

Ethnographic Filming and the Development of Anthropological Theory

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Ethnographic Filming and the Development of Anthropological Theory

PAUL HOCKINGS

University of Illinois at Chicago

This paper will explore the ways in which ethnographic filming can be used to supplement and complement anthropological teaching and research; *i.e.* its limitations and potential role in (a) undergraduate teaching; (b) archiving cultural data; (c) design of research projects; (d) bringing anthropology more into public attention.

Anthropologists, students and professionals alike, have difficulties in comprehending ethnographic films because of our greater familiarity with films made for entertainment; what are commonly called feature films.

We can in fact distinguish between the two forms of the film in terms of how we evaluate them. We could define feature films as films that we judge by reference to other films we have seen, perhaps plays too. In contrast, ethnographic films are films we judge by reference to other cultures we know. Thus our base-lines differ in evaluating the two. Our understanding of consistency in the two also differs. In feature films, this consistency comes, we know, from an eternal triangle of actor, script and direction. Each has to "be true to" the others. In ethnographic film the internal consistency we look for is a patterning of cultural and behavioural features seen within the film, that consistency being modelled on our knowledge of the consistency in the patterning of other cultures, including our own or one we have studied closely somewhere. There is an analogue here: it is social role: actor/patterns of behaviour: script/environmental constraints: direction. Colin Young has made the point that many of the earlier documentaries were made to be monumental, through the acting, directing, and choice of setting; but goes on to say that recently, "Instead of films being *arguments* for a point of view they become *demonstrations*." Clearly he is thinking of the post-1965 ethnographic film. In this paper we have to discover why the films made since that date have still failed to win acceptance with many professional anthropologists, and it is suggested that while anthropology is deductive and empirical, film-making is phenomenological.

It is now over ninety years since the first anthropological film—on Berber pottery-making, one of the very first films of any sort—was shot by Félix Regnault at a Colonial Exposition in Paris [DE BRIGARD 1975: 15]. Since that time the "natives" have modernized themselves, the filming technology has improved beyond recognition, and the discipline of anthropology has built up a complex of theoretical con-

structs and empirical observations that were simply undreamt of ninety years ago. And yet...?

And yet visual anthropology, hardly a distinct discipline even today, has by no means benefitted from these developments. It is still not widely taught in Anthropology Departments, and I relate that to the fact that it is not yet firmly embedded in the theoretical history of the discipline; for, as Margaret Mead observed a decade ago [1975], we still find ourselves "in a discipline of words". It goes without saying that a great majority of anthropologists in 1988 can still achieve all of their professional goals without the use of photography, and certainly feel no need for a subdiscipline called Visual Anthropology. The papers in this collection clearly document the need and the growth of that subdiscipline, in Japan as in many other countries. What the present paper seeks to do is to relate visual anthropology to the theory and methods of cultural anthropology, so as to show whether that growth can indeed contribute to the general development of anthropological theory.

There are clearly some areas, explored in more detail by other contributors to this volume, where ethnographic filming can make a direct and unique supplement to other forms of anthropological endeavour: it has a distinct role to play in (a) undergraduate teaching; (b) archiving cultural material; (c) design and presentation of research projects; (d) exploratory fieldwork; (e) bringing anthropology more to the attention of the public. These activities, as the Figure 1 suggests, are by no means unrelated to each other. If we take a long-term view of the research and education process, then so far as anthropology is concerned in it filming can have an important role to play here.

Thus we can all feel confident that the films and videotapes we and our colleagues have prepared all over the world, if properly archived, will become a valuable part of the cultural heritage for future generations. Alan Lomax has written eloquently [1975: 303-305] of the need to record cultural diversity before it is overcome by a militant modernity with "Standardisation" as its dreary watchword.

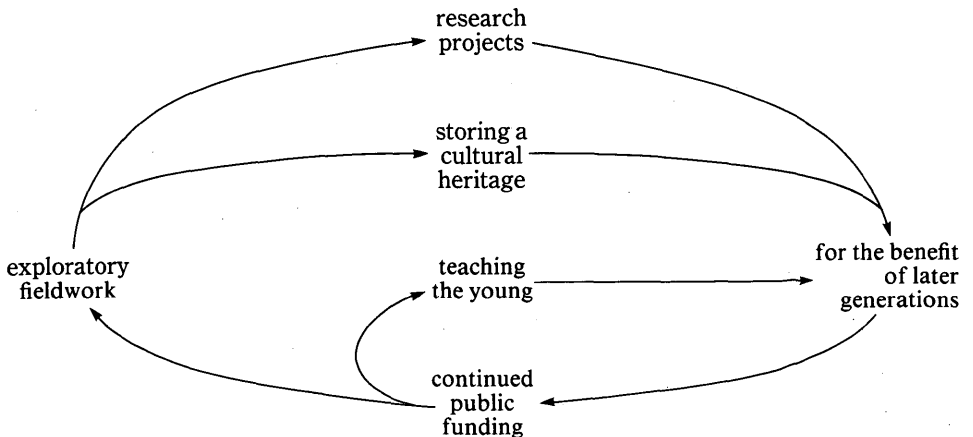


Fig.1. Relations between Funding and Research

From the now-frequent anthropological films to be seen on television in several countries it might appear that the promise of visual anthropology has been fulfilled. That judgment, I fear, is premature. A few anthropologists, as directors or consultants (I use the word loosely), are managing to present to a wide and diverse viewing public at least some sense of the cultural variability that still enriches the world today. That is certainly a positive achievement, one in which Japan, Australia, Britain, France and Canada in particular, as well as the United States, can take just pride. But why has this genuine achievement shown so little impact on the discipline of anthropology?—that is the question that I have set out to answer.

One part of the answer has long been that “anthropological” filming was out of the hands of the anthropologists. It is true that four of the major figures in early anthropology got some sort of cine coverage of cultures they otherwise made famous through their writings: these were Sir Arthur Haddon, Sir Baldwin Spencer, Alfred L. Kroeber, and Franz Boas. In each instance, however, their film is now inaccessible or destroyed, and because it was hidden in museum basements it at no time had any perceptible influence on either the teaching or the theoretical development of anthropology.

During the first forty years of cinema and the silent era of anthropological film, roughly 1895-1935, for every amateurish attempt that a field researcher made to record some situation with a cine camera there was another, much more successful, much more memorable and promising attempt to produce a real film in a primitive setting—and this was done by people like Flaherty and Cooper and Schoedsack who had no training, perhaps no interest even, in the science of anthropology. They were explorers; and we are not ungrateful to them.

Fortunately for social science the situation was to change during the ensuing period, roughly 1935-1965, a period that was to be dominated by the figures of Margaret Mead in America and Jean Rouch in France. It has been said that Mead, working with Gregory Bateson as cameraman, shot more film for a single research project than the entire output of all anthropological film during the preceding period 1895-1935. Jean Rouch, who began his work just after the Second World War, has put together a massive collection of about 110 films, most dealing with African cultures and all of a highly professional quality—quality that had never before been seen from an anthropologist.

There are of course good reasons why the situation improved between 1895 and 1965. First, there are disciplinary reasons—anthropology developed a much clearer grasp, over that period, of what the visually observable components of a culture were and what they meant; and some anthropologists in more recent times (though by no means many) were willing to think about cultures or at least cultural performances in visual rather than purely verbal terms. New techniques of recording data came into being, including high-speed cinematography and later the applications of computers to problems of analyzing filmed data. Kinesics, a science of human gesturing communication; proxemics, a science of human space utilization; and choreometrics, a comparative study of world dance styles, were some of the areas of

research where film became important as a means of recording data for posterity, and more immediately for repeated viewings during the actual analysis. At the same time, technological advances were making filming in the field easier and better. By 1930 16mm. safety film was available in many countries, though the equipment was still inclined to be bulky and sound recording was very cumbersome. By 1940 triple-emulsion colour film was available, but the War slowed down further developments. By 1950 tape-recorders made sound recording in field situations a real possibility, and by 1960 light-weight, highly portable 16mm. cameras capable of diverse work and of synchronous sound recording were readily available in many universities. By 1970 lengthy field recording with videotape was becoming a reality.

By about that time too several real artists of ethnographic film production had appeared. They were different from the craftsmen of the early years in that they all had a serious interest in anthropology and most of them had also received quite advanced training in the subject. One important effect of this training was that these newer film-makers sustained a long-term interest in a particular culture-area, which led to the production of a valuable corpus of films on selected groups. One has to mention here John Marshall, working with the Kalahari Bushmen; Jorge Preloran, working all over rural Argentina; Robert Gardner, working with the Dani, Nuer, Hamar and other tribes; Timothy Asch, working with the Yanomamö Indians and the Balinese; Ian Dunlop and Roger Sandall, both filming tribal life in Australia; David MacDougall, working in East Africa and Australia; and of course Jean Rouch, ranging far and wide through the towns and villages of West Africa, and Yasuko Ichioka ranging through South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. In recent years more and more people have become involved in the enterprise of recording non-Western cultures on film. But since about 1965 we have noticed a critical new development that has opened up vast new audiences for this type of film. That development has appeared in two directions. First, some television networks have begun to use anthropological film in a serious way in their programming. NAV in Tokyo and Granada Television in London have undoubtedly done more in this respect than any other television producers; and they have done impressively well too. In virtually all of their ethnographic productions there has been long and intelligent collaboration between documentary film-makers and anthropologists or others experienced in the cultures under study. Unlike previous attempts at commercial films on primitive peoples, these documentaries have avoided an imposed storyline that is alien to the culture being filmed, and have invested quite long periods of time in the filming enterprise. The result has been an intimate portrayal of daily life in a sympathetic manner that was largely missing from the early efforts. The subjects have been allowed to talk for themselves.

The second major development since 1965 has been the anthropological film archive. People in several countries have taken steps recently to develop such archives, including the pioneer Germany, as well as France, America, Japan and Britain. It is perhaps inevitable that when any country gets a large output of films some organization in the government or the film industry will eventually do something about ar-

chiving some of the films. In too many cases though, that move has come much later than it should have.

Archives which simply store film on whatever subject at 55°F are of course a luxury for any country to have if there are not some clear ideas about the use of the archive. An anthropological film archive, such as the one established in Washington in 1975, is very much of a luxury if the discipline of anthropology has no coherent programme or methodology for the use of its films and unedited footage. (While a number of people are devoted to recording rapidly disappearing cultures in their FILMS, others are only interested in acquiring FOOTAGE for their own narrowly defined research purposes.) There must of course be scope for both the archiving of uncut footage and for the production of sophisticated educational documentaries if ethnographic film is to have a meaningful future. And it is difficult for such an archive not to develop a utility: the longer films are preserved in it, the more important they seem to become as documents for history. And the more films on diverse cultures to be found in the archive, the more sampling of that material for comparative studies becomes a tempting possibility. Richard Sorenson, the first director of the archive in Washington, devoted considerable thought to the problems of sampling film on diverse cultures, as well as sampling diverse cultures so as to film them in a representative way [SORENSEN 1975]. The fruits of his labour still await exploitation.

Archives of footage will always have another use, if access is permitted: it is to fabricate new films, whether as historical surveys of a subject, or comparative essays, or contrasts between footage on one culture at different points in time. Given the technology of the videodisc, it should now be possible to send copies of archival film by mail to schools, colleges and research institutes all over the world, at comparatively little expense, and with no danger to the original archive material. These videodiscs, like television, thus offer a possibility of creating much greater audiences than we have ever known before for filmed documents on cultural variation throughout the world. This is going to be an increasingly important endeavour; or so I would hope.

Yet Ketelaar, summarizing the findings of a recent symposium in Amsterdam [KETELAAR 1983: 179-185], is sanguine about the future of anthropological research film. He agrees with a number of us that archives like those in Washington, Göttingen and elsewhere are getting ahead of themselves, so to speak: expending their resources while available to amass a large amount of footage said to be "for later research", while making little if any effort to develop a methodology that might inform and promote that research. In short, the archives, like any film depositories, might one day turn out to be interesting to historians but worthless to anthropologists. This negative conclusion was emphasized by a UNESCO survey for which 375 scholars answered a questionnaire, and "some 85% of them said they did have footage and intended to analyze it some day but had not yet figured out how to do it" [KETELAAR 1983: 185]. Along the same lines, I have been told that no comparative anthropological study has come out of the vast Göttingen collection, the

so-called "Encyclopedia Cinematographica", in the past quarter of a century. But let me discuss another point.

Returning now to the fieldwork situation, I must define the filmed reality which one may hope to find records of in these archives. It is a reality in which movement, colour and sound come together in a two-dimensional moving image which has the special characteristic of lasting for the duration of the original action at the time it was recorded. Neither museums nor photographs can give a researcher those kinds of data. The more traditional ethnographer only records, and later edits, *memories* of the event, whether they are his or his informants'. And yet beside that sort of work, film records of the actual event can easily remain unconsulted and unknown. The busy academic can all too easily brush their existence aside with a simple "So what?" We must realise that the ethnographic film record is then lost not only to a few hundred ethnographic specialists, the current state of whose theory can perhaps do well enough without it. It is equally lost to archaeologists, psychologists, folklorists, linguists and sociologists; perhaps even to historians, although only the future can tell that.

It has mainly been American and Australian anthropologists—and only a minority of them—who have in recent years begun to value seriously the recording potential of film. The vast majority of documentary aficionados around the world, whether professional behavioural scientists or not, have valued instead the entertainment, the instructional, and indeed the profitability aspects of ethnographic film, such as they are. On the other side of the coin one has to take note of Sir Edmund Leach, a forthright British anthropologist, who has recently had the grace to admit that "other people's ethnography is often very dull" [LEACH 1976: 1]. It is an attitude which we can easily sympathise with, and even gain grudging confirmation for from honest colleagues. How much more interesting those troublesome little ethnographic facts can be if they are presented with such immediacy that you can have the (admittedly fabricated) illusion that you too are there seeing them! Of course, one can go off in the other direction with such facts, as Sir James Frazer and Claude Lévi-Strauss did, and build grand theory out of them in a wholly readable and charming, though totally unverifiable, manner.

If we peruse any History of Anthropology [e.g. HARRIS 1968, VOGET 1975], it becomes apparent that filming of behaviour has never made a major contribution to the development of anthropological or social theory: the subject is not even listed in the book indexes! Even the well-known research of Mead and Bateson, which used both still photographs and cine film, has had relatively little impact on the discipline; perhaps because the concern with culture-and-personality studies, which their research represented, has fallen on hard times itself.

Nowadays, though, there are young anthropologists eager to use films in both their teaching and research, and some graduate students are ambitious enough to seek training in how to make motion pictures, or at least to operate a camera. But beside this acceptance of the medium we must note that many teaching anthropologists, particularly those trained in an earlier generation, never show films

to their classes and can conceive of no use for cinematography in ethnographic research. Some seem quite unaware that such a genre of documentary film exists. Experience has perhaps taught these teachers that our present repertoire of films is not a very full or exciting one; and yet it stretches into hundreds of available examples [HEIDER 1982].

Is filming a sort of scientific endeavour? The quality of anthropological observations depends very much on four key variables: (1) the manner of using informants, to answer one's questions; (2) the use of language in both observation and description; (3) the extension of observation beyond physical, visible behaviour to embrace mental processes; and (4) the effect of the observer's "personal equation" on the situation and on his description of it [NADEL 1951: 35 ff.]. Of these variables, only the fourth one may be considered to operate in much the same manner whether the anthropologist is busying himself with noting questions and answers or with a cine camera.

Let us not be confused about the introduction of this equipment: our cinematography (with sound) differs from the instrumentation used in natural science observation in a fundamental way. There the instruments record the state of certain variables, and call only for our senses to read the instruments in order to acquire scientific data. Not so with film: our ability to "read" it is no easier or more assured than is our ability to "read" the original events. But the possible repetition of those events is what makes film so useful.

Much of the anthropologist's subject matter is in fact language behaviour, and his most usual way of presenting it is through another language, his own. In other words, cultural information comes to the fieldworker primarily through his interlacing of the symbol systems that occur in two distinct languages. You can appreciate that a quite novel intellectual endeavour is going on when, for example, an Italian anthropologist is studying the Bushmen of Namibia. Unlike other kinds of scientific activity, this one probably has no exact precedent to act as a model procedure.

It is enlightening to contrast his written product with an ethnographic film on the Bushmen. The inherent problem posed by ethnographic film is that one cannot ask questions of it and get verbal answers, except in a rather restricted area of subject matter. We can ask a film, "How do the so-and-so do such-and-such?" and perhaps see a reply. But questions about why they do things that way rather than another, what is their moral justification for particular patterns of behaviour, and how they see themselves as interacting members of a social group, are in fact questions that elude any answer more definite than the hunch. Yet I must point out that all these concerns are the stuff of which ethnographies are written.

Filming can certainly make some contributions to the building of anthropological theory. In general, these contributions will be:

- (1) to do exploratory fieldwork, prospecting as it were on behalf of the real mineralogists;
- (2) to improve our descriptive ethnographies, by increasing the quality and quantity of basic observations;

- (3) to provide data in a comparative manner for cross-cultural surveys or theory-testing—film archives will do this;
- (4) to provide a relatively objective view of a culture that contrasts with the somewhat subjective written accounts of another ethnographer or explorer;
- (5) finally, both films and written ethnographies document the cultural change that is visible, particularly when segments of footage taken at different points in time can be juxtaposed.

Evidently then film is a means—a very good means—of recording and preserving observations of events. Less clearly can it be used as a method of analysis. Here then it parts company again with the ethnographer's written account, for that can go a long way towards explaining the phenomena under consideration by relating them to their context and their past. Film can only fix the immediate visible context and the very immediate past by the length of the shot and the juxtapositions which certain camera angles and focuses permit. But this is a very different task—indeed, it was the original one for which moving pictures were invented—and it contrasts also with the cinema as a medium of artistic expression, which it of course became very early in this century.

Real difficulties of method arise however when we try to test abstract anthropological theory with a film record:

- (1) First, film does not generalise as a written description does. (You cannot memorize a segment of footage in its totality the way you can memorize a written passage.)
- (2) Each shot occurs in real, measurable time.
- (3) Until now access to film archives has not been easy, or cheap. Where these facilities do exist, they tend to be in a few capital cities and so have made study of the film rather difficult. (If funding becomes available, the videodisc technology will change this situation radically.)
- (4) The nature of the subjectivity of film still needs to be considered. The cameraman is selective in regard to time, focus, angle and framing of each shot. And after him, the film editor (if there is one) is again selective; very much more so, in fact.
- (5) The conclusion we reach is that film is difficult to use in testing social science theory because, being a photochemical record of an event before the camera, a film makes no POINT about that event: the statement is the film-maker's and the editor's.

To summarise much of what I have been suggesting here: film can capture an external reality for future analysis in many contexts—analysis by many scholars and for many purposes—whereas a written ethnographic account can only capture KNOWLEDGE ABOUT that reality, whether it is the ethnographer's own knowledge or that of his native informants too.

There are numerous polar dimensions along which sociocultural phenomena are ranked by anthropologists. One not in common use is vagueness/precision, which has important methodological ramifications. For while it is normal in an-

thropology, as in sociology, to talk about societies, even a single small society, in vague and general terms that are really restating common sense inferences [BALDAMUS 1976: 12-14, 18-19], it is inadmissible for the ethnographic film-maker to stray from his subject or subjects, to editorialize blatantly, or to state frankly how the prospect before him felt to him at the time. His job is to show us, with precision, some cultural activity.

For those who feel that the central thrust of anthropology should be deductive inquiry, ethnographic film may not appear to provide us with much in the way of a scientific understanding. This deductive-nomological pattern of explanation (to use Carl Hempel's phraseology) is by no means adequate for all of anthropological research, venerable and sound as its Newtonian ancestry may appear. I tend to agree however with Michael Scriven that there are several kinds of explanation, some requiring new knowledge to be brought into play while others relate the explananda to "laws" that are already established. Scriven asks rhetorically:

What is a scientific explanation? It is a topically unified communication, the content of which imparts understanding of some scientific phenomena... What is understanding? Understanding is, roughly, organized knowledge, i.e., knowledge of the relations between various facts and/or laws. These relations are of many kinds—deductive, inductive, analogical, etc. [SCRIVEN 1962: 224-225].

Clearly there is room here for ethnographic film to provide analogical explanations of cultural phenomena. Anthropology asks many kinds of question: some find historical answers, some scientific (in the Newtonian sense), and some phenomenological [GOH 1970: 340].

But what of the subjectivity question I raised? Whether as viewers or as filmers, we are aware of a tension between appearance and reality in the ethnographic filming endeavour, between what appears on the screen and what was really near the camera. It was from what happened to be near him in the field that the cameraman selected his shots; and from those shots he or an editor selected materials perhaps to be put into a finished film. Cameramen and editors know very well the power and responsibility that rest with them in this selection process; and audiences, even without the benefit of any real technical knowledge, sense the possibilities for bias, even fraud, in this selectivity. We are all grudgingly, vaguely aware that a film has a subject whereas reality does not. The ethnographic film's subject is whatever its cameraman has devoted his interests and efforts to. Thus a film made on a Dogon funeral would clearly be recognizable as such, despite the fact that the scene where the filming occurred could as well have been viewed through the trained eyes of a geologist, a botanist, a linguist, a meteorologist, a drama critic, an art historian, a physiologist, an architect, as through those of a cultural anthropologist. For the film to be about a Dogon funeral, selection has to have occurred from a welter of visual information most of which came to be deemed irrelevant. If what is selected for inclusion is still irrelevant to the funeral, the audience gets irritated.

One might wonder whether filming is a cognitive enterprise. The philosopher Herbert Feigl pointed out: "There are two questions with which we are (or at least should be) concerned in any cognitive enterprise: 'What do we mean by the words or symbols we use?' and 'How do we know that what we assert in these terms is true (or confirmed to some degree)?" [FEIGL 1945: 250].

Well, in the case of a film, to the extent that it deals in recognizable cinematic symbols, we may presume that it represents a documentary falsification, an event that never happened in quite the way it has been fabricated by actors and a director. If we are looking for validity or verification, we have to search for internal consistency in the events portrayed, and for a definition of the subject which the film supports. Perhaps neither of these gives a foolproof verification.

But the issue of subjectivity lingers on. Usually at the outset of a piece of ethnographic writing the conscientious anthropologist, aware of how subjectivity can creep into his account, will first clarify his concepts and categories; this is often done by reference to his theoretical antecedents, and may be what sets him apart from the scurvy breed of mere travel writers. It is a necessary first step. Can it be that we find ethnographic film more subjective than a written account because it fails to make this corrective? Scarcely any conference or textbook dealing with visual anthropology fails to bring up the old chestnut about the questionable objectivity of ethnographic film. Anthropologists see the intrusion of the cameraman as analogous to Heisenberg's principle. This is never juxtaposed against the equally pertinent problem of objectivity in ethnographic writing. Yet I think the passage of motion and sound across the matrix of time and the viewer's emotions allows us to "see" or at least to "feel" where the film-maker's objectivity should be called in question. Would that the structure of a written account made our evaluation of it as easy as this! Yet how rare it is for us to read in modern anthropological book reviews that a particular author is guilty of gross subjectivity.

We can agree that if an ethnographer comes to be accepted by a community, it is along with his clothes, his looks, his questions, his opinions and his equipment. The camera is really not something that intrudes any further into the social situation than does the operator himself. It is as objective as he is. In a sense, then, what is filmed is an objective record, a photochemical one, of an alien's interaction with a group of people who, one hopes, are trying to go about their daily affairs. To the extent that the ethnographer/cameraman (whether one person or two) stops the indigenes from getting on with their work at its appropriate time; to the extent that his probing questions irritate his informants, or amuse them, or put them on the spot, this will all be recorded for our later evaluation in the filming of their facial and bodily reactions and their recorded comments. David MacDougall's films show us quite clearly that he was a foreigner in East Africa; and there's nothing wrong with that, because it was true: certainly much truer than any attempt he might have made (following an earlier convention) to convince us that he, the foreigner, wasn't there, whereas we, the viewers, are!

In short, I am arguing that honesty—or better yet, authenticity—is a more

scientifically valuable quality in an ethnographic film than objectivity or indeed subjectivity.

It is unfair and counter-productive to belittle the film-maker because he cannot generalise and theorise in the manner of many writers of ethnographies. He is doing other things, and doing them well much of the time.

At this point we need to ask, do these films present us with concepts, as monographs do? Probably not. No doubt most films have conceptions, by which I only mean a story line or a sort of organization. But concepts?—no. A concept is something with determinate meaning, and as such is unchanging. Thus patriliney, for example, is a system of descent and inheritance of property, power, names, traditions in the male line of certain kinship units. As such, patriliney is a concept. But will we see it in an ethnographic film? The answer is still No. Such a film could only illustrate a pattern of behaviour that we viewers can generalise into the professionally meaningful concept of patriliney.

But the divergence between written and filmed ethnographies does not stop here: it runs deep into the realms of anthropological method. For one thing, in recent years scholars have invented the two terms ETIC and EMIC to help distinguish between two basically different ways of studying and describing alien culture. Emic statements in anthropology are built up on discriminations that actually mean something to the members of a society: the anthropologist describes not so much the forms of culture as the criteria by which they are identified and produced. The other approach, the etic one, refers to discriminations that are thought to be appropriate only by scientific observers. The latter would not, for example, consider the American population as divisible into two "racial" categories, White and Black, even though that is a normal emic categorisation within the culture. Since Malinowski, modern ethnographies have usually been written in emic terms nonetheless, terms that arise from the perceptions of the culture-bearers themselves. Ethnographic films, on the other hand, are essentially etic. And this is arguably a prime reason why so many anthropologists seem to have difficulty following those films (or choose simply to ignore their existence): they require what is presented in an etic format to be explained to them emicly. During some initial screenings of *The Village* (McCARTY & HOCKINGS 1968) I was actually asked by a senior anthropologist to explain the community, *i.e.* to write an ethnography in explanation of the filmed ethnography; and others asked me to add an explanatory commentary to the soundtrack. After all, such a film is scarcely less difficult to understand than the actual Gaelic culture that it depicts.

How different then are these two anthropological endeavours, writing and filming? We may represent the process of doing ethnography by the following formula concerning different points in time (T):

$$T1_{a,b,c...} \longrightarrow T2_{a,b,c...} \longrightarrow T3_{a,b,c...} = EM$$

where T3 are the ethnographer's experiences from his fieldwork on various occa-

sions (a,b,c...); T2 are his informants' memories (a,b,c...) of earlier conditions and events; and T1 are earlier published accounts (a,b,c...) of the "same" society. All taken together, digested, evaluated and analyzed, yield EM, the ethnographic monograph.

This procedure may seem to contrast somewhat with that for making an ethnographic film, since that depends on a truncated formula:

$$T2_{a,b,c\dots} \longrightarrow T3_{a,b,c\dots} = EF$$

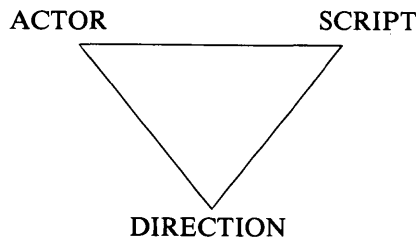
where T2 are informants' accounts (a,b,c...) given as memories on the soundtrack or in on-camera interviews; and T3 are the various shots of on-going events (a,b,c...) taken by the ethnographer or his cameraman and used to constitute the film, EF. Perhaps though the degree of difference between the two procedures summarized algebraically here is more apparent than real, especially as many ethnographers have found themselves to be the first on the scene and hence have had no opportunity to avail themselves of T1 published materials. (Nor have their informants!) So then the difference between these two kinds of product becomes one of emphasis: the monograph tends to rely rather more heavily on informants' statements about the remembrance of things past, while the film tends to rely more on shots taken during one or more periods of fieldwork and treats the informants' statements as supplementary, if indeed they make any.

Probably too there is a difference of length. A film can hardly run for more than an hour or two—budgets can certainly be very limiting here—and this scarcely allows space for an encyclopaedic coverage. The film-maker will never have the facilities to present, or represent, an entire culture, yet he can certainly represent a meaningful segment of one. That representation is not analogous to a demonstration of phenomena in the natural sciences. An instructor can demonstrate how magnesium burns, even how a hydra moves, without raising any questions of intentionality. Not so with the cultures of mankind. Any social institutions have an organization, which is to say an intentional meaning. The acts of individuals have an intentional meaning too. But the meaning of a hydra, on the other hand, is a philosophical conundrum. These few comments on meaning (discussed at much greater length by HANSON 1975) suggest that the ethnographic film-maker is concerned with representing the meanings of cultural phenomena. And this is true, whether he or she is confined to the portrayal of people talking about their own lives, or alternatively is putting together a complex linear arrangement of shots that suggests by its filmic logic that a larger meaning is implied by a number of distinct "scenes", or visible spatio-temporal segments of social institutions. In those scenes we the audience look for patterned regularities that serve as clues to the implicational meaning of institutions we have glimpsed. A film-maker may present these clues with dexterity or with incomprehension. No doubt we are charmed when we see Nanook's monogamous family emerge one after another from the bowels of his kayak; but we may well become somewhat disenchanted with the film-maker Flaher-

ty if we notice that the family which emerges from Nanook's bed later on contains two women, not one: we have been misled about the structure of an Eskimo family.

The point has been made repeatedly in articles and academic discussions that ethnographic film is not a unitary thing standing in firm contrast to the written ethnography. Rather, as Prost has suggested [1975: 325-333], some anthropological film is representational, offering a "one-to-one" but two-dimensional representation of some activity lasting from T1 to T2, and other film is illustrative, an edited series of shots that, taken as a whole, suggest some behavioural theme of interest to the film-maker. More loosely, we make the same distinction when we contrast footage, or raw filmed data, with a finished film, a documentary if you like.

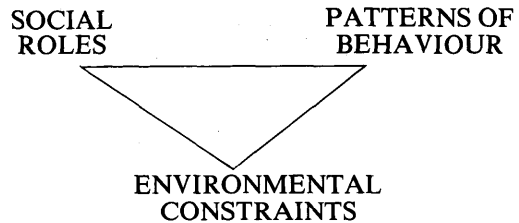
While I have no argument against the importance of Prost's distinction, it is axiomatic today and hardly needing further debate. It would be more useful now to think about distinguishing two other forms of film (not to deny there are further forms), in terms of how we evaluate them. So we could define feature films, theatrical films, as films that we judge by reference to other films we have seen (and perhaps plays too). In contrast, ethnographic films are films that we judge by reference to other cultures we know. Thus our base-lines differ in evaluating the two forms; as also does our understanding of consistency in the two. In feature films the apparent consistency comes, we know, from an eternal triangle:



For any critical success, each has to be "true to" the others. But in ethnographic film, it is generally agreed nowadays, those three features should scarcely be present. What we are looking for in such a film is evidence for verification—or possible falsification—of the linear statement about a culture that is being made on the film. In this respect at least our evaluation of the film parallels our evaluation of a published monograph: in either case we are checking for consistency and functional integration. And because cultural data are presented in a linear fashion on film we are required to remember the details from different parts in order to put them together in our own minds and see if they do form a consistent pattern. The internal consistency we look for there is a patterning of the cultural and behavioural features to be seen within the film; that consistency being modelled on our prior knowledge of the consistency that is to be found in the patterning of other cultures, including our own or one we have studied closely somewhere.

There is an analogue though, as the following diagram of these cultural and

behavioural features suggests. It is—social role : actor
 patterns of behaviour : script
 environmental constraints : direction.



This impels me to come back to a point made in the paper by Colin Young, namely that many of the early documentaries (and here *Nanook of the North*, *Grass* and *Man of Aran* spring readily to mind) were made to be monumental, through the acting, the directing, and most notably the choice of settings. As Young says above (p. 14), "The narrative elements (shots, sounds) were manipulated in the same way as in fiction. To pass as documentaries, they had to be *believed* as being based on observation and analysis, and they had to *lack* certain devices of the fiction film: recognisable actors, a simplified story line, and so on. But scene by scene they were constructed in ways very similar to scenes in fiction".

The grip of established dramatic conventions is very strong in all film viewers, and these conventions put problems in the way of our understanding any ethnographic film, whether or not we are anthropologists. For one thing, we expect the characters in a drama to behave in a coherent way, to portray a character in fact. It is surely unreasonable to expect this of ordinary people who are shown—very partially—in an ethnographic film. Yet our view of those very people is coloured by a tendency we have to think that people who act unpredictably are hence somehow dishonest. Audiences are accustomed to having things "wrapped up" for them, as in virtually all travelogues. Consequently they must find it difficult to accept the contradictions that emerge within a film, and will resist our attempts at having them think through these contradictions to the point where they form their own conclusions about the subject matter. And if they are watching behaviour that is fundamentally unpleasant, so much the worse for the audience's conclusions.

Before leaving the contrast with fictional films, let me mention that a dominant style in theatrical shooting has long been to show one "piece of action" per shot. The film is selected and edited to achieve this, and television has always been especially careful about this matter because of the small size of the viewing screen. Wherever extra action is shown in the background, it has to be explained and to fit in, normally as a connection between this and a later shot. While there may have been producers who occasionally went against this "rule," that was exceptional. In ethnographic film, on the other hand, it is quite common to include in a shot additional action—the passing herd of goats, an old motorcar in the background, and so on—which seem to be incidental to the subject matter of the shot, namely whatever

is talking or is in sharpest focus, and which do not necessarily link up with any subsequent shots. Yet one of the delights and the necessities in watching ethnographic film is that one does see such additional bits of information in the background of a shot; and one cannot dismiss them as incidental or unimportant. In a sense everything visible and audible in a shot is of equal importance in our understanding of the filmed culture: it is the evidence on which we the viewers base our connections. Now what are these connections?

Let me illustrate the point by showing how the connections a viewer notices become his hypotheses about how the culture in question operates. Stated otherwise, the connections noticed between shots can make up an integrative pattern. From our filming of daily life in an Irish village (McCARTY and HOCKINGS, 1968), one can see five shots right at the start of the film which illustrate the "typical" daily milking activity. Amongst the various things one notices in one of these five shots is a heap just outside the door of the cowshed which the viewer could be forgiven for dismissing as just so much cow manure. The shot is mainly concerned with the actual milking; yet when one links up that incidental view of the manure with another scene a minute beforehand in which the Gaelic-speaking farmer shouts at his prize cows (in English, no less) as they wade across the stream just above him, and the viewer has seen the perfunctory way in which this man rinses the milk pail in that same stream-water—and later coughs into it—then some ideas will form about standards of hygiene in the village community, and perhaps one begins to wonder about other incidental aspects of the film: the great lack of children and of teeth, for example.

One sees those five shots in 1^{1/2} minutes, and all of this ecological system has made itself apparent (Fig. 2), at least as a set of hypotheses which the viewer will need to verify or refute as he watches the rest of the film. I am suggesting that at first viewing there may thus be in a single shot several bits of micro-action competing for the viewer's attention: but that is not a defect of an ethnographic film, and there is nothing wrong with feeling that one needs to look at a single film repeatedly, in order to check out several of one's hypotheses about the culture.

Young also says that recently documentaries have taken on an "exploratory role—seeking out the nature of a discrete event, or a set of relationships, or even of a single person ... Instead of films being *arguments* for a point of view they have become *demonstrations*" (cf. p. 14). Clearly he is thinking of the post-1965 ethnographic film, with which he has been so closely associated, even though he does not use the term here.

And if they are to be primarily demonstrations, we are obliged to come back to the people who appear in these documentaries. It is important to ask whether the "reality" that is recorded on film is generally accepted by the people who appear in it and live that reality. How is this question conventionally answered? (1) "They'll probably never see this film and I, as resident anthropologist, know best what is true"; or (2) As often as not they are surprised at what they see and, if at all familiar with films and TV, may be hesitant about "showing" certain aspects of their life: such

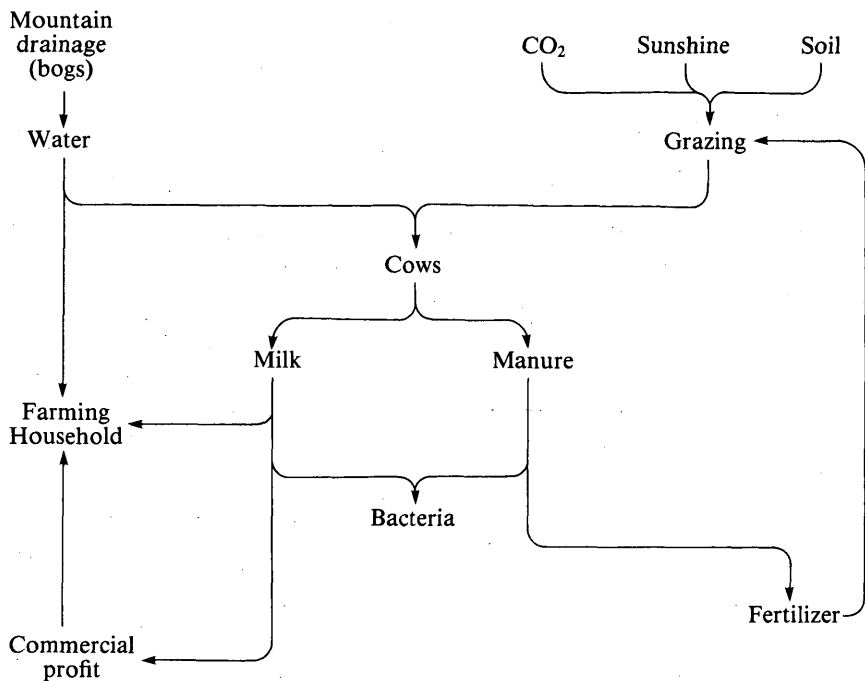


Fig.2. Ecological Relationships in Irish Dairying

people see the making of a film about themselves as a chance to make an ideal statement; or (3) they see it as an opportunity for a political statement, and may even encourage the filming of all that is bad about their condition and in need of government amelioration, with the hope that the film will become helpful propaganda for them. So can we agree with Lajoux, I wonder, that "the acceptance by the filmed group of the cinematographic work which we want to show about them is a necessary guarantee for the expressive ethnographic film" [1976: 123, my trans.]?

Why don't these filmed demonstrations of the nature of a phenomenon contribute more to the development of anthropological theory?—this was our original question. Most would agree that the cine camera can give us raw data, a different kind of field-note. It obviously records visual images in a time-dimension, in a way that anthropologists cannot otherwise do. Instead of the abstract and generalised symbols made with words, film provides us with concrete and specific images created not so much by a human mind as by the reflection of light from the world in front of the camera. These images capture for us much more of a culture than we consciously perceive, and hence will repay our repeated viewings of them. The cine camera is in fact the ideal tool for recording any kind of cultural data that is both complicated and visible: a ceremony, a dance, a technical process, or an interaction within a group of people. The eye and the notebook of most anthropologists (even reputedly great note-takers like Mead and Boas) would combine to give us only a sketchy and incomplete account of what went on, whereas the cameraman would

record more impartially and fully whatever he could see. A cinematographer gives further meaning to his film, of course, through further selection, when he goes on to edit it: he can re-order the material in a new logical, chronological or geographic framework.

It must be understood that the techniques of filming vary greatly with the research project; methods of using film vary too. One authority suggested that the only "scientific use" of film is when one investigator alone with a special viewer examines the film frame by frame. Others have maintained that "scientific film" has to be shot from a tripod at eye level, or through a wide-angle lens, or by the investigator himself. There have even been advocates of a hidden camera. How the research film is shot ought in practice to vary according to the uses of the material and the nature of the field situation. There are no rigid formulae such as I have just sketched that will guarantee usable film footage or even "objective" coverage of a subject.

The British logician Madge wrote about this long ago:

...the demand for objectivity is the demand for an abstract and unrealisable situation in which the observer is an unobtrusive, passive and passionless machine who records without discrimination whatever is put in front of him. The only things that any such machine, however elaborate, can record are events—that is to say, forms of overt behaviour. In these circumstances the insights and interpretations injected into his material by the human observer represent imperfections in the material. As every human observer is subject to these lapses, an inanimate machine like a cinecamera is clearly more appropriate. It is not distracted; it does not select [Oh, but it does!—*P.H.*]; it is not subjected to quirks of distorted memory or actual forgetfulness; the same passage can be repeated [MADGE 1953: 126].

On the other hand, Koloss has put the objectivity question very clearly thus:

Films do represent a preselection of material... film contains subjective as well as objective elements. Film is objective inasmuch as it focusses on "everything". On the other hand, the choice of mechanical aids as well as the time/space factor, perspective, timing, are all subject to personal decisions. Therefore, it is not possible or even conceivable, to have a completely objective film [KOLOSS 1983: 88].

This brief discussion of objectivity bears heavily on the question of why recent cultural anthropologists have not used filming much as a primary method of observation. Many, like Madge, believe somewhat naively that the camera is indeed "objective", while others question that view. But the problem lies elsewhere: it is that filming is phenomenology, and this method is neither the deductive method of logic nor the empirical method of natural science. As Edmund Husserl said, the object of the phenomenological method is the immediate seizure, in an act of vision, of the ideal intelligible content of a phenomenon. Now anthropologists cannot, or do not, look at a culture phenomenologically: they are tied to deduction and empiricism.

Film-makers on the other hand are not so tied.

Kultgen has succinctly identified the central problem of phenomenology: "each ego lives both with others and in an essentially solitary experience which he constantly tries to transcend" [KULTGEN 1975: 372]. And when that ego happens to be an anthropologist going through the essentially solitary experience of viewing someone else's ethnographic film—as distinct from living in that ethnic community—he particularly feels the lack of comprehension of the situation that he might otherwise expect to arise from his interaction with other people in the same situation. But Kultgen goes on to say that "Social agents are social observers, for to interact they must interpret one another" [KULTGEN 1975: 373]. And here lies the crux and the solution to the anthropological film-viewer's problem; for if he can only concentrate on the interaction between people that is being manifested on the screen, he will find that clues as to how to interpret the situation emicly are being given. This is even true, I might add, in films where those clues imply, "We are only acting out this scene at the behest of the director, and all of us in it know that we would never really behave like this!" (*Man of Aran* is a case in point.)

"Now a segment of behavior cannot be observed, phenomenologists insist, without a preliminary interpretation of its meaning, for the meaning constitutes a sequence of bodily movements as coherent behavior and the observer's grasp of the meaning is what integrates observed movements into unitary objects for scrutiny"; so says Kultgen [1975: 377]. The ethnographic film-viewer needs clues on how to make this preliminary interpretation, unless he happens to be very familiar with the culture under scrutiny, in which case he can make some interpretations simply on the basis of past experience.

To conclude this rather introductory paper: there are some things that the man with the movie camera does better than less well-armed social scientists. In the first place he is believed—and not entirely correctly—to be more objective in his recorded observations than are other social observers; a point of view that we have just criticized. Secondly, he is perceived to be exact in his recording, so much so that a few anthropologists like Birdwhistell and Prost have actually measured and lifted their data directly off numbered frames of cine-film. On both counts, objectivity and exactness, the cine-camera appears to be serving empiricism, perhaps to the unspoken envy of its critics within anthropology. But if this is true, that camera is ensnared in a time-lag, because while the equipment itself is wholly of the 20th Century, the ideal of scientific exactness is much more characteristic of the 19th Century. The more pertinent aspect of the anthropologists' goal today is the establishment of relationships between phenomena. This might be done mathematically, although in that line of development sociology is far ahead of anthropology. Or it might be done verbally, and commonly is. Film editing offers a third possible approach, suggesting rather than dissecting pertinent relationships by the conventional procedure of juxtaposition along a linear presentation. And as we continue to look for new relationships between phenomena and better ways of presenting them, many of us have come to realise that

exact truth is both a proper objective and an unattainable one. Exactness is beyond our reach because of the penumbra that surrounds all our observations, and universal truth is not possible because every truth that we adhere to contains within itself some part of our aims, and aims are never unanimous [MADGE 1953: 290-91].

It has been several centuries since astronomers gathered their data mainly with the naked eye. Ever since the great invention of Lippershey and others around 1608, they have tended to work from observations conveniently modified by the telescope. And for over a century they have also worked successfully with photographic plates that conveniently freeze the data of a moment. Anthropologists by contrast have been wary of uncritical reliance on other people's ethnographies, and have sought reassurance from cross-cultural sampling methods or even repeated visits to the field. The visible aspects and effects of behaviour, recorded photographically, now hold out to us an exciting and sophisticated *modus operandi* for the future exploration and understanding of the human universe. These modern methods should be applied to recording, classifying and data analysis, so that we may test the generalizations of behavioural science that may yet lead us to the laws of mankind.

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