

PART 2

Producing Visual Data and Insight





Anthropological Filmmaking: An Empirical Art

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THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Anthropological filmmaking is necessarily defined by what is considered anthropological at any particular time. But because there is no unanimity about anthropology, either today or historically, there are many different conceptions of what constitutes an anthropological film. These range from using film (or video) as a simple recording technology, to films being made according to specific rules or principles (designed to yield certain categories of knowledge), to audio-visual illustrations of written texts, to films combining aspects of these approaches with more interpretive accounts of social and cultural life. The kinds of anthropological films that have been made have also followed changes in what has been possible technically. Films from the silent era relied on images and inter-titles. Sound films added speech and natural sounds, with increasing flexibility as this became less difficult. The first anthropological sound films added soundtracks of commentary, natural sounds, and music to film footage previously shot, since recording

image and sound simultaneously required massive and expensive equipment. When recording image and sound together became easier in the 1960s, anthropological films were able to include spoken dialogue in the way fiction films had since the 1930s, although this still required several further steps in the editing room. With the advent of video, synchronous sound recording became essentially an integral part of the filming process, so that introducing non-synchronous sound actually became the greater challenge.

The ideas, subject matter and methods of anthropology are always changing, and anthropological filmmaking has influenced this process, just as it has reflected it. Many of the more recent concerns of anthropology – the agency of individuals, their subjective experience, social performance, built environments – are well served by the expressive potential of film, which was perhaps less well suited to the study of social structures and religious beliefs in an earlier anthropological era. Because of this, there has been a renewal of anthropological interest in the visual, reminiscent of the

intense interest in visual knowledge among nineteenth-century anthropologists.

However, today's scientific interest in the visual (and audio-visual) has a markedly different character from that of the nineteenth century, when the technical and expressive means of film and photography were more limited and the focus was more strictly on material culture, technology, and human physiology. Anthropological filmmaking now is as much concerned with the non-visual as with the visual. Audio-visual recording has evolved to become a means of exploring the full gamut of human social experience, including ideas, feelings, verbal and non-verbal expression, aesthetics, the role of the senses, and the formal and informal interactions of everyday life.

Visual anthropology and writing

It is important to understand that this has created a tension between conventional ways of doing anthropology and the possibilities opened up by visual anthropology. Anthropology, as a discipline of words, has developed specific methods of research and forms of discourse that are both challenged and complemented by anthropological filmmaking. As anthropology aspired to be a science, with systems of data collection equivalent to those of the laboratory sciences, it produced ways of summarizing and testing its knowledge that could in theory be reproduced by other researchers, even if this occurred rather rarely. Anthropological knowledge came to be understood as that which could be expressed in writing or in the schemata of diagrams and tables. Films, by comparison, do things in a very different way, and anthropological films, partly as a consequence of this, have often failed to live up to anthropological expectations. In considering the potential of filmmaking for anthropological research, we need to look more closely at the sorts of knowledge films can create and their methods for creating it.

Much learning is visual, but in the processes of codification and communication it tends to become verbal. To a great extent films bypass this unless they are built around a verbal text, such as a spoken commentary or interviews with informants. The viewer of a film is exposed to scenes recorded by the camera, and these are organized in the editing to suggest certain possible ways of interpreting them. But there is always much more detail in the scenes than is governed by the interpretation, and viewers may derive knowledge from this material independently. Thus, despite the differences between human vision and photographic reproduction, and the many choices made in filming and editing, viewing a film is closer in character to the visual and auditory experience of the anthropologist in the field than to reading an anthropological text, where much of the detail must be reconstructed in the reader's imagination. This materialist basis of film stands in sharp contrast to the verbal codes of written anthropology.

Because film and writing are such different modes of communication, filmmaking is not just a way of communicating the same kinds of knowledge that can be conveyed by an anthropological text. It is a way of creating different knowledge. For many, this has been both its greatest drawback and greatest promise. The difficulty has been how to identify what is anthropological in the knowledge that film uniquely makes possible, and to have this accepted by other scholars. The promise has been to introduce methods of research and publication that add to what anthropology has already achieved, and ultimately to expand the depth and range of the discipline. But to do so, anthropological filmmaking must make the best use of its specific properties, rather than attempt to copy what anthropological writing has already done. Anthropological filmmaking can thus be seen as a parallel stream of anthropology, with its own areas of interest and its own distinctive ways of creating meaning.

Filming and writing each have certain advantages and are subject to certain limitations

in describing and interpreting human societies. Recognizing the limitations and utilizing the advantages of film are therefore important in deciding how to employ it. Anthropological film obviously has advantages in visual description. Every image is specific to a time and place, with all its particularities as well as its general features. But this is also a limitation in that it makes anthropological film an anthropology of the particular. Films can summarize by presenting a set of different cases for comparison, but they cannot make general statements and draw overall conclusions in the ways writing can. This inability to state abstract propositions about society is however offset by the potential of film to explore the individual case in detail, not only visually but also in its temporal, physical, and emotional dimensions. Visual research using film is capable of taking in and inspecting a wide range of features, individually and in their combination: movement, speech, the visual, the auditory, the material, the corporeal, and so on. There are thus certain areas of social research that are particularly accessible to filmmaking and in which it can make significant contributions, both as a method of enquiry and means of communicating this knowledge to others. These areas include, at the very least, formal and informal interactions among people, their relationships with their physical environment, the social experience and agency of individuals, and the performative aspects of social life.

Anthropological filmmaking as a process

What makes anthropological filmmaking deserving of special attention today is also its relevance to many of the other concerns of anthropology: globalization, migration, gender, emotion, individual and group identity, and visual culture. Yet it is important not to regard visual anthropology exclusively as a method of reporting on these phenomena. Filmmaking is also a research process.

Film has often been seen as a way of presenting knowledge previously gained by other means, a medium of publication and popularization. Conversely, it has also often been seen simply as a recording method, to extract data for later analysis. But the process of filming can be much more than this: it can be a means of interacting with a subject and exploring it in new ways. Filmmaking is a form of looking, sometimes motivated by particular intellectual objectives and sometimes anticipating thought. Often what is learned by filming is only an intermediate step towards further knowledge, or an indicator of what deserves closer attention. Thus, the process of filming is in itself valuable as part of the learning experience of fieldwork.

A major difference between anthropological filmmaking and most other modes of anthropological research is that it collapses the distance between enquiry and publication. The visual recording – i.e. the research data – becomes the fabric of the finished work. What is filmed cannot be rewritten, although it can be edited and presented in different ways. This is in marked contrast to written anthropology, which is the result of gathering data, reflecting on it, and then presenting conclusions in a new form. This means that much of what the audience eventually sees, and how it sees it, will have been inalterably fixed at the time of the original encounter. The expressive strategies of an anthropological film must therefore be ever-present in the mind of the filmmaker at the time of recording.

Cinema and social science

Several recurring theoretical debates have bedeviled anthropological filmmaking since its origins, concerning the positioning of the filmmaker within the work and the relation of cinematic art to science. In both cases the debate has tended to become polarized, creating an impression of incompatible opposites when, in fact, more complex

interrelationships are involved. In general, these debates run parallel to historical shifts in anthropological thought, although films, perhaps because they are judged to have more public influence, sometimes throw the issues into sharper relief.

Anthropological films take many forms and reflect different strategies for achieving an understanding of culture and society. One cause of disquiet among anthropologists about film has been the assumption by some of its advocates that anthropological filmmakers should adopt a single approach, and that approach only. Other approaches are considered biased, naïve, or un-anthropological. An even greater uncertainty surrounds the field as a whole, stemming from its uncomfortable positioning between cinema and social science. This is compounded by the different communicative systems of filming and writing, and also by what they actually communicate. But knowledge of society is not independent of how it is expressed, and utilizing the creative possibilities of cinema can be a legitimate way of approaching previously unexamined subjects and increasing anthropological understanding. Art and science therefore need not be opposed if the art is in the service of more accurate description. Each filmmaker must decide at what point the means of expression employed begin to obscure rather than clarify the subject – in short, at what point aesthetic choices begin to undermine the creation of new knowledge. In the past, the development of clearly recognizable genres, and the specific contexts in which texts have been used (such as in teaching, or publication in journals), have provided the discipline with its guidelines as to what kinds of discourse are anthropological. But these genres and contexts remain less clearly defined for anthropological films.

Positioning, bias, and truth

Another source of uncertainty, fueling much debate, has been how anthropological

filmmakers have positioned themselves in relation to their subjects and audiences. This positioning is crucial to understanding what any work represents; it provides a set of indicators on how to interpret it. Certain genres carry this information with them. We know, for example, that a Western will be a kind of morality play. In anthropological film, assumptions range from trusting the efficacy of implicit indicators within the work, to believing that a meta-commentary outside the work is necessary. The points at issue are always how the author regards the subject and audience and how, in turn, the subject regards each of these. In films, these relationships are reflected in the camerawork and editing, and in the content of the images. Do filmmakers stand aloof or record their interactions with the people in the film? Are the conditions of filming made evident? Is the filmic language familiar, relying on established conventions from fiction or documentary, or is it more personal, reflecting a particular sensibility? How much is assumed about what the audience already knows? Does the filmmaker expect the viewers to understand the situation or make explicit efforts to guide them? Each of these possibilities expresses an ideological position, a theory of knowledge, and expectations about how the film will be used.

One of the dominant debates in visual anthropology has centered on the reliability of the filmed record. Since their invention, photography and film have been regarded by many social scientists as ways of overcoming the inaccuracies of written description and the biases of the individual observer. It was thought that they might become a substitute for direct observation, allowing others to see accurately what the first observer had seen. To some extent this has proven true. Film has allowed anthropologists to inspect certain aspects of human behavior in minute detail, leading to a better understanding of facial expression, posture and gesture, technological processes, rituals, child-rearing practices, the social uses of space, and so on. But beyond questions of the accuracy of

photographic reproduction lie more complex questions of scientific truth and interpretation.

Anthropological films should be distinguished from raw anthropological film footage: they are constructed works, making use of cinematic conventions and the selective potential of the camera and editing. Like written ethnographies they are authored works, influenced by the particular interests and circumstances of the anthropologist. This fact has run up against the ideal of a transparent work in which authorship is effectively erased or bracketed, whether by means of scientific rigor, self-restraint, or self-explanation. Thus, anthropological films are often expected to be both neutral and comprehensive, and are criticized when they are not. Perhaps more often than written works, they are accused of leaving things out or being misleading, as if they should include everything or avoid being interpretive, even though neither is expected of writing. There is in this position what might be called a 'primitive' view of what an anthropological film can or should be.

The participant-observer

The problem has often come down to questioning the objectivity of the filmmaker, underpinned by the supposed neutrality of science. But anthropological filmmakers can never present reality as a single objective fact (assuming this even existed), just as they can never avoid the selectivity involved in filming from a particular camera position, or having certain interests, or being part of a particular historical and intellectual generation. What, for example, is the objective reality of a ritual? Is it the structure of the event, the symbolic meanings it encodes, or the thoughts and feelings of those performing it? It is all of these, but every film must choose which aspects to explore. Subjectivity and objectivity are not possible alternatives; they are elements to be balanced in the work, and each filmmaker will balance them differently.

This argument applies to the question of whether during filming the filmmaker should remain apart from the people being filmed or interact with them. A stance apart is sometimes founded on the ideal of capturing an unmediated reality, but it may also simply reflect a strategy of learning through observation rather than employing more invasive means. Anthropological research typically utilizes a variety of methods: observation, participation in daily life, interviews with informants, statistical surveys, and so on. Filmmakers choose from similar possibilities. Malinowski's 'participant observation' was never meant to suggest opposed approaches, but rather the two combined: the participant as observer. Interaction with subjects is a quintessential part of fieldwork. The question facing anthropological filmmakers, therefore, becomes how much of this interaction to include in the film. We shall have more to say about this in relation to uses of the camera.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Anthropological filmmaking involves both filming methods and methods of research, although in practice the two are closely intertwined. When filming is itself a form of investigation, the two become almost synonymous. 'Visual research' may suggest the recording of images for later analysis, and it has been this for many anthropologists; but it can also be a primary means of study. Research of the first kind views anthropological filmmaking primarily as a technology; research of the second kind as a practice, a way of actively exploring social phenomena.

Prospective uses

How one makes an anthropological film depends largely on how one hopes it will

be seen. (There may also be an eye on posterity: creating a historical record for uses unknown today.) The prospective use is generally clear already, but it is well for the filmmaker to give it a second thought. This does not mean identifying a 'target audience', as educators and television producers like to do, because a film may have several quite legitimate audiences. Rather, it means trying to imagine how it will be received, for without this it is unlikely to emerge as a coherent work. Will it be viewed as scientific data to be studied, or will it provide an experience from which viewers will gain insights into other people's lives? There are a range of possibilities in between. A filmmaker may want to illustrate a particular topic, create a case study, present a set of variations on a theme, or construct a narrative of events. Filming a craftsperson making an object, for example, could be (1) to show the technological process, (2) to show the craftsperson's knowledge and skill, (3) to make a point about labor, (4) to reveal the craftsperson's character, (5) to reflect a passage of time, (6) to recreate a sensory environment, (7) to describe a cultural function or artistic tradition, and so on. The context in which the material appears will direct different readings, and it will also influence the manner of filming.

What is filmed will also be determined by what it is possible to film. What is the best strategy for filming kinship? Should the anthropologist even try to use film for this? Clearly, a diagram is a better means of representing the abstract structural relations of kinship. But film may be better at expressing situations of dominance, affection, or such special relationships as avoidance or 'joking relationships'. How parents treat their children, and vice versa, can be described through written accounts and oral histories, but filming provides another level of understanding by conveying postures, facial expressions, and records of actual incidents.

It was once thought by many anthropologists that film only offered anthropology a way of sketching in the background of

anthropological study – the natural setting, the appearance of dwellings, how individuals exemplified certain social roles, and so on. Film was considered useful for illustration in teaching, but not intellectually important to anthropology. It is now increasingly believed that appearance is in fact a significant locus of meaning for anthropology. The physical body, material culture, the performance of social roles, the aesthetic systems of societies, and the agency of individuals – all these are now part of the mainstream of anthropological theory. This has provided new and productive opportunities for anthropological filmmakers.

Crews and collaborations

Approaching the task of filming in the field, the anthropologist will be faced with the question of whether to film alone or to seek the help of one or more other persons. In the past, to film with 16mm film and synchronous sound, a second person was almost essential to handle the tape recorder and microphone. Today, with video cameras and smaller microphones, one person can achieve almost as much. But the choice also has important consequences for the resulting film material.

A film crew, even as small as two people, creates a quite different relationship of rapport with the people filmed than a single filmmaker. Two people form a social unit from which it is possible to feel excluded, whereas the anthropologist filming alone is always in a more exposed relationship with others. This can have benefits, in that people may be more likely to treat the filmmaker as a member of the social group, or as an intimate to whom information and feelings can be confided. The equipment carried by a single filmmaker is also likely to be less threatening. Another difference, from the filmmaker's point of view, is that most decisions can be made immediately, without requiring consultation or arrangement with an assistant or collaborator.

The advantages of working with another person are that the people being filmed may feel able to establish a more comfortable understanding about what will be filmed: that the whole process can in effect be more public and regulated. This may be particularly important when restricted knowledge is involved or the situation is politically sensitive. A crew of filmmakers may be seen as less likely to form allegiances with a particular faction. If the filmmaker's assistant is from the group being filmed, there may also be an increase of trust (but, it should be noted, sometimes quite the opposite). Two filmmakers may also have access to a wider range of events if they are differentiated from one another: for example, if they are a married couple, or persons of different ages. Sometimes people will fully accept one of the two filmmakers, because of gender or ethnicity, and allow the other to be present in a supporting or honorary capacity. Working with another person also has the advantage of giving the filmmaker someone to talk to about the film, in ways not possible with the people being filmed. A second opinion can throw things into better perspective and contribute additional ideas.

Collaboration between a filmmaker and an anthropologist is often put forward as the ideal formula for successful anthropological filmmaking. Each, it is supposed, will complement the skills of the other, the assumption being that anthropologists are untrained in filmmaking and filmmakers are ignorant of anthropology. This may once have been true, but increasingly anthropologists are eager to add filmmaking to their more traditional methods of note-taking and writing. In this, anthropologist-filmmakers like Jean Rouch have led the way. Filmmakers trained in anthropology are also more common, and indeed the separation of the two domains is beginning to look outdated. Younger anthropologists increasingly regard filming skills as a necessary part of their research repertoire.

In any case, collaboration of any kind can be difficult, and more so if the collaborators

have different interests and ways of doing things. A common pitfall when an anthropologist and filmmaker collaborate is that the anthropologist wants the film to be all-inclusive, believing that anything left out will make the film misleading. The error here lies in assuming that a film must cover everything or avoid an interpretation, and that the viewer has no recourse to other sources of information. The anthropologist may therefore come armed with an encyclopedic list of topics and become upset when they cannot all be dealt with. A variant of this, also meant to guard against misinterpretation, is to load the film with a complex superstructure of verbal explanation, under which the film eventually sinks. Filmmakers, for their part, may be too eager to give the film a conventional dramatic structure, feeling that without this the audience will lose interest. They may become increasingly anxious if this doesn't emerge on its own and be tempted to interfere with events to make it happen. Obsessive fixation on 'story' is one of the failings of all too many filmmakers.

Another kind of collaboration may be desired between filmmakers and their subjects, with the purpose of producing a film that includes a more interior perspective or gives a larger voice to the people filmed. A common problem here is that it becomes difficult to know whose view of a situation the film finally represents. Because of the different interests and objectives involved, the result may be a compromise that avoids exploring anything very deeply. Related to this is another potential problem. One of the underlying principles of an anthropological or cross-cultural perspective is that cultural specificities are best understood in relation to cultural difference. In theory, therefore, a cross-cultural collaboration should develop just such a comparative perspective. But if a film contains too many compromises between the collaborators, it tends to lose its cross-cultural edge. In recent years, a better alternative seems to have emerged: the simultaneous encouragement of both indigenous and cross-cultural filmmaking.

The cross-cultural perspective, in turn, can look in either direction.

Research relationships

This may be an appropriate point to introduce another problem often faced by filmmakers: resolving the tension between trying to present an honest analysis of a situation and avoiding offence to those who are part of it. Frequently, the very things that are most revealing of underlying social forces are precisely the things that people do not want shown or discussed. And yet to tailor analysis to what will not disturb anyone amounts to self-censorship. But this formulation perhaps represents a false dichotomy, for it suggests that people will always prefer silence to truth, or will be intolerant of others' views, and that the filmmaker and subjects cannot work through such differences together. Often, too, with the passage of time, a film takes on a new ambience. It begins to be viewed as a historical document, or even an object of nostalgia. Depending on the time taken between the filming and the film's actual completion, people's attitudes toward it may shift markedly. Thus a situation that originally aroused controversy may later be regarded more dispassionately, and people may be quite happy for it to be shown.

But sometimes this doesn't happen, and then the filmmaker must make a moral judgment about whether it is more important for the material to be seen or to protect people's sensibilities. And it is not only a matter of sensibilities, but of rights. The understanding under which the film was made is crucial to this decision. But rights are not always clear-cut, and the right course is not always obvious. Who has the right to speak for a community, or defend it? When there has been an injustice, does anyone have the right to prevent it being discussed? And there is the reverse situation in which the filmmaker realizes that even though people may allow something to be filmed, including it in

the film may cause distress or damage to some individual. In that case, the filmmaker may choose to leave it out. There are even cases in which someone's life may be endangered by a film. Ethics committees attempt to cover all the eventualities, but they cannot. There are some situations in which a legalistic interpretation of rights is useless, and filmmakers must ultimately be guided by their own consciences and understanding.

The relationship between a filmmaker and those filmed is clearly not a simple one, and it is important to realize that it evolves over time during the making of a film. For that reason, the understanding struck when the filming began will also change, for better or worse. Usually it is for the better, as filmmaker and subjects get to know each other, but tensions can also arise. Having a filmmaker around may look enjoyable at the beginning, but it can wear thin. Filmmakers must judge how not to overstay their welcome. Furthermore, the shifts are not always in one direction; there will inevitably be ups and downs in the relationship. Both filmmaker and film subjects should feel they are deriving some benefit from the making of the film even if, as is usually the case, the reasons differ for each of them.

Fieldwork and filming

One question that frequently arises is how soon filming should begin. Is it better to conduct a period of research and familiarization before beginning to film, or to begin filming immediately? This is both a practical matter and a matter of principle. The conventional wisdom, based on the typical pattern of anthropological fieldwork followed much later by publication, holds that filming should be introduced only after a period of preliminary research. How can one film what one does not know anything about? This is also the common formula for successful documentary filmmaking: that the research should

precede the filming. For one thing it reassures the producers that they won't lose their money. But one consequence of this is that the filmmaker may film largely what has already been established by the research, so that filming simply becomes a way of illustrating it. In effect, the filming has contributed nothing in the way of new knowledge. One might well ask: If one makes a film based on what one already knows, what is the point of making it?

A different approach, based on the idea that filming is an integral part of the research process, is that it should begin quite soon, as the filmmaker begins to explore the subject. Often when this is done, the filmmaker realizes that the ideas that initially appeared so crucial are of less importance than the new ideas they lead to. In this case the act of filming has served as a catalyst to understanding. But if the film is made according to a prefabricated script or treatment, it will tend to be frozen at that earlier stage. There are other reasons too for filming from the start. As first observations become more familiar, they often become taken for granted. They may become so familiar that the filmmaker loses sight of them altogether, only discovering the loss when it is too late. Filming when observations are fresh can cause one to film them more vividly.

Filming from the start can also be a matter of principle. If one introduces a camera after a long period of fieldwork, it tends to alter and even disrupt the nature of the relationships that one has built up, for the filming process necessarily introduces a different mode of behavior on the part of the filmmaker. One must focus more on one's job and may find it impossible to interact with people in the old way. Furthermore, filming inevitably means placing a piece of alien equipment between oneself and one's subjects. It may thus be thought preferable, from both a moral and practical point of view, to introduce the camera early, showing one's subjects straightforwardly what one is doing and allowing the relationships to grow around that.

Filmmaking behavior

These relationships are also crucially affected by the methods and character of the filming. In the days when filmmaking required complex equipment, and even later when it became somewhat less intrusive, the filming process tended to dominate any situation. No wonder documentary filmmakers had to direct people to play their parts. Today, with small video cameras, when technically excellent films can be made by even one person, the intrusion of the technology and the filmmaker need not be so great. But it is less the technology itself and more the approach of the filmmaker that makes the greater difference. If the filmmaker is constantly calling attention to the filming process, or constantly interfering in things for technical or other reasons, the camera will naturally remain the center of attention. But if the object is to make films about how people actually live, it is wise to learn how to work more unobtrusively.

How filmmakers comport themselves is the first consideration. A low-key approach to filming requires an ability to treat the camera not as a problem, but as a trusted companion. This means learning to operate it with a minimum of fuss. It is a little like mastering a musical instrument. Holding the camera steady, for example, is a skill that can be learned by most people. The more experienced one becomes, the more one operates the controls almost without thinking, and the more the camera becomes an extension of one's way of looking at things and interacting with others. The more comfortable you are with the camera, the more open you can be to what is going on around you.

There are other factors involved in filming that affect how others respond to the camera and how the resulting film material appears. This has partly to do with the filmmaker's individual personality and partly with larger matters of method and style. Is the filmmaker working alone or with others? Do filmmakers work close to the people being filmed or stand farther back? Is the filming done with a

tripod or a hand-held camera? Many of these factors are determined by the genre of the film, its anthropological objectives, or the culture from which the filmmaker comes. But they are also open to choice. For example, to film people's informal interactions and conversations may require staying close to them, hand-holding the camera in order to move easily with them, and using a wide-angle lens so that they don't constantly go out of frame. But this can also be a matter of personal stylistic choice, the filmmaker's own preferred way of seeing the world. Another approach, more interested in relations to space, or to the surrounding environment, might call for a camera on a tripod, framing the world in more formal ways. In both cases it may be difficult to separate the subject matter from the aesthetics of representing it.

Camera modes

The choice of camera style is personal in another sense. It has to do with how the filmmaker relates to other people and what sort of relationship with them the film will ultimately express. This is an integral part of a larger strategy of how the film explores its subject. There are various ways of employing a camera, which could be described as responsive, interactive, and constructive. Each has its uses, and each represents not only a different mode of enquiry but also a different way of addressing the viewer. A responsive camera is largely reactive, responding to what is occurring in front of it. It looks, explores, but does not interfere, even though the filmmaker may be on intimate terms with the subjects and, in a larger sense, has some influence on events. The viewer's perspective here resembles that of the filmmaker, who watches but does not otherwise enter into the event.

An interactive camera is quite the reverse. It does intervene, and records its own interaction with the subject. The filmmaker, even if not actually seen, is now pushed more into

the forefront of the film, along with the subjects. Such interactions often take the form of a conversation or interview. Clearly such an event would not have occurred unless provoked or invited by the filmmaker. In a figurative sense the viewer is now situated farther outside the film, watching the filmmaker at work.

A constructive camera presents the viewer with an intervention of a different kind, focused this time on the film images themselves. Through the style of camerawork and editing, the images are reprocessed to produce an explicitly interpretive work, based on a concept of the subject or set of formal conventions. The manipulation of images by the filmmaker is made very obvious. This is a far cry from the realist mode of the other approaches, for here the filmmaker disassembles the subject and reassembles it according to some external logic. In effect, the filming is used not to report on an event but to report on the filmmaker's interpretation or impressions of it. The viewer's position is thus moved still farther outside the frame of the original event and closer to that of the filmmaker's own consciousness.

One of these modes of camera use may dominate a film, but often several modes are employed for different purposes, sometimes merging into one another. It may be difficult, for example, to identify the point at which people who have previously been absorbed in their own affairs begin to involve the filmmaker in their conversations, or at which point the filmmaker starts introducing formal elements into the film that will become increasingly pronounced. It may also be difficult to distinguish between formal elements that are part of generic conventions and those that are idiosyncratically those of the filmmaker. For example, if one films always from a ground-level position, is this a cultural choice or a personal one? In the hands of a great filmmaker like Yasujiro Ozu, it is evidently both.

There is no good reason why several camera modes may not be used in a single film, provided they appear justified and are

not sprung unexpectedly on the audience. For if this happens, the filmmaker will be judged to have lost control of the material or to be indulging personal whims at the expense of the viewer. Stylistic consistency has much to be said for it, as a guarantee of the coherence of the filmmaker's vision. But if there are to be shifts of method, it is wise for the filmmaker to establish these possibilities early in the film. If film viewers do not know the ground rules of the film, they will have difficulty interpreting what they see.

Filming strategies

Anthropological filmmaking can center on an event such as a ritual, a social institution such as marriage, or even an abstraction such as identity or masculinity. It may look at the role of an individual or the experiences of a large group. In some cases the structure of an event provides a framework for the film to follow. This can lend a degree of predictability to the filming, although sometimes even the people involved are unsure of exactly what will happen next. It is not unusual to go to the place where something is supposed to happen only to be told that it is happening elsewhere, or happened last night. The best the filmmaker can do is to try to get the most reliable information from knowledgeable people and be prepared for other possibilities. Patience and flexibility are both necessary assets in these situations. Filmmakers who are too rigid in their expectations are likely to face frustrations and resort to hasty decisions. All too often filmmakers refuse to film something because it doesn't fit into their plans, only to realize later that something of importance has happened right under their noses. Sometimes an unexpected scene or event contributes far more to the film than what the filmmaker had originally envisaged.

There are a variety of strategies for anthropological filmmaking in the field. Some filmmakers will look for events or individuals to follow. Others will look for tensions or

conflicts that appear to be moving toward some kind of crisis, reasoning that discovering what is at stake will reveal underlying forces at work. These social dramas, like more formalized events, have a certain predictability to them and, as Gregory Bateson, Victor Turner and others have reasoned, reflect the ways in which communities reconcile fundamental structural divisions that threaten to disrupt them.

Still other filmmakers will try to explore social forces by concentrating on particular themes that express them, either symbolically or in everyday events. This theme-and-variations approach can be especially productive when the tensions never rise to the level of a crisis, but remain as undercurrents. It can be equally valuable in exploring less volatile aspects of culture, such as the transmission of knowledge from one group or generation to another, or the ways in which cultural traditions evolve and adapt to change.

One tactic in filming a set of related themes is to note down possible scenes that may occur, and that will be relevant to the film. These may be events one has witnessed, that may recur, or other ways in which the same themes are likely to be expressed. The filmmaker is then attuned to a specified range of possibilities and prepared to begin filming when something happens that fits one or another of the items included. As the film progresses, new items will be added and old ones removed, either because sufficient material about them has been filmed or because they no longer appear relevant. Since the filmmaker is constantly learning more about the subject, it is quite normal for the priorities to change.

Visual anthropology also offers considerable scope for studying the visual aspects of culture. We live increasingly in a world of visual images. Anthropological filmmaking can make an important contribution to the understanding of visual cultural forms, since it can show how visual images and visible objects are produced and consumed as well as their physical appearance. There is also a

valuable differential perspective to be gained from using one visual medium to explore another, such as film or video to study still photography, religious iconography, or advertising. Here filming offers anthropology and cultural studies a 'language' particularly suited to its objects of research.

The cinematic triangle

Most anthropological films implicitly announce three separate relationships: (1) between the filmmaker and the viewers; (2) between the filmmaker and the subjects; and (3) between the subjects and the viewers. The last of these is often expressed in the way people in a film imagine the audience will see them, and how, through the film, they attempt to address them. The first is more like a pact between filmmaker and audience that is established by the genre of the film, but also by certain more direct signals from the filmmaker. The genre of the film – whether research filming, a television documentary, or a film for teaching – tells us partly what to expect. The filmmaker may then tell us more by establishing a particular style: for example, by introducing voice-over commentary, subtitles, inter-titles or still images. A camera style will also be established. The filmmaker may prefer long takes or short ones, close shots or wide shots, movement or stillness, or a distinctive combination of these. The film may preserve a convention of omniscience or give the viewer an insight into the filmmaking process by including shots that acknowledge it. The editing will also create a logic and rhythm. Does the filmmaker prefer smooth-flowing continuity or like the use of juxtapositions? Do the images progress from the general to the specific, or vice versa? The point is not that one approach is necessarily better than another, but that viewers sense an intention and intelligence behind the work and feel they are in good hands.

It is also important for a film to establish the filmmaker's relationship to the people

being filmed. This may evolve over the course of the film, but we get early evidence of it in people's behavior before the camera. Do they appear aware of the filmmaker's presence, and if so are they comfortable with it? Do they appear to have been directed? Is there interaction with the filmmaker? Does the filmmaker stay close to them or film from far away, as if from an observation post? The manner of filming embodies an attitude toward the subject.

It also embodies the filmmaker's attitude toward the viewer. Earlier styles of documentary encoded a theatrical convention of distance between the work and the audience. The film was a performance prepared for their consumption. How it was produced was a professional secret, and this mystery was part of its power. Like fiction films, most documentaries assumed an Olympian view of their subjects. Human beings were observed and recorded, but the eye observing them remained unacknowledged and unseen, both by the audience and apparently by the subjects as well. If someone noticed the camera, that shot was cut out. This was a far cry from the novel, in which authors frequently confided their thoughts and methods to the reader. Documentaries made since the 1960s, however, have begun to treat the camera more like a personal writing instrument, although this shift has yet to affect much of television production. In most films, but particularly in anthropological films, the acknowledgement within the film of the filmmaker's situation in the field becomes an important element in allowing us to interpret accurately what we see.

Modes of reflexivity

The disclosure of the filmmaking process, however, is not a single act but may be distributed through many aspects of the film. It need not take the form of overt self-reflexivity – in itself often unreliable, because it can never be wholly disinterested. As filmmaking becomes a more personal and less

industrial process, we can learn a great deal from the filmmaker's apparent behavior. A highly intrusive camera, creating signs of resentment, not only tells us about the insensitivity of the filmmaker but also that what we see is produced under a kind of duress. A camera that moves in certain ways and follows certain details tells us much about the particular interests of the filmmaker. It has often been argued that anthropological films should be accompanied by written notes that describe the field situation and fill in much of the missing ethnographic detail. This may be valuable if the film is used in teaching, but it should not become a crutch that the film depends upon. For in that case, anthropological filmmakers may find it increasingly unnecessary to create a coherent work, and viewers less acute in reading it.

Reflexivity essentially means contextualizing the content of a film by revealing aspects of its production. Makers of anthropological films should distinguish between two kinds of reflexivity. One kind is explicit, making the conditions of filming more apparent. This may mean including footage of interactions between filmmaker and subjects, showing the subjects' acknowledgement of the filmmaking situation, providing a voice-over commentary, and so on. But it also means providing a sufficiently rich context for the events shown to make them understandable in relation to a range of social forces – structural, personal, and cultural. A more implicit kind of reflexivity also permeates most films, to which viewers should be sensitive. It is the stamp of the filmmaker's research interests and personal involvement. It can be read in a multitude of signs in how the film has been made, from the camerawork to the editing, to the responses of people on the screen. It is an expression of the filmmaker's living presence in the film.

The experiences of individuals

If the filmmaker's role is embodied in this way, what about the roles of the film's

subjects and the viewer? The subjects are clearly embodied in a physical sense, because it is their existence that has generated the images on the screen. The camera also registers the outward expression of their emotions and, through their words, signs of their intellectual life. But these signs must be interpreted by the viewer and, in a sense, made their own. The viewer becomes a collaborator in the creation of meaning. In anthropological films this is often complicated by cultural differences, since the signs (most obviously of language) may vary from one society to another. Filmmakers in such cases must often rely on the context to clarify these meanings, or provide explanations by other means. But one of the great assets of anthropological film, as opposed to writing, is its ability to reach across cultural boundaries through those aspects of life that are common to many societies. Viewers may not be able to understand another language, but they can recognize many situations in other people's lives and respond to them. The better the film contextualizes these situations, the better the viewer can interpret them in culturally-appropriate ways.

Although films cannot get inside another person's mind or emotions, they can, by cinematic means, communicate aspects of their subjective experience. They do this partly by paying close attention to the expressions, movements, and responses of individuals and partly by following narratives in their lives. Viewers, through a process of identification, begin to make connections between the behavior on the screen and their own past experiences. But films rarely adopt the actual visual perspectives of individuals. Rather, figuratively and literally, they look over their shoulders, staying close to them through different events. Viewers come to understand others' feelings not by experiencing them directly, but by vicariously sharing their social interactions and physical surroundings.

In the creation of subjective identification, narrative has a central role. Because of this it has great potential for contributing to

anthropological understanding, a potential perhaps more often employed in anthropological filmmaking than in anthropological writing. Narratives occur in every culture and so provide an important mechanism for cross-cultural understanding. They have explanatory power, because they can demonstrate patterns of cause and effect. By observing how something happens, we can often come to understand why it happens. Perhaps more important, narratives of individual lives provide a way of leading us imaginatively through the experiences of others in societies different from our own. In the process, we encounter the complex action of social forces and the ways in which individuals both implement and are subject to them. In addition, narratives of social interaction provide a framework for observing how people inhabit their physical environment – how they use it, alter it, and experience it in sensory terms.

Lastly, the filmmaker needs to be concerned about how the people portrayed in anthropological films see themselves, as they are by right a film's first audience. They are involved in it both personally and as preternaturally exposed representatives of their communities. Films can provoke a wide range of responses, many of them unpredictable. Like still photographs, they can elicit memories, emotions, and tacit cultural knowledge. People's responses to seeing themselves in films can tell us much about what we as filmmakers have got right and what we have got wrong, even if this does not always coincide with what they like or dislike. Their interpretations will also undoubtedly change over time. Many of the cultural and intellectual assumptions clinging to a film will drop away and it may well come to be valued less for these things than for the physical details it has captured. A similar process occurs within anthropology, allowing it to make use of films of the past in new ways. The films we make today become both sources of documentary evidence and evidence of the ideas, prejudices, and interests of their times.

A SELECTION OF FILMS AND PUBLICATIONS BY DAVID MACDOUGALL

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