Ethnological and Anthropological Film : Production, Distribution and Consumption

SENRI ETHNOLOGICAL STUDIES 24 1988

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As in the analysis of an economic process, we can divide our present theme into three phases: production, distribution and consumption. Being closely related with each other, I have to say something about the first, although this paper will concentrate on the second and third parts of the process, namely communication to a more or less specialized audience, and use as an instrument for didactic and general educational purposes. The advantages and limits of such films will be compared with other modes of expression.

The production of these particular kinds of film has to be informed by the various debates in anthropological theory, especially the shift away from functionalism and reductionism and towards an acceptance of the density of cultural symbols and the validity of participation by the subjects.

I wish to draw an essential distinction between ethnographic film and anthropological film: the first of which is the visual recording of some aspects of the reality observed by a researcher during fieldwork; something differing from written fieldnotes only by the use of a camera instead of a pen.

An anthropological film, on the other hand, corresponds in some sense to writing a book, which involves use of prior sources, conceptualized formalization and interpretation. The same applies to an anthropological film, both in the filming and editing.

Distribution and consumption are heavily influenced by the type of product. So one can think of the use of ethnographic film mainly as a very useful visual documentation, especially in areas like the study of symbolism, religious and otherwise.

An anthropological film can offer a more elaborate presentation of the same themes, and often uses the same filmed material. It is in a way a second step, involving analysis and interpretation of the raw data. This further elaboration being also formal, one can direct the product to a wider audience of non-specialists. Television channels can be an appropriate system of diffusion of these films, but very special care should be given to avoid cuts, interruptions with commercials, etc., when possible.

Consumption has to be considered mainly in terms of educational purposes. The use of visual materials in teaching anthropology has been limited for several different reasons. First, technical improvements are recent and not always well-known in university milieux. Costs and lack of availability of films add to the problem. A good distribution system could help a lot. One main limitation also comes from the attitude of many anthropologists, who look at visual documentation with little interest, even with suspicion. But although limited, experience in the use of films in courses of anthropology appears highly successful.

INTRODUCTION

In an interview given at the beginning of this decade, Jean Rouch stated [1981] that around the end of the 'Eighties it should finally be possible to organize a kind of policy for visual anthropology on an international plane, by taking advantage of the progress made in the meantime in the related technology. From the long periods he spent in West Africa, Rouch has obviously learned all the techniques of divination, for I think that the symposium organized by the Taniguchi Foundation at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka has precisely that function.

My contribution to this initiative is focused on the use of audiovisual material of anthropological interest in didactics and in mass communications, drawing particularly on our experience in Italy. But I consider a functional and also logical integration with the preceding phases necessary, from the project stage, to the production and diffusion, till the final destination of the filmed material. This integrated observation is not only necessary for analysis of the different parts of a process, but has a practical interest too, in the sense that many problems and obstacles faced by visual anthropology regarding a correct development and a wider diffusion are precisely to be ascribed, I believe, to lack of homogeneity and integration among these different phases.

In economic analysis it is a common procedure to distinguish three phases, namely production, distribution and consumption, at the end of which the cycle is considered complete. We can apply a similar tripartition to visual anthropology, and consider the production, the diffusion and the viewing of filmed material to be part of a single process, even if each one has its own peculiarities and therefore requires specific attitudes and competence from people active in one section or another. That is to say, integration has to be considered at the general level and it is not at all necessary to go so far as to require that every anthropologist or even anyone wanting to make use of visual material have technical skills in filming and editing, as is sometimes suggested. No doubt this kind of knowledge can help in making one's choices and judgements; but, at the same time, a certain autonomy has to be granted, in order to encourage specialization and professional skills.

If we begin, therefore, by asking ourselves about some possible reasons for starting this kind of process, we should examine visual anthropology at the theoretical level and its position within anthropology in general. Being an anthropologist, I am inclined to give precedence to this kind of approach, but it would be equally valid to start from the interest that anthropological theory or a specific ethnographic subject can have for a film-maker and examine how a film is made out of that, and what would be its expressive, communicative and scientific value. It is only a question of points of view.

NEW TRENDS IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

Anthropologists today tend, on one hand, to recognize the value of many

logical and operational tools elaborated in the past decades and their work therefore shows signs of continuity; on the other hand, they try to engage in research with new methods of investigation and in the exploration of previously neglected aspects of social and cultural life.

If we simplify, we can indicate with empiricism and rationalism the two main directions of anthropological analysis that are immediately behind us and in respectively the political, economic and sociological dimension on one hand, and the systems of thought and the domain of representations on the other. In his invitation to "rethink" anthropology, Edmund Leach [1961] has already urged us to go beyond that, and he indicated a procedure in the formulation of generalizations that, using mathematical expressions, would attribute rigour and wider validity to the analysis; in fact, it was an incursion of rationalism into the preserve of British empiricism.

Today, our discipline feels the influence of other epistemological trends. Complexity is a concept that is often used, from physical sciences to the study of society, to represent the world around us, our present level of knowledge of it as well as our approach to it. The adoption of that concept follows, on one hand, a loss of confidence in certain forms of interpretation; on the other, a critique of the implicit reductionism of those previous schematic forms. In anthropology, this means we should abandon certain rigid typologies and elegant classifications, but also shift attention towards other forms of human expression, in thought and in action. The symbolic dimension, in particular, is the domain of complexity: its very subject is irreducible to functionalist approaches as well as to logical pigeon-holing.

It is not only a question of adapting anthropological theory to the latest trends in contemporary epistemology; the life around us itself urges us to take complexity into account as one of the elements of reality, not only from the logical but from the anthropological point of view as well. For a long time—even if some tend to forget it—anthropology has ceased to consider as simple the societies towards which it has devoted its principal attention. Further, it is more and more difficult to isolate certain societies and freeze behaviour and cultural expressions in a fixed time and space; it even becomes difficult for an anthropologist to restrict his attention to a narrow section of reality. At this point, it becomes natural to search for methodologies better able to grasp that complexity, of open and flexible instruments of observation and expression capable of recording, at least in part, a multi-layered reality. Not rigid statistics, limited typologies, low-grade equations, questionnaires, but rather the more complex and comprehensive mathematical devices the use of which has been made handy by computers, and the extensive use of visual recording, made possible and easy by new technologies. These are all innovations brought into the work of the anthropologist to help adapt him to a world of rapid changes, shaken in every corner by cultural contact and sometimes violent clashes.

THE METHODOLOGICAL IMPACT IN VISUAL RECORDING

Visual recording can rapidly seize crucial moments of these phenomena, otherwise often ignored as being remote and of short duration. To suggest but one example, what a lesson of anthropology we have had from John Marshall, when, while staying in South Africa, he sent us in Europe his video (of low technical quality) from which we were informed about what was happening to the Bushmen, who were first reduced to starvation by losing their land and being forbidden to dig wells, and then convinced to get food for themselves and their families through fighting their neighbours at the Namibian border, thus breaking a long tradition of friendship: one of the most cruel and at the same time more instructive examples of present-day colonialism. Here is a visual fieldnote of incalculable value, credit for which goes to the anthropologist who for years has lived with those people and shared their life: but the opportunity for us to see with our eyes and form independent judgments on some facts, and for him to communicate so vividly at a distance at least a part of his experience, of what only he can see there, all that has been made possible by an economical videotape recorder of half-inch gauge.

There are no more "happy islands" where the anthropologist might observe unspoiled ways of life following the slow rhythm of annual cycles. Today we no longer believe that those societies are simple nor that they reproduce ways of life fixed through time. However, reading the monographs of anthropologists of the past, one becomes aware that ethnographic fieldwork has been made possible, and its quality ensured, to an important extent by the limited dimensions of the phenomena taken into account.

If we want to open our research to modern reality and also to face some new theoretical problems, we have to adjust our methods of work and give ourselves suitable instruments, as well as knowledge and sensitivity.

EXTENDED OBSERVATION

Visual anthropology means not only innovation: it represents also the most significant contribution to continuity, in the tradition of anthropological research. What was the point on which the founding fathers of modern anthropology were most insistent?—observation, continuous, long-lasting observation. And what is visual anthropology, were it not the opportunity to extend observation, to make it possible to repeat it, to communicate it in a way that is more directly related to the personal experience of the anthropologist in the field; since, unlike writing, it is based on the same processes of visual perception, to the processes of optical impression, decoding, selection and storage of images on which anthropological field observation itself is based? What did our teachers say to us? Read all the literature on the people, on the problem in which you are interested, listen to what qualified informants say to you, but trust mainly on what you yourselves can see.

Another main point on which anthropology has always insisted, halfway bet-

ween deontology—the study of moral obligation—and research technique, is that of participant observation. On the side of filming, we have a parallel in the *anthropologie partagée*, that has become the flag waved by Jean Rouch. In fact by today it has become a habit, or better a rule to be respected, for many anthropologists and film-makers to show their film and video to their subjects and the group filmed. This is a well-tried way of obtaining further information through their comments and criticism, of clarifying important details of actions with the cultural actors, thus improving comprehension. Stimulating such reactions must be considered an integral part of the fieldwork itself. Through this process we have them participating in what was happening, a cultural contact that allows them in some cases to exercise some kind of control over the research of which they are the subjects, and at the very least provoking curiosity about what a foreigner living with them has seen.

This is the difference between *anthropologie partagée* using a film and the usual participant observation: in the first case, participation goes, or can go, in both directions, *i.e.* also from one who is the object—the so-called "subject"—of a research towards the researcher and his work. This is possible thanks to peculiarities of the audiovisual: we all know how complex is the process of transmission and decoding of reproduced images on a two-dimensional screen, how sophisticated is the communication system, the so-called filmic language, but at the same time we know how immediate and impressive is the effect of seeing our own image, or that of a relative, an acquaintance, in front of us, someone who speaks and moves "naturally"; how much stronger is all that when compared to a written description, and not taking into account the most important thing, the often insurmountable problem of language. There is another aspect connected with this particularly effective form of exchange. Here too, as in the long list of "good intentions" accumulated in the anthropological ethic, the interest is mainly focused on what we could call an "exprimitive", and I will not raise here again the question of the "guilty complexes" that can lie behind that. All I want to say is that the practice of sharing the experience of seeing the film with the subjects should be extended to the cases where a film is made in a cultural area in which the language of reproduced images is known and practised. The reactions will probably be quite different: more than curiosity and amusement, we will possibly face specific criticisms and objections which can put us in an embarrassing situation. But such difficulties are never a good reason to avoid doing something that can be useful in our work.

Innovation is needed (not only technological, but methodological, and in our systems of understanding and communicating), continuity too (in the objects of anthropological research, in the role of the anthropologist and in his ends); but also an opportunity to open new theoretical perspectives in the sciences of man. We have to be careful not to consider the instruments at our disposal as useful and fascinating gadgets, but instead treat visual anthropology in its entirety as a *tekné*, that is an art, with its appropriate technical means, for understanding and interpreting some aspects of the world around us. A careful, intense work from different angles on im-

ages can offer surprising openings to the study and influence of anthropology in general.

THE STUDY OF CULTURAL SYMBOLS

I would like to mention here but one of the points in which this can happen, one indeed of particular significance. Every cultural expression, one might say, manifests itself and takes form through symbols. In anthropology, a growing interest is directed towards the specific analysis of symbolic activity in ritual and other fields, its forms, its rules, and to the study of the significance of symbols in various cultures. For their character of "density", to use an expression of Geertz, of multi-referentiality, cultural symbols are particularly resistent to a reductionist description and interpretation. Often words, and especially written words, are incapable of conveying all the meanings manifested and the messages transmitted from action rich in symbolic content, as for instance a ritual dance. A film or video recording can store once and for all those cultural expressions in all their richness without leaving anything out, at least within the framing and the range of sensitiveness of the film and the microphone.

Such material can offer a contribution of great importance to the development of anthropological theory, making possible in many cases a careful study that is repeatable and open to comparisons in different times and space, and being in many cases the sole documents to come into our hands of cultural "happenings", of unique cultural representations. Let us think, for instance, of the sets of oppositions that are set out in structural studies, some of which have become classic in anthropology. While structuralists impute these oppositions to universal mental schemes, they could be vitiated by a symbolic ethnocentrism: why should certain colours like white and black be opposite, and not others? Our scientific or psychological explanations cannot give us an answer of general validity. Among some contemporary cultures, as in ancient Greece, the definition of colours is tied to non-visual categories, like that of dryness and humidity. And think of the cultural, symbolic aspects tied to the distinction—in a continuous spectrum when seen with the instruments of the physics of light—between Japanese *aoi* and *midori*, English *blue* and *green,* Italian *verde* and ...what? Yes, in Italian we have also *blu*, but then so many dark and especially light blues. One is called *celeste*, from *cielo*, the sky: but, notice, our sky; and then, has the sky a colour?

No, we give the sky a colour by naming it, and this is part of the cultural interest of linguistics. Parallel to this, visual anthropology's concern, in this respect, would be not so much to reproduce the "true" colours—technical improvements are welcome, of course, but we should have a relaxed attitude towards that—but to study cultural representations of the colours, and the symbolic use made of the palette.

In fields like that, visual anthropology can offer a valid contribution to human sciences. Many steps have already been made in this direction. When Boas, because

of technical limitations, filmed an Indian ritual dance that should have taken place under usual circumstances in the presence of certain persons and in the dark of night, by putting the dancer in front of the camera, in daytime and in the open air, it would seem he obtained little more than the dance of a tamed bear. Notwithstanding this, at the same time he showed us a way, little practised but open to many developments in visual anthropology: the study of gestures in their ritual and communicative significance, the searching for a grammar and a syntax of human movements in functional and symbolic terms. The experiments in cinesics (*cinesica*) by Diego Carpitella in certain Italian regions move in that direction and deserve to be continued.

ETHNOGRAPHY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND FILMING

Up to now, I have talked of visual anthropology in general. But I think that the current distinction between ethnography, as the phase of description pure and simple, and anthropology, which represents the subsequent phase, more elaborate, analytical, and theoretical, based on the study and comparison of ethnographic data collected (often by the same person) in the field, could be introduced with some advantage. These two aspects could co-exist in visual anthropology too, each one with its peculiar characteristics and ends, which are relatively autonomous in their process but strictly linked as different faces or phases of a piece of research. Ideally, a good anthropological film should be generated from filmed ethnographic research.

To an anthropologist, all this should sound familiar. When we are in the field, we take notes that often are understandable only to ourselves and that after a long time can become obscure even to us. Many links between facts are committed to our memory, others are lacking because we think they are already well known; on the other hand, there are many repetitions. We are handling raw material, collected as we find it, often in difficult conditions, but with the confidence that we will be able to decipher it. Then when we decide to write a book, a monograph or a theoretical essay, that material is molded. We give order and meaning to the collected data while trying to express clearly our ideas, our deductions, our analysis. Like all writers, we use stylistic devices, rhetorical rules: in some cases, repetition can increase the impact of what we intend to stress, in other cases it can be simply boring to read the same thing over again. We know that no one else, even referring to the same data, would write the same book that we write. What happens, or should happen, is a fusion between subjective and objective elements, two poles which cannot be missing and should be in equilibrium. While this question of subjectivity and objectivity in science certainly cannot be tackled here, it has to be mentioned, because filmed material gives rise to strong reactions in this respect. Some people—reluctantly accepting as inevitable certain subjective aspects, such as choice of the frame—consider reliable only the shots made in long sequences, using just one camera and without moving it. This, of course, might be excellent material, whether to be left

like that or to be edited subsequently. But we should give ourselves the possibility—the freedom—to work in another way, without thinking that different kinds of intervention in the project, in the filming and in the editing, may render the work less "scientific". This will depend on how it is conducted, on the aims one has in mind, and not on how the work looks.

THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION AND SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIVITY

From time immemorial, man has represented what he sees, whether it be nature, animals, or other men. He can do it for different purposes: to express a personal emotion, a sense of sheer pleasure in observing and attempting to represent things in a certain way; for a utilitarian purpose, like drawing up a list of edible and inedible mushrooms; for ritual purposes and to represent an object of cult; even to make a fool of his own and other people's perception with a *trompe l'oeil*. In all these cases, the draftsman is present with his own personality, skill, taste, etc. But the subjectivity rate will be maximum in, say, the first case, and minimum in the second. We also know that there are paintings that transmit to us a high amount of information of "objective" value and iconic taxonomies or scientific drawings that give a high aesthetic pleasure: think alone of the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci.

The aesthetic dimension, in particular, cannot be considered a factor of interference in a representation, but on the contrary has to be taken as an effective form of communication. In many cases, moreover, it is unconsciously present both with the author and with the viewer: think of some documentaries in black and white, of scientific severity, with few changes of the framing, lights and shadows highly contrasted, and how they remind us of German expressionism in the figurative arts. The opposite case arises too: we can find elements of high historic and ethnographic value which are present for a mainly aesthetic purpose in films like those of Italian Neo-Realism.

But, contrary to what happens when we write a book, we cannot create the "effects" by ourselves while sitting at a desk. Filming is a complex process, not only technically, but mainly because many people—and their personalities—are involved and because of the relative separation of the different phases of production. Every person, every role has his own needs, his own point of view. And as was said about writing, about the different books that can be written from the same data, we know that in editing we might make a dozen different films from the same original filmed material. Faced with that complex situation, we have to be clearly aware of the aims, the goals, what we intend to do, in order to decide how to do it. The anthropologist (or indeed that part of an anthropologist that lies in every film-maker engaged in this sort of film) has to put into that activity his competence, his knowledge of the facts and his skill in interpreting them, and his professional ethic: this, the ethic, and not whether to interrupt a sequence-shot with a close-up, is the guarantee of the scientific "objectivity" of an anthropological film. The director (*qua* visual anthropologist) should try to make the most appropriate and correct use

of the language of images, to dominate and not be dominated by its specificity.

Toward this end, different paths are possible and all may be profitably explored, depending on the situation. There is not a single, better way, because the choices depend in part on external circumstances that we find and in part on personal ideas and tastes, in the sense that a more or less narrative rhythm or a particularly sharp focus derive also from a formal choice.

ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND FILM-MAKERS

One question with different yet equally valid answers, for instance, is whether the roles of anthropologist and director are best conjoined in a single person. There are a few famous examples of this, but I don't think we should require it of the others, nor even recommend it as the ideal. The choice should be left open, depending not only on personal skills but also on the kind of organization required by circumstances, by the production and destination of the filmed material.

What should be clear, is that the interest and the perspective of the author or authors have all to be directed outward, to the object of documentation, and not inward, to his or their own personal emotions and feelings which may arise from the object in front of the camera. Once this fundamental methodological rule is stated, the choice among different and equally possible techniques of production remains open. Personally, I have experimented, under different conditions and with different goals, by filming almost entirely alone—handling photography, sound and lights—or directing a professional troupe, or in collaboration with a director. In this last case, the fact that the two "souls" of visual anthropology—scientific research and cinematography—are represented by two different persons, can sometimes have the advantage of stimulating a debate internal to the work, in response to the common end of "representing" the object to be filmed.

A frequent opportunity for a radical argument against any filming in the field comes from the concern that it could represent a serious disturbance in the social environment. In fact, this is nothing but an extension of what some people say about the very presence of the anthropologist alone, about interference in the original social and cultural equilibrium which may, on one hand, disturb that reality and, on the other, pollute, so to say, data collected during the research.

From that perspective, there is no doubt that if one films the degree of interference is much higher, because of human and technical factors. First, there are usually more than one person involved and they tend to form an autonomous group who communicate between themselves things that are incomprehensible to the outsiders; this is different from what happens when the anthropologist alone tries to communicate through speech with the people he is studying. Secondly, there are technical needs, such as illuminating a scene or putting microphones somewhere. There are also secondary consequences of the filming activity which may have serious effects on some. In some isolated Alpine villages, after a group went filming some ethnographic documentaries there, certain young people who "acted" before

the camera thought they had been chosen to become actors, and since then they felt a certain distance from their own culture as they awaited the opportunity to become film stars. One should add that in this case, some people were indeed used as actors, insofar as they were asked to follow the instructions of the director—something to be avoided generally in visual anthropology. While it is necessary to insist on the need for a professional ethic of cultural and psychological respect in the environment where one works, I think that one has to refrain from having a puritanical attitude whereby certain cultures or subcultures are considered as having been in their original "pure" state until we—the anthropologist, the visual anthropologist, Western civilization itself—have come along to disrupt a perfect but fragile order. No doubt good intentions of cultural preservation can mask a paternalistic attitude. With a more open perspective, we can grant to others the right to participate actively in what we are doing in and on their culture; this is something of interest to them also, and offers the possibility of their benefitting from the results.

The spreading of visual communication is part of cultural change shared by contemporary societies, and to "preserve" from it certain populations can mean cutting them off from a system of communication that could possibly have positive effects for their cultures too. This is the attitude that has been adopted, if I have understood aright, by some Australian film directors working with communities of aborigines, who have asked the former to film actions of particular cultural "density"—painted and carved decorations, funeral rites, etc.—in order to store for posterity some formal expressions and their techniques, gestures, sounds and oral formulas. Filming, in these cases, fills a mnemotechnic function of great usefulness that certainly does not go against, but rather favours, the preservation of traditional cultural values and fills the gap caused by lack of a local system of writing. In Kim MCKENZIE's *Waiting for Harry*, for example, that function is very explicit. The efficacy of visual recording is not minor when applied in cultures that have and use a system of writing, because it supplies data and communicates them utilizing different logical cognitive processes and not just different techniques of communication. Every system of writing, phonetic or ideographic, is the expression of a process of abstraction from the experiences derived from the perceived phenomena and of rationalization of these phenomena to insert them into a communicative, graphic, grammatical and syntactical order derived from a specific cultural agreement, namely a language.

Visual communication, on the other hand, can be said to utilize not a culturally specific rational logic but a logic of analogy, a culturally open analogical link between the represented object and what it represents: a process closer to the original one of the ideogram, except that in this latter case it has assumed such a conventional character to transfer the focus of communication from the analogical "contact" with the object to a process of mental abstraction.

The utilization of these channels of expression and communication as alternatives to writing, with its own rules, can contribute to interaction among cultures, the importance of which is difficult to evaluate. Not only is it possible to transfer in-

formation and knowledge "openly", without the need for a linguistic translation and with great communicative efficacy. One can also foresee an opening up from the narrowness and rigidity of a culturally specific way of rationally ordering our experiences that is inevitably encrusted in the corresponding language. It is difficult to evaluate, again, how much understanding we can get from visual perception alone; but, at least in principle, we think it can be enriching in the ethnographic phase and stimulating in that of anthropological analysis, when one is working in cultural areas that have elaborated during their history a logical and ideological way of thinking different from our own. Think, for instance, of religion and of the embarrassment derived from the neccessity to define linguistically (thus conceptually pigeon-holing) representations of spiritual entities elaborated in different cultural contexts: an embarrassment that has been with anthropology since the time when the Latin term *anima* was used to define as "animistic" many so-called primitive forms of religion.

With theoretical legitimations of this kind, visual anthropology must be in the position to develop itself, by refining its expressive instruments on the level of pure description but also of "thick description", as Geertz puts it [GEERTZ 1974] or of cultural analysis, and thus enlarging its scope.

It is commonly said that we live in a civilization of images: in fact, this expression refers to "reproduced images": photographic reproductions, cinematographic and television transmissions. Their diffusion—a fact that is evident especially in economically developed societies—has gone along with the ability to "read" them, to acquire information and knowledge through them. There are negative aspects also: many pedagogues, in particular, have complained that children get used to storing information with images separately, without connecting them together logically and without a critical elaboration, thus taking everything as it comes. This happens through the habit of switching on the television set and finding programmes at random, changing continuously from one to another. To this kind of dissociated acquisition of information through images, the modes of transmission of the images became adapted: to use linguistic terms, there would be a much wider use of co-ordinates (and-and) than of subordinates (then, so that), and the development of the discourse would take predominantly a repetitive and cyclic course, logically horizontal and not consequential: an example would be the *telenovelas* or "soap operas". The use of writing and of mathematical signs, on the contrary, would lead to a logical development of arguments, and would require more precision and capacity of abstraction, thus leading to the development of fantasy: one would have, for example, to recreate in his own mind the image—a landscape—described in a novel. I think there must be something true in all that, but in general we are dealing here with an example of the eternal problem that every innovation goes together with some change, and that every change goes together with some reaction against it.

A more positive attitude can be that of trying to understand how to make the best use of the potentialities offered by that innovation. First of all, it is important

not to regard the use of the images as an alternative to writing, mathematical signs or other graphic signs which possess their own inimitable precision and economy of communication; not to mention the graphic signs associated with the systems of logic used by computers. From their side, images primarily offer, thanks to their extended diffusion, an opportunity to overcome many ideological, cultural, linguistic and class barriers.

As for their modality of communication, anthropological and ethnographic films, like any scientific documentary, require an attention and often an effort at comprehension and interpretation that should reassure even the strictest pedagogue. It is true, however, that the modes of communication are those peculiar to filmic language. Throughout its history, cinema has developed special relationships with other modes of expression: in fiction, it has privileged narration, has focused its attention on characters, and has assigned a central role to dialogues, thus getting closer to literature and theatre than to the figurative arts; in documentary, it has often adopted the structure and the style of the essay and the monograph. Thus, a "case" is presented in various aspects, along a syntagmatic chain, with little or no use of the opportunity given by the medium to use paradigmatic associations; the single elements of the chain, the scenes, are linked by the logical development of the comment, usually a voice-over, which assures the orderly sequence of shots by giving them the meaning decided on by the author; an author who, following long established tradition, generally remains obscure. The voice, due to a hardly noticed formalism, is not that of the one who has written the text; nor is it always clear who has (or have) written the text, and in any case little importance is given to that. Whoever it was, he gives to the spectator the interpretation of what is shown: but his tone is detached, "objective"; the use of the "ethnographic present" is obligatory, and there is the over-all ambiguity whether the narrator was there at that moment or simply saw the film before we did. In this mood, in recent decades there has been a tendency in Italy to assign a literary status to the comment read, and so writers and poets were asked to contribute to ethnographic films. There are documentaries whose scientific consultant was Ernesto de Martino, filmed according to his ethnographic notes, but which instead of using his commentary directly have texts by the Nobel Prize-winner Salvatore QUASIMODO (*La Taranta*) and Pier Paolo PASOLINI (*Stendalí*). Lyric or "scientific", such commentaries have been so widely used that, when lacking, many people have felt something was missing. Some people, for instance, have discussed whether Robert GARDNER's *Forest of Bliss* could be considered an anthropological film, because the subject—death—was present in the images, even in its proper sounds and voices, yet not in the words of the commentary. On the other hand, there can be long commentaries by different people, each talking "inside" the film on something that concerns himself, giving the insider's point of view. This is what happens, for instance, in *The Saint*, but the first time it was screened, in the same city where it was filmed, for people who were familiar with the persons and the facts, many still felt that a voice was lacking, to guide, comment and give a precise "point of view". Behind that detached tone, this

is exactly what commentaries usually do: they superimpose an interpretation on the documentation given by images and sound. The two levels hardly match, nor can they have an autonomy, as one goes along with the other. The result is usually a didactic tone that inhibits the active participation of the spectator.

In his study of ritual symbols, Victor Turner [1977] identified three classes of data: external forms, indigenous interpretations and contexts of meaning, mostly elaborated by the anthropologist. While ethnographic films usually explore the first two levels, I think that the third one can also be reached in an anthropological film; but it should try to reach this end in a more elaborate way than simply putting in a voice-over with a "contextual" interpretation. Another usual addition to the soundtrack is music that has nothing to do with what was filmed. As it is believed necessary to fill a conceptual void with the guide of a commentary, in the same way one wants to fill a silence (or near-silence) conceived as a sound void. In large part, we know, this is a heritage of the years when there were no synchronized cameras and often the sound was lacking or difficult to match to the images. In fact, even now one of the most frequent problems is with the sound, if we have no specialist with us; but why ask musicians to solve our problems? Our main concern should be to have open ears as well as open eyes for what is around us.

We all know that technical problems often limit our activity: we are sometimes suddenly made aware of this, when we have to stop filming because there is insufficient light, we have run out of film or have to recharge the batteries. All this is especially a problem for an anthropologist, who often works in places where there is no film to buy, or where the batteries get discharged rapidly because of humidity; and the equipment is often too heavy to carry on one's shoulders. If we think of the limitless possibility of storage of visual and sound perceptions in our brain, the technical limitations of cameras are really big. And to these limits we have to add those concerning human problems of filming in certain situations, of putting our lenses in front of people; but much has been written and said on that. I would rather mention the opposing fact that technical opportunities have increased production so much that this is beginning to represent a new kind of problem. Let us put aside the question of quality, which comes afterwards with critical examination of the material. It is a fact that the relatively low cost of video-cassettes and technical improvements make the use of cameras easier, and this along with other factors such as novelty has contributed to the growth of video recording. With no worry about costly film, the shots in video tend to be longer and more numerous. Other technical aspects of editing have the consequence of less cuts being made. Without now going into technical details, it is enough to draw attention to the possible consequences. It would be useless to discuss whether these new opportunities and peculiarities are good or bad, but we should probably try to put some order in that matter before we are submerged by too much material and have no possibility of using it. After all, this is what has happened to written communication following the invention of printing with movable type. To the theoretically unlimited diffusion of every text there came to be opposed the dynamics of demand and supply and a market was created,

not only in the economic sense but also in the symbolic one, a market of ideas and meanings transmitted through that medium: publishers, editors and critics selected the literary production.

In the case of visual anthropology too, distribution and consumption should be adequate to the production and in their turn organize—from below, we might suggest—projects and production. It is not a question, of course, of conditioning the scientific and creative activity by adjusting it to supposed "laws" of the marketplace, but on the contrary of making their life easier, directing the products towards appropriate diffusion channels. In some cases, the question is how to establish adequate relationships with the system in charge of diffusion; in others, how to find or build up appropriate specialized autonomous distribution systems.

Productions that have as target a wide non-specialized public reached through television channels sometimes make use of anthropological material published in books as if this were a script to be adapted to the needs of the medium. Sometimes an anthropologist is directly involved: when this happens in Italy, he takes the form of a "scientific consultant". Under this rubric, different roles can be intended, from writing the text after the film has already been made by someone else, or simply correcting it, to a direct participation in the project, in its filming and editing. In fact, the meaning of this term, officially adopted by the Italian State television (RAI), has to be interpreted as a way to conciliate on one side the bureaucratic and unionist views of the television producer, making it possible for the administration to hire someone temporarily from outside the union of film directors and writers because of his unique competence, and on the other side the aristocratic and autonomist attitudes of the university, which depends directly on the State administration and does not allow faculty members to take part in outside activities. In this situation, the scientific interest of the "consultant" often cannot be fulfilled, unless he lets himself be confined to the minor role of controlling the terminological accuracy of the speaker. On the other hand, the academic habit of caring more about words than images has made most "consultants" satisfied with a minor role. Even de Martino, who is rightly considered the author of a series of ethnographic films produced by the Italian State television on Southern Italy, used to limit his personal participation in the visual part to holding meetings with the director and his team, and he never thought of his duties or personal interests as including the editing; nonetheless, his contribution became most important. Now we should think of developing other forms of joint activity in anthropology and cinematography.

The first obstacle to be overcome in Italy is that, as I have said, an anthropologist working full-time in the university cannot be the director of a film produced by an external agency, whether State television or someone else. A solution would be for the university to produce its own films and video. This is usually done in other disciplines, such as filming surgical operations or experiments in a laboratory, for example: but for anthropology there are problems, financial and otherwise. Apart from the higher costs of going out into the field, often far away, there are rules that forbid taking equipment out of the university; and further pro-

blems, like insurance, etc. But this is not all: the administration cannot pay people outside the university, and it is not easy to find the necessary technicians within its staff. Finally, universities are not organized for distribution and a film, when made, would risk remaining locked away in some Institute. On the other hand, many universities do have efficient structures that can be utilized for post-production, and can supply the necessary documentation for a project as well as the scientific competence of its anthropologists and researchers. On this ground it was possible recently to sign an agreement between the University of Padua and the Venetian branch of the State television (RAI) for the co-production of anthropological films. As for distribution, the university has complete autonomy for educational and scientific circulation in showing its film copy and circulating a limited number of video-cassettes. The RAI has the television rights, at home and abroad. This agreement should ensure, on the one hand, the complete scientific control at every stage to the authors, and on the other hand give all the technical and financial help necessary even for complex and costly projects unaffordable by the university alone, and offer the opportunity of wide diffusion to a large public of an authentic scientific product.

We hope that this will work: up to now, all the initiatives have been taken by the university, and there has been no opportunity to check the response of the public. To be frank, there does not seem to be strong interest, in Italy at least, in production and diffusion of anthropological films from public and even less from private networks. Except for the isolated case, only foreign, translated films are shown occasionally, and mostly in hours of low audience, without definite criteria of selection; one suspects they are an alternative to the usual naturalistic documentary on the life of insects or fish. This should concern us, if we care for the wider diffusion of visual anthropology. We should try to capture the interest of the people in charge of programming; but we should also be critical of what is on the market.

THE ZOO OF IMAGES

The majority of films circulating in the mass-media markets, and often produced inside them, are in fact, conceptually and stylistically, much like the nature documentaries. Populations with an exotic appearance are shown and the attention is drawn to the curiosity of looks, habits, rituals, with a detached and yet sympathetic, almost surprised attitude towards their ingeniousness, as is done when they show how beavers build dams. This superficial approach flattens out the cultural diversities, and so half-naked people who live by hunting and gathering end up looking all alike, as do the individuals in the anonymous crowds of our cities. The result is boring. To keep attention alive, it is sometimes suggested that the camera has "captured" the last images of some archaic culture. With this approach, visual anthropology risks becoming an archive of frozen cultural diversities, neglecting the multiple forms of cultural dynamics. The approach is fundamentally pessimistic and often depressing, a somewhat intellectualistic attitude of the

Western traveller that reminds us of when the young Lévi-Strauss was talking about the *fin de voyages* even before reaching South America [LÉVI-STRAUSS 1955]. This approach is usually rejected by the average spectator. The idea is to put tribal and traditional people into the cages of a "zoo of images", to be always available and ready to be shown. So a series might be made in which one day the Karimojong are shown, the next day the Papuans, then the Pygmies, and so on. One can appreciate the quality of the images and the amount of information, case by case, the more so if one already knows these cultures. But, from the point of view of the average spectator, a series of this kind does nothing but promote the image of anthropologists as "butterfly hunters". To create interest—and therefore make the index of audience grow—a good solution is certainly not that of having sensational and violent scenes, as sometimes happens: the worst example of this kind came from Italy with the documentaries by JACOPETTI like *Mondo Cane* where the most violent scenes were artificially created for the purpose of shocking the audience, in clear violation of all the "rules" of ethnographic filming.

The "zoo of images" effect should be avoided by making programmes for the mass media that are clearly labelled as being "cultural", structured around themes and ideas, and perhaps having a problematic approach towards the diversity of cases shown, rather than an episodic or classificatory one. There should always be a scientific expert in charge of the production, to control texts and their translation, avoid unwanted cuts or ungainly interruptions with commercials, etc. The consequences of the requirements in terms of duration should not represent a serious problem: one could even discuss whether this is more a limitation or an advantage. Undoubtedly there is a "feedback" effect, and many authors think now in terms of half an hour when something is intended to be shown on television.

When considering the various aspects of diffusion, one has to think also of the circulation of video-cassettes. From my European experience, I have the impression that the situation is lacking rules and is left open to individual initiative. What the advantages and the disadvantages are of such a situation is something that could be investigated. What I feel is happening, in practice, is that not only private individuals but institutions private and public record television programmes and make copies of original video-cassettes for collective use, even if restricted to groups, classes, etc., and these copies are then lent or hired out. There should here be a question of copyright, not only in its economic aspects, but for protection of the work from unauthorized and uncontrolled translations, cuts, and so on. Think of how everything is scrupulously protected in the case of the written word. These improvised visual archives, probably illegal in some states, obviously represent a data bank of very easy reference for whoever intends to use images as a way of communication, for research and didactic purposes. Is it necessary to organize, regulate, order and promote that circulation? Is it possible to do so? The matter should be studied at the international level in its legal, technical and economic aspects. From the scientific and didactic point of view, which concerns us most, there is no doubt that it would be of general interest to authors and consumers to

widen that kind of communication as much as possible; and that at the same time there should be the maximum guarantee to preserve works in their original forms. Uncontrolled individual reproduction probably cannot be avoided, nor do I think we should worry about that. What could be possible is a sort of international pool with the common purpose of preserving and promoting the circulation of anthropological film and video through television channels, or through a more restricted diffusion for study and research, thus guaranteeing originality and quality.

The problem of preservation should be one of our major concerns. In Italy we have one of the oldest and most important film archives, the Istituto Luce, a precious source of documentation; numerous other countries have such archives. As far as anthropology is concerned, a film and video archive could be instituted, using modern technical devices such as the videodisc. The home of the Senri Ethnological Studies, the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan, would perhaps be the ideal promoter of that initiative. Videodisc copies could be made and circulated, with translations of the texts in several languages, an information network established, with a catalogue, information about the main institutions in various countries involved in activities of visual anthropology, experiences exchanged, teaching through images encouraged, and so on. This might well have a strong impact on universities, museums and cultural institutions prompting them to include more visual anthropology in their activities.

VISUAL TEACHING: ITS APPEALS AND OBSTACLES

Although limited, my personal experience in using visual anthropology in teaching has been very encouraging. In recent years, during the general course of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Padua, films and videotapes of anthropological interest have been shown. Usually one hour is dedicated to these screenings and the following hour to comment and discussion. The didactic purpose of these cycles is of a general and introductory character, dealing with some leading themes that are part of the course, and wide use is made of comparisons among different cases. An example might be the sex-based division of labour in different cultures.

Besides that, during more advanced seminars, ethnographic material is shown from films and videos, to introduce cases for discussion, and stimulate commentaries. A recent example of this was trance and possession filmed under varying circumstances, within a general discussion on altered states of consciousness. When possible the author of the film is invited to attend, as well as experts with specific knowledge on the topic. In a more restricted field, we find here the distinction I made earlier between anthropological film, of more general interest, and ethnographic film, which can be simply a "visual fieldnote", part of ongoing research that is shown and discussed in a restricted group.

An even more restricted and specific use of visual material is during the preparatory phase before going to the field: films may be screened to give some infor-

mation about the area of interest or to see comparable experiences, to learn some techniques, like interviewing, or even as a complement to a bibliographic study. Finally, video recordings can be part of the material presented in the discussion of a thesis required for graduation. A student, for instance, is now preparing her thesis on a linguistic minority of German origin in Northeastern Italy, making extensive use of VHS recordings to show how this second language is taught outside the Italian-based school system, and to indicate clearly the correspondence between certain terms in that fading archaic dialect and the objects and activities they refer to.

The Centre for Scientific Film and Video at the University of Padua offers the chance to see films and tapes individually or in groups of up to 40–50 students. For didactic purposes, videotapes offer many advantages, like the freeze-frame and going rapidly forward or backward. Subtitles too can easily be added to videos for translation, at the University Centre. One main limitation, on the other hand, comes from the opportunities to obtain material for temporary use or to put into the video archive. There are numerous centres equipped for the production and didactic use of audiovisuals in Italian universities, like the CTU in Milan, but very few are associated with teaching and research in anthropology and therefore are active in that field.

Outside the universities, the most important institution in the field of visual anthropology is the Festival dei Popoli held in Florence, where, besides an annual review of the most relevant international production, there is a film library that lends the films in its archive to schools and other institutions. Sending films has certain bureaucratic and economic disadvantages when compared to video-cassettes, so the films will be transferred to tapes for convenience. Bureaucratic problems become much bigger when having films sent from abroad: unlike the tapes, films have to pass under customs control, and that represents a considerable complication and waste of time. This is one of the reasons, besides difficulties of various kinds (insurance, etc.) hindering the use of material from different institutions throughout Europe, like the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, which has a rich and very interesting catalogue of recent and "historical" films [WOODBURN 1982]. The ease of circulation is the first vital point in the development of audiovisual techniques in the teaching of anthropology.

As for the rewards in teaching and the response from students, the experience seems to be very positive for all concerned. Discussion following immediately after the showing makes it possible to check the degree of comprehension and to have an idea of the amount of information received. Interest or at least curiosity appear to be definitely greater than after a traditional lecture, the involvement is immediate and the questions raised cover a wide range of aspects. For the teacher then the problem may be to direct the attention of the class towards some specific points. Some people may joke about the delights of "going to the cinema" instead of listening to a lecture without music, colours and dances. But, apart from ironical comment of this sort, there is a growing recognition from teachers that the recent generations are more and more inclined to follow the language of reproduced images and

are accustomed to catch the complexity of references and the quantity of messages, whereas in the perspective of traditional teaching a visual exposition of an argument appears to be lacking in conceptual terms.

This could be one of the most persuasive arguments for teaching with audiovisuals; the fact that reality is shown in its natural disorder, as it appears to the eyes of the observer, before the subsequent analysis from the author in a study on that reality. The opportunity is therefore given to have an over-all view and at the same time the viewer is stimulated to pick up some focuses immediately, to single out some connections. We know that in fact filming is the product of personal choices and the result of an often complex process both conceptually and technically. But the way writing proceeds is incomparably more linear, so that the world appears to be "put in order": descriptions come one after the other, without ever overlapping, then come the commentaries, comparisons, hypotheses, and quietly we proceed to their testing. The reality is recomposed following our own will, after our own order; we classify, we build sequences, we impose our own space and time. In the words of a lecture, like those in a book, everything seems to be at its right place, because there has been someone before us listeners or readers who has established that order, according to his intent and capacities. This can induce the student to believe that that kind of order exists in reality, and therefore leads him to an excess of rationalization, and to think it easier and safer to approach the world after someone else has put it in order and explained it, thereby evading the risk of the unknown. The activities of observation and independent analysis are thus frustrated. All this, I think, can be particularly appropriate in the case of anthropology. Visual anthropology gives one the opportunity to bring within the walls of a classroom a bit of experience from the field, and with a double advantage: first, to let the students participate in what the researcher has seen and lived, even though not simultaneously; and second, to display the work of the anthropologist, following the development of on-going research. Here too, of course, time and space are artificial, man-made. But one gets the impression that the world is less ordered, less reduced to control.

Another set of problems concerns a possible later phase in the teaching of visual anthropology, that of direct participation in the filming itself. The facts that this has become increasingly easy and affordable through the use of video recorders and the broad diffusion of visual communication in our societies are elements that encourage untrained anthropologists and students alike to experiment with filming. I think one has to distinguish between the use of these new technical devices for recording, which one can take advantage of whenever possible, and the often unjustified claim to be playing the film-maker. Students who want to graduate in anthropology often spend short periods on fieldwork, usually not far from home. There they engage themselves in the task of understanding and describing the community life of groups that have some peculiarities, due to local traditions, ecological constraints or recent events that introduce changes in their habits, such as the shift from herding to other activities. In a short time, the students have to face many prob-

lems, of which I will name here but a couple, say language and the material culture. What does something mean? What was an object made for, who uses it and when? There are such problems of understanding and of communication: how exactly should one report these things to the teacher or supervisor, who usually cannot come to the field? And how can he understand and give suggestions? In these cases, the use of a simple videotape recorder has proved helpful, supplying more information than fieldnotes and a tape-recorder, and the collaboration of student and teacher has improved. For instance, one can see a person showing an object, naming it, and showing its use, or perhaps describing it also with gestures and a certain mimicking of an activity. Material of this type is suited also for another didactic use, to illustrate for other future researchers what to do and what not to do when in the field. In that case too, the widening of these opportunities to different situations, in other environments and social groups, which could be made possible with an exchange among the universities of different countries, would represent an interesting expansion of the didactic potential of visual anthropology.

But we should not deceive ourselves that, despite the stimulating opportunities for development, visual anthropology does not face limitations and obstacles, most particularly in academic milieux. There is still a broad suspicion among anthropologists concerning filmed material, a resistance to considering it a valid scientific form of documentation. The most superficial tone of these critical remarks is ironical and can be summarized in the charge directed at visual anthropologists that they try to escape the obscure armchair work to transform themselves into Fellinis or, to be more generous, into the followers of Flaherty. In a more serious vein, the question turns to the credibility, the reliability of what is shown. It is the old question of reconstruction or at the worst of faking. In fact, there was a long tradition of "fake ethnology" before the appearance of films, beginning with the reports of many early European travellers. It is somewhat naive to think that film ethnographies were like a magic lantern creating illusions through its evanescent images which became animated on a screen and then disappeared: where is the proof that what we saw was true? We should know by now that images do not dissolve in the air, that they have their own strong presence in this world. We are the heirs to a long tradition that gives pre-eminence to written words. But we all know that a writer can attempt to make his book more attractive by adding images, whether true, half-true, or not true at all. We can admit that the demands of film production can often push us to reconstruct what happened when the camera was not there. But think of the value of Ian DUNLOP's *Desert People*, which is a reconstruction, as is explicitly written at the beginning of the film (a film that I regularly show to students). Here again, we come to the question of professional ethics: it is on this point that the maximum guarantees have to be given, with one's personal assurance or with the control of scientific institutions, to overcome academic prejudices, in order to assure to ethnographic and anthropological film the scientific status it deserves, together with the widest diffusion.

There are, however, some dangers that have to be carefully taken into account,

especially if one wants to expand the dissemination of anthropological films to a wider audience and thus make use of the mass media, of television. Lacking an integrated system of communication, written and/or oral and visual, the images can run the risk of floating in a conceptual void, lacking contextualization both in terms of cultural meaning and in terms of space/time co-ordinates. Here it is not simply the problem of isolating the images within the frame from others that are left aside, something to be ascribed partly to technical limitations and partly to human decisions; what I am referring to here is something close to the experience often felt by an anthropologist when, back from the field, he reads the fieldnotes in order to write a monograph. Many of the facts recalled in the notes lack the density and colours of the facts they are describing, and therefore carry only part of the meanings they were supposed to store, now they are being read under different space and time co-ordinates.

The human mind has a much longer training in changes through time than through space: myths and histories of the ancestors have been recalled by men since the most remote past and brought to life in the present; the frequency with which men and images travel throughout the world is, on the contrary, a recent phenomenon, and the human mind is less trained for that exercise. If it is easy to move the images from here to there, it may not prove to be so easy to grasp the reality they represent, once out of their ecological and cultural niches.

Another danger may be that of superficiality *stricto sensu*, arising from the emphasis given to external signs in a complex cultural system of communication. In our world, people of different societies tend to look more and more similar; but wearing blue jeans or drinking the same soft drinks does not necessarily mean people share the same cultural values.

Yet these can become obstacles to a proper understanding only if there is not sufficient training of our culture-bound visual perception. The use—the consumption—of visual images is also something that has to be learned.

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