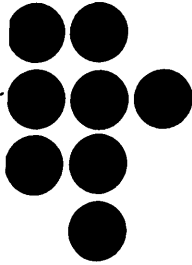


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"The Anthropological Film"

April 15, 1993

4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Bartos Theater

20 Ames Street

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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COMMUNICATIONS FORUM

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Speakers:

James Howe, moderator
Program in Anthropology/Archaeology
M.I.T.

J. Dudley Andrew
Comparative Literature and Communication Studies
University of Iowa

Robert Gardner
Film Study Center and Visual Studies Department
Harvard University

Michael M. J. Fischer
Science, Technology, and Society/Anthropology
M.I.T.

Rapporteur: Kelly M. Greenhill, M.S. Candidate
Political Science Department, M.I.T.

Introduction by moderator JAMES HOWE: We'll begin. This is the forum on anthropological film. This session is sponsored by the Communications Forum and the M.I.T. Program in Cultural Studies. I am Jim Howe, one of the anthropologists here. Each of the speakers will show some brief film clips, and then, at the end of their presentations, we'll open it up to a general discussion.

Our first speaker is J. Dudley Andrew, the Angelo Bertucci Professor of Political Studies at the University of Iowa. He has joint appointment in Comparative Literature and Communications Studies. He is the author of *André Bazin, The Major Film Theories: an Introduction, Concepts in Film Theory*, and *Film in the Aura of Art*. I think you will see that our three speakers come from very different positions; I think we should get an interesting triangulation on the subject.

J. DUDLEY ANDREW [J.D.A.]: I am not a professor of ethnographic film, but I have been interested in it recently as a way of thinking about cinema culture generally. I am extremely interested in motion pictures and film culture, and what movies can do and have been. This whole question of the anthropological film has been crucial to my ruminations in the last little while. It has come on the basis of some books that have been highly touted (in my field, at least) by French quasi-philosopher, Gilles Deleuze. He wrote two impressive lengthy studies of the cinema in the 1980s, and just about the same time, in another of his books, he wrote a chapter entitled "Treatise on Nomadology."

I have studied his film books very closely and got interested in the question of nomadism through him, and partly through that, got interested in the metaphor he develops concerning moving peoples and sedentary peoples. The book that develops an extremely fertile metaphor for me, in which DeLeuze says, in all periods of history, there is something like a nomadic alternative to the sedentary or state system. The nomadic, he refers to as "the war machine," and he talks about it like that because in the nomadic cultures from which he takes his metaphor, there is a constant toppling of chiefs. There is also the free movement of an assemblage of human beings, transportation modes (camels or horses), arms, and so forth across what he calls a smooth space until it runs up against striated space, urban forts and city planning, and so forth, and there has to be a confrontation there. And both need the other, so he uses this as a metaphor, and it becomes fertile in many ways.

One of the ways it becomes fertile is in thinking about cinema and its history. With that metaphor in mind, I can imagine motion pictures not as a tool--tools are things developed in state civilizations and sedentary civilizations for constituted and delimited ends or goals. But as the "war machine," it is developed for no ends, but just as a projectile moving swiftly into unlimited space, where there are possibilities for explosions, rendings, tearings, breaking open, a new future.

Cinema can be thought of as this kind of vehicle. It might have been a vehicle for trade in images of projecting desires and styles of seeing in a kind of global economy. Nomads, of course, also operate in a global economic system, in which they are really quite important, even if only as a minor portion of this economy. They act as transits of information and materials from one sedentary site to another, even if they feel they have nothing in common with it. The nomadic civilizations historically did that, so it is another part of the metaphor, which I find fertile here.

What if we think about cinema developing in a way different from the way it has developed? We know how it has developed; it has developed in urban centers like Los Angeles and Paris and Rome. But, it could have been a dispersed medium, and for a time, it seems that it was. Lumière, for example, inventor of the cinematograph, commissioned wandering cameramen scattered across the globe to take pictures of locales that would ultimately be viewed at other locales around the globe. This is a disperse system of distribution and production that could have become a certain kind of norm.

These are what they call views, which was often the name they gave these films of locales in the very early days of cinema. They certainly followed from kind of narrative

slide shows of itinerant wanderers that were so popular at the turn of the century. This helped to bring different styles of vision and desires into the metropole. So with this version of cinema in mind, the traveling fair, and ambulatory projection teams, and even spontaneous showing of films at town centers and in cafés should not be taken as primitive ways of exhibiting cinema, but really as perhaps a proper site of this notion of film distribution and exhibition as seen with the cinema as war machine, rather than as state system. That would have saved the medium from its institutionalization--the picture palaces that developed after 1915 and into the 20's and so forth, where it emulated the state-sponsored grant arts of opera and theatre.

Cinema, of course, did not follow up this ambulatory, nomadic version very well. It very quickly became urbanized in manufacturing and distribution by rationalizing its energies. There remained a hunger for exotic, but it brought that into the studio. Hollywood films would soon elude to the outside world, would cite it really, rather than be led to it and be led by it, on the whole. This shift is easily gauged by noting the disappearance of films from the traveling fairs, and its reappearance at world fairs. One world fair that I have spent a lot of time thinking about (because of the work I do in studying the interwar period in France) is the Parisian Exposition Colonial of 1931. At that immense exposition, they brought to the metropole all the colonies of the world, and reconstituted them inside (at the outskirts of the metropole), but still inside the hexagon of France. That becomes a metaphor for me of colonial desires of the time, one of which was to give audiences the illusion of travel. There was even a little train you could take around a lake; it was like a Disneyland or Epcot Center. I have never been to Epcot, but I assume one can go and see natives that were brought in to speak their local language, and look as they are supposed to look.

Anyway, by going to the fair and taking a little train ride, from the safety of your car, you could sample the world. This is like the cinema where, likewise in a sedentary position, you view the screen. In fact, there was a large cinema presence at the Exposition Colonial, and it was led by a man named Leon Poirier, the first French anthropological filmmaker, who made a film I was going to bring today called *Citroen* in 1925. I have got some slides of it, which I will show you in a minute.

Another way to look at the shift is to look at the ethnographic impulse inside Hollywood films at the time, and even inside French films at the time. Within the studio walls, the entire world needed to find itself represented. Now there remained, as you know from going to films long ago, a newsreel office. There were always a couple of newsreel offices in the United States, and in France as well. And also a short film office, which would provide material from the actual open air world to fill out programs when you went to the movies. But that program would always be dominated by what was called the feature film.

In Deleuze's terms, the state or studio empire, which is sedentary and hierarchized, protects itself by colonizing the uncontrolled spaces, times, and dramas outside its walls. A few filmmakers fought this trend by trying to open cinema up to the outdoors, to the lives and spaces and temporalities of other peoples. But, on the whole, they had to do so through very special exhibition and distribution methods. So, you can see ethnographic cinema develop like one of Deleuze's war machines against the studio practices of the capital system of Hollywood. Here, it kind of gallops across a boundless terrain, with variable assemblage of personnel and material, the way Deleuze talks about nomads. Production on location resembles logistics, and logistics is something which dominates both nomadic life and ethnographic film making (from what I have heard from those people engaged in that practice). This is opposed to kind of the big strategies or plots that are the concern of the assembly line studio practices in Hollywood. In fact, nomadic peoples may have led filmmakers to develop new ways of shooting film, quickly affecting fiction film. I just reminded myself that one of the very first ethnographic films is a film about an expedition. And I'll just show a moment of a couple of films here.

This is from *Grass*, a 1926 film about the Bakhtiari annual migration, where a couple of hundred thousand people, and, I am told, sheep go across mountains in Central Asia. [Film clip shows a caravan of people crossing over the mountain range.] The filmmakers had to devise all kinds of new strategies for keeping the film warm, and for having enough film—evidently they had eighty feet left at the end of the expedition. Through very special distribution, (they could not get it into normal theatres), they found quite an audience for their film. They were therefore led to try to be incorporated by Hollywood processes. They then went on to make mixtures, a couple of hybrid films, blending documentary and fiction. Let's speed forward to the film's conclusion, which ends with a sedentary moment-at home, relaxed.

In this next clip, a film entitled *Rango* that was shot soon after *Grass*, we have a very different attitude toward the exotic. It begins with a lion, like the MGM lion. Suddenly we are definitely in the studio, and we are tracking in and in. I love it as this gets speeded up. We are moving in, shot after shot, towards some central moment, which is a certain very clear desire. These two filmmakers went on to make the most famous hybrid of all, King Kong, two years later.

In France we have the same thing. Leon Poirier, the man that I mentioned as the first ethnographic filmmaker that I know of, made in 1930 a film called *Cain* about Madagascar, and he got an actual Madagalese woman to play the part. But he found her in Paris, where she lived in a tasteful apartment, where she was forever practicing Chopin at a white piano. But she was authentic in looks and in genes. That's what happens when you get this hybrid form. (There has been a recent, very fine dissertation that I was associated with by Dana Benelli, who teaches here at Clark, on the hybrid forms of these documentary and fiction films in this period.)

What I want to make sure I get to is to mention is one of the important technical aspects that is really more technical than we can think of with respect to ethnographic film, as it opposes the Hollywood model. We generally think of the Hollywood model as a model in which studio made shots are put together rationally, according to a number (usually between 300 and 700 shots) in a beautiful plot, organized form. Ethnographic films often do not follow this form because the material itself takes you outside the normal story structure.

In reading Deleuze's book, I found lots of references that relate to the film theorist that I am most associated with, and have spent a lot of time reading, and that is, André Bazin. Something I want to draw attention to here is the notion that a film's editing, in Bazin's terminology, can be thought of as a kind of traversal, where you go from one point to another. In standard Hollywood film making, Bazin says, the Hollywood creates a bridge made out of bricks, shapes each of the shots into perfect form, and then cements these together. The form of the brick is set up so that it can shape the bridge in perfect organization, and you'd never think of the brick except for its utility for the bridge, and the bridge except for its utility for passage. So, everyone uses the bridge to get across to the other side.

Speaking about Italian neo-realism, he offered another metaphor for how Rossellini's films work. He says Rossellini does not edit films this way, and he does not treat scenes like little bricks. He treats them as rocks in a stream, and in fact, you forward the film. The rocks were not put there for you to get across, but you can use them that way.

Deleuze talks about ethnographic and nomadic experience in much, much the same way, and I think as far as ethnographic film has been attentive to the shape of the world that it photographs, it has subsumed a trajectory to those blocks or bricks in the stream of things. I am reminded, by looking at one of the greatest of all films. This is the kind of smooth space that Deleuze calls smooth space. [Professor Andrew shows a scene from the film *Nanook*, which displays what Deleuze calls "nomadic space" --Eskimos crossing ice and fishing in an isolated area; this is the "crucial moment in *Nanook*"].

The last thing I wanted to do, in reminding us about the impact of ethnographic film on fiction, is to remember that Flaherty went on to work with F.W. Murnau in *Taboo*. Poirier made this film *Cain*. Neo-realism gave us *Open City* and the docudramas. In other words, ethnographic film had tremendous effects on Hollywood. I have one film here that will remind of us one of the most controversial ethnographic films; it had enormous effects on cinema and the New Wave. This is *Les Maîtres Fous* by Jean Rouch. I am just going to pick out an image at random. At its first screening at the Museum de Lyon, a number of viewers said we must destroy this film, and many, many ethnographers and Africanists agreed with him. Then it was shown in Venice, and became one of the most famous films of all time. [*Professor Andrew presents a clip of an African village, where villagers are dancing, and supposedly performing the taboo act of consuming flesh*]. The reason I need the film in this conclusion is to quote Ausman Sembene, one of the greatest, probably most famous, African filmmakers, who loathed this film. In a rather well-known argument with Jean Rouch, the maker of the film, he said, "I love your fiction films, Jean Rouch, but I hate *Les Maîtres Fous* and all of your ethnographic films." Rouch did not understand why, and he said, "because you don't give them enough context. You treat us like insects. I reproach you for not giving us context, and for treating us like insects."

I will show a couple of slides here, and say a little something about this insect motif that is related to the surrealist aspect of ethnography that has been so talked about of late, and I find it still crucial, at least to my own understanding. This is Poirier, by the way, in this kind of military conquest of Africa. [*Andrews presents a slide of Poirier with his camera man.*] This is him on the left, looking like Napoleon, ready to go down. It is a military conquest, so this business of the war machine is interesting to me. Next is hint of the great illumination of the Exposition Colonial, where you tried to bring the spiritual might of the colonies in, but it is through generators in France that you get this much light on it. [*slide of Exposition Colonial*] Next, we have a slide of the praying mantis. The praying mantis is a different kind of image of insect than Ausman Sembene was just mentioning in conjunction with Jean Rouch. For me, it suggests that the anthropologist is ready to be absorbed by something other, attacked and consumed, really.

One of Buñuel's famous films begins with an image of the scorpion [*slide of articulated tail of scorpion, followed by one of the scorpion attacking a rat*] with the venom in the last articulation, and then the attack on the rat. There is something really correct about the relationship of the document and documentary, and its relationship both to the studies of other people and foreign places, and of the studies of insects. The very first documentaries in France were either about the natural world and insects, or about peoples from foreign places.

The figure of woman gets involved in it in a really rather insistent way, which is really rather horrific to imagine today. What I am trying to suggest is from the ordinary French film, starring Jean Gabin to documentaries of Poirier going into Africa, to the dissident surrealists who were trying to expose the bourgeoisie culture, they all of an image of the praying woman, as a kind of other that will consume you. Here Man Ray's famous photograph, and here is an insect film, which is considered to be more erotic than Joan Crawford [*insect slide of spiders in web opposite of a photo of Joan Crawford*]. Compared to her, here is Jean Gabin and Annabella [*slide of two lovers embracing*]. The French are still saying that this film is a much better ethnographic film about Islam than anything Hollywood has produced. Yet it is also about the mixing of blood, and Gabin being lost in the sands--note the military aspect of this. [*Professor Andrew shows a slide of colonial soldiers in pith helmets*].

The final thing I will say is that cinema wants to use something very stark, an other from different places, it always has. It has different ways of trying to corral that energy and protect itself from it. It is startling to me that as the century ends, we have, what many people call the demise of cinema, as it begins to be absorbed into some other kind of technology, which is vaguely media technology and teletechnology. We also have the entropy of nomadism as more nomads become sedentarized, and I am not sure about

anthropology, that is what I am here to find out. Maybe the entropy of anthropology as fewer and fewer different peoples are being found to be studied, or we are turning in on ourselves to study through cultural studies, something like an anthropology of ourselves.

We have a confluence as the century ends of these three different parallel forms that have had a major effect in the way we think about life in the twentieth century. I'll stop there, and come back later.

J.H.: Our second speaker is Robert Gardner, filmmaker, teacher, director of the Harvard Film Study Center, past chair in visual and environmental studies, and past and future director of the Harvard Visual Arts Center. But, he is perhaps best known for various ethnographic and non-fiction films: *Dead Birds*, *River of Sands*, *Deep Hearts*, *Forest of Bliss*, and many others. Among many current projects, he is completing a new film with many of the characters originally filmed in *Dead Birds*, and is writing a book about his experiences filming in the field.

ROBERT GARDNER [R.G.]: I find myself strategically placed between two people who are scholars, and have spent much of their lives in the academy, as I have. I think it is wonderful that anthropological film, as it is now called, is being distinguished by the presence of these people. I have often wondered if the answer to what the anthropological film is would ever come. If it does not come today, perhaps everyone should give up. I suppose I am here as an exhibit of a kind, that is to say, someone who perpetrates these things that get discussed in forums such as this, and I am happy to contribute whatever I possibly can to making any of this a little bit clearer. I think you can detect in what I say, or even the tone of my voice, that I am really rather troubled by the concern over what anthropological film is because I really don't think there is such a thing. I think there is film, and I would like to address that by starting out saying, if we are going to find out what the anthropological film is, what is anthropological work? What do you do when you do anthropology, as I think Cliff Geertz used to put it.

What is doing anthropology and what is doing anthropological film? Well, isn't it only trying to use one's human sensibilities in some informed way? Aren't anthropologists and filmmakers, for that matter, limited only by their own abilities, their intellectual capacities, their intuitive faculties, their empathy, even graphic talents, if there is such a thing, to ascertain what is out there, and to describe the world. It seems to me making films is trying to describe life and there are films that utilize the imagination in the way they are doing this, and there are other films which seem to utilize reality, and perhaps the anthropological film derives its authority more from actuality than the imagination.

But despite that distinction, which I think does not really hold up in all cases, it seems to me that whenever a film is wrought, that something is fictionalized, that, in fact, it is a fiction--that film is a fiction. While Mr. Deleuze suggests there is some kind of nomadic space, I keep thinking of cinematic space, I don't think of nomads at all. (In the *Nanook* clip), I was just thinking of a quite wonderful way of looking at the world, and seeing it with the eyes of a filmmaker, not anything less or more. I don't think there is a useful distinction between film as fact and film as fiction. I think all film whatever its intentions is a fiction. If it is acceptable to think that the act of describing the world, whether in words or in images, is dependent on the peculiarly human sensibilities I mentioned, and then it is perhaps possible to say some of the best anthropology will be done by artists and some of the best anthropology, and not by social scientists. In fact, it may be that some of the best observers are poets and prose writers. Maybe George Eliot is the best anthropologist of the Victorian period. I think she probably did better than most of her contemporaries who called themselves anthropologists, if there was an anthropology then, as I suspect there was.

My point is quite simple, and I won't belabor much further than to suggest that contrary to a lot of claims about what documentary is, or what this specific subgenre of documentary called anthropological film might be, it is not true that these forms are

objective, that they are somehow rid of the act of fictionalizing, that subjectivity does not play a part in it. I am convinced that subjectivity is not only playing a part in it, but if it does not play a part in it, then there won't be much that is insightful or informing in the end. You may have a few facts, but I think that the interesting mission of anthropological film making, if you will, is to find meaning. And I do not think you can find meaning by simply chronicling facts.

I promise not to show all of the films I have in front of me. There are a few moments, however, which might be illustrative of what I have said. Let me say a word or two about this first clip. It is the opening sequence of a film I made about five years ago in India called *Forest of Bliss*. I am showing it because I hope it begins to say a little about the act of film making. It says something for me about how one gets started making these kinds of films. I went to Banaras for the fifth time to make this film. I had been to India many times before starting this film, and I kept going back to Banaras, and kept being overwhelmed by the experience by this incredibly powerful place. At a certain point it seemed the only way I could respond, if I was to continue to go back, or even think about the experience of having been there, was to try to make a film.

Banaras is, at least on first encounter, very close to something like chaos, and chaos is not an easy thing to deal with, not even I suspect, for the theorists now working with it. A filmmaker has no choice but to begin to organize what is out there. At least a person working as I do, with actuality, has found ways of shaping the world. If the world is chaotic, this just becomes more problematical.

The beginning of any film is usually an attempt to set some thematic lines that are followed in the rest of the film. What I want to do is just show you this, and say that this section is meant as a prologue which begins to sort out the chaos by fixing on, pictorially, certain elements in the environment, elements I hope will be relatively apparent after you have seen the segment. Let me add, somewhat ironically, that by holding back information at the beginning of this film, I hoped to make it easier to know the meaning of what I was trying to show. This is difficult to explain, but maybe you will see in the very images themselves that it is hard to see what is going on. Contrary to trying to reveal the world, trying to make the world clear or simple, or providing you with factual information, I am actually making it more ambiguous, more mysterious, veiled in some way, so that it is even harder to see, but harder to see, only to hopefully see better in the end.

[Mr. Gardner shows a clip of his film Forest of Bliss, which include some of the following images: sound of birds as a dog runs across a sandy shore (with a rhythmic scraping noise of dog's feet in the background), the sound of someone rowing accompanies images of a fog-covered body of water, a person runs across the screen with a kite, a boat sails across screen, a dog screaming while being attacked by another dog, title shot, and a quote, "every thing is either eater or eaten."]

Okay, those were eleven shots presenting out of the chaos that is Banaras, a few elements of that environment which give me the opportunity to tell the tale I wanted to tell, to embark on the fiction I wanted to make. They include the steps, the river itself (indicated by these quite mysterious boats), and the dogs, which are sort of emblematic of a life that is hard and predatory. Other images include the fire and the kite, which the little boy was pulling. Those were some of the major elements out of which the whole film was eventually made.

I would like to show you another short clip. It is a man rowing on the river in a boat full of sand. You saw in the opening sequence men carrying bags of sand to these boats. *[Scene switches to a small boat.]* That is pretty straightforward. A man is poling a large boat full of sand which you saw in the opening sequence being loaded with sand. What they do is load it on one side of the river, and then take it to the other. What I wanted you to see was the image of the sand dripping over the edge of the boat, because that one indicator of what sand does if it is piled up too high on a boat was what explained a tremendous amount to me about life, about the meaning of life, about the meaning of being in this place, about all kinds of things. I am sure I pack too much into this one little gesture

this sand is making. At the same time, I feel it is a filmmaking gesture, and I want you to see it because it is the kind of thing which is so much a part of the business of making all kinds of film, so-called anthropological or so-called fiction film.

There is just one more little clip that I will show. *[Clip begins with a view of a similar boat, filled with sand, anchored. The camera pans across bow and along the side of the water craft. Cut to scene of kites flying, with noise of children frolicking in the background. Cut to scene of a house and some children playing with kites. Cut to two men sitting on the edge of a smaller boat, which is rowed into the middle of the river and from which a small bundle attached to a stone is slid into the water.]*

I wanted to show this because it demonstrates something about the nature of this work. I have sometimes thought about filmmaking as the result of intention, chance, and circumstance. There are essentially two things happening here. There is a boy flying a kite and two men who come out in a boat to drop a body into the Ganges. They did not happen at the same time. I was in Banaras filming for a period of about twelve weeks. They may have happened in the same month, or in the same week. They certainly did not happen in the same day. But they happen in the film in the same day; in fact, the whole film happens in a day. The fiction is alive and well.

As to the facts, I am going to tell you something you will never know from watching the film. But, I have a feeling you may somehow sense some of it by watching the film. Because there are no words in the film, no one can know by being told. I was on the river, probably going home, when out of the corner of my eye, I saw a boat setting off from the shore. I knew from what it had on its little deck that they were about to put a body in the river, so I filmed it. I am one of those people who deals in actuality, and I wanted these images. When I saw it in the rushes, I saw something happen in the deep background. A kite falls out of the sky, and into the river. I don't know whether you saw it on this video monitor, but on a good screen in 35 mm, it is very clear. There is a red kite that actually plunges into the river. Now, for me, this was absolutely spectacular. It was total accident. This is the chance element I was talking about. My intention was only to film this boat drifting out to do its deed in the river. In the cutting, I decided to put it together with the business of the boys flying kites to make a sequence which I would say something about what I was feeling about the event that I had filmed.

When I talked to the men who had done the burial in the river, they told me it was a child, who fell off a building, flying a kite. Now, if I had put that on a soundtrack, I think everybody would say, "how do you expect us to swallow that kind of stuff?" It would just have seemed so contrived. But, this *is* what happened. Yet, I am content, in fact I am intent on withholding that information in order for you to somehow get it's meaning another way. It would not be right to just tell you baldly what happened that day.

As for circumstance, I should mention I spent hours trying to film a kite falling into the river. I have I don't know how many scenes which were total failures, which I never used. Also, the circumstances were that kites were being flown when I was there. If I had not gone to Banaras when they fly kites, I would never have filmed them. I would never have dealt with those images. My fiction would have been some other fiction.

I won't go into the extended meaning of kites, the breaking of their strings, the end of life and so forth, but it is all there in some way. I will stop because I am sure that you have heard enough from me, but not before quoting a wonderful writer/observer (I am sure you will all agree), Samuel Johnson. I read this to myself all the time because it makes me feel better about doing what I am. He says, "Nothing can please many and please long, but just representations of general nature. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest. But the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth." This was in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare, but I really feel he could be talking about filmmaking, especially filmmaking that is grounded in actuality. But then, I submit, whether it is grounded in actuality, or in one's fancy, it is all a fiction. Thank you very much.

J.H.: Next speaker is Michael Fischer, who has just come to M.I.T. in the Spring term after eleven years at Rice. Michael holds positions in both the Science and Technology in Society and Anthropology programs. In addition to *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, which he co-authored with George Marcus, which is undoubtedly one of the most influential books in the last few decades in anthropology, has also written *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*, and more recently, with Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues Between Tradition and Post-Modernity*. As far as I know, he has not made an ethnographic film, but he has thought a lot about it, teaches use of film in ethnography both as research and as classroom teaching, and can tell us a bit about that.

MICHAEL FISCHER [M.F.]: Let me try to complete the triangulation of perspectives on anthropological film by focusing on a topic that has not been mentioned so far; translations--translations among cultures, among different groups within a single culture, among segments of society, translations of negotiations of differences of perspectives and of meaning. I want to use the notion of translation to focus three sets of brief comments about anthropology and film.

I have brought clips from two films, which I will show first, so that I will not have to run back and forth to the VCR. The first is a Moroccan film called *A Door to the Sky*, by the short story and script writer and now filmmaker, Farida Ben Lyazid. It is about a young woman, like many of us in this room, who are bi-cultural and constantly have to negotiate differences of frames of meaning and moral codes. The young woman is returning from Paris to Fez for her father's funeral. At the airport, one watches her worldly demeanor as she goes through passport control; her sister hugs her, then comments about her punk hair-do, black leather skirt and sleeveless t-shirt: you are back in Fez, you won't be able to go out like that. I just want you to note this scene of cultural border crossing that I'm sure many of you in this room have also experienced in this or other forms. And I want to show you just two other ethnographic elements in a second clip from this film. Much of the film is shot in one of those wonderful old Moroccan houses, and this film is visually rich in portraying those kinds of ethnographic elements: look at the courtyards, the tilework, the plasterwork, the gardens, etc. But note also this second Westernized woman: it is the mother of the young woman from Paris, a European--just a reminder that border crossings are not something that are new in the present generation, that there is a historical set of legacies in cultural crossings and translations, one explored in the film through dreams, songs, legal systems, visions, rituals, and other modalities. The story of the film, among other things, involves a very contemporary feminist set of issues: the protagonist is drawn back into Moroccan culture, but she transforms her father's home into a shelter for battered women with the aid of a local woman healer and Qur'an reciter: the traditional harem is transformed into a modern one, a protected space, a space of protection, one that crosses class lines as well.

The second clip is from John Singleton's *Boyz and the Hood*. I like to show it as an illustration of the power of film juxtaposing different socially grounded perspectives, a technique of cultural critique that often can be done more powerfully on film than textually. The key segment is the classroom scene where you hear the teacher giving the lesson about the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving, something not so unnatural in Massachusetts perhaps, but painfully out of place as we view the scene through the camera angle from the class with the black children of South Central L.A. A boy intelligently makes fun of the lesson, and makes his critique stick. The scene is preceded by the reality of South Central: the kids on the way to school see a roped off site of a murder, and one explains to the other about blood plasma in quite sophisticated terms. An emotionally explosive scene follows as the white teacher calls to complain about the boy, and makes inaccurate assumptions both about the boy's mother's educational, marital, and financial status, and about the boy's psychological responses to the worlds in which he lives. Again: three fictive modelings of ethnographic realities. Another example of this same simple technique of juxtaposition is

used in *Europa, Europa*, when the little Jewish boy is forced to recite the antisemitic catechisms of the Communist and then the Nazi Parties, with the camera viewing the scene through his eyes/perspective.

O.K., now I just want to make three kinds of observations about anthropology and film. First, regarding something that Bob Gardner has already mentioned, the question of genre. Is there a game or set of genres that can be called anthropological or ethnographic film? There is a continuum of opinion. At one end are those who insist that ethnographic film is essentially a kind of documentary realism, using footage from reality or actuality. And further, many of these writers also argue that the use of documentary visuals must be subjected to the textual, either in the form of voice-overs and subtitles or in the form of supplementary explanations in books. The argument is that the visual is not analytical in the same way that language is, so the visual can only be used as a kind of illustration. (This is, for instance, the position of Karl Heider, for those of you who know a bit about this literature.) At the other end of the continuum, and I myself am closer to this end as the two clips I just showed indicate, are those who say that almost all films have ethnographic potential. (Sol Wirth is associated with this position in the older literature.) All film has ethnographic readings, all films are cultural artifacts, and need to be read in terms of who is producing them, who they are being produced for, and what kinds of cultural interactions the films put into play

Another way of thinking about this--my second set of observations--perhaps more helpful than thinking about it in terms of genre conventions is to ask whether there are different kinds of films that can be used for different kinds of anthropology. For simplicity, let's say there are two kinds of anthropology. There is the understanding of anthropology as the study of small scale societies or traditional societies. And there is a canon of ethnographic film that goes along with this understanding. Normally, the term "ethnographic film" in fact refers to films about those small-scale societies. There is a very interesting history that could be unpacked about this set of ethnographic films, the way these films develop over time, the way they are structures, the societies selected and the items within the society selected for documentation, and the filmmakers' preoccupations in the structuring and selection processes--films about the Northwest Coast Indians by Harlan Smith, about the Yananamo by Tim Asch, about San or !Kung Bushmen by John Marshall, and so on. Many contemporary anthropologists dismiss much of especially the early ethnographic films because they tend to be structured around the idea of salvage anthropology, a search for a vanishing past, but one that is recaptured often by staging reconstructions, so the whole claim they are documentary is open to question. In the 1970s, especially with the Northwest Coast Indians, there was a move to structure ethnographic films not around tropes of salvage (the disappearing past), but around a kind of revivalism, another form of exoticism denying change or assimilation as superficial, or documenting a recovery of an essential cultural authenticity.

This is not to deny that some of these films do have real documentary value. I was delighted that Dudley Andrew showed some clips from one of my favorite early ethnographic films, because I've worked in Iran, the film *Grass*, a 1924 film about the Bakhtiari that was produced as one of the first educational films in human geography. One can, of course, criticize it in various ways: it suppresses the political context of what it shows as just the exotic nomadic East. This was a period of the state beginning to put pressure on the tribes to sedentarize, and some of the figures in the film are also known from the political history in the film. There is, for instance, a stick dance in the film that is now evolved into a different form. The crossing of the river with inflated goatskin rafts is wonderful as are a number of other scenes. It is interesting that when I show this film in my introductory anthropology classes, my students often hate it: it seems like trivial camp to them. They have to be given a good deal of context in order to be able to receive it.

Another interesting feature of the early history of ethnographic films is that many were done by people based in museums, and there is a divergence in what they were trying to capture on film from what anthropologists in the fieldwork tradition were trying to

capture in their texts. For instance, the films about the Northwest Coast Indians in the 1930s and 40's when cultural and social anthropologists were focusing on the great potlatch ceremonies and thinking about what these ceremonies meant in economic, political, and cosmological terms--these ceremonies did not show up much in the ethnographic films. What shows up in those films instead are interest in objects like totem poles.

One final interesting dimension about these ethnographic films is that there is a sequence of conceptual change that goes along with technological change. One of the complaints about ethnographic films is that the voices of the natives have been excluded much of the time. Partly this was a technical problem in the early days, with heavy equipment and lack of synchronized sound; so there was reliance in films like *Grass* on intertexts, and later on voice-over explanations. Today with lighter equipment, synchronized sound, and video, films have begun to incorporate native voices, and there has been some very interesting experimentation. Let me just mention two forms of experiment. Since 1953 the Marshalls have created a lovely series of films on the San or !Kung Bushmen; the most recent, *N!la, the Story of a San Woman*, incorporates clips from the previous films, and you get a very non-romantic picture of the San: pushed onto impoverished reservations, recruited into the South African Army to fight SWAPO in Namibia, treated miserably as one can see not only in their conditions of living but in some extraordinary scenes of interactions with the South African Army officers.

Another interesting development is the putting of the camera in the hands of the natives, now made much easier with video. Terrence Turner has over the last few years provided the Kayapo Indians in the Amazon with video cameras, and they have been able to use those cameras in their political struggles to appeal to an international audience against the Brazilian state.

Okay, there is that kind of anthropology that focuses on small-scale societies. Then there is another kind of anthropology that is the study of our own contemporary societies, in which the small-scale societies may be component units, and important in their own right, but where there are many other kinds of issues that can be ethnographically investigated: concerns about ethnicity and the unequal distribution of educational and vocational resources as in *Boyz and the Hood*; concerns about transnational cultural interactions as in *A Door to the Sky*; concerns about the creation of new polities that can allow for diversity of very different kinds of perspectives that require translation. The kinds of films useful for thinking about these issues are very different from the traditional ethnographic films. Many of the most useful films for these purposes are narrative, fiction, films that may contain "real" footage, that may model real behavior or conflicts or dilemmas, or that may present narrational genres from different cultural traditions undergoing change in their own contexts. In dealing with these issues one wants to ask about the various kinds of films that bear on the issues who is making the films, how are they constructed, who are their audiences, and how are they received and interpreted. For instance, if one is doing a course on ethnicity in America, often what is done is to merely show Hollywood films and analyze the stereotypes in them. Much more interesting is to show films made by ethnic groups about themselves, that evoke their own genres, and their own sets of dilemmas and issues.

I find it interesting and puzzling, in this context, that social and cultural anthropology which was formed in the 1920s around Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, and that claimed to be the comparative sociology of our global world, that was going to use our knowledge of the structures and dynamics of social life to reform society, that this anthropology seemed uninterested in film. Film is arguably one of the most important media in the changing consciousness of vast segments of the populations all around the globe. Film was produced not only in Paris and Hollywood and Berlin, but also in Bombay and Cairo and from as early on. It was not only something for urban folks, but was disseminated in rural areas of India by itinerant showmen. Among the most interesting film traditions, one might have thought, was Tamil film, where throughout the 1940s and after the independence movement, narrative film was used as a political device in

terms of social issues portrayed, in terms of the promotion of leading men as political figures. As you may know, five of the chief ministers of Tamilnadu have come from the film industry, working their way up through films, being very conscious of the kinds of roles and lines in their films. By reading the ethnographies of anthropologists you might not know any of this.

I am then led to ask my third set of thoughts about the uses that contemporary anthropology and anthropologically informed cultural studies would make out of films. Let me suggest that the tasks of anthropology are quite different in the late twentieth century than they were in the early twentieth century. Dudley Andrew talked about the desire for exoticism as one of the drives of the cinematic gaze. Anthropology in the beginning took as one of its tasks translating the exotic into the familiar. This was Malinowski's task: what the Trobriand Islanders did was not that strange, one could find ways in which it paralleled what we ourselves do. Or the complementary task was to defamiliarize the way we did things: things that seem very natural take on the cast of being culturally constructed when seen comparatively. Margaret Mead is the classic example of this style of anthropology: showing that American child-rearing practices are not natural, but quite specific cultural patterns. A third task which anthropology set itself in the 1920s was the notion that one could have an encyclopedic description of the societies of the world arrayed by a few structural dimensions of comparison that would be sociologically enlightening.

The task of the current period is really a quite different: now the task is really the translation of different perspectives within various social arenas. Translation is not easy, because cultural perspectives are socially grounded, sanctioned and reproduced, and they have their own blinders built into them that protect them against contradictory perspectives. One of the examples that I like to use, since I work on Iran, is that in the 1970s, just before the Islamic Revolution, there was a fluorescence of first rate films, a New Wave of Iranian films, along with a stream of short stories and novels that were perceived as politically engaged by their writers. The films took footage from villages and urban life, put them in narrative form and in a kind of surrealist form, in order to explode, in surrealist tactical fashion, the common understanding of people, to show that old ways of doing things had become oppressive and needed change. The religious classes of Iran received these films and writings with incomprehension and hostility: all they could see was nihilism and rejection of Iranian culture. Likewise the intellectuals who created these films and short stories condemned the religious classes as just repeating old dogmas and being impediments to social change. Well, we now know that the latter charges were extremely wrong. I think that one could show that although the religious classes and the intelligentsia were speaking in mutually unintelligible discourses, the underlying philosophical structures of what they were saying were quite similar. It is an example where translation across class or social strata lines was difficult.

Control of film and television was high on the priorities of the Revolution. The power of the media was understood, and Iran has at times been able to turn the international media to its political advantage. After the Revolution there was a period of decline in film-making, there was a period of turning the media to propaganda in a crude form. But now, all of a sudden, there have been a revival of interesting Iranian films, picking up the tradition of the 1970s, but also doing some new things that teach us a great deal about the sensibilities of the Iranian post-revolutionary society. Let me just mention one. A number of these films take as their subject the devastations of the Iran-Iraq war and of the earthquakes that have hit Iran. Instead of dealing with these devastations in ideological terms, they develop a humanistic style, not unlike the women poets of Beirut, called the Decentrist poets, who describe the insane fighting and macho posturing of their brothers and fathers in the civil war but do it from a personal, low-key, everyday life perspective. These films do not look like American war films, neither World War II nor Vietnam war films, they do not demoralize the Iraqis or others. They are more like Italian neorealist films immediately after World War II, or like some of the absurdist surrealist films of Eastern Europe, but with their own low-key humanist twist. What is even more interesting

is that these films have become a discourse in the technical sense of referring to one another, building upon the imagery and strategies of one another (and of the pre-Revolutionary films). Techniques that seemed too modernist for ordinary audiences in the 1970s have somehow now been assimilated; films teach audiences, there is a learning curve, and Iranian films are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

Let me just end by saying that there are many things film could do for an anthropology of the present, particularly in exploring the part film has had in the transformation of consciousness during the course of the twentieth century: by changing the speed of perception, by teaching tracking of multiple channels of communication simultaneously, by disseminating a comparative perspective, and by foregoing situations requiring cultural translation. One often hears about the hegemonic power of Hollywood over the screens around the world; but there are many national traditions of film-making as well, and they have very different styles, techniques, symbolic structures, genre expectations, and social settings into which they insert themselves. Thai action films may borrow a bit from Hollywood and from Chinese films, but they function and look quite differently. These varied kinds of ethnographic registers, involving cultural translation transnationally and within social arenas, are among the things I try to teach when I do the course called "Ethnographic Film as Cultural Critique"

J.H.: We have some time for discussion and questions.

Q: At risk of opening another tangent on what I found to be a stimulating set of papers, I am intrigued by the fact that over the years, as we argue about what is ethnographic film, we still fight about the film frame. We went into it, what can we get out of it, but still we are arguing about what is up on that monitor. And ironically, the thing that has not received much attention at all, is who is the viewer, what is the audience, what is the occasion for these films. I was intrigued that Professor Andrew picked up Sembene's critique of Rouch, which though I like Sembene, I found to be extraordinarily misplaced, given that Rouch gets more feedback from the people in the process than almost anybody, and ironically, the context of Rouch's films (in the Asch/Heider tradition and this) comes in his books. So, it is the responsibility of the viewer to come with an informed eye. The film is not a self-contained instrument, and too much discussion of film treats it as one. I would like to expand the discussion out to include why we make these films other than Bob's, who I have long argued is not an ethnographic filmmaker, but an artistic filmmaker, whose medium of expression is ethnography. Why do we make these films...(unintelligible)?

J.D.A.: I'd be glad to say something about the *Les Maitres Fous* just to reinforce something I was probably stuttering about in my presentation, and that is, you are quite right that Sembene misunderstands, at least in that specific confrontation; he misunderstands Rouch's project. He does get his people involved, and, in fact, he wants to get involved himself, and not just a distant observer of insects, as Sembene thought. But Sembene obviously wants to see two things. He wants to see fictional films that can build their own contexts, or ethnographic films, where Rouch says, you are just struck by very powerful images for which the voice-over narration in English are absolutely inadequate. So, you are stuck with these rocks. They are very, very powerful. You can use them to get across, but you can also cut your feet on them, and they have their own consistency. There is no context between them, no mortar to connect them one to the next. Now, you can go and find a study of this in the encyclopedia, and get some sense of context, but I think Rouch would claim, out of the surrealist tradition, he would claim that he still wants to shock, to have these images be, in fact, unassimilable. And the thing about going and finding the books that will then put these in order, and make you feel calmer as to why blacks are frothing at the mouth in these rituals, is to miss the fact that human beings can be transformed, and you can visually see it, even thirty years later.

J.H.'s Q: I have a question. One thing that struck me in most of what we saw when talking about the influence of ethnographic film in the other direction, is how hard it is to get away from narrative, and how, even in films that resist the influence of Hollywood, how difficult it is to find any discourse which we manage to do in a written way that does not turn into a story. Is there anyway to avoid that? I have seen small bits of film that resist it, only to come back to a linear story line.

M.F.: I am not quite sure where your question is coming from--why do you want to avoid stories?--but it generates two thoughts: about narrative order, and about the modernist techniques of involving the viewer in deciphering the hieroglyphic structure of a filmic composition. Let me cite two examples:

One of the films I like to show is Gaston Kabore's *Wend Kuuni*. It is an African film, from Burkina Faso, a story about a child who loses a parent, is lost in the desert himself, and loses his powers of speech. The story is a traditional oral tale; the film changes the narrative order of the tale. That is, it takes something the villagers are familiar with, a story that would have been told over and over, a story whose resolution is to show how to achieve social harmony. The point of the film changing the narrative order of the tale is to get people to think about social change, how to transform society, rather than how to reestablish the tradition authority structures. Both the tale and the film are narratives, but they do different things. In thinking about the film, I also try to have my students think about whose stories these are. It is a question of voice, or of situated knowledge. Are these stories and genres that are culturally constituted within a particular kind of tradition, or are they stories that are constituted by a filmmaker?

The other thought your question stimulated might be illustrated by another one of my favorite films, a surrealist film by Jamil Dehlavi, a London-based Pakistani filmmaker called *Towers of Silence*. It is about the offspring of an intermarriage of a Zoroastrian and a Muslim in Karachi. It is done in a surrealistic style, but has some footage, for instance, of the Zoroastrian funeral ritual that one might use for an ethnographic excursus. The story line provides a kind of puzzle, which serves as a pedagogical function of involving viewers in teasing out the meaning. In class, this pedagogical function allows reflection upon the structural elements of the film, which are a series of dilemmas such as escaping the cycles of repression (familial, political, etc.) in Pakistan where neither exile nor revolution are viable options (thanks to repression, nightmares, the unconscious carrying the legacies of the past, etc.) In this example, the notion of story is complex. It can be interpreted into a linear form, but it is more adequately dealt with as a matrix of dilemmas, as a hieroglyphic composition.

Q: I found the discourse today very rich and suggestive, and I was struck by the extent to which all three of you converge on certain themes. I want to highlight, or question, one of those sub themes, and to oversimplify it, as I believe Bob Gardner did, I want to ask the panelists to comment on one aspect of what I take to be a kind of undersong in the discourse of all three of you, and that is the blurring of the distinction between fiction film and a non-fiction film. Maybe we should not use the term ethnographic, and we should instead use the term documentary or non-fiction, but the existence of these two broad categories of film seem to me to be put into question by a good deal of the discourse of the panelists. And of course, I can see the virtues, and even the importance, of making us aware of the extent to which so-called fiction or entertainment films contain powerful anthropological, ethnographic data, which we can use. Michael's examples certainly show that, and there are of course, many others. I can also see the virtues of emphasizing the degree to which every filmed artifact is constructed, and contains coherences and juxtapositions that are created by the filmmakers, and in that sense, fictions.

Nonetheless, it seems to me, and I am interested what the panel feels about this, it seems to be of critical importance to maintain an awareness of the difference between a

fiction film and a non-fiction film, just as we need to maintain the distinction between a novel and a biography. Of course, a gifted biographer will use many of the devices of a novelist, and a novelist may, indeed, use many of the devices of a biographer. Nonetheless, there is a fundamental convention of understanding when you open a novel as against what happens when you open a biography. Certain constraints that are imposed on the biographer that are not imposed upon the novelist. I think the key term, which is obviously very important to Robert Gardner, both in his discourse and even more in his marvelous poetic films, is the term actuality. In non-fiction texts, there is a constraint, to violate that constraint is to, in some way, violate the agreement you make with the viewer when you present the film or the written text to the viewer or reader as something that is identified as being constrained by actuality in the way fiction is not. I would like to pursue this more deeply without denying that there are many ways in which construction and creation are operative mechanisms in what I want to designate as non-fiction. I wonder if the panel agrees with me, or disagrees, and what like to comment on this question.

R.G.: I have not spoken yet, and would like to respond to you for just a moment, by saying that you have not only asked an essential question, but you have given an essential answer. The further effort I would make to giving a more rounded answer to your question is to suggest there is inevitable blurring between fiction and non-fiction, between Hollywood films, so-called, and the documentary. It also has to do with this issue of narrativity, of storytelling, I think it comes out of the nature of the medium of photography, quite apart from film, a photograph of almost any description, of any conceivable content, looking at it without a caption it is soon supplied with innumerable captions. What happens when we look at something taken from the phenomenal world, is to try to make meaning out of it, to attach some history to it, to attach, if you will, a story to it.

We make something out even as simple an artifact as one image of one man sitting on a bench in a park, a whole incredible story of this person's life, the meaning of this life. So, isn't it natural that whenever these lifelike phenomena are given to us, we are always narrating it in some way, we are always making it into some kind of narrative event, even if we are intentionally persuaded not to do that. I think it happens, and I think it is inevitable because of the nature of the material.

M.F.: It seems to me, David, that the binary distinction between the actual and the fictive--albeit a useful enough starting point--is not very helpful in a medium that is multidimensional and that can generate multiple readings of the same visual set. Films with actual footage might be more useful for some ethnographic and anthropological purposes, but the narrative armature in which the footage is encased is also of ethnographic interest, particularly if it is drawing on a cultural repertoire whose social functions are at issue, including the conventions or reportage or documentary, or the juxtaposing of those conventions against other ways of knowing. A Hollywood story will be read one way, a story like *Wend Kuuni*, or the resonances of the Vietnamese epic the *Tale of Kieu* in Trinh Minha's *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam*, will be read in a different way. One final blurred genre example: the film *City of Joy*. I had my students in the ethnographic film course go to see it, and they came back initially with all the easy conventional dismissals: it is culturally imperialistic, putting a white man at the center of the story, a Hollywood structure, etc. Yet, one of the students who had lived in India piped up and admitted that the reality of India seeps out around the edges of the story.

What is that reality? Some of it might be the footage, albeit staged, some of it was situational modeling of behavioral patterns, but some of it is more complexity to be read in the structure of who the actors are. Shabaana Azmi and Om Puri are surely miscast as starving Bihari peasants, both in their body types and their accents; and yet Shabaana Azmi is one of the actresses who has done most to get serious roles for women and is politically active in a variety of other ways as well. So her acting provides a meditation on the power structure of the Indian film industry and its setting in the international film industries. That

is an ethnographic register as well that has everything to do with the power relations that go into the representations of Indian realities. So the original binary distinction needs to be pulled apart into its multiple dimensions.

J.D.A.: There is a way in which viewing situations complicate the notion of contract that you bring up. I think it is apt, and genres can be thought of contracts with the producing agents, but especially in the age of multiple distribution patterns--VCR's, for instance. People rent films from their VCR stores for their own purposes. For example, in the dissertation that I mentioned earlier, there is mention of a famous study of the film named *Ghagi*, an early film that was distributed and actually exploited. It was marketed as, on one hand, as a scientific film about the Missing Link, and on the other hand, as a quasi-stage film about the abduction of native women into the forest by gorillas. And people are using the same footage (two different contracts) for the same actuality. And I think that this is the notion of entropy that I was talking about, the movement between fiction and documentary, that was much more distinct earlier is getting much more blurred today. People seem to like that undecidably, but I think you are right. The contract method is probably the best way to talk about what one thinks one is going to get; it is just that the producers no longer have as much control as they did before over viewers because people view things in their own circumstances, and the number of products has differentiated itself so fully.

J.H.: We could go on talking, but I am afraid we would be doing it in the dark. So, that will be the final word.