In the first edition of this book I was more inclined to use these attributes to judge films as being more or less ethnographic (but not to call some films non-ethnographic). With another thirty years of films to consider, it now seems clear that there are many ways to make films of ethnographic value.

This is an attempt to bring a nuanced appreciation of ethnographic film to the fore. We are conditioned by film reviews in the popular press to read a film title and immediately thereafter see the grade, be it four stars or several thumbs up or down. There are books claiming to rate, for example, “more than 18,000 movies!” In my classes I try to get students to begin with an analysis of a film, but many papers or discussions still start off with “I really liked this film” or “This was a really bad film.” Of course, in real life, films live or die by such immediate reactions. But the problem is that once having committed oneself in that way, it is difficult to think out the qualities of film that we shall now explore.

This chapter is divided into three parts, each a more systemic treatment of the attributes than the preceding part. First we shall explore at some length the principles underlying each attribute. Then we shall make a succinct definition of each attribute and diagram that attribute as an attribute dimension with examples of specific films that illustrate the various points along this dimension. In the final part of the chapter, we shall examine the attributes as a grid on which a profile of ethnographicness can be drawn for any particular film.

THE ATTRIBUTES

Basic Technical Competence

One of the most unambiguous criteria for any film is simple technical cinematographic competence: the images should be focused and exposed so as to be visible; the sound, especially when it is in the language of the intended audience, should be clear enough to be audible; and the editing should be free of accidental mistakes and errors due to incompetence. Today, with most film shot on videotape, such factors are no longer of great analytical importance.

1. Appropriateness of Sound

Although one tends to think of film as a visual medium, in fact nearly all ethnographic films have a sound track, as do all films shot in video, and the relation of the aural to the visual is of great significance.

51
TABLE 3.1 APPROPRIATENESS OF SOUND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inappropriate (e.g., orchestral music, heavy narration)</th>
<th>Moderate narration</th>
<th>Natural, synchronous sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nanook (1949)</td>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
<td>Post-1960s films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dani Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The appropriateness of sound may vary greatly from scene to scene within a film. The extreme in inappropriateness was reached in the 1949 version of *Nanook of the North*, which has both full orchestra and a woody, redundant narration. Most films shot on film or video since the late 1960s use natural, synchronous sound.

When actual film was used, we had to distinguish synchronous sound from wild sound. Synchronous sound is the sound recorded at the same time as the film was shot, with camera and tape recorder working in precise synchrony. Wild sound is any other sound: it may be of the same sort of behavior or plausible background noises, postsynchronized to the image to give the illusion of true synchronous sound; it may be a read narration; it may be mood music; it may be a mixture of several of these. When a video camera is used for recording, synchronous sound is automatic. One would have to seriously disable a video camera to avoid sync sound.

When the sound includes speech in an exotic language, other problems arise that can be handled in various ways. Actually, much human use of language is so repetitive and so redundant with other sorts of behavior that speech can often be left untranslated and the audience loses very little information.

This point is especially well illustrated by *Nawi*, a film by David and Judith MacDougall about the Jie of Uganda. Through most of the film the people are simply sitting around, doing minor tasks, and talking a lot about very little. Bronislaw Malinowski coined the phrase "phatic communion" for this: "flow of language, purposeless expressions of preference or aversion, accounts of irrelevant happenings, comments on what is perfectly obvious... a type of speech in which ties of union are created by the mere exchange of words" (1923, 314–315). An occasional subtitle is enough to give us a sense of what is being said. *Nawi* was an early attempt to capture the ordinary low-energy action so characteristic of most people much of the time. Today it is much more common to hear such chatter, but, interestingly, audiences resent not having it all translated even when that would add little to the scenes.

An Argument about a Marriage and *The Feast*, both about high-energy events, use occasional subtitles in English so that the audience can follow the gist of an argument. In *The Nuer* and in *Rivers of Sand*, there are interview sequences in which, after someone makes a long statement in his own language, it is translated in the English narration. Direct dubbing of English, as is often done in commercial films, has not yet been tried with ethnographic films. None of these alternatives is totally satisfactory. One wants to savor the experience of seeing and hearing someone expressing herself in her own language, and one also wants to understand what is being said. But except for the obvious perils of mistranslation, there are no major problems of misleading distortion in synchronous sound.

The skillfully post-synchronized wild sound of pre-video films is quite a different matter. All the sound in *Dead Birds* is post-synchronized and covers a wide range. For the most part, Michael Rockefeller, Gardner's soundman, tried to record wild sound to cover each shot that Gardner made. Then, when Gardner came to edit his footage, he could use the most appropriate passages from Rockefeller's tapes. But when I filmed Dani house construction and horticulture two years later, I did not attempt to record sound. (At that time I was alone with the Dani and could not manage being soundman in addition to anthropologist and cameraman.) When I came to edit *Dani Sweet Potatoes* and *Dani Houses*, I decided not to go back to Rockefeller's tapes for appropriate wild sound because it simply wouldn't have been a close enough fit.

Music. To me, music is inevitably a distraction except when it is the sound of the events actually happening when the visuals were shot or, like the wild sound of the orchestra in *Trance and Dance in Bali*, when it is very appropriate to the visuals. The most common sort of music in ethnographic films is folk songs or instrumental music from the particular culture, but too often it appears in quite inappropriate contexts. It may seem somewhat harsh to criticize such music, because it is undeniably pleasant, audiences enjoy it, and it fills in those silences that cinema convention has declared to be abominable. But the main criterion for ethnographic films should not be the quantity of information and impressions and sensory enjoyment they can convey but rather the successful conveyance of information. The primary criterion for a sound track should be that it reinforces the visuals by providing very complementary information or that it at least is neutrally silent and does not work in opposition to the visuals by introducing vastly new information.

But I must acknowledge that recently my students disagree with this strong stand. Many of them are used to a constant musical background, even while studying, so any music on film is welcome and not distracting.
Narration consists of explanatory sentences read along with the visuals. It is almost impossible to have a narration that does not detract and distract from the visuals. Most ethnographic films show us totally exotic scenes: strange people wearing strange clothing doing strange things. Even if we focus our entire awareness on the scenes, we can barely take them in. But to have someone standing at our side telling us information in English as we are trying to watch the film must split our attention, and we lose much from both the auditory information and the visual scene. The purest solution to this problem was reached by the Netsilik Eskimo films, which have no narration at all, only postdubbed natural sound. These films treat simple subjects lengthily and redundantly, and they are meant to be shown by instructors who can answer questions and direct students’ discussions. Actually, much is clarified by the progress of the events themselves. But most ethnographic films must cover more activities less redundantly and are somewhat more self-contained. So narrations are almost inevitable, in some form or another.

Narrations vary tremendously, but much of the important variation can be summarized in terms of two dimensions. One dimension can be called “added information” and concerns the amount of information that the narration adds to the film beyond what is contained in the visual images; the other dimension can be called “visual relevancy” and concerns the degree to which the narration is relevant to the visual images.

At one end of the continuum is the banal redundant sort of narration, so typical of the worst “documentary” film, which tells us things that are perfectly obvious from the visuals. We hear “and the rains fell” as we see rain falling. This sort of narration is closely related to the visual images but adds no information at all. A prime example of this style is found throughout the series of otherwise valuable films called the People of the Australian Western Desert. These films concentrate on technological processes, and most of the action is immediately understandable or is soon explained by the next actions. Nearly every word of the narration of all the films in this series is redundant with the visuals. At best, there are the proper nouns—names of people, of grasses, or of lizard species—which are really added information.

At the other extreme lies narration that is used to carry a story line when in fact the visuals show nothing of the sort. In some of the more exciting sections of Dead Birds, the excitement exists only in the narration, and the visuals are short, bland, scenic inserts. These sections are cinematically weak, but the narration is essential to carry the thread of the story while important events happened that could not possibly have been filmed. The amount of added information is very high, because the words have hardly any relation to the visual images.

Within the optimal zone we can distinguish two styles of narration. In one, the words are used to explain or to clarify visual mysteries. In the other, the words put an act or event into the larger cultural context.

The two major misuses of narration, which fall outside the “optimal zone,” are information redundancy and information overload. The former is unnecessary; the latter could better be handled in printed form.

This scheme is fairly abstract. Applying its principle to criticism or to the making of a specific film involves a series of judgments that are often extremely difficult. For example, what is the line between necessary contextualization and overburdened esoterica?

Robert Flaherty, in his earlier, silent films, pushed the visual potential of film by creating and then resolving mysteries visually. The Netsilik Eskimo series does the same, using carefully chosen wild sound without narration. A close comparison between the Netsilik Eskimo films and the Australian Western Deserts series is revealing. Both series were made in the mid-1960s,
and both were about technological processes of a foraging group. The Netsilik budget was obviously much greater than the Australian budget, and the Netsilik films have excellent synchronized sound, whereas the Australian films lack even wild sound. If the Australian films omitted narration, they would be essentially silent films, and silent films seem to be anathema to many. But since the Australian narrations add so little, the films are, for all practical purposes, silent films. If one views any of them with the sound turned off—as I did once, by accident—it is clear how much more effective they are if the viewer can really engage in the visuals, without the distraction of the narration.

An interesting question comes to mind: If the narration is so redundant with the visuals, it may be meaningless, but is it really distracting? Or perhaps might it not assist viewers to concentrate on the visuals? I doubt it. In the Netsilik films, the viewer is left alone and has to work to understand. I would say that this understanding will be much more real than if one had information prechewed, as it were. This question could easily be studied in an experimental situation where the same film was used with and without redundant narration to two different groups and then each group was tested to see which had learned the most from the film. (Throughout this book, I am taking positions that could actually be tested. They seem reasonable, even obvious, but the next step is obviously to subject them to empirical testing.)

The Flaherty films, the Netsilik films, and the Australian Western Desert films all deal with technological processes, which are more amenable to a heavily visual clarification than are rituals. In films of rituals, where so much of the meaning is on the abstract, symbolic, verbal level, words are essential. In Pomo Shaman, the sparse commentary consists of statements by the shaman herself, recorded after the ceremony, as she describes what she is doing and how it felt to her. In Jean Rouch’s films Les matres fous and The Lion Hunters, both dealing with complex ritual, a narrator gives what seems to be the native explanation of the different actions. Similarly, in We Believe in Niño Fidencio, the narration holds closely to the participants’ explanation of the rituals. In Anastenaria, the narration gives a frankly ethnographic, or analytical, view of the ceremony.

Both the native understanding and the analytical, ethnographic understanding are essential ingredients of ethnographic presentation. But there are real advantages in using the native view in the film and saving the ethnographic analysis for a written report. When the native statement is coupled with the native behavior, they reinforce each other and increase the immediacy of the film experience. The analysis is essential, but it is a removed line of thought and has the effect of distancing the viewer from the film.

In Dani Sweet Potatoes, I tried to keep the narration down to an absolute minimum, using it only to explain actions that have been confusing or incomprehensible to an audience. And then, on Carroll Williams’s advice, I laid each narration line in toward the end of a scene in order to engage the audience and give them time to be puzzled and, perhaps, to solve the mystery themselves.

One solution would be the use of only synchronous sound, without any narration. The use of the printed ethnographic companion to films would relieve the narration of much expository burden. Then much background information could be printed, rather than narrated, and ethnographic filmmakers could concentrate on making their films more filmic. But in practice it is difficult to make both film and print conveniently available to audiences. Another solution is the interactive DVD, which can in effect provide footnotes to films. Peter Biella has been experimenting with such materials, but they are still far from common.

3. Ethnographic Basis

Underlying all these considerations is a single one: an ethnographic film must be based on ethnographic understanding. The more successfully a film has this understanding, the more ethnographic it will be. However, this is no simplenminded recipe like “stir in heaping spoonfuls of ethnography.” If that alone were sufficient, we could turn over all ethnographic filmmaking to ethnographers and be assured of successfully ethnographic films. But in fact a film may be made by an informed ethnographer and still be a failure ethnographically. In making an ethnographic film, ethnographic understanding is useless unless it is transmuted by filmic imagination. But despite these cautions, the single best predictor of ethnographicness in a film is the extent to which an ethnographer was involved in the filmmaking.

The basis for this has already been discussed at some length in chapter 1. In ethnographic writing, the understanding and conclusions emerge through the process of data gathering, analyzing, writing, and rewriting and are constantly being refined and even changed up to the moment of publication. But in filmmaking, on the other hand, the initial act of shooting footage produces fixed images and so precludes much of the rewriting possible in ethnography. The result is that whatever ethnographic understanding can be applied to the film must be present beforehand.

Perhaps the best model for ethnographic filmmaking is The Feast (see chapter 2). The filmmaking began only after the ethnography was completed, and the film itself was made by a filmmaker (Timothy Asch) working in
The degree to which an ethnographic film has been informed by ethnographic understanding is difficult to determine with real confidence, but one obvious indicator is the role (if any) that an ethnographer had in the filmmaking. Some films, like Dead Birds and The Feast, were made as part of an ethnographic study. At the other extreme is Grass (on the Bakhtiari of Persia), a remarkable film in its own way, made by keen observers but quite uninfluenced by ethnographic understanding.

In this approach there is maximal opportunity for the fully digested ethnographic understanding to shape the film. Other films, such as Dead Birds, Dani Sweet Potatoes, and Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea, were shot by ethnographers as research was underway and thus had considerable ethnographic input.

4. Explicit Theory

In the not so distant past, much ethnography was fairly atheoretical and descriptive. It seemed important to record as much as possible before cultural variety in the world vanished. This was a sort of salvage ethnography. Today, despite globalization, cultures seem more robust, the interest in salvage ethnography has waned, and purely descriptive ethnography has yielded to more theoretically based studies.

Now ethnographic films also are more likely to be explicitly based on theory. Timothy Asch saw his Yanomamö film The Feast as a visual gloss on Marcel Mauss’s classic study of exchange, The Gift (1925). Alan Lomax’s films (Dance and Human History, Palm Play, Step Style) illustrate his chorometrics coding and theory. India’s Sacred Cow is based on Marvin Harris’s materialistic explanation of the Hindu prohibition on eating zebu cattle. Ron Simon’s Latah explores the hyperstartle syndrome in Malaysia as an example of a biocultural model.

Although film seems most suited for straight descriptions of growing sweet potatoes, building houses, and the like, some films do, with the help of narration, present theoretical statements more or less explicitly.

In the 1960s, Douglas Oliver puzzled about how to incorporate thinking about and analysis of social organization in film. Peter Loizos did just that in Life Chances, about Greek Cypriots; John Marshall and Timothy Asch tried it in two Ju’hoansi films, A Joking Relationship and An Argument about a Marriage. And there is Jean Rouch’s Lion Hunters, an account of tension between cattle herders and marauding lions on the upper Niger, framed in terms of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s symbolic dualism.

5. Relation to Printed Materials

No ethnographic film can stand by itself. An ethnographic film must be supplemented by written ethnographic materials. Or, put the other way around, an ethnography is a written work that may be supplemented by film. It is easy to conceive of ethnographies that are words without pictures. In fact, most of the best ethnographies either have no pictures at all (especially in the case of journal articles) or have a few irrelevant snapshots. But it is impossible to conceive of ethnographies made up of pictures without words. Of course, ethnographies can be complemented by pictures. And the use of film to describe some things that words cannot describe is one of the major challenges of ethnographic film and is discussed in chapter 4.

But the ethnographic enterprise demands a depth of description and of abstract generalization that cannot be handled in pictures alone. And while a few words can be spoken as narration, they are inadequate to convey much, and in any case are so overpowered by the visuals that they are barely understood.

So an important criterion of the ethnographicness of any ethnographic film is the extent to which it is backed up by written material. One major purpose of the catalog Films for Anthropological Teaching (K. Heider and Hermer 1995) has been to list the ethnographic materials relevant to the various films.
The degree to which an ethnographic film is supported by written materials about the culture and about the circumstances of the filmmaking ranges widely. For Grass, there is some casual material on the filmmaking but no ethnography; for The Nuer, there is ethnographic material on the culture but from a different time and place; for Dani Sweet Potatoes and Dani Hoes, there are published materials on the subject of the films by the filmmaker-ethnographer; and for Dead Birds, there is extensive ethnography and a study guide. The Balinese films on Jero Tapakan are also supported by an analytic and descriptive monograph (Connor, Asch, and Asch 1986). Some films, like Neighborhood Tokyo (see Bizer 1989), India's Sacred Cow (see Harris 1979), Life Chances (see Loizos 1975), and The Goddess and the Computer (see Lansing 1991) were actually made after the supporting ethnographies.

An example of this is Dead Birds, which was accompanied by considerable literature about the Dani, the culture described in the film, and especially by an "ethnographic companion" (K. Heider 1972a), a short pamphlet that specifically ties the film to the ethnographic literature (and is now out of print). More of such study guides are beginning to appear, and they will greatly increase the ethnographic richness of the films they accompany. In addition to the ethnographic companion for The Path (Rundstrom, Rundstrom, and Bergum 1973), several study guides were produced on the Marshalls' Kalahari films (see Reichlin 1974a–g, L. Marshall and Bieseke 1974, and Reichlin and Marshall 1974) and on the Yanomamô films. Connor, Asch, and Asch wrote a book on the first four Jero Tapakan films from Bali (1986), and Gardner and Östör's book, Making "Forest of Bliss," is indispensable (2001).

6. Voice: Point of View

A film without a point of view is inconceivable. The process of selecting and excluding images that goes into making a film must be based on some con-cept. Even if we imagine a film that is somehow constructed according to a table of random numbers, that film would be based on an obvious point of view. Dada as an artistic movement may have rejected rules, but it certainly had a point of view.

The label "propaganda film" is often fixed on a film with a particularly obvious point of view, especially when the film's position is different from that of the critic. Rather than trying to define "propaganda film," let us shift to the more defensible and useful proposition that all films express some point of view. The points of view may vary greatly in substance, in the consciousness with which they are employed, and in the explicitness with which they are expressed, but they do exist and we can examine any ethnographic film in terms of them.

This seems quite obvious, yet a fair amount of critical blood is shed over the question of whether or not films are "objective." Probably there will always be filmmakers who claim that they are just reporting the facts, just as there are ethnographers who might claim the same position. The university where I studied anthropology has for its motto the single word "Truth" (in Latin, of course). But for both ethnographers and filmmakers a more comfortable guide word would be "Truths," in recognition that there are many different approaches to understanding. The famous Japanese film Rashomon, by Akira Kurosawa, is pertinent here. Set in medieval Japan, the investigation of a death and (perhaps) a rape turns up four versions of the same events. In ethnography, "the Rashomon effect" refers to the many factors that can affect an ethnographer's account of a culture (K. Heider 1988). In ethnography or in ethnographic film, it really comes down to this: selectivity is inevitable, and the author and the filmmaker should be aware of their points of view, because in the end they cannot avoid responsibility for them.

There are many points of view. Some films are made by special interests or at least subsidized by them, with the expectation that they present the group's point of view or at least show the product or the brand (product placement). Basil Wright and John Grierson made Song of Ceylon for the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board; the film consists mainly of poetic images of Ceylon, with some scenes of tea growing and preparation. Flaherty had engaged in the same very subtle imagery; Nanook was sponsored by Revlon Frères, a fur company, and one scene shows Nanook and his family at the company's trading post, exchanging furs for goods. Flaherty's Louisiana Story was subsidized by Standard Oil, and it includes a shot of an oil well in the bayou. But it would be difficult to pinpoint ways in which these commercial interests shaped the point of view of the film.

No Longer Strangers, made by the Regions Beyond Missionary Union
TABLE 3.6 VOICE: POINT OF VIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From the ethnographer</th>
<th>Mix of local and ethnographic voices</th>
<th>The local people tell us</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implicitly</td>
<td>Explicitly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanook</td>
<td><strong>Dani Houses</strong></td>
<td><strong>Farm Song</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Makiko’s New World</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanunoo</td>
<td><strong>Dead Birds</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fit Surroundings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>How to Behave</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest of Bliss</td>
<td><strong>Dani Sweet Potatoes</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Nuer</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(with book)</td>
<td><strong>Forest of Bliss</strong></td>
<td><strong>Box of Treasures</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>A Kalahari Family</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Number Our Days</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnographies and ethnographic films were in the beginning told in the voice of the ethnographer or the filmmaker, almost always an outsider’s voice. Whether in silent films or through an omniscient narrator, we heard and saw the point of view of that outsider. The advent of sync sound and video not only allowed local voices to be included in films but also stimulated the movement toward presenting local points of view to shape films. Some films like Farm Song and A Kalahari Family even presented conflicting local points of view. Films like Number Our Days and How to Behave also presented local points of view.

about its conversion of the Western Dani to Christianity, is cinematographically rather crude but very effective. It was made to show to church groups in the United States in order to publicize the Dani mission work, to raise money, and to recruit missionaries. The point of view is explicitly that of evangelical Christianity. Traditional Western Dani rituals are described as a satanic mockery of Christianity. In other ways pre-Christian Western Dani culture is denigrated by such narration lines as “dancing girls perform their duties” and by the statement that the Dani had no tools, only stone axes. And while the narration describes the joys of the Western Dani when they became Christian, the visuals show masses of Christian Western Dani who are sullen, unsmiling, and not obviously joyful. No Longer Strangers makes an interesting counterpoint to Dead Birds. It was filmed near the Grand Valley, and the Western Dani of No Longer Strangers are closely related to the Grand Valley Dani of Dead Birds in language and culture. Although audiences often react strongly to the point of view of No Longer Strangers, they rarely even recognize the much more subtle point of view that Gardner has built into Dead Birds. In fact, Gardner takes the usual anthropological position of accepting a culture’s practices on its own terms. So he discusses the Dani practice of cutting off girls’ fingers as a funeral sacrifice and shows many mutilated hands; he shows and discusses war, battles, ambush, and killing without making a moral judgment. In my ethnographic writings about the

Dani, I do the same (1997a, 133–136). But we must recognize that this amoral observation is as much a point of view as is the missionaries’ condemnation.

Even Dani Houses expresses a point of view. It shows, with some respect, Dani housebuilding at a time when the Indonesian government was attempting to induce the Dani to change their house style on the grounds that traditional Dani houses were smoky and unsanitary.

In addition to commercial, political, religious, and philosophical points of view, we must consider the scientific point of view, or the ethnographic interpretation. Just as ethnographic writings usually choose one sort of interpretation out of many possible ones, so do ethnographic films. However, films are more likely than writings to stay close to a straight descriptive level. Films like Dani Sweet Potatoes and Dani Houses do not undertake any real theoretical interpretation of Dani horticulture or construction. India’s Sacred Cow is an explicitly polemical film. Different narrators argue different interpretations of the issue, although the film clearly favors Marvin Harris’s cultural materialistic point of view. Some films use the native interpretation of events. For example, Appeals to Santiago used a first-person narration to describe the cargo ritual of the Chiapas Mayan and to present the explicit Mayan rationale that the ceremony is to honor the saints and has no economic function.

In the ethnographic tradition, the native explanation is an important datum, one which may agree with an ethnographic interpretation or which may be opposed to an ethnographic explanation. In Appeals to Santiago, the Mayans explain the Chiapas cargo ritual as an expression of Christian piety and deny that it is a competitive prestige-seeking institution. Frank Cancian (1965) has analyzed the same institution from an economic standpoint, showing how it functions to even out wealth in exchange for prestige stratification. Neither the Mayans nor Cancian are wrong, but from one we hear the explicit or manifest function, and from the other an implicit, latent function. (And this hardly exhausts the possibilities, for other analysts could make other analyses.)

For example, in Les maitres fous, Jean Rouch explains the Hauka ceremony in psychological terms as a cathartic experience that releases hostility toward the colonial government and then allows the natives to return to their submissive daily occupations. In The Turtle People, Brian Weiss explains Miskito Indian subsistence in ecological terms and argues that the Miskito are destroying the turtle population for short-term financial rewards but will experience eventual economic disaster when the turtle boom is over. In The Feast, Asch analyzes a Yanomamó intervillage feast in terms of Marcel Mauss’s gift exchange (Mauss 1923). The Rundstroms and Bergum show the
Japanese tea ceremony in *The Path* in terms of its symbolic structure, and Susannah Hoffman in *Kypseli* analyzes the Greek village in terms of sexual division of labor.

Each of these films utilizes only one of several possible theoretical points of view to analyze a situation. But this is a legitimate ethnographic strategy, and the films cannot be faulted for not including all possible points of view. A legitimate criticism might be that they misused a type of explanation or that they chose an inappropriate type of explanation. But in any case, they are more ethnographic than a film like *Dani Sweet Potatoes*, in the sense that they attempt to move beyond ethnographic description to ethnographic explanation. This is also a more hazardous course, for it is much easier to make a satisfactory descriptive film than to achieve a film whose description and explanation are above attack.

7. Holism: Behavioral Contextualization

Although the holistic approach to human behavior is one of the hallmarks of anthropology, holism is not so much a theory as it is an attitude that characterizes anthropological research and distinguishes it from other sorts of social science research. Holism is reflected in the typical ethnographic research strategy of living in the midst of a society and making extensive observations of many events; and it is reflected in the typical ethnographic account, where the emphasis is on the interrelationships of many facets of a culture or a society. Ethnography places great emphasis on the context of behavior. Ethnography is extensive, in comparison with the more intensive interests so typical of sociological or psychological research.

The anthropological emphasis on holism accords very well with the capability of film to show things and events in physical and temporal context. But just as the mere fact of living in a culture does not guarantee holistic ethnography, so merely shooting film does not assure holistic ethnographic film. Some basic anthropological principles, or corollaries of the principle of holism, are directly pertinent to the problems of ethnographic film. They have to do with contextualization of behavior and what we can call whole people, whole bodies, and whole acts, to be discussed below.

Contextualization is a basic but easily misunderstood concept or imperative. At one extreme it is obvious: things or events must not be treated in isolation; they have meaning only in context. On the other hand, it is clearly impossible to describe everything about everything. But it seems safe to say that although no film (or ethnography) has been hurt by overcontextualiza-

**Table 3.7 Holism: Behavioral Contextualization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Isolated, decontextualized</th>
<th>Well contextualized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wooden Box</td>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Joking Relationship</td>
<td>Dani Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td>The Goddess and the Computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I Love You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Box of Treasures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contextualization is a measure of the degree to which a film sets behavior in its cultural and physical context. Of course, no film can make a complete contextual statement. And in some senses a short single-concept film may be contextualized not by itself but by other similar films (as the several short *Ju/'Hoansi* films are) or by written materials (as with the two shorter *Dani* films). J. Stephen Lansing's *The Goddess and the Computer* is explicitly holistic in linking *Bilum* religious activity to the rice irrigation system. *Box of Treasures* sets *Kwa Kwaka’ Wakw* art into its cultural and historical setting.

...tion, many are flawed by inadequate contextualization. The precise degree of contextualization that should be achieved in an ethnography or a film is, in the end, a matter of judgment.

One can speak of contextualization in terms of cultural aspects. For example, I have often heard *Dead Birds* criticized for its lack of attention to *Dani* women. This is really the common but veiled complaint that the critic wanted a different film. While *Dead Birds* focuses on *Dani* men's life, it actually does show many aspects of women's life in the gardens, at the brine pool to get salt, and at ceremonies. But the film is about *Dani* men, and in *Dani* society the women are peripheral to the political, ritual, and warfare activities that concern the men. (I have speculated [2004] about the shape of the film if we had been the Radcliffe Peabody Expedition, made up of women, instead of the Harvard Peabody Expedition, and the films and books had been produced by female anthropologists and filmmakers.)

In other respects, *The Nuer* shows many acts taken out of context, presumably for aesthetic but not ethnographic reasons. *Grass* is another classic case of decontextualization, for although we see at great length the dramatic march of the Bakhtiari herdsmen over the mountains of Persia to their summer pastures, we learn practically nothing of the social, political, or economic context of this movement. The march exists as a brilliant, isolated act.

*Mokil*, which deals with overpopulation on a Micronesian atoll, and *Rivers of Sand*, about sex roles in an Ethiopian tribal society, are particularly notable attempts to handle the complexities of these topics through film.
8. Physical Contextualization

In *Dead Birds*, Gardner used early shots very skillfully to establish the context of the landscape in which the action will take place. He used several long shots taken from a hill. First, in a long pan following a hawk that glides across the landscape, actually below the camera level, the bird is in focus and the landscape out of focus. But the narration at this point is dense and important, so the audience is allowed only an impression of the landscape. This shot is followed by another, also from the hilltop, that begins looking down into Weyak's village, then pans along a path to the gardens, then zooms out to a wide-angle view of gardens, no-man's-land, enemy country, and the far mountains. A later shot from the same high vantage point also begins at

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.8 Physical Contextualization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little or no physical contextualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Nuer</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I Love You</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Goddess and the Computer</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It helps to have hills or tall buildings as vantage points from which to film the entire behavioral setting of the event, as in *Dead Birds, Neighborhood Tokyo*, or *Hamunoo*. *The Goddess and the Computer* uses maps and diagrams to help describe the field of action. But often the subject is so domestic (*Dadi's Family* or *Lanph*) that there is little need for this contextualization.

9. Reflexivity: The Ethnographer’s Presence

The very presence of outsiders, be they ethnographers carrying out their research or filmmakers making films, inevitably has a myriad of influences on the subjects’ behavior. Reflexivity implies both the acknowledgement of that presence and, more important, analyses of the effects of that presence. Most ethnographic filmmakers deny this effect and simply edit out any footage that reveals camera consciousness or too-blatant mugging. Admittedly, this is comparable to the general practice in ethnography, but it is one instance where the ethnographic practices can be followed too closely. The alternative is to build the outsider’s presence into the structure of the film, to give some idea of how the people may be reacting to the outsiders, how questions are asked and answered, and the nature of deliberate intrusions, experiments, or the like that the outsiders are making.

Some ethnographic films do make the anthropologist the major focus of the film. *Margaret Mead's New Guinea Journal* follows Mead in her return visit to Manus, forty years after her original fieldwork there. *Gurkha Country*, made by John and Patricia Hitchcock in Nepal, shows the Hitchcocks themselves living and doing research among the Gurkha. And *A Man Called “Bee”: Studying the Yanomamö* presents anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon at work in the Venezuelan jungles. *Neighborhood Tokyo* follows Theodore Bistor around the area that he studied, and Alison and Marek Jablonko show Maurice Godelitz investigating *The Baruya Story*. Barbara Myerhoff is very much a presence in *Number Our Days*, as is David Plat in *Fit Surroundings*.

In fact, considering that the major use of ethnographic film is in introductory anthropology courses, it is surprising that there have not been more filmic attempts to show how anthropologists actually work. The success of
### Table 3.9 Reflexivity: The Ethnographer's Presence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnographer's presence ignored by film</th>
<th>Ethnographer's presence mentioned</th>
<th>Ethnographer shown interacting and gathering data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
<td>The Moontrap</td>
<td>Fit Surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chronicle of a Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dani Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neighborhood Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number Our Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Just a Few Days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By judiciously incorporating the ethnographer and the filmmaker into the film, and analyzing their effect on the behavior being recorded, a film can become more self-conscious about the sorts of information it communicates. Jean Rouch was the leading proponent of this approach. His *Chronicle of a Summer*, which is not simply about Paris in 1960 but more about how an anthropologist and a sociologist go about investigating Paris in 1960, illustrates the strengths of using ethnographic presence. *Dead Birds* and the two short *Dani* films, on the other hand, omit the presence of the ethnographers completely. In the middle ground is *The Moontrap*: although we never see the filmmakers, we are told that the revival of whale trapping, which is the subject of the film, was done at their instigation. Likewise, in *I Love You: Hope for the Year 2000*, we never actually see either ethnographer or filmmaker, but they are integral and explicit actors in the events described.

By judiciously incorporating the ethnographer and the filmmaker into the film, and analyzing their effect on the behavior being recorded, a film can become more self-conscious about the sorts of information it communicates. Jean Rouch was the leading proponent of this approach. His *Chronicle of a Summer*, which is not simply about Paris in 1960 but more about how an anthropologist and a sociologist go about investigating Paris in 1960, illustrates the strengths of using ethnographic presence. *Dead Birds* and the two short *Dani* films, on the other hand, omit the presence of the ethnographers completely. In the middle ground is *The Moontrap*: although we never see the filmmakers, we are told that the revival of whale trapping, which is the subject of the film, was done at their instigation. Likewise, in *I Love You: Hope for the Year 2000*, we never actually see either ethnographer or filmmaker, but they are integral and explicit actors in the events described.

of written accounts of fieldwork like Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), Kenneth Read's *The High Valley* (1965), and many others suggests that comparable films would be most welcome.

The most ambitious film in this vein was one of the first, *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), made by anthropologist Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin to capture the mood of Paris in the summer of 1960. Throughout the film, the two men are very visible and present. The film opens with Morin interviewing a young woman and directing her to do street interviews, to ask people, "Are you happy?" Morin and Rouch have several more talks with people, probing their psyches. Then, at a group discussion, Rouch announces that the film should turn to consider politics—Algeria and the Congo. More discussions with students, workers, and artists are followed by a sequence in a screening room where Rouch, Morin, and the subjects, who have just seen the film, discuss it, themselves, and each other. And finally, Rouch and Morin alone in the Musée de l'Homme, strolling past the relics of other cultures safely enclosed in glass, discuss whether they have shown the reality of their own culture in the film. *Chronicle of a Summer* is a richly provocative film in the extent to which it reveals and attempts to analyze the methodological mystery of ethnography, but as yet no other ethnographic films have risen to its challenge.

Nevertheless, ethnographic films have acknowledged and used the presence of the outsiders in various other ways. In Adrian A. Gerbrands's *Matjemosh*, the narrator, supposedly speaking the thoughts of the Asmat (West New Guinea) wood-carver, tells of his wife's shyness before his friend Gerbrands and of his own amusement when Gerbrands asks him to make drawings of Asmat designs with a felt-tip pen on paper for the film. (Unfortunately, since Matjemosh speaks in a Dutch-British accent, the effect is somewhat lost.)

In *An Argument about a Marriage*, one of John Marshall's short Kalahari films, we are told that the conflict was precipitated when the Marshall expedition freed and brought back some Bushmen from enforced labor on a farm. And midway through the argument, when one man attempts to invoke the Marshalls on his side, the other replies, according to the subtitle, "Screw the Marshalls." And in *Death by Myth*, the fifth part of Marshall's *Kalahari Family*, we see a great deal of Marshall himself, involved in bitter arguments about the fate of the Ju/'hoansi.

In *The Nuer*, an old man makes statements that seem to be responses to questions, although we never see or hear the questioner. *I Love You: Hope for the Year 2000* was made by filmmaker Kahirn Oester and anthropologist Heinzpeter Znoj. We never see either of them, but the narrator is a woman, supposedly the anthropologist, and at times we hear the man's voice asking a question. The film works well in showing some of the problems of fieldwork, but one has to ignore the reversal of roles.

But there are many styles of ethnographic film, and some are better suited than others to including anthropologists in the film. It is always possible to explain the film crew's presence in written material that can be used to supplement the film, as, for example, the Rundstroms did in their essay (1979) on making *The Path*.

On the whole, the reasons in favor of showing the ethnographic presence in an ethnographic film seem to me to be compelling. In the first place, the ethnographic presence is, after all, part of the behavior being filmed, and so by including some of this in the film, we can see that part of the behavior and form some idea of how it affected the rest. In the second place, since the outsiders are mediating the information about one culture to an audience from another culture, including them in the film personalizes the mediation and, by making it more understandable, makes it more effective. The impersonal distancing effect of omitting the ethnographer decreases the ease with which an audience can understand a film; it also carries a political implica-
tion of noninvolvement, of treating the people as impersonal objects. This is a subtle matter, which I have thought about in regard to my own research. When I do research among the Dani, they are, inescapably, the subjects of my study but, I hope, not merely the objects I study and describe. Even when I quantify and generalize, I try not to lose sight of the fact that they are people who matter. Now, there are certainly ways to communicate this in films without showing the ethnographer, but the ethnographic presence is one way of adding this effect. (Of course, in making Dani Sweet Potatoes and Dani Houses, when I was both ethnographer and entire film crew, it would have been exceedingly difficult to have included myself or the effect of my presence in the films.) When we were filming Dead Birds, Robert Gardner had considered including shots of the Harvard Peabody Expedition members. But that was in 1961, and at that time it didn't seem appropriate or necessary (although Jean Rouch, making Chronicle of a Summer at the same moment, did try it).

There certainly can be drawbacks to the ethnographic presence in a film if, for example, shots of the ethnographer are included without concern for their relation to the action in the film. Obviously the idea is not merely to prove that an ethnographer and filmmaker were present, and to give them a chance to be movie stars, but rather to show the manner in which their presence was felt. There is sometimes a thin line between the good and bad uses of the ethnographic presence.

10. Whole Acts

Cinema is ideally suited to present process, or behavior through time. But in order to show the structure of a whole act, especially in nonstaged shooting of naturally occurring behavior, one must know how to anticipate an action. Acts can be said to have beginnings, peaks, and endings. The unknowable observer or filmmaker will notice an act as it is climaxing but will not have enough experience to know that it will happen soon enough to pick up the beginning and will not have enough sense of the act to follow it past its end. An especially telling film is Hugo van Lawick's Baboons of Gombe.

van Lawick had been filming primates, especially chimpanzees, at Gombe Stream Reserve in Tanzania for a decade. With his experience, van Lawick was able to follow a variety of acts, large and small, almost from before their beginnings, through their peaks to their endings.

The criterion that whole acts are desirable refers to the selective use of structural features of the act. It is not possible to demand that everything

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fragmentary bits of acts</th>
<th>Beginnings, peaks, and ends of acts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primate</td>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nuer</td>
<td>Dani Sweet Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forest of Bliss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Cows of Dolo Ken Paye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Hunters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ongoing, naturally occurring behavior can be analyzed and understood as a series of acts, of greater or lesser magnitude, many occurring simultaneously but often not coterminously; and each of the acts has a beginning, a peak, and an end, not to mention prehistories (antecedents) and consequences (outcomes). Some ethnographic films, like The Cows of Dolo Ken Paye and The Hunters, are particularly successful in portraying whole acts in this sense of the concept, while films like The Nuer and Primate are made of fragments of behavior.

An act can be of any length, measured in seconds, hours, days, or years. Acts are usually presented in their actual sequences, but sometimes a film like Forest of Bliss presents the ritual process of death in separate scenes out of the real order, with the intent that the viewers will slowly put the actual sequence of events together in their minds.

about an entire act be shown. That is unrealistic realism. Two ethnographic films have attempted to approach this by having film time equal real time. But even in these films much had to be omitted. In Carroll Williams’s An Ixil Calendrical Divination, the camera holds in close to the hands of the diviner as he lays out his pieces on a surface. Consequently, we do not see the interaction between the diviner and his patients, an interaction that surely gives the sensitive diviner as much information about the problem as the way in which his pieces fall on the board. In The Path, the Japanese tea ceremony is shown in real time, but in order to film it, the action was stopped and repeated many times, and so a part of the interaction between hostess and guests was lost to the film. It is conceivable that a short and simple act could be filmed by several cameras simultaneously and then projected on multiple screens. This would be an interesting exercise. But it would merely be the reproduction of reality, not the understanding and analysis of reality that are the basis of ethnology (or any other science).

Selection of shots is inevitable in filmmaking. The criterion of whole acts demands that the selection be done so as to present the important features of an act. Just as there are many different legitimate ethnographic approaches, so the selection may bring out different aspects of an act. It is not good to be dogmatic at this point. The Rundstroms selected shots in The Path to show
yin-yang balance and energy management (Rundstrom, Rundstrom, and Bergum 1973). Other anthropologists might make quite different selections from the same event.

The whole act must be adequately represented by selective elements. And in this context, where we are speaking of the ethnographic film, we can say without hesitation that the selection should be done on the basis of some ethnographic understanding, and the adequacy of the whole act can be judged ethnographically.

What is a “whole act”? This is an extremely flexible concept, but useful nevertheless. Acts may last seconds; they may last years. There are acts within acts. And in the end the filmmaker or the ethnologist chooses which of the countless possible acts will be attended to. Harold Conklin’s Hanunoo is an extreme example of incomplete acts. It is sixteen minutes of short clips. There is no attempt to follow through on any one act. (Yet it can serve as a study piece for getting an overall visual idea of Hanunoo life—see K. Heider 2004a). In Dani Sweet Potatoes and Dani Houses, I deliberately planned to show each step of the sweet potato cycle and of construction. But both films were narrowly conceived. I did not follow through and show how Dani houses were lived in, or much at all of how sweet potatoes were distributed and eaten. My whole focus at the time was on production, not distribution or consumption. If I were to remake these films today, they would be very different.

In Dead Birds, Gardner follows the entire salt-making process and all the major steps of a funeral (as well as we understood them in July 1961). In contrast, the initiation sequence in The Nuer is a badly incomplete document. It shows a few peak moments, dwelling at length on the bloody forehead incisions. The film captures the most obvious events, but what it omits (presumably because they hadn’t been filmed) are many important symbolic events that we know of from the ethnographic literature; and, presumably, from ignorance of the meaning of initiation itself, the film doesn’t even follow the individuals into manhood.

Although Frederick Wiseman spent one month shooting and two hours of screen time on bits of scientific experimentation at the Yerkes Primate Research Center in Atlanta for his 1974 television film, Primate, the film never followed a single experiment as a whole act. This approach had interestingly different effects on different viewers. Laymen (including television critics) were simply horrified by the picture of senseless butchery in the guise of science; one friend of mine who is familiar with that sort of research could fill in the gaps for himself and was fascinated by the film; more thoughtful viewers reacted strongly against the film itself on the grounds that it made no attempt to communicate an understanding of primate research by presenting whole acts but only used scenes of gore to play on the audience’s emotions and turn them away from such research.

BEGINNINGS

We can consider the wholeness of any act in terms of its beginning, its peak, and its ending. The beginnings are the most difficult to film because this really demands enough knowledge of the behavior to anticipate an act before it begins. In some acts, such as trance states, the transition from the previous, or “normal,” stage into the altered state is of obvious importance. Trance is an extreme example, but it serves as a good model. When we speak of “an act,” we mean some relatively definable behavioral event that is different from what preceded it and from what follows. If one is writing ethnography, it is easy to construct sentences after the fact that will describe the beginnings of an act. But it is much more difficult to have a camera at the right time and the right place to capture an act as it is beginning.

One ethnographic film that does this particularly well is The Cows of Dolo Ken Paye, made in a Kpelle village in Liberia by Marvin Silverman and James L. Gibbs Jr. The major act in the film is the resolution of a conflict over a cow that had been found in a farmer’s field, was wounded by a machete blow, and died. The peak action began with the discovery of the wounded cow, and following the case from that moment was relatively easy. But thanks to Gibbs’s intimate ethnographic understanding of the culture, the film was able to re-create the beginning of the act. It described the complex implications of rich men’s cattle and poor men’s farms; it incorporated still photographs that Gibbs had taken of a similar conflict years earlier and that had served as a precedent, and it even was able to include serendipitous footage of the culprit chopping a log with his machete, taken before the act. Thus, with the combination of luck and deep ethnographic understanding, the film was able to anticipate an act. The beginning of the act was approximated in the editing room, in a manner similar to the ex post facto written description of an ethnography. It may well be that this sort of reconstructed beginning is all that we can expect for many larger acts shown in ethnographic films.

PEAKS

Peak activity is the part of the act that involves the most energy and activity and draws the most attention. It is this peak activity that even the most uninformed filmmakers can capture. But there is a great danger of infatuation with peaks. Just because peaks are so obvious to see and easy to film,
attention is distracted from other activity that may be less energetic but, in cultural terms, more important. John Heider (1974) discussed this in human potential encounter therapy, where a peak, or “blowout,” is customarily followed by a long plateau of creative ecstasy. He describes how, in the early days of Examen Institute, group leaders were preoccupied with achieving the peak experiences. Only gradually did they come to understand the importance of the postcathectic plateau. In ethnographic film, a similar preoccupation with peak drama can make for an exciting but superficial picture of an event. But I feel diffident about accusing specific films of this failing, since the full ethnographic facts are usually not available.

**Closure**

The final part of the demand that ethnographic films show whole acts is the need for some degree of closure: that acts or events are brought to some sort of completion.

We are familiar with the conventional symbols of closure that American cinema adopted from storytelling: the boy and the girl live happily ever after. A more cinematographic symbol of closure is the final shot of a sunset, preferably over an ocean. The power of the symbol is that we accept it as closure and feel satisfied. This is a kind of emotional satisfaction, different from the intellectual need for complete information.

In *The Nuer*, we are often brought into an important event, and before we learn its outcome, the subject is changed. In *Dead Birds*, on the other hand, Gardner’s final philosophical statement about the Dani and death is a very personal attempt to give emotional closure to the entire film, probably for Gardner himself as well as for the audience.

Many ethnographic films do impose a punch-line structure. This is the structure of the joke that closes with a climactic punch line. But in fact, most behavior does not follow this pattern. It may reach a peak, or climax, but then slowly fades out into another act. Two of John Marshall’s Kalahari films have particularly fine treatments of closure. In *The Hunters*, after the giraffe has been killed, we follow the bringing home of the meat, the distribution, and the eating. Then it is all recapitulation as one of The Hunters tells the story of the hunt, and when that is over, people slowly get up and disperse. In *Bitter Melons*, the final sequence shows men doing a dramatic ostrich courting dance. The final shot seems to hold forever as the men drop the dance, lie down to nap, or drift away. Still the shot holds, as two boys make a halfhearted attempt to revive the dance. Then they, too, become still. And finally, after all activity has slowed down to a stop, the shot is over. To hold a shot so long...
overdose of information, no matter how ethnographic the film. But the data of microbehavioral analysis must be distinguished from the grosser sorts of information that ethnographic films are designed to communicate. So it is legitimate to say that a film may have too little, too much, or appropriate amounts of information, depending on the audience.

This overloading of information is especially common in ethnographic films made by anthropologists. It seems reasonable to blame this on the anthropologists’ familiarity with print where, as we have seen, more information can always be added in another (often unread) chapter or appendix, in such a way that it does not compromise the entire work. Most of the criteria discussed in this chapter are ethnographic criteria; the danger of information overload is one that cinematographers are much more sensitive to than are most anthropologists. The problem is to judge how much information is enough and to stop there.

The most usual and obvious locus of superfluous information is, of course, in the narration. I now think that I did this in Dani Sweet Potatoes. Since I had no sound other than the narration, I was self-conscious about having too much silence. Also, after showing a work print of the film to many different sorts of audiences, I was very aware of the sorts of questions that were usually asked, and I tried to use the narration to head them off. So, for example, over a shot of a large newly planted sweet potato bed, I described the other sorts of gardens and cultigens of the Dani. Now in fact, that information is available in print, and the view of the garden in itself, without narration, contains enough information to engage an audience. So here and elsewhere in Dani Sweet Potatoes the narration provides an overload of information.

Information overload can result from a narration that says too much, visuals that show too much, or a combination of narration and visual excesses. But this is a particularly difficult judgment to make. Much depends on the nature of the audience and the intensity with which the film is viewed. If an ethnographic film is shown on prime-time television to a mass audience, it can tolerate far less information than if it is only to be studied by advanced college classes in anthropology, who may see it more than once.

II. Narrative Stories

Flaherty is always considered a master storyteller, and some of his films reflect this. Although there is no real narrative story running through Nanook, he does realize a story in Moana, where the Samoan youth achieves manhood and wins his girl by undergoing the tattoo initiation ritual. In The Hunters, John Marshall tells a story of how the Ju/Hoansi shoot and track a wounded giraffe for days in order to kill it and bring back meat for the camp. In Dead Birds, Gardner is able to create a story by following the events of war for the five months he was in the Grand Valley, as Weyak’s group lose a boy to the enemy but finally restore a balance by killing one of the enemy.

Some films, like the Netsilik Eskimo series or Dani Sweet Potatoes, achieve a continuity not through the adventures of an individual but by following a technical process to completion. The weakest attempt at a story line, but one that ethnographic filmmakers sometimes try, is “a day in the life of the village.” James L. Gibbs Jr. and Marvin Silverman’s film of the Kpelle of Liberia, The Cows of Dolo Ken Paye, started out in this way, but partway through the filming they stumbled onto a dramatic legal case that became the subject of a quite different and much more focused film.

Bateson and Mead achieved another sort of continuity in their Balinese films by filming a few individuals, especially infants, over a long period to show the developmental process. Karba’s First Years is a unique ethnographic film that traces the development of a Balinese boy through the major stages of early childhood. Few anthropologists studying child development have designed their research to follow individual characters as they grow up, but John Marshall’s !Nai, edited from footage that Marshall shot over the years, does follow !Nai from childhood into adulthood.

Many ethnographic films are little more than series of vignettes, or “impressions.” The Nuer is this sort of film: brilliantly filmed impressions of a cattle camp. An occasional event happens to occur: a marriage dispute, a
mass healing ritual, an initiation, and an exorcism. But the filmmakers were not familiar enough with the culture to know what should be filmed in order to show complete and understandable event sequences. The prototype of the impressionistic vignette film is Song of Ceylon, made by John Grierson and Basil Wright for the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board in 1934. It is a series of scenes, loosely organized into thematic sections.

A film may be thought of as having various levels of possibilities for continuity. The entire film may have a single theme, like Dani Sweet Potatoes, which follows the Dani horticulture sequence from clearing land, planting, weeding, and harvesting to cooking and eating. Practically every shot in the film contributes to that complex.

On a less inclusive level, a film may contain one or more shorter activity sequences. Edited throughout Dead Birds is a complete sequence of women producing salt, and another of a man knitting a shell funeral band. To the extent that Dead Birds has a story line, it is the accident of the sequence of events during five months in 1961. But if Gardner had not had the overall story line, he would still have had a film of several reasonably complete shorter event sequences.

12. Whole Bodies

One of the most entrenched conventions of American cinema is the full-face close-up, in which a person's head or even just a face fills the entire screen. The close-up is remarkable on several grounds, the first of which is its unnaturalness. In normal interaction a person may focus visually on another person's face, but only if the two faces are very close to each other will the face be the only thing present in the total visual field. Even in cultures where normal conversational distances are relatively short, the eyes of a normally sighted person can visually attend to more than just the face of another by means of peripheral vision and quick eye shifts. A close-up shot of a face does not permit this. As an extreme example, when two people are in sexual embrace, their faces may be so close that their actual visual fields approximate that of a cinematic close-up shot.

But interestingly enough, in such scenes in films where close-ups of faces might be experientially real, close-ups are rarely used, and the camera stays far enough removed to get at least full head-and-shoulder shots. One can accept the proposition that close-ups are perceptually and logically unnatural, but the fact is that they are conventions of film, accepted and expected by filmmakers and film viewers alike.

The real question here must concern their effect on the ethnographicness of a film. We begin with the obvious fact that every close-up frame of a face means a frame omitting the rest of the body. What, then, are the gains and losses of this particular selection? One argument in favor of close-ups is that they create visual variety and so sustain the viewers' interest. But this argument is based on the assumption of fairly low audience commitment, and I think that it is worth trying to encourage a new way of seeing ethnographic film.

A second argument in favor of the close-up is that film should be allowed to examine parts of a body, or whatever, one after the other in close-up detail in the way that a written account does. But this argument misses the point of a difference between words and film. In order for words to describe an entire body at once, they must move to a very general level. No single word or phrase can describe the details of hands, face, body, and voice. Rather, each must be dealt with in turn, as a kind of isolating close-up. But a film image does hold so much information that a long shot of a person's body can, in fact, allow the viewer to observe hands, face, body, and voice in simultaneous interaction.

A third, more important argument is that full-face close-ups allow the audience to experience and relate to a person. This assumes that the core of the person is best visible in the face and can be understood through the face. If this is valid, it depends on the fact that the close-up cuts out everything but the face and is not based on the absolute size of the image of the face. Films using facial close-ups are viewed on screens and television tubes of widely varying sizes, with viewers sitting at various distances from the image. So
the actual size of a face’s image, measured in degrees of retinal image, varies greatly from that for a person who sits close to the screen in a large theater to someone who sits across the room from a small television set. There is certainly some perceptual principle at work here, but I know of no studies of it. I think that it is clear that size of image is less important than limit of information. Close-ups are a convention not because greater size of facial image is desirable. On naive grounds, one might say that if that were so, people would sit in the front of movie theaters rather than toward the rear. Instead, close-ups are used because they concentrate attention on the face and give relatively greater detail. But what is lost when the bodies are omitted? A great deal. It is clear that from an ethnographic standpoint much specific communication is done through the body, and much general cultural information is contained in body movement.

Research on nonlexical or nonverbal communication has shown the importance of the body in modifying, supplanting, and even contradicting those purely verbal messages that had so long been the sole focus of interpersonal communication research (cf. Condon and Ogston 1966; Ekman and Friesen 1969a, 1969b; Birdwhistell 1970, 173; Bateson 1972, 228–243; Davis 2001–2002; Jablonsko 2001–2002). Ironically, the loss of communicative behavior through the use of facial close-ups is a relatively small loss in most ethnographic films, since so few even attempt to capture interpersonal communicative behavior.

But the loss of whole body movements in general is important. Alan Lomax and his associates at Columbia University, who carried out choreometric research on dance and work motion, showed that there are definable styles of motion that vary from culture to culture and from culture area to culture area. Lomax’s research made us aware of the profound cultural significance of movement itself and what can be called the cultural integrity of the whole body. The implications for ethnographic film are that the entire body must be observed and photographed and that filmmakers must be exceedingly cautious about moving closer than whole body shots (Lomax 1973; Bishop 2001–2002).

There are countless examples in ethnographic films where the camera moves in on faces (or isolates other body parts) and prevents us from seeing what is happening in the rest of the body. In Holy Ghost People, a film about an Appalachian Pentecostal church, there are frequent scenes where people enter ecstatic trance states. Their ecstasy is obviously felt and expressed in their entire bodies, yet the camera compulsively zooms in on faces. In Desert People and the other films of that series, the facial close-ups prevent us from following the rhythm of whole bodies and even, at times, from seeing the technology of what the whole bodies are doing. The loss of this information is hardly compensated for by the close-ups of expressionless faces, often shot from above so that we do not even have a good view of the face itself.

In The Nuer, some of the most effective scenes are long shots of people walking alongside their cattle. One is able to see the exotically graceful ways in which these tall, thin people walk and how their walking seems to be in harmony with the movements of their cattle. But in the same film we are not allowed to watch the movements of women pounding maize in wooden mortars as the women stand, rhythmically thrusting the long wooden pestles into the mortars. After a brief establishing shot, the camera plays in and out on moving body parts: upper arms, breasts, and faces. The camera creates its own vision. It is reminiscent of filmmakers who use footage of childbirth or other real events to create a personal aesthetic pattern. This approach can result in an interesting film, but it makes little sense to judge such a film by the standards of ethnographic reality.

It is probable that the information loss is not so critical when the people and the activity in the film are familiar to the audience. Then viewers can reconstruct entire acts from minimal cues. But for most ethnographic films that show exotic acts from exotic cultures, viewers need all the information they can get, and the deprivation of information in the close-up is particularly felt. A counterargument could be made to the effect that the increased detail of a close-up shot of a face gives more information, not less, and in addition, creates a mood of intimacy between viewer and subject that is lost when the camera stays back at the necessary distance to capture images of whole bodies. Although these counterarguments are interesting, they do not seem convincing. But certainly the whole matter should be investigated by empirical research.

The question comes down to this: Is the ethnographic filmmaker to focus on the events of the film or on the conventions of the cinematography? It is very difficult for a creative filmmaker to resist the conventions of the craft. But respect for the subject demands a limit on such conventions and creativity. The words “creativity” and “imagination” must not be allowed to become points of false debate, however. The creativity and imagination essential to good science, here including ethnographic film, are significantly different from the creativity and imagination essential to good art, here including most other uses of film.

It is not possible to make absolute rules like “whole bodies must always be in frame” or “close-ups are always bad.” But generally speaking, close-ups should be avoided unless they really contribute to picking out details that are lost in the whole, and then close-ups should be preceded and followed by contextualizing whole shots. This principle holds for close-up shots of
technical processes as well as of body parts. I do not want to condemn all close-up shots, but I do want to insist that the close-up should be seen as an extraordinary step, taken only because of extreme necessity. A nice illustration of this turned up in two 30-minute videotapes shot by two students for an ethnographic film course at UCLA in 1974. The subject of both tapes was the same: a father helping his four-year-old son assemble a jigsaw puzzle. Both filmmakers had the same goal, which was to show the interaction between father and son. One tape showed both actors in full frame throughout; the other moved in and out, to the father's face, then to the boy's face, then to the boy's hands, and so forth. The second tape was more aesthetically pleasing, but the first showed much more about the interaction. Filmmakers judged the second more interesting and complained at being asked to watch through a stationary lens for thirty minutes. Anthropologists judged the first more revealing about the father-and-son interaction. Both, in their own terms, were right.

The concepts of "contextualization" and "whole bodies" are different ways of getting at the ability of film to present simultaneously occurring events simultaneously, allowing the viewer's eye to travel back and forth, examining parts and the whole. Word descriptions may attempt this holism, but it is hindered by the inexorable linearity of words strung together in sentences.

13. Whole Interactions

One of the most consistent absences in ethnographic films is any description of communication or other sort of interaction between people. In part this is because normal, naturally occurring conversation is so hard to film. It is a relatively low-energy, fragile sort of behavior, which is easily disrupted by the camera. It is much easier to film one person or many people engaged in some physical activity. So the percentage of real interaction in any ethnographic film is very low.

And when filmmakers do shoot conversation, they usually ignore the more basic fact: conversation is interaction. The work of Gregory Bateson, Ray Birdwhistell, and others, such as Adam Kendon, has clearly shown that a conversation between two people is not just a sequence of utterances. Rather, both parties are communicating constantly about a variety of things. At any one moment, a person may not be speaking words but is nevertheless contributing to the interaction. This is ignored in the usual film or television drama, where conversations or interactions are often filmed as an alternating series of full-face shots of people talking and reacting. In drama this technique may have its uses: by reducing the communication to a minimum, all

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Table 3.13 Whole Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Including all parties to interaction in frame</td>
<td>Cutaway shots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>alternating between two parties in interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hunters</td>
<td>Farm Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronicle of a Summer</td>
<td>Dance and Human History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is notoriously difficult to capture face-to-face interaction onscreen. Even in acted fiction feature films where directors have control over their actors, American films make use of cutaway shots, whereas East Asian films are more likely to include both or all parties in the same frame.

attention is cruelly and powerfully focused on verbal and (occasional) facial channels. But of course it results in the loss of the great range of communication nuance of real life.

Alan Lomax once pointed out how well the richness of this range is captured in a final sequence in The Hunters, where one hunter relates the story of the hunt to others of his camp (pers. comm.). The camera keeps its distance, so not only can we see the vivid act of storytelling, but we can also appreciate the dynamic role of the audience. The giraffe hunt itself is a lonely business, and the four hunters rarely interact. But the climax, the end of that whole act, is a flurry of interaction, and Marshall spends time showing us how the meat is shared and how the stories are told. A strikingly similar scene was used twenty-five years earlier in the Eskimo film Wedding of Pau, when Samo tells a group of people how he chased and killed a polar bear. One could argue that both these scenes are too visually complex to be understandable. Indeed, it is only after repeated viewings in slow motion that one can really appreciate the complex coordination of narrator and audience.

One of the few attempts to make a film about a conversation is John Marshall's Kalahari film A Joking Relationship. The entire fifteen minutes of the film show the casual hunter between a man and a girl. The two are relatives, and their relationship is such that they are not permitted to marry, but they are allowed an informal, even bawdy "joking relationship" (L. Marshall 1957). This film is an extremely interesting attempt to capture the mood of this particular kinship tie, and thanks to a good sound track and subtitles, it is quite effective. But through most of the film the camera moves back and forth in a series of close-ups. Only rarely are the two people shown at the same time. We see one person and then the other. In fact, we hardly see a
relationship in the literal sense. The behavioral interactions were created in
the editing room. The film is a testimony to how much skillful editing can
gild over faulty camerawork.

14. Whole People

It is safe to say that all ethnographic films show people, even though few of
the films are actually about specific individuals. But the extent to which
individuals are identified and shown as well-rounded personalities varies
greatly. Some films show only faceless masses, while others make the viewer
acquainted with one or two individuals. There is no single ethnographic
standard. Although the goal of ethnography is some sort of generalized cultural
or social statement, there are many different strategies of research and
description. This is reflected in ethnographic films made by ethnographers
themselves. Some, like Adrian Gerbranda's Matjemoish, show us much about
the life, the work, and even the thoughts of one New Guinea wood-carver.
The film is similar to Gerbranda's book (1967), which explores Asmat art
through a detailed description of six different carvers. At the other extreme,
we find Brian Weiss's The Turtle People, shot while Weiss was doing research
for his dissertation in ecological and economic anthropology at the University
of Michigan. Weiss's film very much reflects his concern for the impersonal
impact of outside economic factors on the culture and the society of the
Miskito Indians of Nicaragua. Now, one could argue that The Turtle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3.14 WHOLE PEOPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only faceless masses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanoos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Turtle People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India's Sacred Cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the printed word inclines written ethnography toward generalization,
the specificity of film makes it easy and desirable to show a few individuals
as whole people with real personalities, rather than merely members of faceless masses. Matjemoish, Dead Birds, and Nanook all explore cultural
phenomena by focusing on the lives of one or two individuals. There are rarely
advantages in shooting only faceless masses, but for a film like India's Sacred Cow—a theoretical statement concerned with the many uses of the
cow—specific individuals are less important.

People is just as humane as Matjemoish in terms of being concerned with real
problems of people. But its strategy is not to focus on any individual Miskito.
Films made by nonanthropologists are as varied along this dimension as are
those made by anthropologists. However, there is the strong Flaherty tradition
of building a film around a single person. Robert Flaherty began this
with Nanook in 1922 and followed it through his other films. However, the
more I see Nanook, the less I feel that the film really tells us much about
Nanook as a whole person. Perhaps much of Nanook's reputation came from
a few shots where Nanook engagingly smiles or laughs into the camera lens.
But despite these reservations, there is no question that Flaherty led both
naive audiences and film critics to relate directly and warmly to the Eskimo
man as a whole person.

So there is precedent in both ethnography and ethnographic film for a
wide range of treating or ignoring individuals. But I think that we can argue,
as much on filmic grounds as on ethnographic grounds, for whole people
rather than faceless masses.

15. Distortion in the Filmmaking Process

It is inconceivable that an ethnographic film could be made in such a way
that it did not distort or alter its images of reality in a myriad of ways. Therefore it gets us nowhere to ask if a film is subjective or if it distorts
reality. The answer to both questions has to be yes.

And as we discussed in chapter 1, ethnographies also distort reality in
many ways. One could make a strong argument that because both films and
ethnographies do distort reality, there is no point in discussing reality or
truth at all. This argument may have a beneficial effect in freeing cinema-as
art from false constraints. But here we are talking about cinema in the service
of science. Social scientists (and even physical scientists) are well aware of
the distortions and the subjectivity and the selections that enter their research.
But at the same time, the scientific goals are phrased in terms of truth or, at
the very least, truth; and scientists speak without embarrassment of the possi-
bility of being more or less accurate. Because of this, the nature of a review
of a monograph in Science is very different from that of a film review in Film
Quarterly.

This book is to some extent a treatise on the curious relationship of the
scientist to truth. As we explored the implications of ethnographic film in
chapter 1, we began to look at truth and distortion in an unusual light.

Now I will reformulate the position of this book. I start with the assump-
tion that the task of ethnography is to achieve a truthful and realistic descrip-
### TABLE 3.15 DISTORTION IN THE FILMMAKING PROCESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Temporal sequences rearranged</th>
<th>Condensed time</th>
<th>Real time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hunters</td>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
<td>The Path</td>
<td>Divination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
<td>Dani Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td>An Isil Calendrical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest of Bliss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuity</th>
<th>Single sequences constructed out of shots from many actual events</th>
<th>Actual sequences preserved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hunters</td>
<td>An Isil Calendrical Divination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
<td>Dani Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Path</td>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time, continuity of action and place, and perspective are just some aspects of reality that may be intentionally altered in the process of shooting and editing film. For convenience, we can talk about these in terms of only two variables, time and continuity. Some films are high on one but low on the other, like The Path, which presents the Japanese tea ceremony in real time but does so by using shots that were made separately and then edited together for continuity. An Isil Calendrical Divination, on the other hand, was made in real time and shot at a single divination ceremony.

These all are decisions that must be made fairly deliberately, and they result in a film that includes some behavior and omits other behavior. In all this, of course, film resembles ethnography.

In the following sections we will discuss the various sorts of distortions that are found in ethnographic filmmaking, and we will try to evaluate the degree to which these distortions threaten the integrity of an ethnographic film. I have chosen the word “distortion” with due thought and some trepidation. Obviously, the word is not used in a totally negative sense. It is meant to denote all the alterations in the representations of reality that take place during the translation of behavior from original occurrence to the final image on the movie screen.

There are two main sorts of distortions: one occurs when filmmakers, intentionally or inadvertently, cause alterations in the behavior they are filming; and the other occurs during the filmmaking process itself, through the selective acts of shooting or editing.

#### A. INADVERTENT DISTORTION OF BEHAVIOR

Many ethnographic films purport to show naturally occurring behavior. All ethnographic films have used cameras that are visible and thus intrusive into the behavioral space of the people being filmed. Only rarely have ethnographic films been made of people for whom camera and film crew are a natural part of their behavioral space.

There is the paradox.

In any ordinary ethnographic research, ethnographers can only guess at the effect their presence has on the behavior being observed. They can never observe it in their own absence. In ethnographic film this bind is writ large because the camera is often wielded by a stranger, perhaps assisted by a film crew, and so is far more intrusive than a single ethnographer poking about, notebook in hand, making observations and interviewing people. Few ethnographers have ever tried to answer the question of the effect of their own presence. It is one of the conventions of anthropology that we usually ignore it.

In fact, only recently have ethnographers made much more than the obligatory acknowledgment that they were there. In his famous introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* in 1922, Bronislaw Malinowski insisted that ethnographers must explain how they gathered their data. This seems like a minimal demand, but forty-five years later, David Maybury-Lewis, in the introduction to his *Akue-Shavante Society*, could still regret that "anthropologists are frequently reticent about the circumstances of their field work" (1967, xix).

Actually, while the manner of obtaining data is relatively easy to describe,
ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

TABLE 3.15A INADVERTENT DISTORTION OF BEHAVIOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extreme</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
<td>Les maîtres fous</td>
<td>Dani Sweet Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The presence of a camera team is bound to have some effect on behavior. No matter how unobtrusive the filmmakers attempt to be, there will be some inadvertent effect on the behavior. The two major factors in this inadvertent distortion are the degree of camera consciousness, resulting in unease before the camera, and the relative energy levels of the camera crew and the subjects. The possession ceremony in Les maîtres fous or the battles and funerals in Dead Birds had such high levels of energy of their own that the filmmakers were virtually ignored.

Although the activity in both Dani Sweet Potatoes and Dani Houses was at a comparatively low energy level, the people were not at all camera conscious, and they were so familiar with the filmmaker that there seems to have been little inadvertent distortion of behavior. It would be possible to use footage of such distortion and incorporate it into a film so as to make a telling ethnographic point. But when distortion is unintentional, uncontrolled, and unincorporated into the ethnographic understanding, it detracts from the ethnographic quality of the film.

the extent to which the data reflect the intrusion of the ethnographer is much harder to determine. Ethnographers can write around their presence, creating a conventionally fictionalized account of events that might be called "the ethnographic absence" (a permutation of the phrase "the ethnographic present," referring to another convention of ethnography, in which we describe cultures not as they are but as they presumably existed in some untouched primal state). But even though the ethnographer can write in the mode of "the ethnographic absence," an ethnographic filmmaker usually cannot, because the camera uncompromisingly records the effects of the intrusion and film audiences can easily sense mugging and other forms of camera consciousness.

How does filming affect behavior? Only a few anthropologists have even considered the problem in print. Margaret Mead, writing about the study that she and Gregory Bateson carried out in Bali in 1936–1938 and that involved extensive still and movie photography, suggested that the presence of the cameras had little effect on the Balinese: "They were unsel-know-conscious about photography, accepting it as a part of a life which was in many ways always lived on a stage" (1970, 259). Bateson, writing specifically about still photography (in Bateson and Mead 1942, 49), discussed the factors "which contributed to diminish camera consciousness in our subjects." But these are
denials of influence and not real considerations of the extent of the influence. And in fact, in many scenes in the Bateson and Mead Balinese films, especially those showing casual family interaction in a courtyard, the adults do seem to be acting in reference to Bateson and Mead and even appear to be asking them for instructions.

Adam Kendon and Andrew Ferber came to similar conclusions in their study of greeting behavior, where they had set up three 16 mm movie cameras at an outdoor birthday party near New York City. On the basis of the participants' reports and their own observations, they felt that the people were "almost completely unaffected by the cameras" (1973, 598).

But the opposite opinion is stated by Edmund Carpenter. He describes an experiment with natives of the Sepik River area in New Guinea. He first used a hidden camera to film people who were unaware that they were even being observed; then he made them camera conscious and filmed them in that state. Carpenter claims that the presence of the camera totally altered their behavior: "Almost invariably, body movements became faster, jerky, without poise or confidence. Faces that had been relaxed froze or alternated between twitching & rigidity" (1972, 138).

Anthropologists who use film to record and analyze body movement, or nonverbal behavior, often use an interesting argument to support the position that cameras have no significant effect on behavior. They claim that they are looking at patterns of behavior that have been so thoroughly learned and are so unconscious that they will not be easily altered, or if they are altered, the alteration is only on a surface level and does not affect the basic cultural movements.

But these arguments would concern only the most overlearned and unconscious aspects of behavior. To draw an analogy to language is appropriate here. It is one thing to suggest that a person who knows that her speech is being recorded will not make significant changes in her vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammar, but it is quite another thing to say that the content of her speech is unchanged. And in the behavior that is recorded in ethnographic film, what is being done is quite as important as how it is being done.

Pat Loud, the mother and wife in the television series An American Family, described vividly how her family altered its behavior at the first suggestion that they would be filmed:

Immediately the Heisenberg Principle—anything observable is changed by the fact of being observed—went into effect and we all became charming, amusing, photogenic, and generally irresistible. We did our number... it might not be apparent... but we always put on a good

88
front. . . . We were quite capable of keeping up a running ho-ho banter which perfectly achieved its aim of hiding anything either of us felt about anything. (Loud and Johnson 1974, 89)

You can't forget the camera, and everybody's instinct is to try and look as good as possible for it, all the time, and to keep kind of snapping along being active, eager, cheery, and productive. Out go those moments when you're just in a kind of nothing period, hibernating until you move onto the next thing. (Ibid., 102)

It is interesting to compare Pat Loud's "native" account with that of Alan and Susan Raymond, who shot most of the film for An American Family (1973). The Raymonds make no attempt to evaluate the effect of their presence on the Loud family and indeed show no awareness at all that they had any effect. How can we judge these contradictory claims? We have no comparable "native" statements for any other ethnographic film. In the case of An American Family, it is clear that at least one subject felt that the film account of her life was wildly inaccurate, while the filmmakers felt that it was accurate. There are obvious possibilities for bias in both accounts. We can take the easiest (but long-delayed) first step and raise the question of the effect of camera intrusion on behavior. The next step, answering this question, is much harder but should be attempted.

Incidentally, camera consciousness may be as hard to simulate as it is to avoid. In Alfred Hitchcock's Rebecca, there are scenes of home movies that the characters played by Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine took of each other on their honeymoon. In the film as a whole, both Olivier and Fontaine give outstandingly convincing performances, but in this film-within-a-film sequence, neither can capture the easily recognizable symptoms of camera consciousness. They are simply too much in control of themselves.

Relative energy level. A major determinant of disruption is the relative energy level of the event being filmed and the filmmakers. In the Hauka ceremony possession scenes of Jean Rouch's Les maîtres fou, or in the funeral and battle scenes of Dead Birds, the activity itself had such high energy that it absorbed all the attention of the people, and the cameras were ignored. Kendon and Ferber are quite explicit about this factor in their discussion of camera consciousness at the birthday party, where they claim that "the event gathered its own momentum and proved to be absorbing enough for both adults and children for them not to care very much about the filming" (1973, 598).

But typically in shots of casual activities, where not much is happening and the energy level is comparatively low, attention is drawn to the camera. Then the camera crew becomes a significant part of the total behavior. Often, camera consciousness is marked by people making eye contact with the camera. But there is a subtler form, marked by body stiffness and "unnatural" movement, which audiences can sense even when they cannot precisely describe the cues they have observed.

Mugging. A more extreme sign of intrusion is mugging, a stylized performance in which people interact in exaggerated manner with the camera, making silly faces and gestures. Every photographer has had experiences with subjects mugging in this way. It is a sign of extreme unease at being confronted, not with a familiar human face, but with a glass-and-metal contraption. Mugging may be a kind of exaggeration of gesture into which a person intuitively feels pushed in order to communicate through the opaque barrier of the camera machinery. As shouting is an exaggerated voice level necessary to span physical distance, so mugging is exaggerated nonverbal communication necessary to span the machine-created distance.

Photographic sophistication. In a few cases, camera consciousness has been minimal simply because the people do not know what a camera is. These naive situations are rare and will soon be nonexistent except for very young children. In 1961, when Dead Birds was being filmed in West New Guinea, the Dani had no experience with cameras, and we did not explain what cameras were, since we felt that there was a danger that they would misunderstand and feel threatened. Later, as I came to know the Dani better, I realized that this was an unnecessary fear. But in 1968, when I visited the Dani, I left a Polaroid camera with a missionary, who proceeded to use it quite openly. As a result, by 1970 most Dani in that area were extremely camera conscious and mugged at the sight of a camera. Despite this, a Japanese-Indonesian television crew that filmed the major pig feast in 1970 (see K. Heider 1972a) found what we had experienced nine years earlier: when important ceremonies were going on, the Dani completely ignored the cameras. But today tourists who visit the Dani meet professionals who demand money for posing for photographs.

B. INTENTIONAL DISTORTION OF BEHAVIOR

Nanook's igloo is the classic case of a filmmaker altering material culture. Flaherty found that a normal Eskimo igloo was simply too small and too dark to allow him to shoot inside it. His solution was to have the Eskimo build a half-igloo shell, twice normal size, in which he could show Eskimo home life. This was deliberate distortion done to achieve reality. The film is able to show something of Eskimo life inside the igloo. We see the family un-
TABLE 3.15B  INTENTIONAL DISTORTION OF BEHAVIOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extreme</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Path</td>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
<td>Dani Sweet Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netsilik series</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The behavior shown in a film may have been intentionally altered or distorted by the filmmaker in a wide variety of ways, ranging from altering the material culture to staging, triggering, or reconstructing behavior. One can speak of this as a variable running from extensive to minimal intentional distortion of behavior, but it does not necessarily correlate with ethnographicness. There can be good ethnographic justifications for any degree of such distortion. One cannot say that the Netsilik Eskimo films, with their reenactment of Eskimo life, or The Path, in which the Japanese tea ceremony was filmed bit by bit, are less ethnographic than Dani Sweet Potatoes, which was filmed with no intentional distortion of behavior. In each film, distortion was made or avoided for legitimate ethnographic reasons.

dressing, getting under the fur covers, going to sleep, and waking. It is hardly a comprehensive treatment, but this is really the only sequence in which the whole family is established as a family unit. The drawback, however, is that we are given a false impression of the size of the igloo living space. And we are given a false sense of the inside temperature when we see Nanook and his family strip off their clothes when it is obviously cold enough for their breath to condense. But Flaherty decided that the advantages of distortion outweighed the disadvantages.

But there is a second decision: Should the filmmaker reveal such artifice, and how? On the whole, filmmakers are reluctant to discuss this, except informally. From an ethnographic standpoint, however, we must know in considerable detail what distortion occurred. To a great degree the ethnographic integrity of a film depends on the extent to which we can learn of the distortions. It is certainly difficult both to create artifice and to reveal it in the course of a film. In most cases it is sufficient to describe it elsewhere, in writing. For example, many of Flaherty's distortions are now well known from the books and articles written about him and his films. But most other reconstructed films, such as the Netsilik Eskimo series, the American Indian series, and the Desert Peoples series, have fallen far short in desirable explanation of how they re-created behaviors and artifacts.

Reality can be deceptive too. Ronald Rundstrom (pers. comm.) has described how the carnations in the teahouse in The Path were chosen and arranged carefully by the filmmakers and the tea mistress to enhance the autumnal mood of that particular tea ceremony. But somehow, perhaps because of the color balance of the film or the wide-angle lens, in the finished film the carnations are too obtrusive.

**Interruption of behavior.** The filmmaker may interrupt behavior, breaking its flow in order that cameras may be moved, so as to get a variety of shots from different angles. Then the footage can be edited together to create an even flow. In Dead Birds, for example, during a minor curing ceremony a man makes a feathered reed wand and gives it to two boys, who run shouting out of the compound. The boys are seen from inside the compound running out, and then the next shot they are shown outside running down The Path. Gardner stopped the boys as they got outside; then he set up his camera outside and filmed them as they resumed running. It would be difficult to argue that this made any significant change in the boys' running behavior.

On the other hand, in The Path each shot was set up separately for optimal camera angle, and then it was rehearsed and shot. The filmmakers believed that the women had so routinized their movements after years of training that they could resume the flow of action at will. However, the filmmakers acknowledged that their approach eliminated the easy social chatter that accompanies the movements. Knowing this, the viewer can study the film for its description of movement and gesture but is warned not to use it to study the tea ceremony as social interaction.

The use of two cameras can get around this problem. Tidikwaa and Friends, made by Jeff and Su Doring in New Guinea, is one of the rare ethnographic films that has used two cameras to good effect in the field. One memorable scene of a man felling a large tree cuts from a close-up of the falling tree to a long shot, leaving no doubt that two cameras were covering the same event. The major drawback, of course, is that the effective use of two cameras creates a larger and more intrusive film crew.

**"Staged" behavior.** Casual critics of ethnographic films often condemn a film on the grounds that some scenes are "staged." By this they seem to imply that because the behavior was directed by the filmmaker, it is not accurate. This is in fact a very complex question. To evaluate "staged" behavior, we must know the circumstances of filming and the culture being filmed.

There are two related questions: If the events in a film were not purely spontaneous, then what was the role of the filmmaker? And if the events were in some manner instigated or encouraged by the filmmaker, were they events in the current cultural repertoire, or were they revived after more or less long abeyance?
ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

Although these facts should be part of the public record of any film with scientific pretensions, they can be established for only a few ethnographic films, and then more often from external published account and oral tradition (i.e., rumor or gossip) than from evidence within the film itself.

*Wedding of Palo* is a good example of such knowledge, because we know that it is a scripted, acted Inuit love story. But it was directed by Knud Rasmussen, a knowledgeable Arctic anthropologist and traveler whose mother was Inuit, and it was acted in Greenland by Inuit. One scene is of a song duel between Palo and Samo, rivals for the love of the girl. The song duel is a classic conflict-resolution institution, well known from the literature on the Inuit. On these grounds, one can say with fair confidence that the song duel in *Wedding of Palo* is accurate both in its particulars and in its context. But of course that particular song duel never happened. And it is inconceivable that a naturally occurring song duel could have been filmed in anything approaching the detail of that one.

At the other extreme, *The Sky Above and the Mud Below*, a popular travelogue from the 1960s about a trip across New Guinea, was noteworthy for its obvious manipulations and exaggerated claims. For example, in an early scene the camera is traveling up a river in the Asmat and suddenly meets a huge war party of Asmaters in dozens of canoes bearing down on it. Only the most credulous viewer could believe that it is accidental. Obviously the “war party” was arranged for the film. Illegitimate? Not completely, for these are Asmat warriors, paddling in the Asmat manner.

Soon thereafter we witness an Asmat initiation ceremony. But it is one that had not been performed for years and was revived for the benefit of the film crew—a preyly the roof of the house was even removed to provide enough light for the filming. However, this ceremony is done by Asmaters and must be to some extent genuine. The trouble is that most viewers cannot separate the genuine from that which was dictated by the French film crew.

The behavior in the Netsilik films is also a puzzle. We know that an ethnographic present of 1919 was re-created in the 1960s. It is easy to see how artifacts can be reconstructed from drawings. But how is a complex process like hunting or fishing or housebuilding reconstructed? How much came from the actors’ memories, how much from their parents’ memories, and how much from Rasmussen’s writings? These are the sorts of things we need to know. They are described briefly by Balikci and Brown (1966).

**Triggering behavior.** Another practice similar to reconstruction is that of triggering the behavior. This is a matter not of reviving some behavior from the past but of influencing the timing for some behavior in current usage.

Bateson distinguished between photographs that are posed and those taken when the ethnographer merely triggers the behavior:

In a great many instances, we created the context in which the notes and photographs were taken, e.g., by paying for the dance or asking a mother to delay the bathing of her child until the sun was high, but this is very different from posing photographs. Payment for theatrical performances is the economic base upon which the Balinese theater depends, and the extra emphasis given to the baby served to diminish the mother’s awareness that she was to be photographed. (Bateson and Mead 1942, 50)

With this distinction, Bateson was trying to make the point that some distortions are good (or at least acceptable) while others are unacceptable. But the matter is much more complex, and it depends greatly on the sorts of data to which one is referring. To evaluate how justifiable it was, we need to know what role the filmmakers played and just how they distorted, or “created the context” of, an event. But even more, we need to have some evaluation by the ethnographer of the result of that distortion. For example, in *Desert People* the opening titles tell us that the film was made of an Australian Aborigine family that had been on a mission station for only three months when it agreed to return to the Western Desert to work with the film crew. That is important and necessary information. But there is no hint whether this might have had any effect on the family’s behavior. Were they hunting for food, or were they hunting animals for the camera and then having bully beef with the film crew? And if the latter is true, did it make any difference?

In the middle of filming, *Dead Birds*, the leaders of one Dani sib said that they would like to perform the *wam kneke*, a renewal ceremony for their sacred stones, but unfortunately they did not have enough pigs; however, if we would pay for the necessary pigs, they could perform the ceremony and we could see it. We paid, they performed, and we watched and filmed. I am still not fully certain what was really going on. We did contribute to the ceremony. But were they planning it anyway and saw an opportunity to make us donate pigs for it? Had our expressed interest in seeing their sacred stones planted in their minds the idea of killing two birds with one set of pigs? As the ethnographer, I should know, but I do not. However, I have no reason to suspect that our role in the ceremony significantly altered the performance of the ceremony as seen in the film or on the level I was able to describe it. (If I had reached a deeper command of the Dani language and culture by then point and had been making a careful study of ceremonial exchange, the data
would have been anomalous, with pigs coming from the expedition and not from other particular Dani.)

I feel hesitant about writing about this incident, partly because I cannot give a satisfactory account of all its subtle complexities, and partly because I am sensitive to the persistent rumors that we instigated war among the Dani. We did not, but the rumor is more interesting than the denial and will undoubtedly persist. That is the problem about even describing the circumstances of this ceremony. It is liable to be misunderstood and turned into a claim that we paid for ceremonies. This is at best a partial truth, falsified by being stripped of its context. But it must be discussed, for the question of intervention is one that faces many ethnographic filmmakers and, indeed, many ethnographers. It is important to understand and describe these situations.

A similar situation lies behind the scenes of the gar initiation ceremony in The Nuer, according to Robert Gardner (pers. comm.). George Breidenbach was alone with the Nuer when an initiation took place, but he was unable to film it because his camera batteries were not charged. Later, the Nuer told him of two more boys who should have been initiated, but because of the disruption of a smallpox epidemic, there was not enough beer available to hold a proper ceremony. Breidenbach offered to supply the beer, and the two boys were initiated. Unfortunately, because of his lack of understanding of the ceremony, the scenes are very incomplete. But there is no reason to doubt the integrity of what he did shoot, since it agrees well with Evans-Pritchard’s description of the initiation.

C. EXPLANATION OF DISTORTIONS

Most films that show reconstructed or reenacted behavior simply present it straight as an unacknowledged sort of ethnographic present. Only a very few films indicate in an introductory title or the narration that the behavior is reconstructed. But of course even when this is said, it all does is to serve notice that something is wrong. There is a certain amount of verbal tradition floating around the ethnographic film world—usually misinformed—describing how the scenes were made. It is paradoxical that one can learn more about the technical illusions of feature films, whose purpose is illusion, than about manipulation of reality in ethnographic films, whose purpose is reality.

The Moontrap is a remarkable film because it shows not only the reconstruction event but also the process of that reconstruction. One of the filmmakers, Michael Brauk, had worked as cameraman on Jean Rouch’s Chronicle of a Summer, and The Moontrap reflects and extends Rouch’s vision of reality in film.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No acknowledgment in film or in print</th>
<th>Some attempt</th>
<th>Fully adequate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hunters</td>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
<td>The Path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
<td>Jero Tapakan films</td>
<td>Forest of Bliss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dani Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the course of filmmaking, a vast number of changes, intentional as well as inadvertent, are wrought on reality. Some of these are quite necessary, desirable, and intentional, others not so. But it is crucial to the ethnographicness of a film that they be explained, justified, and evaluated. This criterion could well be taken to ridiculous extremes; it would be impossible to explain every frame of every shot. But the filmmakers and ethnologists should spell out in reasonable detail how they made the film. The bulk of this has to be done in print, through something like an ethnographic companion or study guide that can accompany the film. The fullest example of this explanation and evaluation is The Path, which is accompanied by a detailed publication written by the filmmakers themselves (Rundstrom, Rundstrom, and Bergum 1973). Dead Birds, with its ethnographic companion (K. Heider 1972a), is fairly well analyzed from this standpoint, while The Hunters, Dani Sweet Potatoes, and Dani Houses have fewer printed materials.

We are told in the opening titles of The Moontrap that the National Film Board camera crew encouraged the people of a small French-Canadian community on an island in the St. Lawrence River to revive their custom of trapping beluga whales. The film follows one man as he tries to organize the whale trapping. He discusses it with men who were old enough to have participated in it forty years earlier; he searches the town archives for records of how the task was organized; the matter is discussed at a town meeting; and outlines of the last whale trap are located in the river mud at low tide. The idea of the enterprise begins to have a life of its own. The great virtue of this approach is that it does much more than show how some people once trapped whales. It does that, of course, but it also shows the meaning of the past for the present.

The Moontrap has the best of two worlds: It records in detail an interesting and unusual technological process of the past (a film of the same villagers repairing their television sets would not have been as interesting or valuable), and it manages to show how that technological process is embedded in its social context. The film cannot recapture the social context of the original whale trapping, of course, but it does follow out the reverberations of the effort to revive the whale trapping in personal, political, and even religious
and cutting was done without regard for geography, people race down one street, turn a corner, and are magically transported to another spot a mile away. Obviously The Third Man was edited for drama, and it cannot be used to make an accurate street map of Vienna.

But when this technique from fiction film is carried over into ethnographic film, it is not so harmless. Since we view ethnographic film as much for its true information as for its entertainment value, it does matter whether the continuity of a sequence is real or has been contrived in the editing room.

Ethnographic films contain countless scenes that have been created through editing. For example, when Nanook reaches his igloo in the blizzard and crawls inside, shots of a normal-sized igloo in a blizzard are followed by shots of the mock-up, half-shell, extra-large igloo taken on a clear day.

The giraffe hunt in The Hunters is edited together from scenes shot in different years with different men. If audiences could distinguish individual Bushmen—or even different giraffes—the effect would not be possible.

The major battle sequence in Dead Birds is put together from shots of different battles at different locations. Also, in Dead Birds, scenes of women going to the brine pool for salt alternate with scenes of men at battle, but in fact the brine trek was shot on a different day. All these are examples of distortions, but in each case editing is used to construct a description that is plausible. Before creating the counterpoint of men's battle and women's salt trek, Gardner was careful to determine that it could have happened. And it accurately illustrates the apparent indifference with which women did go about their normal activities while their men were engaged in battle.

This is a good moment in the argument to think some more about the nature of truth in ethnographies and in films. When I wrote the following sentence, I said relatively little, but what I did say was true: "Dani women never approach a battlefield, and in fact often work in the gardens apparently unconcerned, only occasionally looking up when a particularly loud cry comes from battle." (1970, 111). If Gardner as a filmmaker wants to say the same thing in the visuals of a film, he is likely to have to say a great deal more, and not all of it can be literally true in the same sense. The women did go to the brine pool; the men did fight in several battles. But when he edits the footage from several battles together in order to say visually something like "This is what Dani battle looks like" or "This is the best picture I can give you of Dani battles," he follows the convention of filmmaking and lets the narration say, in effect, "This is one battle." So of course the audience sees it as one battle.

Then, he edits battle shots alternating with salt trek shots to communicate visually the idea that while Dani men fight, women do things like getting
salt. But again, he follows film convention and claims in the narration that, on the day when that battle took place, these women went to the brine pool—and the audience sees it as an account of one particular Dani day.

Dead Birds is a particularly good film to use for this discussion because Gardner is so talented and knowledgeable as both a filmmaker and an ethnographer that we can assume he knew what he was doing. In his attempt to use the standards and conventions of both cinema and ethnography, he had to compromise, and he betrayed both to some extent. Now we can understand better what he did: in order to capture so many truths about the Dani, he had to tamper with the literal chronological truth in some points. But before we take a purist position, it would be good to recall the discussion in chapter 1 about such cinematographic conventions in juxtaposition to the very comparable distortion that occurs in written ethnography.

Perhaps as we become more aware of these implications, some anthropologists will come to reject ethnographic films like Dead Birds in favor of more modest and literally true films like Dani Sweet Potatoes. This would be a shame, for the films in the grand tradition have their value as ethnographic and human documents. But we do have the right to insist that, if they are to be taken seriously as ethnography, their distortions must be explained and justified in separate written documents. The ethnographic companion to Dead Birds (K. Heider 1972a), written by Gardner and myself, was a step in this direction but has long since gone out of print. I have mentioned above two more recent attempts to address this problem: a monograph on the Jero Balinese films (Connor, Asch, and Asch 1986) and the shot-by-shot discussion of Forest of Bliss by Gardner and Östör (2001).

Real time and film time. Another common distortion in film is condensed time. Practically never does film time equal real time except, of course, within each individual shot. The actual time may be indicated visually or verbally. For example, in the narration of Dani Houses, I mention how long it took to build each structure. In fact, since the Dani work pattern is quite irregular, the time figures mean very little. But when I showed the work print to audiences, they invariably asked for time data. So I provided these data, but more in the interest of relieving audience tension than for accuracy.

Most events shown in ethnographic films simply take too long to show in real time. Two exceptions occur in An Islai Calendrical Divination and The Path (about a Japanese tea ceremony), both of which show short events in real time. It is interesting that most unprepared audiences find both films unbearably long, although they are only thirty-two and thirty-four minutes, respectively.

A few films use brief scenes in slow motion, or freeze frames, to point out complex behavior (as in Trance and Dance in Bali) or to dramatize a moment (as in Dead Birds). But I know of no use of time-lapse photography in ethnographic films (although once Robert Gardner talked about the potential of time-lapse photography in compressing a day's activity in a marketplace into a few minutes of film, in order to show general trends of activity).

16. Culture Change Made Explicit

Today, even if culture change is not the primary subject of printed ethnographies, it is at least explicitly acknowledged. It is generally recognized that cultures change, and that all cultures change all the time, even though different aspects of cultures change at different rates, and some aspects may even be remarkably stable. Earlier films went to great lengths to preserve or reconstruct a sort of "ethnographic present"—the presumed untouched state before outside influences came in. But this was always an "ethnographic fiction." Nothing illustrates this point better than the contrast between John Marshall's first and last films. In The Hunters (1957), the Ju/'hoansi hunt with metal arrow points, and in one scene a hunter wears rubber flip-flop sandals. But the narration ignores these signs of change, and only the most acute observers will notice them. At the other extreme, Marshall's last film, A Kalahari Family, is all about the changes that have reshaped Ju/'hoansi life over the last decades of the twentieth century. There are no hints of change in Dead Birds, and in my own Dani film, Dani Sweet Potatoes, I include a scene where a man splits firewood with a metal ax and I remark on it in my narration. But I make no attempt to analyze the change from stone to steel axes, even though that was going on in front of me. Today ethnographic films routinely deal with culture change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeless &quot;ethnographic present&quot;</th>
<th>Acknowledgment of culture change</th>
<th>Analysis of culture change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dead Birds</td>
<td>Dadi's Family</td>
<td>Trobriand Cricket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dani Houses</td>
<td>I Love You</td>
<td>A Kalahari Family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although cultural change is always going on, it is possible to avoid it altogether in a film. Recent films tend at least to recognize change. In Dadi's Family, the grandmother talks about changing family roles even as she resents what is happening to her. Trobriand Cricket focuses on how the English game has been changed to fit the Melanesian culture.
ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES

Particularizing and generalizing. One of the greatest differences between words and pictures lies in the fact that words are necessarily abstracted, generalized representations of reality, whereas photographs, despite the subjective selection involved in shooting, are in some sense direct, specific representations of reality. Not only do ethnographers use words, but they also use words to make generalizations, to state cultural norms. However, the strategy of ethnography is to begin with the data of specific behavior and to move to the cultural generalization. And a good part of any ethnographic writing is description. It is in the realm of the critical anecdote, or the illustrative case, that film most often serves ethnography. Film shows a specific event, carefully chosen and edited for its ethnographic import, and put into a generalizing framework by a few words printed in a title or read in the narration.

So most ethnographic films make cultural generalizations by showing a particular event or artifact or person and implying or openly claiming that the particular is typical, that is, general. Thus, in Dead Birds we are invited to see Weyak and understand “adult Dani men”; we see Weyakhe’s funeral and understand “Dani funerals.” Whether this is a justified step depends greatly on the filmmaker’s understanding of the culture and the filmmaker’s skill at choosing shots that are indeed fairly typical. But obviously behavior varies so much that no one man or single funeral can really be representative of all men or all funerals. The ethnographic filmmaker has an obligation to select reasonably representative events, but also to provide, perhaps in the film and certainly in supplementary written material, those ethnographic data that will spell out the relation of the specific image to the range of variation of those specifics and to the general.

These thoughts raise an interesting question: How far can films go in making general statements out of specific raw material? It is obvious that this can be done with generalizing words read in a narration. But how much can it be done visually?

Douglas L. Oliver, in his monograph on the Siuai of Bougainville, said that his photos would give a better idea of Siuai physique than his words could (1955, 10). So ethnographic films that show dozens or hundreds of people in a society can provide the raw materials for generalization. In The Nuer this is done quite deliberately in several sequences that show a dozen or more short shots of ivory bracelets, tobacco pipes, or scarification designs. Thus, although one photograph or twenty-four photographs per second can never actually make a generalization, a film can show a range of acts, events, or artifacts and so set up a generalization. In terms of film language, or the semiotics of film, we can think of two sorts of visual implications or statements. In one, a single representation is shown and a generalization implied—for example, “This is how Weyak behaves and therefore how Dani men behave.” In the other, we see many different representations, and the implied statement is “Here is how so many hundred Dani men appear, and therefore this is the range of similarity and variation of Dani men.”

For the most part these unspoken “statements” are merely filmic implications and are not really comparable to explicit, mutually understood intentional linguistic utterances. To some extent the filmmaker intended to make them, and to some extent some viewers perceive them, but there are always ambiguities: one can legitimately ask, “What did he say?” and “Is that what he really meant?” Such ambiguity may be used to great effect in art, and, indeed, it may be considered the essence of art. But it is not tolerable in science. So we must insist that ethnographic filmmakers clarify in narration or in writing the extent to which they mean generalizations to be made.

One of the films in the Desert People series (part 2, Gum Preparation, Stone Flaking; Djarawara Leaves Badjar) does this well, taking particular pains to warn us when it would be false to draw the logical generalization from the visuals. At the beginning we are told that the films were made in an unusually dry spell, certainly an important factor on the Western Desert of Australia. Elsewhere we see a man perform a task but are told that usually women do it; we see a bark dish but are told that most dishes are made of solid wood; and as we see a man getting gum from grasses, we are told that this time he is having particular difficulty in making the gum congeal.

Semiotics. “Semiotics,” or “semiology,” is a general term for a wide range of interests that have developed out of linguistic concerns. One of these interests concerns the way in which cinema resembles language. A language is a system of symbols used to communicate; a film uses symbols to communicate. But the crucial semiotic question focuses on the “system”: Does a film or do films embody regular systems that are in any sense comparable to syntax or lexicon? Put another way, do the concepts of syntax and lexicon help in understanding film? The idea is fascinating, but I do not intend to deal with it at any great length here. Much of this work has been done in French and is only gradually being translated (e.g., Metz 1974).

Sol Worth, in his 1969 paper “The Development of a Semiotic of Film,” explores these sorts of questions: Is there a grammar of film; if so, is there a possibility of “ungrammatical” film statements? But Worth is careful not to claim too much. The experiment with Navajo filmmakers that Worth carried out in collaboration with John Adair attempted to explore some of these implications: If there is something analogous to a language of film, will Navajos
make films in some sort of Navajo film language that is different from other (English, Hollywood, etc.) film languages.

As yet, there is very little in the way of results that one can point to with any degree of confidence. At present the differences between film and the language of ordinary discourse seem more important than the similarities: language is a more precise, instrumental medium of communication; film communicates, of course, but in a more diffuse, noninstrumental way. The utterances of language are brief, and reaction and correction are immediate, usually measurable in seconds; with film, if there is any comparable message turnaround time, it is measured in months and years. Film may be more analogous to novels or plays. But even there, while novels and plays are constructions of the language of everyday discourse, the ingredients of film (shots and sequences of shots) are not present in ordinary discourse of any sort.

Despite these problems and uncertainties, we can point to some general principles.

1. Cutaway Shots

The juxtaposition of two shots often implies that the contents of both are related. When a shot of a face watching something off-camera is followed by a shot of a logical something, it is almost inescapable that the filmic statement be read as "X is watching Y." A very common cinematographic technique using this type of juxtaposition is the cutaway, when shots of an event are broken by close-ups of people’s faces supposedly watching the event. The cutaway has special perils for ethnographic film.

First, the cutaway is often used to break up a long action, on the assumption that the audience cannot tolerate focusing its attention on a single act for more than a few seconds. But in fact it is more likely that in ethnographic film we need to see a long and uninterrupted act and that the editor’s decision to cut away will be based on some arbitrary number of seconds and will do violence to the integrity of the action. (A slightly more excusable use of the cutaway is when the camera has stopped or run out of film, and the cutaway is a sort of rescue operation.) This of course rarely happens with video, where a single take can last an hour or more.

Second, the shots inserted as cutaways are usually shot before or after the main action. Then, when they are inserted into the sequence of an action, they are likely to be misleading. If the main action is a vehement speech or the peak moment of a funeral, for example, we understand the cutaway to mean something like "This is how X was observing and reacting to this moment in the speech or the funeral." Such cutaways could be literally true if two cameras were being used in synchrony with each other. If not, the cutaway is more or less false. It has only aesthetic rationale and adds nothing of ethnographic value. I would go further and say that the ethnographic demand for a longer, uncut shot would be more aesthetic, despite its cinematographic unconventionality.

2. Camera Angle

A very common practice is to shoot downward on people. In my experience most ethnographic filmmakers are taller than most people being filmed. When cameras are handheld or tripods are set up, the camera is usually at comfortable standing height for the filmmaker, but, especially in close-ups, this results in the camera and the viewer looking down on the people. Now, one can talk about the meaning of camera angle. Specifically, let us imagine three close-up shots of a person, showing just head and shoulders: one at her eye level; one from above, looking down on her face; and the third from below, looking up into her face. Each of these three shots would have somewhat different connotations. One of the important dimensions of meaning that vary here has to do with superiority/inferiority, status, and personal distancing. Of course, the English words appropriate to the situation reinforce this suggestion: specifically, that a shot from above, or a film that consistently shoots from above, is in some way making the viewer superior, looking down on the people who are beneath him. This is one factor in what can be called the semiotic of film. It seems certain that continuous use of high camera angles results in greater distance and less empathy and thus perverts what is presumably one goal of ethnographic film.

3. The Audience

Intended audience. Printed anthropology is generally written with a specific audience in mind: reports of research and theoretical contributions are presented in journal articles and monographs aimed at professional colleagues; textbooks, prepared for students, are secondary reworkings of description and theory; and occasionally anthropologists write popular accounts in such journals as Natural History or in books aimed at a general lay audience. These are not absolute categories, for journal articles are reprinted in readers for courses, and monographs may also be used in courses; an occasional textbook like Eliot D. Chapple and Carleton S. Coon’s Principles of Anthropology (1942) may also be an important theoretical formulation; and series like the Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Case Studies in Anthropology, edited by
George and Louise Spindler, were short ethnographies written for classroom use and may be the only comprehensive reports on particular cultures. But on the whole, writers have fairly specific ideas of their primary audience and adjust their writing to the appropriate level.

Most ethnographic films, on the other hand, seem to have been made with little thought for any specific audience. The outstanding exception is the Netsilik Eskimo films, which were carefully designed for a primary-school audience. During the planning stages a team of educational specialists, led by psychologist Jerome Bruner, worked out a program for using ethnographical materials to introduce basic social science. They decided on the specific concepts they wanted to communicate to a specific audience and then produced films that would best accomplish this.

**Film demands on the audience.** The range of demands that film can make on an audience is nicely demonstrated by the old and new versions of *Nanook*. Flaherty originally made *Nanook* with various visual puzzles that first heightened the awareness of viewers as they tried to understand what was going on and then rewarded them by showing the outcome. The revised version of *Nanook*, however, introduces explanatory narration and soothing music. Viewers now are disengaged and merely relax in the wash of sight and sound. There is little left to be attentive to. The narrator attends to all.

We have already discussed how easy it is to overload a film with so much information that viewers simply cannot comprehend it all. The most obvious sort of overloading is to read great quantities of information in the narration.

Another way to overload a film is to lead viewers to a level in the action that is simply too complex to be grasped in a film. The Marshall Kalahari film, *An Argument about a Marriage*, is overloaded in this way. If viewers were only to see the film as an argument, there would be no problem. But the filmmakers wanted to make the viewers understand the historical background and present course of a fast-moving argument involving the complex Bushman marriage practices. No viewer can keep up. Film simply cannot carry so much information. Even if a film is designed for a high level of complexity, there are bound to be questions that can be answered only in written accompaniments.

Perhaps *The Path* makes more demands on an audience than any other ethnographic film. It was designed not just to describe the Japanese tea ceremony but also to reproduce its qualities so that audiences could use it almost as a meditation or a study experience. At the other extreme, Flaherty made his films for a general theater audience and probably had no thought that one day they would be seen almost exclusively in classrooms. The Bateson and Mead Balinese films are the closest approach to a filmic monograph, and certainly they were conceived as an integral part of a monographic report.

But for the most part, ethnographic films apparently try to appeal to all audiences. (One must say "apparently" because the filmmakers' aims are rarely accessible.) There are some advantages to this approach. It does give a film a chance to sell at several different markets. But this advantage may be illusory. In fact there is basically only one market for ethnographic films: the educational or classroom market. This market uses films as much for entertainment as for informational, educational value. There is a sort of positive feedback at work. Films are entertaining, so they are used for entertainment. And so most anthropologists have not considered the serious anthropological potential of film. (An important exception to this is in the study of primate behavior. Since E. R. Carpenter's films of monkeys in the 1930's, primate films have been important scholarly productions.)

It is probably fairly easy for filmmakers to state, if pushed, the audience they had in mind for any particular film. But I think that for most filmmakers this is an ex post facto rationalization. To the extent that they have an audience in mind, it is a select preview audience of their friends.

A more interesting question concerns the attributes of ethnographic films that are made for entertainment or for instruction. The major differentiating dimension is the intensity of information. Films like *Nanook* and *The Nuer* contain relatively little information but give much atmosphere; films like *Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea* and *Dani Sweet Potatoes* are loaded with information and spend little time on pure atmosphere.

In my experience of showing ethnographic films to schoolteachers, I have been surprised at the resistance to films that show "naked savages." Nakedness is culturally patterned, of course. The Dani are extremely modest, in the sense that they do have some body parts that must be covered, and they are quite embarrassed if these should inadvertently be exposed. But to most American audiences, bare breasts of mature women or scrotums of mature men constitute nakedness. And schoolteachers strongly resist using films that show peoples whose patterns of body coverage differ from their own. The teachers say that their pupils are too immature to see such films without making jokes or that the parents would object. As an anthropologist, I accept this as an accurate appraisal of at least parts of contemporary American culture. It is undoubtedly very fortunate, and perhaps no accident, that the major curriculum film project for grade schools was made on the Netsilik Eskimos, a fully clothed people.

**Credibility.** For me one of the most baffling and subjective attributes
of ethnographic films is credibility, or believability. For years I have been showing ethnographic films to audiences of many different sorts, and I am still surprised at what people will or will not accept. Much of the narration in *Mowari Munika*, which was shot in Venezuela, comes verbatim from statements made by a Warao Indian woman and a missionary nun. These statements were translated into English and read by people with slight accents. Chick Strand, the filmmaker, obviously tried hard to create a sense of the two conflicting realities, that of the Indians and that of the missionaries. But to my surprise, many viewers think that the entire narration was created out of Strand’s imagination.

A somewhat more understandable but equally unjustified disbelief greets *The Turtle People*. The beginning titles establish the Miskito Indians as living in Nicaragua. Most viewers know that Nicaragua is Spanish-speaking, but practically none know that the Miskito actually speak English, not Spanish. So when we hear heavily accented English in a first-person native narration, it is difficult to believe that it is genuine. Perhaps in these films some explanatory introductory titles could help—if people would believe the titles.

Earlier, I questioned the convention of the ethnographic present in ethnographic films. But for some viewers this convention allows them to believe. Many viewers are disturbed by the asphalt highway that appears in the background of some shots of Peter Furst’s *To Find Our Life: The Peyote Hunt of the Huichols of Mexico*. In fact, the Huichols do now use vehicles in their peyote quest, and some of their sacred spots are beside highways. It would be much more logical if Furst’s honesty had strengthened the credibility of his film, not weakened it. In reporting these reactions, I may seem to undermine the previous arguments for explicit reality. Of course that is not my intention. In fact I have no idea how representative are the doubters I reported on, and I should expect that, as viewers become more sophisticated, their credulity will become better placed.

**THE ATTRIBUTES AS DIMENSIONS**

The previous discussion has treated a number of principles that underlie any consideration of the ethnographic prominence of film. These attributes can now be considered as continua or attribute dimensions, along which the various films can be placed. Although it would not be sensible to treat any of the attribute dimensions as finely calibrated scales, it is possible to present them as qualitative scales. But the purpose of the attribute dimensions is to present a systematic way of analyzing any ethnographic film, and I hope that the reader will not hesitate to use the attribute dimension diagrams as a sort of notebook or tally sheet on which to enter comments on other films, whatever their ethnographic prominence. Diagram 1, below, provides a convenient form for this.

**Diagram 1. The attribute dimension grid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Appropriateness of sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Narration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ethnographic basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Explicit theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Relation to printed materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Voice: point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Holism: behavioral contextualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Physical contextualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Reflexivity: the ethnographer’s presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Whole acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Narrative stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Whole bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Whole interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Whole people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Distortion in the filmmaking process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15a. Inadvertent distortion of behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15b. Intentional distortion of behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15c. Explanation of distortions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Culture change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>