The Problem of the Ethnographic Real

by I. C. Jarvie

Stated simply, the problem of the ethnographic real is, what exactly is it that the ethnographer sets out to record and study? It is a serious problem not because ethnographers do not know what reality is, but because they constantly invoke it as a standard (Heider 1976:79); this renders vicious the otherwise possibly innocuous and unavoidable fact that the activities of perceiving, recording, and thinking are fraught with distortion. It is a problem because the aims of ethnography are vague and the philosophical assumptions behind those aims poorly understood. By looking at this problem from the angle subtended by ethnographic film, rather than that of classic one-man fieldwork, it may be possible to illuminate philosophical issues in the basis of anthropology as well as of film.

I

The most popular philosophy of science is inductivism, which alleges that science begins with the gathering of data. When social scientists were unselfconsciously inductivists, they could and did argue that ethnography was the data-gathering base of their science (Jarvie 1964, 1967). Out there in the world were societies and cultures about which anthropologists wished to collect the facts. From the data bank accumulated by their collection efforts anthropologists would be able to make generalisations, at first locally, then covering cultural areas, and finally comprehending mankind as a whole. This antiquated methodology, which I have seen seriously put forward as recently as 1979 in the inaugural lecture of the current Professor of Social Anthropology at Oxford (Needham 1979), is only good when naive, and as such it has great and obvious appeal to naive documentary-film makers. Thinking perhaps in the tradition of those uncritically inductivist social scientists Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Grierson (1946:78-82) defined documentary film as an exercise in the creative treatment of actuality. The actuality he had in mind was the ordinary lives of ordinary working folk, the lives of the rich, comfortable, or intellectual being thought of as artificial and unreal and thus in some way unappealing as those of the creatures of fiction film. More to the point, Grierson combined a romantic temperament with the approach of a preacher; hence he was able to draw in both earnest young men and government support. It was the romantic in him that allowed an alliance to be forged with the explorer Flaherty. To the true romantic, however, sentimental, even the working classes seem to live somewhat artificial lives; the only truly unspoiled and hence real people are those out of touch with civilisation but in touch with nature: primitive people. While romanticism is part of the impetus behind anthropology, one must be clear how superficial and naive romanticism + preaching would seem to such as Boas, Kroeber, Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown. Their concern was the building of a science. On this base an axis was possible because inductivism was a shared philosophy of film makers and anthropologists (Jarvie 1964, 1967).

Romanticism, then, made the anthropologist's bailiwick of Aran, Hudson Bay, or the Kalahari desert attractive to film makers. We must be careful, however, not to confuse this coincidence of interest in places and peoples with comparable aims and results. Flaherty is more appropriately studied with Cooper and Schedsack, Grierson with Riefenstahl, then either is with Chagnon and Asch, Gardner, MacDougal, Marshall, or Smith. Unfortunately, film makers were a little behind anthropologists in the development of their sensibility. Even if their initial impulse was a sentimentalised attraction to the noble savage, anthropologists spent a good deal of the first third of this century freeing themselves from some of the grossest of their assumptions. Romanticism and its associated ethnocentrism were eschewed. On the contrary, the "savage" (the need for scare quotes indicative of self-consciousness and uncertainty) came to be portrayed as tough-mindedly interested in wealth, power, and manipulation. Anthropologists taught themselves to be sceptical not only of their own preconceptions, but also of first impressions and of the accounts offered of their behaviour by the objects of study (Leach 1945:59; Brown and

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2 A classic statement of this line is Schapera's (1956) Government and Politics in Tribal Society. Leach (1950:53) traces the ancestry of the idea to Radcliffe-Brown.

3 The Webbs argued that you only had to reveal the facts to make the necessity of reform apparent (Webb and Webb 1932:chap. 12). It should not, however, be denied that "scientific" anthropology became pretty preachy too, and still is.
Barnett 1942:31–32). Rather, anthropologists increasingly brought to their ethnographic fieldwork intellectual problems and methodological difficulties “imported,” as it were, from their training. The clash between this and inductivism created a sense of crisis in the foundations that has inspired a range of works (Nadel 1951, Sidney 1953, Steward 1955, Harris 1968).

Film makers acknowledging the element of creativity in the presentation of reality would probably not be surprised that inductivism is defensible. Barnett and those whoExports generalisations of science can be erected. Every statement of fact, every observation-report already embodies a selection procedure, point of view, theoretical assumptions, and so cannot serve as a logically prior base. Theory-ladenness is exactly shown by the fact that the command “Observe!” evokes only the response “Observe what?” and that the explanation “The facts” evokes only the further response “Which facts?”; whereas, if we say, “Observe and record the facts of kinship in this society!” assumptions pour out into the open in both the command and the response. Kinship is assumed to be a category (some things are in it and other things are not, and this boundary is presumed relatively unproblematic); it is assumed to be observable and recordable; it is assumed to be significantly different from the next (otherwise why record it?); and so on. Once this much is clear, we realise we have been denied categorial spectacles manufactured by the theoretical system in which kinship is significant and through which we must now observe. What we observe, then, can hardly provide secure grounds for theories, since it is already theory-laden (Popper 1959:59 and chap. 5).

The indiscriminate collection of data thus comes to seem wasteful, but not useless, for buried in the mass there may be nuggets that in some way challenge or contradict the implicit or explicit ideas of their collector. When this contradiction is noticed we have an intellectual problem, and the discovery of such a problem constitutes intellectual progress. What once we thought we knew or even took for granted, we now know we do not or cannot.

An argument like this shifts the legitimacy of the recording function of fieldwork away from a mythical base of pure fact from which science can be synthesised. This is not to deny all value to data gathering. Rather, its value is not to serve as a basis for future induction. Data gathering, thus, is no longer indiscriminate and wasteful but becomes a search for some definite material, e.g., for anomalies, exceptions, and, if the philosophy of Sir Karl Popper is correct, best of all, for counter-examples to current theories.

Film making is not more an objective or mechanical recording of what is there than is painting. Already Popper’s follower Gombrich has plausibly argued that the history of representational painting can be reconstructed in terms of a process he calls “making and matching” (Gombrich 1962). That is to say, a painter wishing to capture some aspect of the visual world seeks, tests, and improves devices to represent it in paint on two-dimensional canvas. Gombrich reproduces the wonderful New Yorker cartoon of the drawing students in ancient Egypt all holding their pencils at eye level to take the measure of a model who happens to be an angular, two-dimensional woman. The same point could be made about film by drawing a film studio in which there are actors and actresses whose bodies are flat, or who are cut off at mid-chest, or who have voices but no body. In other words, like Gombrich’s painter, film makers too have striven long and hard to make and match: to portray emotions, the logic of dramatic action, parallel action, inner thoughts, depiction, and also, most subtly, a point of view that is neither that of the characters nor that of the audience, but akin to the voice of the narrator in prose: namely, the point of view of the film maker himself. So successful have they been in this that, far from being inductivist, the majority of film makers, practical and academic alike, hold that film is irremediably subjective. There is a failure of logic here: subjectivism is the despairing redoubt of the disappointed inductivist, but it is an error to imagine that induction is identical with the method of science. Induction is a theory of science.

Among alternatives, Popper and Gombrich offer us a philosophy of science which even allows us to speak of the effort “to show that the undeniable subjectivity of vision does not preclude objective standards of representational accuracy” (Gombrich 1962:xi).

The upshot of all this, then, is that neither anthropologists nor film makers see their task as definable in terms of recording given and unproblematic facts. They have different aims—anthropologists to advance the problems their subject treats, film makers creatively to express their vision. Hence it is not surprising that the anthropologist rarely makes a film satisfactory to the film maker, the film maker rarely makes a film satisfactory to the anthropologist. The continuing controversy...
in Great Britain over such television documentary series as "The Disappearing World" echoes in its concerns the controversies between film makers and historians over the series "The Great War" and "The World at War" (P. Smith 1976). What is at issue is not the inclusion or exclusion of phenomena themselves, but the argument that the so-called phenomena are constituted by the activities of the anthropologist or the film maker. What an anthropologist sees in New Guinea, and therefore wants to record and reflect upon, may be invisible and inaudible to a film maker without the intellectual concerns and categories of the anthropologist (Heider 1976:10-11). What the film maker wishes to do when let loose in New Guinea may strike the anthropologist as not much more than a rather sentimentally presented set of pretty pictures. At best, the pictures may be unsparring yet enervating (Dead Birds). The Ax Fight (1975) is a reworking of some intricate footage of a fight in a Yanamamo village that the anthropologists were lucky enough to capture on film; Nanook of the North (1922) is a laboriously restaged and faked but gorgeously photographed reconstruction of the struggle to survive in the frozen north (Jarvie 1978a). A recent example of the Nanook style is Hilary Harris's elegant travelogue masquerading as ethnography, The Nuer (1970), justly criticised by anthropologists (e.g., Heider 1976), yet appreciated by no less than Evans-Pritchard (Evans-Pritchard 1972). The trite though of course possible solution that has been advocated is for anthropologists to become film makers and film makers to become anthropologists (Loizos 1977). Though this certainly would be good for enrollments at film schools and diploma courses in anthropology, the solution misses the point; it attempts to overcome the dissatisfaction rather than explain it. Perhaps the aims of film makers and anthropologists are at variance; if so, we may explain their mutual dissatisfaction even if we do not come across a solution.

How much at variance? Film makers cannot assume a captive audience; they must keep their audience entertained; their primary responsibility is to their imaginative vision, the source of their integrity, and they employ their skill in the service of that vision. Anthropologists, by contrast, are academics and scholars, and, while they may be pedagogically flexible, their values will be those of science: caution, responsibility, accuracy, a critical attitude, and scrupulous attention to the demarcation between what is agreed upon and what is controversial. Above all, to be sententious, their responsibility is to truth. Film makers' audiences are a frame of reference; anthropologists share with their audience partnership and criticism and a transcending frame of reference, the traditions and goals of their discipline. So, if we find the concept of truth hard to handle (Weiner 1978), we can get by by relating their responsibility to the traditions and activities of the intellectual discipline and the peer group. Anthropologists portray a tribe not because of its aesthetic appeal (although they need not ignore that), not because they have an imaginative vision (although they may), but because the tribe or the aspect of culture/society they are showing is of anthropological significance. This means it is a contribution to research or teaching or both. Well of significance is a function of the traditions and activities that make up anthropology. Anyone trained in both film making and anthropology, then, might indeed be notable for being able to do both, but not necessarily for being able to combine these disparate aims in one creation.

II

The account I have given thus far of anthropologists and film makers avoids a more basic challenge to their joint enterprise. This challenge is to the model of ethnographers or film makers as detached observers, isolated from rather than interacting with their subjects. This is sometimes expressed by saying that the model positivistically assumes there is a real world available for recording and study independent of the observer. Another way it can be put is to say that we cannot penetrate appearance and touch reality: an anthropologist doing ethnography is entering into social relationships with the persons he is recording/studying, and so what he is aware of is essentially appearances and even of a specific kind, namely, the reactions his presence generates, his own social interactions. Another anthropologist, then, with different interests or a different personality, at another time, might provoke or generate different interactions and hence record and study the appearance of a different process (Fabian 1971).

The trouble with this challenge—indeed, the trouble with taking the problem of appearance and reality too seriously—is that it becomes a red actio ad absurdum on itself. Starting from the idea of anthropologists as interacting, it ends up not allowing them anything to interact with. If the product of ethnography is a record of interaction, it is all too easy to say this breaks down the distinction between observer and observed, and this easily collapses into ethnographic solipsism: all ethnography is no more than a report on the ethnographer (Jarvie 1971, 1975). There is, nevertheless, something to the idea; the issue is to prevent it from running amuck. The commonsense model of the anthropologist (subject) noninteractively observing (an object) is naive; it is the same as the model of perception as some sort of "within" (the mind? the inside of the skull?) peering out of "windows" (the cortex? the eyes?) at the "external world" (things? other people?); nevertheless, there must be a two-place relationship if we are to talk of someone learning something.

At this point I shift gears briefly, to deal with the issue of appearance and reality in a general manner. It will perhaps be remembered that Bishop George Berkeley used the duality of appearance and reality to show that a radical empiricism demanded the permanent vigilance of an all-seeing God. From the contradictions in sense experience, such as seeing a straight twig in water as bent and feeling the same vessel of water to be hot to one hand and cold to the other after the hands had been plunged one into hot and one into cold water, he argued for not altogether trusting the unaided senses as guides to what is there—for not admitting appearances as a guide to reality. Clearly, at times we perceive things that are not there. From the further point, at people (and things) did not disappear when he turned his back on them, or at least the people said they did not, and gardens appeared to go on growing when nobody was there, and adding to this his radical empiricist principle "esse is percipi," Berkeley concluded that in order for it to be true that things were there when no one was perceiving them there had to be, as it were, a Supreme Perceiver always around to ensure that the permanent possibilities of perception awaited us (Berkeley 1910).

Berkeley was one of the ablest arguers in philosophy, and his position, which is logically the same as a highly respectable doctrine called phenomenalism (Wisdom 1953:1-94), espoused by, among others, the nonbishops John Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell, is not easy to rebut. The place to start, perhaps, is the argument from illusion. What follows from the
universally admitted fact of perceptual illusions? Most obviously, to repeat, the general unreliability of perception as a guide to what there is, of appearance as a guide to reality. Is this, however, cause for despair? Does it follow from the fact that a person makes a mistake that therefore everything he does or says should be put under suspicion as unreliable? Only, I suspect, if one has in mind some paragon of reliability, some error-free algorithm. If a calculator tells you $2 + 2 = 5$, then you would do well not to trust it to multiply $2,345$ by $67$. The reason is that its operations are mechanical, and if they are wrong in one simple place they may be and probably are wrong in others because of the interlinking of the mechanisms. In contrast, if one morning a bank clerk mis-adds a page of figures it is doubtful that the bank will then recalculate everything he has ever done.

So: sense illusions provide one with a reminder to keep a watching brief on the evidence of the senses, but they do not undermine it completely. One might formulate the correct conclusion as follows: rely on the senses by all means, but where good reason is offered for not trusting them, be careful. Thus, don't trust the desert because of mirage; orient yourself in fog by different means than on clear days; compensate when reaching under water or using the driving mirror. Thus one can hold on to the project of a science like anthropology utilising the evidence of the senses in studying part of what can be called the external world, even while being cautious about identifying any part of it as the real world. The real world is not the external world; the real world is not the perceived world; the real world is not the world as it seems from any particular privileged vantage point. The decision as to what the real world is, as to what objects populate it, is a judgement, a judgement in which perceptual evidence, along with a great many other kinds of evidence, such as logic, mathematics, the body of theories we hold, and common sense, plays a part. It is a little misleading to say that the real world is a construct; rather, our picture of the real world is a product of, or an attribution made in, a judgement. To say we construct the real world leans towards idealism, for we also construct dreams, illusions, fantasies, myths, and fictions. Rather should we say this: we designate as real those entities, states, and processes that in our judgement best explain the evidence of our senses and that best suit and cohere with the demands of our theories. Thus we decide what the real shape of a coin is by deciding it is the one that best explains the many different-shaped perceptions it can give and best fits our theories of optics and metalurgy, our geometry, and our knowledge of minting. The advantage of this view is its minimum concession to idealism, namely, the notion that knowledge is the outcome of an interaction between the observer and the observed, the knower and the known, the mind and the world, yet its retention of a stable, mind-independent knowledge of things in the real world the objects and processes of which are nevertheless subject to reexamination.

Unresisting to puns, I cannot help but now ask, what is the real world to the real world? The answer flows, I think, fairly naturally: it is advisable to trust film even less than to trust the evidence of the senses. Film is not the evidence of the senses; it is the highly processed evidence of other people's judgement put into sense representation. It cannot, therefore, come at all close to the status of data. Already an anthropologist's informants' reports are advisedly treated critically; how much more critical is one justified in being towards selected film of informants, which has therefore about as much standing as hearsay? Film cannot normally be primary evi-

dence, not even in the way that fieldwork yields primary evidence or in the way that for a historian documents do (Jarvie 1978). To be a little more encouraging, film can be treated as a primary source, but only if its use is hedged about with severe restrictions. Basically, it must be possible to situate the piece of film in the context of some other, unproblematically primary, materials, thus lending it the credibility (never total) usually accorded to primary materials. This might be the case, for example, with a film shot by a fieldworker who can describe exactly the time, place, and circumstances of its making, allay fears about the intrusion effect of the machinery, report that nothing is missed because of limited angle of view, necessity of changing film, quality of sound recording, and so on. So much information of this kind is required, however, that for anthropological purposes one is inclined to suspect that the film will be no more than an illustration of the written field report and usually redundant. If the fieldworker can verbally and in writing give such situating assurances, he lets us know how we can use the film at the same time that he is reducing it to the level of an item in his notebook. Apart from such things as the visual appearances of things, people, and ceremonies, it is difficult to know what film would add to such an entry. With such an abstract item as a conversation (between two objects or subject and object), however, it is obvious that 100 words in a notebook could summarise, make sense of, and contain anthropological insights on it as film or tape could not.

To give a parallel example from history: of what value is a piece of film showing Winston Churchill speaking with Franklin Delano Roosevelt at one of their wartime rendezvous? To begin with, the war, their position as leaders, and the signification of their different meetings all have to be established by primary documentary means. Even then, to be of historical value the film must be authenticated (by literary means); we need assurance that these are the real people, not impersonators. If we "overhear" them talking, we need to know much that the film cannot supply: whether this was staged or was a little genuine eavesdropping that they later approved for release. We also must, as historians, connect whatever information we take from this film with all the other information we have: for example, just because they smile and seem amiable we should not conclude that FDR's well-documented suspicion of Churchill as an old imperialist warrior can be discounted. In summary, film can be used as primary evidence only when other primary evidence permits. Film, then, is the opposite of optical illusions. They, I have argued, do not in any way yield the conclusion that all perception is to be mistrusted because of occasional illusion. Because film is at one or more removes from perception, it is to be mistrusted as a matter of course. Perception is usually to be trusted, though at times rejected; films are usually to be mistrusted, though at times accepted. Film is, as historians say, "a tainted source." Indeed, I will go so far as to suggest that fiction film may be less tainted than factual film.

III

In looking at the problem of appearance and reality I have so far used examples from the physical world of objects, not from the social world of processes, structures, classes, and institutions. It is widely believed that these social entities are in some serious way less substantial than physical objects, that the study of them is therefore harder to ground, harder to carry out, and that therefore it is permissible and even recommended that such study be creative and frankly subjective. This is not a view I share. My thesis, to the contrary, would be that human beings, far from inhibiting self-study with their un-
predictability or whatnot, positively cooperate with and facilitate social studies; that it is easier, not harder, to study people than things. Studying human beings is in certain decisive and noticeable ways easier than studying the natural world. The behaviour of people in society is anything but the random and unpredictable chaos of the motion of gas molecules; it is as orderly as and in some ways more predictable than the behaviour of all but closed and very simple physical systems (Popper 1966: §27; 1972: chap. 6). How can these differences be brought home? The answer is that rationalism which makes up a part of society, constitute it, and conceptualise about it. This latter is the most important. Men's society-making activity is primarily conceptual: they order and organise their actions depending on how they think things are (Jarvie 1972). Thus a strategically placed informant is of the greatest value in anthropology because he or she is, as it were, the horse's mouth. The informant may not operate with anthropologists' concepts, but anthropologists bring their own concepts into relation with the informant's concepts and end up giving an account of the society or culture that is congruent with the informant's conceptions. More than one informant is needed for purposes of comparison, checking, and access to areas of the society that are closed to outsiders.

Now this really simplifies matters. Beetles and rolling stones do not cooperate with the naturalists and physicists studying them in offering their conceptualisation of the situation as a starting point to be checked, supplemented, corrected, and used. We have to guess and test, guess and test, endlessly. Some systems, admittedly, may be less volatile than human systems, but only in some respects and to a certain degree; others, like the weather, volcanoes, explosions in laboratories, all attest to the unpredictable volatility of physical nature too. Motivestless crimes, riots, fecklessness, and unreliability testify similarly about human nature. But in proper social settings the opposite holds: most of the time, the bus drivers arrive at their garages at shift time just about as reliably as the diesel fuel in buses' cylinders explodes to order. Indeed, we have a higher expectation of our understanding of the human storm than the stormy weather: we still allow freak storms and so on to pass without explanation, yet we strive to offer rational accounts of motiveless crimes (Lejeune 1977, Posner 1980), riots, and fecklessness. We employ what philosophers of social science call the rationality principle and press it through to an extraordinary degree. The rationality principle is where we commence our attempts to understand human beings by attributing to them rationality, that is, behaviour directed towards an intelligible aim by feasible means. Where our initial effort fails, the principle urges us to try again: to alter our model of the situation, the actor's model of the situation, his appreciation of the means, and his putative aims. Only if all our efforts fail do we consider action unintelligible. Whether the ascribed aims and appreciation of means are themselves allowable as rational demands an appraisal of the wider context in which the actor operates. This almost empty but regulative principle that people act appropriately to their situations turns the closed systems of human interaction into almost a clocklike predictable closed system (Popper 1967; Jarvie 1972: chap. 1).

On a philosophical level, then, the contrast between appearance and reality is somewhat less of a problem with social objects than with physical objects. To a considerable extent, society is what society seems to be to its own actors, for they will act on the basis of what it seems to be and so the consequences of their acts, namely, the configuration of the society at the next time-slice we take, will be a product—will have been formed—by what it seemed. This is why anthropologists are strongly interested in tuning in on how the actors see things: as a first approximation to figuring out how they are, i.e., what construction of them best explains the empirical evidence given current theories.

This formulation of the status of the ethnographic real avoids the two extreme positions of emics (accept our categories) and etics (impose our categories). Whereas Harris (1967: 56, 504) dismisses the emic position and anthropologists (e.g., Leach 1963) dismiss the etic one, I allow neither dismissal. Anthropology is the record of discussion of the discovery of emic inadequacies and hence the development of etics. This brings us to the trickiest and hardest point to explain: simply characterising intellectual work in anthropology in this manner puts the ethnographic film in even graver difficulties than the foregoing arguments have suggested. Before coming to that, just to emphasise once again the point made, anthropologists trade in conceptualisations of societies: their informants' and their own. Film is not especially adept at recording or explaining such conceptualisations, still less their dispute. Film concretises things, responds to the skill of acting and presentation, and carries with it dangerous overtones of its own authenticity. It has a tendency to present appearance as though it were reality so far as the physical world goes and undoubtedly is biased towards members' accounts when representing the social world. This interferes with the process that anthropologists is engaged in, which might be summed up as attempting to mediate between different members' accounts by arriving at an account of their own that incorporates and explains all those members' accounts. This is a dialectical or discursive process, and the greatest cognitive weakness of film is its clumsiness in presenting material discursively (Jarvie 1978).

Earlier, I drew a contrast between the society of the observers and the society of the observed and showed how the society of the observers differs radically for the anthropologist and the film maker. I placed less stress on the contrast of a society of science versus a society of art than on that of a society of coworkers under the regulative ideas of truth, community, and tradition as opposed to a society of imaginers and their audience. Scientists are part of their own audience in a manner that creators cannot be. Intellectual disciplines can be (are I think best) characterised as chains of argument or debate around certain sets of problems (Popper 1959, Hattiangadi 1978-79) that are fought over by various schools of thought (Agassi 1975), which advance and defend explanatory theories intended to solve these problems. As in the adversarial trial process, evidence is marshalled, witnesses are called, speeches are made on each side. The scientist himself moves easily and naturally between being an advocate and being a member of the jury—which in a way he is, because science is a self-governing activity and the verdict is pronounced by a jury of his peers. However, both verdict and sentence are always subject to review, as the problems on trial proliferate along with the solutions offered to them. This picture of the nature of science is very different from the inductivist picture with which we began science no longer depends on a neutral data base that can be gathered by the neutral observer as objective and detached as the camera and tape recorder are alleged to be. Science is a process of ongoing debate in which evidence is marshalled for partisan purposes, and yet the marshalling is subject to certain rules regarding its public and repeatable character, its empirical or observable nature, and its conformation to the laws of logic such that interim assessments of the

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[9] In this paper, Popper shows concisely how Freud is a sort of archrationalist, uncontroversial paradigms of irrationality, rational, i.e., actions appropriate to the situation as the actor sees it.

[10] The jargon is Garfinkel's (1967).

[11] According to Mead (1963), photographs "provide an impersonal check record against which field observations can be placed" (p. 175). Moreover, such impersonal photography should take place before the hypotheses are formulated "for, once the hypothesis was formulated, the anthropologist might become too selective in what he photographed" (p. 172).
state of our knowledge are possible. Knowledge is simply the best surviving theories. Where no theory is clearly the best by any of the established criteria, or where the criteria are uncertain or under challenge, candour demands that we present whatever competing alternatives there are. One may conceive of filming a textbook; it is unclear how one films an endless scholarly debate. How rarely film as opposed to slides is used in the party sciences—and the party sciences tend to lectures, not as part and parcel of research—deserves noticing.

To my mind this poses a grave challenge to claims about the value of film in ethnographic endeavour: even to employ a piece of film as a speech in the debate requires that its viewers be reassured by its being situated and its public and repeatable character's being attested. Film as it were embodies in itself a vision of the ethnographic real, when anthropology, the very exercise it is intended to feed, is engaged in attempting to judge how to describe what the ethnographic real is. In my view, the ethnographic real is not a given, a piece of some unproblematic external world, subject only to some minor troubles to do with disentangling appearance and reality. Rather is the ethnographic real a misleading label for what statisticians call the best-case hypothesis; the curve that best fits the data, the theory that best solves the problem. The inductivist thinks he studies, observes, classifies, and generalises about something he thinks of as a real-world object out there. I, on the contrary, prefer to think that reality as it presents itself to us comes in the form of problems, conundrums, practical tasks, aims to be pursued. The real, then, is whatever entities our best-tested theories need to assume in order to do their work: neither stones nor social institutions have a god-given permanence independent of the vagaries of human enquiry.

IV

I have now switched over from critical and sceptical arguments towards some articulation of a positive point of view of my own, a point of view about both the doing of ethnography and the value of film in ethnography. Beyond ethnography there lies anthropology in general, and the value of film in that. Were I to sum up my negative views I might say that film is at best a supplementary recording device, a useful illustrating medium, a visual aid in teaching, a poor expository and argumentative device, and, in general, in view of its expense, complications, and discursive poverty, very much a mixed blessing.

I shall begin the project of expressing more positive views by means of an analogy, that of the map. A naive inductivist view of maps is that they simply represent what is there. Yet it is obvious that there can be an infinite set of maps of any one piece of earth, ocean, or sky. Even after deciding on projection and on scale, there remain all the many things that can be put on a map: isotherms, isobars, isolines, isogloths, population density, elevation, geological character, rainfall, means of communication and transportation, crust thickness, extent of ice-age coverage, and so on. To a noninductivist geographer there is no such simple "real" as a piece of land, sea, or sky with these and those characteristics waiting to be mapped. There are problems and tasks which direct one's attention to certain sorts of sense that can be imposed on a landscape and then transcribed in many varying ways to maps.

In other places (Jarvie 1972:159–72) I have compared the task of the social scientist to that of the map maker, stressing the additional difficulty that the social scientist is poised uneasily between the entities or categories employed by the actors he is studying and the entities and categories he brings to his task from his disciplinary training. The social scientist, I have argued, maps not only the society he fancies he is interacting with, but also the mental maps of their own society carried around by the actors.

To this argument it is sometimes objected that either the actors' maps are enough or the actors' maps are redundant and should be ignored. My rebuttal consists in saying that the outcome of action is a functional relationship between the way things seem to the actor and the way in some sense they actually are. The social scientist uses his informants' view of the way things seem as his first clue to the way they are. If an actor acts on the basis of a mistaken supposition about the way things are, the outcome will clearly be a product of his action, plus its impact on the situation as it is. If a long rider believes he is being pursued by a murderous gang and as a result rides his horse to death and perishes himself soon thereafter, his death cannot be explained if we ignore his mistaken belief. Similarly, in accounting for the death of James Dean his view of the situation, as embodied in his reported last words, is highly germane: "That guy up there's gonna stop; he'll see us" (Dalton 1974:281). On a more complicated level I have argued that in a certain way the question of whether there is a system of social class in any sense can be short-circuited when we know that, whether there is or there isn't, a great many people believe that there is and, in acting accordingly, thereby generate phenomena that constitute a class system of sorts. In a beautiful argument in the "Arrest" section of The Gulag Archipelago, Solzhenitsyn stresses the degree to which the entire system of oppression he is describing derives its effectiveness from a certain voluntary surrender of legitimacy to it by countless of its victims (Solzhenitsyn 1974:3–23). The actors constitute and sustain the social system.

What role can we see for film in all this? For one thing: a lot of talking heads. Society and culture are to a considerable extent invisible and inaudible, but they can be described in talk (MacDougal's and Smith's work illustrates this). Interaction and transaction are the primary modes by which an ethnographer does his work. To an ethnographer busy interacting and transacting, a camera may simply be a rather inconveniently large and obtrusive pencil. Moreover, most subjects of anthropological inquiry nowadays know what a camera is and hence are very much "on" when it begins to roll in a way that they are not with an ethnographer who takes discreet notes or even stores it all up in his mind for diary-writing in the evening.

Apart, then, from the value of seeing, and the accidental recording of something valuable, i.e., uninterpreted material at the time of shooting, I am sceptical of the value of film as a vehicle for scientific anthropology. To wind up my argument I want to consider some apparent counterexamples: a case in which a casual remark to the camera can be thought to typify an aspect of the culture in a much smoother way than would be possible in print; a case in which the film makers stumbled on valuable material and learned from the attempt to understand it (the event itself so bewildering that note-taking might have been too slow); and, finally, an attempt to be discursive, even didactic, in film, an effort documentary-political rather than ethnographic but one that is widely respected and hence useful for my purpose.

Case (a) is a casual remark vividly illustrates a point. In the Viracocha film of the Bolivian Series of the American Universities Field Staff's "Faces of Change," a radical set of attempts to see just how much can be accomplished with the medium of film, there is an already notorious episode in which a mestizo landlord is speaking to the camera about his Aymara peasants and there suddenly appears a subtitle to the effect that he is lying. Since the man is on near the beginning of the film, its makers may have thought they had to correct what they thought was misinformation as it was given. But if the information was so misleading, why not edit it out? Answer: it may typify mestizo attitudes to Aymaras and therefore has some ethnographic validity. Clearly, unless there is further evidence we will assume that this landlord acts towards his peasants in conformity with the picture of them he is describing. To describe a point of view, even a prejudiced one, as a lie, how-
ever, is to intrude a naive view of the difference between appearance and reality and of the nature of social and cultural processes. All evidence is equal to the ethnographer, even socially sanctioned lies, prejudices, and confusions.\textsuperscript{12}

Case 2: luck and anthropological expertise produce something unique. Napoleon Chagnon and Timothy Asch’s \textit{The Ax Fight (1975)} is held up as an exemplary piece of ethnographic film-making because the fight they photographed just began happening when they were otherwise occupied and they were fortunately able to turn their cameras on it and utilise the footage three times. They illustrated some important social and cultural facts as they were displayed in the fight itself and showed the anthropologist at work learning about what he had observed. Without detracting at all from their feat and its ingenuity, what is all the fuss about? Is there anything in the film that Chagnon and his pencil would not have caught? Maybe so. Just possibly events moved so fast that only capturing them on film in order to go over them at leisure made all the difference. Here, then, we have a slim argument for the value of film in the ethnographic enterprise. Whether the benefits would justify the expense of including filming budgets in all field trips is doubtful, especially as one might argue the whole thing was a fluke, unlikely to be repeated in hundreds of field trips to societies less volatile.\textsuperscript{13}

Most ethnographic films are the merest fragments of putative contributions to ethnography: Hilary Harris’s beautiful-to-look-at film \textit{The Nuer} lasts 75 minutes and contains only a tiny fraction of the information covered in Evans-Pritchard’s book of the same name. For the parochial undergraduates of North America, just the chance to see \textit{National Geographic}-style pictures of how others live is perhaps salutary. Be that as it may, where are the filmed attempts to address the major questions that agitate anthropologists intellectually—the discussions of structure and sentiment, ethics versus emics, Australian kinship, Choctaw terminology, the structure of unilineal descent groups, primitive knowledge of the connection between coition and pregnancy? Nowhere to be found, I am afraid, and any student unfamiliar with these matters has not been seriously trained. So for my third case, which I do grant more to than others, I take a documentary of the utmost seriousness and even pretention: \textit{The Sorrow and the Pity}, the film Alvie Singer (in \textit{Annie Hall}) sees time and time again. This film wants to be taken seriously as a study of collaboration under German occupation in Clermont-Ferrand. To this end, Germans, Frenchmen (collaborators and resisters), and outside statesmen are all given time on screen to explain their points of view. The film is very long, as perhaps befits the gravity of its subject, and skillfully made. And yet . . . how different is it from what is laughingly known as trial by television? How are those who talk of the image they cut on screen? How honest was the director in letting them talk and then editing so that they condemned themselves out of their own mouths? How close is the film to propaganda, and how far is it from history? I raise these questions because I believe the film does not conform to the methods of social science and history and therefore is itself a tract rather than a primary document. One wishes there were sequences in which those coming off worst were viewing it on the Movieola and having the chance to comment and gloss what they said and what the film maker is saying, rather in the way the Rolling Stones do in \textit{Gimme Shelter}.

These three cases witness the role I have already assigned to ethnographic film, and the final case goes to my point that anthropology (or history or sociology) cannot be done on film. The medium itself is unsuitable, even though film makers try valiantly to be reflexive and deposit their 36,000 feet of film in the Smithsonian (H. Smith 1976:24).

V

In an earlier aside I said that feature films might be a richer source for ethnographers than consciously ethnographic or anthropological film. This is because the value of a primary source has a great deal to do with its not being used for the purpose for which it was intended. We do not take Shakespeare’s histories as guides to the interpretation of the events they pretend to depict. We are suspicious of all memoirs as likely to be self-serving. Historians hunt for documents that throw light where they do not intend to; similarly, social scientists seek clues to social processes that people scarcely notice, still less are contriving to confect. But this raises a serious question about the value of film versus the value of discursive language. It is a fact that history is largely a matter of documents and talk and society is largely a matter of institutions, actions, and talk. Film is integrally involved in neither. Briefly in the ’30s and ’40s film was utilised for political purposes, but now that function has passed to television. Film is outside the major processes we call history and society. Zapruder’s footage of Kennedy’s assassination is valuable because Zapruder captured what he did with a minimum of contrivance. Fiction film is valuable too because in hosts of ways of which it is not aware it depicts people, mores, and landscapes of its time. It is fragmentary and tantalising, but nevertheless available to the acute observer.\textsuperscript{14} The socially conscious film, however, is far less useful to the scholar, except insofar as it is typical or generic.

The real is created, not given. The artificial is part of the real world: the standing street set in the Burbank studio is a real-world physical object. Film makers are traders in appearances and illusion, whether they are Busby Berkeley and his impossible effects, Flaherty and “The March of Time” faking it, or Emile de Antonio editorialising to a captive audience. The possibilities of ethnographic film seem very limited, because film cannot suspend belief: What appears is real, while in science the whole debate is about what to call real given the conflict of evidence before us.

Comments

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\textbf{2 xi 82}

The problem raised by Jarvie is an important one in both theoretical and philosophical terms. Jarvie’s basic argument is that the anthropologist’s “ethnographic real” is quite different from the film maker’s “real,” and therefore “the anthropologist rarely makes a film satisfactory to the film maker, the film maker rarely makes a film satisfactory to the anthropologist.” This is perhaps because the aims of film makers and anthropologists are at variance. Working as an anthropologist in film

\textit{by Binod C. Agrawal}

\textsuperscript{13} It is usual to define ethnographic film as film that reveals cultural patterning. From this definition it follows that all films are ethnographic . . . ” (de Brigard 1975:13). The play here is on “reveals.” Film may reveal cultural patterning intentionally by showing, which is acceptable, or inadvertently by being what it is, which is perhaps best.

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and television production, I hear such remarks almost every
day. As I see it, the problem lies in the conversion of an idea
into print or film. Both media record certain aspects of a social
reality in a given cultural milieu. Up to now print has had the
unique ability to describe a social phenomenon economically
by discarding its "unnecessary" or "unimportant" aspects. Film
cannot do this as accurately because it captures several
dimensions of human behaviour simultaneously. If this is so,
then the question is whether the distinction pointed out by
Jarvie is not simply due to the limitations of each medium.
Anthropologists, skilled in the print medium, and film makers,
skilled in the film medium, are unable to recognize this prob-
lem. Hence the idea that the issue of inductive science is a
major factor leading to the difference of opinion is not accept-
able to me.

I cannot agree with Jarvie that film is the opposite of "opti-
cal illusion." Buddhist philosophers would take the view that
everything that we perceive as "real" is essentially an illusion.
In that sense, even most anthropological data based on obser-
vations are illusion. At the same time, we try to isolate or
separate the real from illusion by objective methods. In my
opinion the "ethnographic real" must be somewhere between
the two. The same holds true for emics and etics. In this
perspective, I fully agree with Jarvie that one cannot dismiss
either of the two positions.

However, this philosophical view in no way poses any graver
difficulty for ethnographic film than for the discipline of anthro-
pology as a whole. The issue raised by Jarvie is going to become
even more difficult with the development of video technology
and other electronic media. In the near future, electronic
systems are increasingly going to be used not only as means of
recording and storing ethnographic data, but as tools for
describing and analysing the "ethnographic real."

by ASEN BALKICI
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Jarvie's sophisticated paper seems to reflect an opinion com-
monly held among social anthropologists: that ethnographic
film is at best bad ethnography, allowing one to perceive only
the visible surface of the ethnographic "real" and leaving most
covert (basically important) data and analytic elaborations
aside. It is a form of entertainment with only one clearly
established virtue: it is evidence that the native peoples anthro-
pologists write about do exist in reality. This is typically
the opinion of the anthropologist who looks at audiovisuals as a
writer and evaluates ethnographic film in relation to the
written text.

Basically Jarvie's arguments do not add anything intrin-
sically new to the various discussions concerning ethnographic
film. The manipulative-constructive aspect of the ethnographic
film and its relation to ethnographic "reality" have already
been described by Luc de Heus. The importance of film
records as an organic part of a research strategy is clearly
established in the contributions of Birdwhistell and Jablonko,
among many others. As for the pedagogical implications of
ethnographic film records, it is possible to mention the highly
successful use of the Bushman, Yanomamo, and Netsilik series.

We are left with two points. First, on Margaret Mead's
programmatic pronouncements concerning the virtues of the
camera as a research tool: as a pioneer in this field and an
enthusiastic one, Mead has possibly oversimplified the issue.
A closer examination of her substantive contributions on Bali
and New Guinea involving visual data provides a better frame-
work for an evaluation of what she really thought and did.
Second, the conception of ethnographic film as bad or super-
ficial ethnography in relation to the written text poses an issue
that does not really exist. Stressing the inability of the film
medium to parallel discursive argumentation in print is stating
the obvious. Fortunately, film is not the written text and does
not pretend to cover the same areas of observation and analy-
sis. It has an originality of its own, and one would be tempted
to say that whenever the fieldworker uses the camera in place
of his pen he is doing bad ethnographic film.

by JOHN W. CALLAGHAN
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87501, U.S.A. 4 xii 82

The author of this article offers a very compelling rational-
ization for not using film to study "social science and history."
However, he makes the debilitating mistake of continually
equating anthropology with solely the study of "institutions,
actions, and talk." That film is unable to provide "discussions of
structure," etc., overlooks much of what film can provide
for anthropology—a research method to document (in an ad-
mittedly biased fashion) the ethos of different cultures: "Evi-
dently then the emotional background is causally active within
a culture, and no functional study can ever be reasonably
complete unless it links up the structure and pragmatic work-
ing of the culture with its emotional tone or ethos" (Bateson
1958:2). Film provides a frame of reference for the anthro-
pological study of ethos that necessarily includes both the
audience and "the traditions and goals of their discipline."

That is, in order to study a concept such as ethos, the anthro-
pologist who uses film must, first, admit that what is "real" is
totally an audience-provided standard and, second, invoke
the comparative techniques of anthropology to impart importance
to any surmised realities.

To sum, I could not agree more with the author: film is out
of place as an inductive method for the study of many of the
aspects of culture. Nonetheless, the use of film is on the fore-
front of science in its ability to provide the "data" upon which
we may proceed with deductive reasoning about certain aspects
of culture. Indeed, the author asks with regard to the use of
film in ethnography: "Where [are] the discussions of . . . senti-
ment?" I would simply answer that without film any discussion
of sentiment is relegated to a discussion of esoteric impressions.
Film at least provides a discursive point of departure for those
interested in the study of important—but seemingly forgotten—
anthropological concepts such as ethos.

by EMILIE DE BRIGARD
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U.S.A. 6 xii 82
Jarvie's essay is parochial and muddled. Film was invented in
the 19th century as an instrument of scientific investigation;
it quickly developed in the 20th century into a medium of
mass entertainment. Now it is also a means of entertaining
anthropology students. Whatever its use, film remains a fac-
simile of events. Film doesn't have an "attitude," and it can't
"suspend belief"; only people can do these things.

Jarvie writes about the conflicting aims of anthropologists and
film makers; the problem of appearance and reality in the
"status of the ethnographic real"; some uses of film, and the
limited possibilities of ethnographic film. He neglects to men-
tion (1) basic principles of film literacy, the relation between
what is seen and what is known—the levels of context, content,
form, style, emotion, etc., on which every film must be read
simultaneously; (2) techniques of film analysis developed by
scholars as varied as Birdwhistell (1970) and Sadoul (1949),
permitting the most delicate microanalysis to coexist with the
broad strokes of world history; (3) the world movement since
1952 toward the creation of an ethnographic film sample and
index, as the Germans, French, Japanese, and Americans bring
us closer to fulfilling Regnault's (1931) prophecy that "film pre-
serves forever all human behaviors for the needs of our studies";
(4) the role of "ethnographic science fiction" films in both
documentation and directed change, demonstrated by Rouch
in his films of ritual in West Africa and Europe; and (5) the intimate connection between film research and feedback, demonstrated by Lomax (1974) in his choreometric research derived from ethnology, ethnomusicology, and social documentary film.

I agree wholeheartedly with Jarvie on the need “to overcome the rigidity of the society of the observers,” and I believe that if we are dissatisfied with the possibilities of ethnographic film as they present themselves to us in 1982, it is because we have not demanded enough of ourselves in terms of research effort, audience training, and tangible material support for the unique and irreplaceable record of the traditional and evolving situation of our own species. The Marshalls took the lead in this in the mid-20th century, and their efforts will be cherished long after Gombrich, Harris, and Popper have become obscure.

by Nina S. de Friedemann
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I conclude that Jarvie frames his opinions on the ethnographic real in the academic exercise of Anglo-Saxon anthropology. Perhaps for this reason, his concepts of the use of ethnographic film appear restricted and alien to this part of the world. Therefore, it would be useful to examine the activities undertaken by other academies in countries different from those with which Jarvie is familiar.

Of course, as Jarvie says, ethnographic film contains only a small fraction of the information about a theme or a community that can be presented in a book. Also, films do not routinely contain the complex discussions about structures of descent groups or explanation of kinship terminologies that is found in the specialized literature. But it is also true that film and book have different goals. A book does not try to get the reader to perceive with his/her ear a miner’s tone of voice or to see with his/her eyes—the eyes in his/her physical body—the tones and textures in a river’s rapids. Film and book languages are different.

Obviously, Jarvie is not dealing with research or teaching in southern-hemisphere countries. Perhaps this is the reason he states that anthropology—with the academic boundaries and specific roles he assigns it in this article—cannot be done with film. In this part of the world, the global crisis of the universities has fostered the search for new alternatives and new settings for the exercise of the social sciences and the validation of their knowledge in the societies to which they belong. This is not to deny any of the orthodox norms for discussion in the classroom or for the utilization of a codified, specialized language in scientific elucidation. In this context, the film-document has allowed for the exploration of new possibilities in anthropological work (Friedemann 1976:509–46).

In Colombia, individuals trained in anthropology and film make movies that are useful outside university classrooms. Some anthropologists have contributed their knowledge to films made with the collaboration of the base communities and with individuals trained in film. There is an effort in these cases to transcend academia by broadening its goals and modifying the dehumanized norm of the observer and the observed. When there is active participation of individuals in both research and film, object becomes subject and the product is useful for science-action. In many instances, then, ethnographic films have functioned as communication tools among local communities, between these and governmental policy circles, and even among guerrilla formations.

The role options taken by these films have not prevented them, on the other hand, from being acknowledged as cinema works as well as ethnographic products. Recent examples are Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva’s Nuestra voz de tierra, memoria y futuro (Our Voice from the Land, Memory and Future) (1981), made with Guambianos and winner of the Fiprese, Oci, and Cartagena International Festival prizes, and Campesinos (Peasants) (1975), winner of the Palmares—Grenoble Festival and Oberhausen prizes. Other titles are, for instance, Los hijos del subdesarrollo (Underdevelopment’s Children), by Carlos Alvarez (1975), winner of the Silver Dove prize, Leipzig; and El oro es triste (Gold is Sad), by Alfredo Sánchez (1972), winner of the Cartagena International Festival prize.

The above contrasts with Jarvie’s statements that individuals trained in anthropology and film are unable to combine the (for him dissimilar) goals of cinema and science in a creation. This would only be true if science and scientists were exclusively cloistered in academia—for it is here, according to Jarvie, that “the whole debate is about what to call real”—and if cinema had only the role of providing entertainment for mass audiences.

by W. R. Geddes
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Jarvie’s article comprises two parts, tenuously interconnected—a philosophical stance on the nature of anthropology and a rejection of film as a “true” recording of culture. Jarvie’s argument, it seems to me, runs as follows: there is no real external world of cultural facts independent of the observer which can be observed and categorised; rather, the ethnographic real is an accumulation of hypotheses in the mind of the anthropologist; the role of the anthropologist is to promote his hypotheses by marshalling evidence “for partisan purposes,” i.e., to advance his particular school of anthropology; therefore ethnographic film which tries to record reality neutrally is attempting a hopeless task and is of little use to anthropology.

At all the steps I find the argument unconvincing. Space limitations prevent a properly argued reply, but I shall try a few points. Jarvie scorns inductiveism, which he parodies, and follows a Popperian line. The dangers of this line are well illustrated by Popper’s use of the concept of “tribalism” in The Open Society and its Enemies. When he was writing the book, I tried to convince him that the “facts” of life amongst the tribes with whom I had lived did not accord with his concept, but he was impervious, because his hypothesis was his immaculate conception too precious for partisan purposes to be held up to doubt. To some anthropologists it must be comforting to believe that the peoples they talk about—and unfortunately name—are created and changed by the vagaries of their seminars. If this were merely nonsense, it would not be so bad. But, to borrow a word from the author, it is vicious in the effect it has on the reputation of anthropology amongst the studied peoples, who want realistic understanding of their situations and not to be the playthings of intellectual overlords. If fairly presented, a strong case can be made for the “inductivist” approach. After all, if a negative instance can change one’s mental orientation, why cannot positive instances, especially clusters of them? The final arbiter of disputes as to how the mind proceeds must be not abstract logic but psychology.

It does not seem to follow from Jarvie’s preceding argument that the approaches of ethnographer and film maker, as he outlines them, contrast, since it is implied that both are creative. Nor do his examples clarify the issue. He says The Nuer was “justly criticised by anthropologists (e.g., Heider 1976), yet appreciated by no less than Evans-Pritchard.” Who here is the anthropologist and who the film maker? Truly, so much confusion! The fact is that there are many different kinds of ethnographic films made for different purposes. Some fit an a priori noninductivist model, such as much of MacDougall’s
work, in which the camera may legitimately be compared to a pencil, although these films, like all good ethnographic films, also achieve the communication of what Malinowski called the "imponderabili" of a culture almost impossible to convey by the written word. A feature of most of the films quoted by the author is that they are short and thus cannot have the scope of an ethnographic monograph. As he refers to the lengthy film deposits at the Smithsonian, I presume he has studied their content, but he cannot be familiar with the equally extensive archival films at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies because he asks "Where are the films about Australian kinship?" In any case, however, it is missing the point about film to compare it to the written word. The two are different media able, if well used, to communicate different aspects of reality.

A final point: Jarvie appears to differentiate between slides (valuable) and film (rarely valuable). But a film is nothing more than a sequence of slides shot at the rate of 24 to the second. His criticism of films should hold of photographs in general. He says films are rarely, if ever, used in the hard sciences. The exposure time of one-sixtieth of a second limits their usefulness. But photography is a major tool of the natural sciences.

by C. ADRIAN HEIDENREICH
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Jarvie's article intends to be about the ethnographic real and pose a number of interesting issues and ideas. Much of it is difficult to follow, however, and there appear to be a number of faulty assumptions and arguments.

1. Distinction between the romanticism of film makers and the hard-minded skepticism of anthropologists has nothing to do inherently with film itself. Nor does contrast between a society of science ("coworkers under the regulative ideas of truth, community, and tradition") vs. a society of art ("imaginers and their audience") make a difference. We are all imaginers with communities and audiences. Anthropologists move between being advocates and being members of the jury, but not easily.

2. What is of anthropological significance depends on one's "school" and current theoretical and research interests. Anthropology is one of the humanities as well as one of the sciences. Certain questions agitate some anthropologists; other questions agitate other anthropologists. The history of humanity shows that the social construction of reality occurs in science as it does in art and everyday life and is subject to periodic, if not constant, review in all areas.

3. Staging is common to the core of social behavior. People are "on" as a function of acting through their assumptions and role behaviors, within their own heads and in interaction with others who are taking notes or not, filming or not. The methodological problem is how to distinguish the types and levels, and the relationship of appearance to reality, in the staging, perception, recording, and interpretation of human behavior.

4. To film or photograph an artifact or behavior without written details about context is unsatisfactory. A written description of an artifact or behavior without the same details is equally unsatisfactory. To describe an artifact or behavior without some pictorial representation also is unsatisfactory. All written and pictorial documents (including film) are abstractions, and each provides evidence and supplements or transcends the other given certain contexts, interests, levels of explanation, and so forth.

5. In writing, different people will summarize the same material somewhat differently, and summary of an event often does not capture much of the meaningful verbal and nonverbal communication that occurs. Anyone who has read committee minutes or subjected field notes to evaluation by knowledgeable colleagues realizes this. To be of current or historical value, written evidence also must be authenticated in terms of when it was written, who wrote it and with what bias, and so forth. One always must cross-check primary evidence. Film footage (raw or edited) is little different from artifacts or written documents in this respect.

6. Filmed field data or completed fiction or nonfiction ethnographic film for audience viewing is no more highly processed evidence than are written symbols in field notes, completed ethnographies, or novels. All are processed and can be data for various purposes. All evidence is tainted; the question is how and to what extent. Films—or books, field notes, or behaviors—are perceived or evaluated as being authentic by people who believe or suspend belief, who learn culturally what kind of reality they are supposed to represent.

7. The "apparent counterexamples" for the possible value of film are shoddy. Case 1: Evidence is not all equal. Some is not even noted, and some is eliminated consciously or unconsciously because it is judged unimportant or less important than other evidence according to the interests of ethnographers. Case 2: Whether or not filming of The Ax Fight produced something unique, it might be criticized on philosophical grounds, but not on the basis that it may have been a fluke or that the process is expensive. Case 3: To include different types of film under the rubric "ethnographic film," take arbitrary examples from within the category, and then dismiss the validity of the category is fallacious.

In sum, the article raises important points which are overshadowed by somewhat obscure arguments and questionable conclusions. It seems to point to very limited and limiting definitions of the real, whether written or filmed, ethnographic or otherwise.

by SERGIO RAMíREZ LAMUS
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Jarvie confronts scientific/conventional ethnographic analysis and the filming of ethnographic events. The fabrication of ethnographic film may be, according to his views, less revealing than the conceptual treatment of "cultural patterning." Inadvertently, fiction film fulfills more efficiently than documentary film the mission of recording "people, mores, and landscapes of its time."

For Jarvie, "film is at best a supplementary recording device"; it lacks the reliability of "discursive" ethnographic reporting. The camera is a device afflicted with gigantism and expense. Within the scene in which the ethnographer attempts to map the wilderness of social life, the camera is a technological dinosaur. Jarvie's repudiation of film texts is reminiscent of the Western tradition that distrusts writing as an orphan text. The action of a "supplement" is superfluous, clownish, alienated from the wise man's essential and truthful paternity of his living speech (Derrida 1975). Restated in Jarvie's terms, the tutored exuberance of argumentative exposition is opposed to a visual-aural record wherein the argumentative and "discursive" are derisive. Academic speech exceeds the capabilities of the (disavowed) supplement: "One may conceive of filming a textbook; it is unclear how one films an endless scholarly debate." Jarvie underrates the constitutive nature of nonverbal interaction in the shaping of institutions.

If one does in fact question any ossified set of oppositions (emic-etic, structure-sentiment, etc.), the supplement cannot be opposed to its (the) master text without a dose of uncertainty. In other words, any description (recording) is a theoretical construct. Only inductivists, as Jarvie emphasizes, would state it otherwise.

If film is thought of as replete with argumentative inadequacies, the medium deploys an imagistic bias. The conceptual realm would be foreign to the film medium, whose functioning would resemble bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1964). Filmic bricolage
could then be seen as distinctly different from wise scientific-ethnological discourse (Immaculate Conception versus heteroclitte bricolage; cf. Derrida 1971).

But bricolage may not be, after all, a harmless, peaceful, and aphasic labor. The bricolé was a war machine (Derrida 1971: 179). Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau have mystified the notion of the savage. Like them, Jarvis believes one can draw a sharp distinction between two modes of knowledge. Unlike Lévi-Strauss, Jarvis seems to imply that the bricoléur is an aphasic. If we conceive of writing as inscription, both pencil (or typewriter) and camera are parts of a writing machine. A critique of the camera and its output ought to review the implications of optical inscription: The frame-vanishing-point perspective and the constitution of an imaginary subject (Baudry 1974) raise the issue of a mode of inscription wherein voyeurism is a paramount drive.

The objectification of images about mankind poses the following supplementary questions: Does film constitute an instance in which the voyeuristic drives of Western culture are laid bare? Is the ethnographer's real world so different from the objectifying real worlds of his multinational culture?

The cinematic apparatus objectifies a trend in Western culture which can be traced to Renaissance painting. Supplements to the iconic screen, such as those pointing to the fraudulent characteristics of a Bolivian landlord's assertions in the film Jarvis cites, are not to be so rapidly dismissed as "intrusions" ("All evidence is equal to the ethnographer ... "). Any inscription may well be examined as belonging to some level of legitimation of social reality (Berger and Luckmann 1972). These levels cannot remain "immaculate," and master/supplement dichotomies are less real outside the objectifying reeves of Western metaphysics.

by ROBIN RIDINGTON

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Jarvis's indictment of film in anthropology is based on his assumptions that (1) film makers are responsible primarily to their imaginative vision and (2) anthropologists are responsible to truth as judged only by other anthropologists. He tars film making with the brush of naive indivism and concludes it is doubly useless because of its dedication to creativity and to a notion of the ethnographic real.

Beyond my dismay at Jarvis's lack of respect for the aesthetic and creative within anthropology in general and the hubris of his assertion that truth is the product of internecine backbiting, I take issue with his assumption that film cannot communicate information of anthropological significance. Of course films are a tainted source, just as ethnographies are tainted, because both select information relevant to their creator's point of view. The untainted source is an illusion, because all ethnographic information is influenced by the means of its conveyance to us. Jarvis's invocation of this ideal as if it were real imubes his argument with a false sense of objectivity.

Jarvis fundamentally confuses document and documentary. Raw film footage and audio tape are documents analogous to field notes. Finished films and books are documentaries that use raw data to demonstrate the anthropologist's point of view. Of course ethnography cannot be done by turning on a machine and walking away, nor do I believe Mead ever advocated such an absurdity. Having collected an extensive archive of field recordings, I know that the machine is a third presence making the ethnographer's role more complex but yielding rich data that can be communicated either in print or through an audio documentary medium. Jarvis perpetrates stereotypes of film makers as attractive but unreliable "artists" and anthropologists as coldly objective scientists capable of communicating only with a closed community.

Of course films are different from ethnographies. The Nuer film by Hilary Harris that Jarvis calls a travelogue glories in the sights and sounds of Nilotic life: the dust, the long-legged running and jumping boys, the richness of cattle and water in a near-desert, the power of drawing blood, the rhythm of movement becoming music. Surely anthropological insight is incomplete without some means of communicating how different from our own human existence can be.

To illustrate that films can and do communicate analysis and content, I cite two recent Canadian films of merit. In The Last of the Cuisos, anthropologist Bernard Arcand narrates from tropical South America his knowledge of conflict between a foraging people and encroaching settlers. The film explains clearly the social concomitants of foraging and landholding modes of production. It is powerful and effective precisely because it shows real people in conflict rather than abstract argument relevant only to academic anthropology.

Pollachi: A Strict Law Bids Us Dance, by the late Dennis Wheeler, documents another conflict, the circumstances surrounding the pollatch's prohibition. Here the anthropologist, Gloria Cramer Webster, is also a Kwakiutl and daughter of a central figure in the film's story. There is no other source in any other medium that duplicates this film's information. Interestingly, it uses dance sequences shot by Boas, underscoring the fact that expressive aspects of culture are lost unless documented on film or tape.

Films, ethnographies, and learned argument are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. All contribute to realities we as anthropologists create. Words can be more illusory than visual images if they are confined within the self-serving security of a discipline that is its own jury. Today, a single magnificent illusion by Edward Curtis is worth a thousand words of armchair theorizing by his contemporaries.

Reply

by I. C. Jarvis

Downsview, Ont., Canada. 24 1 83

My commentators label the paper unoriginal, muddled, parochial, faulty, shoddy, even confused. This is a surprise to me, since I intended the paper to be soberly argued and non-polemical. Its underlying mood was one of disappointment. As a lifelong student of all forms of film I could only welcome the advent of intellectually rich (i.e., thought-provoking) anthropological films. Interestingly in their diverse ways though many of these films are, two deficiencies are striking. Time spent viewing anthropological films rarely yields the intellectual rewards of comparable time spent reading. Yet, ironically, time spent with merely "entertainment" films is richly rewarded with ideas about the culture and society in which they originate, as anthropologists were the first to demonstrate (Bateson 1943, Benedict 1946, Mead and Métraux 1959, Weakland 1966, Wolfenstein and Leites 1950). Seeking to explain these deficiencies, I offered analyses of the limits of film and the nature of a scientific discipline. Striking directly at such basic issues, my arguments, if correct, have considerable force. This may explain the agitation reaction to them.

Clearly the most forceful reply would be a counterexample: an anthropological film as rich as entertainment film or as a piece of writing. Some commentators allude to recent work, some of which I have not seen. Eagerly though I shall approch their suggestions, it is with slim hope that they will be genuine counterexamples. My commentators find in them atmosphere, affect, the texture of life. Who would belittle these? Certainly not I. But who would claim that these are more than side benefits of the main business of scientific anthropology, which has to do with explaining how societies work?
It is true that my paper is rather difficult, as is evidenced by that fact that Geddes's summary of it is incorrect on every point. His assimilation of my position to idealism ("there is no real external world of cultural facts independent of the observer which can be observed and categorised") betrays an insuffi-
ciently close reading. My point was not that there is no ethno-
graphic reality but, rather, that the ethnographic real is prob-
lematic. That is, anthropologists, like other scientists, spend some
of their time disputing about the nature of the real world, what
it contains and how it works. In doing this they employ, and
dispute about, hypotheses. Besides the examples given in the
paper I could mention the dispute about whether or not there
are survivals, the protracted trans-Atlantic dispute about
whether social structure and culture are real explanatory cate-
gories, or the Marxist argument about infrastructure and super-
structure. The form of my argument may explain its difficulty;
it is what philosophers call transcendental, that is, it concerns
itself with the possibilities and limitations of film in anthro-
pological work.

Ridington's charge that I confuse document and documentary
may be turned against him. Neither raw film footage nor field
notes are primary documents in the way those housed in the
National Archives or the Public Record Office are. This issue is
subtle. Notes, commentaries, interpretations, histories using
primary documents do themselves become, usually after a lapse
of time, primary documents. However, the evidence they con-
tain is primary not to their ostensible topic, but to the context
in which they were generated. Whereas the document (D) is
part of the history of its time, the notes, footage, commentary,
interpretation—for short, history (H)—is part of the history of
different time. By parallel argument, the situation in anthro-
pology is this: The ethnographic report (E) is evidence
about (not part of) the anthropology of a society (S). The
anthropology book (B) discussing E is part of the anthropologi-
cal history (AH) not of that society (S), but of its home society
(HS). E, clearly, besides being evidence about S, can, especially
after a lapse of time or if looked at from the point of view of a
third society, be used along with B to indicate the AH of its
HS.¹

In contrast to this position of mine on documents, both film
makers and anthropologists laboured for a time under the mis-
apprehension that whereas written documents interpose a
screen of interpretation between the evidence and the world,
the movie camera somehow permits direct access. While the
claim in its naive form may have been quietly abandoned, my
argument was that it still tacitly informs claims and hopes for
anthropological film.

All scientific documents try to point beyond themselves, to
be evidence about the world which science studies. However,
scientific theories about that world change (only an idealist
thinks this changes the world), and materials such as notes and
raw footage that are informed by current science become dated.
They then become evidence about that part of the world studied
in the history of science. Their value as historical documents about
the folk anthropology of our predecessors is higher the less
their present status. There is, however, a real threat to the
value of entertainment films. Not aiming to inform later genera-
tions, or other peoples, they are virtually uncontaminated
sources.

While it is understandable that my commentators mistrust
transcendental arguments, few of them offer alternative solu-
tions to the problems raised: that anthropological films are
intellectually disappointing and that films wholly unintellectual
in content can be anthropologically rewarding. The stress they
lay on atmosphere, affect, and texture of life suggests that they
may harbor different conceptions of the major business of
anthropological science. Perhaps for them it is not about solving
problems by proposing hypotheses and criticizing and testing
them. Ridington's defence of the film of The Nuer seems wholly
innocent of Malinowski's ridicule of the wind-rustling-in-the-
palm-trees school of anthropology. Geddes says studied peoples
want realistic understanding of their situations and that induc-
tivism fosters such a realistic approach, whereas conjecture-
and-retention leaves people with a hypothesis (rather than a problem).
While appreciating
travesties that convey something of the feel of a culture and
agreeing that the reactions of studied people to anthropological
ideas are important, I find neither anthropologically decisive.
Dry treatises may inform us more fully about a society than
striking pictures. The makers of The Ax Fight acknowledge
that their first interpretation was mistaken and resort to dia-
grams and commentary to explain what they think was really
going on. This makes fun of the final "filmic" exercise of hand-
ing the footage to an anthropologically innocent film editor to
put it together in a way that makes filmic sense. One does learn
from this rare intellectually rich anthropological film—just
how limited film is compared to literary means! As to the re-
actions of studied peoples, important though they are, it is a
credible anthropologist who accepts emic definitions of the
real.

Perhaps it is excessive expectations of anthropological film
and/or confusion about the aims and methods of anthropology
that have sustained the neglect of the pioneering work of
Bateson, Benedict, Weakland, Métraux, and Mead on the use of
other kinds of film for anthropological purposes.

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¹ There is a limiting case in which S = HS, i.e., the anthropologist
or historian is studying the society in which his tradition of study is
situated. Furthermore, of preliterate societies we could say that
there are no primary documents, and of all societies that film is never
a primary document.
Our Readers Write

Since we are still discussing the sacred cows of India (CA 23:365–83) and since Harris maintains his materialist position, I should like to inform readers of the somewhat different status this animal has among some 25,000,000 members of the "Scheduled Tribes" of the hilly areas of central India and in the ancient world view of the so-called Dards, who have been pushed back into the remote valleys of the extreme northwest of the subcontinent. In both cases the cow is considered a polluting animal; people abstain from cows' milk and leave herding to groups of the lowest status, and beef is consumed without hesitation. Surely Harris will swiftly find a convincing materialist explanation of the fact that the tribal inhabitants of a central Indian village will eat beef and avoid milk while the nontribal inhabitants of the neighboring village will drink milk and avoid beef. His style of using general plausibilities to explain specific avoidances is bound to offer a solution; it is also the greatest weakness of his case. Alsdorf (1962)1 long ago gave specific historical reasons for the specific development from cow slaughter in pre-Buddhist times to cow immunity later; his work is frequently cited by authorities on India.

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The December 1982 CA carries a review by Scott Atran of Dale F. Eickelman's The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach, together with Eickelman's reply. The first sentence of Atran's piece contains an error of fact which Eickelman ignores but which I cannot let go uncorrected. Atran says (p. 70) that Eickelman's book "represents the first serious attempt at a general survey of the area from an American anthropologist's point of view since Coon's Caravan (1958) and Patai's Golden River to Golden Road (1962)." This statement is incorrect. In 1976, my book, The Middle East: An Anthropological Perspective, was published by Goodyear. It is indubitably such a "serious attempt at a general survey," and it was so reviewed in various journals.

Having one's work ignored in contexts where it is relevant is a cross that one learns to bear in academic life, and it is usually best to bear it in silence. In this instance, however, which involves a clear-cut factual issue that is professionally important to me, I wish to set the record straight.

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