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LOCAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

When I first arrived as a consulting producer at WCCO-TV, the Minneapolis CBS station where I worked in 1981-82, I was introduced all around as an anthropologist. Since that is in part who I am, I decided to live with the identity given me. Much later, at the good-bye party thrown for me when I left, I discovered that my colleagues, like all natives, had negotiated me into their environment in a way that made sense to them. Rumor had it, apparently, that while I was working on documentaries there, I was, in fact, secretly doing a study of life in a TV station and that, under the guise of biological need, was retreating periodically to the ladies room to scribble notes about my observations.

Constructing knowledge in another way, I argue, is not feasible; instead, what is needed is a departure from the institutional contexts and uses, it is illogical to argue that the medium by itself is leading us down either a rosy path to a utopian global village or a rocky path to a totalitarian videocracy (273).

Looking at broadcasting in historical and comparative contexts underscores the point: it is not the technology itself but the social relations of the industry in a particular context which we need to study and understand. For that reason, before going into the details of my own case, I would like to present a brief overview of what I will call ethnographic broadcasting, i.e. the ways in which television has recognized and incorporated anthropology as a potential programming area in both Britain and the United States.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BROADCAST ETHNOGRAPHY

When ethnographic film was first being developed, the broadcast industry was in its infancy and anthropologists had, in a sense, a monopoly on the representation of images of “the other”-the non-western or traditional communities that have been the discipline’s stock in trade. Such subjects were considered non-lucrative by a burgeoning Hollywood film industry interested in turning a profit.

By the 1940’s and 1950’s, broadcasters were experimenting with format. In 1953, CBS introduced the first regular television show to use ethnographic material. “Adventure,” as the series was called, was produced on a shoe-string budget and filled a “dead” programming spot on Sunday morning. Produced with and shot on location at the American Museum of Natural History, the producers used anthropologists, among others, as consultants in the filming of forty weekly programs designed, in part, to give viewers insight into other cultures (Eiselein and Topper 1976c: 130; Penelope Baudry-Sanders, personal communication 1985). As broadcasting came more and more under the control of corporate commercial interests in the U.S. (Barnouw 1975), network efforts at educational programming with an...
thropologists were sporadic at best. Independently produced ethnographic films were not shown on television but were channeled into educational curricula for colleges and universities. Throughout the 1960's, anthropological subjects were contracted out to large production houses under the auspices of companies such as National Geographic or Time-Life. These corporations occasionally employed anthropologists as consultants but allowed them little or no editorial decision-making power (Hoffman 1975).

By contrast with the American experience, the British "Disappearing World" series produced and broadcast by Granada Television represented an unprecedented collaboration between anthropologists and filmmakers. It resulted in the creation, between 1970 and 1976, of 22 generally excellent ethnographic documentaries. The way this series was produced underscores the differences between American and British broadcasting systems. Reliable funding was given to support talented producers working with anthropologists over sufficient periods of time to develop the experience, coherence and audience interest needed to sustain such a series. This allowed for its development without the annual threat of funding cutoffs or the pressure of immediate success, measured in audience ratings, in order to gain corporate advertising or underwriting.

In America, with the advent of educational television in 1967 (Barnouw 1982: 398), anthropologists, by the 1970's, began to play more instrumental roles in the creation of ethnographic broadcasting. Nonetheless, the impact of different funding structures on anthropological productions in television is exemplified in the difficulties encountered by "Nova" producer Michael Ambrosino in developing "Odyssey," a series focusing on anthropology for American public television. He received a pilot grant in 1976 to begin research. Despite his many awards and his solid reputation for the "Nova" series, Ambrosino was turned down by 52 public and private funding sources from which he requested money for staff and production costs. Apparently the "Odyssey" project was considered insufficiently popular in interest. Eventually, he was bailed out by the NEH, the CPB and Polaroid, but on a considerably reduced budget. Because the money is granted only on an annual basis, energy has to be continually devoted to fundraising and justifying programs in terms of quantitative audience statistics. This example bespeaks the hegemony of corporate control and its influence on subject matter in the organization of even public television in America.

As for commercial networks, in the last ten years they have been sending their own production crews out to gather footage of "exotic peoples" without even bothering with the formality of an anthropological consultant (Hoffman 1975: 440). This process is aided by the ease with which increasingly portable and high quality videotape recorders can be taken into remote field settings (Barnouw 1981: 434). In this sense, the introduction of videotape into broadcasting — with its demand to fill ever increasing programming slots — has undercut anthropology's monopoly, in terms of both interest and access, over representing "the other" to the west. Like it or not, television producers have the interest, means and mandate to gather images of those who traditionally have been anthropology's subject and present them as they will. As early as 1973, anthropologist Alan Lomax assessed the situation rather pessimistically:

The uncontacted peoples of the world have acquired a definite value for the global entertainment industry and there is a rush to film them for television...Footage made at such expense to our society and to aborigines is often culled for sentimental and exotic scenes (1973: 475).

Lomax's gloomy summary suggests that, for practical, ethical, and epistemological reasons, we cannot ignore such developments. Pragmatically, we disregard them at our own peril. As those in American broadcasting increasingly generate their own representations of other cultures, anthropologists can no longer pretend to control that domain. Our own specialized access to what Clifford Geertz calls "local knowledge" (1983) is increasingly part of "the global village" (McLuhan 1964) a situation which highlights one of the central ethical dilemmas of our work. We have material and moral relationships not only with the people we study, but also with the image-producing industries whose representations compete with our own. While we have no ownership over these images of the other, we can influence the systems that produce them in our own society. To do so, we must be able to understand them. Like any other social system, broadcasting can be understood by looking at the social relations that shape it in different times and settings.

Most recently, American mass media has been characterized by increasing diversification (Brantlinger 1983: 284) due to legal mandate, community demand, and technological changes. For example, the recent massive growth of cable television, satellite telecommunications, home video-cassette recorders, and low-cost production equipment has provided an array of new possibilities. The current interest in "narrowcasting," i.e. highly specialized programming to meet the needs of a plurality of audiences suggests not only new distribution possibilities for anthropological programs. It also generates the potential for an expansion of community-generated productions in which anthropological skill could be of tremendous value. These technological and institutional shifts have been accompanied, to some extent, by new ways of thinking about the future of the communications industry (Roger: 7-15). The ideal of creating a monolithic "global village" (McLuhan 1964) that was popular with the spread of mass media in the 1950's is gradually changing. As social critic Raymond Williams reminds us in Television: Technology and Cultural Form 1975, the techniques of mass communications themselves are at worst neutral. In similar vein, Brantlinger writes:

Technological innovations that make for fuller more varied, more democratic communications — two-way electronic hookups, satellite broadcasting, videodiscs, "communication webs," and so on — should be encouraged...But it is only through the opening doors of communications systems that "the masses" enter the field of history as something more than exploitable objects — as the possible agents of social change and the potential masters of their situation (282).
This vision, though optimistic, assumes that the television industry as it currently exists is monolithic. While it is not the tool of the masses envisioned by Raymond Williams, it is nonetheless characterized by substantial differentiation, not only between networks and local affiliates, but within stations as well. For example, in my case, I worked with the documentary division of a public affairs unit which won awards but made no profit. This station, like most, relies on news and syndicated serials for its bread and butter. Producing three educational documentaries a year was a luxury that provided status and helped that station fulfill the FCC mandate for community service that was in place until 1983. For these reasons documentary producers were looked on by the newsroom personnel as effete intellectuals. This division was exacerbated by the fact that we had the almost unheard of luxury of 3-6 months production time and, within the limits of a 55-minute format with three commercial breaks, nearly complete creative control over their productions. Thus, a complex division of labor is created and marked according to the nature of the images one is expected to produce and their potential to generate profit, measured in audience ratings and commercial sponsorship. Institutionally, this creates specialized units with different mandates and methods, and which attract different personnel whose disparate sensibilities must be taken into account in analyzing their work. The point is that while broadcasting is, in some sense, overdetermined by commercial interests, it is, nonetheless, internally differentiated. Working within it are those who not only resist the domination of the profit motive but also seek to use the medium to give voice and visibility to people who are in other ways disenfranchised. The concerns of most journalists trained in social documentary traditions have concerns that in may ways complement our own.

Among anthropologists, the notion that the mass media can be used to help realign power relationships has gained increasing currency as well. This sentiment is expressed by some in paternalistic terms in which the media are seen as a humanistic palliative that can “lower world conflict levels” by giving minority groups “a sense of dignity” (Lomax 1973: 479). Others recognize in the production and distribution of film and television the power of the fourth estate, a means to dramatize and win empathy and political support for oppressed or neglected groups with whom we work. For instance, anthropologist Brian Weiss 11 writes,

If these interpretations and results are to go unrepresented, then we beg our responsibility as anthropologists. If we can’t conclude, if we can’t speak, then why do we study? The monograph is traditionally purused by specialists. A film will reach and affect not only specialists but also non-anthropologists (1977: 300).

Clearly, as these comments suggest, the bringing of anthropological subjects into the broadcast media raises important ethical concerns regarding the pragmatic consequences of our work in relation to the people we study. These, in turn, bring to the surface central questions regarding the epistemological models of anthropology. The presentation of our work in broadcasting reveals what the production of specialized ethnographic texts often mystifies: the complex relationship between the producer of images, the represented subject, and the presumed audience.

Nonetheless, many anthropologists still join with other social critics in their presumption that broadcasting is hopelessly philistine. 13 In arguments against television, the relationship between the producer-subject-audience in particular is considered irreparably insensitive if not immoral. The reasons for such criticisms generally fall into three categories:

- the rapidity with which productions must be generated;
- the focus on crisis or political conflicts;
- the orientation toward a broad and supposedly uneducated public.

I would argue that it is these very characteristics, used by critics to discredit the credibility of ethnographic broadcasting, that can make documentary work in this system of representation more, rather than less accountable to its subjects than written ethnography. My evidence is drawn, necessarily, from my particular experience working for the public affairs division of a commercial television station as an associate producer on two hour-long documentaries. The first documentary to which I was assigned when I arrived at the station was about a large community of Laotian Hmong refugees 14 that had resettled in the Minneapolis area. The show we produced focused on the trials of a particularly extended family adjusting to American life, and their efforts to bring over kin stuck in refugee camps in Thailand. The second production I worked on, entitled “Prairie Storm,” followed a local controversy that split a North Dakota town after the opening of an abortion clinic, an idea I proposed based on my own research interests. My overall responsibilities included: research, field production, script writing and editorial decisions.

I would like to turn now to my own experience as an anthropologist working in the broadcast industry to clarify and illustrate some of the arguments I have made thus far. The first point I would like to underscore is that rather than being intrusive:

1. Documentary film productions (with the exception of investigative pieces) require cooperation and trust between subjects and producers. The quality of that relationship, i.e. sincerity, candor, language facility is visible in the final production; these qualities are ones by which we tacitly judge a work’s authenticity. In ethnography, they are often submerged or even disguised.

For example, preparing the Hmong show required my getting involved with local Hmong as well as interviewing the social workers, policemen, linguists, psychiatrists and politicians who worked with them. We eventually returned to those who were most articulate and insightful for on-camera interviews. Our being able to shoot at all depended completely on the cooperation of the family with whom we worked, on different factions in the Hmong community as well as on innumerable agencies both domestic and international, involved in their resettlement.

In the case of the documentary covering the abortion issue in a small city, we simply could not have produced the show without the trust of leaders from both sides. They knew full well we would be having conversations with their op-
ponents. Two points are relevant here. As an anthropologist, I had nothing to offer people in exchange for the risk I was asking them to take in speaking frankly to me. As a journalist, I could at least offer them publicity which was much more of the goal of their political work.

A second feature that distinguishes television is pejoratively described by some as its “trendiness.” While this is often true in the case of news in particular, in documentaries I would identify it as:

2. The need to have a dramatic focus of narrative or topical interest in order to sustain the interest of a broad audience. This generally means that:

- the producer attends to issues that are of importance to the subjects themselves;
- the timeless, ethnographic present is avoided;

At the time we were shooting the Hmong show, a proposal had been raised in the City Council to stop further refugee resettlement in the area. The producer and I shared a commitment to creating an immediate human connection for a local audience that ranged from sympathetic, to ignorant, to racist. To do this, we decided to shape the narrative around an event that was illustrative of the central concern of family reunification; the story of an extended kin group awaiting the arrival of a beloved uncle from the refugee camps in Thailand an event-focus that could sustain audience interest and represent the Hmong with integrity. This allowed us to portray kinship relations as emotionally rich and as guiding principles for action rather than eternal verities that exist independently of historical disruptions. Because of our choice of focus, we decided to follow our Minneapolis family’s relative from a camp in Thailand to Minnesota. When we arrived, we discovered he could not leave as scheduled for bureaucratic reasons. After some panic, we regrouped, deciding that our hero’s dilemma offered an emblematic drama of the difficulties faced by refugees. Again, while television is criticized for focusing on conflict and crisis, these moments are dramatic because they have meaning for the people themselves. It is their drama rather than one imposed on them.

In “Prairie Storm,” the need for dramatic focus lead us from the outset to organize the show around the abortion controversy as it took shape in a very particular context. In so doing, we avoided freezing political opponents into Manichean frames, but showed them as fully dimensional actors involved in a local struggle over defining their own community around this issue.

A third and central feature of television is

3. The accessibility (generally) of the final product to the subjects about whom it is made, a kind of accountability that is rarely the case in written ethnographies about (often) illiterate or unsophisticated populations, published long after the fieldwork period, usually by specialized presses.

The station where I worked, like many others, generally produces a “Town Meeting” after the first airing of a documentary. Basically, this is an hour during which people with expertise on the issues raised in the show answer questions from a studio audience and, via phone, the “viewing public.” Rather than having the resident anthropologist stand in for the variety of informants with whom I had worked, Hmong leaders and others could actually be present to field questions from the public regarding their own representations.

The shooting and editing of “Prairie Storm” was more difficult in many ways than the Hmong show because of our own ambivalences or strong feelings on the abortion issue. Speaking subjectively, in terms of keeping us honest and fair, the best of our intentions was no match for the knowledge that people from both sides of the controversy with whom we had worked were going to be in the audience at the station the night of the broadcast. When I returned to the field to finish my Ph.D research, my informants made it clear to me that the main reason they were cooperating with me in my anthropological work was because activists on both sides of the issue felt they had been fairly represented in my journalistic work.

A fourth and related point is:

4. In broadcasting in particular, cast as part of “the fourth estate,” the possibility for audience response is yet a further check on accountability. This means, as well that the audience is accounted for as an actual, constituted social body, rather than a sort of timeless, unmarked entity. As a producer, you can never pretend that the work you produce will not have consequences, either bad or good.

As one of the people who selected calls to go on the air for the Town Meeting following the Hmong show, I had a good opportunity to judge audience response, something anthropologists rarely encounter in relation to their written ethnography. Most calls indicated that the documentary had moved people to think about who in fact the Hmong were - both in the present, as refugees, and as historical subjects connected to American adventures in Southeast Asia. Judging from audience response (including phone calls and mail), it seemed that sympathy and understanding for viewers was generated by their being able to see, literally, how their lives and those of the Hmong intersected. Weeks later, when the long-awaited uncle finally arrived from Thailand, the event was announced on the evening news. The station was immediately swamped with calls offering assistance, indicating that the show had had more than a momentary impact.

To conclude, local broadcast programming on anthropological subjects can bring into view the relationships of the parties involved in what we might call the ethnographic encounter - the image producer, the subject, and the audience in a way that challenges the privileged stance of knowledge -cordoned off from the response of its subject -that most written ethnography, until recently, has sustained. The comparison between written ethnographies and television productions is, I hope, instructive. It illuminates how and why two different institutional arrangements -academic publishing and broadcasting -in dialogue with different audiences can generate different relationships with representations of some human “other” who is our common subject.

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ENDNOTES

1. I began working at WCCO-TV as a Mass Media Science Fellow, part of a program sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science to encourage the coverage of science in both print and broadcast journalism. The fellowship offers three-month awards annually to 20 graduate students in the sciences and places them in a variety of intern-like settings to work with professional journalists. For further information, contact: Mass Media Science Fellows; American Association for the Advancement of Science; 1776 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.; Washington, D.C.

2. The difficulties Robert Flaherty had in marketing “Nanook of the North” and “Man of Aran” are testimony to the attitude of the early Hollywood film industry toward ethnographic subjects. See “Nanook of the North” by Paul Rothe and Basil Wright in Studies in Visual Communication, Volume 6, Number 2, Summer 1980.

3. One of the few exceptions was the CBS decision in the late 1960s to re-edit Asen Balikci’s Netsilik Eskimo material (produced for the innovative Man A Course of Study program) for two hours of broadcast time under the title “Fight for Life” (de Brigard 1975: 37).

4. While some of the films have been criticized as lacking sufficient historical or political context, in general, the series has received enthusiastic support from the academic anthropological community as well as the general public (Tapper: 1976).

5. In Brian Moser’s case, for instance, this system allowed him the time and freedom to become acquainted with new ideas in ethnographic film, both in terms of style and substance (Ambrosino, personal communication).

6. As a PBS producer, Ambrosino had directed his efforts at bringing intellectual substance, especially on scientific subjects, to a general audience through popular medial forms. In 1970, as the American Fellow Abroad for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Ambrosino spent a year at the BBC where he developed the idea for the now famous “Nova” series which resulted in an ongoing series of outstanding science documentaries.

7. Of the twenty full-time staff people that were involved in “Odyssey” productions, half had advanced degrees in anthropology. Each producer worked on a single program for the 6-7 months required for production. The staff members met regularly to talk out ideas, critique each others’ work and brainstorm (Kendig 1980).

8. While the laws are currently being revised, broadcast television has been subject to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rulings that required broadcasters to meet the needs of populations in its frequency area in order to renew the station license every three years. FCC laws required documentation of public service showing that “the station has systematically ascertained the ten most significant problems and needs of its community” (Eiselein 1976c: 166). While the law is only sporadically enforced, groups recently have been challenging the license renewal of stations in their area on the grounds that they have failed to supply appropriate programming (Brown 1978).

The 1971 ruling of the Sloan Commission required cablecasters with more than 3500 subscribers to have community-originated programming (Eiselein and Topper 1976c: 130).

9. I do not mean to suggest that there have been no such efforts to date. At the local level especially, over the past 20 years, anthropologists have been working for radio and television stations developing programs to meet the needs of specific communities they have studied (Eiselein and Marshall 1976: 157).

10. The work process underscored both the similarities and differences between documentary production and anthropological work. Both require the definitions of issues in a particular locale and sociocultural frame. Each field attempts to examine the roots of some problem in order to illuminate some larger question. Other differences may lie in the journalistic emphasis on general concerns for as broad an audience as possible. While this is not foreign to anthropology, it is rarely the stated goal of a scientist interested in the development of theory for a small community of scholars.

11. Brian Weiss worked on a film The Turtle People which dramatized the ecological dilemma being faced by Miskito Indians as they deplete their subsistence base while meeting the demands of a market economy.

12. Other efforts in this vein include Maragoli, a cross-cultural study of population growth and rural poverty in Kenya, directed by Scarlett Epstein from the University of Sussex. The film, which cost $85,000 to make, is aimed chiefly at government officials and others who make development decisions (Loizos 1977). On a lighter note, Trobiand Cricket was made with the Kabisawali movement of Papua New Guinea, “a piece of propaganda by indigenous Trobrianders in favor of their national game” (Leach 1975).

13. I draw my generalizations from conversations with colleagues, reviews of media work written by anthropologists, and the cogent presentation of contemporary theories of mass culture as social decay offered by Brantlinger in Bread and Circuses.

14. The Hmong lived, until recently, as slash-and-burn horticulturists in the hills surrounding the Plain of Jars. During the Vietnam War, they were recruited by the CIA as guerilla fighters and pilots. Since the Communist takeover of Laos in 1975, they have been systematically killed by the Pathet Lao. Over 100,000 have fled their homeland. 40,000 have settled in the US while at least that many remain in refugee camps in Thailand.

15. For example, in the American Anthropologist and the newsletter of the RAI, film reviews, in contrast to book reviews, almost always evaluate the political and interpersonal stance of the producer in relation to his or her subjects, as well as the potential audience for whom the work is produced. This critical relationship is generally ignored in reviews of written ethnographies. I would suggest that this is due to characteristics of visual media, and broadcast production in particular.
PUTTING ANTHROPOLOGY ON TELEVISION—FILMING ‘DISAPPEARING WORLD’

My diary of that first Mursi film is littered with the discussions:

A long conversation round the campfire after dinner about how to reconcile the anthropology with the showbiz, me with Turton. It’s obviously the central “Disappearing World” problem and David says he’s never seen it properly worked out. But we do get on and I can only hope we will work it out. I certainly agree with him on the importance of making a permanent record rather than just a transitory entertainment. And I think he accepts a necessary degree of film style. We shall see, months and thousands of miles away in some quiet cutting room. It seems inconceivably distant at this moment.

We were trying to make a documentary about public debating amongst a group of East African herders, but every night round those campfires David Turton* and I were pursuing our private debate about the competing demands of academic anthropology and peak-time television for a mass audience.

A lengthy chat after dinner on the purposes of anthropology and how I’m going to edit this film. I confess that, in the end, the only way is to change the habits of a decade. I’ll just have to work closely with David or an inferior film is going to result. I simply can’t know enough about what we’ve shot, especially given the importance of language. After my weeks of loading film and portering the tripod, it’s hard to work out what my contribution as director will have been.

A dozen years later, after collaborating with Turton on three Mursi films and working with other anthropologists on four other “Disappearing Worlds”, I’m still trying to work out that contribution. Before the first Mursi film in 1974, I had spent a decade making current affairs documentaries for Granada Television’s “World in Action” series and the habits I had acquired there were, as I had suggested in the diary, hard to break. Most addictive of all, I suppose, was the range of control that “World in Action” invests in the people it calls “producers”. Like my producer colleagues, I’d roamed the planet with film crews, acting simultaneously as producer, director, investigative reporter, interviewer and script-writer. It was vastly enjoyable, but it didn’t perhaps equip me ideally for the very different job of trying to make ethnographic documentaries. I found it hardest of all, I suppose, to shed those assumptions about my role as a Renaissance Man and total film-maker, and work instead on collaboration with

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someone who knew more about the material than I ever could—the anthropologist.

"Disappearing World's" starting point when Brian Moser devised the series in the early 70's was to work as closely as possible with the anthropologists who had an established relationship with the people they were studying and a fluent ability to speak their language. Moser's intention was to weld that anthropological expertise with the skills of documentary film-makers in the hope of producing films which would have value for two very different audiences. Our ambition was to address both specialist students of anthropology and that mass of peak-time television viewers who might have switched on with the expectation of watching something closer to "Dallas" than to the debating methods of nomadic herders in southern Ethiopia.

The relationship between film-makers and anthropologists has fueled and shaped the series over the 40 films which have been produced during the past 15 years. I've been involved with making 7 of those documentaries in Nepal and China and the French Basque country as well as in Ethiopia. Those debates about conflicting values and necessary compromise are as vigorous today as they were in the beginning.

From the beginning, many of us who worked on "Disappearing World" whether trained in anthropology or not, were greatly influenced by the work of David and Judith MacDougall and in particular by their film To Live with Herds. Their concern with "the observational approach" and "a revelatory style" rejecting dramatizing contrivances, favoring long takes and most importantly insisting on subtitles rather than intrusive voice-over translations became the central ingredients of "Disappearing World's" style. The intention was not to popularize academic theses but to offer to a television audience an understanding of other ways of life from the viewpoint of people who lived them. The commitment to subtitles was a demanding novelty for British Television audiences, but we were all convinced that it was only by allowing the people we filmed to speak directly to our audience that the central purpose of the series could be served. Happily, Granada was as supportive of the technique as it was of the series.

At the same time as a documentary film-maker for television, I've always seen myself as being essentially in the story-telling business, and I reckon that priority has generated more problems than any other in my relationships with anthropologists. My wish to locate a microcosmic situation, populated with strong characters and developing incident has, I know, sometimes exasperated my ethnographic partners. They look at a wider picture, seeking understanding and analysis in areas which often elude the capacities of film. It's a truism perhaps worth restating that film is by nature weak on analysis and ideas, and strong on the communication of feeling, and primetime network television emphasizes those tendencies. I can't feel, for example the film is likely to do a good job in exploring kinship and I'm aware how frustrating it must be sometimes for my anthropological partners that a single page of text can convey more detailed information than 25 minutes of film. At the same time, they've relished the layers of content that can be derived from a single sustained shot in an apparently unremarkable sequence.

Leslie Woodhead, Senior Documentary filmmaker for Granada Television in the U.K., has produced six films for the "Disappearing World" series and has two more currently in production. In Search of the Mursi, his new book about the experience of making three films in Ethiopia, will be published by Heineman in September 1987.

As Paul Henley has noted, a crucial problem for ethnographic film is how non-visual information, vital in providing sociological context is to be offered. Given a mass TV audience with no prior knowledge whatsoever, that problem has special emphasis. While over-use of narration can swamp films' special capacity for creating empathy, the absence of context can lead to the confirmation of ethnocentric bewilderment. Working with Turton, I've tried to achieve a synthesis by recording conversations with him about the material we've filmed and then using his comments and insights to complement my own informational narration.

Over the year Turton has, I think, come to accept that my search for character and story in the flow of events during our filming together doesn't imply a populist distortion of realities. I recall a rambling discussion in a beautiful hillside campsite during our most recent Mursi film. Turton was uneasy with my enthusiasm for the gathering story of how the Mursi's concern about a plague of Army worms might lead them to seek a conversation with government officials. For me it was a striking illustration of our main theme about the Mursi's increasing involvement with the outside world. David's worry was that we might warp the film, giving too great a weight to the little drama. In the end, I hope I managed to convince him that the documentary record of what happened was a revealing microcosm of the changes reaching the Mursi in the 1980's - not the whole story, but a telling little incident with a beginning and an end, involving identifiable individuals.

In the end, I sometimes feel I've had the best of the bargain. Working with David Turton over the years in Mursi country has compelled me to re-examine long established documentary practices. On our very first day together, I vividly recall David's well-justified and instructive horror at my asking a tribesman to repeat the action of walking away from us. Driven by his resistance to reordering reality to accommodate the traditions of narrative documentary, my own style has become more tuned to the messier truths of observation, unmediated by irrelevant film grammar. The methods and logic of observational fieldwork have propelled me and the film crews towards longer takes, less journalistic film techniques and greater efforts to try and record realities rather than re-invent them.

It's a continuing process of course and I recall how even during our most recent filming with the Mursi in 1985, I risked squandering a chance to shoot with an important witness while we hunted for a suitable background for the conversation. On a scorching morning, 45 minutes were consumed while we fussed
about framings, contrast ratios and sound problems and our Mursi witness waited patiently in the sun. In the end, we compromised with a less handsome shot in the shade which put the man at his ease. But the episode remains an uncomfortable illustration of how things can go wrong when the technical and aesthetic dictates of film are allowed unbalanced priority.

If I’ve learned to try and avoid that kind of misjudgement, Turton has I think become more tolerant of the technical disciplines necessary for network television documentary. I can still remember his early frustrations as he struggled to come to grips with the often cumbersome business of documentary filming, and the realization that we could never be as unobtrusive and immediately responsive as a lone anthropologist with a notebook. Even with the highly-experienced crews we’ve employed on “Disappearing World” those inescapable technical constraints remain. The need to get the mike close enough, the treadmill of slates and reloading, they were all regular ingredients of those early campfire debates. “ Couldn’t you surrender some of those technical standards in favor of becoming less obtrusive?” was the question. Well, the equipment has become lighter and faster and we’ve all learned new ways I think.

Our struggle over the years to gather material with Mursi women reveals something about those developments. After failing during our first two films to make worthwhile contact with women, we experimented in 1985 with radio mikes, filming at a greater distance with longer lenses. We also spent much more time in establishing relationships while the film gear was visible in unthreatening situations. The result was a considerable gain in worthwhile material which allowed women to speak naturally about their lives.

As I confessed to the diary in 1974, I quickly discovered how dependent on Turton I really was. Without access to language or culture, I was almost blind, struggling to know what we ought to be filming. Back in the safety of a Manchester editing room, my reliance has continued. My films have been structured and paced to hold the interest of a television audience. But with Turton just up the road at Manchester University, our daily conferences have remained an essential ingredient in shaping the films. More remote anthropologists have travelled to Manchester to advise on editing. Those location debates have continued in the cutting room through hours of discussion about emphasis in narration or the precise nuance of a sub-title.

Inevitably, the curious alliance of anthropologist and television film-maker has its continuing problems. Sometimes the pacing appropriate for a peak-time TV audience is faster than a student of ritual might wish, sometimes the need to give space to an ethnographic insight risks making a non-specialist viewer restless. I’m aware constantly of the investment of trust that the anthropologist has to risk in the film-maker. For the television professional, the film is another film - often unusually absorbing - but still an incident in a career. For the anthropologist, the film may draw on a life’s work and it could prejudice relationships and understandings built up over years in the field. As far as I know, “Disappearing World” has always managed to respect the anthropologist’s commitments and the differing priorities involved in the collaboration have not led to significant breakdown in the relationships.

For me certainly, the films I’ve made with anthropologists have proved the most engrossing documentaries of my experience, provoking a re-examination of many assumptions, both professional and personal. I came across a quotation from Franz Boas the other day which I feel could apply to the impact on my own films of working alongside anthropologists.

The value of anthropology is its power to impress us with the relative view of all forms of culture. How can we recognize the shackles that tradition has laid upon us? For when we recognize them, we are also able to break them.

In the end, of course, it’s the reaction of the people who’ve been filmed which is most instructive. During our latest visit to Mursi country in 1985, we were able to show our earlier two films to television’s newest audience. After an initial astonishment, the Mursi reaction was intriguingly mixed. “What’s the use of it?” one man asked, “I can’t eat it or tie my bull up with it”.

Another Mursi viewer was more positive. “It’s good” he said, “because now that our life is changing, we could use this to teach our children about our traditions and our history”.

THE BRITISH CONNECTION

Leslie Woodhead, writing about his filmmaking experiences in Southern Ethiopia with anthropologist David Turton exemplifies the status of anthropological films in Britain today. It is a small and specialized field which, despite having had considerable influence on the academic world, has had to struggle in order to find sufficient finance to achieve any real goals. Woodhead, (recently recognized by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts with a special award for his contribution to British filmmaking,) has been one of the protectors of anthropological film from within the corridors of Independent Television, which

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has financed and produced almost all ethnographic film in Britain. There lies the difference between what is happening in Britain and the U.S.

In Britain there have been no university centers for ethnographic film like those at the University of Southern California, Harvard, Temple or the several other schools across the U.S. which promote and teach anthropological film. Sponsorship has come rather from the commercial world of television. The names of those who have most developed and changed anthropology through the use of the visual media (such as Brian Moser, Melissa Llewellyn-Davies, Chris Curling, Peter Loizos and Leslie Woodhead) all did so in television. The most obvious and relevant reaction to that situation from those
outside Britain (and by some within) is to ask whether the constraints put upon the filmmakers and/or anthropologists by the commercial needs of television have distracted, corrupted, or changed the work and how differently we would have approached the material given more independence. It's a difficult question to answer. Woodhead has pointed out some of the problems he has faced as a filmmaker trying to structure material to prime-time TV. There are many others.

The first area affected is in choice of subject. There is no doubt that the fieldwork of an anthropologist in a visually exciting part of the world amongst peoples that have not been filmed before may attract television finance easier than a further bout of filming among a society already tackled. However the filmmaker must still persuade the financiers that the subject is worthy of their interest and investment. For some, therefore, a form of editing of subject matter has gone on in their minds and with their departmental bosses before any real work has begun. The factors that weigh heavy in this process of editing are often not concerned with issues of anthropological significance.

It is often a “bums and spears” syndrome in reverse, i.e., the packaging of the product in the sexiest way possible is an important prerequisite. The ability to flatter the TV administrative hierarchy into believing that they are simultaneously sponsoring exciting dramatic TV whilst contributing to academic learning also helps. In the end, the issue is largely determined by the company needs at the time. Documentaries about people might be off the menu one year to give more finance for another soap opera. Perhaps no one inside the TV company is sufficiently motivated to persuade the moguls that anthropology is worth spending money on.

Filmmakers are further constrained by the well-tried formula found for presenting their material in a 52 minute television slot. It is rare that the filmmaker is given the opportunity to present his or her material in a length or structure that the film me be able to sustain. Melissa Llewellyn-Davies’ *Diary of a Masai Village* which ran to a number of hour-long episodes was a worthy exception to that rule. It regulates the filmmaking process to the extent that the director cannot allow sequences to run to their optimum length, knowing that there can be no place in the final film for them, no matter what their quality. Our shooting ratio averages around 13:1 which gives quite a good deal of scope for additional film to be shot, but the necessity for brevity does frustrate the inclusion of many potentially important scenes.

On the other hand, this forces the filmmaker to have discipline in presenting his or her material. The ability of an uninformed audience to sustain interest in the subject is thus more important than the pursuit of intellectual excellence. Perhaps this is not always a bad thing, but it is highly frustrating for the anthropologist who sees a 300 page monograph on political organization reduced to 5 minutes of screen time!

On the other hand, television sponsorship of anthropological film in Britain has many advantages over the university-based type which predominates in the U.S.. The overwhelming one is that major documentaries have been made in the first place, and seen by mass audiences simply because TV production provides considerable resources in both production and distribution. Although constraints have to be accepted, the benefits of finance, technical expertise, equipment, facilities and a massive support system are immense. For the persevering, a passion for a particular story with a particular anthropologist can be fulfilled and the film eventually be made. Examples of this include Leslie Woodhead’s return to Ethiopia to make *The Kwegu*, Brian Moser’s *Last of the Cuiva*, Melissa Llewellyn-Davies’ *Masai Village*, my own chance to return to Pakistan to film *Afghan Exodus* and *Lost Tribes*, and the work of many others. They all owe their existence to the ability of the filmmakers to persuade the TV companies that the result would justify the investment.

The newest turning-point in anthropological filming in Britain should be in 1988. Manchester University will then form Britain’s first major Visual Anthropology Centre. If it succeeds, the Center will merge the two important areas of television and academic needs. Granada TV, responsible for the “Disappearing World” series, is partially funding the Centre and allowing its students to have access to its invaluable and massive film archive. The University will allow more scope for film to be used both for teaching and as a research tool; a scenario that has long been in existence in the U.S.:

What this might do is enable the needs of a teaching resource to be combined with a TV audience. A double-structuring of material from conceptualization to presentation. An input from the Centre for Visual Anthropology will guide the TV team to material that is important and relevant for the teaching of anthropology whilst not (one hopes) jeopardizing the TV production. Both the University and the broadcasters should benefit from the combination.

It will be of vital importance and interest to monitor whether the Centre will generate a different kind of film to that currently being made, or whether other constraints, this time imposed by academic needs and audiences and by different financial pressures will be equally restrictive on the filmmakers working from the University.

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TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL IN ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM-MAKING

Although I am not a film-maker, I have maintained a long-term interest in ethnographic film and have been successively involved as an anthropologist with film-makers in five different projects since 1968. It is this experience which I shall discuss here.

1. THE BBC “FAMILY OF MAN” PROJECT

In 1968 I assisted a BBC team (directed by John Percival) in gathering material for their television series on the human life-cycle as it is handled in different cultures. At this time I was conducting the first of many return visits to the Mount Hagen area of the Western Highlands in what became in 1975 the state of Papua New Guinea. My first fieldwork was carried out in 1964-5, by 1968 I had an established network of Melpa friends, largely among the Kauloka people, and sufficient familiarity with their language to act as a guide, interpreter, and negotiator on behalf of the film. This I take it, was precisely what the film-makers were looking for, but no more. The plan of the “Family of Man” series was simple: birth, growing up, marriage, childbirth, aging, death, as experienced in a number of cultures around the world; another play on universality and variation, the one and the many. To grasp such a theme and film it in the space of a few weeks in each location chosen, they needed, in an absolute way, the anthropologist. There was little time for mutual discussion or exploration. The director’s budget and script determined all. This necessitated the staging of some activities, such as a courting dance held at night inside a house. While our relationship was a symbiotic one, my reservations about staging activities created tensions as well.

The film team’s demands led me into direct contact with matters which otherwise I might have asked about more indirectly. I learned something, but I also felt my own uncertain presence as an anthropologist magnified, if not caricatured. I experienced these events twice, as it were: once as real, and again as surreal. This same feeling has been repeated in subsequent collaborations, indicating that as an anthropologist I always refused to merge with film-makers, yet always also agreed to cooperate with them, conscious of the value of the type of record which they made. Yet I myself did not have access to that full record. The product was rather appropriated from both myself and, more importantly, the Melpa. Hence their requests for ‘pay’, when they discovered for example that the full version of their courting session would not return to them. I was paid a consultant’s fee of 300 pounds, but as a part of this exchange all the material and notes which I supplied became property of the BBC, effectively the producer, who told me that he could thereby write a book using these materials but I could not! Although in a legal sense, this was a part of the contract, in a much deeper sense he could not possibly take from me the right to explain Melpa custom. It had already become a part of my own being and therefore could not be alienated in this way. I understand now that this experience was among those which came over time to make me bracket myself with the Kauloka as against other categories of persons, a categorization which then entered a long historical trajectory of its own. At that time there were no nationally established regulations requiring deposit of copies of film in the country where it had been shot. Such regulations began only in 1974 when the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (IPNGS) was founded in Port Moresby and took over the functions of monitoring research by anthropologists and film-makers in the country.

I collaborated with this team partly because I had known its producer as an undergraduate at Cambridge University in England in 1959. He had directed a play in which I had a minor part. The filming experience also felt rather like that. The whole tempo demanded by film-makers seemed altogether too fast. The purpose of film should be to record sensitive things in their full sensuous nature, but how can such nuances be captured if one is forced to move on after only a short while?

Three points should be made clear here. First, I do not mean to criticize film teams personally, but only structurally, as it were. Second, the BBC has, albeit very late in the day, sent copies of materials since 1981, when I became Director of IPNGS (a position I held till mid-1986). Third, my remarks apply to teams working for television companies, not to independent film-makers or to teams set up outside of the elaborate bureaucratic rules under which television companies and workers’ unions operate.

2. GRANADA TV’S “DISAPPEARING WORLD” FILM: Ongka’s Big Moka

I have previously published an account of my part in this project, but it is little known or circulated (A.J. Strathern 1977). “Disappearing World” is an ethnographic film series sponsored by Granada TV in England and having as its aim the portrayal of ways of life threatened by change in different parts of the world. Its prime mover was Brian Moser, and two young film-makers who became well known through it were Christopher Curling and his wife Melissa Llewellyn-Davies. Here again, there was a personal link. Curling had been a student of mine in anthropology at Trinity College Cambridge while I was a Research Fellow there from 1965-9. He suggested that we make a film among the Melpa when we met at an Association of Social Anthropologists meeting in Oxford in 1973, and I agreed. By this time I was Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Papua New Guinea. It was a busy job, with many administrative responsibilities, and it represented a considerable switch-over from the Fellowship I had held at the Research School of Pacific Studies in Canberra from 1969-72. The Canberra position had enabled me to write two books, and also to stay regularly in touch with field areas in both the Western and the Southern Highlands. The job in Port Moresby was quite different. My attempt to maintain it while also acting as consultant anthropologist to a film team produced another set of tensions-between work and research, which have stayed with me ever since.

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In the event, the team which arrived did not include Christopher Curling, but another Director, Charlie Nairn. He was a skilful and adaptable film director, with definite ideas on how a film should be put together. "We want a film with human interest", he told me. With the Melpa, how could such an aim fail? Charlie had brought with him a copy of another of his "Disappearing World" films, *Kataragama: A God for all Seasons*, set in Sri Lanka. The theme of a family's search for their lost son, a search in which the God Kataragama's aid was solicited, held this film together. Charlie told me that they had just come across the story and followed it as a reporter would. He was looking for something similar in Melpa. I offered him the character of my friend Ongka and his current plans to make a big ceremonial gift to his clan's allies within the nexus of the cyclical moka system of exchanges. He was dubious, clearly regarding me as an academic obsessed with the technical aspects of anthropology as a discipline (quite wrong) and still concerned about his 'human interest'.

This team comprised a research person (Pattie Winter), a cameraman (Ernest Vincze) and two sound men as well as Nairn and myself, a total of six people. A formidable imposition on any small local group, but one which Ongka was well prepared as a leader to accept and manipulate. One of the early scenes in the film itself shows Ongka standing at a fence haranguing some of his favorite exchange partners (the lineage of Ndamba, whose step-daughter is Ongka's wife Rumbuk!). He begins his speech by saying "Look, I've got all these white people here, and they want to see our moka, but they can't stay long, so will you please hurry up and produce the goods." Conscious of being on camera, Ongka deliberately mentioned the team itself, but he also seriously meant to use their presence as a further lever by means of which to get the moka moving. Others were becoming self-conscious about the film teams too. The old leader Ndamba courteously inquired whether they would like him to walk from his women's to his men's house, as he had done for the BBC, or perhaps in the opposite direction as a variation. For anything itself 'staged' we could re-run or reverse actions, but for 'real' affairs I felt strongly that we could not and should not. Hence I was angry when the team asked me to arrange for a repeat of part of a ceremony which they had not been able to film very well. A ceremony has its own tempo, its moving style. You can re-run it once it is captured on an editing machine, but it should not be interfered with as it unfolds itself. Or so I thought. In practice it is a matter of power. The fact that the team thought I might have the power to make people repeat their performance suggested to me, unpleasantly, that they might be seeing the situation through colonial eyes.

Yet these were sensitive people. Although the title of the series had an antiquarian flavor about it, they made no attempt to film in fictitiously 'traditional' settings. Ongka appears early on in the film (haranguing his relatives as I have noted) wearing a T-shirt with the motto "Do it in the road: state of Hawaii." He had no idea what this motto was, though had he known it might have appealed to his sense of mischievous humor. The point is that Charlie Nairn did not ask him to take it off. It is there in the film, along with his 'postman's hat' (a type given to native officials in colonial times), cardboard boxes used to feed pigs with sweet potatoes, and other bric-a-brac which have found their way into the hands of the Melpa. The 'incongruities' in the juxtaposition of objects became a part of the film's unconscious humor, an area of experience in which I think that Ongka's sense of humor blended with Nairn's.

This film was my first serious experience of the exigencies and problems of film-making. I lived with the whole team for some weeks in a single house. We filmed, ate, and translated sound-tapes together. Ongka was with us all the time. Charlie took many excellent still photographs and sent back copies of them all for distribution, including a huge blow-up of Ongka himself, which was later pinned to an inside wall of our house. I saw the director making a kind of script or shape for the film as he went along, saw him calculating the fade-ins and fade-outs, the pieces he needed to link scenes. For the first time, I understood a film as an artifact, a product of artifice. Finally, I saw him considering his budget and deciding with much regret to leave before the big exchange actually took place. It is a credit to Nairn's intuitive feeling that a successful film could still be made, it is less credit, though, to the system which burdened him with too large and expensive a team and gave him too little time to follow through what he needed to see and know.

Though I had found 'time out' from other duties to accompany the team to the Highlands, they required me to devote my whole attention to them. I could not do any other fieldwork at the same time and had to plead to be away for a few days in the Southern Highlands to study and take part in a pig-killing festival there. Later I had to return to Port Moresby to teach. Brian Moser reminded me that the other anthropologists who worked with his teams had been with them full-time. My colleagues at the University all disapproved of my being away to make the film, but they all used it in their courses when it came out.

I began by wanting to make a good film about the moka system. As I worked with Charlie I realized better what he had meant by 'human interest'. We had to make a film that would capture people's humanity. For that it was necessary to set up humanity among ourselves and between us and the subjects of the film, and that needed time. In so far as we succeeded, the alienation of the first experience of film-making was replaced by something better. The fact that Pattie Winter (the film's researcher) joined in one of the courting rituals we saw was commented on for years afterwards. It gave her a reality for people. They still ask me sometimes where she is.

For Ongka himself the films and books in which he appears are seen in two different ways. One is alienating. He knows that money is made from these things, and asks why his share was not greater. He has a point, although in fact he was paid separately both by the team and by myself, at rates comparable to those I received. The other is integrative. He refers to scenes as co-terminous with the rest of his life, and jumps from them to matters which are still in issue. For him, of course, this is not 'ethnographic film'. It is just another part of his life, and can be utilized as aide-memoire. It is also a part of the historical record.
for the Kawelka people as a whole.

One interesting point of conflict which emerged during the editing in London was that Charlie Nairn had tried to use the minimum of sub-titles and I wanted many more. I think this revealed our divergent aims in making the film. At this time I still saw it as a documentary into which as many ethnographic, that is verbally expressed, ‘facts’ as possible should be included. Charlie saw it in more visual terms, and wanted the visual images to speak for themselves, supplemented from time to time by his commentary. Some balance between such conflicting aims has to be achieved. One way is to put a lot of the ‘facts’ into an accompanying text available for those interested to read. An Olympian-sounding commentator who seems disembodied from the action and yet knows all about it can be irritating. The device serves to distance ‘us’, the viewer, from the film by identifying us with the commentator rather than with the people in the film. Yet information cannot always be conveyed immediately through the images or the voices of the film’s subjects. Large ‘print-overs’ of the information can be used, but these can be tiresome too. If I want to read a book, I can do so. Why go to the expense of projecting a book page onto a film screen? The mixture between modes of communication is a delicate one.

In 1978 I was again working in England at University College London, and I was visited by Sanford Low, an American anthropologist working for the Public Broadcasting System’s “Odyssey” series. He wanted to use the Ongka film for this series, but to modify it with the help of any further footage he could find in Granada’s archives in Manchester. He invited me to Boston to work on this new film. We had the chance to re-do the subtitles, including more of them and rewriting the commentary which Sanford then spoke. We also used a few beautiful shots which were clipped out of the first version. Curiously, I have never seen a formal screening of that revised version, yet I have always much appreciated the fact that I was involved in making it.

3. ABC TV MELBOURNE: VOICES OF THE FOREST

My third experience was of quite a different order. This time there was no team, just one extraordinarily energetic cameraman and director, David Parer from the Australian Broadcasting System. While I was back in the field in 1978, he asked me to help him make films about Birds of Paradise. I agreed to this, a little reluctantly, but Parer was very insistent.

Naturally, Ongka was pulled in again. At that time if anyone wanted me they also got Ongka because he was my constant mentor and companion. Two main sessions of filming were “staged”, one with Ongka in the forest pretending to search for birds and explaining how the use of the gun has decimated some bird populations. The other scene had him in a remote valley discussing a purchase of plumes of the white Bird of Paradise with one of his trade partners. My work on the film revealed to me the extent of native traditional practices of conservation. For example, they would not take too many birds from a single display tree, for to do so would attract witchcraft upon oneself. Significantly, the term for witchcraft in the Melpa language (kum) also translates as ‘greed’.

In terms of collaboration, I found that there was still a lack of balance between myself and the filmmaker because of the speed with which he demanded we operate. This was also the case for the next experience.

4. BARBARA HOLECK: ANTHROPOLOGY ON TRIAL

Up to this time my role as an anthropologist had been unquestioned. I was heeded as an ‘expert’, and the ‘key’ to the culture. Barbara Holeck’s film for PBS’s “Nova” series, was quite different. Specifically it was a critical look at anthropologists and their relationships with the local people who enabled them to become experts. Barbara arrived in 1983 when I was Director of the IPNGS in Port Moreseby. The Institute processes all applications from foreigners to do research or filmmaking in PNG, and requires that copies of results be deposited with the PNG government or some other public body. Holeck contended that anthropological research could be exploitative, and posed the problem of how a proper relationship between anthropologist and subject could be maintained. She revisited Margaret Mead’s stomping ground in Manus and interviewed Nathan Rooney, a Manus politician who is currently the Minister for Culture and Tourism. She went to the Popendetta area to see a young Canadian anthropologist’s work on village oral history. She looked briefly at the teaching of anthropology in the University of PNG and spent a hectic few days with me in Mount Hagen interviewing some friends of mine. Ongka returned once more to film, and by this time he realized that he was internationally famous because these filmmakers keep coming and looking for him. (I had published his own translated autobiography (A.T. Strathern 1979a) since the last film.) Ongka actually interviewed the team when we first met together, raising with them the question of why Western technology is so advanced. This is one of the things we should have filmed. In the actual interviews I spoke a good deal about anthropology in general but there was no room for this in the final cut. Ongka’s wish that he could do a reverse ethnography on the places of the white people, seen through his own eyes as I had seen his place does get in however, and this is the final part of the whole film.

Hokeck’s film caused a great deal of controversy. Many anthropologists did not like it. On the whole it was popular with prominent Papua New Guineans because it reflected their own views of at least some anthropologists. It is clear that complicated issues cannot be easily handled in the constricting format of a short film though this film was undoubtedly a catalyst. One should note that it is a pity that a copy of this film did not reach the PNG government until long after it was shown in America. This was not exactly Barbara Holec’s fault, but was rather due to extraneous reasons, however, it did appear ironic at the time. I determined that my next involvement in film would meet some of the problems that had been a part of the earlier collaborations, and also some of the criticisms made in the Holeck film.

5. THE IPNGS FILM ON THE FEMALE SPIRIT CULT IN MOUNT HAGEN

In all my collaborations up to 1983 I had been incidental to the wider plan of the films made and had participated only in a portion of the projects as a whole. In 1983 I proposed to the IPNGS filmmaker Chris Owen that we start a longer
term project of filming a spirit cult in Hagen about which I had published articles (A. T. Strathern 1970, 1979b). For the next performance of the cult I was to be fully initiated and to take part in the final dance. This would give us entree into the inner or secret part of the cult which was hidden from women. We engaged the help of Ru, the cult’s sponsor among the Kawelka, a friend of mine since 1964 and a guest of the IPNGS during 1982. He advised us as to which parts of the film taken could be shown in the public version. Chris Owen had made several well known films about PGN and had been involved in others with Dennis O’Rourke and Bob Connolly. (The list includes; Gododala, Shark -Callers of Kontu, Malagan Labadama, Turkana, and First Contact.) The sound recordists employed were both national trainees at IPNGS who could be accepted in the cultural context. Chris and I would plan the film on an equal basis, and shoot it during 1983-84 over a number of visits. The film’s original materials would belong to the nation and be kept in Port Moresby. Ru would have final say over what was shown in it, and his own to-camera statements would provide links as necessary. I also would not be just a disembodied asker of questions behind the camera but would have a place in the film itself. Here at last was the kind of collaboration which was not alienating or mystifying and I was overjoyed to undertake it.

In 1984 we spent many weeks together at Kuk, where the performance was to be held, waiting (shades of 1974) for things to happen, but when they didn’t occur on time, Chris would return to Moresby while I kept watch on things in Hagen. The role-conflicts of 1974 were also now replayed, and for the same reasons; attention to the field project kept me from administrative work. In July of 1984 the cult was at least completed and we had a double team of cameramen and recordists to film it. I recorded nothing, because I was distributing pork and dancing. Altogether we have a total of about 115 rolls of film on the cult, and the materials are ready for a first cut.

In 1974 the film team left without seeing Ongka’s Moka which they came to record, but the film came out quickly. This time the reverse has happened. We made sure to be on the spot and actually record everything. But this very action aroused opposition to myself in the National Culture Council which employed me, and became a part of a decision not to renew my contract with the Institute as its Director. Chris Owen and I finished a review of all the rolls only in December 1986. His actual film budget was not awarded in that year, so we could not do more. An effective and sincere collaboration at the individual level thus lead to bureaucratic repercussions. We will try to complete our filming in 1987.

CONCLUSION

It will be evident that all but the last of my film involvements have been with television companies. Also that the film projects tend to bring out to a peculiar degree the special positions of the anthropologist vis-a-vis the people, employees, and the filmmakers themselves. Film projects are a kind of test of relationships and can cause them to break. In my case I have thought such risks are worth taking for the sake of the product and its potential impact, which is so much wider then any I can hope to have through books. In addition, it may lead people back to the available written materials about the cultures and thereby provide a further context for the images on film.

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REFERENCES


1972 One Father One Blood. Australian National University Press.


MAKING STYLE WARS

-Min, we're setting up a shoot next week in the Grant Avenue tunnel, you, Sach, Quick, and Iz the Wiz.

-You Henry man, no way. I wouldn't be caught dead in a movie with Iz the Wiz, that pussy.

-But Min, two months ago we filmed you together at Rockaway Boulevard, you were all friends and —

-No way, man, that was then, this is now. After what he did — he went bombing with P.J. That dude shot our boy in the back and he went over all of Shy's burners. Iz is a sucker.

HENRY CHALFANT

-But Min, we need to have some continuity in the movie. We can't film different people every time. And we need to do it at Grant Avenue, because that's the most interesting tunnel visually, and we need Iz the Wiz, cause that's his lay-up.

I'm in a phone booth on I-95 enroute from New York to Washington. It's a week before shooting the bulk of the footage for Style Wars. The schedule must be met; commitments have been made to the crew, rental equipment reserved, and the Transit Authority, after long negotiations has agreed to let us into that tunnel and to muster into the lay-up certain select trains painted by Min, Quick, Sach and Iz. Trying to pin down the most important elements of the scene, the people, I've stopped at every phone booth on the way to reason with the skinny blond teenager.

-Min, we've spent all this money filming you guys in that first sequence, and we'll just have to throw it all out if....

-So that's where your head's at. All you care about is the money.

Eventually Min acquiesced and agreed to round up his crew and meet at the Grant Avenue tunnel at the designated time. We contacted Iz the Wiz separately, and he said he'd be there too.

On the night before the shoot, Min, Sach and Quick stole into Iz the Wiz's lay-up, the Grant Avenue tunnel, crossed out all his tags and throw-ups, and wrote insulting references to his masculinity everywhere. The next night everyone arrived on time, and we made preparations for the shoot. While the film crew was already in the tunnel setting up the lights, oblivious to the desecration that surrounded them, we stood outside affixing the $2000 contact mikes to the four graffiti writers. When the time came to begin filming, the writers opened the hatch and climbed in. Almost immediately, Min, Sach and Quick exploded from the hatch with the Iz in hot pursuit. Everyone started screaming, "the mikes, the mikes." (Is that all we cared about?) The ensuing brawl produced one eight inch knife (unused) and some bruises. The mikes came out unsathed but not so the feelings of Iz the Wiz. In a towering sulk that rivalled that of Achilles in his tent, he had to be coaxed patiently back to the tunnel with promises of star billing. This scene and others like it marked my passage through this first film making experience and demonstrated to me the complexity of finding the delicate balance of truth between the subject and the requirements of the film maker.

Before Tony Silver, who directed Style Wars, approached me about making the film, I had spent several years working with the top graffiti writers of the New York subway and had already emerged as an important figure among them: the primary archivist of their work and a valued neutral witness to their disputes and rivalries. My first thoughts when Tony suggested doing a film about the graffiti writers with whom I was involved, was simply to try to reveal their world as much as possible from their point of view. At this point I knew nothing about film makers' methods, production values, and artistic demands. My notion of making a documentary film was that you hung around interesting people with your camera, and when they did something exciting, you shot it. My first shock was learning what it costs to make a film and how cumbersome the whole process is, making it inevitable that events and special moments that would be wonderful to record are often irretrievably lost. I wondered if we shouldn't be using a cheaper, more versatile medium such as Super 8. But Tony pointed out that to record something of such visual complexity and power as the graffiti art on the trains, we had to respect it. To capture the kinetics of the art and the kinetics of the canvas on which it moved was essential to the subject and the only way we could do it justice was to do it as artistically and obsessively as we could. It was essential, Tony said, not just to record it but to see it; to make the camera see it in the same sense that eyes see it. And trying to capture the visual texture of the subject is the most costly thing in making a film. 16mm produces an image far superior to either Super 8 or videotape, but it is much more expensive at every stage of production. But we discovered that one drawback of having such high aesthetic goals was that the search for funds to pay for them delayed us to the point that we risked losing our subject.

From the beginning, Tony and I planned to feature The Rock Steady Crew, before they were famous, before anyone had even heard of break-dancing, since my graffiti contacts had given me an inside track on such inner-city activities as breaking before it was in vogue. The first scenes that we filmed were of Rock Steady hanging out in the playground and "battling" The Dynamic Rockers in a Queens roller disco. But it took two more years to raise enough money to do justice to the subject, and by the time we were able to resume what we had begun, The Rock Steady Crew had become world famous, their manager had locked them into an exclusive contract, film rights and all, and we were forced to change the focus of the film to put a greater emphasis on the graffiti artists.

In addition to representing the subject faithfully and being true to the exigencies of the film maker's art, we had to consider still another force, the audience. Not only the upscale public television-type viewers we imagined and the kids everywhere who turned out to be Style Wars' major audience, but also the funding agencies who backed us. The first thing that Tony and I did when we agreed to make a documentary on hip hop culture was to invest our own money and that of generous family members in order to get some initial footage. With a bare minimum of essential equipment and crew members willing to defer their fees, we were able to make a 1/2 hour proposal film with which to attract the attention of possible buyers and donors.

Next we wrote a proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities. We were warned at the outset that our project was controversial on two grounds; one the catch 22 that it hadn't been studied and therefore had no
academic standing as a subject for study and two, that it might be seen as glorifying criminal behaviour. In the end, that was what brought it down at the NEH.

The NEH had a new chairperson, a Reagan appointee, and some new appointees on the council. There was a particular staff member who flagged our project early on, as a “this one could get us fired” proposal, and brought it to the attention of the chairman and at least one important council member. So, whereas at that time the council did not, by custom, scrutinize proposals that were recommended by the staff, it was made sure that this one was not fully recommended, but “flagged” for special scrutiny by the three-person subcommittee of the council who voted two to one against it. Then it was defeated by the full council at the bidding of one subcommittee member who believed it was not in the interest of the endowment to fund a project like this.

This came as no surprise to me, since I had already encountered the same fear and revulsion in the New York cultural establishment, that it made it difficult for me to exhibit my photographs of graffiti art in galleries and museums and forced me to seek out the more tolerant climate of Europe to find a publisher for my book, *Subway Art*. Needless to say, the shortsightedness we met seriously hampered our efforts to find support for *Style Wars*, and we went to considerable lengths to enlist the endorsement of prestigious scholars to counteract it. *Style Wars* was eventually funded by no less than five major funding agencies* each of whom required a different approach and a different proposal. We undertook these tasks with some cynicism: what do they want to hear, and can we give them what they want to hear without distorting the project? Thus the grant proposal writing started out as a process of justification and rationalization, but it made us think hard about what the film could be about, and for Tony, at least, it bore out his original sense that it was about “a great societal drama.” He says, “the more I thought about it, the more it made me respect the culture of the graffiti writers. It seemed even more courageous and amazing to me that they would pit themselves against all adult society and strive to improve themselves and their work not only to themselves and among themselves, but to the world at large.

For me, the funding parties’ concerns that we treat the subject with a balanced and fair minded view of the opposition, i.e. law enforcement, city officials, and beleaguered riding public, helped me realize that my initially simplistic goal to reveal the writers’ world from their own point of view, wasn’t nearly as effective as seeing it in the context of (and in conflict with) society. Mayor Koch as a shadow figure is as indispensable to the understanding of graffiti writers (and vice versa) as the “village people” are to the forest-dwelling Mbuti of Turnbull’s *The Forest People*.

What finally and clearly marked my own transformation from graffiti loyalist to film maker was the necessity that grew inexorably out of the material we were getting, to include the renegade Cap in the film, who at the time was “going over” all the other writers, destroying their art. He “bombed” not just the trains but the work of other writers in order to become “king” in a way that was particularly destructive and sadly ironic in the graffiti writers’ context. This was all anybody could talk about when we first began filming. It became obvious, even to me, that the film would now need Cap if we were to make any sense of all that dialogue, and besides, here was what any film maker desires, a real-life drama unfolding before our eyes. The problem was that according to the rules of graffiti society, Cap was a pariah, and to give him any exposure would be to give him the fame that all the writers were striving for. How could I, an insider, betray the others by having anything to do with him, let alone put him in our film? I feared that I would lose the respect I had won, four years of cordial relations and put in jeopardy all future work, including the film in progress. And then, my association with Cap would mean that he would visit me and want to hang out at my studio like everyone else. I would run the risk that his enemies might find him there with predictable results. It was a prospect made all the more alarming by the knowledge that Cap and his friends always went around “strapped,” and that they had already shot more than one person.

In the end, Tony was able to persuade me to invite Cap to take part and I’ve never regretted it. By including the dark side, we were able to create a more honest portrayal of the graffiti world than the white-washed version the other graffiti writers might have preferred. It also made a better film. Still the outcome was more or less what everyone had predicted. Cap was made into a kind of hero (“King of Bombing”) and role model for thousands of younger “bombers” for whom the object was “more, not the biggest and the most beautiful, but more”, and cross-over wars became epidemic in the declining years of graffiti in New York. Furthermore, I had to quickly learn survival techniques such as hiding out and dissembling in order to keep separate the volatile combinations of people who might show up at my studio unannounced at any given moment.

My position in Hip Hop Society was distinguished by an underlying paradox: I respected the culture, and yet through my photography, and because I was a link to the art world and the media, I became one of the agents of change that would alter it in subtle but fundamental ways. *Style Wars* amplified and accelerated these effects, as, on the one hand, it revealed a secret and unknown society and created a self-consciousness among its members, and on the other hand it became a cultural icon and a paradigm to a wide audience ready to identify with and imitate the originals. Graffiti writers traditionally were secretive both for practical reasons and because there was a potent mystique attached to the artist in the dark of night, a kind of Zorro or Lone Ranger figure. But there was also a tremendous hunger for fame, and both drives co-existed in great tension. As society seemed to reward the revealed identity with art shows, media recognition and money, many came forward into the light, while an arbitrary enforcement of the law frightened others away. Photographs, which could be used in portfolios and find their way into magazines, books and films came to overshadow the original painted train in importance to the writers, and congregating at the old, underground writers’ bench to watch the trains go by was replaced by “benching,” or taking pictures at any number of station platforms with good
outdoor light, suitable for photography. Meanwhile, the fact that nearly every major city in the western world acquired a graffiti subculture complete with New York street jargon, "racks", and cross- 
ways are palpably demonstrates the power of the media. The rapid spread of break-
dancing was made possible be a wide 
distribution of VCR's with a "pause" mode that helped kids from Vienna to 
Guam to analyze, then learn the form. The electronic medium is like the magic 
genie. To summon it is to unleash far-
reaching and unforeseen consequences far 
beyond anyone's ability to control. The 
audience at any showing of Style Wars 
attended by Tony or me always raises the 
same questions: in one, angry citizens 
berate us for encouraging vandalism 
everywhere, and in the other, the purists 
ask if we regret being part of a process 
that has destroyed urban folk culture. To 
the first question, we can't conceive of 
making a film for such a reason, and to 
the second we can answer that we were 
also part of a process whereby Turkish 
youths in Berlin and Maori youths in 
New Zealand found in Hip Hop a new 
idiom of expression and a new source of 
pride vis a vis the dominant culture. 
What is clear though is that the making of 
Style Wars was only possible because we 
were so close to the subject as to be 
part of its history, riding the crest of a 
movement that aroused such controversy 
and was of such inherent interest that 
even the funding agencies recognized the 
need to document it.

Henry Chalfant has exhibited sculpture and 
photography worldwide. His work is in collections 
at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh and the 
Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. His 
many publications include Subway Art (Thomas & 
Hudson 1984) and Spray Can Art (Thomas & 
Hudson 1987)

* The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, The 
National Endowment for the Arts, Media Arts and 
Folklore, The New York Council for the 
Humanities, Channel 4 (Gr. Britain,) The William 
and Mary Grave Foundation, and private contribu-
tions.

VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY 
IN NEW ZEALAND.

Since its precocious beginnings in the 
1920's, when James McDonald accom-
panied Elsdon Best and Johannes 
Andersen on several expeditions and 
shot the first research footage on 
Maori culture, visual anthropology in 
New Zealand has had a chequered 
career. As had been the case elsewhere, 
promising beginnings were here follow-
ed by decades of relative inactivity, 
punctuated by occasional spurts of 
visual research and periods of 
documentary photography and film-
making activity. Sixty years on, the use of 
visual media in ethnographic research, and for the presentation of 
cultural studies is still in its infancy.

Recently, however, a growing interest 
within and beyond the universities indi-
cates that the situation is changing, 
and that visual media in the 1980s, are 
at last playing a more important role in 
how New Zealanders "think themselves" culturally.

Almost from the moment Pakeha 
(European) settlers first arrived, we 
turned still, then movie cameras on the 
land, ourselves, and the Maori. Initial-
ly, the camera was used to record, in-
deep celebrate Pakeha technological 
domination of an undomesticated 
landscape, and the cultural domination of its indigenous inhabitants. At 
different periods in the last one hundred 
years, Pakeha images of self and other 
have contraposed nascent (European) 
civilisation and the (Maori) Noble 
Savage, an emerging colonial 
bourgeoisie and a "degraded native" 
and, most recently, increasingly 
politicised ethnic groups in a wide-
ranging struggle for power and 
resources. Strangely, very little of this 
commonplace (but ideologically infor-
mativ) visual record attracted the atten-
tion of anthropologists or historians 
until the mid-seventies. Nor, until then, 
had this primarily non-academic 
visual tradition effectively suggested 
that visual media might seriously be us-
ed to understand or discuss the realities 
of life in a multi-cultural society.

KEITH RIDLER

As regards film, for example, with 
the notable exception of McDonald's 
work, the newsreel productions of the 
National Film Unit in the forties, and 
Barry Barclay's path-breaking Tangata 
Wenua (People of the Land) series 
made in the mid-seventies, the 
documentary ethnographic record is 
almost blank. The number of Pakeha 
filmmakers who have wanted and 
been able to sympathetically document 
changes in Maori life, or in the situ-
ation of other ethnically-defined groups 
(Polynesian, South Europeans, Asians) 
could be counted on the fingers of one 
hand. Disgracefully, the number of Maori and Polynesian film-makers 
who have been able to gain access to 
Pakeha controlled expertise and 
technical resources has been even 
smaller.

Within the last ten years, however, 
and despite major obstacles, visual 
media in various media have burgeon-
ed. A number of excellent 
photographic histories (most notably 
Sinclair and Harrex 1978; Binney, 
Chaplin and Wallace 1979; King 1983) 
have appeared, and a major document-
ary photography exhibition, Witness 
to Change (curated by Janet Bayly and 
Athol McCredie, 1985), recently 
toured the country. On the film front, 
in 1981, the New Zealand Film 
Archive, directed by Jonathan Dennis 
was established in Wellington to act as the 
main national archive and research 
collection. Although hampered by inade-
quate funding, the Archive has carried 
out a major restoration project (the 
four McDonald films) and, over the 
last five years, given historical film 
research a public profile. Documentary 
film-making, while receiving little of-
ficial support, has had several signifi-
cant accomplishments, among them, 
Merita Mita's film Bastion Point and 
Patu! dealing with Maori land strug-
gles and the movement against the 1981 
Springbok (South African national 
rugby team's) tour respectively. Last 
year Ted Neia received major funding 
from the Maori and South Pacific Arts 
Council to complete a tribal history of 
his own people, Te Ate Awa, currently 
in post-production. Within the univer-
sities, a teaching and research pro-
THE GRANADA CENTRE FOR VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

In Britain, there have been no academic centers for exploring the potential contribution of film and video for anthropological research until now. The Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, together with Granada Television is about to set up such a center, to be called the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology.

The aims of the centre will be:

1. To establish the first postgraduate course in Visual Anthropology in Britain. An elementary (diploma) and more advanced (M.A.) courses will be open to graduates with previous anthropological training.

2. To explore educational and commercial possibilities in the video production of anthropological material at both the tertiary and other educational levels.

3. To develop the use of visual media as a tool of anthropological research both in data gathering and analysis.

4. To act as an experimental production unit for the making of full length anthropological films.

5. To act as a Centre for the growing body of professionals with expertise in anthropological film, and to encourage visitors from abroad.

The Department of Social Anthropology at Manchester is one of the country's major centres of anthropology, with an established national and international reputation. The University's Audio-Visual Unit is exceptionally well equipped in the fields of film and video, and possess the necessary technical expertise and equipment to support the centre. The University has excellent links through faculty with Granada Television which is the world's leading producer of anthropological films for television.

The Centre will have its own Director who will be affiliated with the Department of Social Anthropology. Students taking the M.A. in Visual Anthropology will attend courses in the Department as well as receive training in the use and appreciation of visual media from the Director and from specialist outside lecturers. Practical work will be based in the University's Audio-Visual Department which includes a fully professional television unit (Manchester University Television Productions). The holding of seminars, workshops and conferences will be an important aspect of the centre's work.

The M.A. program in Visual Anthropology will begin in October 1988 and will be open to applicants with an undergraduate background in anthropology. (Graduates of other disciplines may take a one year conversion course, leading to a diploma.)

Applications for the M.A. will be considered after October 1, 1987 and should be addressed to the Postgraduate Admissions Tutor, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, Roscoe Building, Brunswick Street, Manchester M13 9PL. (Telephone) (061) 273-7121. For informal inquiries, which are welcome at anytime, please contact Marilyn Strathern at the above address.

Applications for the post of Director are now invited. The Director will be responsible for the development of this academic centre, exploring the potential contributions of film and video to anthropological research, and instituting an M.A. degree in Visual Anthropology. Applicants should have research interests in Social Anthropology and experience in anthropological filmmaking. The Director will be affiliated with the Department of Social Anthropology. Appointment will be made according to qualifications and experience, on the Lecturer or Senior Lecturer scales. The appointment will commence on July 1, 1987, and will be for an initial period of three years. Application forms are available from the Registrar, The University of Manchester M13 9PL. Quote ref. 264/86. Informal inquiries may be made to Marilyn Strathern, Department of Social Anthropology (Telephone 061 273-7121 ext. 5160).

UNIVERSITY OF
ZURICH

Since 1985, the University of Zurich has offered a one year course in the Department of Anthropology entitled "Photographic Documentation of a Specific Subject: Man and Animal." The course is taught by C. Vogelsanger and Ricabeth Steiger. Vogelsanger's teaches "Man and animal in our culture," and Steiger "visual anthropology through photography."

The course emphasizes the training of anthropology students in photography, showing them the specific characteristics of photography, and how to handle these characteristics in a theoretical, and above all, in a practical way.

For further information contact: Ricabeth Steiger, Department of Anthropology, University of Zurich, Switzerland. (Visual Sociology Review)

VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF
AMSTERDAM

Courses in Visual Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam started in 1984. The entire course takes about 14 months to complete, and for anthropology students at Amsterdam University there is no enrollment fee.

The complete course consists of three separate blocks, taught by Dr. Robert Boonzaier Flaes and Martin Rens. Part of the second block is taught by Dr Leonard Henny and Dr Henk Ketelaar.

ROBERT M. BOONZAIJER FLAES

Unlike many courses in Visual Anthropology that I know of, the education we provide is "hands on" from the start. Moreover, it is exclusively based on video. Students will start with a four month practical course producing short videotapes each week. During the first two weeks camera handling is confined to the classroom. After that they are sent out into the streets and alleys of Amsterdam, producing short visual statements each week in situations that become progressively further separated from their own lifestyle as the course advances.
We have three U-matic video sets and two editing units at our disposal, to be divided between approximately 24 students. We disfavor specialization at this or at any later stage, students will do all the work required by themselves or in pairs. Each week the results are shown, and we will explain why some things work out and others do not.

To our initial amazement, most students have more problems with the social than with the technical aspects of filming—most of them will learn how to handle a camera amazingly well in a short time, but continuing to breathe, talk, walk and shake hands with the people one films is more problematic. No doubt this is one of the sad results of today's anthropology being more theoretically than practically inclined. This shortcoming appears in the first results, one sees an endless amount of videotapes where respondents are the mirrors of both the shyness and the panicking self-importance that the filming students radiate. Next to improvement in camera and sound handling, overcoming this attitude is the main thing we work on.

At the end of this first four month course, all students indicate what project they want to make a video film about. This proposal, combined with the camera and editing results obtained thus far, qualifies about sixty percent of the aspiring entrants for the next round of work. Visual studies about one of the many immigrant groups in Holland, and more especially in Amsterdam are the more popular subjects, and the position of women in these groups is an entree that is frequently chosen. This next course takes about five months Feb. through June, (though many students do not finish until Sept.). Students work on their own project, helping each other out as sound or camera assistants where necessary. The progress of each project is reviewed and discussed collectively once a week, and each student has a claim to any individual help he or she might require from us, this is done in private sessions with Martin Rens and myself. Restricting the scope of the projects to something that can be meaningfully captured in a visual presentation takes up most of the energy in these sessions—both for the students and for ourselves.

Halfway through this course we perform a rather cavalier attempt to cover the history of Visual Anthropology in five working weeks through film viewing and study of the relevant literature. We have found that it makes sense to do the theoretical and historical parts after students have gained some insight into the difficulties of filmmaking. There is then a keen interest in "how anthropological filmmakers manage," because the participants will recognize the hardship they are going through themselves.

Editing, sound mixing and (sometimes) subtitling the individual video productions take anything from a month to half a year, and by the end of September the final products (under no circumstances surpassing fifteen minutes duration) are shown to the academic community. Most students will find other outlets for their product as well, a museum, a PBS, a Society for the Advancement of the such and so, a university or a specialized scientific meeting.

Having finished their own video production, students can further specialize in a course that is called "reality creation." It takes another four months, and consists of two parts. One is a series of weekly lectures by filmmakers from a variety of backgrounds; anthropology, independent and TV bound documentary filmmaking, commercials, features and video art. The work these artists and scholars produce is studied beforehand together with any material that they themselves consider instrumental to their work, a wide collection of books, comics, films, travelogues and diaries. Going through this material helps us to form a more or less private opinion of the in- fluences on each filmmaker. A few days later the work is discussed with the filmmakers themselves. This method is time-consuming, but has turned out to be very fruitful, it ensures that the discussion of the work under review is thorough, and not just limited to a few odd questions and answers.

The second part of this course is an experiment in editing. All students are given exactly the same raw footage (usually an extensive interview), which they then edit in such a way that a flawless piece of work emerges. Every student has to create a different character in the editing process, as a result, the same person in the same footage will look distressed, happy, informative, stupid, sexy or whatever. This experience greatly enhances editing expertise, and grinds quite firmly into everyone's mind the fact, that a picture is not real or true in itself, that reality is to a large extent a construction of the way an anthropologist looks at his collection of field notes, visual or otherwise.

We consider practical experience the most important part of Visual Anthropology, theoretical and historical notions and components are used more or less as a frame of reference, as advice and help to the future visual anthropologist. We do not take on students who are interested in Visual Anthropology as a theoretical field of study. As a result, it is comparatively easy for graduate students to find jobs as trainees after completing the courses. Trainee jobs have been found or created at museums, trade unions, the anti-apartheid movement, and on Dutch television. We feel that this further experience is essential, since one does not become an accomplished visual anthropologist in just a year and a half.

There are several reasons why we have opted for video rather than the more traditional photography and cinema. One reason is cost. Although video per se is not cheaper than cinema in a situation of real cost accounting, it is cheaper in university surroundings where one does not have to rent the equipment. Purchasing and servicing the equipment is centralized at the university level; when something breaks down, it will be replaced sooner or later. Until that time, it can be used free of charge, which means that the staff and students of my department only pay for the tape they use.

Another even more important reason for choosing videotape over film is the possibility of instant replay. In any teaching situation this is a valuable asset. When working with larger groups of students anyone not actively handling the camera can at least follow what others are doing on online monitors, and the results can be discussed immediately after shooting. Moreover, I consider this facility essential for anthropological work. Using video gives the opportunity of showing and discussing your work with your respondents. Especially when
starting a project, this can be of great importance. People will tell you when you leave out important details, you can discuss what is essential and what is peripheral, and you will gain a better understanding, of your work. In this respect, film is a much less versatile medium.

Finally, in many situations video is much less complex and threatening to respondents than is film. In most surroundings there will be a TV set or a video player, and if not, that will be just the thing that we are providing. The playback possibilities will usually overcome initial resistance. This also applies for dealing with officials, getting permissions (though usually we do not apply for them), crossing borders and so forth.

So far, the main problem that we are facing is the fact that we are grossly understaffed. We cannot take on more than 24 students a year, and we have 150 applicants waiting. This waiting list exists despite the intensity of the course and its energy-consumption, a success ratio that is under fifty percent, and the fact that no credit points are given for the work done in the first four months. Apparently, Visual Anthropology appeals to a lot of future anthropologists, and that to us is a heartwarming thought.

For further information, contact Dr. Robert M Boozenger Flaes. Amsterdam University, Dept. of Anthropology. 0.2 Achterburgwal 185. 1012 DK Amsterdam. Holland.

BRISTOL POLYTECHNIC

Students taking the BA Humanities modular degree may take two modules in 'Visual Anthropology' and 'Recording Contemporary Culture'. These developed from a collaboration in audio-visual practice work over a number of years with staff at the Bristol City Museum.

Arising from the experience of one of the curatorial staff with the Swedish SAMDOK organization for the documentation of contemporary culture, the Bristol activities combine a first experiment in this field for the Museum and a project-based approach to their teaching of the visual anthropology group in the polytechnic.

The department has its own audio-visual, radio, and video studios and portable equipment, and several of the staff have current production experience in broadcasting. Programs and rushes of sufficient quality are accessioned into an Archive of Contemporary Culture housed in the City Museum.

For further information contact: Richard Thorn. Communication Studies, Department of Humanities; Bristol Polytechnic; St. Matthias, Fishponds, Bristol, UK.

SUMMER SCHOOL AT YALE

African Studies at Yale University is offering a five week workshop in Ethnographic Film between July 6th and August 7, 1987. It will be taught by Jean Rouch, John Middleton and Emile de Brigard.

For brochure, information and an application contact: The Council on African Studies, P.O. Box 13A, Yale Station, New Haven, CT 06520.

NEWS AND FESTIVALS

FESTIVAL PANAFRICAIN DU CINEMA

The tenth annual Festival Panafricain Du Cinema (FESPACO) will be held February 21-28 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, West Africa. The biggest cinema gathering of the African continent will host filmmakers from more than 33 continents. Over 500 guest filmmakers, journalists, critics and buyers from Africa, Europe, the Carribean and other parts of the world will attend. The theme for FESPACO 87 is cinema and cultural identity. Special events will include, the first Paul Robeson Cinema Award for the best film, a special series of children's films, and a symposium on media and oral tradition.

For further information contact: Festival Headquarters, FESPACO, B.P. 2505, Ouagadougou- Burkina Faso. West Africa.

SOCIETY FOR VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY FILM FESTIVAL

The Society for Visual Anthropology seeks entries for its Second Annual SVA Film Festival to be held in December, 1987. Film/videos with a completion date of 1985 or later will be eligible. Films will be reviewed for technical competency, clarity of intent, communication of anthropological objectives to the filmmaker's chosen audience (researchers, students, general public, indigenous group or community, policy makers, etc.)

As in 1986, the festival will be juried by a group of Society for Visual Anthropology Board Members, joined by invited outside jurors.

Excerpts from films selected by the SVA jury as Festival winners will be featured in a Special Event Session at the 86th American Anthropological Association meetings in 1987 in Chicago, Illinois, and will receive the SVA Certificate of Award. The films/videos will also be scheduled to be shown in their entirety during the meetings at a separate screening.

HANDLING AND SHIPPING OF ENTRIES: The cost of transportation of films and videos to the Festival is to be covered by the entrant. Transportation must be prepaid. Productions will be returned by mail. Foreign entrants must cover the cost of return shipping over and above $10.00 U.S. Entrant's identification must be on the case, can, reel, film leader or tape. Every reasonable care will be taken to protect productions from damage or loss, but the Festival cannot assume liability for either. Should you desire another shipping method or extra insurance, please also enclose additional money to cover the increased cost.

For further information contact: Joan Williams, 1626 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, NM 87501 U.S.A. Telephone (505) 983-4127.

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

The National Educational Film Festival is one of the nation's largest and
most respected competitions for educational and informational media. It is the only annual competition of a national scope which builds its judging system around the concept that a production's target audience should have a major role in the judging process. The Festival's judging involves a rigorous three-tiered approach in which students, civic leaders, educators, community groups, and individuals with areas of expertise such as health, anthropology, etc. coordinate in an immense judging effort.

To be eligible entries must be released after January 1, 1986 for distribution in the United States. Entries also have English language sound tracks or subtitles. Forms are available in October, 1987 and must be returned before December 1, 1987.

For further information contact: Sue Davies, Executive Director, National Educational Film Festival, 314 East 10th St., Oakland, CA 94606 (415) 465-6885, 465-6891.

The Festival also operates a telephone referral service. Any filmmaker may phone the Festival and receive information about distributors, information about other festivals, and information about local/national resources.

**ANTHROPOS '87**

Anthropos 87, the first annual Barbara Myerhoff Film Festival, will be held at the University of Southern California in May. The festival will showcase works from all over the world that focus on contemporary human diversity and that tell us something about the way we live in society and in our global village.

The festival organizers have arranged entries into the following categories: **Documentary:** Ethnographic Subjects, Womens Subjects, Jewish Subjects, Social Issues, "The Native Eye" (films made by people who are traditionally the subjects of anthropological research) and **Non-Documentary:** (short films of any non-documentary genre.)

There will be five $1000 prizes given, one each in the categories of ethnographic documentary, women's documentary, Jewish documentary, student documentary, and non-documentary short. Award decisions will be made by a jury of leading film authorities and anthropologists.

For further information contact: Maggie Mills, Anthropos '87 Office. Center for Visual Anthropology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0661 (213) 743-5241.

**NEW ENGLAND FILM FESTIVAL**

The New England Film Festival is currently in its twelfth year as a competition celebrating excellence in independent and student filmmaking in the region. While there is no specific category for ethnographic film, films of all genres are encouraged as long as they are independent, non-commercial works.

The New England Film Festival is open to residents of New England and students whose film was made while a student at a New England college or university. This year's entry deadline is April 3, 1987 and entry brochures are available through the Arts Extension Service.

For further information contact: Colleen Sherry, New England Film Festival, Arts Extension Service, Division of Continuing Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003 (413) 545-2360.

**THE GLOBAL VILLAGE**

The Global Village thirteenth Annual Film Festival will be presented by Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival at the Public Theater in April.

The festival is devoted exclusively to video and film documentaries. Approximately 20 works will be screened at the Public Theater during April. The jury will award prizes for Best Video Documentary, Best Film Documentary and Best Documentary for TV.


**A NEW GENERATION OF FILM**

Documentary Educational Resources has announced publication and availability of their newest catalogue supplement, D.E.R. A NEW GENERATION OF FILM. In addition to a listing of all D.E.R. titles (nearly 150 in all), the catalogue provides background information on D.E.R. and its current activities, descriptions (including running length, available formats and prices) for all of the films and videos acquired for distribution since 1982. This supplement is organized geographically and provides a subject index for easy cross-referencing.

A NEW GENERATION OF FILM is available upon request free of charge. Any contributions would, however, be gladly received. To order your supplement, or for further information on D.E.R., please contact: Sue Marshall Cabezaz. Documentary Educational Resources, 5 Bridge Street, Watertown, MA 02172. (617) 926-0491.

**THE 12TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL SCIENCES**

The 12th conference of the International Congress in Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences will be held July 24-31, 1988 in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. The general theme is visual research strategies-visual anthropology in the 80's, will include six symposiums on the following topics: Visual anthropology and education; visual anthropology and the public; visual anthropology and cultural preservation and revitalization; visual research results; visual anthropology and development studies; and visual research strategies.

For further information contact: Nasko Križnar, Audiovizualni Laboratorj ZRC SAZU, Wolfova 8, 6100 Ljubljana, Yugoslavia.

**ANNUAL SEMINAR OF THE NORDIC FILM ASSOCIATION**

The theme of the fourth Annual Seminar of the Nordic Anthropologica Film Association will be 'The Fourth World Through Film. It will be held June 15 - June 21, 1987.

For further information contact: Oysten Steinløkken, University of Tromso, Institute of Social Science, Breisika, P.O. Box 1040, N-9001, Tromso, Norway.
CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR THE USE OF FILM AND VIDEO IN THE CLASSROOM

The Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges (S.A.C.C.), has compiled its first curriculum guide to help facilitate the improvement of undergraduate education in anthropology through the use of film and videos. The guides compiled by Angela Zerdavis provide questions for post-viewing discussions and writing assignments.

For further information and copies of the guides contact: Charles Ellenbaum, Professor of Anthropology and Religious Studies, College of DuPage, 222nd Street and Lambert Road, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137-6599.

W.I.F. ANNOUNCES FILM FINISHING FUND FOR 1987

The Women in Film Foundation announces its third annual grant round for the Film Finishing Fund. Small completion grants are available for videographers and filmmakers who have demonstrated advanced and innovative skills consistent with the goals of WIF.

Last year, awards were granted to Lourdes Portillo and Susana Munoz for Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Lauren Lazin for The Flapper Story, and Mirra Bank and Perrin Ireland for Spirit to Spirit: Nikki Giovanni.

For guidelines and application send a self-addressed envelope to: Film Finishing Fund, Women In Film, 6464 Sunset Blvd., Suite 660, Los Angeles, CA 90028. Deadline: March 1, 1987.

VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE SVA NEWSLETTER.

It seems as if there has been a great deal of activity in the world of visual anthropology over the past few months.

In December, the American Anthropological Association held its Annual meetings in Philadelphia. There were more films screened this year than ever before, and many of them appeared to generate considerable interest and debate from people outside the ethnographic film-making community as well as those within. If the meetings left the impression of growth and interest in the field of visual anthropology, that impression has been reinforced by a number of other developments.

The Department of Anthropology at New York University is now establishing a Ph.D. program in ethnographic film (details in the next edition.) Amsterdam University has an exciting course in ethnographic video production in full swing (details P. 18). It also seems as if Manchester is set to become a location for much activity in ethnographic film. Granada Television is now producing more programs in their “Disappearing World” series after a number of years of standstill. They have joined forces with the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester to establish a new Centre for Visual Anthropology. The University will begin a MA program in ethnographic film in 1988 (see P. 18 for details).

The International Visual Sociology Association is publishing a strong bi-annual newsletter called The Visual Sociology Review and edited by Doug Harper at the Sociology Department of the State University of New York at Potsdam. The CVA Newsletter which was published by Asen Balikci in Montreal will not be continuing, but the Commission on Visual Anthropology will be publishing a new refereed journal called Visual Anthropology. For further information contact: Asen Balikci, Commission on Visual Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, University of Montreal, PO Box 6128, Station A, Montreal, Quebec, H3C 3J7, Canada.

Over the past year, we have been building the SVA Newsletter into a strong publication which carries articles of general interest as well as news of events in the visual anthropology world. The Newsletter is now published in Spring, Summer and Fall.

Many of you will have received this copy free of charge. We hope that you will complete the membership form provided and become regular subscribers and contributors.

We offer space in our Newsletter to all national and international bodies concerned with visual anthropology, and are pleased to publicize festivals and news. Please address all correspondence to:

The Managing Editor
SVA Newsletter
Department of Anthropology
University of Southern California
Los Angeles CA 90089-0661.
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Thanks also to Mae Horie

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Society for Visual Anthropology/American Anthropological Association

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☐ I wish to enroll as a new member of the AAA and SVA. My check/money order for $55 (☐ $40 if a student) is enclosed.¹

☐ I am currently an AAA member and wish to enroll in SVA too. My check/money order for $20 is enclosed.² I understand that my new SVA membership will expire at the same time as my current AAA membership.

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¹Dues include subscriptions to the Anthropology Newsletter (professional $14, student $8) and the SVA Newsletter ($10).

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