, and photography for research and teaching; the analysis of visual symbolic forms from a cultural-historical framework; visual theories, technologies and methodologies for recording and analyzing behavior and the relationships among the different modes of communication; the analysis of the structuring of reality as evidenced by visual productions and artifacts; the cross-cultural study of art and artifacts from a social, cultural, historical and aesthetic point of view; the relationship of cultural and visual perception; the study of the forms of social organization surrounding the planning, production and use of visual symbolic forms; the support of urgent ethnographic filming; and/or the use of the media in cultural feedback.

The Society's primary tasks are coordination and promotion of interests and activities outlined above. To that end, it publishes *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, occasional Special Publications and a Filmography. (See inside back cover for a list of publications available from the Society and for Information to Authors.)

SAVICOM works closely with the Anthropological Film Research Institute, a committee of anthropologists concerned with the creation of a national anthropological film archive and research center at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC.

SAVICOM's annual business meeting is held during the American Anthropological Association meetings (usually held in late November). All SAVICOM members are encouraged to attend. During the AAA meetings SAVICOM sponsors a number of symposia and is responsible for the program of film screenings. Members are encouraged to develop symposia and to suggest films for screening at the annual meeting, and for review in the audiovisuals section of the *American Anthropologist* or in *Studies*.

### OFFICERS

#### *President (1974-75)*

Sol Worth  
Annenberg School of Communications  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA 19174

#### *President (1975-77)*

Jay Ruby  
Department of Anthropology  
Temple University  
Philadelphia, PA 19122

#### *Secretary-Treasurer (1974-76)*

Joan Williams  
Anthropology Film Center  
P.O. Box 493  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

### *Board of Directors*

Tim Asch (Documentary Ed. Resources)	(1974-76)
Napoleon Chagnon (Pennsylvania State University)	(1973-75)
Philip Dark (Southern Illinois University)	(1974-76)
Gordon Gibson (Smithsonian Institution)	(1974-76)
Laura Greenberg (University of British Columbia)	(1974-76)
Paul Hockings (University of Illinois, Chicago Circle)	(1973-75)
John Marshall (Documentary Ed. Resources)	(1974-76)
Carroll Williams (Anthropological Film Center)	(1973-75)
Sol Worth (University of Pennsylvania)	(1973-75)

### *Advisory Committee*

Dan Ben-Amos (University of Pennsylvania)	(1973-75)
Emily de Brigard (Museum of Modern Art)	(1974-76)
Ray Birdwhistell (University of Pennsylvania)	(1973-76)
Karl Heider (Stanford University)	(1974-76)
Edward Hall (Northwestern University)	(1973-76)
Dell Hymes (University of Pennsylvania)	(1973-75)
Alan Lomax (Columbia University)	(1973-75)
Margaret Mead (American Museum of Natural History)	(1973-76)
Richard Sorenson (Smithsonian Institution)	(1974-76)

### *Publications Board*

Sol Worth (University of Pennsylvania), Chairperson  
Karl Heider (Stanford University)  
Jay Ruby (Temple University)

The Society is open to all interested persons. To become a member write to SAVICOM, 1703 New Hampshire Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20009 for an application form. For further information or questions concerning the Society, write to the President at the address listed above.



## INTRODUCTION

### PICTURES AS DOCUMENTS: RESOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF NORTH AMERICAN ETHNOHISTORY

JOANNA COHAN SCHERER

The following two papers—Joanna Cohan Scherer's "You Can't Believe Your Eyes: Inaccuracies in Photographs of North American Indians" and Bernadette Bucher's "The Savage European: A Structural Approach to European Iconography of the American Indian"—were part of a symposium entitled "Pictures as Documents: Resources for the Study of North American Ethnohistory," presented at the 72nd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in New Orleans in November 1973, the purpose of which was to show how some ethnologists are utilizing still pictures,<sup>1</sup> and the importance of these records as documents.

It became obvious in organizing the symposium that few ethnologists deal with, or are interested in pictorial records. Most interest in visual material has come from art historians (Baxandall 1972), especially those studying symbolism (Vastokas 1974). Art historians have learned to deal with visual material by having as their primary data visual documents, such as paintings or sculpture. In evaluating their data these historians study the various versions, copies, sketches, or prior models in order to interpret the image. They also study stylistic traits of "the work" from which they can frequently identify unknown works. However, art historians (Baxandall is an exception) are primarily interested in the work itself and not the historical and social circumstances that "created" the work. Ethnologists, on the other hand, have had little experience in using visual material.<sup>2</sup> They have instead dealt primarily with verbal material, either written or spoken. This is despite the fact that the original field situation is a definite visual experience, but it is one that is transferred almost at once by the ethnologists into written notes. As they become more interested in pictorial records, it seems logical that ethnologists should turn to art historians for their methodology.<sup>3</sup> The main difference between art historians and ethnologists is that for the latter the visual image will not be an end in itself but a means to enable the ethnologist to understand the wider culture(s) which "created" the image.

It is apparent to those of us who are working with documents in visual anthropology that, contrary to some opinion, still pictures are not more objective than data obtained by any other means. Because they are nonverbal as well as pictorial does not make them any less subject to speculation or any less open to organization, manipulation

and structuring (Gombrich 1960). We must interpret these data just as we must interpret any historical document. This interpretation must be based on our understanding of the motives, intentions, and contemporary culture of the picture maker as well as the culture of the people depicted. We need to understand not only each culture but the impingement of the one culture on the other. We must understand society's attitude toward the subject and the extent to which the photographer or illustrator upheld these stereotypes of society. Further, we must understand the methods by which the picture was made, the peculiarities and limitations of the medium, the style of its articulation, and the cultural factors surrounding the medium (i.e., how were pictures used and thought of by the culture at a particular point in history). All these have an ultimate effect on how we interpret visual material. Thus no picture, whether artist's drawing or photographer's view, is culture-free. The artist draws what s(he) thinks s(he) sees, what the culture tells one is "right" to see, or what s(he) wants to depict, and the photographer selects from innumerable views what s(he) will photograph to much the same purpose. Neither is objective.

The problem then is how to deal with a body of anthropological pictorial material that presents unique visual historical data. Part of the problem in dealing with this material is to determine how much the image can "say" without words. Bucher describes the confusion caused by de Bry's engraving of Timucua Indians sowing crops. There the artist depicted both the European technique as well as the native method, but in his verbal description described only the native method. The image and the verbal information thus conflict. On the other hand, visual material can add information that the verbal description of the observer omitted. Thus in Bucher's figure showing the Timucua preparing for a feast the artist le Moyne showed the technique of leaching but didn't understand it. Le Moyne described what he saw "... others [cooks] put water for washing into a hole in the ground" (Cumming et al. 1971:191). Bucher's ethnographic knowledge plus Cabeza's verbal description of leaching among other Indians helped confirm the information in the picture. Similarly, Scherer's verification of Hillers'/Powell's use of Ute clothing on Paiute Indians was confirmed only after research in manuscript and published sources. Thus, in some cases, pictures include information not understood at the time, but later verified, while in other cases pictures distort the ethnographic facts.

Although these papers may seem different on some levels they are similar in that both deal with pictorial records of the people of native North America as seen by Europeans or White Americans. Bucher's paper deals with engravings (some copied from lost originals made by European artists who visited America), which interestingly enough show more about the European artist's perception of the native culture rather than the native culture itself. She shows how they tied into the artist's own cultural framework, especially into the political intentions underlying the people visualized. The image told something about the Indian's culture, but was frequently so mixed with European culture traits that it is difficult to separate out ethnographic fact. Scherer's paper also deals with biases and underlying goals, but of photographers of North American Indians in the late nineteenth century. Thus in both papers the agent who created the



image becomes one of the main focuses in an attempt to interpret the picture.

As it is we have covered but a small part of pictorial records of Indians as seen by Whites, for there are hundreds of drawings and paintings of the Indians by European or White explorers (Gunther 1972), missionaries (Point 1967), and travelers (Catlin 1841). There are also tens of thousands of photographs of North American Indians taken by many types of photographers (Scherer 1970). Further, there are visual materials made by Indians themselves, such as the numerous winter counts (Howard 1960), signatures on treaties and deeds (Feest 1973), and pictorial interpretations of religion or other aspects of their experience (Ewers 1972). Each of the above materials, although unique, can I believe be analyzed in much the same ways as those described in these papers.

The papers presented are attempts by anthropologists to develop methodologies to deal with pictures as documents, and to discuss some of the problems encountered in using visual material. This attempt is vital as more and more of our research methods utilize visual techniques. Visual documents have to be dealt with, and it is somewhat unfortunate that only as we are being virtually inundated by visual data (still pictures as well as motion picture footage) are we even beginning to think of the material as primary documents. It is hoped that the following articles will stimulate other anthropologists to use and experiment with methodologies for better utilization of pictorial materials in anthropological research.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I use the term "still pictures" to include photographs (including all the early forms such as the daguerreotype, ambrotype, tintype, stereograph) as well as paintings in whatever medium (oil, watercolor, pen and ink, pencil) and woodcuts, engravings, and lithographs. The latter were sometimes, but not always, based upon an original source such as a sketch or painting.

<sup>2</sup> Ethnologists such as Bateson and Mead (1942) or Collier (1967) who have used still and motion picture film are, of course, the major exception.

<sup>3</sup> An example of the use of the same methodology is as follows. The study of stylistic traits is used in art history to identify the works of a painter and can be applied in the same way to identify a photographer. Photographers such as Adam Clark Vroman or William Henry Jackson, who both photographed North American Indians in

the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century had distinctive portrait styles for arranging their subjects, typical backgrounds and even limited specific studio props (Pilling n.d.). Thus, even if unaccompanied by written documents, we can sometimes identify a photographer or date span by studio furnishing, props, or portrait style.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Bateson, Gregory, and Margaret Mead  
1942 *Balinese Character*. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences.
- Baxandall, Michael  
1972 *Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Catlin, George  
1841 *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians: Written During Eight Years Travel Among the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America in 1832-39*. 2 vols. New York: Wiley and Putnam.
- Collier, John  
1967 *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*. Studies in Anthropological Method. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Cumming, W. P., R. A. Skelton, and D. B. Quinn  
1971 *The Discovery of North America*. London: Elek Books.
- Ewers, John C.  
1971 *A Unique Pictorial Interpretation of Blackfoot Indian Religion in 1846-47*. *Ethnohistory* 18:3.
- Feest, Christian  
1973 *Personal communication*.
- Gombrich, Ernst H.  
1960 *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gunther, Erna  
1972 *Indian Life on the Northwest Coast of North America as Seen by the Early Explorers and Fur Traders during the Last Decade of the 18th Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Howard, James  
1960 *Dakota Winter Counts as a Source of Plains History*. *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 173.
- Pilling, Arnold  
n.d. *William Henry Jackson as Anthropological Photographer in the Southwest*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Point, Nicolas  
1967 *Wilderness Kingdom. Indian Life in the Rocky Mountains 1840-1847*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Scherer, Joanna Cohan  
1970 *Indian Images. Photographs of North American Indians 1847-1928*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Vastokas, Joan M.  
1974 *The Shamanic Tree of Life. In Stone, Bones and Skin, Ritual and Shamanic Art*. *Artscanada* (Dec. 1973-Jan. 1974).



## YOU CAN'T BELIEVE YOUR EYES: INACCURACIES IN PHOTOGRAPHS OF NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS

JOANNA COHAN SCHERER

Pictures, especially photographs, have been either ignored or overlooked by most anthropologists. Reproduced for the purpose of breaking up text or as fillers for lack of text, they are often found without captions, source, or any documentation, or cropped beyond recognition. Further, there has been little attempt at source criticism<sup>1</sup> as there has been in art history. Anthropological pictures can be important documentary sources but before they can be used must be critically analyzed and evaluated.

Drawings, paintings, engravings, and even photographs are no more objective than written material. The artist or photographer has a point of view, a personal or cultural bias, and although the camera may pick up more than the photographer originally intended, still the photographer aimed his camera at but one point of one event in a continuum of action (Pitt 1972:50). Thus, though a picture is an actual record of an event and not an after-the-fact record, such as a painting made from memory by an artist who witnessed the scene, or field notes written up during or after the event, its objectivity is limited by the data accompanying it.

Some of the data on which later researchers might evaluate the authenticity of visual material are as follows: who took the picture, when, where, why (purpose for which it was taken), how (type of equipment used), who is in the picture and their reaction to being photographed. Unfortunately, too many photographs remain undocumented and thus almost useless as source material for the scholar using pictures as ethnographic data. This does not mean that all undocumented picture material is totally useless. Undocumented pictures, especially photographs, have been frequently used as source material for certain purposes. Travel

magazines or popularized works often show photographs with no information, which nevertheless give one the "feel" for something. This may be as specific as what type of architecture one will see in a particular city, or as unspecific as views that give one a "feeling" for life. Thus the often-used phrase, "A picture is worth a thousand words," depicts the use of photographs for that purpose. The family picture album with its scanty if any documentation has always been used by itself both for entertainment and for reinforcing kinship ties. In addition, photographs of buildings or sites without detailed documentation may be used as source material for reconstruction purposes. These then are some of the uses of undocumented picture material.

Some of the factors that are vital to a study of anthropological photographs, especially historical ones, are a knowledge of the limitations of early photographic equipment, a comprehension of the photographer's biases and goals, and a knowledge of the inclinations of the subject being photographed.

Today's pocket-size or instant developing cameras make it difficult to understand the conditions under which early photographers made their pictures. Figure 1, taken on the Hayden Expedition in 1870, shows one of the cameras used by William Henry Jackson, a well-known photographer of North American Indians. In addition to the burro loaded with this gigantic camera, Jackson needed a wagonload of chemicals, a dark tent, and hundreds of glass negatives while in the field. Negatives made of thick glass were used until 1884 when George Eastman introduced the first paper-roll film. The glass plates were frequently eight by ten inches or eleven by fourteen inches in size and about a quarter of an inch thick; they weighed almost a pound apiece. In the photographic process the glass was covered with an iodized collodion and then bathed in a silver nitrate solution. The picture was then exposed for several minutes to fix the image and developed immediately (Gernsheim 1969:194-199). The plate could be used only when it was wet, and thus this type of photography became known as the wet-plate process (Taft 1942:119). After the plate was dry it was varnished and packed in a wooden grooved box to await making prints at a later time. An individual being photographed was frequently backed into a metal vise to keep him, particularly his head, still during the exposure. Figure 14 shows the bottom half of the stand for a head vise painted out by some later individual at least several generations after it was shot. It was taken in 1868 by A. Zeno Shindler who probably was so used to the head vise that he didn't even see it. It was reproduced unretouched in the *Handbook of North American Indians* (Vol. 30 of the Bureau of American Ethnology publication, Volume 2, p. 66) in 1910 "exemplifying" the Nez Perce. Even with these precautions many views are blurred. Photographic equipment was thus cumbersome, fragile, and most difficult to master. This limitation of equipment should be taken into consideration when one views posed, "stoic" portraits of Indians. Not until later did more portable, faster-speed equipment allow for the spontaneity of everyday behavior to be captured.

The goals and biases of particular photographers are very important. There were many people taking photographs as early as 1860 despite the difficulties of using the equipment. Two types of photographers, quite different in their goals,

---

*Joanna Cohan Scherer is currently Illustrations Researcher for the 20-volume Handbook of North American Indians project of the Smithsonian Institution. Author of Indians: The Great Photographs That Reveal North American Indian Life 1847-1929, published by Crown in the United States in 1973, in Great Britain in 1974, and in Germany in 1975, she is also the author of "The History of American Indian Research at the Smithsonian," in the Smithsonian Institution Festival of American Folklife Program, 1970. She also was organizer of Indian Images, a traveling exhibit and catalog of the Smithsonian Institution in 1970 to 1976—currently a Bicentennial exhibit.*

---





Figure 1



Figure 2

although not always mutually exclusive, were the anthropological photographer and the commercial photographer. The anthropological photographer was primarily interested in documenting how the Indian currently lived, probably because he believed Indians were a vanishing race. Included in this group were official government cameramen who took photographs of treaty councils and delegates visiting Washington, D.C., and museum anthropologists doing fieldwork. The commercial photographer, on the other hand, some with permanent studios in the frontier towns, some with traveling galleries,<sup>2</sup> took pictures primarily to make money. These men often attempted to make their subjects look exotic, savage, or romantic to create more interest in their product—the Indian prints they sold. One should not underestimate the popularity of this type of product. In an age without movies, television, or the automobile, the family library and parlor were the seat of family entertainment. Here photographs, especially the stereograph, were a vital part of family fun. Indian stereos were especially appealing and thus profitable to the photographer.

The inclinations of the subject also need to be considered. Even if the subjects were camera shy, because they lacked understanding about the photographic process or through fear that their soul was being tampered with, their personal preference influenced the picture obtained. Other preferences are unusual costumes which appear in a picture and are the result of the individual's peculiarities and not the custom of a group (Figure 2). The use of an item such as a feather duster used by Sky Striking the Earth, a Chippewa photographed at the Smithsonian in 1896, was probably the man's



own idea and used as a substitute for a traditional head-dress.<sup>3</sup> Another frequent personal preference which is seen in interpreting a picture is the primping that often took place before a picture was taken. Thus dressing up in ceremonial costume to perform mundane activities or being surrounded by unrelated artifacts is commonly seen.

All kinds of tricks can be used to get the desired photographic results, including requesting the printer to print the photograph in a special way to block out certain activity or to alter something. For example, John P. Harrington, a prominent ethnologist and linguist requested in the 1930s, that his negatives of California Indians be printed extra light because his Indian friends did not want to see themselves with dark skin (Harrington n.d.).

The limitations of photographic equipment, cameramen's biases, and subjects' inclinations thus all contribute to discrepancies in the ethnographic picture record and must be considered in a study of historical Indian photographs. Following are some example of specific inaccuracies.

John K. Hillers was the chief photographer of John Wesley Powell's second Colorado River Expedition of 1871-73. He began the trip as a boatman but replaced the two professional photographers when they left the expedition. Hillers learned the art of photography rapidly and his pictures on this trip are always remarkable, if not always ethnographically accurate. He later became the chief photographer for the U.S. Geological Survey. Because Major Powell was head of both the Survey and Bureau of Ethnology, Hillers' Indian pictures became a sizable part of early Bureau records. He was actively taking Indian photographs until he retired in 1900. Hillers' later pictures of Indian delegates to Washington, D.C., and of Indians taken on field trips after 1873 are completely different from this early series. As a whole they do not show the same ethnographic inaccuracies as can be seen from the photos of his first trip among the Great Basin Indians.

The Paiute and Ute Indians in these photographs, from the Colorado River Expedition, are posed to the extreme and rather humorous in some of their content. Figure 3 shows Major Powell and a Ute woman posed on a skin examining a mirror case. The Major, in his Indian-styled buckskin costume topped with feather cuts an amusing figure while the woman wears a Plains-style buckskin garment. The Plains costuming is typical of this entire Great Basin series of photographs. Walter Clement Powell, who was Major Powell's first cousin and an earlier contender for the role of photographer on the expedition, wrote in his journal dated October 4, 1872, "After breakfast Maj., Jacob, Jack [Hillers] and I drove over to the Paiute camp to picture it; were at [it] nearly all day. Braves, squaws and pampooses were done up in the most artistic fashion, as also was the Ancient Arrow Maker" (Kelly 1948:457). Figure 4 shows the old Paiute arrowmaker and his daughter dressed up in their new Plains-style garments. Frederick Dellenbaugh, the artist, noted that "he is chipping a flint arrowhead the flint being fastened with pine gum in a sort of handle. Generally the flaking was done with a piece of bone and the palm of the hand was protected by a bit of buckskin" (Euler 1966, Appendix I:4).

Julian Steward in his article on Hillers' Great Basin photographs notes that art seems often to have outweighed



Figure 3

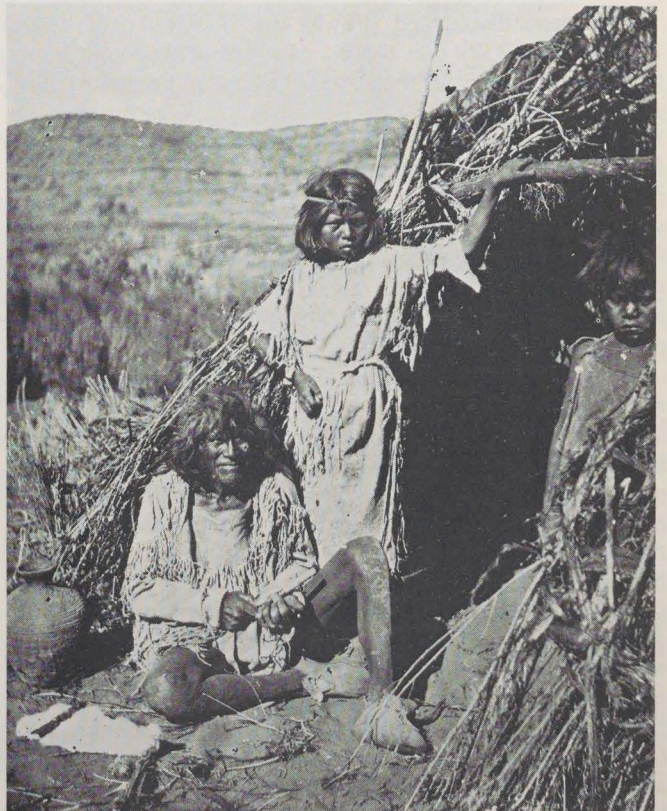


Figure 4



realism in the selection of objects represented. "A woman in semidress probably indicates Powell's and Hillers' idea of photographic art rather than actual use of garments" (Steward 1939:4). Figure 5 shows a Paiute woman named Kaiaer posed supposedly in native summer dress. In fact, however, southern Paiute traditional dress was scanty, due both to the climate and to the poverty of the people. Even Powell observed this in his official report, saying that they wore very little clothing, not needing much in this "lovely climate" (Powell 1875:126). It is therefore doubtful that in summer women wore such dresses.

Thus, in addition to posing the Indians, it has been further established that the costumes were not actual garments owned by them. According to Dellenbaugh, "All the buckskin garments in these photographs were made to order for Major Powell on old patterns, and after the photographs were made the garments were sent to the Smithsonian Institution" (Euler 1966, Appendix 1:2). In reality, the Indian women probably wore clothing like that of the white women in the area. Figure 6 shows Kaiaer in her more usual cloth settlement-type clothes.

Otis T. Mason confirms the above: "Much of the clothing (buckskin and rabbit fur) and many of the baskets were made by the Indians working under the directions or rather observation of Mrs. E. P. Thompson, the endeavor being to have the work done by the methods employed before the coming of the whites and by the older people of the clan" (Mason 1902:490-491). Mrs. Thompson was Powell's sister, and her husband was the chief topographer of the expedition and the field supervisor. Although the rationale for having specimens made for the museum was logical, one wonders how much direction was given by Mrs. Thompson.

It is generally agreed (Fowler and Fowler 1971; Euler 1966; Kelly 1972) that the Plains-style buckskin costuming that dignifies many of the Indians in these photographs must represent Powell's and/or Hillers' idea of what garments these Indians should wear and should not be viewed as traditional Paiute costumes. Figure 7, again of southern Paiutes, this time outfitted in upright feathers, is likewise completely without authenticity. Among Owens Valley Paiute in California upright feather headdresses were used as part of the dance costume (Steward 1939:14), but nowhere has this been found in northern Arizona, except in these Hillers photographs.

Much of the material collected by Major Powell on this expedition is housed in the U.S. National Museum with very little accompanying information, sometimes not even the tribe. However, it is known that much of the costuming photographed in 1871 to 1873 was made for Powell; and in one case there is indisputable proof that the dress worn by the subject was lent to her by Powell for the occasion of being photographed.

Figure 8 is of a Paiute mother and children from northern Arizona taken by Hillers in 1873. Notice that she is wearing a beaded buckskin dress. According to Powell's letter of transmittal with the specimen, dated April 12, 1871, the dress was collected from the Utes probably on his first Colorado River Expedition in 1869. It was cataloged as Ute, accession #2106, catalog #10800. It was then carried back by Powell into the area of the southern Paiute for this photograph two years later. The museum accession number



Figure 5



Figure 6





*Figure 7*





Figure 8



Figure 9

and Colorado R. written across her bodice is undeniable evidence, which underscores the unreliability of this whole series of photographs.

What can be seen here then is a premeditated distortion of the historical record by a man whose work is so well thought of that it is tempting to accept it at face value. Major Powell left a stunning record of accomplishments, and his energy created one of the foremost organizations dedicated to recording American Indian traditions, the Bureau of American Ethnology. The reason he allowed these pictures to be entered into the record seems to be simply one of monetary gain. He, as others, sought a share of the lucrative market photographs created. According to Darrah, Powell received 40% of the proceeds of the sale of the Hillers stereographs, Thompson received 30%, and Hillers received 30%. There is no record of how much Powell made on this entire enterprise, but during the first six months of 1874 Darrah reports that the sale of Hillers photographs totaled \$4100. A joke around the U.S. Geological Survey in the late 1880s was that Major Powell had paid off the mortgage on his house through the sale of these views (Darrah 1951:182).

Like Hillers, DeLancey Gill was a photographer for the Bureau of American Ethnology. Gill was employed by the Bureau from 1888 to 1932. During that time, he accompanied expeditions to the field and photographed Indian delegates who came to Washington, D.C. These delegates were often brought to the Smithsonian by Andrew John, a Seneca who was paid \$1.00 a head for each Indian he brought to be photographed (Anonymous 1903-06). The photographic record made by Gill during this time shows the



Figure 10



tendency even of Smithsonian photographers, who were more concerned with the historical record than commercial photographers, to try to capture the more exotic side of the Indian. The following six pictures were all made by Gill at the Smithsonian.

Figures 9 and 10 show two Cheyenne men, Jacob Tall Bull and Thadeas Redwater, wearing the same shirt with beaded flag design and headdress. They were taken in 1914. Figures 11 and 12 of Playfull Chief and Comes Upon the Village, Osage elders, are wearing almost entirely the same costume from moccasin to hat, including a James Buchanan peace medal issued in 1857. Minor variations are in the neck scarfs, cane, blanket and top feather. These two were taken in 1900. The costumes shown in the last four figures were not found in the Smithsonian ethnological collections, so it is not possible to determine if the photographer had a hand in their costuming or if the group simply pooled their clothes and allowed one another to use each other's garments when the time came for their picture to be taken. Regardless of which reason is correct, the ethnological record has been confused by this duplication and exchange of costume. In some cases, knowing whether a man had exchanged his

costume with another would be vital, if one is trying to identify the role or feats of the person by his dress.

Studio props, including full Indian costumes, especially Plains dress, were owned by numerous commercial photographers. Alexander Gardner, who started his photographic work in America with Mathew Brady in 1856, is thought to have had such a collection of Indian costumes in his studio in Washington, D.C. According to J. Cobb, who did research on Alexander Gardner from material in the National Archives, Mrs. Gardner,

had the unhappy task of assisting her husband in the posing of the Indians and outfitting them in feathers and beads and tribal garments from a smelly collection of native costumes maintained by the Gallery. For they often came to Washington dressed in odds and ends of the white man's clothing rather than their traditional dress. They would bring their squaws and papooses to the Gallery with them and while the Gardners were engaged with sitting, the Indian children would appropriate any articles or items of furniture that they could get away with. Despite the fact that the sittings were something of an ordeal for the Gardner family, many of the Indian delegations were photographed at the Gallery until about 1880 [Cobb 1958:134].

Despite Cobb's research, of the 186 photographs in the Smithsonian attributed to Gardner, only two show any similarity in clothing, and this is simply the same tobacco pouch being held by two Blackfoot Sioux. However, photo-



Figure 11



Figure 12





*Figure 13*



*Figure 14*



*Figure 15*



graphs in the Smithsonian attributed to A. Zeno Shindler, which there is reason to believe may be by Gardner (Walsh 1974), do indeed show Indians wearing the same costume. Figures 13 and 14 are of this series and are images of two Nez Perce Indians named Jason and Timothy. They were taken in 1868 and both are wearing the same warshirt and leggings and holding the same pipe.

Other photographs show more conclusively the use of clothes from the museum collections. The Indian man photographed in Figure 15 is surrounded by artifacts bearing museum catalog numbers. Catalog cards can be seen dangling from his left wrist, on the drum, gourd rattle, and elsewhere. The photographer and date are not recorded, but it was in the Smithsonian about 1900. He is identified as a Winnebago scribe, but any resemblance to reality is probably coincidental.

Studio props, especially Plains dress, were owned by many commercial outfits. There is picture evidence to hypothesize that Christian Barthelmess, who photographed Plains Indians and Southwestern tribes in the 1880s and 1890s (Frink 1965), must have had studio clothes in which he dressed his subjects. Figures 16 and 17 show two different Cheyenne men photographed by Barthelmess, both wearing the same distinct shirt and also holding the same pipe.

Major Moorhouse, a commercial photographer active

among the Plateau Indians around 1900, carried his gallery with him (Moorhouse 1905). He posed his subjects with great care, using the same studio props again and again. The two Moorhouse pictures, Figures 18 and 19, show Rosa Paul and Anna Chapman wearing the same hat and dress. Rosa Paul, who is nursing the infant, is a Wallawalla; Anna Chapman is a Cayuse.

Besides dressing up their subjects, many photographers attempted to create exotic airs through the use of body paint. If the Indian posing did not wear paint, some commercial photographers doctored up the negatives so that it looked as though the subject did engage in this so-called exotic habit. Figure 20 of a Kansa girl is an extreme example of this doctoring. Lines applied to the negative run over her eyes and mouth. The photographer in this case is not known, but it was doctored up sometime in the late nineteenth century. A less disturbing example is Figure 21 of Mohave and Maricopa men showing face paint added to the standing Mohave. At least in this example it is possible that the man posing had some facial decoration present which did not show and therefore was only touched up by the photographer, E. A. Bonine of Pasadena, California, after he took the shot in 1876.

William Soule, another commercial photographer who took many photographs of Plains leaders in 1860 and 1870



Figure 16



Figure 17





Figure 18



Figure 20



Figure 19



Figure 21





Figure 22

(Russell and Weinstein 1969) took many that are invaluable to the historical record. However, he also liked to include Wichita "cheesecake," and Figure 22, is an example of those that were no doubt more lucrative than historically significant. Figure 23 by Soule, showing a boy named Lone Bear dressed in Kiowa costume and then later (Figure 24) in Osage costume with face paint added after the picture was completed, has confused the record to the extent that the boy's tribe is not identifiable.

Some of the works of William Soule, Christian Barthelmess, DeLancey Gill, and Jack Hillers have been cited here to show kinds of visual problems faced when researching anthropological picture records. Even the most documentary-minded photographers had their moments when historical accuracy became secondary to other goals. The value of these North American Indian photographs then is primarily that they reveal how American photographers, even anthropologists, distorted the view of Indians for commercial, aesthetic or other purposes. These distorted photographs obviously cannot in themselves be used indiscriminately by anthropologists in a study of the ethnology of American Indian tribes. They can, however, be used by anthropologists to determine such things as the influence of White culture on a tribe. Thus, though distorted, the pictures still have value.

However, William Soule, Christian Barthelmess, DeLancey Gill, and Jack Hillers did not always distort the historical record. On the contrary, most of the photographs they took (and which I have not illustrated) are accurate historical records and thus very valuable for anthropologists.<sup>4</sup> The pictures are of special value, sometimes because they are the



Figure 23





Figure 24

only record of their day, accompanied by little if any written record.

The ultimate goal of picture research must therefore be to carefully examine and to detail the circumstances of each image as far as possible in order to understand the historical and anthropological circumstances behind each. By doing this, inaccuracies and distortions of record, some of which have been mentioned here, can be better understood and the visual image can be placed both in an historical as well as an ethnographic perspective. The value of revealing these inaccuracies is to caution the researcher about the complexity of picture research and to make them aware that the visual record cannot be taken at face value but must be studied and analyzed, perhaps even more than a written source.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Source criticism of pictures means an exhaustive study of the historical circumstances from which a work, such as a photograph or painting, emerged. The when, where, why, how, and who questions must be established for each picture and considered in as wide a historical framework as possible.

<sup>2</sup> A traveling gallery was a portable studio. These galleries varied immensely from horse-drawn wagons, to flat boats, to hand carts pushed by the photographer. Some included the full reception room, sitting gallery with props and elaborate backgrounds, and chemical dark room, while others were merely conveyances that carried all the material needed for the photographer to set up his outdoor studio and

darkroom. The darkroom could be made as simply as covering one's head and equipment with a large calico bag, which was fastened around the photographer's waist (Gernsheim 1969:276).

<sup>3</sup> Traditional Chippewa men's headdresses varied but frequently included upright feathers. Feathers, eagle or wild turkey, were worn to show that a man had met an enemy. One feather was used for each scalp taken. Thus feather headdresses were evidence of great personal bravery (Lyford 1942:112).

<sup>4</sup> Anthropologists specializing in North American Indians use these photographs in studying change in Indian life, especially change in material culture (clothing, house types, implements, etc.). Social, religious (especially ceremonial), economic, and political changes can also, to a limited extent, be interpreted from pictures. Who is sitting with whom and where they are arranged in a formal photograph especially during delegation visits, can be used by researchers in the study of politics and status. What dance (especially ceremonial) was being performed at a given time and whether the photographer was allowed to take photographs of it in its entirety can be interpreted. Types of food being prepared and eaten can show economic conditions, as pictures of house types show change of habitation and availability of material over time.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Anonymous  
1903-06 Delegates conducted to Photo Lab. by Andrew John. Typed and manuscript lists in National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
- Belous, Russell and Robert Weinstein  
1969 William Soule, Indian Photographer at Fort Sill, Oklahoma 1869-74. Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press.
- Cobb, Josephine  
1958 Alexander Gardner. Image, Journal of Photography and Motion Pictures of the George Eastman House, No. 62, Vol. 7, No. 6.
- Darrah, William C.  
1951 Powell of the Colorado. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Dellenbaugh, Frederick  
1962 Romance of the Colorado River. New York: Putman's Sons.
- Euler, Robert C.  
1966 Southern Paiute Ethnohistory. University of Utah Anthropological Paper No. 78 (Glen Canyon Series No. 28).
- Fowler, Don (Ed.)  
1972 Photographed all the Best Scenery: Jack Hillers' Diary of the Powell Expedition 1871-75. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Fowler, Don, and Catherine Fowler  
1971 Anthropology of the Numa: John Wesley Powell's Manuscripts on the Numic People of Western North America (1868-1880). Smithsonian Contribution to Anthropology 14.
- Frink, Maurice, with Casey E. Barthelmess  
1965 Photographer on an Army Mule: Biography of Christian Barthelmess. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Gernsheim, Helmut, and Alison Gernsheim  
1969 The History of Photography from the Camera Obscura to the Beginning of the Modern Era. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Harrington, John P.  
n.d. Manuscript notes on negative jackets in uncatalogued photographic collection of California Indians. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
- Kelly, Charles (Ed.)  
1948 Walter Clement Powell Diary. Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 16.
- Kelly, Isabel  
1972 Personal communication.
- Lyford, Carrie A.  
1942 The Crafts of the Ojibwa (Chippewa) in Indian Handcrafts, No. 5. Publication of the Education Division, U.S. Office of Indian Affairs.
- Mason, Otis Tufton  
1904 Aboriginal American Basketry: Studies in a Textile Art



- Without Machinery. Report of the United States National Museum 1902.
- Moorhouse, Major Lee  
1905 Souvenir Album of Noted Indian Photographs. Pendleton: East Oregonian Print.
- Pitt, David  
1972 Using Historical Sources in Anthropology and Sociology. *In* Studies in Anthropological Methods. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Powell, John Wesley  
1875 Exploration of the Colorado River of the West and Its Tributaries. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Steward, Julian  
1939 Notes on Hillers' Photographs of the Paiute and Ute Indians Taken on the Powell Expedition of 1873. Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collection 98.
- Taft, Robert  
1942 Photography and the American Scene: A Social History 1839-1889. New York: Macmillan.
- Walsh, Jane  
1974 Personal communication.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

- Figure 1* – Some of the photographic equipment of William Henry Jackson. Photographed on Hayden Expedition, 1870. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 33818-a.
- Figure 2* – Sky Striking the Earth, Chippewa, from White Earth, Minnesota, wearing a feather duster headdress. Photograph by William Dinwiddie, 1896. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 590-a.
- Figure 3* – Major John Wesley Powell and Ute woman identified as Yan-mo or Tau-ruv, wife of Won-wan. Photograph by John K. Hillers, Uintah Valley, eastern slope of Wasatch Mts., Utah, 1872-74. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 1540.
- Figure 4* – "The Arrow-maker and his daughters." Photograph and caption by John K. Hillers, Kaibab Plateau, northern Arizona, 1872-73. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 1609.
- Figure 5* – Kaiar, a Paiute, posed in Hillers' cheesecake stance with breast "artfully" displayed. Photograph by John K. Hillers, Vegas or Meadows, southern Nevada, 1872-73. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 1653.
- Figure 6* – Kaiar in settlement type dress. Photograph by John K. Hillers, Vegas or Meadows, southern Nevada, 1872-73. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 1654.
- Figure 7* – "Group of [Paiute] men in full dress." Photograph and caption by John K. Hillers, Kaibab Plateau, northern Arizona, 1872-73. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 1613-a-2.
- Figure 8* – "The [Paiute] Mother." Photograph and caption by John K. Hillers, Kaibab Plateau, northern Arizona, 1872-73. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 1599.
- Figure 9* – Jacob Tall Bull, Cheyenne, from Lame Deer, Montana. Photograph by DeLancey Gill, Smithsonian, 1914. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 220-a.
- Figure 10* – Thadeas Redwater (also called Mayom), Cheyenne, from Lame Deer, Montana. Photograph by DeLancey Gill, Smithsonian, 1914. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 226-a.
- Figure 11* – Playful Chief (also called Saucy Chief), Osage, from Oklahoma. Photograph by DeLancey Gill, Smithsonian, 1900. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 4060-b.
- Figure 12* – Comes upon the Village, Osage, from Oklahoma. Photograph by DeLancey Gill, Smithsonian, 1900. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 4101-d.
- Figure 13* – Timothy or Tamason, Nez Perce chief who signed the treaty of 1868. Photograph probably by Alexander Gardner, Washington, D.C., 1868. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 2923-a.
- Figure 14* – Jason, Nez Perce chief who signed the treaty of 1868. Note the painted out section which shows between his legs. This was a vise used to keep the subject stationary during the exposure. Photograph probably by Alexander Gardner, Washington, D.C., 1868. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 2922-a.
- Figure 15* – "Winnebago scribe writing on birchbark." Photographer and date not recorded. Caption from Smithsonian file print. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 8392.
- Figure 16* – Studio portrait of Dives Backward, a northern Cheyenne. Photograph by Christian Barthelmess, Fort Keogh, Montana, 1888-97. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 56066.
- Figure 17* – Studio portrait of northern Cheyenne man. Photograph by Christian Barthelmess, Fort Keogh, Montana, 1888-97. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 56067.
- Figure 18* – Rosa Paul, a Wallawalla. Photograph by Major Lee Moorhouse, about 1900. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 2902-b-13.
- Figure 19* – Anna Chapman, a Cayuse. Photograph by Major Lee Moorhouse, about 1900. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 3073-b-4.
- Figure 20* – Studio portrait of young Kansa girl wearing trade silver brooch and earrings. Photographer and date not recorded. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 56834.
- Figure 21* – Studio portrait of Mohave (seated) and Maricopa men. Photograph by E. A. Bonine, 1876. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 53507.
- Figure 22* – Studio portrait of a Wichita woman. Photograph by William Soule, 1867-74. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 1335-a.
- Figure 23* – Lone Bear (Tarlo) in Kiowa costume. His shaven head, however, is more Osage-style than Kiowa. Photograph by William Soule, 1867-74. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 1476-g.
- Figure 24* – Lone Bear (Tarlo) in Osage costume including ribbon-work leggings, moccasins and hair-pipe breastplate. Note the stripped light paint over his eyebrows. Photograph by William Soule, 1867-74. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 1409-c.



## THE SAVAGE EUROPEAN: A STRUCTURAL APPROACH TO EUROPEAN ICONOGRAPHY OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

BERNADETTE J. BUCHER

Among pictorial documents showing non-acculturated Amerindians shortly after the European invasion of America, the de Bry collection of *Grands Voyages* published in 13 volumes between 1590 and 1634<sup>1</sup> is certainly the most voluminous and richest corpus. It consists of some three hundred engravings that illustrate narratives of travel in America ranging from Columbus' expedition in the late fifteenth century to the Dutch and English conquests in the early seventeenth. Thus a great many tribes are represented, from the Algonquians of Virginia to the Alacalufs of Tierra del Fuego. In addition, a period of almost a half-century elapsed between the appearance of the first and the last volume, so that some of the prints show the same group of people at different periods of contact. They could therefore provide a valuable source of information about possible historical changes among the peoples represented.

Unfortunately, most of these engravings were made in Europe by artists who had never seen the New World, and who imagined it after reading the texts they were to illustrate. Some of the pictures were based on sketches, drawings, or watercolors made by cartographers who had taken part in an expedition. The first two volumes of the collection are an example of this.<sup>2</sup> But, apart from these exceptions and a few other prints from later volumes, the iconography of the *Grands Voyages* offers little reliable information about Amerindians that is not available from the texts, whether on material culture, social organization, religion, or myth. On the other hand, these pictures are extremely revealing about the ways Europeans visualized Indians and the New World at the time. In this respect, the de Bry collection constitutes a unique ethnographic document, not so much about Indians *per se*, but rather about the European modes of perception—of how Europeans of that

period viewed cultural and physical differences of other peoples.

It is from this point of view that the engravings are here considered as documents. It is obvious that anyone who wants to make inferences about non-Western cultures from historical pictorial records must face this problem: to what extent is a given European-made picture biased by the cultural and historical classifications through which the observer perceived an alien people and the observer's political intentions regarding the people he describes? In other words, the problem the ethnologist has to face is ethnocentrism—that of the picture-maker, and that which derives from the ethnologist's own culture. More often than not, the attitude of the latter is, in this respect, a negative one: ethnocentrism is the gremlin that has jammed the circuit, the villain who has maliciously hidden a precious needle in a haystack. However justified, such a negative approach may seriously hamper the search for an accurate and systematic means of analyzing pictures. If, on the other hand, we turn the anthropological inquiry momentarily away from the needle, toward the haystack, ethnocentrism will appear as a problem in Western systems of classification and of their relation to political attitudes. By trying to be the ethnographers of our own culture (at least as it was four centuries ago), we may get an insight into the processes through which certain cultural or physical traits are distorted, transformed or overlooked altogether. We may also discover rules that predict when and how such transformations are made by specific groups of people at certain periods of history.

A larger study on the *Grands Voyages* illustrations (Bucher n.d.) showed that de Bry's engravings constitute a form of nonverbal mythology in which the "pensée sauvage" (or undomesticated thought of certain specific European groups of that time) expressed itself freely on the subject of the New World and its inhabitants. Without exploring this mythology in detail, this paper will indicate how some conceptual tools of the structural analysis of myth are useful for studying this type of document and how these tools can contribute to the development of a semiotics of pictures.

### TECHNIQUE OF BRICOLAGE

Any study of semiotics starts from a few postulates: one is that cultural processes can be studied as communication processes and that, as such, they are based on systems (Eco 1972). A system is defined as a totality composed of interrelated and interdependent elements. As a result, the meaning of an element or of a term can only be understood in terms of its relationship to the whole. At first, the description of the communication network to which the *Grands Voyages* belongs reveals only a congeries of heterogeneous elements. This network involves the following.

(1) The makers of the collection, including not only a family business, a dynasty of Dutch Protestant engravers exiled to Frankfurt-am-Main for their creed (father, sons, grandsons and grandson-in-law), but also those who participated in the workshop, editing, translating the texts to be illustrated and those who helped in designing the etchings, as well as those who wrote the captions to the engravings.

(2) The literary sources of information through which the engravers formed their ideas about the New World. These

---

*Bernadette Bucher was born in France and received her Licence ès Lettres and her Doctorate from the Sorbonne, Paris. She has taught at Sir George Williams University (Montreal), at City College (New York City), and is currently Assistant Professor in the Division of the Humanities at Fordham University, New York. She has published several papers on theater, a structural analysis of the de Bry engravings, and has just returned from fieldwork in a rural community of the Vendée.*

---



sources led to the information network of the big maritime companies of the Protestant countries involved in the conquest of America and in league against Spanish papal supremacy. First, the Company of Virginia for which a great number of the texts included in the *Grands Voyages* had been compiled and collected in England by the diligent Richard Hakluyt.<sup>3</sup> Then the Dutch company of the East Indies in relation to which most of the texts beginning with Part IX were written. Most of these texts were reports informing the company about the way their money, invested in exploration, had been spent. It is from this point of view that the New World and its inhabitants were described.

(3) The audience for which the collection was created, and which seemed to impose other constraints on the perception and representation of the New World.

(4) Finally, there are the iconographic models, a maze of iconographic motifs borrowed from very heterogeneous sources. Some were drawn by skilled cartographers, others were sketches made by sailors and navigators, while others were woodcuts from the early sixteenth century illustrating the first accounts of the conquest. To these must be added medieval pictures of the "savage," and the marvels and monsters of far away countries. The de Bry family also used engravings from the first volumes of the *Grands Voyages* (White's Algonquians, le Moyne's Timucuas and the pictures of the Tupinambas) as models to represent Indians from other parts of the continent.

In brief, the representation of the New World in the *Grands Voyages* seems to depend upon a multitude of sources and constraints and, if it does contain "ethnographic facts," these have been amalgamated into a strange syncretism between different peoples from different periods. On the other hand, we can recognize here the technique of "bricolage" described by Claude Lévi-Strauss as an analogy to the ways in which mythic thought or "pensée sauvage" operates:

The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual "bricolage"—which explains the relation which can be perceived between the two [1966:17].

In the same manner, the makers of the *Grands Voyages* used odds and ends, debris from former constructions to rebuild a new ensemble, by a double process of selection and combination. Out of chaos, this new ensemble becomes a consistent whole with an internal logic of its own. This logic uses the material at hand—an Algonquian hairdo, a Tupinamba practice of roasting human bodies, a piece of Inca costume—as signs to mean something else.

Within this framework, even a single isolated picture must be considered as a piece of a vast puzzle that has to be unraveled before the meaning of the piece can emerge. For this, Erwin Panofsky's method, with its three stages of analysis (pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis, and iconological interpretation) remains a fruitful approach to decipher this forest of cultural symbols (1955:33-40).<sup>4</sup> But once the stage of "iconological interpretation" is reached, structural analysis of myth can bring us new tools of exploration, in particular the notion of

systems of transformation. First stated by C. Lévi-Strauss in 1945, this concept was used later in *La Pensée Sauvage* (Ch. 3) and became the cornerstone of the four volumes of *Mythologiques*. Again, there is no space here to undertake a full-fledged structural analysis of the *Grands Voyages* prints to show the use of these tools. My intention is simply to sketch the directions of such an analysis and to indicate some of the results it can lead to.

## SYSTEMS OF CLASSIFICATION AND TRANSFORMATION

In spite of the chaotic aspect of the collection, there are clearly two axes. First there is the diachronic axis, irreversible, provided by the chronological order in which the volumes were published and by the sequence of the illustrations within each volume. For instance, first comes the idyllic image of the Algonquian of Virginia, then the Timucua of Florida, followed by the grim picture of the Tupinamba in Brazil and the Spanish conquest in Central and South America.

Second is the synchronic axis, provided by recurrent iconic elements in the representation of the New World and its inhabitants. Moreover, among the assemblage of elements that make up the varied representation of the New World in the 300 prints, a set of constants appears through different codes. There are four of these: (1) the physical appearance of the Indians, expressed by means of two codes, anatomical (somatology, anthropometry, sex, age) and vestimentary (clothes, ornaments, body paint, etc.); (2) the actions Indians perform—gestures, attitudes, postures (whether cooking, hunting, fighting or eating, and so forth); (3) the sociological relationships among the characters represented in a print—wives/husbands/children, priests/sorcerers, enemies/allies, guests/hosts, conquerors/conquered; (4) the habitat in which they appear (landscapes, fauna, flora, dwellings).

The problem is to find out if there is a systematic relationship between, for example, the anatomical representation of an Indian male and the habitat in which he lives, or between an action (eating a roasted human limb) and the status of the cannibal. By permuting one recurrent element of the representation of Amerindians into all the contexts in which it appears (for instance, the long-haired or bearded Indian, or the disheveled sagging-breasted woman) two things can be discovered. On the one hand, paradigmatic oppositions such as that between the long-haired bearded Indian and the well-groomed, shaven Indian, or between the sagging-breasted female Indian and the well-shaped one. On the other hand, syntagmatic chains within which one of these elements combines with others, are revealed; for example, the long-haired Indian sticking an arrow into his throat, while Magellan is discovering the Straits, or elsewhere, the long-haired Timucua berdaches used for tasks reserved to women; or the Cuna hermaphrodites from the Isthmus of Panama given to the dogs to be devoured.<sup>5</sup>

Thus a meaningful system based on heterogeneous elements emerges and reveals various systems of classification through which the Europeans visualized and conceptualized the New World and the different Amerindian "customs." For instance, the representation of Tupinamba cannibalism



pedum interuallo, quadrata figura, æquali vero trium fere pedum altitudine,

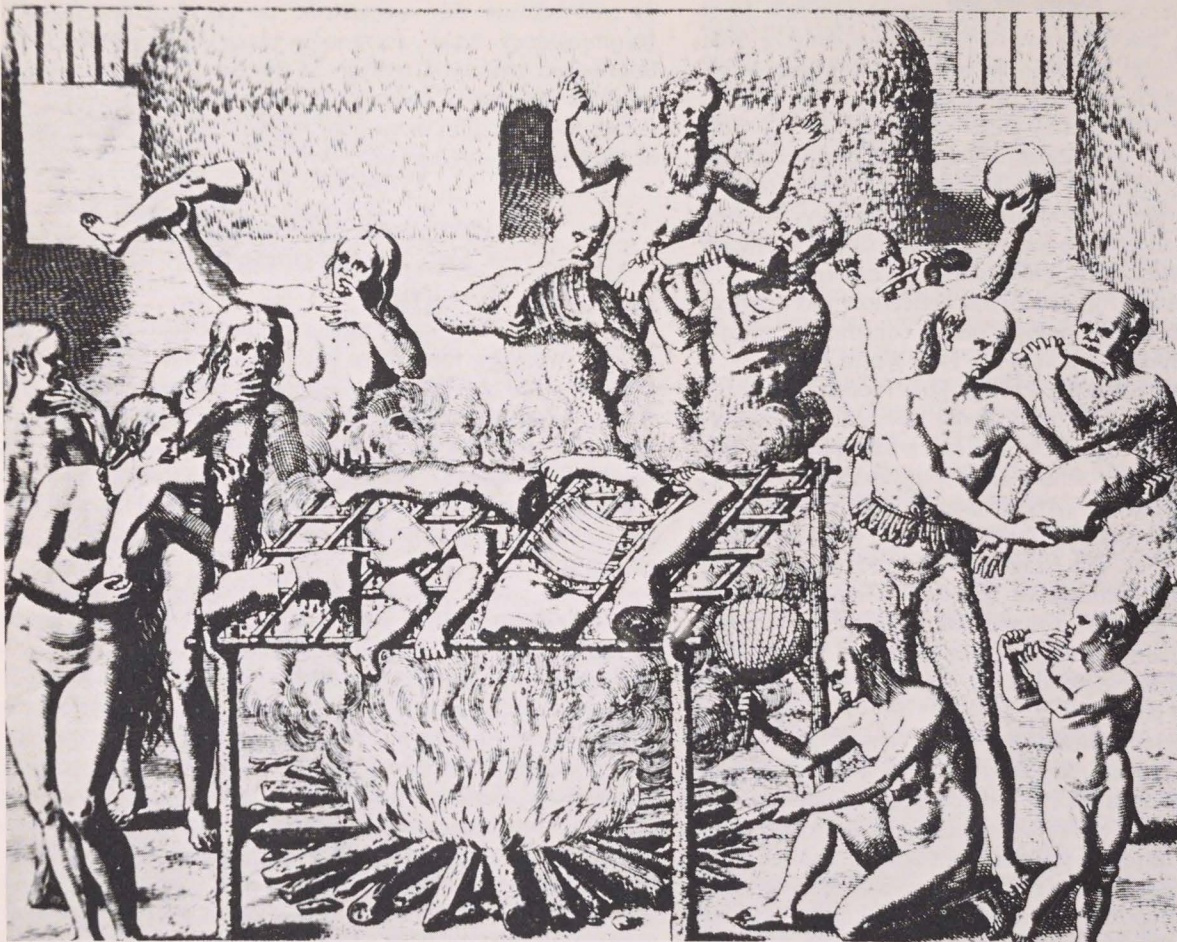


Figure 1

(*Grands Voyages*, Pt. III) in Figure 1 rests upon a classificatory system that relates, through a close network of correspondences: (a) elements of the physical representation of Tupinambas; (b) parts of the human bodies as they are quartered before being cooked; (c) modes of cooking used to prepare the different morsels (whether boiled or roasted); (d) and, finally, their distribution among the cannibals according to their age and sex (Bucher n.d.).

Furthermore, this classificatory system is itself part of a system of transformation between the perception of cannibalism and (Pt. IV, V, VI) the vision of the Spanish conquest in America with the representation of the Carib Indians generously offering fruit to the conquistadors who subsequently expropriated, tortured, and destroyed them. This, in turn, reveals itself as the transformation of the Biblical myth of the Fall and integrates the existence of the Indians into a protestant interpretation of the original sin. Thus the engravings depicting Indian customs which shocked Europeans of the time (nakedness, "idolatry," and cannibalism) are shown to be organized, down to the smallest detail, on a tripartite conception of time shaped by a theological interpretation of human nature. Within this conceptual framework, correspondence is established between: (1) a classification of matter and the natural world

coming from very old cosmologies and the system of correspondences between Macro and Microcosm used by alchemists; (2) a classification of land in terms of subsistence technique and the legal rights to exploit it, as it was organized in Europe at the time; (3) the social and political relations between the Indians and the Europeans.

Thus, the key to sorting out of ethnographic fact from the mythical interpretation of the observer is not to be found at the level of a surface interpretation of the engravings—even with the help of a thorough knowledge of the observer's background—but at a level where ethnographic facts are integrated consistently as part of a myth. These structures can be unveiled through a semiotic analysis. Since such an intricate analysis cannot be presented in a short essay, I shall concentrate on one aspect of these systems of transformation, an aspect that accounts for the distorted and biased perception that Europeans had of subsistence techniques among the Amerindians.

## MYTH AND ECOLOGY

Throughout the mythical system built up around the bearded male and the sagging-breasted female Indian, one finds a congruence or isomorphism between an anatomic





Figure 2

code, an alimentary code, and a sociological code. This congruence systematically relates certain categories of food given or eaten by certain physically anomalous characters to sociopolitical attitudes of the Europeans toward the Indians. These relationships appear meaningless or arbitrary until related to the division of land for subsistence purposes in Europe at that time.

This mythical system is based on three groups of transformations organized on a tripartite conception of time: before the Fall/after the Fall/Apocalypse. The first group corresponds to a mythical time when alliance with the Indians was not only possible, but prescribed. In this phase, offerings of garden fruit by Indians to Spaniards, as in Figure 2, are a transformation of the offering of fruit by the demon in the garden of Eden. The Spaniards, failing to reciprocate as they should have, behaved like the demon in paradise, thus marring forever European-Indian relations.

The second group of transformation (after the Fall of the Indians) implicitly justifies a taboo of intermarriage between Indian and Protestant, because of the original sin committed by the Spaniards. This second moment of the mythical history of the conquest is expressed by a symbolism of food given and food refused, this time using smoked fish and raw bird. These are opposed with regard to subsistence technique to the fruit of the first transformation group as animal to vegetable diet, and as gardening to hunting and fishing. Finally, in the third group of transformations, the alimentary

code is expressed by juices of roasted human flesh licked by female cannibals (see Figure 1), and ashes thrown on a Dutch captain by an old Indian woman. On the sociological level, this corresponds to an apocalyptic vision of social relations.

Thus, the mythical interpretation of the deterioration of Indian-Protestant relations is accomplished through a logic of concrete qualities embodied in different types of food offered, eaten, or rejected. To understand their symbolic values, one must place them in the context of the European ecology at the time.

The fruits from the garden correspond to a privileged category: it is the private, enclosed space around the house, which is fertile all year round, thanks to the proximity of the house and the continual fertilization by domestic refuse. It is also private and not subject to any of the obligations or taxes levied on the other parts of the land. Birds and fish, on the other hand, pertain to an uncultivated nature: land or waters, woods, forests, marshes, rivers, and sea. This territory is subject to a group of communal rights (Duby 1962). As for human and ashes, they are non-foods and are not involved in the division of land for subsistence purposes. They rather partake of the space reserved for garbage or cemetery.

Within this mythical framework, there is a glaring omission—the third division of land in Europe in terms of subsistence, the one reserved for agriculture and animal husbandry. In the European context, it represents a mediation between the two others: on the one hand, the garden,



fertile all year round and private, and on the other, uncultivated land or waters, which are communal. Agriculture and stockbreeding seasonally alternate the properties of the two: part of the year the land is cultivated, fertile. It is enclosed and private. Once the harvest is over, fences are removed and livestock are let in to graze freely on stubble and bush outgrowth left on the fallow fields. It then becomes communal (Duby 1962).

The importance of this omission in the mythical scheme should not be overlooked. It is part and parcel of the justification used by Protestant settlers to expropriate Indian land and later restrict them to reservations. This fact is, of course, contrary to the observation of ethnographic facts recorded in the very texts included in the *Grands Voyages*. Nevertheless, as far as the graphic representation is concerned, Indians appear almost exclusively as devoid of agriculture. The only real representation of Indians as agriculturalists is to be found in the first two volumes of the collection at a time when the company of Virginia was putting all its efforts in a propaganda campaign to attract settlers to North America. However, the perception of Amerindian subsistence techniques show even there an inconsistency quite revealing in itself. For instance, Figure 3 is supposed to depict a Timucua technique of sowing corn and beans that was quite different from the method of sowing used in Europe. The caption of the print explains that

a woman makes holes in the ground with a stick and another drops the seeds into the holes. However the print represents two contradictory ways of sowing. One woman makes holes and another broadcasts the seeds in the European way, thus rendering an efficient indigenous technique completely absurd.

In another print, Figure 4, Timucuas are preparing a feast. Again, portrayed is a juxtaposition of actions that do not really make sense. A man pours food into a large pot containing boiling water. In the foreground, another man pours water into a hole made in the earth, and on the opposite side, another man throws the contents of a basket on the ground. In the background, women are sorting out grains, nuts, or seeds; a man grinds some food on a millstone. The caption says that they are herbs used for seasoning.

In reality, this strange preparation of food may be used as evidence that the Timucuas utilized the technique of leaching to render edible a naturally toxic plant. In the ethnography of the Timucuas (Swanton 1922; Mooney 1910; Ehrmann 1940), leaching is not mentioned as part of their technique for producing food. Swanton, quoting le Moyne de Morgues as he mentions the holes in the ground, does not venture a comment (1922:376). Ehrmann (1940:184) gives a puzzling interpretation: the Timucuas must have had cleanly habits, for "at feasts, holes were dug into the ground to hold water for washing."

## Culturæ & fationis ratio.

XXI.

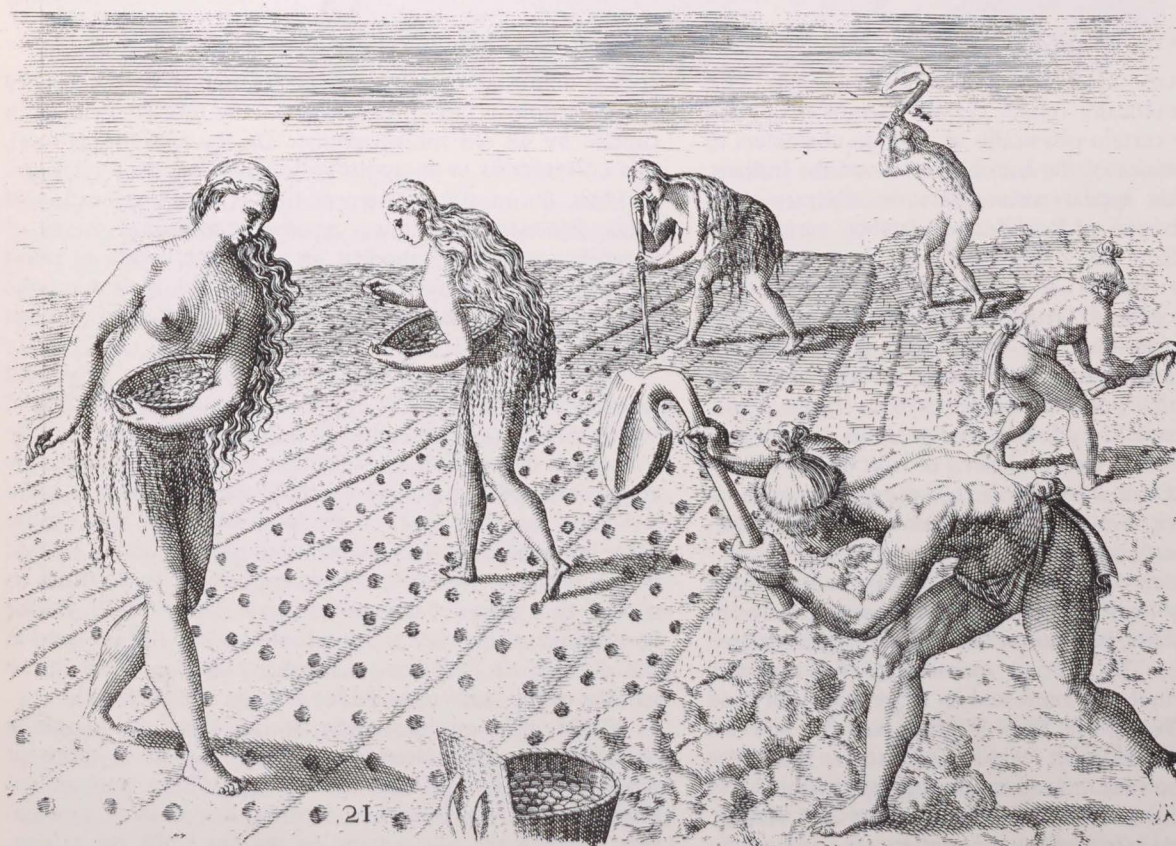


Figure 3



One of the first Europeans to understand the process of leaching in North America was Cabeza de Vaca (1555), who accurately described how mesquite is made edible by some Indians, probably from Texas or Northern Mexico. His description of the process could almost serve as a caption for this print, except for a few details. After they dig a hole in the ground, says Cabeza:

then they put the fruit into it and grind it with a wooden stick. They add more fruit which they mix with earth in the hole and grind it again for a while. After this, they remove the contents of the hole in a container looking like a small round basket and pour enough water on it to cover it completely. Next, the man who had been grinding the grain tastes it and if he thinks that it's not sweet enough, he asks that more earth be added and until he is satisfied.<sup>6</sup>

Although it cannot be identified from the print, the plantfood prepared by the Timucuas may be acorns. Mesquite is out of the question, because of its desert habitat; manioc is unlikely; but acorns were part of the Timucua's environment and it is known they ate them. The practice of leaching acorns is common to many North American Indians, especially among California Indians for whom it was a staple food (Driver 1953).

If this hypothesis is correct, this engraving is a remarkable example of the disjunction between visual perception of cultural facts and their knowledge and understanding. Le

Moyne de Morgues, the artist who made the original drawing for the print, witnessed this scene in Florida without understanding it. The fact that the Timucua were simultaneously grinding on a millstone, making holes in the ground, throwing the half prepared food on the ground, and boiling it, did not escape his attention. If his perception is correct, in spite of his faulty judgment, the different operations of leaching as performed by the Timucuas may be inferred from this print. In contrast with the method described by Cabeza de Vaca for leaching mesquite, the grinding of the plant is made on a millstone and not directly in the hole with a wooden stick. The meal ground from the acorn was also put directly in contact with the earth and then covered with water. Then it was cooked.

## CONCLUSION

Structural analysis of pictorial documents supported by a corpus of ethnographic facts may uncover unsuspected truths about the people observed as well as about the observers. It may also sensitize the investigator to discord in the evidence that otherwise might go unnoticed. This is all the more important when dealing with peoples now extinct. Here the ethnographic literature depends a great deal on the early accounts of travelers who were the last witnesses of a vanished tribe. The only new reliable evidence comes from

## Conviviorum apparatus.

## XXVIII.



Figure 4



archaeological studies. Pictures, however, can contribute to knowledge of the past by posing new questions to ethnologists and archaeologists alike.

Moreover, even if we grant that images can express mythical thought as well as words do, structural analysis may help us discover our own unconscious systems of classification and, more importantly, how they were formed historically. However, in order to successfully apply the tools of structural analysis to nonverbal messages such as pictures, there is one prerequisite: analysis must make use of a set of images, large enough to show recurrences and constants. It is only through examination of variations that systems of oppositions can become meaningful through transformations. This is why it is hardly possible to condense in a brief paper the actual steps of such an analysis, whether of myth or iconography.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Most of the volumes were published in Frankfurt-am-Main, a few in Oppenheim.

<sup>2</sup> In the first volume, the engravings were copied from John White's watercolors. Sturtevant (1964) has studied them from an ethnographic point of view and the second volume engravings, copies from le Moyne de Morgues' watercolors on the Timucuas will receive the same treatment.

<sup>3</sup> De Bry obtained a great many of his texts for the collection from Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*.

<sup>4</sup> For Panofsky, one tries to grasp, at this stage "those basic principles which underlie the choice and presentation of motifs, as well as the production and interpretation of images, stories and allegories and which give meaning even to the formal arrangements and technical procedures employed" (1955:38). On the conventional character of visual signs see also R. Arnheim (1954) and E. Gombrich (1960).

<sup>5</sup> These prints are to be found respectively in Pt. IV, II, and IV.

<sup>6</sup> My translation from the French edition by Bandelier (1922).

## REFERENCES CITED

- Arnheim, Rudolph  
1954 *Art and Visual Perception*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bandelier, A. F.  
1922 *The Journey of Alvar Cabeza de Vaca*. American Explorer's Series, New York.
- Bry, Théodor de, et al.  
1590-1634 *Grands Voyages*. 13 vols. Frankfurt-am-Main and Oppenheim.
- Bucher, Bernadette  
n.d. *Le monde qu'ignoraient les Sybilles: Etude de Sémiologie sur la représentation graphique des cultures et peuples*

- amérindiens dans les *Grands Voyages* de Th. de Bry. Unpublished manuscript.
- n.d. *Les Fantômes du Conquérant*. In, C. Lévi-Strauss. R. Bellour, Ed. (In press). Paris: Gallimard
- Cabeza de Vaca, Alvar Nunez (see Bandelier)
- Driver, Harold  
1953 *The Acorn in North American Indian Diet*. Proceedings of the Indian Academy of Science 62:56-62. Indianapolis.
- Duby, George  
1962 *L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l'Occident médiéval*. 2 vols. Paris: Aubier.
- Eco, Umberto  
1972 *La structure absente*. Paris: Mercure de France.
- Ehrmann, W. N.  
1940 *The Timucua Indians of 16th century Florida*. Florida Historical Quarterly 18:168-191.
- Gombrich, Ernest  
1960 *Art and Illusion*. Washington: Bollingen Series XXXV, 5.
- Hakluyt, Richard  
1589 *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*. London: Bishop and Ralph Newberie.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude  
1945 *Le dédoublement de la représentation dans les arts de l'Asie et de l'Amérique*. In *Renaissance*. Revue publiée par l'Ecole libre des Hautes Etudes de New York, 1944-45. pp. 168-186. (republished as *Chapter XIII in Anthropologie Structurale*. Paris: Plon, 1958).
- 1966 *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1964-71 *Mythologiques* 4 vols. Paris: Plon.
- Mooney, James  
1910 *Timucuan Family*. Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 30(2):752-754.
- Sturtevant, William C.  
1964 *John White's Contribution to Ethnography*. In *The American Drawings of John White*. P. Hulton and D. Quinn, Eds. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Swanton, John R.  
1922 *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors*. Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 73:398-414.

## CAPTIONS OF ENGRAVINGS

*Figure 1* — Depiction of Tupinamba cannibalism. Engraving published by Theodor de Bry, 1590-1634.

*Figure 2* — Indians offering fruit to the Spaniards. Engraving published by Theodor de Bry, 1590-1634.

*Figure 3* — Timucua method of preparing the ground and planting. Engraving published by Theodor de Bry after lost original by Jacques le Moyne who visited Florida in 1560s. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 57561.

*Figure 4* — Timucua preparations for a feast. Engraving published by Theodor de Bry after lost original by Jacques le Moyne who visited Florida in 1560s. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian: 57558.



# CINÉMA NAÏVETÉ: A STUDY OF HOME MOVIE MAKING AS VISUAL COMMUNICATION<sup>1</sup>

RICHARD CHALFEN

In comparison with other types of films, home movies are stereotypically thought of as films of everyday life, of commonplace family activities, of life around the house, and the like. At face value, such films seem to be extremely rich in ethnographic data, and as such, should be valued by social scientists as native views of intimate realities.<sup>2</sup> One objective of this paper is to examine this proposition as data about the problematic relationship between the symbolic reality of the home movie medium, the stated cultural and technical prescriptions about its use, and the reality of everyday life. A related objective is to better understand the notion of symbolic manipulation as it applies to one genre of film communication—namely, home movies.

The paper is divided into four parts. The study of film communication is discussed first. Second, home movies are examined in general terms with some reference to previous and ongoing attention to the medium. Third, the structure of home movies and the process of home moviemaking are analyzed in terms of communication "events" and communication "components." The fourth section consists of a functional analysis of the home movie medium as a cultural enterprise.

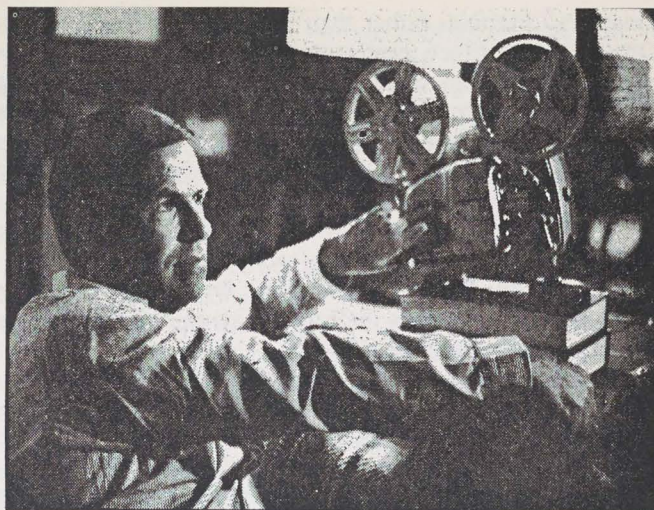
## FILM COMMUNICATION AND HOME MOVIES

Film communication is being studied here as a process of human social behavior that manipulates a recording on film for the purpose of articulating some meaningful content or message through the pattern we impose and the way we structure the content as well as the actual pieces of celluloid. A film (or group of films) is understood as a symbolic form that is produced and viewed as part of a process of human

---

*Richard Chalfen is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Temple University in Philadelphia, specializing in the areas of culture and communication, visual communication and vidistics. His research interests include teenage filmmaking, the home mode of visual communication and, most recently, the anthropology of mass media. His published papers include "Reaction to Socio-Documentary Filmmaking Research at a Mental Health Clinic" (with Jay Haley), "How Groups in Our Society Act When Taught to Use Movie Cameras" (with Sol Worth), and "Introduction to the Home Mode of Visual Communication."*

---



Those home movies on TV—more bombshells to come?

Figure 1

behavior organized within social and cultural contexts. Behaviors surrounding filmmaking are understood as promoted, limited, or restricted primarily by social norms rather than as limitations primarily imposed by psychological or technical variables.

Film communication can thus be studied as the creation, manipulation, and interpretation of symbolic events that occur in, and as, a series of social "performances." Rather than studying filmmaking as an idealized cognitive activity, film communication can be studied ethnographically and comparatively as it actually occurs.

Elsewhere (Chalfen 1974), based on the work of Worth (1966, 1970), Worth and Adair (1972), and Hymes (1962, 1964, 1972),<sup>3</sup> I have outlined a series of parallels between the ethnography of speaking and an ethnography of film communication. I suggested that any process of film communication can be broken down into four kinds of "events,"<sup>4</sup> namely, (1) planning events, (2) filming events (which necessarily includes the two subcategories of "on-camera" events and "behind-camera" events), (3) editing events, and (4) exhibition events. In turn, each of these events can be described as structured by a series of "components," namely, (1) participants, (2) topics, (3) settings, (4) message form, and (5) code. Each of these conceptual units will be described further in the following pages. When each component is referenced with each event, a pattern of activity and behavior emerges that is characteristic of a particular film genre. It is my argument that any film genre can be defined by extracting the relevant event-component relationships from this framework.

This study examines one particular genre and the relationship of one message form, the "home movie," to the other components mentioned above as they systematically operate within a sequence of film communication events.

Home movies are one example of a much larger collection of symbolic behavior that I have called the home mode of visual communication (Chalfen 1975b). This mode of photographic representation is characterized by the non-professional use of communications technology for private "doc-



umentary" purposes rather than for public or "artistic" use. Other visual artifacts representative of the home mode include family album snapshots, wallet photographs, wedding albums, and photographs displayed on household walls, on television sets, bureaus, and the like. For purposes of this report, primary attention is given to home movies, with only parenthetical examples from other home mode products.

The history of home movies probably begins with the invention of the motion picture camera during the late nineteenth century. Perhaps the Lumiere brothers' *Feeding the Baby*, filmed in 1895, is the earliest example of home movie content that has been preserved.<sup>5</sup>

The first commercialization of the home movie dates to January of 1923 when the Eastman Kodak Company announced "a new invention enabling motion pictures to be taken by any amateur without difficulties." This introduction of a reversal-processed 16mm film was followed in June by the first Cine-Kodak movie outfit, "the first practical camera and projection package for amateur home movies (and) ushered in the era of home movies." According to one account:

They were oversize box cameras that used 16mm film, less than half the width of professional motion picture film. It was assumed that most personal-movie pioneers would use their cameras to make real motion pictures, shot from scripts and off the tops of tripods in imitation of Hollywood productions [Knight 1965:v].

However, it was not until 1932 that Kodak introduced the now familiar 8mm filmmaking equipment, and by 1936, 8mm color film began replacing the black-and-white stocks. The popular Super-8 equipment, with drop-in cartridges for both cameras and projectors, was introduced as recently as 1969. Sound home movie equipment is the latest innovation, but as of this date, sound movies have not been very popular.<sup>6</sup>

Readers should understand that the home mode process of visual communication and its associated imagery are *not* determined by type of motion picture equipment. In this sense, home mode imagery can be produced by Bolexes, Auriflexes, and Eclair cameras, as well as the less expensive 8mm and Super-8mm equipment.<sup>7</sup>

While the technical aspects of movies reveal some characteristics of the home moviemaker, they tell us little about the social activity that surrounds the *use* of such technology. We should not be thinking only in terms of what filmmaking equipment is used, but rather how, when, where, and for what purposes it is used, and secondly, of the characteristic social organization that surrounds such activity. I will frequently stress that the communicative importance of home movies is more controlled and structured by social prescriptions and limitations rather than by technical ones.

Another contextual dimension that deserves attention involves home movies as a special kind of visual communication that falls somewhere between forms of interpersonal and mass communication. A form of private and personal communication is produced with technology that is usually associated with forms of mass communication. When Wright describes the process of mass communication, he says:

Although modern technology (television, motion pictures, newspapers, etc.) is essential to the process, its presence does not always signify mass communication . . . [To] take a more mundane



**"If you don't mind, Junior, let's watch our home movies without philosophizing about the empty, dreary lives they record!"**

Figure 2

example, a Hollywood motion picture is mass communication; a home movie of vacation scenes is not [Wright 1974:5].

Thus we are not talking about filmmaking as a form of mass communication. Complex formal organization, the need for large capital resources, the need for large audiences of heterogeneous composition, and an impersonal relationship between communicator and audience, are clearly absent from this kind of visual communication.

An example of using movies in an interpersonal context was suggested by the filmmaker Zavattini and has been recorded in an article by John Grierson.

Zavattini once made a funny speech in which he thought it would be wonderful if all the villages in Italy were armed with cameras so that they could make films by themselves and write film letters to each other . . . [Sussex 1972:30].

Admittedly, this idea was offered as a joke, and I am not suggesting that home movies are now made as "film letters." However, it should be understood that the home mode of visual communication borrows characteristics of other modes and could possibly become popular as a form of film letter just as "tape letters" are now a major form of tape use.

## PREVIOUS AND ONGOING ATTENTION TO HOME MOVIE MAKING

The majority of published material on home movies appears in the form of "How To Do It" manuals and short magazine articles on "How to Improve Your Movies." All of these offer a set of prescriptive guidelines on how to do it "right" and how to avoid "mistakes." This literature contains



an interesting and quite complete paradigm of idealized behavior which can be compared to the actual home movie-making behavior that does occur. (A selection of these manuals and articles has been included in the second and third References Cited sections.)

In the literature that deals with the study of film (text books, journal articles, film criticism, etc.), home movie-making is virtually never mentioned. For most serious minded filmmakers, home movies represent the thing *not* to do. For the film scholar, it appears that home movies have been too trivial a topic to merit serious attention.<sup>8</sup>

One source of discussion about "home movies" comes from the writing and filmmaking of Jonas Mekas (1972) and Stan Brakhage (1971). However, their use of the term "home movie" is considerably different from the material and process of visual communication being examined in this paper. For instance, Mekas, a filmmaker, film distributor, and film critic for the *Village Voice*, says:

The avant-garde film-maker, the home moviemaker is here . . . presenting to you, he is surrounding you with insights, sensibilities, and forms which will transform you into a better human being. Our home movies are manifestoes of the politics of truth and beauty, beauty and truth. Our films will help to sustain man, spiritually, like bread does, like rain does, like rivers, like mountains, like sun. Come come, you people, and look at us; we mean no harm. So spake [*sic*] little home movies [1972:352].

But I could tell you that some of the most beautiful movie poetry will be revealed, someday, in the 8mm home-movie footage . . . [1972:131].

Films made by members of the New American Cinema such as Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage, Ken Jacobs, Shirley Clarke, Gregory Markopoulos, Jack Smith, and, in his early films, Andy Warhol and his imitators, are "home movies" only in the sense of sometimes being filmed "at home" with simple and comparatively inexpensive filmmaking technology.

Another example is provided by Frederick Becker's use of raw home movie footage. Becker's feature length film *Heroes* is an edited compilation of 25 years of movies made by three families (Van Gelder 1974).<sup>9</sup> Fabricated home movies and scenes of home moviemaking occasionally appear in feature films. Most notable are the home movie sequences in *Up the Sandbox* (1972) directed by Irwin Kershner.<sup>10</sup> In other instances, entire films are being shot and edited in what we sense as a home movie style.<sup>11</sup> In addition, home movies are seen as a separate and distinct view of a social event in *Six Filmmakers in Search of a Wedding*.

Another use of the home movie mode occurs in a new genre of avant garde or "art" films of a biographical-confessional nature. A perhaps unusual example is the film titled *Film Portrait* (1971) by Jerome Hill. This film not only uses examples of his own early films made in the 1920s, but also includes home movies commissioned by his father and photographed by Billy Bitzer, the cameraman for *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and other early American films. In that period before Eastman Kodak provided movie cameras for everyone, a railroad tycoon hired a professional cameraman to photograph the same kinds of filmic subject matter that I have seen and studied in the livingrooms of my subjects.

A recent development is the archival collection of "authentic" home movies made by celebrated personalities.

Occasionally, some of this footage appears on television.<sup>12</sup> The public exhibition of home movies may occur in other contexts. For instance, on October 19, 1973, the Center for Religion and the Arts in New York sponsored a session titled "Home Movies: Great American Folk Art."<sup>13</sup> And most recently, the Family Folklore Center showed a selection of home movies and family albums during the Festival of American Folklife in Washington.<sup>14</sup>

In the social science literature, I find no sustained interest in home moviemaking. Reference to either the making of these movies or the movies *per se* is parenthetical at best. For instance, observations by David Sudnow (1966), Weston La Barre (1968), and Edmund Carpenter (1972) are very brief and go in three different directions with no sense of sustained attention. For instance, Sudnow relates home movies to his ethnomethodological interests in studying social life as it occurs in natural environments as follows:

You can look at films that are made by the member [of a particular society] in a variety of actual natural circumstances and treat these director's productions as data. In this regard, what I have been trying to work with are home movies where we can see the varieties of the ways in which the filmer of the home movies attempts to structure the final product in accord with his conceptions of the phenomena and the interest that the phenomena would have for later recall, later use, and so on [Hill and Crittenden 1968:55].

Another reference to home movies is provided by Weston La Barre when he discusses the relationship between interpersonal eye contact and staring into the lens of a camera:

One of the reasons that watching amateur "home movies" is often so uncomfortable or embarrassing is that the subjects, as in a still photograph, *look at* the movie taker, whom they may know better than the viewer (to his discomfort) knows them—whereas, in professional movies, we are accustomed to the rigid convention that the actor *never* looks directly at the camera . . .

The contrast between home and professional movies was brilliantly exploited in one of the Burton-Taylor movies when "home-movies" were indicated very simply and unmistakably by the actors' looking directly into the camera and putting on the self-consciousness of the amateur who knows he's being "taken" [1968:101-102].

Edmund Carpenter mentions home movies in another context. When he discusses the notion of a collective unconscious and corporate images that produce homogeneous patterns in "art" forms, he says:

A Canadian artist recently went on CBC radio to ask listeners to let him borrow old home movies. He assembled these into a remarkable document—remarkable because it enables us to perceive, with some objectivity, our clichés, our collective unconscious, something otherwise so immediate, so obvious, we can't step back from it [1972:59-60].

Brief references of this nature remain merely anecdotal and speculative at best.

It is important at this stage to distinguish between different types of film that are called "home movies" by some people at first glance. It appears that the label of "home movie" has been attached to a variety of film forms based on notions of such qualities as "primitive," "non-professional," "inexperienced," "naive," "non-narrative," and the like. It is possible to distinguish five categories of these films:



- (1) the "artistic" home movies produced by members of the New American Cinema which may be understood as a kind of Dadaist reaction to Hollywood and to stereotypic Hollywood film products;
- (2) the use of raw home movie footage as "documents" in the autobiographical and biographical films, such as *Film Portrait* mentioned above;
- (3) the use of a home movie style in commercially produced theatrical fiction films, as in *Up the Sandbox*;
- (4) native-generated films such as Worth and Adair's Navaho-made films (1972) or Chalfen's socio-documentary films made by groups of Philadelphia teenagers (1974); and
- (5) home movies made mostly by middle-class amateurs for family use only.

There is a tendency to confuse the contents of categories (4) and (5) because of the deceiving similar criterion of "native-generated film product" with associated qualities of "primitive" and "non-professional." The fact is that neither Navaho Indians nor Black lower socio-economic teenagers make the type of home movies that are being investigated in this paper.<sup>15</sup>

It is specifically the task of this paper to show that a particular arrangement of film communication "events" and "components" distinguish and isolate a unique genre of film called "home movie." The home movie genre explicated in this paper does not include films studied in a "culture at a distance approach" (Mead and Metraux 1953), bio-documentary films (Worth 1965), or socio-documentary films (Chalfen 1972, 1974). These films and the other categories mentioned above manifest *different* arrangements of events and components, and thus do not belong to the home movie genre.

In summary, this paper concentrates on an unexamined genre of film communication. It appears that little serious attention has been given to the study of home movies as such, as a cultural artifact, as expressive behavior, or as a process of communication in any of the related disciplines of sociology, folklore, anthropology, cinema studies, communication, or psychology.<sup>16</sup>

## SOURCES OF HOME MOVIE DATA

Sources of data for this report come from approaching the study of home moviemaking from four different directions.

(1) "How To Do It" manuals (hereafter referred to as HTDI manuals) and related advice columns and articles on home moviemaking. By examining this published material, I have extracted a set of prescriptive and proscriptive rules for home moviemaking behavior. I have looked for statements that determine what kinds of behavior are considered appropriate within the framework of communication events and components previously outlined.

(2) Approximately 9000 feet of what people have shown me in their homes as their home movies. In addition, the possessor of these films (not necessarily the same as the moviemaker) was interviewed for contextual information that was not available when simply viewing the home movies.

(3) A series of 40 interviews asking what it was like to be an audience for someone's home movies. Primary attention was paid to determining the proper social organization and expected behavior for the exhibition event.

(4) The culling of innumerable popular resources for any kind of reference to home moviemaking. Materials here included daily newspapers, popular moviemaking magazines, camera advertisements, and the like.

The diversity of these approaches is an attempt to compensate for one major shortcoming of this study, namely, an inability to actually observe the complete process of home moviemaking in progress. Observing film communication, as it "naturally" occurs, is a difficult task. In contrast to studying a speech event, film communication requires the observation and description of several different types of events over time. For this study, different parts of the home movie-making process have been observed, but no long-term participant observation strategy has been attempted.

Readers should also understand that all behavioral examples discussed in this report come from a limited sample of white middle-class subjects. It is not known how other cultures or social groups would respond to the concept of "home movies." Many non-industrialized societies, of course, do not have such a notion at all, while in our society different groups have embraced the technology of the camera, but little is known of how this technology is used or for what purposes.

The descriptive and analytic sections of this report begin with a discussion of film events, followed by film components and a functional analysis of home moviemaking.

## HOME MOVIE PLANNING EVENTS

The conceptual category of "planning" consists of any activity, behavior, or performance in which there is some form of decision, first to use a camera, and second, what to record and how to record it in motion picture images. Thus we may (in some genres of filmmaking) be describing such activity as learning to use the equipment, organizing a film production in terms of getting a director, cameraman, grips, etc., or auditioning actors, making arrangements for on-location shooting, doing historical research, preparing a script, re-writing, and the like.

The study of planning events for home movies, however, reveals the first major difference between prescribed behavior and actual behavior. While almost all of the HTDI manuals recommended some type of planning, subjects admitted to rarely ever doing any. Seldom do extended discussions or debates involve the question of whether to make a movie or not. Shooting scripts or acting scripts are seldom, if ever, written. Subjects said they "just knew" when to get out the camera and buy some new film.

For instance, one home movie manual was organized and written around the notion of planning. An introductory statement read as follows:

No one can produce a successful film without planning it. The only question is *when* we are going to do the planning. At first, we may leave it until editing, so the first section is devoted to Planning After Filming. Then we see the advantages of Planning During



Filming... Finally, we become sufficiently experienced to attempt Planning Before Filming, and this is discussed in the third and main section... [Grosset 1963:6].<sup>17</sup>

Another example comes from an advice column:

#### How to Plan an Interesting Film.

All it takes is some extra thought. Take Christmas, for instance. It involves the entire family, and there is plenty of colorful activity. Start by making a list of the activities that your family normally engages in during the holiday. Break this into three parts: preparation, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day. Now list the events in logical order [Anon. 1968].

... since the key to a good film is pre-planning, and giving some thought to how the final product will look... [the] filmmaker should try to visualize the completed film, and even write a short scenario, if necessary [Smith 1975].

None of my informants said that planning was important. Subjects implied that asking about planning a home movie just did not make sense.<sup>18</sup> It appears that home movie-makers just "like to do it" and do not treat it as "a production." They just know when to make a movie and want to leave it at that. Planning, it seems, would take the fun out of it.

Thus for this genre of film communication, unlike most others, planning and decision making do not consciously occur before filming begins. Decisions on specifically what to shoot and what to avoid apparently take place tacitly, at the last moment, when the camera is loaded and the cameraman is looking through the viewfinder. Notions of what to shoot, and what not to shoot, however, are hardly random. One's culture and social norms make it tacitly clear that certain events, behaviors, and so on, are to be shown or not shown.

### HOME MOVIE FILMING EVENTS

For analytic purposes, "filming" events must be subdivided into "on-camera" events and "behind-camera" events. Behind-camera filming events are discussed first.

The conceptual category of "behind-camera filming" consists of any activity, behavior, or performance that in some way structures that use and operation of a motion picture camera. Thus we try to include description of a film director's behavior, coordination between director and cameraman, the cameraman's shooting techniques or "tricks," etc.

Another discontinuity emerges when we compare the behavior prescribed by the HTDI manuals and the actual behavior of home moviemakers. In general, the manuals offer a lot of technical advice and strategies for the cameraman. For example, one advice column recommended the following:

Start your shooting with a long shot of your house and a member of the family putting a wreath on the front door. Move in for a medium shot of the person putting up the wreath, then a close-up of the wreath and a ribbon on which you have printed your title—say "Christmas 1968" [Anon. 1968:134].

Vary your shots. Film Mother entering with groceries, then stop the camera and move to another angle to shoot the bags being emptied. Move to another vantage point for a shot of the turkey being held aloft, then come in for a close-up of a child's face registering delight... you'll have variety and a fast pace [Anon. 1968:134].

However, one manual cautioned its readers:

... if you intrude too much or try to direct too much, it's likely to lose all its genuine flavor, and the results won't have the really memorable quality that spells out B-O-Y [How To Make Good Movies, p. 26; hereafter referred to as HT].

One example of behind-camera behavior characterized by over-direction and intrusion is nicely illustrated by the following cartoon (Figure 3).



Now! Let's do it right this time! THEN you can open your presents!

Figure 3

Some of the manuals offered a set of rules to overcome common behind-camera "mistakes." These corrective rules included (1) starting each sequence with an establishing shot, (2) photographing all scenes in a logical order, (3) avoiding excessive panning—pan only when following some action, (4) avoiding excessive use of the zoom lens, etc.

However, the majority of footage viewed for this study ignored all of these "rules." In fact, it appears that disobeying these rules describes the norm for behind-camera behavior. (Characteristics of this norm will be described further in the section titled "Code Characteristics" in the following pages.)

Subjects stated that they did not want to be bothered with thinking about camera techniques—as long as the pictures "came out," everything was fine. Again, as with planning, the HTDI manuals have emphasized an event and components that home moviemakers prefer to ignore.

However, this situation is exactly reversed when we analyze "on-camera" events. This category consists of any activity, behavior, or performance that in some way structures the persons or things that "happen" in front of an operating motion picture camera. Examples of suitable behavior range from how an actor reads his lines to hamming for the camera or how people spontaneously present themselves to a camera, etc.

The HTDI manuals seldom give advice on how to behave while on-camera in home movies.<sup>19</sup> Both the manuals and



informants agreed that people frequently act "funny" when home movies are being made. The HTDI manuals describe this situation as follows:

There's something about a movie camera that makes people stop what they're doing and stare into the lens. Or, they may simply wave at the camera [Family Movie Fun for All, p. 24; hereafter referred to as FM].

[When most people] become aware that a camera's unblinking stare is aimed in their direction, they react stiffly, self-consciously, and inhibited. [HT, p. 18].

There's no use ignoring the all-too-obvious fact that most adults feel somewhat ill at ease in the bright beam of a movie light [HT, p. 54].

More advice was offered on how *not* to behave. For example, one advice column cited "artificial posing as a common reason for "disappointing" home movies:

People just standing in a group, a wife waving at the camera, a child making faces at the camera all make dreadfully dull movie shots [Anon. 1968:132].

Nothing looks quite so goofy as a group of people standing stiffly in the midst of a lively scene. You've got to get them to do something, but you can't leave it up to them; they haven't the slightest idea of what to do [Sutherland n.d.].

The manuals resort to behind-camera instructions for adopting a filming strategy that causes minimal disturbance. Instead of providing information for on-camera behavior, the HTDI manuals continue to promote behind-camera activity.

... I believe that the best kind of home movies result when you avoid being self-conscious about shooting motion pictures. The camera just happens to be around when people are having fun and doing what they like [FM, p. 25].

To capture them un-selfconscious and relatively uninhibited, your best bet is to plan your shooting for occasions when your intended subjects are engrossed in some sort of activity [HT, p. 18].

However, scenes of "natural" behavior were seldom seen in the home movies viewed for this study. Impromptu realities were greatly outnumbered by scenes of hamming or "acting-up" for the camera. In general, patterns of on-camera behavior contradicted the behind-camera objectives recommended by the manuals. Capturing an impromptu reality was by far the *exception* rather than the rule.

Observations made by subjects about on-camera performance also contradicted the HTDI manuals' claim that posing was "dreadfully dull," and that reactions to the camera produced "disappointing results." Instead, viewers generally expressed delight and pleasure when seeing these facial and gestural reactions to being "caught" on-camera. It appears that waving at the lens, making faces, posing stiffly, and the like, are entirely appropriate examples of accepted behavior for this event. Informants openly recalled the fun they enjoyed when they were *in* the movies rather than shooting the movies.

### HOME MOVIE EDITING EVENTS

The conceptual category of "editing" event consists of any activity, behavior, or performance which accumulates,

eliminates, or rearranges film in a specific order or sequence *after* it has been exposed and chemically developed, but *before* it has been shown to an audience. Activity appropriate to this category includes everything from simply cutting off film leader to the making of A and B rolls for the multiple production of prints, constructing optical dissolves, cutting in frames of stop action, and so on.

Editing in this mode of visual communication represents the fourth non-overlapping example of prescribed behavior versus actual moviemaking. Almost all of the HTDI manuals promote some form of editing from the home moviemaker. Editing is given as much attention as planning and shooting the movie. For instance, one advice column stated that moviemakers just don't take advantage of editing's potential:

This is an all too frequently neglected aspect of home filmmaking, yet with just a few cuts and splices any film can be made to look better... To edit is first to remove, then to rearrange, then to remove once more [Smith 1975].

One of the HTDI manuals stated:

Most movie makers hesitate to change the order of scenes, feeling that it is a little like changing the truth. Not at all. If changing the order of scenes from the way you shoot them helps to make your movie more interesting and informative you're actually making the truth stronger [FM, p. 79].

In actuality, however, most home moviemakers were extremely reluctant to do any editing at all. Few attempts were made either to cut out poorly exposed (or even unexposed) footage or to rearrange shots within one roll of film.<sup>20</sup> When some form of editing was observed, it generally meant cutting off some excess leader at either end of the 50-foot roll and splicing two or more rolls together. The motivation for this accumulative "cutting" was simply to produce a movie that would take a longer time to show on the projector.

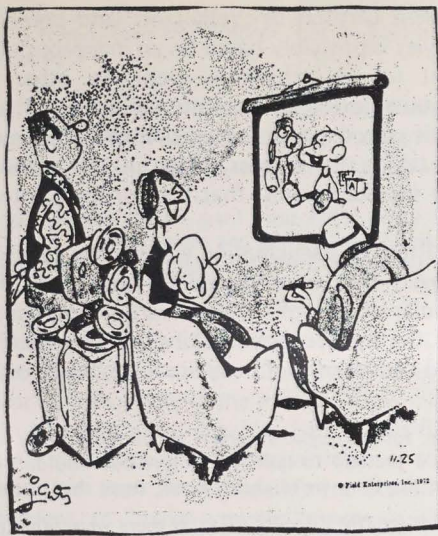
Again, home moviemakers stated that they just did not want to be bothered with cutting and "glueing" pieces of film; it was hard enough to keep all of their reels of movies in order, "never mind fooling around with individual shots." Thus actual home moviemaking behavior does not conform to the prescribed behavior offered by the manuals and advice columns.<sup>21</sup>

### HOME MOVIE EXHIBITION EVENTS

The last event category under examination is "exhibition." This conceptual category consists of any activity, behavior, or performance in which film is shown and viewed in a public context. "Public" contexts do not include the viewing of rushes or edited work prints on a viewer or a projector by the filmmaker or editor alone. These activities are classified as "private" showings and are better categorized as editing events. Exhibition events may occur in many settings, such as a downtown movie theater, a classroom, a drive-in theater, or a livingroom.

A comparison of the emphasis put on exhibition events by both the HTDI manuals and moviemakers reveals another set of differences similar to those that were observed for on-camera events. The manuals have little to say; the home moviemakers a lot.<sup>22</sup>





**"It's a preview for a few select relatives before it goes on general release to friends and neighbors!"**

Figure 4

In one rare exception, one manual offered the following advice in a section titled "How to Stop Torturing Family and Friends:"

Consider your audience. The lights are extinguished and everyone settles back to enjoy your movies. They aren't permitted to settle very far or very comfortably though, because four minutes later . . . on will come the lights again while you rewind and thread a new roll through the projector. This spasmodic sort of performance is upsetting to the digestion, not to mention what it will do to one's temper [HT, p. 92].

This remark was actually directed toward editing activity. Home moviemakers were advised to lengthen their reels of film by splicing rolls together to make a longer screening time.<sup>23</sup>

For most home moviemakers, exhibition events are very exciting times. Informants reported that home movies are usually shown in a party atmosphere, not too unlike the situations that originally inspired the shooting of the films.

In summary, a consistent non-overlapping pattern of emphases has emerged for the five categories of film communication events under examination. The reciprocal pattern of emphases may be schematically represented as follows:

Event	Prescribed Behavior	Observed Behavior
(1) Planning	X	O
(2) On-Camera Filming	O	X
(3) Behind-Camera Filming	X	O
(4) Editing	X	O
(5) Exhibition	O	X

X denotes occurrence or emphasis of event behavior  
O denotes non-occurrence or non-emphasis of event behavior

In other words, the process of visual communication that has been extracted from the literature addressed to those inten-

ding to perform this communication event bears little resemblance to actual behavior exhibited by moviemakers in the home mode. The HTDI manuals promote the creation of a symbolic environment that emphasizes *manipulation* of a reality. Home moviemakers, however, stress the use of filmmaking technology to symbolically record, document and *reproduce* a reality. It is interesting to note that the "naive" home moviemaker embraces the view of filmmaking often promulgated by social scientists of certain schools, i.e., that editing is "bad," planning the subjects' activity is taboo, objectivity is equal to no editing, and so on (Feld and Williams 1975).

From an analysis of the communication events involved, we can thus understand how the notion of symbolic manipulation applies to this particular genre of film communication. It is obvious that any form of mediation lends itself and often determines symbolic manipulation of some kind. Technologically mediated realities allow for differing sources of manipulation. For instance, behind-camera events, on-camera events, and editing events offer different, but not mutually exclusive, chances for symbolic manipulation. Not all forms of film communication use or emphasize the same events. Patterns of emphasis separate one film genre from another. Home moviemaking, in contradistinction with Hollywood or television films, for example, stresses a manipulation of symbols primarily in on-camera events and ignores opportunities in both behind-camera and editing events. This pattern is unlike most other genres of film communication.

It is now possible to characterize further the process and events of home movie visual communication by examining the second dimension of my previously described scheme, namely, the film communication components. In this way, the symbolic manipulation and the nature of the symbolic reality created for this film genre will become clearer.

Ideally, each component should be examined in relationship to each event. Since we have already established that on-camera and exhibition events are most important in home moviemaking, we may limit our discussion to these events and their relevant components.

Each component should also be examined for its relationship to the component message form. "Home movie" is the filmic message form being examined for a systematic configuration of relationships with other components. In this sense, "home movie" is a recognized style characterized by (1) a limited list of "actors" and "actresses"<sup>24</sup> (participants); (2) repetitive scenes of certain activities involving certain themes (topics); (3) a restricted set of places where the movies are shot and later shown (settings); and (4) a habitual use of camera techniques, juxtapositions, and style (code). The set of patterned relationships that emerges from component-event interactions defines home movies as a genre of film communication.

The next section explores specific characteristics of the home movie pattern as it was revealed by both the HTDI manuals and interviews about actual home moviemaking.

## PARTICIPANTS IN HOME MOVIE MAKING

Examination of the component "participants" is a convenient starting point. The category includes anyone<sup>25</sup> who



participates in an activity (therefore any event) for which the central organizing concern is to produce motion pictures. We must look for patterned relationships between those people who do participate and those that do not.

First of all, it is very clear that the majority of home movies contain pictures of people. Both the HTDI manuals and actual home movies agree on this point. Almost all shots contain people rather than things—with the exception of the commonly seen household pet or animals in other contexts. One moviemaker told me:

... Almost never is there not a face—99% of the time. That's just the way we operate: we think film is too expensive to expend it on non-people, or, unless it has some historic value, it has nothing ....

The HTDI manuals frequently stated who should be included in the movies. An informal inventory of participants appropriately included in on-camera events appeared as follows:

Good movies ... are entertaining. It's fun to see movies of picnics, vacations, ski outings, and badminton games when they involve friends, neighbors and relatives [Better Movies in Minutes, p. 39; hereafter referred to as BM].

Add color, depth, and interest to your scenic movies by including friends or family members in the foreground [BM, p. 23].

Thus, according to the prescribed norm, the community of participants appeared to be limited to immediate family members, relatives, close friends, and neighbors (the close friends do not have to be neighbors, but the neighbors have to be close friends).

A similar inventory of participants was prescribed for home movie exhibition events. A consensus of agreement was found in all HTDI manuals. For example:

... shooting film that your family, and your friends will enjoy looking at [FM, p. 5].

... how skillful you become in taking movies that your family and friends really enjoy watching [Now That You're in Show Business, p. 1; hereafter referred to as NT].

Good movies ... are fun to see and fun to show next month when friends and relatives drop by [BM, p. 9].

... that will make it repeatedly enjoyable not only to you, yourself, but to the audiences of friends and relatives who'll also want to see [HT, p. 9].



Figure 5

The frequent cartoon of "reluctant" and bored viewers of home movies is probably based on an inappropriate choice of participant for an exhibition event. In other words, the viewer is outside the appropriate collection of participants.

It is this closed system of participants—the people named as either taking the movies, being in the movies, or being invited to see the movies—that is of primary interest to this analysis.

This pattern of participation was strictly adhered to in the home movies that were viewed for this study. By far, the most popular choice of subjects were young children in the family of the moviemaker. Asking informants if and when this closed community of participation could ever be broken, I was told:

... If an aunt brought a person to the party that we all didn't know, I'd pretend to take her picture but wouldn't—didn't want to waste the film; we're cheap, yeah, done that lots of times ....

... It was strictly a family event; if there were other people in the movie it was just because they were there at that time ....

This attitude was very obvious in the movies. The camera seems to tolerate the "other" people in scenes of crowded places (especially beach and amusement parks). However, the camera does not attend to unknown people as it does the central characters of the home movie community.

Thus one important common denominator of most on-camera participation is that people are personally known to the home moviemaker. One piece of moviemaking advice incorporated this theme:

Actually there's no limit to the subject matter you can shoot with your camera. But for this first movie choose something or someone you know quite well [FM, p. 11].

It was clear when viewing home movies that relatives, neighbors and close friends' friends *not* known by the moviemaker were unlikely choices for on-camera participation.

The pattern of appropriate participants is further clarified when we consider other people who are known and who regularly interact with different family members, but do *not* appear in movies. For instance, home movies can include the family doctor, the mailman, the paper boy, delivery men, trash collectors, metermen, and the like—but they don't. Inclusion of these people is highly unlikely in spite of their regular appearances "at home." On the other hand, family relatives (especially favored relatives) are likely to be included because of their regular but infrequent appearance at home.

Several other characteristics of appropriate on-camera participants further reveal the pattern. For instance, participants are almost always awake,<sup>26</sup> never naked (except for young children), and almost always in good health. People who are ill and bedridden with a communicable disease or a broken limb are generally not included.<sup>27</sup> One does not see a person vomiting in home movies. Participants are always alive; dead people are not appropriate subjects for home movies.<sup>28</sup>

Determination of which participant is designated as cameraman must also be considered. In nearly all cases investigated for this study, the male head of household used the camera most of the time. In a few cases, a teenage son, who was learning about cameras and filmmaking, took over this responsibility. One HTDI manual acknowledged the situation as follows:



Good news for you Dad! Your . . . camera can be operated easily by Mom, a friend, even the children. Let Dad get in the movies too! [NT, p. 9].

In actuality, however, the rule was that Father participated more in behind-camera events than in on-camera events. Another piece of advice suggested the following:

By the way, if you should want your entire party in the same scenes . . . just set the camera and ask a friendly-looking bystander if he'll do the shooting. You'll hardly ever get a turndown [HT, p. 36].

There is more flexibility in letting someone unknown, yet "friendly-looking," take the pictures than having a stranger share a major or minor role in the movies.

Thus, another important characteristic of this film genre is the expressed importance for most participants to *appear* in the movies rather than be responsible for actually shooting the movies. Here, to "make a movie" means to appear in the movie rather than shoot the movie, set the camera, decide what to shoot, etc.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, the community of participants in the home movie genre is a relatively closed system. The list of people who are invited to participate is quite limited and unique. It is not the case that anyone can be in any home movie. The narrow selection of participants is perhaps most clear in exhibition events when only family members, relatives, close friends, and neighbors—who are usually in the movies—are invited to see the films. Participants in on-camera events are limited to a similar grouping of people. This choice is further regulated by the cameraman who is usually the male head of household.

Another aspect of symbolic manipulation has been reinforced from analyzing the participant component. Much more attention is given to appearing as an on-camera participant than in a behind-camera role. In this sense, the presentation of oneself and manipulation of oneself are *more* important than controlling and manipulating the symbolic content from behind the camera. This finding corroborates results of the event analysis presented earlier.

## TOPICS OF HOME MOVIES

Examination of the "topic" component in conjunction with home movie filming events further develops a profile of patterned social behavior. Topic describes film content in terms of themes, subject matter, and activities that are filmed and later shown in a movie. Topic is usually described by answering the question: "What was the film about?"

Readers should be aware that present camera technology allows pictures to be taken of nearly anything, regardless of excessive movement, varying light conditions, size of subject matter, and so on. This is equally true for professional filmmaking equipment as well as the less expensive cameras usually used for home moviemaking. Advertisements for popular cameras encourage camera use "anywhere." However, examination and comparison of the HTDI manuals and home movie footage reveals that actual use of cameras is relatively restricted to sets of appropriate topics and themes. For instance:

Movies are best and most interesting when they show people actually doing things rather than merely smiling or waving at the camera. A baby's first awkward steps, your family's vacation activities, a friend on water skis—these are the kind of subjects that make memorable movies [HT, p. 8].

How much would it be worth to you in ten, fifteen or twenty years to be able to relive today . . . see your children as toddlers . . . watch your family through all their happy times . . . on Christmas morning . . . at birthdays . . . graduations . . . on family vacations . . . on visits to grandparents . . . *to keep a complete filmed record of your family's life together?* [emphasis added].<sup>30</sup>

Other good subjects for family movies are parties, a class day at school, feeding a new pet, building a tree house, making a snowman, a child painting a picture, building a model—in short, *any activity that shows the family in the process of living and growing* [Anon. 1968:134; emphasis added].

Good movies are especially great in a few years when you want to relive a trip to the lake, the shore, or to the big city; the snowball battle the kids had after the blizzard of '68; Johnny's first birthday and his first steps; the day you got the new station wagon; the Easter-egg hunt—it's an endless list [BM, p. 9; emphasis added].

As I will show below, the patterns of prescribed behavior and observed behavior are once again dissimilar. The HTDI guides and advice columns frequently suggest "a complete filmed record" of family life or an "endless list" of suitable subject matter. For example:

When a boy meets a bologna sandwich, especially small boy and large sandwich, the movie potentialities are measureless. Children at mealtime are first-rate movie subjects . . . [HT, p. 54].

Once there was a brother and a sister . . . (who took a bath) and left their bespattered parents amused, exhausted, and totally unconscious that such carryings-on make wonderful home movies [HT, p. 43].

An extreme example appeared in an advice column entitled "A Good Home Movie Is Not Necessarily 'Well Made'":

. . . there are nevertheless dozens of dreary routines that you might someday be glad you filmed . . . Your route to work, your friends' houses, the same old tennis court, a plain old street bus . . . [Sutherland 1971:122].<sup>31</sup>

However, the list of topics that home moviemakers actually do record is *not* endless. The selection of topics that the home moviemaker *can* make and the actual list that he *does* make do *not* coincide. The actual list of preferred topics and themes appears to be quite restricted and limited.

While we might expect "home movies" or "family movies" to be mostly concerned with family life at home, it appears that only a small fraction of everyday life is recorded on film.

Several broad categories of topics were found to be the most appropriate choices for home movies. The following listing has been developed from a frequency count of topics seen in the actual movies studied for this report.

(1) *Vacation activity* is very well represented. For instance, home movies contain many scenes of children at the beach or the lakeside during summer vacation. Camping and boating activity are frequently seen along with swimming and bicycle riding. Children regularly appear in various play activities—floating a toy sailboat, chasing a ball, climbing a tree or on swings, or in other activities where a lot of action and movement is involved.



(2) *Holiday activity* frequently demands use of a movie camera. For instance, home moviemakers are likely to include images of the Christmas tree or of the family opening presents, Thanksgiving dinner, an Easter-egg hunt in the backyard, or colorful Halloween costumes.

(3) *Special events* in the lives of family members (especially children) are frequently included in home movies. Examples here include a christening, a birthday party, a trip to an amusement park, graduation day, a parade with a family member involved, a wedding party, and the like.

(4) *Local activity* will also be filmed when slightly unusual events are taking place. For instance, home movies are likely to include scenes of snowball throwing, lawn parties, a baby learning to walk in the driveway or playing with garden flowers. Children and adults are frequently seen showing off something new such as a new toy, bicycle, or car. Family pets are also regularly filmed when playing with family members, chasing sticks or balls, and so on.

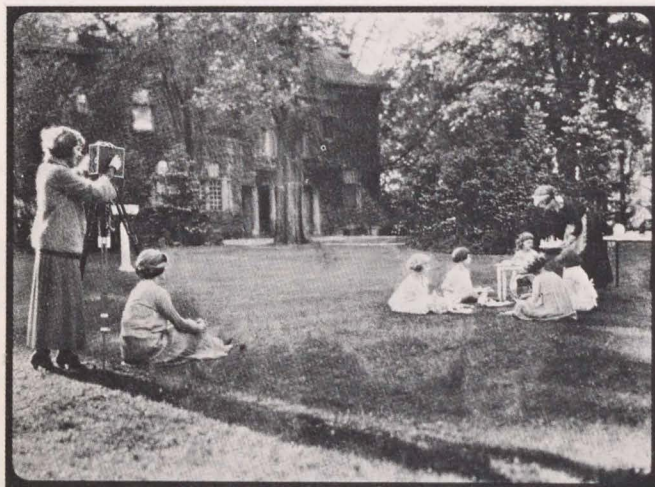


Figure 6 —making home movies, 1923

The pattern is further clarified when considering the many activities around-the-house that are not included as appropriate topics for home movies. For instance, one seldom, if ever, finds family members preparing, eating, or cleaning up from breakfast, lunch, or dinner in these movies. On the other hand, we do find that a “special” meal will be filmed such as Thanksgiving dinner, a birthday meal, a meal at a wedding reception, or a summer barbacue when relatives, neighbors, or friends are present. We never see people getting dressed in the morning or getting undressed and going to bed at night; we never see family members going to the bathroom to either wash or use the toilet, though young children infrequently appear in bathtubs. We never see children going to school or father or mother going to work. We never see scenes of washing dishes, cleaning house, or doing house repairs (other than a major renovation). We never see family members reading a book or magazine, watching television, listening to records or to the radio, or writing a letter. We do not see scenes of children being scolded, family quarrels, or lovemaking.

In summary, it seems to be the case that the list of excluded topics is endless, rather than the included ones. The obvious conclusion is that what is supposed to be a documentation of daily family life, isn’t at all. Rather than finding that anything can be filmed, we find a very selective choice of topics.

## SETTINGS FOR HOME MOVIE MAKING

Much of the analysis of topic selection is relevant to examining choice of setting. The conceptual category “setting” can refer to two different things. In some cases, setting describes the specific times and places when and where a communication event (such as planning, filming, editing, or exhibition) takes place. In other cases, setting may refer to the times and places that appear as the content of the movie.<sup>32</sup> In the home movie genre, it is highly likely that a description of the setting for the filming event coincides with a setting description of the scene in the movie. For instance, film shot at a beach shows scenes of action that actually did occur at the beach. Just as participants do not disguise themselves to “play” a fictitious character, settings are not radically changed for appearance in home movies.<sup>33</sup>

Readers should understand that for most of this analysis of the topic component, I held the setting variable constant—namely, “at-home.” However, it appears that not all settings at home are appropriately included as home movie content. First of all, outside-home settings are much more common than indoor settings on roughly a ten to one ratio. When filming inside a home, moviemakers seldom used their cameras (and lights) in bedrooms, bathrooms, attics, cellars, or kitchens. Thus it is not the case that any setting in or around the house can be used. Home movie settings in this context are usually restricted to livingrooms, diningrooms, and backyards.<sup>34</sup>

While the home setting is frequently used, this setting usually requires another special element. Christmas day, Thanksgiving dinner, an Easter-egg hunt, or relatives visiting to see what the new baby looks like might provide this additional element. Something must intrude, such as a snow storm or a hurricane, to change the common appearance of the home setting. In this sense, home movies do *not* record the reality of everyday life. Instead, we find a carefully selected repertory of highlighted times and occurrences that a family is likely to celebrate and wish to remember.

Another category of home movie settings might be labeled “away-from-home.” On an everyday basis, family members leave their homes for various reasons. However, very few types of away-from-home settings include a filming event. In general, only three types of social activity are important to this context, namely, trips to the home of a relative (or very close friend), special events, and vacation trips. The first group conforms to at-home characteristics previously described. The second category of special events frequently takes moviemakers away from home and includes a graduation in a school auditorium, a parade in a city street, a wedding reception, and so on.

Home movies made in the third context are sometimes called “vacation movies” or “travel films.” These movies usually document “special” places such as a wildlife preserve, a zoo, a historic site, a national park or landmark, an Indian



reservation, or a natural "wonder" such as Niagara Falls.<sup>35</sup> The majority of these films are made during vacation times. When vacation consists of staying at a seaside cottage, a mountain retreat, a wooded camping spot, etc., topics are filmed that would not deserve attention when movies were made at home. For instance, at a vacation setting, home movies are likely to include common everyday activities such as riding a bicycle, getting wet in a backyard sprinkler, playing catch or frisbee, or just roughhousing on the ground. In this respect, topic choice for filming events co-varies with setting choice. Topics and activities common to everyday life at home are more appropriately filmed *away* from home.

Selection of setting also includes a consideration of time. If we ask what periods in a human's life or what social situations we choose to record in home movies, we find evidence for a conventionalized pattern of selection. Filming events occur during the first days of an infant's life, or a baptism, during early birthdays, at confirmation and Bar Mitzvah parties, during graduations, weddings, anniversary parties, and the like. On the other hand, we do not find scenes of the last days of life or of divorce proceedings.



"I had no idea they were going to show us home movies of their divorce evidence against each other!"

Figure 7

Description of setting also includes where the exhibition events take place. This is perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of all home movies. In all cases investigated, home movies were shown in a livingroom or a recreation room of a private home. Home movies are almost never shown in movie theaters, in school auditoriums, in drive-in theaters, or other public exhibition settings. Only rarely will such a film be shown in a film festival or museum collection.<sup>36</sup>

In summary, we see that home moviemakers do not arbitrarily select any person, any activity, any site, or any

time to use their cameras.<sup>37</sup> Rather than a random or haphazardly chosen set of participants, settings, and topics, we find a relatively limited selection of subject matter that is all positively (versus negatively) valued. The symbolically created world of home movies is a very happy place, full of smiling people engaged in enjoyable and important activities.

## CODE CHARACTERISTICS OF HOME MOVIES

The last film component to be discussed is "code." A description of a code includes the elements or units that define a particular message form (or style)—in this case, the message form of home movie. Analysis of code includes both the description of filmic habits, conventions, or filmic routines (in shooting and/or editing) and a description of social habits and conventions when they are patterned. For instance, we may be describing a particular sequential ordering of shots as well as a pattern of on-camera social behavior, such as people always looking at the camera, or people always wearing new or clean clothes, etc. While it is easy to label a film "like home movies," a description of its code allows us to specify what kinds of behind-camera and on-camera behavior determines this recognizable style.

The following patterns appeared with highest frequencies, although the HTDI manuals are quick to warn novice movie makers about these as "mistakes."

(1) In general, there is a great deal of camera movement and a strong tendency to pan. Frequently, the camera tries to follow pieces of action and to stay with whatever is moving or doing something. In scenery shots, panning is equally extensive. Frequently, the cameraman tries to cram as much into the picture as possible.

(2) There is a frequent use of the zoom technique. The majority of the newer cameras have a zoom lens built into the camera body, and home moviemakers use the zoom lenses with which they are provided.

(3) The majority of shots in home movies are "long" and "medium" shots. Close-up shots are rare, but more common in the most recently made films. The tendency is to draw back from the subject matter, leaving the central concern (person, place, thing, etc.) of the shot rather small in the overall picture. Standard compositions most often include a great deal of "empty" space around the objects of central concern.

(4) More footage is poorly exposed in older home movies than in the recently made films. Automatic exposure meters have been built into the newer camera models. Of the poorly exposed footage, more footage was under-exposed than over-exposed.

(5) Lengths of shots in a home movie vary greatly. The older cameras were spring wound; this regulated the maximum length of any shot. Most of the newer cameras are battery operated. Now one movie *could* consist of two 25-foot long shots<sup>38</sup> or, with the cartridge loaded cameras, one 50-foot shot. However, this seldom if ever happens.

(6) The shots contained in any 50-foot reel of film seem to begin and end anywhere, with little visual continuity and no apparent conventional order of appearance. The shots were not necessarily related to one another beyond the fact that they were shot in the same place, about the same thing, at the same time, or that they were all shot by the same



person. There was little if any attempt to structure a sequence of shots in terms of storyline or plot.<sup>39</sup> The possible structures other than conventional narrative or story have yet to be explored. But it seems clear that people making home movies do not make them randomly. They are, however, following a pattern that doesn't seem to conform to that of other pictorial genres.

(7) The same 50-foot roll of film will sometimes contain shots from several shooting sessions. Different locations or times of shooting were not separated by any visible marker such as a short piece of unexposed film or blank leader.

(8) Jump shots occur very regularly. Rather than a flow or conventional blending of shots into "smooth" sequence, the shots of a home movie tend to jump around, and to appear to be "rough," "jumpy," and not smooth.

A description of code also includes a repetitive pattern of characteristic behavior for on-camera performance. The following elements or tendencies reappeared in each sample of home movies viewed for this study. Each of these tendencies was often mentioned in interviews as "common things that happen in home movies."

(1) There is a lot of waving at the camera. This seems to be appropriate when the cameraman says, "okay, do something," or "move!" People will also wave when they first realize that the camera is taking pictures.

(2) Very frequently one sees people, especially children, walking directly toward the camera, sometimes directly into the lens.

(3) There is an extraordinarily large amount of just staring into the lens of the camera. (Recall the reference to staring by Weston La Barre included earlier in this paper.) People look as though the camera is going to make some form of acknowledgment. This staring is similar to the looks of people sitting for still portraits.

(4) People will strike a pose or present a "camera-face" for an operating movie camera. Subjects will project themselves as the camera watches.

In part, it is this collection of behavioral traits for both behind-camera activity and on-camera appearances that people refer to when they say "it looks like a home movie." In almost all cases, however, a "rule" can be found in the HTDI manuals that contradicts these "natural" tendencies. It must be concluded that the HTDI manuals are promoting the production of a different style of film, and, in turn, a different pattern of film communication.

## FUNCTIONS OF HOME MOVIE MAKING

The final task of this report is to examine the social functions of home moviemaking. An understanding of the relationship between the suggested components and events can be considered along a functional dimension. Aside from initially asking why home movies are made at all, we can also examine what people do with their private use of this media technology, and what this enterprise does *for* the people involved.<sup>40</sup> In this case, we can use three sources of data: the HTDI manuals, interviews with participants, and the analyst's observations of the films.

The HTDI manuals were quite helpful in exploring a functional dimension. When asking why home movies are made at all, we find the following:

Few people enter upon movie shooting out of any fatal fascination with the photographic details of it. Usually the impetus is the single desire to preserve things . . . [HT, p. 18].

With a movie camera . . . you can preserve the entire event, unfrozen and continuous, exactly as it happens [HT, p. 7].

What makes it [a home movie] worthwhile is seeing the event replayed on the screen, getting yourself hurled back to something you'd wanted to preserve [Sutherland 1971:123].

The first group of functions focuses on the idea of preserving a piece of experienced reality. The ideal is to "capture" a slice of time and possess it forever, to be able to retrieve it and re-experience it at any time.

The preservation function is predicated on a "capture of reality" theme regularly expressed in the HTDI manuals.

. . . you'll find much to your pleasure, that you've captured a wonderful slice of childhood, complete and continuous . . . [HT, p. 9].

Inside your camera, imprisoned on the film and ready for processing, is a truly documentary film story of the cookout, just as it happened [HT, p. 23].

Just point the camera at your subject, press a button, and "capture moving subjects on film." That's all you have to do! [NT, p. 2].

In very cogent, persistent, and persuasive terms, the HTDI reader is led to believe that the primary function of the home movie enterprise is to capture and store a strip of reality. Probably the most extreme statement in this context comes from the avant-garde filmmaker of "home movies," Stan Brakhage:

When an amateur photographs scenes of a trip he is taking, a party, or other special occasion, and especially when he is photographing his children, he is seeking a hold on time and, as such, is ultimately attempting to defeat death [1971:24].

Closely related to the preservation function is the positive value placed on creating a visual memory and a retention of details. The HTDI manuals stress that another major function of the home movie genre is that of a memory bank:

There's just nothing that will recall all the color, fun, and reality of good times like a good home movie [BM, p. 1].

These nine sequences were a beautiful story that will please you and your friends that see it for years to come. Why? Because you have recorded on film a story from beginning to end that tells who was there and what happened [NT, p. 4].

Another example of the memory and storage function is clear in the following letter, which appeared in the *Boston Globe*, entitled, "Movies of Mother All Daughter Will Ever Know."

Dear Killing Me Softly—

. . . A bizarre and tragic accident took the life of my eldest daughter, 27, last summer. She left a husband and three young children, two boys, 8 and 6, and a new baby daughter, only 5 weeks old. . . I don't think our memories should be let go, unless they keep us from functioning among the living. I have some marvelous movies of my daughter, starting when she was 4 years old. This is the only way her little girl will ever know the kind of person her mother was. I am extremely thankful that I stuck to my movie-making so faithfully. It comforts me to bring back the happy memories.

Signed—Can't Help Singing  
[June 6, 1975]

Occasionally the prescribed behavior for home movie-making combines the theme of a visual memory with a pragmatic emphasis on making an investment.



You've got an investment in every 50 feet you shoot. It's not only an investment in money . . . but one in memories. Every roll you shoot probably has a dozen things on it you'll want to remember . . . Actually that film is rather precious [FM, p. 73].

Shooting home movies is like making a good financial investment—you give up something at the time, but you get a profitable return later. And like most good investments, this one grows as time passes [Sutherland 1971:123].

The HTDI manuals also speak of a hedonistic function. "Good times" frequently require some form of photographic recording. Not only should one have a good time making the movies, but viewers should be able to repeat and re-experience these pleasurable times. The hedonistic function plays a large role and is expressed as follows:

This is a book about movies. Not the LIGHTS-CAMERA-ACTION kind of movies, but the kind of personal movies that we make so that we can enjoy our good times over and over again, as often as we like [BM, p. 1].

. . . whenever you place your eye in the viewfinder, if you think primarily in terms of recording natural, interesting activity, your films will become a marvelously rewarding, continuing source of deep pleasure [HT, p. 8].

What is neglected in these statements is the basic drive in most of us to see ourselves performing, either in terms of doing something, such as work, riding a bicycle, or in some form of interpersonal interaction.

The last function which attracts attention involves the idea of keeping track of change. When home movies are viewed in a chronological order, the juxtaposition of each movie documents changing settings, fashions, people's looks and the like. For instance:

They [home movies] spark the surprising and sometimes disturbing realization that a lot has passed without our having noticed; the gradual changes imperceptibly mounted upon one another . . . We're reminded how we used to look, think, live, and behave . . . [Sutherland 1971:180].

From the small sample of people that I interviewed, I found general agreement on the functional importance of home movies. The most frequently mentioned was the "triggering of the memory" function characterized by:

. . . Someone might say "oh look at such and such doing such and such," and the family would make general comments—"oh remember when we were driving past there." It's almost as though the pictures would sometimes serve as a triggering device and then they'd come out with some incident that was associated with the trip . . .

We must also consider functions *not* served by home movie production. An idea often mentioned in the interviews was that home movies were *not* an outlet for artistic expression. Just as there would be little artistic motivation when making a tape recording of something, there was little or no concern with making a home movie in an "artistic" manner.

The concern was with documenting an activity or a place:

. . . It's for a record and they think because it's moving it's more of a complete record than stills would be . . . [they] want to document what went on; no artistic impulse . . .

In the home mode, people make and see "movies" rather than "films" or "cinema." I would speculate that for the home moviemaker "to make and do art" means to tamper with or alter the images of reality. Results of this meddling activity do not reproduce the whole truth or an accurate rendition of reality. Since the emphasis in home movie-



*"It was when he started referring to his home movies as 'films' that I knew we were in for a bad night."*

Figure 8

making is to accurately duplicate reality in all its living color, any attempt to alter a copying ability somehow profanes the purpose of the medium.

So far, I have discussed functions that are frequently mentioned in either the HTDI manuals or the interviews organized for this study. However, another group of functions are less clearly articulated but equally important. This collection of functions is best understood when one examines the position of home movies within the entire process of film communication.

When analyzing latent functions, we see that the making and showing of home movies tends to act as a bonding agent creating a specific social structure. Whether this structure is based on kinship ties, neighborhood relationships or close friendships, home movie activity offers visual evidence of specific relationships and both allows and offers future social activities to reinforce these ties. I have noticed that the same people tend to be involved in each of the filmmaking events. In both filming events and exhibition events, specific relationships are re-established, reified, and celebrated. In this sense, these film events illustrate the function of communion. Certain people, representing a specific set of social rela-



tionships, are brought together to re-affirm an order of people, things, values, perspectives, and worldview.

One can further speculate that functions of home movies include a form of socialization, a maintenance of a behavioral conformity, and a validation of culture.<sup>41</sup> This suggests connections with the role of myth and other forms of expressive behavior operating within cultural contexts.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper has been to examine home moviemaking as a process of visual communication and home movies as a culturally structured product of symbolic manipulation. A scheme of film communication events and components has been described and used to isolate a set of distinctive characteristics of one genre of film communication.

In the first part of the paper, a comparison was made between a paradigm of communication prescribed by a series of home moviemaking manuals and a pattern found by observing actual moviemaking behavior. From identification and comparison of a series of film communication events, it was found that the prescribed paradigm did not describe the norm for observed behavior.

In the second half of the report, the symbolic content of home movies was examined. A series of film communication components was introduced to delineate a set of event-component relationships that further characterized home movies. Rather than finding that *anything* can happen in home movies, a highly selective set of preferences emerged that controlled a limited choice of subject matter.

In one sense, the content of home movies is no different from any other form of visual representation. All mediated forms of reality are, in essence, symbolic representations; and all visual forms are a result of a process of symbolic manipulation. In no case is everything shown, and in no case is the visual symbolic form equal to the "real thing." Thus each form is a result of a decision making process (implicit or explicit) that controls the selection, use, and manipulation of symbolic items and events. It seems clear that different types of visual recording modes, media, and codes emphasize different parts of the overall process of representation.

It has been shown that home moviemaking, as one type of visual recording, de-emphasizes the manipulative potential of the recording technology. In this sense, home movies stress a documentary function in order to produce a copy of a familiar reality. Again, however, it is not the case that everything is shown or that anything can happen. One purpose of this study has been to outline the out-of-awareness dimensions of symbolic manipulation that produce the world of home movies.

The structure of the criteria of selection and manipulation rule out the possibility that home movies document a reality of everyday life. Instead of a fabricated reality common to most feature-narrative films, used in a context of mass communications, we find a special reality documented in the personal home movie "portrait of life." Commonplace behavior, mundane activities, and everyday happenings do not get recorded. Just as we cannot easily see our own culture, we tend not to find it with our cameras.

When one considers all forms of filmic recording that in any way present, illustrate, or illuminate the human and socio-cultural condition, home movies are stereotypically thought to show the most accurate and realistic picture of everyday life. On a relative scale, this may be the case. However, if Martians or Venusians should study our home movies long after we have ceased to exist, they would, in fact, have a carefully constructed and biased view of everyday life.<sup>42</sup> Without knowing how home movies function as a specific product of symbolic manipulation used within a specific process of visual communication within a cultural context, observers could not make valid inferences about the behavior shown on film. This is so for any form of visual representation from which we try to gain knowledge about the past, present, or future state of the human and social condition.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this paper was presented in the Symposium on Ethnographies of Visual Communication at the 71st Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Toronto, 1972. The writing of this version was facilitated by a Faculty Research Grant from Temple University, 1975. I wish to thank Sol Worth and Jay Ruby for critically reviewing earlier drafts of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Other forms of native accounts have been studied such as letters, diaries, notebooks, journals, dreams, and expressive interviews (see Gottschalk, Kluckhohn, and Angell 1945; Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest 1966). However, visual materials such as snapshots and family films have been neglected.

<sup>3</sup> The theoretical orientation used in this paper has been developed largely from the writing and research of Sol Worth and Dell Hymes. For the development of Worth's vidistic perspective on film and the subsequent emergence of "sociovidistics," see Chalfen (1974). For a statement regarding the anthropological relevance of vidistic fieldwork and the contextualization of film as a symbolic form, see Worth (1972) and Worth and Adair (1972).

<sup>4</sup> The notions of a communication "event" and "component" have been borrowed from Hymes' ethnography of speaking paradigm (1962, 1964, 1972). While Hymes dealt directly with verbal symbolic forms, attention in this paper is to visual forms. Thus I am simultaneously examining the assumption that Hymes' theory of communication is general enough to be applied to a variety of communication modes (see Hymes 1964 for an explicit statement of the change from "speaking" to "communication").

<sup>5</sup> The qualification of "home movie content" should be emphasized. As will be demonstrated later, this film might not be included in a home mode context because of its subsequent use in public contexts rather than private ones.

<sup>6</sup> No attempt has been made to study sound home movies for this report.

<sup>7</sup> In this sense Nikons and Leicas can be used as well as Instamatics and Polaroids for the still counterpart of home movies, namely, family album snapshots.

<sup>8</sup> For the film critic, home movies have sometimes represented a standard for the evaluation and comparison with other more professional forms. For instance, Nicholas Pileggi's review of *The Godfather* is titled "The Making of 'the Godfather'—Sort of a Home Movie" (1971), and Joe Adcock's recent review of *A Woman Under the Influence* is titled "John Cassavetes' Latest Is a Draggy Home Movie" (1975).

<sup>9</sup> Another example is *Dawson Family Reunion*. Harry Dawson, Jr., made a Super-8 film of his family's reunion at the request of his father. Subsequently, Dawson entered the movie "on pure whimsey" in the annual Oregon Filmmakers Festival. The film won first place (personal communication 1974).



<sup>10</sup> Another interesting example of the usurpation of home movie-making is the Bar Mitzvah scene in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974) directed by Ted Kotcheff.

<sup>11</sup> Films in this category include *Ricky and Rocky* by Jeff Kreines (Chalfen 1975a), *Mother Marries a Man of Mellow Mien* by Abigail Child, *A Visit to Indiana* by Curt McDowell, and *Going Home* by Adolphus Mekas and Pola Chapelle.

<sup>12</sup> The home movie efforts of the Kennedy family and movies of Hitler's home life have been shown on television during the past five years. Most recently, the home movies of Bob Haldeman appeared on a Mike Wallace CBS News Special, arousing further interest in Water-gate activities and "back-stage" White House life (Dean 1975).

<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Professor George Semsel, in the College of Fine Arts at Ohio University (Athens), directs an "annual home movie festival at which the local community is invited to screen such films" (private communication 1973).

<sup>14</sup> This project was directed by Steve Zeitline, assisted by Amy Kotkin. Zeitline and Buddy Star produced a film titled *Home Movie—An American Folk Art* as part of this project (see Fisher 1975).

<sup>15</sup> The progression of research projects completed by Worth and his students is particularly interesting in this regard. Worth first observed the making of "bio-documentary" films (a form of native-generated film) by white middle-class graduate students (see Worth 1965). In collaboration with John Adair, Worth then observed a group of Navaho Indians make films about themselves for the first time (see Worth and Adair 1972). Subsequently, several of Worth's graduate students began to instruct and observe urban teenagers as they produced films in their own neighborhoods (see Achtenberg 1967; Chalfen and Haley 1971; and Chalfen 1972). And most recently, I have begun to investigate movies and still photographs made by white middle-class families as part of the home mode of visual communication (see Chalfen 1975b). However, the "primitive" or "naive" qualities of these *different* forms of visual communication do *not* singularly serve to unite all these forms under the heading of "home movies."

<sup>16</sup> It is surprising to find that home movies are not mentioned in appropriately titled references as *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology* (Gottschalk, Kluckhohn, and Angell 1945), *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (Collier 1967), *Unobtrusive Measures: Nonreactive Research in the Social Sciences* (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest 1966) just to mention a few.

<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to notice the terminology used in this short quotation. Three of the four film communication events (planning, filming, and editing) are mentioned. The neglect of exhibition activity is a common characteristic of the HTDI manuals.

<sup>18</sup> We may speculate that when people begin to plan their filmmaking (versus moviemaking) they are leaving the home mode and entering an "amateur mode." Readers should notice that this shift may have nothing to do with camera technology.

<sup>19</sup> For a set of instructions for how to pose for the family snapshot, see "Do Your Pictures Flatter You?" (*Woman's Day*, November 1971, p. 17) or "Camera Shy? Practice to Overcome It" by Mary Sue Miller (*Evening Bulletin*, January 16, 1973, p. 58).

<sup>20</sup> A consideration of editing is important to the transformation of home movie footage to an "artistic" mode. For instance, Clay Colt, writing on "Home Movies—Beyond Nostalgia and Kitsch," outlines three possible ways that filmmakers can use raw home movie footage: rearranging existing old movie footage; editing one's own home movies with an end in mind that goes beyond being "just home movies;" or drawing on the naive style while enriching the content to develop a strong aesthetic or social statement [1974:6].

<sup>21</sup> For an account of editing still photographs in the production of a family album, see Jeanne Lamb O'Neill's article "All in the Family Album" (*American Home*, August 1972, p. 22).

<sup>22</sup> The importance of showing home movies was mentioned by Don Sutherland, a regular contributor to *Popular Photography*. He made a meaningful distinction between professional and amateur filmmakers:

As a pro, I enjoy the challenges of shooting movies; as an amateur, my pleasure is in showing them . . . What makes it worthwhile is seeing the event replayed on the screen . . . [1971:123].

<sup>23</sup> For a satiric account of an exhibition event in a related form of home mode visual communication—namely, travel slides—see Leonard S. Bernstein's "How to Stop Them—After They've Photographed Paris," *House Beautiful* (October 1972, pp. 171-172).

<sup>24</sup> For purposes of exposition and the avoidance of awkwardness, the term "actor" shall refer to both males and females, just as "cameraman" should be read as "cameraperson."

<sup>25</sup> "Anyone" must be understood to include animals whether it be simply a household pet or a "star" such as Lassie, Rin Tin Tin, or Benji.

<sup>26</sup> Beach scenes may include a sleeping person—an inclusion determined by a change in setting.

<sup>27</sup> Casts on a child's broken arm or leg, covered with signatures, were seen several times, however.

<sup>28</sup> This has not always been the case for the message form "snapshot." At one time, the photographing of dead people in caskets for the photograph collection was commonplace. I have collected several examples of this behavior from Polish and Italian families.

<sup>29</sup> A common attitude is that cameras take the pictures and that the people behind the cameras have very little to do with the process. In this sense, the cameraman becomes a bystander, while the competent technology of the camera apparatus is totally responsible. Camera advertisements clearly foster this attitude, presenting an image of the helpless picture-taker who needs the totally automatic, in some cases, computerized camera. For another approach, see Paul Byers' "Cameras Don't Take Pictures" (1966).

<sup>30</sup> Quoted from an advertisement for a GAF home movie outfit sold and distributed by the Gulf Oil Company to their credit card holders.

<sup>31</sup> Jonas Mekas, avant-garde filmmaker and film critic for the *Village Voice*, praises the film *Man of the House*, made in 1924 by Carl Dreyer, for his attention to everyday things and activities:

. . . the film is full of most precise and most beautiful details from the daily life at the beginning of the century. All the little things that people do at home, in their livingrooms, in their kitchens, you can almost smell and touch every smallest activity, detail. In a sense one could look at it as an ethnographic film [April 2, 1970]. This extreme attention to everyday detail may, in fact, belong to another film genre, either that of the "art" film or the "ethnographic" film.

<sup>32</sup> This distinction is important in some, but not all, genres of film communication. For instance, in a Hollywood production, the setting of the filming event may be a studio or a studio "lot," but the setting for the action of the film might be a western saloon, a livingroom, an airplane interior, and the like.

<sup>33</sup> However, some form of minor modification, such as cleaning a room, may precede filming.

<sup>34</sup> Rare exceptions occur in the case of a baby's bedroom, a young child's bath time, or a special dinner eaten in the kitchen.

<sup>35</sup> "Special" is meant here in a positive sense. We do not find pictures of city slums, abandoned housing, or city dumps in home movies—at least not in home movies made of "our" society. However, these scenes may optionally be included in travel movies made of "other" societies.

<sup>36</sup> Moviemakers may feel awkward when their private images are shown in public places. One example is provided by Harry Dawson, Jr., who entered his home movie titled *Dawson Family Reunion* in the first annual Oregon Filmmakers Festival. The film was given "first place and sparked a very lively local controversy. I was chagrined; here's my private home movie up in front of everyone, some identify with it, others cry hoax! I was very upset . . . To me it's still mostly for family . . ." (personal communication 1974).

<sup>37</sup> Slight variation in the patterned choice of appropriate participants, settings and topics indicates a different genre of film communication. Some manuals urge readers "to organize home moviemaking into the spirited adventure it can be." We see some of the familiar components being used for different ends, changing the pattern of film communication. For example, one manual promoted the production and direction of home movies that will look like "downtown films":

Imagine shooting a no-guns Western in your own backyard starring



your one and only Junior. A comedy that features Mother. A crime mystery, sports story, drama, legend or a community documentary that's meaningful at a town meeting... You have the cast and production crew: your own family friends and neighbors. All indoor and outdoor sets are home and hometown sites... Everything you need to know to organize home movie-making into the spirited adventure it can be—a new kind of family and community participation! [Goodwin and Manilla 1971:vii-viii].

Here we see that choice of on-camera participants and settings are appropriate, but choice of theme (comedy, mystery, legend, etc.) and exhibition participants (a town meeting) are not in the pattern of home movies.

<sup>38</sup> In most 8mm cameras, the camera has to be stopped and the film spool turned over before the second 25 feet of film can be exposed. This is not necessary with the newer cartridge loaded cameras.

<sup>39</sup> Titles, credits, and "fin" are very infrequent. Home movies generally begin when there is film available to shoot and end when the supply of film runs out.

<sup>40</sup> We are not so concerned with what home moviemaking does to people in a strict effects orientation. More attention is paid to a functional approach which stresses what people do *with* the media (see Wright 1974).

<sup>41</sup> I am borrowing a lot from William Bascom's 1954 paper entitled "Four Functions of Folklore" in which he discusses "what folklore does for the people who tell and listen to it" (1954:342). Bascom stresses the notion of folklore maintaining the stability of culture: "Viewed thus, folklore operates within a society to insure conformity to the accepted cultural norms, and continuity from generation to generation through its role in education and the extent to which it mirrors culture" (1954:348-349).

<sup>42</sup> For a Venusian interpretation of a reel of film, see Arthur Clarke's "History Lesson" in *Across a Sea of Stars* (1959).

## REFERENCES CITED 1

- Achtenberg, Ben  
1967 *Making Not Much to Do: An Experiment in the Use of Documentary Filmmaking as a Tool in Communication Research*. Unpublished MA thesis, Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania.
- Bascom, William  
1954 Four Functions of Folklore. *Journal of American Folklore* 67:333-349.
- Brakhage, Stan  
1971 In Defense of the "Amateur" Filmmaker. *Filmmakers Newsletter* (Summer):20-25.
- Byers, Paul  
1966 Cameras Don't Take Pictures. *Columbia University Forum* 9(1):27-31.
- Carpenter, Edmund  
1972 *Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me!* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Chalfen, Richard  
1974 *Film as Visual Communication: A Sociovisual Study in Filmmaking*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania.  
1975a Review. *American Anthropologist* 77:466-469.  
1975b Introduction to the Home Mode of Visual Communication. *Folklore Forum* 13:19-25.
- Chalfen, Richard, and Jay Haley  
1971 Reaction to Socio-Documentary Filmmaking Research in a Mental Health Clinic. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 41(1):91-100.
- Chalfen, Richard, and Sol Worth  
1972 How Groups in Our Society Act When Taught to Use Movie Cameras. In *Through Navaho Eyes*, by Sol Worth and John Adair. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Colt, Clay  
1974 Home Movies—Beyond Nostalgia and Kitsch. *University Film Study Center Newsletter* 4(5):6-7.

- Dean, John W., III  
1975 Haldeman Is No More Innocent Than I Am. *New York Times* (April 6).
- Feld, Steve, and Carroll Williams  
1975 Toward a Researchable Film Language. *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 2:25-32.
- Fisher, Emily  
1975 The Home-Movie Tradition: Everybody's Baby as Art. *Washington Post* (June 11).
- Gottschalk, Louis, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Robert Angell  
1945 The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology. *Bulletin* 53, Social Science Research Council, New York.
- Hill, Richard, and Kathleen Crittenden, Eds.  
1968 *Proceedings of the 1968 Purdue Symposium on Ethnomethodology*. Institute Monograph Series, No. 1.
- Hymes, Dell  
1962 The Ethnography of Speaking. *Anthropology and Human Behavior*. Thomas Gladwin and William C. Sturtevant, Eds. Washington, DC: Anthropological Society of Washington.  
1964 Introduction: Toward Ethnographies of Communication. *The Ethnography of Communication*. John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, Eds. *American Anthropologist* 66(2, pt. 2):1-34.  
1972 Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life. *Directions in Sociolinguistics*. John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, Eds. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. pp. 35-71.
- La Barre, Weston  
1968 Comment on Hall. *Current Anthropology* 9(2-3):101-102.
- Mead, Margaret, and Rhoda Metraux, Eds.  
1953 *The Study of Culture at a Distance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mekas, Jonas  
1972 *Movie Journal*. New York: Collier Books.
- Sussex, Elizabeth  
1972 Grierson on Documentary: The Last Interview. *Film Quarterly* 26(1):24-30.
- Van Gelder, Lawrence  
1974 *Film: Heroes, Ode to Home Movie*. *New York Times* (December 15).
- Webb, Eugene J., et al.  
1966 *Unobtrusive Measures: Nonreactive Research in the Social Sciences*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Worth, Sol  
1965 *Film Communication: A Study of the Reactions to Some Student Films*. Screen Education Yearbook. London: Wm. Dresser and Sons. pp. 3-19.  
1966 *Film as a Non-Art: An Approach to the Study of Film*. *American Scholar* 35:322-334.  
1970 The Development of a Semiotic of Film. *Semiotica* 282-321.  
1972 Toward an Anthropological Politics of Symbolic Forms. *Reinventing Anthropology*. Dell Hymes, Ed. New York: Vintage Books. pp. 335-364.
- Worth, Sol, and John Adair  
1972 *Through Navaho Eyes—An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Wright, Charles  
1974 *Mass Communication—A Sociological Approach*. 2nd edition. New York: Random House.

## REFERENCES CITED 2 HOME MOVIE MAKING MANUALS

- Bell and Howell  
n.d. *Now That You're in Show Business*.
- Duitz, Murry  
1960 *Better 8 mm Home Movie Guide*. Modern Camera Guide Series. Philadelphia: Chilton.
- Eastman Kodak Company  
1966 *How To Make Good Home Movies*.  
1968 *Better Movies in Minutes*.



- 1970 Home Movies Made Easy.  
 1972 Editing Your Movies.  
 Gilman, Edwyn  
 1963 Photographer's Guide to Movie Making. New York: Amphoto.  
 Goodwin, Nancy, and James Manilla  
 1971 Make Your Own Professional Movies. New York: Collier Books.  
 Grosset, Philip  
 1963 Planning and Scripting Amateur Movies. London: Fountain Press.  
 Knight, Bob  
 1965 Making Home Movies. New York: Collier Books.  
 Matzkin, Myron A.  
 1971 Family Movie Fun for All. New York: American Photographic Book Publishing Co.  
 Schultz, Ed, and Dodi Schultz  
 1972 How To Make Exciting Home Movies and Stop Boring Your Friends and Relatives. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday.

### REFERENCES CITED 3 ADVICE COLUMNS

- Anon.  
 1968 How You Can Make Better Home Movies. Better Homes and Gardens (November):132-134.  
 Babcock, David  
 1971 It's Fun to Make Home Movies. Parents 46(January):50-52.  
 Peter, John  
 1965 Livingroom "Spectaculars": Home Movies. Look 65(March):50.  
 Smith, Steven T.  
 1975 Editing Will Improve Every Home Movie. New York Times (June 22).  
 Sutherland, Don  
 1971 A Good Home Movie Is Not Necessarily "Well Made." Popular Photography (October).  
 n.d. Human Relations—How to Make Films Without Losing Friends. Travel and Camera.

### REFERENCES CITED 4 FILMOGRAPHY

- A Visit to Indiana. Directed and produced by Curt McDowell (n.d.). 16mm, color, optical sound, 10 minutes. Distributed by Canyon Cinema, Room 220, Industrial Center Building, Sausalito, CA 94965.

- Film Portrait. Directed by Jerome Hill (1971). 16mm, color, optical sound, 80 minutes. Distributed by Filmmakers Cooperative, 175 Lexington Ave., New York, NY.  
 Going Home. Directed and produced by Adolphus Mekas and Pola Chapelle (1972). 16mm, color, optical sound with English narrative, 61 minutes. Distributed by New Yorker Films, 43 West 61st St., New York, NY 10023.  
 Heroes. Directed by Frederick Becker (1974). 16mm, color and black and white, optical sound, 90 minutes. Distributed by Vision Quest, Inc., Box 206, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.  
 Home Movie—An American Folk Art. Directed by Ernst Star (1975). 16mm, color, optical sound, 25 minutes. Distributed by the Division of the Performing Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.  
 Mother Marries a Man of Mellow Mien. Directed and produced by Abigail Child (n.d.). 16mm, color, optical sound, 8 minutes. Distributed by Abigail Child, 114 East 13th St., New York, NY 10003.  
 Ricky and Rocky. Directed and produced by Jeff Krienes and Tom Palazallo (1974). 16mm, color, optical sound, 15 minutes. Distributed by Vision Quest, Inc., Box 206, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.  
 Six Filmmakers in Search of a Wedding. Produced by Pyramid Films (n.d.). 16mm, color, optical sound, 13 minutes. Distributed by National Educational Film Center, Finksburg, MD 21048.  
 The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. Directed by Ted Kotcheff (1974). Produced by John Kemeny, starring Richard Dreyfus, Micheline Lanctot and Jack Worden. Panavision and color, 35mm, 120 minutes. Distributed by Paramount Pictures.  
 Up the Sandbox. Directed by Irvin Kershner (1972). Produced by Irwin Winkler and Robert Chartoff. Released by First Artists. Starring Barbra Streisand and David Selby. Technicolor, 35mm, 100 minutes. Distributed by National General Pictures.

### FIGURE CREDITS

- Figure 1 — from the *New York Times* (4/6/75).  
 Figure 2 — from the *Evening Bulletin* (3/30/73).  
 Figure 3 — from *Rewind* (Vol. 14, No. 6, 1972), a publication of Deluxe General Inc.  
 Figure 4 — from the *Evening Bulletin* (11/25/72).  
 Figure 5 — from *Today's Filmmaker* (4/75, p. 48).  
 Figure 6 — from *Popular Photography* (10/71, p. 122).  
 Figure 7 — from the *Evening Bulletin* (4/6/73).  
 Figure 8 — from *The New Yorker*.



## IS AN ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM A FILMIC ETHNOGRAPHY?

JAY RUBY

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In the social sciences, the communication of scientific thought has been, by and large, confined to the printed and spoken word. The presentation of a *statement* in any visual medium (painting, film, drawings, engravings, photography or television), structured in a way which would articulate a social science concept other than description, is virtually nonexistent. Photographic images, as well as drawings, engraving, etc., have been used traditionally by social scientists as illustrative materials—to describe, to amplify, to fill in details, and to provide a “feeling” for an object or situation. It would seem reasonable to inquire why they have had such limited functions and whether these are the only social science uses of the visual mode—and, in particular, of photographic media.

Logically, there are two possible explanations for this situation. First, it is conceivable that photographic media *may* have some inherent limitations which curtail their social science communicative value. It has been suggested that a photograph describes everything and explains nothing. If social scientists are confined to descriptive statements in the visual mode and cannot generate synthetic, analytic or explanatory visual statements, then they will obviously have to depend upon spoken/written codes to convey these understandings, and the visual media will have to remain in a descriptive, illustrative position.

On the other hand, these limitations may exist in our culturally derived attitudes toward visual media rather than in the media themselves. Moreover, it appears that social scientists have accepted that these limitations are indeed the case, without any scientific examination of the question. Human beings have been writing and examining the nature of the spoken/written mode for thousands of years. The technology necessary to produce photographic images is only slightly over a hundred years old and the scientific examination of the communicative potential of visual media is still in

its infancy (Worth 1966). It would therefore seem premature to relegate these media to any particular place in social science.

While it is reasonable to expect anthropologists and other educated members of our culture to be highly sophisticated, competent, and self-conscious about speaking and writing, an analogous assumption cannot be made about their understanding and use of visual communicative forms. Training in visual communication is not a commonplace experience in our education. It is rare to find an anthropologist who knows very much about these forms, and even rarer to find one who has any competence in their production. It is only recently that our society has begun to acknowledge the need to educate people about photographic media, and only in the last decade have anthropology departments attempted to develop ongoing training programs in the area.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this situation, there is a long tradition of picture-taking in anthropology. Anthropologists have produced photographic images ever since the technologies were available.<sup>3</sup> It is rare today to find a cultural anthropologist who doesn't have some photographic record of his field trips.

However, to become a competent visual anthropologist, it is necessary to be trained in two fields—anthropology and visual communication. If people are to be motivated to undertake the time-consuming and usually expensive task of gaining this training, it is necessary to more fully integrate the study and use of visual forms into the central issues of anthropology. Unless this integration is realized, the production of photographic images by anthropologists will remain an activity that is basically peripheral to the needs and goals of the majority of anthropologists.

This paper is the first in a series of explorations of the questions raised above as they specifically relate to the anthropological uses of still and motion picture photography.<sup>4</sup> I will argue in this paper that anthropologists do not regard ethnographic film as filmic ethnography; that is, they do not regard ethnography in the visual mode with the same or analogous scientific expectations with which they regard written ethnography. The major consequence of this attitude has been to place the use of film on the periphery of anthropology and therefore the majority of anthropologists show only marginal interest in film as a way to articulate the central issues in anthropology. While the exploration of this issue may be of immediate concern to visual anthropologists, it is part of a larger issue; of the communicative, and thus sociocultural consequences of various modes, codes, and styles of scientific reporting.

My concern in this paper is with the problems which arise when an anthropologist attempts to convey his anthropological knowledge to others through photographic imagery—more specifically I am concerned with the motion picture as a means of communicating ethnography. The emphasis here is not on the exploration of the world through the camera but rather on the presentation through film of an anthropological view or statement of, and about the world.<sup>5</sup>

For purposes of clarification, a classification of all film into four divisions is proposed. If we examine film in terms of the intention of the makers and, in addition, the intentions of the users, the following rather obvious divisions occur. There are films which are intentionally produced to be

---

*Jay Ruby is a professor of Anthropology at Temple University in Philadelphia. He has founded and directed the Conference on Visual Anthropology for the past six years, and co-directed the 1972 Summer Institute in Visual Anthropology. He is currently doing research in the visual ethnography of anthropologists, and has been elected as the next president of the Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication.*

---



ethnographic and those which are not. Second, and independent of the first division, there are those films which anthropologists choose to use for a variety of research and teaching purposes, and those films which anthropologists do not choose to use.<sup>6</sup>

All motion picture footage, like all products of human consciousness, *can be* considered anthropologically useful in that it contains information which may become data for research and/or teaching purposes (Worth 1972). All film displays information on the culture of the maker and the culture of the subject (if, of course, the subject is human). An anthropologist could analyze a film in order to discover the set of culturally specific rules which govern its production (cf. Worth and Adair 1972 for an example of this type of research), or examine a film to describe the nonverbal behaviors of the subjects (cf. Birdwhistell 1970).

Any film, from *Nanook of the North* to *Gone with the Wind*, can be used in a classroom to illustrate some aspect of culture—much in the same way that a novel or an article from the *New York Times* might be employed. These items are not anthropological *per se*, but a context can be provided for them, that is, their anthropological significance can be pointed out.

Having noted this, film as a datum of culture, the research utility of photographic media or even the relevance of film for anthropologically educating the public will not be discussed further. This paper deals with how film functions as a communicative medium which will allow *anthropologists to present ethnography*. Without more understanding of this question the pedagogical and research potential of film is severely hampered. The problem can be stated as the exploration of the question—*Is an Ethnographic Film a Filmic Ethnography?*

This exploration into the relationship between film and ethnography is based upon two assumptions: (1) that an ethnographic film should be treated as an ethnography; that is, be subjected to the same or analogously rigorous scientific examination and criticism as any other product of anthropology, (2) that ethnographic filmmakers, like ethnographic writers, have a primary obligation to meet the demands and needs of anthropological investigation and presentation.

By emphasizing the scientific obligations of the ethnographic filmmaker and the scientific nature of ethnographic film, I do not wish the reader to think that I am in any way falling into the old and somewhat clichéd argument in documentary film discussions concerning art and science; that is, the erroneous idea that there is some inherent conflict between something called the “art” of the film and the science of anthropology. If one regards filming and the resultant product, film, in a manner analogous to the way in which one regards writing and its various products, as a medium and technology of communication, then, the ethnographer simply selects the most appropriate modes and codes for communicating ethnography. At present, I wish to argue that unless anthropologists regard film simply as a medium and technology of communication (delaying for the moment the significance and meaning of an “artful” communication of ethnography), the development of a scientific style of film will be greatly impaired.

Anthropologists have been involved in the production of

motion pictures since 1896 (de Brigard 1971). There are literally hundreds of films and countless footage in existence which have been labeled at one time or another as anthropological or ethnographic (Heider 1972). Since World War II the number of films produced in conjunction with professional anthropologists has sharply increased. It is now commonplace to find these films used in classrooms from elementary schools to universities.

In order to discuss these films as ethnography we must assume that when a filmmaker says that his film is ethnographic he wishes to be taken seriously. The film is to be regarded as the product of an anthropological study, and its primary purpose is to further the scientific understanding of the cultures of humankind. To treat the film otherwise suggests that the term is being used in a loose or faddish way.

During the past few years the term “ethnographic” has been applied to almost any film that even vaguely comes from the realist tradition ranging from S. Ray’s *Pather Panchali* to Jonas Mekas’ *Notes and Diaries*. While it *may* flatter some members of our profession to think that anthropology has so captured the public’s attention that filmmakers and distributors who know virtually nothing about our field seek validation by identifying with us, it is clear that the majority of these films were not intentionally produced to be ethnographic, nor do they in any way meet conventionalized expectations of what constitutes a valid ethnography. The labeling is simply a *post hoc* rationalization or advertisement that equates ethnography with any document of the human condition.

In addition to filmmakers who seek to legitimize their films by calling them ethnographic, some anthropologists seem willing to accept films produced by people with no apparent anthropological training, or even any in-depth knowledge of the culture they are filming, as somehow ethnographic. For example,

... *Tidikawa and Friends* is the exposition of filmmakers who are attuned to what may be revealed of a way of life through the subtleties of movement and sound, rather than through a knowledge of cultural symbolism or social organization. As the film stands we think the presence of an anthropologist could have added very little. Indeed, it is possible that an anthropologist’s presence would have detracted from the film’s success ... *Tidikawa and Friends* demonstrates that sensitive and perceptive filmmakers can say a great deal about a culture with which they are not familiar if their explication remains on the level of their own medium of sight and sound. When properly edited by someone who understands them, there is considerable ethnography in visual rhythms and acoustical space ... [Schieffelin and Schieffelin 1974:712-713].

If one were to take this quotation at face value, it appears that the authors are saying that one needs no anthropological training to produce a competent ethnographic film. It also could imply that “sensitive perception” is all one needs to do ethnography in the written or spoken media as well. If that were actually the case, one wonders why aspiring anthropologists put up with the discomfort of graduate school?

While the borrowing of the term ethnographic by professional filmmakers for their own aggrandizement is sometimes annoying and often confusing, it is not an issue that needs to be seriously dealt with here. On the other hand, the tendency on the part of some anthropologists to equate virtually any film about people with ethnography is a serious impediment



to the development of a social scientific means of visual communication and must be dealt with.

This inability to discriminate filmic ethnographies from other varieties of film is the result of two problems. First, as already noted, some anthropologists seem to forget that while all films may be potentially useful to anthropologists, that does not necessarily mean that these films should be labeled as ethnography. Second, the tendency to be overly inclusive when labeling films ethnographic is an example of a problem that anthropologists also have in the written mode; that is, a confusion over the parameters of ethnography. This confusion can be put to use here, however, as it reveals some of the basic issues relating to ethnographic film.

Anthropologists, like other social scientists, tend to be more concerned with the gathering and analysis of data than with the communicational consequences of the manner in which they present their findings.<sup>7</sup> I would argue that most anthropologists implicitly believe content should so dominate form in scientific writing that the form and style of an ethnography appears to "naturally" flow out from the content. It is, therefore, not surprising to discover that an examination of the anthropological literature reveals a general lack of formal discussions of the essential elements of ethnography and only occasional references to presentational styles in anthropology (Edgerton and Langness 1974; Parssinen 1974; Hymes 1974).

Assuming that my own training as a graduate student and subsequent experience as a teacher of graduate students is representative of most anthropologists in the United States, I suggest that anthropologists learn to write in a manner acceptable to other anthropologists by reading anthropological writings and through the criticism they receive from their professors of their seminar papers, theses, and dissertations.

Because we learn anthropological linguistic codes by example and inference, the models employed in written ethnography are implicit. They have not been subjected to any formal scientific examination or discussion. It is, therefore, difficult to know whether the majority of anthropologists all share similar expectations regarding what constitutes an adequate ethnography.

The problem is compounded by the fact that certain novels, journalistic reports and essays written by persons with no formal anthropological training seem to resemble ethnographies.

When an anthropologist in search of a medium to communicate ethnography turns from the spoken/written mode, that he is trained to deal with, to a visual mode, where training is rare and where an acceptable social science tradition does not exist, it is not difficult to understand why confusion might arise.

While this paper is not the place to present a detailed discussion of the communicational implications of ethnographic writing styles and their relationship to non-anthropological writing styles,<sup>8</sup> I will simply argue that, in spite of some uncertainties and probable disagreements as to the exact boundaries between ethnographic writing styles and other similar styles, anthropologists in the United States do share a core of common expectations about ethnographic presentations.

As further evidence that anthropologists do have implicit models for writing ethnographies, we can note that there is a

tradition of criticism which has a considerable time span—witness the book review section of the *American Anthropologist*. A similar tradition and time span does not exist for ethnographic film—witness the audiovisuals review section of the *American Anthropologist*. While a content analysis was not undertaken, a casual comparison of book and film reviews in the *American Anthropologist* reveals different emphases: book reviewers tend to concentrate upon the content and quality of ideas, while film reviewers stress ethnographic accuracy and form (aesthetics). It would be interesting to pursue these differences because they probably represent different assumptions about the communicative functions of the two modes. As a result, there is confusion over what criteria should be employed to evaluate films, as well as a lack of established norms which would allow reviewers to separate ethnographic film from other types of film.

These confusions are perhaps exemplified by the following quotation: "It is probably best not to try to define ethnographic films. In the broadest sense, most films are ethnographic—that is, if we take 'ethnographic' to mean 'about people'. And even those that are about, say, clouds or lizards or gravity are made by people and therefore say something about the culture of the individuals who made them (and use them)" (Heider 1974:1). Apparently, Heider feels that because human beings make films, that act—all by itself—is somehow to be considered ethnographic. By the same logic, one could argue that all writing (from novels and poems to love letters), painting (from Miro to Norman Rockwell) and composing (from Bach to Randy Newman) are also equally ethnographic. In addition, Heider implies that ethnography is about people. I would argue that ethnography is about culture which does *include* people, but in a special context that differs from the way that biologists, painters, or psychologists deal with people. Finally, to broaden the connotation of ethnography to the extent that Heider suggests causes it to lose all significant meaning and implies that anyone, regardless of their training or intent, can do ethnography. What in such a definition would be non-ethnographic—a description of atomic particles?

Heider is not alone in this position. Goldschmidt, in his definition of ethnographic film, says that "Ethnographic film is film which endeavors to interpret the behavior of people of one culture to persons of another culture by using shots of people doing precisely what they would have been doing if the cameras were not present" (1972:1). The first half of this definition would cause us to include the majority of documentary and a good number of fiction films, and suffers from the same non-discriminating problem as Heider's non-definition. The second half resembles the "If the tree falls in the forest and no one is present will it make a sound?" paradox; that is, it is impossible to gather evidence either to support or to reject the assumption underlying his definition. Goldschmidt's definition appears to be based on the old question, "Does the presence of the camera modify the behavior of the people being filmed?" Apart from the fact that there is no way to answer the question, except perhaps philosophically, ethnographers tend to ask that question when they pick up a camera and tend not to ask a similar question when they pick up a pencil and notebook, which seems to me to further diminish the significance of the



question as a problem. Furthermore, the question is founded upon the erroneous assumption that it is possible to record something called "unmodified human behavior," that is, that the camera can record events in an unmediated manner.

Having suggested that ethnographic filmmakers have inherited some confusion over the exact parameters of ethnography from ethnographic writers, and that ethnographic filmmakers have done little to clear up the confusion, I will now restate the major argument of this paper. It is essential to have a set of explicit assumptions about what constitutes ethnography before it is possible to evaluate film as ethnography. Once these assumptions have been articulated, then a body of films can be examined to discover to what degree they satisfy these criteria.

As stated earlier, these expectations exist more as implicit models than in explicit form. It becomes necessary, therefore, to articulate the expectations based upon my own assumptions about the nature of ethnography. The criteria to be articulated below were not tested against the expectations of a representative sample of anthropologists. However, I would argue that, if tested, they would suffice. The characteristics have been phrased so that they can be applied to both written and visual forms. This formulation is based upon the assumption that an ethnography is a specific style or group of related styles of scientific presentation and that ethnographers make syntactical, lexical, and other decisions based upon a tacit model which they acquired in graduate school, in the field, and at professional meetings where they became "native speakers" of the various anthropological linguistic codes.

According to these assumptions, an ethnography must contain the following elements: (1) the major focus of an ethnographic work must be a description of a whole culture or some definable unit of culture; (2) an ethnographic work must be informed by an implicit or explicit theory of culture which causes the statements within the ethnography to be ordered in a particular way; (3) an ethnographic work must contain statements which reveal the methodology of the author; and (4) an ethnographic work must employ a distinctive lexicon—an anthropological argot. Each element will now be discussed and elaborated upon.

(1) *The primary concern of an ethnographic work is a description of a whole culture or some definable element of a culture.* This is a feature which ethnography shares with a vast number of nonethnographic works. Virtually all products of the realist tradition in film, novels, paintings, and journalism contain some descriptions of aspects of the culture or group portrayed in the work. In some cases, the description is the major focus. Often these descriptions are quite accurate, almost scientific in style. Frequently, these works are even used by anthropologists for a variety of research and teaching purposes. I would argue that because realism as expressed in some novels, paintings, and films developed out of the same or similar needs in Western culture as did anthropology, the similarity is understandable.<sup>9</sup> As discussed earlier, this similarity can create confusion because anthropologists have failed to articulate models for presenting ethnography which could serve as a means for separating ethnographies from realist works of art and journalism. However, while these realist works may be descriptive, they

seldom contain all the critical features of ethnographic works. In other words, a descriptive focus is a necessary element, but is only part of what constitutes ethnography.

(2) *An ethnographic work must be informed by an implicit or explicit theory of culture which causes the statements within the work to be organized in a particular way.* No anthropologist is interested in (or capable of) attempting something called "pure" description. All ethnographers have a theory of culture which causes them to perceive and to collect their data in certain ways, and subsequently to present them in ways that reflect their point of view. Thus, a Marxist ethnographer will stress the means of production and a British structuralist will concentrate on social relations. Although ethnography shares this feature with other endeavors, significant differences do exist. Because anthropologists are trained to deal with models and theories of human organization, they tend to use them self-consciously, and they are concerned with the adequacy of the models and theories that they employ. Other writers and imagemakers who are not trained in the social sciences tend to accidentally or unconsciously utilize their own society's folk models of culture. Often, these models are found upon examination to be inadequate bases for organizing descriptive statements. This is particularly true of journalistic accounts of exotic cultures which are often based upon ethnocentric assumptions of primitiveness, or of the "Noble Savage," or of other simplistic notions of non-Western cultures such as the confusion of race with culture.

The application of this feature of ethnography to film assumes that the theory of culture held by the ethnographic filmmaker would lead him to select certain events for filming, to film them in a certain way and then to edit those images in a manner which not only reflects the theory but articulates the theory intentionally in a form possible for an audience to interpret.

(3) *An ethnographic work must contain statements which reveal the methodology of the author.* To be considered scientific, an ethnography must contain an explicit description of the methodology used to collect, to analyze and to organize the data for presentation. Writers and imagemakers who make no pretense to being scientific are not under these constraints. Furthermore, if they do describe their methodology, they do not have to defend it on the basis of its scientific merits. Ethnographers must be able to defend their methodological decisions on the basis of their scientific logic.

(4) *An ethnographic work must employ a distinctive lexicon—an anthropological argot.* This is a feature which more clearly separates written ethnography from other works. Anthropologists are trained to be "native speakers/listeners" of several anthropological linguistic codes. They not only are able to employ these codes better than people without professional training in anthropology, but as "readers" they can make sophisticated distinctions between ethnographies and works which may utilize some elements of the code but are not the products of an anthropological intent. The writings of Tom Wolfe, for example, *The Pump House Gang* (1968), are, in this sense, ethnographic-like. The



application of this feature to ethnographic film is a very complicated issue which will be discussed in detail below.

Before an attempt is made to apply the criteria listed above to ethnographic film, it is necessary to make some preliminary remarks about the films that will be analyzed. If we examine the body of films that are most frequently labeled ethnographic,<sup>10</sup> a set of common features can be described: (1) a tendency to deal with non-Western people (that is, exotic subject matter); (2) a visual and auditory style which is shared with films called documentaries; and (3) a dependence upon narration or accompanying written materials for an anthropological interpretation of the film.

The vast majority of films described as ethnographic are concerned with exotic, non-Western people. Because of the division of labels, "sociologists" study their own society (and occasionally other Western societies) and "anthropologists" study exotic cultures. Documentaries, therefore, about contemporary urban America are more likely to be labeled sociological. However, subject matter alone is not a sufficient criterion to justify labeling a film or a book ethnographic. If it were, then the anthropological literature would have to include every traveler's account, missionary diary, and journalistic description of a culture.

An examination of such films as *Dead Birds*, *The Hunters*, *The Feast*, and *The Winter Sea Ice Camp* (undoubtedly the most popular ethnographic films) reveals that the visual style of these films follows documentary film conventions. Their style is neither original nor exclusive to them, but is to be found as well in films which are not intentionally anthropological. While a detailed stylistic analysis of documentary film conventions has yet to be written,<sup>11</sup> most film scholars would agree that there exists a dominant humanistic and ideological-propagandistic style in documentary film and still photography which attempts to portray human beings and their cultures. This cinematic style had its origins with Robert Flaherty, was further developed in England and Canada by John Grierson, in Russia by Dziga Vertov, and is currently employed by a number of filmmakers in many different countries. It was not the invention or even the development of an anthropologist or even an anthropologically trained filmmaker. The fact that the films mentioned all employ similar filmic conventions is not the result of an exclusively anthropological contribution to film style, but rather of the dependence of some ethnographic filmmakers upon a set of artistic and humanistic ideas derived from documentary film. These documentary conventions are employed because ethnographic filmmakers seem to assume that documentary film conventions are the most suitable conventions for their purposes.<sup>12</sup> In other words, ethnographic film cannot be separated from other documentary films on the bases of a distinctive visual style.<sup>13</sup>

The style of the sound tracks of these ethnographic films is also derived from the documentary film tradition. Three of these films employ narration. *The Winter Sea Ice Camp* has only native dialogue. The narrations either contain some anthropological argot (as in the opening of *The Feast*) or are written in an empathic style (such as *Dead Birds*). While *The Winter Sea Ice Camp* has untranslated, unsubtitled Eskimo dialogue, it was designed to be used with accompanying written materials which provide an anthropological inter-

pretation for the film. It seems to be a standard assumption that if a film is shown in a class it must be accompanied by some readings, such as Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's *The Harmless People* (1965) with John Marshall's *The Hunters*. Interestingly enough, our cultural bias becomes clear when we note that the opposite position is almost never advocated, that is, that written materials must be accompanied with films or pictures.

To sum up, the films most commonly regarded as ethnographic are films about exotic non-Western people. These films employ the visual and auditory conventions of documentary film and tend to rely upon narration or accompanying written materials for an anthropological interpretation of the content of the film. These films are a blending of two preexisting forms—documentary film and written anthropology—without any significant modification of either.

I will now discuss four films—*The Hunters*, *Dead Birds*, *The Feast*, and *The Winter Sea Ice Camp*—to determine to what degree they satisfy the four criteria discussed earlier, that is, can they be considered adequate filmic ethnographies? I selected these particular films for two reasons: (1) they are the ethnographic films most widely used in anthropological teaching and therefore the majority of readers will have seen them, and (2) I believe them to be representative of ethnographic films produced in the United States since World War II.

All of these films clearly represent attempts to describe some aspects of a culture (the first criterion). Further, it is possible to discern a theory of culture as implicit in them (the second criterion). *The Hunters* and *The Winter Sea Ice Camp* appear to be constructed around an economic/ecological model. *The Hunters* focuses on male hunting activities. *The Winter Sea Ice Camp* deals with the winter economic cycle (this film is one of a series, which, taken as a whole represents an annual cycle). Both of these films are organized to emphasize the interplay between the culture's economic system and the physical environment, and to suggest that other aspects of the culture are derived from the economic system. *Dead Birds* seems to be organized around a theory which partially resembles the recent popularization of some ethological studies on human and animal aggression (cf. Ardrey 1961). The organization of the film appears to suggest that ritual warfare is the single most important characteristic of Dani culture. Finally, *The Feast* appears to combine some interest in Mauss's (1925) idea of the cultural significance of reciprocity (as suggested by the narration), with a film structure which simply chronicles a particular feast. Unfortunately, there is no discernible marriage of the film structure with Mauss's idea. The structural decisions revealed in the editing reflect the current conventions for the structuring of an "event" film rather than a rationale based upon the translation of the concept of reciprocity into film structure.

None of the four films discussed above has adequately satisfied the third criterion—the articulation of methodology. At the beginning of *Dead Birds*, the audience is informed that none of the events depicted in the film were staged. At the beginning of *The Winter Sea Ice Camp* we are informed that the film is a reconstruction of precontact Eskimo culture. Beyond these a viewer can learn nothing about the



methodology unless they read the published statements of the filmmakers.<sup>14</sup> However, even the published statements are not sufficiently complete or rigorous to satisfy scientific standards for describing methodology. As I intend this criterion to be applied, a filmic ethnographic work must include a scientific justification for the multitude of decisions that one makes in the process of producing a film—the framing and length of each shot, selection of subject matter, technical decisions (such as choice of film stock, lens, etc.), type of field sound collected, use of studio sound, editing decisions, etc. Some of these matters may at first sound trivial and overly technical. However, unless a filmmaker is willing to subject these decisions to scientific scrutiny then it is difficult, if not impossible, to justify or to think of the film in a scientific context.

It may not be particularly important *where* the methodology is revealed—within the film itself, as in the case of Jean Rouch's *Chronicle of a Summer*, or in a published article, as in the case of Don and Ron Rundstrom's and Clinton Bergum's *The Path* (1974). What is important is the absolute scientific necessity for making methods public. By keeping their procedures private, ethnographic filmmakers are implicitly conceding that they do not wish to have their films considered scientifically nor do they wish to consider themselves social scientists. The argument could be made that they see themselves more in the role of artist-filmmaker than social scientist.

The final criterion is the use of a specialized lexicon, an anthropological argot. Do these films contain a set of visual and auditory signs which are conventionally recognized as being scientific and anthropological? There exists a series of spoken/written anthropological codes which the anthropological community share. As discussed earlier, the four films under consideration here either utilize anthropological argot in the narration of the films or in the written materials which accompany the films. These "texts" may be regarded as instructions which prepare audiences to make anthropological inferences from the film.

Without these spoken/written signs, the films would be indistinguishable from other documentaries. In other words, ethnographic filmmakers have not developed a way of articulating or organizing images in a manner that is related structurally to anthropological perceptions of the world, and produced in a framework of anthropological visual symbolic forms which are conventionalized into a code or argot.

Instead they produce films that at best can be thought of as being *about anthropology*, rather than as *anthropological films*. This is an important distinction—one which is central to the thesis of this paper. It is suggested that the majority of films which are currently labeled as ethnographic are really *about* anthropology and are *not* anthropological—in the same way that a science writer can write about anthropology or an anthropological subject and still not write anthropologically (that is, have competence in that particular communicative code).

This distinction has been borrowed from a French Marxist filmmaker and theorist, Jean-Luc Godard. In attempting to differentiate his films from others, Godard has said that there are two kinds of radical cinema—films about revolution and revolutionary films (Henderson 1970-71). He is concerned with the latter. Godard feels that film form is a reflection of

cultural ideology. Consequently capitalist culture can only produce capitalist films regardless of the subject matter of the film. To be a revolutionary filmmaker according to Godard one must organize a film—both the articulation of the images and their organization—according to Marxist-Leninist principles and not simply record the "reality" of the class struggle. The subject matter of a film is only raw material, it becomes radicalized by recording and organizing the images in a certain way. Marxist-Leninist principles must be translated into a set of filmic conventions. In his film *La Chinoise*, Godard has graphically expressed this idea as CINEMARX and MAO.<sup>15</sup>

R

T

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This brief examination of ethnographic film has been based upon the following assumptions:

(1) that film as a medium and technology of communication has the potential for the communication of scientific statements;

(2) that ethnographic film should be regarded as filmic ethnography;

(3) that it is possible to evaluate ethnographic film based upon a set of explicit expectations as to what constitutes ethnography; and

(4) that the four films discussed here—*The Hunters*, *Dead Birds*, *The Feast*, and *The Winter Sea Ice Camp*—are representative of the ethnographic films produced in America since World War II.

The analysis can be summarized as follows: ethnographic films are descriptive in intent, informed by a theory of culture which sometimes has been translated into a means of organizing the images, tend not to reveal methodology (either within the film or elsewhere in print), and employ a specialized spoken/written anthropological lexicon but do not employ a specialized visual anthropological lexicon.

I have argued in this paper that, when examined as ethnography, the majority of ethnographic films do not fully satisfy my proposed criteria. I believe that these shortcomings can be ultimately traced to one source—the lack of scientific self-consciousness on the part of the filmmakers and its corollary—the lack of such self-consciousness by the majority of anthropologists in this country (Scholte 1972). Ethnographic filmmakers appear to be primarily concerned with satisfying the conventions of documentary film, and only secondarily, if at all, concerned with meeting the scientific requirements of ethnography. Thus they have not been involved with what I would consider to be the most crucial issues of ethnographic film, or for that matter, of ethnography:

(1) the translation of anthropological theories of culture into theories of film which would provide the filmmaker with rationales for the articulation and organization of image/sound structures;

(2) the description of the methodology which would logically follow once such a translation occurred.



By blindly following the conventions of documentary film, and by relying upon the written/spoken word to "anthropologize" their images, ethnographic filmmakers are demonstrating the lack of conventions for creating image/sound structures which will be interpreted, in and of themselves, as being anthropological or even scientific.

I have been extremely critical of ethnographic filmmakers in this paper because I am convinced that their lack of concern with the ideas expressed here has caused film to be relegated to a marginal position in anthropology. Filmmaking is an activity engaged in by few anthropologists, but it is a product used by most in their teaching. Like introductory textbooks, films are regarded as having pedagogical utility, but are not thought of as a serious scholarly communicative vehicle. In fact, the analogy can be carried further. While both are activities which some scholars occasionally participate in, the production of a film or a textbook is regarded by the academic community with only slight interest, and neither is regarded as a place where significant new discoveries will be announced. Although the economic rewards for writing a textbook are potentially greater than for producing a film, no scholar would seriously consider dedicating a lifelong career to either activity, and few departments would contemplate offering graduate seminars in either subject.

With the exception of Jean Rouch (in *Chronicle of a Summer*), Don and Ron Rundstrom (in *The Path*), and Tim Asch (in *The Axe Fight*), the majority of ethnographic filmmakers have apparently assumed that if they satisfied the demands of documentary style they somehow would automatically be using the most scientific means of articulating and organizing images and sound. In many significant ways, the field of ethnographic film/visual anthropology has seen little progress since the 1930s when Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead raised the question of the relationship between image-producing technologies and anthropology.

If film is to be a serious and scientific means of communicating ethnography then ethnographic filmmakers as well as viewers and, most particularly, teachers of anthropology will have to become more concerned with the study of visual communication and the development of anthropological visual codes, and less interested in producing "pretty pictures."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The preparation of this paper occurred while I was on a study leave granted by Temple University and was partially supported by a University Grant-in-Aid. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Sol Worth, Aaron Katcher, Denise O'Brien, Darryl Monteleone, Richard Chalfen, and Larry Gross.

<sup>2</sup>See Ruby and Chalfen (1973) for a description of the program at Temple. Other training programs in ethnographic film/visual anthropology currently exist at the Anthropology Film Center, Santa Fe, under Carroll and Joan Williams; at San Francisco State College under John Collier and John Adair; and at University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, under Paul Hockings.

<sup>3</sup>A review of the history of anthropological cinema (soon to be published by the Museum of Modern Art in New York) has been written by Emile de Brigard and the role of still photography has been discussed elsewhere (Ruby 1973).

<sup>4</sup>The next two papers in preparation are: (1) "The Fallacy of Realism in Ethnographic Film" and (2) "The Role of Narrative in Written and Visual Ethnographies."

<sup>5</sup>While it has become increasingly common for researchers engaged in the study of nonverbal communication to employ a camera to record analyzable behavior (the origin of this approach is, of course, Bateson and Mead's Balinese research [1942]), no further discussion of photography or cinema as a mechanical aid to research will be undertaken. Readers interested in pursuing this field should consult the writings of Richard Sorenson (1967) and John Collier (1967).

<sup>6</sup>Since there are a large number of films which are labeled ethnographic or anthropological that were produced without the aid of an anthropologist, it would seem logical to extend the classification to six categories by adding: films which were produced by or in conjunction with an anthropologist and films which were not produced with an anthropologist. I have chosen not to include these categories because as I shall argue later on in this paper, anthropologists do not make movies that are in any way distinguishable from movies made by other people.

<sup>7</sup>"As far as science is concerned language is simply an instrument, which it profits it to make as transparent and neutral as possible: it is subordinate to the matter of science (workings, hypotheses, results) which, so it is said, exists outside of language and precedes it. On the one hand and *first* there is the content of the scientific message, which is everything; on the other hand and *next*, the verbal form responsible for expressing that content, which is nothing" (Barthes 1970:411).

<sup>8</sup>For further discussion on this point, see "The Role of Narrative in Written and Visual Ethnographies," in preparation.

<sup>9</sup>This is obviously not the place to launch into a full scale discussion of the historical development of realism in the arts, literature, and modern journalism (especially the so-called "New Journalism" [Wolfe and Johnson 1973], which combines elements and techniques of the novel with traditional reportage), and their relationship to the development of anthropology. For now, it is sufficient to point out that Linda Nochlin's definition of Realism sounds very much like some definitions of anthropology: "Its aim was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based upon meticulous observation of contemporary life" (Nochlin 1971:13). I am presently pursuing the similarities between ethnography and Realism because I believe they illuminate some interesting problems in ethnographic film. The results of this inquiry will be published in a paper entitled "The Fallacy of Realism in Ethnographic Film."

<sup>10</sup>The films discussed in this paper are not a scientifically selected sample, but rather the result of ten years of intensive viewing on the part of the author. Most of the films are by Americans or Canadians. I mention this fact only because French films such as those of Jean Rouch seem to display a sophistication lacking in most of the American films. My critical remarks about the state of ethnographic films are not intended for these films. Some of the films, such as *Dead Birds*, *The Feast*, and *The Hunters* were screened over 50 times each and others were only viewed once or twice. I would estimate that I have looked at well over a thousand documentaries and about half of them were presented to me by the filmmaker or distributor as being ethnographic. They were regarded in that manner until evidence to the contrary emerged. I will make no attempt to list the films. Instead, I refer the reader to Heider's filmography (1972). The majority of the films I screened are listed there.

<sup>11</sup>This statement should not be construed to mean that there is no scholarly literature on documentary film. On the contrary, Barnouw (1974) has written an excellent history and Jacobs (1971) has compiled a thorough reader of criticism and theory.

<sup>12</sup>I propose to challenge this assumption primarily because it has been assumed *a priori* to be correct and consequently never subjected to scientific examination (cf. "The Fallacy of Realism in Ethnographic Film," in preparation).

<sup>13</sup>An analogous situation appears to exist regarding still pictures taken by anthropologists (Ruby 1973).

<sup>14</sup>Asch (1971), Gardner (1972), Balikci and Brown (1966); while Marshall has not written about *The Hunters*, Gardner (1957) has.

<sup>15</sup>A further exploration of Marxist film theory might be of value for visual anthropology. People like Godard, Eisenstein (1964), and Vertov (1972) have attempted to translate a theory of culture—



Marxism—into a theory of film. For example, Eisenstein attempted to use the Hegelian dialectic as the basis for his montage theory.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Ardrey, Robert  
1961 *African Genesis*. New York: Dell Books.
- Asch, Tim  
1971 *Ethnographic Film Production*. *Film Comment* 7:40-42.
- Balikci, Asen, and Quentin Brown  
1966 *Ethnographic Filming and the Netsilik Eskimos*. Educational Services, Inc., Quarterly Report Spring-Summer. Newton, MA. pp. 19-33.
- Barnouw, Eric  
1974 *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Barthes, Roland  
1970 *Science Versus Literature*. In *Structuralism, A Reader*. Michael Lane, Ed. London: Jonathan Cape. pp. 410-416.
- Bateson, Gregory, and Margaret Mead  
1942 *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*. New York: New York Academy of Sciences.
- Birdwhistell, Ray  
1970 *Kinesics and Context*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Brigard, Emile de  
1971 *History of Ethnographic Film*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Theatre Arts, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Collier, John, Jr.  
1967 *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Edgerton, Robert B., and L. L. Langness  
1974 *Methods and Styles in the Study of Culture*. Corte Madera, CA: Chandler and Sharp.
- Eisenstein, Sergei  
1964 *Film Form and Film Sense*. Leyda, Trans. New York: Meridian Books, World Publishing.
- Gardner, Robert  
1957 *Anthropology and Film*. *Daedalus* 86:344-350.  
1972 *On the Making of Dead Birds*. In *The Dani of West Irian: an Ethnographic Companion to the Film Dead Birds*, by Karl G. Heider. New York: Warner Modular Publications.
- Goldschmidt, Walter  
1972 *Ethnographic Film: Definition and Exegesis*. *PIEF Newsletter* 3(2):1-3.
- Heider, Karl G.  
1972 *Films for Anthropological Teaching*. 5th edition. Washington, DC: Program in Ethnographic Film (now Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication).  
1974 *Ethnographic Film*. *Lifelong Learning*, Two-74:1-5. Berkeley: University of California Extension Media Center.
- Henderson, Brian  
1970-71 *Towards a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style*. *Film Quarterly* 24(2):2-14.
- Hymes, Dell  
1974 *An Ethnographic Perspective*. *New Literary History* 5:178-201.
- Jacobs, Lewis, Ed.  
1971 *The Documentary Tradition*. New York: Hopkinson and Blake.
- Mauss, Marcel  
1925 *Essai sur le Don*. *L'Annee Sociologique* 1:30-186.
- Nochlin, Linda  
1971 *Realism*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Parssinen, Carol Ann  
1974 *In Pursuit of Ethnography: The Seduction of Science by Art*. Unpublished paper, Center for Urban Ethnography, University of Pennsylvania.
- Ruby, Jay  
1973 *Up the Zambesi with Notebook and Camera or Being an Anthropologist Without Doing Anthropology . . . With Pictures*. *SAVICOM Newsletter* 4(3):12-15.
- Ruby, Jay, and Richard Chalfen  
1974 *The Teaching of Visual Anthropology at Temple*. *SAVICOM Newsletter* 5(3):5-7.
- Rundstrom, Donald, Ronald Rundstrom, and Clinton Bergum  
1974 *Japanese Tea: The Ritual, The Aesthetics, The Way*. Warner Module, No. 3. New York: Warner Modular Publications.
- Schieffelin, Edward, and Bambi Schieffelin  
1974 *Review of Tidikawa and Friends*. *American Anthropologist* 76:710-714.
- Scholte, Robert  
1972 *Toward a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology*. In *Reinventing Anthropology*. Dell Hymes, Ed. New York: Random House.
- Sorenson, E, Richard  
1967 *A Research Film Program on the Study of Changing Man*. *Current Anthropology* 8:443-469.
- Thomas, Elizabeth Marshall  
1965 *The Harmless People*. New York: Vintage Books, Alfred A. Knopf.
- Vertov, Dziga  
1972 *The Vertov Papers*. Marco Carynnyk, Trans. *Film Comment* 8:46-51.
- Wolfe, Tom  
1968 *The Pump House Gang*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Wolfe, Tom, and E. W. Johnson, Eds.  
1973 *The New Journalism*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Worth, Sol  
1966 *Film as Non-Art: An Approach to the Study of Film*. *American Scholar* 35:322-334.  
1972 *Toward the Development of a Semiotic of Ethnographic Film*. *PIEF Newsletter* 3(3):8-12.
- Worth, Sol, and John Adair  
1972 *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.



## THE SITUATION AND TENDENCIES OF THE CINEMA IN AFRICA PART II\*

JEAN ROUCH

translated by STEVE FELD

### EDUCATIONAL FILMS

Undoubtedly, some of the films which I have classified as commercial and documentary are equally educational films. Nevertheless, I wish to place in a separate class those films where entertainment is merely a pretext and whose real aim is instructional.

As I have already said, the appearance of educational films is relatively recent, occurring around 1950 in both the Congo and the British territories. In former French Equatorial Africa it is even more recent, having developed at the end of the 1950s.

My discussion will deal separately with English-speaking Africa, the former Belgian Congo, and former French Africa.

*English-Speaking Africa.* Before the last war, audiovisual media were extremely rare in Sub-Saharan Africa, although lantern slides were used to illustrate health lectures in Nigeria as early as 1920. It was in 1929 that the first truly educational film in Africa was produced, in order to help combat an epidemic of the plague in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria. This film showed Africans how rats spread the disease, and encouraged them to cooperate in a general rat extermination campaign, which was so successful that the government of Nigeria decided to continue using film in the future. Fortunately, however, there were very few similar occasions calling for recourse to this kind of education through films. Yet it was in Nigeria, some years later, that the organization of overseas films was to take shape.

The Colonial Film Unit was founded in 1939 by the British government to secure African participation in the war effort; Mr. William Sellers, who was responsible for the first experiments in education through films in Nigeria, was appointed as director. Although the immediate purpose of the Colonial Film Unit was war propaganda<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Sellers' long-run aim was in fact to generalize the use of films for African audiences.

At the outset, the only films produced were European films; these were simply re-edited with a new narration for

African screenings (and for screenings in other overseas English language countries). To add to their attraction, short sequences shot in Africa were spliced in. This so-called "Raw Stock Scheme" for producing local sequences served the double purpose of introducing and popularizing 16mm motion pictures in Africa, and supplying raw stock for local shooting to a few enthusiastic filmmakers.

By the end of the war, this operation had allowed for the distribution of 200,000 meters (about 666,000 feet) of 16mm film, and the equipping of 20 mobile cinema trucks in tropical Africa.

In 1955, the British Colonial Film Unit changed its objectives and began a program of film production to deal with the main social problems of its territories in tropical Africa, while continuing to make a few films in Great Britain showing Africans the British way of life (the best of this series is *Mister English at Home*).

Between 1945 and 1950, the Colonial Film Unit established 12 film production sections (each called "Film Units") in eight British territories in East and West Africa. During this same period, the amount of finished films totaled 50 hours, and distribution rose to over 1200 prints shown in Africa.

These Film Units were manned by first-rate technicians; but although their films always aroused great interest in Europe, it must be admitted that their success with the African public (to whom they were addressed) was relatively slight.

Systematic studies revealed the difficulties inherent in making this type of film, and showed that one of the most serious problems was the technicians' ignorance of the local communities in which the films were shot: one could hardly demand that the technicians be equally proficient as ethnographers.

In 1951, a research team consisting of a filmmaker and an anthropologist paid a long visit to Nigeria to study the question of audience reactions to films. Their report showed that the only solution was to make films with a minimum of foreign elements to distract the spectator. This, of course, threw the entire conception of "Colonial cinema" into chaos, and for the first time, it appeared that it would be necessary for films to be made for Africans by Africans.

At about this time, the British Colonial Film Unit discontinued almost all it was doing directly for the territorial Film Units. The main reason was financial: the British Government considered that it no longer had any obligation to make educational films for countries with independence a near prospect, and that it was for the treasuries of the territories concerned to provide for the management of their own film services. In 1955, it was concluded that the British Film Unit had served its purpose, and the work was to be taken over by the 14 African film services.

The Colonial Film Unit then became the "Overseas Television and Film Centre," keeping its original staff, still headed by Sellers, who transformed it first into the British agency of all the overseas film production centers (except Ghana), and then into a training school for African technicians. The value of such an organization is obviously tremendous: each African film service had its representative in London to supervise the laboratory work, film shipments,

---

*This is the third in a series of translations of the major writings of Jean Rouch, translated by Steve Feld, which will appear in the first five issues of Studies. An introduction by Feld to the entire series of articles appears in Vol. 1 No. 1.*

---



purchase of equipment, and to provide optimum spare parts services. The growth of television is even further increasing the activities of the center.<sup>2</sup>

But, in my opinion, the most important part of the center's work is the "film training school," the prime mover of which, George Pearson, is one of William Sellers' oldest colleagues in Nigeria and London.

The first school was opened in 1950 in Accra, and trained three Ghanaian and three Nigerian students, who were given a seven-month course which enabled them to become familiar with 16mm and 35mm film equipment. The school moved to Jamaica, then to Cyprus, and finally to London. In all, about 100 students were trained during this time. Of course, as Georges Sadoul has pointed out, none of these technicians has thus far produced a real African film, but that was not the aim of William Sellers and his followers; their only goal was to enable Africans to make their own educational films.

What, then, might be said of these films, generally speaking? It is certain that Sellers must in any case be considered one of the true pioneers of African cinema, and if, perhaps soon, a true African filmmaker springs up in Nigeria, Rhodesia, or Kenya, it will certainly be the result of the modest but obstinate effort of this man.

I have had the opportunity of seeing some of the films made by these Film Units. Many are quite disappointing, if one considers them from a purely cinematographic point of view. But their educational value is sometimes considerable, as for instance in a 1950 film by the Central African Film Unit titled *Lusaka Calling*. The purpose of this film was to promote demand for low-cost radio sets; showings of the film produced actual riots among the audiences, who immediately dashed to the shops to buy wireless radio sets which most could not obtain because the stock had been sold out almost immediately.

On the other hand, all of these films exhibit what I consider to be an extremely serious fault (a fault which by no means is reserved only for the cinema), namely the paternalism characteristic of even the films made with the best intentions. For example, the film *Leprosy*, shot in Nigeria by an entirely African crew, intends to communicate the necessity of seeking treatment, yet brings in some "African witchcraft" scenes rarely equalled for their superficiality. Was it really necessary to denigrate traditional African culture in order to better show the efficacy of foreign medical methods? Was it necessary to once again destroy in order to build? Is it not nauseating to show Africans themselves mocking their own culture, and in precisely one of the fields in which Africa has a few things to teach the rest of the world?<sup>3</sup>

The work of the Ghana Film Unit requires separate treatment. For reasons of which I am ignorant, it split off fairly early from the Colonial Film Unit, in favor of association with groups of independent English producers, or with first rate producers such as Grierson, one of the masters of the English documentary film. The Unit received its initial impetus from one of Grierson's young assistants, Sean Graham, who, with the help of the excellent Canadian cameraman, George Noble, got the center started and produced an impressive number of outstanding quality films between 1950 and 1955.

I have already mentioned the films *Jaguar* and *The Boy Kumasenu*. In fact, both of these films began as educational films, but their quality was such that they were extremely successful in both their own country and abroad. The educational films made by the Ghana Film Unit for strictly African audiences have always been of such high quality, both technically and dramatically, that they are models of their genre. From *Progress in Kodjokrom*, showing why taxes must be paid, to *Mr. Mensah Builds His House*, a propaganda film for building loans, the pictures, music, and dialogue are in the best tradition, with no concession whatsoever to demagogy. But here we reach the limit of this genre of films. The time came for Sean Graham to make a film about the recruitment of nurses. His Irish temperament, a certain romanticism, as well as his talent combined to make *Theresa*, a shattering document on the difficult life of nurses. The government hesitated for quite a while over releasing this film, fearing that there would not be a young woman in Ghana with enough courage to embark upon such a testing career.

After Ghanaian independence, Sean Graham left the Film Unit. Though his influence is still discernible, the quality of films made since his departure is definitely lower.

Thus in Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and East Africa, Africans have been trained to take over. Their work is by no means extraordinary, but—and this is the inestimable contribution of the Film Unit's promoters—films are now regarded everywhere as an essential medium of mass communication. This means that the situation is particularly favorable for the flowering of a typically African cinematographic art in the very near future.

*Former Belgian Congo.* The Belgian effort in the Congo followed close behind that of the British. Toward the end of the war, the Congo government began to think about the value of cinema for the Congolese masses. As was always the case in the Congo, this action was divided into two distinct forms: government film production, and missionary film production. In both cases, and quite contrary to British Film Unit practice, attention was given to making entertainment as well as educational films.

The initial outcome was the production of special films for the Congolese, distributed together with other films selected either in Belgium or neighboring African countries (Rhodesia supplied a larger number). These films were shown either by permanent cinemas or by mobile film trucks.

The language problem seems to be one of the major obstacles that the Belgians tried to overcome. The multiplicity of vernacular languages, over and above the four major ones of Kikongo, Lingala, Tschiluba, and Kiswahili, made it necessary to invariably use local interpreters, who would deliver a translation of the dialogue into a microphone simultaneously while the sound track played in one of the four major languages. This experiment is perhaps one of the most significant made in Africa in the area of projection techniques, because, as we shall see at the end of this report, it is toward a similar system that the new African educational film industry must move, using double system projection, with the sound track in the local dialect.

Belgian efforts reached their maximum in 1957 with fifteen thousand showings for a total audience of nearly nine



million people. But what can we say of these films produced by the Belgians in the Congo before independence?

The government films strike me as incredibly superficial and paternalistic, with the African invariably treated as an overgrown child to whom everything must be explained. The missionary films, on the other hand, seem more advanced, and mention should be given to the Centre Congolais Catholique d'action cinématographique in Leopoldville, where genuinely African productions started to appear through the stimulation provided by Fathers Develoo, van Haelst, van Overschelds, and van den Heuvel. For instance, the missionaries made film versions of Congolese folk tales and even cartoons, such as the series, *Mboloko, la petite antilope*. I do not know how the missionary film would have developed if it had continued on this course. The existing films stop, both technically and in spirit, at the level of a minor guild production, while still offering promise of improvement, which, unfortunately, has not taken place.

The missionaries themselves were conscious of the shortcomings we have mentioned and, although they held to the view that films for Africans should "exclude all the love scenes, vain dreams, and violence of Westerns," they did support, as far back as 1956, the idea of Africans making African films. (See, for example, the paper read by Father van den Heuvel at the International Symposium on "The Cinema and Africa South of the Sahara.")

As regards the present state of the film industry in the Congo, in 1960 I met a few young Information Service trainees in Berlin who had come to Europe to learn filmmaking. Judging from what they said, no films had been made in the Congo since independence. Here again we must wait for what the next few years might bring.

*French-speaking Africa.* In the area of educational films it must frankly be said that French-speaking Africa comes last by a long shot. A few films were produced by individuals, particularly in the area of medicine (on combating malaria and other endemic diseases) but most of them date from before the war. Moreover, I cannot imagine where these films could have been shown at the time as it is only in the last few years that the former French African territories have had projection equipment.

The quality of these few films is in fact doubtful, to say the least. I have had the occasion to see the anti-malaria film at the cultural center in Niamey; no clear explanation was given of the difference in scale between the macroscopic and microscopic shots, and as a result, half of the audience (uneducated, of course) thought they were seeing cartoons and the rest (still less educated) thought it was a film about mythical animals like "Godzilla" or other "monsters from the deep" from the science fiction films being shown at the same time in the Niamey public cinema. When a territory had a young administrator who was a film enthusiast, he would try to arrange a bush film circuit with a generator truck that was borrowed; but the only program available would be documentaries on the castles of the Loire or the fishermen of Brittany. Thus in 1957, while the Ivory Coast was economically comparable to its neighbor, Ghana, all it had to compare with the Ghanaian fleet of 20 mobile film trucks was one beat-up power wagon in almost unusable condition, and an

old 16mm projector belonging to the Cultural Center which was death to any film projected through it.

However, in 1958, the Ministry of French Overseas Territories began to wake up and asked a producer, Pierre Fourré, to make a series of films for African audiences. These films, made ten years after the British Colonial Film Unit's *Mister British at Home*, showed a few simple facets of life in France (this was the period of the French community). Of these few films made—*Bonjour Paris*, *L'élevage du mouton*, *Un petit port de pêche français*, etc.—only the memory remains today (and only in France, not in Africa), although they did incorporate an interesting experimental commentary in basic French, using a vocabulary of only 1500 carefully chosen words. The few showings that these films had in Africa appear to have yielded encouraging results there, but the experiment, like many others, was never pursued.

It is only since independence that genuinely African educational films have begun to be made on former French Africa. As usual, the initial impetus came partly from the enthusiasm of a few individuals for the cinema, but the main factor was the appreciation that the young African nations had for film's possibility as a medium of communication.

Film centers have sprung up quite rapidly, and although their initial efforts may be modestly limited to a few films on current political events, the centers are at least operating and educational films figure in all of their production programs. I have not been able to collect all of the information hoped for on the organization of these centers; many of them prefer to remain modestly silent about their activities until they have produced some real films. The general pattern though is to use 16mm film for basic production, and for more important films, to call in outside producers who make 35mm films for general distribution. The centers are equipped with projection trucks either converted locally, or received as gifts on the occasion of the country's independence (Togo, for example, received a complete mobile cinema truck as a gift from the United States). Examples of recent productions are the following:

*Mauritania:* A 35mm film on independence by a good crew from France (unfortunately a high budget film).

*Senegal:* The Film Section, after likewise having called in foreign producers, (e.g., *Dakar a un siècle* made by Actualités Françaises) has, since 1958 had its own newsreel crew. Since 1959, it has had, thanks to Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, the first African producer to graduate from IDHEC, a center with 16mm and 35mm equipment which makes educational films locally, and is a co-producer (with a Senegalese motion picture company headed by another African filmmaker, Blaise Senghor) of short and feature films.

*Mali:* Since the breakup of the Mali Federation, a Mali Film Center has been set up at Bamako for "the political education of the individual, the citizen, and the worker." It has already made political events films on the visits of foreign heads of state (shot in 16mm), and has also called in foreign technicians to make purely educational films like Joris Ivens' excellent *Demain à Nanguila*.

*Ivory Coast:* The Film Center of the Information Service of the Ivory Coast, after making a number of 16mm



information shorts, sometimes with sound, since 1958, called in the French producer, Jean Ravel, to make the first synthetic film about the Ivory Coast, in connection with the opening of the Abidjan Bridge. The Center also cooperated fairly actively in the making of two of my own films, *Moi, Un Noir*, and *La Pyramide Humaine*. For the past year, an Ivory Coast motion picture company (associated with the Société de Dakar) has been expanding its activities and is now competing with a French newsreel company for the production of a newsreel program.

**Dahomey:** Despite a relatively restricted budget (15 million francs CFA for the whole Information Service, as compared with 40 million in Upper Volta and 71 million in the Ivory Coast), the film section, spurred on by the energetic Minister of Information, has since 1959 been producing a *Revue Dahoméenne Trimestrielle* in 16mm color, which runs for about half an hour. Sixteen millimeter color film has also been used for some ten educational films since 1960, including *J'étais un Tilapia* which recently won first prize at the 16mm Film Festival at St.-Cast, France in 1961. Dahomey has only one mobile cinema truck, but it does remarkable work; 132 shows have been screened in six months to a total of 300 thousand spectators.

**Cameroun:** The Cameroun Film Service, run by an enthusiastic group, has installed its own developing and printing laboratories, cutting rooms, and sound synchronization rooms and thus can meet the optimum newsreel criterion of screening topical events within twenty-four hours of their occurrence. It may be expected, with Alain Gheerbrandt's team in charge, to expand its activities still more in the coming months.<sup>5</sup>

**Chad:** In 1959, to mark the Republic's independence, the Ministry of Information asked Serge Ricci to make a 16mm color film with the title *Le Tchad a un an*, and in 1960, Suzanne Baron, a French producer, and formerly chief editor of many African films, made a 35mm color film for the Independence Day celebrations.

**Upper Volta:** At the present time, the Republic of Upper Volta is undoubtedly a model in the field of African educational film production. Under Serge Ricci's leadership, a complete 16mm production and distribution center (without laboratory) has been established at Ouagadougou. Although the first films made were mainly political in character (*A minuit, l'Indépendance*, a 16mm color film on the independence of the four alliance states of Niger, Dahomey, Ivory Coast, and Upper Volta) since 1961 the center has been producing true educational films with an African technical staff trained on the spot.

**Niger:** The Mass Communications Service of Niger so far has no more than an embryonic film center (specializing in political newsreels), but the Republic has done a good deal in the area of mass education through films in cooperation with the Niger Museum and the Research Institute (IFAN). On the production end, recourse has been taken to European directors (I have made seven films in Niger, Henri Brandt has made one, etc.). An interesting experiment in production was a Niger-Canadian effort made in 1959-60 to mark the Republic's first birthday and Independence Day. This film, *Le Niger, jeune république*, was directed by Claude Jutra and produced by

the National Film Board of Canada. At this time, an initial version has been broadcast over Canadian television, and the National Film Board of Canada is preparing a Djerma and a Hausa language version for distribution within the Republic of Niger. With UNESCO's help, an audiovisual center attached to the Research Institute is now being organized; it plans to build, in 1962, a 4000-seat open air theater where plays can be performed and films shown.<sup>6</sup>

To conclude this bird's eye view of educational films in former French Africa, it may be noted that many avenues toward the cooperation of all of these efforts is now being explored, either at the government level (the African Mass Communications Services, in France the Ministry of Aid and Cooperation, the Comité du Film Ethnographique of the Musée de l'Homme, and the National Film Center) or on the commercial plane (Actualités Françaises, Pathé, Gaumont, the television branch of SORAFOM). So far, no solution has been agreed upon, but opinion seems to be leaning toward a center in Paris (like the Overseas Film and Television Center in London) which I myself suggested following a meeting on African cinema in Niamey in June of 1960. Such a center would provide a permanent liaison at the technical, artistic, and professional levels between Africa and the only readily accessible laboratories, in Paris.<sup>7</sup>

### IMPORTANCE OF THESE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FILM FROM CINEMATOGRAPHIC, CULTURAL, AND SOCIOLOGICAL POINTS OF VIEW

In analyzing the cinematographic, cultural, and sociological value of African films, they will again be divided into the two categories briefly surveyed above: (1) Commercial and documentary films, (2) Education films. The reason again is the impossibility of making a combined study of films so different in object and having developed on such different lines.

#### Commercial and Documentary Films

**Cinematographic value.** While the growth of commercial and documentary filmmaking has obviously been accompanied by an improvement in quality, it must be emphasized from the beginning that the relative worth of the results, cinematographically and socially, remains lower than that of corresponding films from other areas of production. This phenomenon should not be considered an isolate but rather should be viewed in the context of the overall policy of mediocrity, whose effects are still making Africans suffer.

In English-speaking Africa, motion pictures achieved far less healthy growth than trade or education: the British were not interested in African cinema except for use in educational areas (which will be discussed later), and left the field in their African territories to American filmmakers more concerned with exoticism and the box-office than with African culture or motion picture art.

In French-speaking Africa, the evolution of quality followed a more complex pattern. Although Léon Poirier and the crew that made *La Croisière Noire*, Marc Allégret, Marcel Griaule, and more recently the Ogooué-Congo and ethnographic film crews undoubtedly outclassed the Colonial



Civil Service filmmakers, all too frequently genteelness or contamination by the surrounding mediocrity made them incapable of aiming at a job that was totally creative. Today it is a peculiar experience to re-watch a film like *Sous les masques noirs* made in 1938 by Marcel Griaule, a film set in a "Colonial Exposition" context with a commentary and incidental music which seem entirely old fashioned. Why has a very comparable film like *Los Hurdes* made at the same period by Bunuel, not aged similarly? Is it because of Africa's very considerable progress, as compared with Spain's post-Civil War stagnation? It is impossible to say, but all old films on Africa are terribly dated, and those who love both the cinema and Africa who are able to catch from the still splendid images the message now stifled, feel the urge to re-edit the films and add authentic sound effects and a scientific commentary.

The same applied to more recent films. *Au Pays des Pygmées*, made in 1948 with terrific precautions, was Africa's first ethnographic film. Yet today, it has lost the power it had ten years ago to stir artistic emotions or the feeling of scientific discovery. Here again, one wants to remake the commentary, re-edit the film, or even take the more serious step of starting again from the beginning.<sup>8</sup>

How is it then that African films have aged so quickly? I am afraid that the reason is their lack of quality. It is the masterpieces among European and American films which are perennial, but the bulk of their output of ten years back is now just as impossible to sit through as the African films of the same period.

A point that we must grasp is that, in fact, African masterpieces are extremely rare. Admittedly, I have often drawn attention to good qualities in these films in my current report, but even so, the level is pretty low by world standards. We know that after *Louisiana Story* (which has not aged in the slightest), Robert Flaherty intended to go to Africa to make a fifth film and fifth masterpiece. Unfortunately, death was to prevent African film production from achieving a place of honor in the history of cinema through a film by Flaherty.

Should this be taken to mean that in the cinema art Africa's score is nil? I don't think so: all of the films mentioned had some merit to them, and still do, yet not one of them will really find a place in the history of the cinema.<sup>9</sup>

*Cultural and sociological value.* Is the same to be said for these films on the cultural and sociological level? Sociologically, these films retain their value; even though films grow scientifically sound as ethnographic techniques improve, the fact remains that the intervening stages are of great interest. Films now out of date like *Voyage au Congo* or *La Croisière Noire*, or aging films like *Au Pays des Pygmées* or *Masques Dogon*, are of considerable historical value, not only as milestones in the history of African films but also as unique evidence of the outlook and behavior of an epoch, its culture in the scientific sense.

Keeping to the classification in the previous chapter of more recent films made since 1950, we find in each class of film a sociological content area of great importance.

The "exotic Africa" films, like *King Solomon's Mines*, *Nagana*, or the *Tarzan* films, exhibit screen stereotypes of the continent as seen by outside observers and, however

distorted the latter's vision may be, the errors are of absorbing interest in themselves. It is due to this genre of film and above all because it has a public that it becomes easier to explain some manifestations of racism which today seem incongruous. Even when Africa has become just another continent and when men have stopped basing their judgments on the color of their neighbors' skin, the exotic style will survive, just as Westerns survive long after the end of the adventure period on the western prairies of America.

The "ethnographic Africa" films, evolving from superficiality to a steadily increasing degree of penetration provide world culture with visual and sound records of civilizations either vanishing or becoming completely transformed. For instance, when I was beginning to shoot *Moro-Naba* in Upper Volta in 1957, a film of the Mossi chieftain's funeral in the old tradition, I was fully aware that my ramshackle camera and poor tape recorder were capturing data of essential importance, not merely to Upper Volta but to world culture, since this was almost certainly the last observance of a dying custom. The next *Moro-Naba* was definitely going to be Catholic, and, without my film, the great traditional funeral rites would have faded away into oral tradition or a few incomplete reports by ethnographers.

The films of "emergent Africa," told in the pictures already discussed, are just as irreplaceable, and even though the technique is often poor and the narrations outdated even before the film is printed, documents such as *Afrique 50*, *Les Statues meurent aussi*, or *Le Carnaval des Dieux*, remain, despite the irritation they may arouse, unique testimonies of a history which is a perpetual source of wonder. Indeed, one would be almost tempted to welcome their premature aging as a proof of the vitality of African evolution.

Lastly, films of Africa by Africans, or films of Africa with Europeans providing technical knowhow only and leaving action and words as much as possible to Africans, will probably always retain the quality of bold experimentation. It has already been emphasized that European filmmakers, however sympathetic, cannot get inside the skins of Africans, and that overindulgence toward the first purely African films was a form of racism as sterile as any other. While these films were suspect to begin with, these suspicions have gradually been allayed, projecting an image of Africa that could be related to by people who hitherto had completely ignored the continent. For example, thanks to a film like *Come Back Africa*, the problem of racial segregation in South Africa has been brought home to many Europeans who before had never known or cared to know anything about it. Another more personal example is found in the unexpected results of the showing of my *Moi, un Noir*. From the African point of view, this film has been repeatedly criticized for presenting a portrayal of a "low life" African milieu. Yet it also awoke the spontaneous sympathy of the humblest audiences, who discovered a man who looked different, spoke a different language, behaved differently, but after all was quite close to themselves.

It is on this level that some of us impatiently and eagerly await the coming of genuinely African films. They will not, of course, be a series of masterpieces from the start, but they will be a thousand times more moving than any of the films we have been discussing, since, for the first time, Africans will be speaking directly with other people. Cinemato-



graphically, African films may well be of indeterminable length, in a language which makes subtitles necessary, and using music in ways that would be unthinkable to us. But once the first shock is over, I know that such documents will have an unequalable value. Sociologically, film, a medium whose full scope is still unexplored, will enable men to tell and show the world directly what they are, what they do, and what they think. Culturally, the impact of these films will be still greater, since they will be made for people of a common culture, people to whom the idiom will be understandable from the start, without their being able to read or write.

### *Educational Films*

The recent date at which educational films started in Africa, as well as their moderate quality, prohibit my dwelling on their cinematographic, sociological, or cultural value.

From the cinematographic point of view, it must be admitted that with very few exceptions (in particular the Ghana Film Unit) the films are frankly of quite limited artistic value. They are of course a particularly difficult type of film to make, and for that very reason require absolutely first rate directors. Unfortunately alike in former French, British, or Belgian Africa, most of the directors (leaving aside exceptions like Sean Graham) were (and are) amateurs, administrators, or missionaries.

Sociologically, more value can be derived from these films by studying where they failed rather than by seeing where they succeeded. In particular, it would be interesting to make a methodical study of the means employed and actual results obtained in a specific field such as health, or housing. If one took films of quality such as *The Boy Kumasenu*, *Demain à Nanguila*, or *A minuit l'Indépendance*, I think that it would become apparent that they did not have, and will not have, the slightest influence at all on juvenile delinquency, the role of agricultural cooperatives, or the building of a national spirit.

Should one then condemn these films? I think not, since the role they do and should fulfill culturally remains essential in spite of everything. Actually, they are irreplaceable (if awkward) means of communication about a continent where information is precisely what is lacking. (In the capital of an African state more is known about what is going on everywhere else in the world than about the surrounding community.) Secondly, these education films remain a training school for the African film industry of tomorrow. I have already said that whatever we may think of the films produced by the Colonial Film Unit and by William Sellers and his group, it is through these films that the cinema has reached the smallest villages in Africa and has become a familiar means of education. And it is in making them that the technicians of the African cinema of tomorrow are learning their craft.

### **ANALYSIS OF NEW TRENDS AND THE CONDITIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN CINEMA**

In this last section I shall not separately discuss education, commercial, and documentary films, since all of them, in my

view, are equally involved in the future of the new African cinema. The only type of film requiring separate consideration is the newsreel. So far, it has hardly been mentioned for two reasons. First, apart from a few more or less periodical "screen magazines" which really cannot be thought of as newsreels, the latter is a very recent development in response to the demands of the newly independent African republics. Second, newsreels are mainly irrelevant to our present subject, since despite the fact that they provide excellent training for film technicians, time factor requirements in shooting, editing, adding sound, and distributing are such to make it a highly specialized area of cinematography.

It is the failure to understand this difference which has led some African nations to harness their promising young filmmakers to the production of this kind of film, condemning them thereby to total frustration in the area of motion picture art itself. Undoubtedly the young African Republics urgently need newsreel services, but, in fact, the only way of meeting this need is to attend to it independently of all other film activities. Each state should have a team specializing exclusively in this type of filmmaking, and should have an arsenal of equipment reserved for this type of work. Even so, there are from the start two conflicting choices: between news films shot and processed entirely in the country and those processed abroad.

Using the methods recommended by UNESCO, it is possible, in 16mm black and white, to create a complete newsreel system at low cost, including cameras, sound recording equipment, development and printing labs, and projection rooms. A disadvantage of this is the visual mediocrity of the films thus far made; but an important advantage is the ability to show the films (as elsewhere in the world) a few days if not a few hours after being shot—the essential quality of newsreels.

However, the example of newsreels made in the developed countries in 35mm (and then in color) has tempted the young republics to try to make films of the same quality, although they do not have the means to do so locally. Results of this to do are as follows: either, as in Senegal or the Ivory Coast, monthly or bi-monthly news digests, shot in 35mm, are processed in Paris by a specialist firm, or, as in Mali, newsreels are shot in color and then have a narration or background music added. In both cases, the result is more like a magazine than a true cinematographic journal; the delays in shipping and other adjustments prohibit the films from being projected immediately after being shot.

The problem arises in the same terms for commercial or educational films: in my view, it is the choice of technical method which will set the course of African filmmaking. Financially speaking, African film production is stuck with following the low-budget route, first because of the scarcity of cinemas and second because of the extremely meager budgets of the African republics. These countries therefore need to be able to resort to money saving methods. We will consider these possibilities as concern shooting, sound recording, editing and sound synchronization, distribution via both commercial cinemas and mobile truck units, and finally, in terms of television possibilities. It must be emphasized here that a low budget film need not be a low-grade film. For the reduction need not be made at the expense of the story, but simply by changing the operation's



financial terms along lines that may need refinement in detail but have already been followed successfully (the so-called "nouvelle vague" school in France is in fact an attempt to liberate cinematographic art from economic constraints).

### *Shooting*

The choice to be made is between 16mm and 35mm. I have already drawn attention, in the first part of this report, to the important influence of the 16mm camera's appearance in the post-war African film scene. The 16mm camera was originally only for amateurs. The enormous extension of its use was due to the war, when it became the tool of the combat cameramen. In the United States in particular, the 16mm format has made considerable progress, and as early as 1945, successful blowups were made from 16mm to 35mm. These attempts were so conclusive that Walt Disney, a filmmaker so exacting in his concern with image quality, used blown-up 16mm for his great "Wonders of Nature" series.

In Europe, 16mm only came into professional use with the appearance of television, but already, pictorial quality is practically unaffected by the film format.<sup>10</sup> The only outstanding problem until recently was color enlargement (the size of grain made it impossible to use the 16mm color negative direct and copies had to be made from dupe negatives with a displeasing increase in contrast). The appearance of soft color original film of the Ektachrome type has solved the problem.

The advantages of shooting in 16mm are considerable: the cameras are lighter and thus easier to handle. Film costs are a quarter of the costs of 35mm. Finally, successful tests of a series of prototypes suggest that in the very near future, noiseless portable cameras will be available, permitting synchronous sound shooting under all conditions with both minimum equipment and crew.

Of course great progress has also been made in reducing the weight and increasing the flexibility of 35mm cameras. But why use a technique that may be equalled or surpassed in a few years time and which costs four times as much for results of hardly perceptible technical superiority?

### *Sound Recording*

Sound recording techniques have also made progress toward greater simplification. When the crew of the Ogooué-Congo films was shooting *Au Pays des Pygmées*, in 1946, its sound recording equipment (a disc recorder) weighed nearly a ton and required a crew of three or four for operation. I have already mentioned that I was among the first to use a battery-powered tape recorder in Tropical Africa. While the original models weighed nearly 50 pounds and yielded rather indifferent results, improvement was fairly rapid. Today these tape recorders are standard motion picture equipment, both on location and in the studio.

Three years ago a number of manufacturers solved the problem of synchronizing unperforated sound tape (which slips, whereas perforated film does not) by recording on the tape a separate signal emitted by the camera motor. This technique is also progressing quickly, and today, perfect synchronization is obtainable by using two frequency generators, one regulating the camera speed and the other

printing a signal on the unperforated quarter inch sound tape.

Thus, today, the noiseless camera and battery powered tape recorder combination weighs about 25 pounds and can be handled by two people, or even one. This technique, which is already revolutionizing a part of cinematographic art, is progressing appreciably each month: miniature microphones eliminate all wires and boom poles, inter-operator signals between cameramen allow for the simultaneous use of more than one synchronous camera, and the next step will undoubtedly be to start and stop the camera function by remote control. And we can expect more progress as a result of television.<sup>11</sup>

Once again, at the very moment when these developments are taking place in motion picture technique, it would be a great pity for the emergent African cinema to opt for the conventional methods and thereby be obliged to replace all of its capital equipment within a few years, in order to regain ground which should never have been lost.

### *Editing and Sound Tracks*

In this area there is less to choose between 16mm and 35mm on financial grounds, since the editing equipment for picture and sound is much the same in cost regardless of the film format. Quality is the same in either case, but once again the cost of 16mm is lower, owing to the saving of tape which is a quarter the price of 35mm.

The materials for a cutting room are extremely simple and basically require comparatively inexpensive equipment (viewer with synchronizer and magnetic head sound reader and amplifier). It is essential that the filmmaking centers in the African republics each have at least one editing table setup; it must not be forgotten that cutting a film remains the best way for the filmmaker to learn his craft, and it would be a pity not to see this exploited by the African film centers.

A sound recording studio is a bit more complex, but in any case, infinitely less so than the broadcasting studio variety. In practice, a small studio with facilities for mixing four sound tracks appears to be essential. With this, all recording can be done locally and, more particularly the dubbing of dialogue or narration in the vernacular languages, which is most important for African filmmaking. (I shall later return to this question, which is essential to the showing of films in rural areas.)

The most serious difficulty is not building and equipping editing rooms or sound studios, but maintaining them: good electronic engineers are rare and it will be necessary to make a special effort to train some to meet this situation.

### *Distribution*

The question of distribution in 16mm versus 35mm is not a problem in Africa since most existing commercial cinemas have both types of projector. In projection, too, 16mm has recently made enormous progress, and with arc projectors the images are fully up to 35mm standards. Rural (or "bush") cinema is already exclusively equipped with 16mm projectors and cannot be supplied with another size. This, then, is not the question; the two important problems seem to me to be the following:



*Projection Technique.* Although in Europe the travelling cinemas can make do with small screen projectors, owing to their limited audiences, the same is not true in Africa, where full-scale commercial cinemas are comparatively rare. In Africa, an open-air film show in a village is attended by the whole population of the village, i.e., an audience as large if not larger than that in a normal European commercial theater. Part of this audience consists of young people who have travelled extensively and know the experience of urban film showings, and thus cannot be satisfied by a tiny screen with an image that is of inferior luminosity, or by feeble loudspeakers that are easily drowned out by the noise of the audience.

It is therefore necessary to devise projectors adapted to this kind of problem, namely, relatively portable and easily handled units, giving results up to the standards of town cinemas. It seems that the manufacturers are already on the verge of a solution to this problem, using Xenon light sources which give comparable luminosity to that of arc sources, without the inconveniences or dangers. Similarly, these manufacturers have almost solved the problem of designing sound amplifiers which are both powerful enough and portable enough to reach the whole of an audience of several thousand people.

This technical aspect of the distribution problem is extremely important: if we want Africans to go to films, it is essential for projection to be up to normal standards. This was the point that was overlooked until recently by most equipment manufacturers, who were under the impression that educational films could be screened cheaply and draw audiences because admission was usually free.

*Language question.* The question of the language used is also very different in Africa as compared with other places. In European countries, a foreign film is dubbed or subtitled. But as Africa is still largely illiterate, subtitling is out of the question, since it would be a help to only a very small proportion of the audience. Dubbing is therefore one solution, but once again the proposition is not the same as in other countries and the multilingualism of African republics calls for a fresh approach to the problem. While the official languages of the modern African nations are French or English, this by no means signifies that they are either understood or spoken by the majority of the population, and it is precisely the uneducated and uninstructed sectors of the African public who should be reached with films. It is thus essential to be able to dub films in the languages spoken in all the different regions of a country.

As we have already seen, the Belgians studied and dealt with the problem by having local people deliver a spoken commentary on the film as it was screened. The French, on the other hand, favored the use of a narration in simplified "basic" French, using an abbreviated vocabulary.

Both of these solutions strike me as being outdated, and here again a technological solution appears to be found in the use of double-system projection, with 16mm projectors of this type having in fact been developed by some manufacturers, though for quite other purposes (better sound quality for preparation of sound effects and music tracks). These projectors have an ordinary picture reel, plus a 16mm perforated sound magnetic tape reel. The result is the

flexibility of being able to play a composite optical sound film print, or a double-strand sound and picture copy. What could be done might be to use the optical reel for screening the film with the sound and voice track in the official language (English or French) while the magnetic tape would be recorded in the local sound studio, in one or more vernacular translations. In areas where there is a need for dubbing in several languages, a corresponding number of magnetic sound reels could be recorded, and the correct version selected for a particular performance, according to the language spoken by the majority of viewers.

This solution, or something along similar lines, seems to me to be the only one which will make Africa's transition to real films of its own possible, not merely financially, but above all artistically, since it is well known that an art can only grow in contact with the people among whom it is born: there will not really be an African cinema until it is made for and by the peoples of Africa themselves.

Incidentally, these remarks apply equally to all of the film genres we have discussed—education, documentary, or feature commercial films. African audiences have learned the language of the cinema at a school which was not always perhaps a good one; now they need to build upon that knowledge, to read in "books" appropriate to their own cultures.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Future of Television*

Although television did not originally enter into the purview of this report, it seems to me necessary to say just a few words about it, as it has already appeared in Nigeria. Initially, the government of Nigeria went no further than experiments in television rebroadcasts, and broadcast only programs on film. However local traders have put television receivers on sale, and their success was so immediate and so huge that in Southern Nigeria live television has come to stay.

Of course, for the present, the shows are restricted to political news and to original film programs and advertisements of questionable quality, but I feel that it is necessary to go through this stage in order to settle a number of technical problems, and that the quality of Nigerian television will improve as time goes on.

Following Nigeria's example, Ghana and Ivory Coast are planning to open television networks quite soon, and even in the least developed countries, the problem is rapidly coming to the fore.

Actually, although African television so far may be thought of as serving somewhat materialistic ends, its development can be viewed in another light. It appears that as techniques improve, the cost price of mounting a television network is likely to be lower than that of establishing a rural film circuit. For example, one film truck per seven villages is required to provide one program per week, and the number of print copies will thus be equal to the number of seven-village circuits in the whole of the particular state. On the other hand, with one television in a village, a program per evening can be shown, perhaps by direct broadcast. But there is also another point: television can be an administrative tool of considerable power, for while improved transportation puts any African capital



within a few hours travel of the other capitals of the world, the difficulties of local travel keep those same capitals several days journey from some of their own villages. The latter are only in touch with the district administrative center once a year and with the capital only one day every ten years, plus occasional official flying visits.

Although the same situation is also found in industrial countries, essential daily contact with the rest of the world is ensured through the press. Thus African television appears a means of settling the difficult problem of ineffectual administration due to difficulties of communication. And one might even go further to say that if television does take root, it will give rise to a communication process of unforeseeable possibilities. I have already said that the masses in Africa have grasped the idiom of the cinema screen. They will understand the television medium in the same way, and thus, at one bound, without literacy, will be in direct daily contact with the outer world and with other cultures hitherto beyond their reach.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

All of these forecasts may seem a bit like something out of science fiction. But re-reading this paper will show how much ground has really been covered from the time when that bioscope was stolen in 1896 by a vaudeville magician and shown in South Africa. This very report is probably already out of date in all the young African republics. Before it reaches them, the full-fledged African cinema will be born. Things are, of course, still in an apprenticeship stage of newsfilm or educational film, but the new nations' young technicians are avid to learn and to follow in the steps of those who have gone before them in the world's schools of cinema art. They are reaching London, Paris, New York, or Moscow little by little, and if their qualifications are not good enough for entry into advanced schools, they attend more modest technical schools or simply find their way to the studios and get taken onto camera crews. Some of them are almost completely non-literate, but they know their cinema by heart; they have already outgrown the Westerns and the gangster films and are turning their attention to more difficult productions. They have found their way to the film libraries and to the art and experimental cinemas. They are jostling to buy 16mm cameras and whatever film they can scrape up, and they are making their first experiments in cinematography.

Already, contact has been made between them and the veterans from the film institutes, and after being separated for a long time, they can meet again speaking the same tongue. A language not to be learned from grammars or dictionaries, but before the screens of darkened film theaters, through the eyepiece of the camera, the earphones of the tape recorder; a language whose words and phrases are not printed on paper but recorded on film and tape, an audiovisual language which all people in the world find they can understand without even knowing that they learned it, a true international language.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>It is interesting to note that the National Film Board of Canada was established by Grierson for similar propaganda purposes. This, incidentally, is how Norman MacLaren's career began.

<sup>2</sup>It is interesting to note the annual production and distribution figures for films in English language African territories, reported by Mr. Sellers in 1958: *West Africa* (not including Ghana)—The five Film Units of the Federation of Nigeria plus the Gambia and Sierra Leone units produced about 100 35mm films and 150 16mm films. Sixty-eight mobile cinema trucks served a total audience per year of nearly 15 million. *East Africa*—The six Film Units were producing ten 35mm and 78 16mm films per year, had 30 mobile cinema trucks and reached a million viewers.

<sup>3</sup>There was a heated discussion on this point in July 1958 during the International Symposium on "The Cinema in Africa South of the Sahara" at the Brussels World Fair. The whole team of the Colonial Film Unit took part, and the present writer, carried away by his feelings, argued that in the long run the effect of this sort of film was even negative.

<sup>4</sup>Once again, I have not cited the educational films made in South Africa as they, too, are mostly Afrikaans in language and outlook. A few English-speaking films that I was able to see were mainly semi-publicity films for the mining industries, and in that way were only of secondary interest from the filmic and educational points of view. Nevertheless, now and then, I believe that it is better to have poor films being produced than no films at all. Moreover, it is quite in the cards that in the cinema we will witness a phenomenon similar to that which has occurred in the sphere of the press, with the rise in South Africa of genuine African journalism (c.f. the magazine *Drum*).

<sup>5</sup>I was unable to obtain specific information about the other republics of Equatorial Africa, except the Congo, which in June 1961 indicated that its Mass Communication Service was trying to start a film section, but that with the meager resources at its disposal, no real filmmaking could be undertaken before 1962 or 1963.

<sup>6</sup>At Claude Jutra's instigation, a young designer at the research center, Moustapha Allasane, has already produced a pilot animation, with the shooting being done in Montreal by Jutra, Michel Brault, and McLaren. Since then, this young artist has prepared a medium-length educational film, also animated, and has applied for a UNESCO fellowship for training in Paris and Montreal.

<sup>7</sup>I cannot discuss Portuguese-speaking Africa as I have no information on the subject. The only films I have been able to see, and which were of quite good quality, were made by Portuguese anthropologists in Angola, about the Bushmen of the Northern Kalahari.

<sup>8</sup>Needless to say, my reaction to the majority of my own earlier films is exactly the same.

<sup>9</sup>Going through the chronology of major films between 1892 and 1951 (see *L'art du cinéma des origines à nos jours*, by Georges Sadoul) the following are the few African films that can be found: 1896 France Pathé, *La Dame Malgache*; 1900 Great Britain, William Paul, *Kruger—A Dream of Empire*, Rosenthal, *Escarmouche avec les Boërs*; USA, James White, *Scènes Reconstituées de la guerre du Transvaal*; France Pathé, *La guerre du Transvaal*; 1930 Germany, Ruttman, *Melodies of the World*; 1951 USA, John Huston, *African Queen*—a total of seven films, only two of which were made later than 1900.

<sup>10</sup>A very recent film of my own, *Chronicle of a Summer*, was shot in 16mm and enlarged to 35mm. Many of the professional filmmakers who saw this film did not even notice this.

<sup>11</sup>These technical advances are mainly in 16mm equipment, which is natural enough, considering that television services, using 16mm exclusively, have to provide shows 24 hours a day, or, with two channels, 48 hours per day.

<sup>12</sup>An experiment along these lines is to be tried shortly at Niamey, where, with UNESCO's help, a community theater-cinema is to be built. The present writer, who is partly responsible, will try out more particularly the double-system projectors discussed earlier,



showing not only films from Niger but also film classics with dialogue and narration where necessary, in various local languages.

<sup>13</sup>The gulf is partially bridged already by sound broadcasts. Experiments made with "radiovision" (direct projection of filmstrip during a broadcast program) had a degree of success which argues well for that of television.

### TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

\*English translation of "Situation et tendances du cinéma en Afrique," which appeared as an appendix, pp. 374-408, of the

*Premier Catalogue Selectif International de Films Ethnographiques sur l'Afrique Noir*, Paris, UNESCO, 1967. Rouch's paper was first written and presented to a UNESCO symposium in 1961. A translation of the 1961 original was prepared by UNESCO for limited distribution. Portions of the first third of the article, slightly edited and modified, formed the basis of a short article, "The Awakening African Cinema" published in the *UNESCO Courier*, March 1962. Otherwise, Rouch's extensive knowledge of African cinema has not previously been accessible to an English-speaking public. Special thanks are again due Ms. Marielle Delorme, of the Comité International des Films de l'Homme in Paris, for review and for locating a copy of the 1961 UNESCO translation. Due to the unusual length of the article, it has appeared in two parts.



## REVIEWS AND DISCUSSION

*Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration of Film Communication and Anthropology.* Sol Worth and John Adair. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972. xiv + 286 pp.; photographic section 14 pages. \$12.50 (cloth), \$4.50 (paper).

Reviewed by Margaret Mead  
American Museum of Natural History

This delightful and epoch-making book (which the publishers have just brought out in paperback) is in a way a representation of the dilemma that is also its subject matter. It describes, in careful sequence, with alert self-analysis, biographical detail, verbal scenarios and photographic reproductions, a process by which the authors set out to test the potentials of teaching members of another culture to make films. To understand it, the reader needs to be able to see the films themselves, and ideally they would come packaged with the book, as we shall soon be able to buy video tapes. But because this experiment was done in 1966 and not in 1976, the films—distributed by the Museum of Modern Art, which have been available for limited viewing since 1968 and for rental since 1972—have been separated from the book which gives an account of how they were made.<sup>1</sup> Although short discussions appeared earlier, an analysis of the films themselves appeared only in 1972, and the book is at last being reviewed in 1975 (see Worth 1969, 1970, 1972; Collier 1974).

It is virtually impossible for one who has seen and used the films, taught with them, meditated over, and argued with Sol Worth about, their meaning, to judge how this directly written, elegantly constrained book would strike a reader who has not seen them. In fact I really don't think this should be attempted. Get the book, read through page 93, look at the films (on rug making, drilling a shallow well for water, etc.), then read further to Chapter 13 and view Al Clah's film, *Intrepid Shadows*. Or, for viewers who are very accustomed to thinking about film, it might be wise to see the films first, as I did; I showed them to a large class with Sol Worth present to introduce and discuss them.

The book can, of course, be treated as a manual for how to conduct a controlled operation in the field, how to relate to the people, involve them in an activity, think at each step about the cultural and idiosyncratic implications of what is being done, and write it up so that it advances our knowledge of cross-cultural communication fieldwork in general, and the Navajo in particular. From this point of view it can be separated from the films made by the Navajo "students" such as the one of an old woman weaver taught by her daughter. It then stands as one more valuable attempt to use writing about films in the discussion of culture, alongside *Movies* by Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites (1957), *Hitlerjunge Quex* by Gregory Bateson (1945),<sup>2</sup> Erik Erikson's

analysis of *The Childhood of Maxim Gorky* (1950), and *Balinese Character* (Bateson and Mead 1942), where still photographs, illuminated by the study of the parallel movies, are presented in cross event simultaneity. These are discussions of one way of looking at culture through the films its members make and the way in which the film makers choose to illuminate the perceptions and values of the culture which is being studied in depth.

The Navajo were an ideal selection for the experiment. John Adair had done extensive fieldwork in the very area where the new team chose to work, and where, 27 years earlier, he himself had directed a film about the Navajo (Adair 1939). There also exists an enormous amount of literature on the visual arts, the poetry, the ritual, and the language of the Navajo from which the authors could draw, and from which anyone wishing to make further study of the films themselves can draw. One defect of the book, however, is that the bibliography is not of the Navajo, but simply the references use by Worth and Adair. Anyone wishing to do more work on the relationship between the Navajo films and the rest of the culture should realize that there is more beautiful material on the sand paintings, poetry, linguistic usage, and social organization which would be available for student projects, or for experimenting with further hypotheses which can be derived either from the films or from the rest of the material on the culture.

The entire procedure by which the Navajo students were selected and trained to use the camera is carefully explained so the reader can follow every step. The authors worked on the hypothesis that film is a kind of language and they were exploring the way in which members of another culture would use such a language. As a result, all of the theory is linear, as was Sol Worth's teaching. The way frames could be combined to make cademes, and cademes edited into edemes was conceptualized as a linear process of the linguistic type which has script as its model. One is led to wonder what would have happened if students who did not realize the role played by single frames had approached the whole process not as a matter of composing, cutting, editing and recombining frames, but had simply attempted to produce a flow of movement.

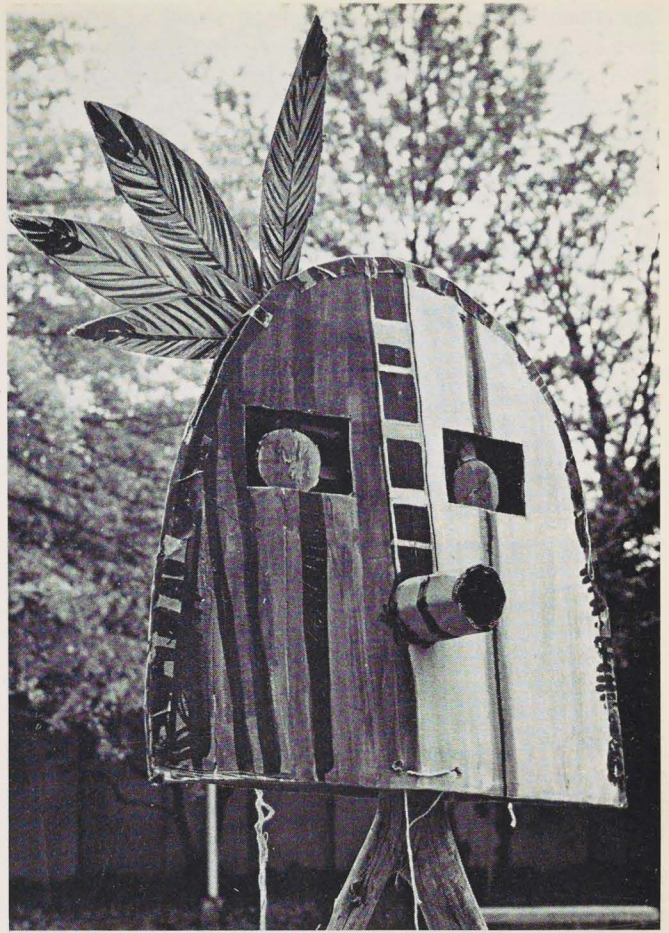
Furthermore, as Worth was accustomed to teaching students, the filming process was presented to the Navajo didactically, so it is not surprising that all of the Navajos but one—the artist—made didactic films, to tell other people about the Navajo and the way they weave or do silver work. We have no way of knowing whether a different kind of presentation might have evoked a different kind of filming. We do know that they were taught a craft and learned to use the new equipment in a craftsmanlike manner.

As noted, the one exception is the young artist, Al Clah, who had studied at the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. His film was a work of art. I think it is unfortunate that the authors treat him more as an outsider than as an artist because his film is as Navajo as any of the others. But it is a version of Navajo culture used expressively by a Navajo who was a stranger in the community where he worked and who had learned a considerable amount of art school type sophistication. The results, however, are outstanding. He handled his camera so that the viewer actually sees animism—animism as reported in the myths and texts of





—Photograph of Yeibechai mask in the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art, Inc., Santa Fe, New Mexico



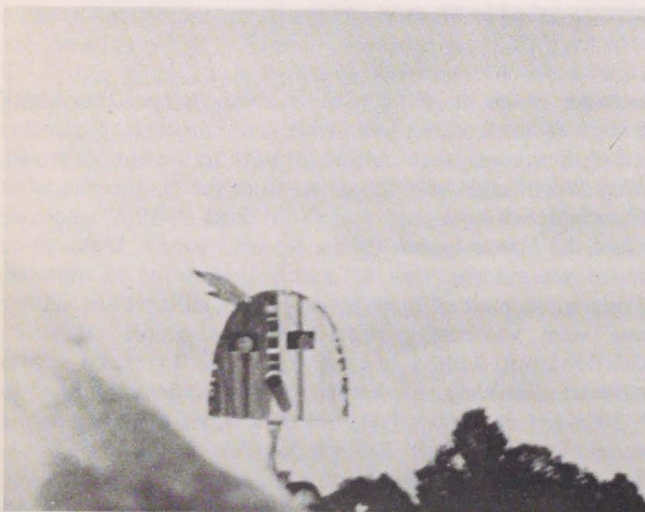
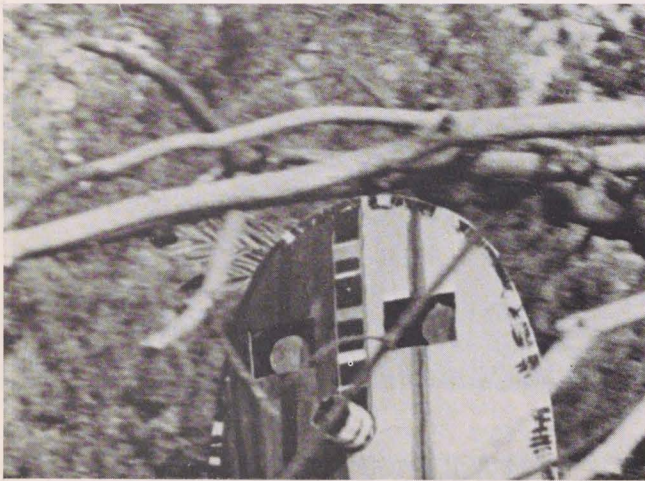
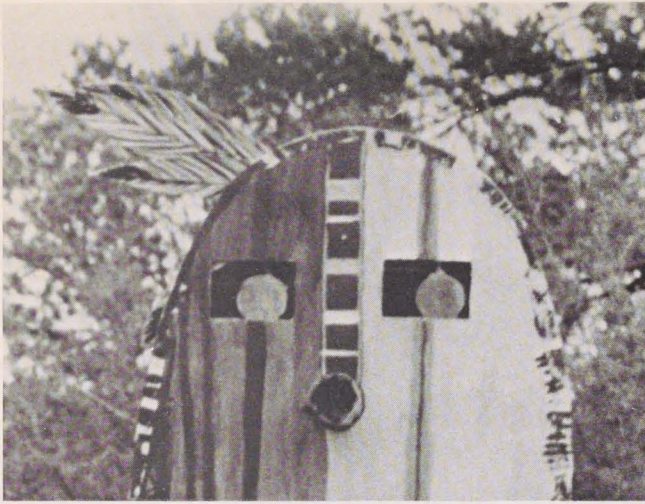
—Photograph of Yeibechai mask constructed by Al Clah for his film *Intrepid Shadows*, in the collection of Sol Worth; photographed by Michael Liebowitz

primitive peoples—a kind of animism which I had never seen, but only heard about. His effect is achieved by the use of a mask—as a statement of the camera—and by moving the camera independently of his own movement when photographing trees and grass already ruffled by the wind. His comments on the film, both volunteered and evoked, and the authors' interpretations of them, are complicated somewhat by the nature of the dual relationship in which Worth interacted with Clah: as a former painter, Worth was a fellow artist, but as a filmmaker he was the teacher, thus complicating the relationship between them. This film makes it possible to actually see the kind of images in the trees which are so often reported, but usually remain invisible to eyes that are not attuned to this vision.

The book closes on a somewhat anticlimactic note, with a brief summary of the differences between films made by American teenagers, black and white. But the emphasis on the fact that black teenagers want to present themselves as persons, while the white teenagers want to make, produce, edit and plan films, highlights a point that is not discussed in the book when the authors marvel at the way in which the Navajo also took to filmmaking. The Navajo and the black

teenager share a self-conscious minority position; both groups, when working with whites, are on stage, presenting either themselves, their culture, or both to the outside world. What Worth and Adair obtained from the Navajo was what Theodore Schwartz and I also obtained in 1952 when we asked the Manus leader, Paliau, to make a tape. Although he had never made a tape before, he spoke for 45 minutes, giving an account of himself to a white audience. In neither case were we dealing with "primitive people" living in isolation, but with a group acutely aware of the white audience. Similarly, the Omaha Indians, whom I studied in 1930, lived on a stage, and read *Billboard* as the magazine most relevant to their view of themselves. The authors see the white teenage filmmakers as interested in manipulating, but I would simply interpret their behavior as that of members of the majority culture who had no audience to which they wished to present themselves or their culture, and when asked to make films, selected the most bizarre and arresting material they could find. Similarly, when American boys who have constructed "worlds" are asked why there are no engineers in the trains they have put together, they reply, "but, I am the engineer."





—Frames from the film *Intrepid Shadows*, by Al Clah

This pioneering and important experiment has given us many valuable things: a mode of studying the introduction of a new piece of behavior in a form which provides its own record, and in a form that is wholly manageable; a filmic

accompaniment to all the other rich materials on Navajo culture, from among which the authors have selected with great care just the most apposite statements; and clear statements that stimulate the reader to respond with new hypotheses and plans for other experiments. It reasserts how valuable film is as a way of recording things about a culture that can be recorded in no other way.

One note of caution: the whole effect of *Intrepid Shadows* is spoiled unless the audience is cautioned to preserve absolute silence.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Films made by the Navajo are available for rental from the Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019, under the collective title *Navajos Film Themselves*, or individually as follows:

Benally, Susie. *A Navajo Weaver*. 20 minutes.

Nelson, Johnny. *The Navajo Silversmith*. 20 minutes.

Tsosie, Maxine, and Mary Jane Tsosie. *The Spirit of the Navajo*. 20 minutes.

Nelson, Johnny. *The Shallow Well*. 20 minutes.

Anderson, Mike. *Old Antelope Lake*. 15 minutes.

Clah, Al. *Intrepid Shadows*. 15 minutes.

Kahn, Alta. Untitled film. 10 minutes.

<sup>2</sup>A new print of *Hitlerjunge Quex*, with analysis by Gregory Bateson, is available for rental from the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

#### References Cited

Adair, John

1939 Navajo Silversmithing (film). Produced and distributed by the Taylor Museum, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

Bateson, Gregory

1945 An Analysis of the Nazi Film *Hitlerjunge Quex*. Mimeographed. New York: Institute for Intercultural Studies. (Reprinted in *The Study of Culture at a Distance*, 1953. Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux, Eds. pp. 302-314.)

Bateson, Gregory, and Margaret Mead

1942 Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis. Special Publications of the New York Academy of Sciences, II.

Collier, John

1974 *Review of Navajos Film Themselves*. Sol Worth and John Adair. *American Anthropologist* 76:481-486.

Erikson, Erik H.

1950 The Legend of Maxim Gorky's Youth. In *Childhood in Society*. (2nd revised edition, New York: Norton, 1964. pp. 359-402.)

Wolfenstein, Martha, and Nathan Leites

1957 *Movies*. Glencoe: The Free Press.

Worth, Sol

1969 The Navajo as Filmmaker: A Brief Report on Some Recent Research in the Cross-Cultural Aspects of Film Communication. *American Anthropologist* 69:76-78.

1970 Navajo Filmmakers. *American Anthropologist* 72:9-34.

1972 Toward an Anthropological Politics of Symbolic Form. In *Reinventing Anthropology*. D. Hymes, Ed. New York: Pantheon. pp. 335-364.

*The Cable Book*. Ben Achtenberg. Cambridge, MA: Urban Planning Aid, Inc., 1974. vi + 106 pp. \$1.50 (paper).

Reviewed by Kay Beck  
Georgia State University

The widespread dissemination of cable television during the next decade will provide communications researchers with vast new areas for study. With a capacity for 40



channels or more, cable TV will easily rival the print media in its variety of content. How will society utilize these channels? What will be transmitted and who will control access? How will the increased potential for non-face-to-face relations affect human interaction? How will the human mind adapt to the information overload made possible by the coaxial cable? What will be the effects of cable television on education, politics, the right to privacy, crime prevention, socio-economic stratification, etc.?

More specifically, cable TV will offer students of visual anthropology an opportunity to analyze the structuring of reality by the "man on the street." The provision of public access channels will enable any individual to present his view of the world. In the process, researchers will gain a unique vantage point from which to study the public's interests, values, beliefs. As Theodora Sklover has said, "television is a tool, and like the written word, its expression can turn into a natural extension of the participant" (1973:328).

Whether cable will fulfill its potential for academic inquiry and public service or merely extend "the vast wasteland" into more homes on more channels remains largely unknown. Arthur Hall III (1973) suggests that research is urgently needed to assess the available technology and its consequences, to inform the public of its potential and to develop consensus as to competing priorities.

Hall may be asking more of communications research than can be realistically delivered. The effects of cable technology, though difficult to reverse, may be less observable than those of an Alaskan pipeline or a nuclear power plant. Moreover, the resources in the hands of the developers of communications technology far exceed those available to its potential assessors. Given this situation, the possibility for quality research and effective evaluation of communications technology seems remote. Edwin Parker, however, suggests a two-pronged attack, by which researchers, working with community groups, can affect the course of development and the final outcome of this "communications revolution." Parker proposes an assessment of the institutions that control the technology, coupled with active attempts at "institutional change as well as passive evaluation" (1973:534).

If Parker's prescription is correct, then *The Cable Book* is an invaluable source for those desiring to affect the future of cable television. *The Cable Book* documents the efforts of community organizers in one town (Somerville, Massachusetts) to obtain modifications in their town's cable franchise and to secure an active role in programming the system's public access channel. The experiences of the Somerville Media Action Project (SMAP) offer the researcher an opportunity to examine the interface of a media conglomerate and an aroused citizenry while providing community organizers with practical lessons about what to do and what not to do, in attempting institutional change.

After outlining the history of Somerville's award of a franchise to a cable company, Achtenberg gives an account of subsequent community efforts to revise the license. It is a depressing story.

SMAP made extensive preparations for a public hearing on the franchise. Although well represented at the hearing, SMAP's suggestions were ignored and the franchise was released without revision in May 1973.

As Achtenberg describes it, the cable company thereafter

proceeded to ignore its original franchise commitments and its obligations to serve the community. Studio facilities were not opened, schools were not wired, a mobile van for local programming failed to materialize. Within six months after signing the agreement, the company claimed that it could not keep its promises.

Presumably because of his experience with the Somerville franchise, Achtenberg has written *The Cable Book*. His message is an appeal for community involvement in the franchising process, with the ultimate goal of citizen participation in all operations of the local cable system.

By participating in the franchising process—the procedure for granting and defining the terms of the license to operate—Achtenberg believes that citizens may bring about changes in the powerful institutions that tend to capture any significant technology. However, a number of these institutions are already well entrenched. Teleprompter, one of the largest cable operators and a subsidiary of the Hughes Tool empire, has gained a foothold in a number of important communities, including New York City. Viacom, a CBS spin-off, has made a similar commitment to the new industry. And the Federal Communications Commission, charged with protecting "the public interest," has been criticized for capitulating to the very industry that it regulates in the adoption of the Commission's new cable rules. Ralph Lee Smith (author of *The Wired Nation*) described what happened as follows:

[the FCC] played the role of Helpful Harry to the three industries that have a stake in the growth of cable—the broadcasters, the cable entrepreneurs and the owners of program material—assisting them to come to a private mutually beneficial economic accommodation among themselves, and then obligingly freezing the result in federal bronze [1973:121].

Nevertheless, Achtenberg believes that citizens can retain some control over cable and thus force institutional change. In the process of granting a franchise, important decisions about cable are made on the local level. Since the franchise sets the basic operating rules which the system operator must follow, citizens can demand the inclusion of provisions to protect the public interest.

Achtenberg lists several demands which citizens should make of the franchise applicant. Among these are an elected community "watchdog" board, a guarantee of at least one public access channel; and a ban on cross ownership by other communications media.

If these demands are met, they will force some changes in the institutions which develop and deploy the new technology. As Parker has stated, however, any such attempt requires widespread publicity, mobilized manpower and research (p. 544). *The Cable Book* serves as an instrument both for mobilization and publicity. Realizing that a public educated about the potential benefits and dangers of cable TV is essential for action, the author has prepared a layman's guide to cable technology for participation in the regulatory process.

The first chapter is a comic-book introduction to cable, explaining what it is, what it can accomplish and why community groups should organize to control it. The following chapters provide detailed information about franchise issues and the regulatory framework. There are



especially useful chapters on public access and cable's potential threat to privacy.

The book repeatedly implores citizens to become involved at the earliest stages—when officials are deciding if and under what conditions cable systems will be developed. Achtenberg attempts to dispel the intimidation of technology by including photographs of volunteers operating cameras, adjusting lights, editing film, and testifying at public hearings on technological matters. The photographs and accompanying text seem designed to rebut the industry argument that production of programming must remain the sole prerogative of the cable company.

Let me return once again to Parker's plea for assessment of communications technology and institutions. Parker asks that communications scholars realize that the timing of their research can influence social change. He notes that research on broadcasting was "too little, too late" to have any effect on the structure of broadcasting institutions. Parker maintains that institutions with a vested interest in technology are most susceptible to public directed change while they are undergoing a period of crisis or instability (1973). If Parker is correct, then the time for assessment of cable television by communications scholars is now. Indeed, Achtenberg's own involvement in SMAP resulted from his realization that the still fluid regulation of cable at the local level offered community groups a chance to influence the dissemination, development, and control of the new medium.

The cable operators are asking the public to refrain from interfering until the companies can realize a profit from their investment. Or, as Achtenberg sums it up: "Let us do whatever we can make a buck on, and sooner or later we may get around to giving you what you need" (p. 2).

Cable television is a powerful new medium; it is relatively undeveloped. But powerful economic institutions, often in partnership with their governmental regulators, are moving rapidly to solidify control. The present opportunity for the public interest to prevail over narrow economic concerns may not again present itself for decades. Yet Achtenberg believes that there is still time. Community groups can mobilize to demand public control. Communications scholars can evaluate the probable effectiveness of various forms of control and their social consequences. *The Cable Book* offers useful information to those of both groups interested in making a beginning.

In the last analysis, *The Cable Book* is what it purports to be: a handbook "for groups who are trying to figure out what [cable is] all about and what it is going to mean to them and their communities" (preface).

As such, *The Cable Book* has been prepared primarily for community organizers; but the book is worthwhile reading for students of visual communication, indeed for anyone interested in what this new communications technology portends.

#### References Cited

- Hall, Arthur, III  
1973 Introduction. In *Communications Technology and Social Policy: Understanding the New "Cultural Revolution."* George Gerbner, Larry P. Gross, and William H. Melody, Eds. New York: John Wiley and Sons. pp. 3-7.  
Parker, Edwin B.  
1973 Technology Assessment or Institutional Change? In *Com-*

munications Technology and Social Policy: Understanding the New "Cultural Revolution." George Gerbner, Larry P. Gross, and William H. Melody, Eds. New York: John Wiley and Sons. pp. 534-547.

Sklover, Theodora

- 1973 The Open Door Policy on Television. In *Communications Technology and Social Policy: Understanding the New "Cultural Revolution."* George Gerbner, Larry P. Gross, and William H. Melody, Eds. New York: John Wiley and Sons. pp. 327-339.

Smith, Ralph Lee

- 1973 CATV: FCC Rules and the Public Interest. In *Communications Technology and Social Policy: Understanding the New "Cultural Revolution."* George Gerbner, Larry P. Gross, and William H. Melody, Eds. New York: John Wiley and Sons. pp. 122-123.

*Walbiri Iconography.* Nancy D. Munn. Preface by Victor Turner. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973. xxii + 234 pp., diagram, figures, map, photographs, bibliography, index. \$16.50 (cloth).

Reviewed by Mark Glazer  
Purdue University

The Walbiri, one of the semi-nomadic groups of hunters and gatherers of Central Australia, are well known for their art. This book is, however, not about their art but about the utilization of drawings as a part of what Munn calls a "semiotic" (p. 5) of Walbiri culture. The Walbiri semiotic is to be understood as an ordering structure which is formulated in myth, sign media, and ritual processes. It must be added that this semiotic is in reference to the Walbiri view of life sources and creation.

The book is organized around an introduction and eight chapters dealing with Walbiri beliefs, storytelling, and their representation in designs. The first chapter is an introductory chapter on Walbiri culture which among other topics delineates their social organization and the relationships of their patrilineal descent groups to their designs. This is done through the term *guruwari*. This term refers to both man's ancestral designs, which represent ancestors, and to "ancestral fertility power" (p. 29). Thus, *guruwari* refers, on the one hand, to the visual (designs) and, on the other, to invisible forces.

The second chapter is a general discussion of the different types of designs and to the functions of these designs. The basic types of designs are the *yawalyu*, the *ilbindji* and the *guruwari*. The *yawalyu* are women's designs which are regarded as unimportant to men and which come into existence through dreams or maternal inheritance. The basic functions of these designs are procreation, health, and the growth of children. *Ilbindji* designs are created by men to attract women as lovers. The *guruwari* designs are men's designs and, generally, cannot be seen by women. These designs can be painted on the body, ceremonial objects, the ground, boards, stones, and weapons. They are utilized as a part of camp ceremonies, dramatizations of ancestral events, circumcisions and fertility ceremonies. This makes the *guruwari* the more important set of designs.

The telling of stories through the utilization of sand designs is the topic of the third chapter. Stories are not told through designs among the Walbiri; designs are, however,



utilized as graphic images which accompany the telling of a narrative. Chapter 4 is about the women's designs; they usually refer to food gathering or ceremonies. Most of the contents of these designs are of edible animals. The graphic system is open-ended, and these designs are a continuation of designs utilized in ordinary narrative.

The next three chapters (5, 6, and 7) involve men's designs, and these too are a continuation of sand designs utilized in storytelling. These often involve the view that designs represent marks made by ancestors on the local topography. Men's designs are more specialized than those of women and are given a multiplicity of meanings by the narrator. These designs represent the importance of ancestors and through them the relationship between the individual and his social setting. The chapter on *banda* (fertility) ceremonies demonstrates the relationship between the design system and some ritual constructions. It also discusses symbolic dealings between opposite moieties.

In her conclusion, Munn states that Walbiri designs are codes which can be said to be a part of the norms that

regulate experience. Thus, the function of these designs as ritual assertion are fundamental to this society.

In her account of Walbiri iconography, Munn is concerned with a fundamental aspect of visual anthropology: the role and function of design within the ritual and social context of a society. It is through such studies of the visual aspects of the human experience that we can expect to reach a better understanding of the importance of visual materials in anthropology. Most anthropology is concerned with either the material aspects or the organizational aspects of human life. Munn's book bridges the material and organizational aspects of human life by extending her analysis to the visual. What is noteworthy is how thoroughly the visual materials complete the ritual and organizational aspects of Walbiri life. The importance of such studies for visual and for cultural anthropology has to be emphasized. Munn has given us an absorbing account of the importance of visual materials in the human experience by demonstrating the importance of designs among the Walbiri as a semiotic of human interaction.



## NOTES AND NEWS

□ **FILM CATALOG AVAILABLE** Audio-Visual Services of Pennsylvania State University (University Park, PA 16802) has available their film catalog entitled *Films: The Visualization of Anthropology*. In addition, they have just published a supplement to this catalog. They are available free of charge.

□ **UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA OPENS CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY CENTER** A Center for Creative Photography, specializing in the outstanding photographers of the twentieth century, has been established at the University of Arizona. The archive and research facility has purchased substantial collections from Ansel Adams, Wynn Bullock, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, and Frederick Sommer. Harold H. Jones, former associate curator of the George Eastman House and director of the Light Gallery in New York, will become the Center's director.

□ **GOVERNOR WALLACE ON VIDISTICS** "I don't have to go to Norway and Denmark to know we freed you. That's something everybody knows... If I went over there, I'd see a bunch of grass and a bunch of trees. You can tell about as much about a country as you can by looking at moving pictures" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 9, 1975, Section A, p. 3).

□ **ARTICLES OF INTEREST** In Volume 1 Number 1 of the new journal *Teaching Sociology* there are two articles of interest to visual anthropologists: "Videotape as an Aid on Sociology Instruction," by Calrice Stoll, and "Teaching Introductory Sociology by Film," by Don Smith. The journal can be ordered from Sage Publications, PO Box 776, Beverly Hills, CA 90210.

□ **FILM SYMPOSIUM** In conjunction with a year-long research project devoted to film study, the Center for Twentieth Century Studies of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, will hold an International Symposium on Film Theory and Practical Criticism November 19-22, 1975. Main addresses and workshops will be presented on: semiotics of film, film and ideology, approaches to film history, film and narration, film and the visual arts, and experimental ciné-video. More information available from: Michel Benamou, Director, Center for Twentieth Century Studies, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI 53201.

# HANDBOOK for PROXEMIC RESEARCH

by EDWARD T. HALL

Published in 1974 by the Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication, Hall's *Handbook for Proxemic Research* includes programs, illustrations about the placement of cameras and observers, and an extensive bibliography. It is available to members of SAVICOM at \$3.00 per copy, and to non-members and institutions at \$5.00 per copy. Address orders, enclosing payment, to SAVICOM, 1703 New Hampshire Av NW, Washington, DC 20009.



## PUBLICATIONS

The following publications are available from SAVICOM, 1703 New Hampshire Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20009. Payment must accompany orders.

### *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*

*Studies* is a publication of the Society. It is published two or three times a year and contains verbal and visual material describing and analyzing research in the areas of interest described under the purposes of the Society. *Studies* also publishes reviews of relevant books and larger review articles of groups of related books and other publications. It contains a section of correspondence and brief communication. The publication committee encourages members as well as non-members to submit written and visual materials for publication. Write to the *Studies* editor for additional instructions for submission.

From time to time SAVICOM will publish special publications related to the interests of its members. The following is a list of current publications:

### *Films for Anthropological Teaching*

The fifth edition of Karl Heider's *Films for Anthropological Teaching* lists over 500 films together with their distributors, bibliographic references and has subject, distributor and author indices. The cost is \$3.00 for Society members and \$5.00 for non-members and institutions.

### *Handbook for Proxemic Research*

Edward T. Hall, author of the *Silent Language*, *The Hidden Dimension* and other works, is allowing SAVICOM to publish this new handbook detailing his methodology for proxemic research. The *Handbook* includes computer programs, illustrations about the placement of cameras and observers, and an extensive bibliography. It is available to members at \$3.00 per copy and to non-members and institutions at \$5.00. In order to keep the price down for teachers, students and active workers in proxemic research, Hall is not accepting royalties on sales to SAVICOM members. Bookstores, teachers and others wishing to place bulk orders should write to Sol Worth for special instructions. All others wishing to obtain copies should write directly to SAVICOM.

### *News, Notes, Correspondence and Brief Communications*

In addition to the section of correspondence and brief communications which appears in *Studies*, the Society is responsible for a section of news and notes in the *Anthropology Newsletter* of the American Anthropological Association. All interested persons are encouraged to contribute news of fieldwork, announcements of conferences, festivals, training opportunities and any other pertinent news and notes to Jay Ruby, News and Notes Editor, Temple University, Department of Anthropology, Philadelphia, PA 19122. Members of the Society who are not already members of AAA will regularly receive the *Anthropology Newsletter* without additional charge as part of their membership dues.

## INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

**STYLE.** Issues of the current volume should be consulted, along with the *Manual of Style* of the University of Chicago Press. Major subheadings should be kept to a minimum and, where possible, roman numerals only should be used. Under no circumstances are second-level subheadings to be used. **MANUSCRIPT PREPARATION.** Manuscripts must be typed *double-spaced* (including abstract, quotations, notes and references cited) one side only on 8½ x 11 *noncorrasable* bond, with ample margins for editorial markings (at least one inch on all sides). Do not break words at the ends of lines. Retype any page on which complicated corrections have been made. The original and two copies must be submitted. Author should keep a copy. **ABSTRACT.** The text should be preceded by a 50-75 word abstract and a list of up to five headings under which the paper should be indexed. **FOOTNOTES.** Footnotes appear as "Notes" at the end of articles. Authors are advised to include footnote material in the text wherever possible. Notes are to be numbered consecutively throughout the paper and are to be typed on a separate sheet (double-spaced). **REFERENCES.** The list of references which accompanies an article should be limited to, and inclusive of, those publications actually cited in the text. References are not cited in footnotes but carried within the text in parentheses with author's last name, the year of original publication, and page, e.g., (Kroeber 1948:205). Titles and publication information on references appear as "References Cited" at the end of the article and should be listed alphabetically by author and chronologically for each author. Write out the names of journals and other publications in full. Provide complete references following the style of recent issues for form of citation, punctuation, capitalization, use of italics, etc. References cited should be typed on a separate page (double-spaced). References not presented in the style required will be returned to the author for revision. **TABLES.** All tabular material should be part of a separately numbered series of "Tables." Each table must be typed on a separate sheet and identified by a short descriptive title. Footnotes for tables appear at the bottom of the tables and are marked \*, †, ‡, §, ¶, etc., according to standard usage. Marginal notation on manuscript should indicate approximately where tables are to appear. **FIGURES.** All illustrative material, drawings, maps, diagrams, and photographs should be included in a single numbered series and designated "Figures." They must be submitted in a form suitable for publication without redrawing. Drawings should be carefully done with India ink on either hard, white, smooth-surfaced board or good quality tracing paper. Photographs should be glossy prints and should be numbered on the back to key with captions. All figures should be numbered consecutively and all captions should be typed together on a separate sheet of paper (double-spaced). Marginal notations on manuscript should indicate approximately where figures are to appear. **PROOFS.** Galley proofs are sent to authors who are expected to check for typographic mistakes and errors in fact. No part of an article can be rewritten in galley proof. Significant new data or an absolutely necessary comment may sometimes be added as a brief footnote. All changes and addenda submitted by the author on his corrected galley proofs are suggestions only and may be disregarded at the discretion of the Editor. The corrected proofs should be returned to the Editor within 48 hours of receipt. It will be impossible to make corrections not promptly received by the Editor. **REPRINTS** will be supplied to authors who return with payment by the specified deadline reprint order forms mailed to them at the time of publication of the journal.

Editor: SOL WORTH

Annenberg School of Communications  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA 19174

Book Reviews: O. MICHAEL WATSON

Department of Anthropology  
Purdue University  
Lafayette, IN 47907

Notes, News and Brief Communications: JAY RUBY

Department of Anthropology  
Temple University  
Philadelphia, PA 19122



