Shared Visions:
Toward Collaborative Visual Ethnography

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Abstract

Recent critiques of both the subject and method of anthropology have caused the discipline to reexamine its process of representation. This thesis provides an exploration of approaches to representation in visual anthropology, with specific emphasis on collaborative visual ethnography. Both theoretical and practical issues are considered. The first chapter traces the history of ethnographic film and discusses various approaches to subject participation in literature and films. The second chapter presents a theoretical basis for collaborative visual ethnography, primarily from "postmodern" critiques of anthropology and recent visual anthropology literature. The third chapter consists of an analysis of a video resulting from a collaborative project I facilitated, in order to illustrate ideas of collaborative visual ethnography in a practical setting. The fourth, and final, chapter examines the few examples of collaborative film and video that are documented in order to construct a framework for approaching collaborative projects.

Abstrait

Des critiques récents de l'anthropologie mettent en question la méthode de représentation dans la discipline. Cette thèse constitue une exploration des differentes approches à la représentation dans l'anthropologie visuelle, particulièrement l'ethnographie visuelle collaborative. Le premier chapître présente l'histoire du film ethnographique ainsi qu'une discussion des différentes approches à la participation du sujet en cinéma et en littérature. Le deuxième chapître, qui incorpore des notions d'anthropologie postmoderne et de la recherche récente en anthropologie visuelle, présente une structure théorique de l'ethnographie visuelle collaborative. Le troisième chapître constitue une analyse d'un projet de video collaboratif qui j'ai effectué afin de mettre ces principes en pratique. Le quatrième et dernier chapître a comme objectif d'examiner quelques exemples de film collaboratif et d'élaborer une méthode de travail pour la collaboration en video ethnographique.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Visual ethnography occupies a unique place for cultural exploration, situated as it is between film and anthropology, between theory and practice. This positioning creates a tension between content and aesthetic, as ethnographic films struggle to find a balance between the realms of science and art. The factors that make written ethnography beautiful - well-worded prose or the skillful use of metaphor - add to the quality of the text's argument. The factors that make visual ethnography beautiful - panoramic views and exotic locales - can be said to distract from the ethnographic content. Fortunately, the tension that is unresolved in the practice of ethnographic film also creates a space for freedom of experimentation. However experimental, ethnographers who write are still limited by the written word and the printed page. Visual ethnographers are limited too of course, because film and video are not all-expansive media. However, visual ethnography has more tools at its disposal with which to explore the many possibilities of sight and sound, and to create layers of meaning with vision and voice.

The exploration of this space has been approached many times in ethnographic film's hundred year history; it is impossible to trace one particular path that it has followed. Very early practitioners sometimes incorporated more participatory approaches to ethnography than practitioners of the 1980s and 1990s. Some filmmakers have always tried to incorporate the concerns of their subjects into their films; others have not. The possibility for collaborative visual ethnography to exist is clearly apparent, although it has not been approached as a separate object of study.

The main assumptions that have guided the research and writing of this thesis are that collaborative visual ethnography is a worthy endeavor, and that it is possible to construct a non-exploitative anthropological relationship. I further posit that a good way to do this is by working closely with the people we wish to represent, and by studying the collaborative process to understand the implications of such an encounter. By assuming the creation of a collaborative ethnographic film or video is possible, I assume two more things as well: that people from different cultural backgrounds can enter into an interactive relationship; and that out of this relationship can come a product that to some extent represents the shared vision of its creators.

The first assumption, that people from different cultural backgrounds can, through conversation and interaction, arrive at least approximate understandings of each other's positions is a prerequisite to almost any anthropological undertaking. The second, however, that an interaction of this type can result in a mutually acceptable and intelligible visual product, is more problematic. It is difficult to determine what meanings different people from the same culture extract from visual documents, let alone people of different cultural backgrounds, so implicit in my approach is a disavowal of radical cultural difference that would prevent this type of communication from taking place. This is not to say that everyone has the same reading of a film or video, or that everyone has similar ideas about how to convey information in visual form, but it does imply that approximations can be reached; that understandings can be developed on certain levels that allow people to make decisions together with regards to the representation of cultural practices.

Approaching visual ethnography as a collaborative undertaking can have results that are beneficial for all the participants, and if handled

appropriately, can have results that are more beneficial than if people choose not to work together. The particulars of the collaborative process in specific situations need more exploration, and this thesis represents a step in this direction. The first chapter presents a partial history of ethnographic film with particular attention paid to the role of subject involvement. The second chapter examines the theoretical basis for collaborative visual ethnography, while the third describes my own research project in the Comoros Islands as an example of these ideas in practice. The final chapter uses examples from my own and other projects to develop a framework with which to approach collaborative visual ethnography.

Chapter I: Historical context of collaborative visual ethnography

Definition of ethnographic film

Constructing an operational definition of ethnographic film is a difficult task. Broken down into its component parts, the questions of "What is ethnography?" and "What is film?" have already received attention in numerous journals and books. Ethnographic film has been broadly defined by Worth (1981) as "film that its makers or viewers use for the study, description, or presentation of people in culture" and associates its development with anthropology. The editors of the journal *Ethnographic Film* (1977) define ethnographic film as that which "represents the conjuncture of interests of anthropologists and documentary film."[1] De Brigard (1975) defines an ethnographic film as one which "reveals cultural patterning" (13). She then interprets this definition to mean that all films are ethnographic, although some "are clearly more revealing than others."

Because all films present some aspect of some culture, and if films themselves are cultural documents, it is very difficult to narrow down the category. Still, it is not difficult to recognize an ethnographic film. One can understand that the film is somehow representative of life somewhere, usually another culture,[2] and one interacts with the film in ways that are different than if viewing a standard fiction film. For both academic and

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[1] Although signifying two different approaches to the visual representation of culture, the terms "ethnographic" and "documentary" film have often been used interchangeably. The two have different histories however, and have developed along parallel yet distinct lines. Documentary film is a specific film genre which combines "ideas of nonfiction and education with social seriousness, non-commercial or alternative or television distribution" (Waugh 1984: xvii). In this thesis, I use "ethnographic film" as a blanket term, and specific films I cite may also or more generally be considered documentaries, and my comments may also be applicable to that genre

[2] Fabian (1990) in fact refers to "ethnographic" as a euphemism for "exotic."

general audiences, ethnographic films are evaluated on the basis of the audience's belief in the truth of what they are seeing (Martinez 1992), as well as their evaluation of the aesthetic quality of the presentation.

Further proof of the existence of ethnographic film is the presence of a canon of films whose standards influence peoples' expectations of visual ethnography. If a film does not live up to an expected level of spontaneity and accuracy, its maker can be accused of not being "ethnographic" enough. I have chosen not to grapple with the "ethnographicness" of any particular films in this thesis, but rather to discuss the ways in which various filmmakers have interpreted cultural material. Most ethnographic films can be defined by the rather narrow view that they are films made of foreign cultures by Western academics for the purpose of educating people in some way. Increasingly, however, ethnographic film has been the domain for a variety of experimentation and representation. It is this trend that provides the impetus for this thesis, and which can be seen to have risen from the roots of ethnographic film.

A brief history of ethnographic film

The history of ethnographic film can be read in many ways, depending upon one's particular perspective. For purposes of this thesis, two separate histories of ethnographic film will be traced. The "dominant" history has involved a search for a realistic method for cultural translation, an occupation which has preoccupied much of ethnographic film. The "subordinate" history has developed concurrently with the dominant history but generally has not received as much attention. This second history has a tendency to use experimental forms and to incorporate the subject into the

filmmaking process, in contrast with the dominant practices of "objective" anthropological filmmaking. The history will be presented chronologically, and will contrast instances in which the role of the camera is to be an objective recorder of real life, and the times in which filmmakers strayed from dominant styles of filmmaking. It will also present only a partial history, primarily that of ethnographic film in North America, because to encompass the worldwide ethnographic film movement is beyond the scope of this thesis.

As long as motion picture film has existed, it has been used for ethnographic purposes. One of the first uses of film, in 1898, was to record for purposes of cross-cultural comparison the movements of Wolof, Fulani, Madagascan, and Diola people (de Brigard 1975: 15; Rouch 1975: 85). The camera was recognized early on in its development as a tool with important potential for ethnographic research. The Cambridge Anthropological Expedition in 1898 to the Torres Straits incorporated the use of motion picture photography, as did subsequent trips by various researchers throughout the early 1900s (de Brigard 1975: 16). The drawbacks to this type of research were considerable, however. In addition to being extremely expensive, the equipment and film were quite delicate and could even be dangerous, due to chemical and fire hazards.

Pioneering filmmakers of the early twentieth century

The techniques and technology of ethnographic cinema were the subject of experimentation during the first half of this century. No rules existed to guide practitioners of non-fiction film throughout this time, and various approaches were adopted as people explored the potential of this new

medium. The firm line between fiction and non-fiction film was just beginning to be developed, and standards for ethnographic filmmaking were embryonic.

Although recent work has cast doubt on the reliability of his films as ethnographic documents, Robert Flaherty is arguably the most successful of early filmmakers who worked in foreign cultures. Flaherty has been praised for his techniques, as well as criticized for his methods, particularly during the making of *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Man of Aran* (1934) (Rouch 1975; MacDougall 1975), and as such presents a paradox. He was responsible for many innovations in the field during the shooting of *Nanook*, particularly considering the unsophisticated state of filmmaking at the time, for example his use of color film with a black and white camera (de Brigard 1975).

Flaherty was also an early practitioner of collaborative techniques. He worked closely with Nanook in designing many of the scenes used in the film, and encouraged his input during the actual filming. He used a technique which is now being heralded as a new method for visual anthropology[3] - he developed his film in the field, set up a screening room in an igloo and received feedback from the subjects about the process as the filming was on-going. He also trained some of the Inuit to assist him with the technical end of the filming, and to help him maintain his equipment (de Brigard 1975; Ruby 1991). The collaboration was not continued after the film project, however. Flaherty had a successful career as a filmmaker and Nanook died of starvation.

A thorough discussion of Flaherty brings up many of the contradictory issues that surround the theory and practice of ethnographic film. Flaherty

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[3] At the 1992 Eyes Across the Water Conference on Visual Anthropology, for example, an entire session and a few other individual papers were devoted to the subject of receiving feedback from and in the field.

did not subscribe to the observational, non-interventionist method that is popular today. He developed a narrative structure and carefully controlled what was filmed. In fact he has been accused of mistreating his subjects and creating feudal conditions while filming, particularly during the making of *Man of Aran* (1934) (MacBean 1983). In *Nanook,* he employed a "man against the elements" motif which was continued in *Man of Aran* and provided a dramatic element for these films. He used native actors to play the roles he wanted (Asch 1992: 196); the "families" he created for his films were made up of people not related to each other, but ones whom Flaherty found to be appropriate for the film.

Although he has been criticized for embellishing (or perhaps even inventing) this dramatic quality of his films (MacDougall 1992), it made for a popular appeal that many ethnographic films lack. Flaherty's concern was not with anthropological standards of ethnographic reliability, but rather for creating a film that would be found interesting. Paying such close attention to the cinematic aspects of his films enabled them to be favorably compared with fiction films of the day (Young 1975: 70). At the same time Flaherty was influenced by cinema practices of his day, fiction filmmakers seeking ways to impress their films' authenticity on the viewer were in turn influenced by the immediacy of Flaherty's style. Stylistically it is often difficult to draw a firm line between fiction and non-fiction film because in both exist a pretense of non-intervention, whether the subject is a Maasai warrior or a romantic couple. The oscillating relationship between the practices of fiction and non-fiction film is what allows MacDougall (1975) to maintain that he and his contemporaries were most influenced by dramatic fiction films, particularly those of the neo-realist movement, as they were appropriately "observational in attitude" (112).

Adopting this observational attitude was also important to Margaret Mead. This is due at least in part to her willingness to work with a variety of media to express her ideas to the public. In the late 1930s Mead engaged in a comprehensive ethnographic project in Bali with her then-husband Gregory Bateson. This field study, conducted from 1936 to 1938, resulted in thousands of photographs, detailed research notes on the growth, movement and character of the Balinese, as well as a series of films, released in the early 1950s as part of the Character Formation in Different Cultures Series (de Brigard 1975: 27). Mead relied on film to create a verifiable record of actions and behaviors that she felt could not be accurately described by notes or by a translated language, in order to provide a basis for cross-cultural comparison Mead and Bateson filmed for purposes of collecting ethnographic footage, rather than for creating a film that would present Bali in a way that was interesting to the general public (although some films, such as *Trance and Dance in Bali* (1951) are still popular for classroom use). Because Mead and Bateson were so fastidious with their efforts, both cinematic and still photography were demonstrated to be valuable tools for anthropological research.

Mead continued to champion her view of ethnographic film's importance as a research method in her later years, and her viewpoint demonstrates the importance placed on the observational method in ethnographic film. In her Introduction to *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (1975), Mead describes the value of ethnographic film as a way to help anthropology in its quest to become more scientific, and as a tool to "refine and expand the areas of accurate information" (10).

According to Mead, the camera is a neutral observer which gathers data that can be analyzed by different researchers, creating results that are therefore

verifiable and more scientifically valid than those obtained by mere participant observation. In order for anthropology to achieve proper respect as a science, it was felt that the vehicle through which ethnographic knowledge was represented should be as unobtrusive and impartial as possible. That is, if an observer was able to free herself or himself from biases that could cloud judgment, the result would be an accurate and objective account of a culture. The facts would be allowed to speak for themselves. Mead (1975) expounds this position by explicitly addressing "the oft-repeated argument that all recording and filming is selective, that none of it is objective" (9). She responds that if,

> "a camera or video is set up and left in the same place, large batches of material can be collected without the intervention of the filmmaker or ethnographer and without the continuous self-consciousness of those being observed....*what it records did happen*" (ibid, emphasis added).

This concept implies the existence of some sort of cultural truth that can be captured visually by any researcher with knowledge of exposures and f-stops. This view of ethnographic film leaves out the role of the ethnographer or filmmaker in the research process, as well as the role and response of the people being filmed. The guiding tenet behind this type of ethnographic filmmaking is that the researcher "endeavors to interpret the behavior of people of one culture to persons of another culture by using shots of people doing precisely what they would have been doing if the camera were not there" (Goldschmidt 1972, quoted in MacDougall 1975). An understanding of film such as this one is reflected in the Mead-narrated film *Families in Four Cultures* (1956) in which representative families of four different cultures are

seen going about their daily business - eating, bathing, sleeping - apparently oblivious to the camera crew standing in their living room.

These people must have been aware of the camera crew and it is entirely possible that the subjects' response to being filmed shaped the outcome, not just of this, but of many anthropological films. Attempting to remove the presence of the anthropologist or filmmaker ignores the influence of this presence not only on the relationship between the researcher and subjects, but also the relationship between the researcher and the resulting product. In the last two decades it has become an anthropological truism that this approach produces ethnographic accounts that are not particularly more accurate than others, and in fact the role of a distanced observer may be inappropriate for the type of involvement that anthropologists hope to achieve with their subjects. This view will be explored in more detail later in the thesis.

Ethnographic film in the post-WWII period

Because of technological innovations during World War II, ethnographic filmmakers of the post-war period had a greater variety of options available to them then did previous practitioners. The use of synchronized sound was made available through the creation of lightweight, portable tape recorders, and film cameras became quieter and more easily available in a smaller format (Rouch 1975). The 1950s witnessed the development of ethnographic film as "an institutionalized scientific field, with recognized specialists and a body of criticism" (de Brigard 1975: 14). Practitioners of ethnographic film were now able to experiment with and explore both foreign cultures and the possibilities of representation. During

this period many important films were made and the main players of contemporary ethnographic film began to gain prominence. Two of these in particular, John Marshall and Jean Rouch, are perhaps the most important of this period and illustrate contrasting approaches to ethnographic film.

John Marshall is primarily known for his many films about the !Kung San of the Kalahari desert. He began working in the area in the 1950s with his family, and he has produced several films on this group, both educational shorts and full length ethnographic films. He is also known for working with Frederick Wiseman during the making of *Titicut Follies* (1967). The African films, as well as a series he did working with the Pittsburgh police department, were primarily intended for educational purposes (de Brigard 1975: 34). Perhaps best known of Marshall's full-length films with African subjects are *The Hunters* (1956) and *N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980). By looking at these two examples, a path can be traced that helps to illustrate the evolution of the observational style of filmmaking.

The Hunters (1956) is a depiction of a !Kung village, and contains lengthy scenes of a small group of !Kung men hunting a giraffe. The !Kung are presented as living a delicate lifestyle in great isolation. An anonymous male voice narrates as the villages are seen engaging in their daily tasks. The dramatic intensity of the film is provided by the arduous hunt which the men undertake to provide meat for their wife and children.[4]

This film presents, as the title suggests, a synchronic view of !Kung San culture as eternal, unchanging, and in harmony with nature.[5] The film ignores external political changes that were affecting the !Kung at this time, and concentrates instead on ethnographic details of the hunt (Tomaselli 1992).

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[4] The importance given to men hunting in this film reflects the "man the hunter" hypothesis of human evolution that was popular at this time.

[5] A perspective echoed in the popular movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (Uys 1981).

The narrative employs short, declarative statements that intensify the impression of a simple people. The presence of the camera crew is not acknowledged, and the !Kung are seen engaging in activities representative of a way of life that characterized much of human prehistory - hunting, story-telling, and leading a nomadic way of life. The film ends happily, the people of the village enjoy a good meal of much cherished meat, and they are left storytelling around a campfire, creating an image of Africa that has endured.

This film is also an example of how an ethnographic film presents a fictionalized account as reality. The film is edited so that the viewer thinks they are seeing a very long hunt that culminates in the collapse of an exhausted giraffe. This is not the typical hunting style of the !Kung, however. The film was actually made from footage of a series of shorter hunts and the giraffe was shot and killed from the back of a truck by a member of the camera crew, not by the spears of the !Kung as is suggested by the film.[6] The use of a anonymous. authoritative voice-over (also referred to as "voice-of-God" narration) encourages the viewer's sense that he or she occupies a privileged place from which to view the culture. The voice explains the progress of the hunt, as well as what the characters, including the hunted giraffe, are thinking and feeling (MacBean 1983: 37). The Marshalls are well known and deservedly lauded for their years of work filming the !Kung. The film, however, is fiction.

Another well-known film of Marshall's, *N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980), presents a view of !Kung culture years later. In addition to the great changes that have affected !Kung society, changes can be seen in the filmmaking style of Marshall as well. Instead of concentrating on traditional

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[6] Recent discussion on the e-mail AnthroNet suggests that the debate over this occurrence is still very much alive.

aspects of !Kung culture, *N!ai* dramatically shows the changes that have been imposed on the society through contact with other cultures. The picture presented, particularly when compared with Marshall's earlier films, is one of poverty and dependence. Marshall uses old footage of the !Kung to highlight this change.

Another notable aspect of this film is Marshall's concentration on one individual to explore issues of cultural continuity and change, as opposed to presenting an impersonal view of another way of life. By following N!ai as she explains the changes she and her culture have experienced, he is able to put a human face on political and economic issues. Marshall does not shy away from these political issues either, but is able to explore them within the film by showing members of the South African army recruiting the !Kung San to fight against the revolutionary movement in Angola.

Marshall also shows another influence on the !Kung - that of filmmaking expeditions. In a rather absurd scene, the makers of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (Uys 1981) are seen interacting with the !Kung actors with whom they worked. The arrogance of the filmmakers and the way that they ignore the actors' attempts to create a realistic portrayal of their culture implicates all filmmakers who try to document a culture while ignoring those who create it. Compared to Marshall's earlier work, *N!ai*, by showing Marshall's personal concerns for the current cultural context of the !Kung, is ultimately more revealing.

Another filmmaker who worked primarily in Africa, Jean Rouch began doing both visual and written ethnography in West Africa in the early 1950s. His films often do not correspond with traditional conceptions of what ethnographic film should be, and as a result his works tend to be controversial. Working amongst one group of people (the Songhay of Niger)

for so long resulted in the intimacy which characterizes his films. It also resulted in a collaborative working style that requires as much participation in the creation of the film from the "actors" as from Rouch himself, in what Rouch refers to as "shared anthropology." He worked with the same colleagues for many years and they, as well as himself, have been involved in all aspects of production.

His style is seemingly observational, but with a twist: in many of his films, Rouch himself is a character (at least implied), and the action is the result of "actors" improvising their way through scenes which are both staged and spontaneous. Some of his films, *Les Maitres Fous* (1957) for example, are more blatantly "ethnographic" than others, but still remain controversial.

Les Maitres Fous was created in response to an invitation that Rouch received from members of the Hauka cult to record one of their possession ceremonies (Stoller 1992), and his personal knowledge of the ceremony is apparent in both the narration and his filming style. Because the adepts eat dog meat, froth at the mouth, and engage in sacrifices, *Les Maîtres Fous* has been criticized by both African and European scholars for portraying the participants in the ceremony as primitive and bestial. When the film is understood in context with Rouch's written ethnographies on the same subject however, a more comprehensive and compelling picture of the cult emerges, although this itself does not provide a defense of the images. The intense atmosphere of the ceremony is enhanced by Rouch's up-close filmic style, possible because of his use of a hand-held camera, and by his familiarity with the cult.[7]

Rouch strays from the observational style to illustrate some of the aspects of the cult he is trying to convey. For example, a dramatic element of

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[7] This is termed a "radical methodology" by Cohen (1989: 60).

the film is Rouch's juxtaposition of scenes from the possession ceremony in which the spirits act out their roles of colonial administrators, with footage of the colonial administrators themselves. This moment of mimesis (Taussig 1993) highlights the colonial relations in a way not possible by just showing the cult members.

Contrasting with this film is a motif that Rouch used in other films in which African characters are seen adjusting to European elements and situations. One of these films, *Pétit à Pétit* (1963), concerns a man from a small African village who wants to build a skyscraper, and takes a trip to Paris to learn about them. The film is undeniably fiction, and the plot that is described by the film did not actually occur, but the interaction between the African characters, and between the African characters and "real" Parisians has a quality of truth and spontaneity that characterizes ethnographic film.[8] The film employs "candid camera" elements, as well as deliberately parodying anthropology. While in Paris, the main character played by Damouré Zika, a long time Rouch collaborator, describes himself as an ethnologist and insists on taking the measurements and checking the teeth of Parisians who happen to be passing by.

Rouch's most recent film *Madame l'Eau* (1992) follows a similar theme; the main characters visit Amsterdam from their village in Niger so they can learn about windmill technology. Also similar is Rouch's use of the same players that are featured in *Pétit à Pétit* thirty years earlier. Two documentaries about Rouch, *Jean Rouch and His Camera in the Heart of Africa* (Bregstein 1979) and *Rouch's Gang* (Neyknecht and Nijland 1993) show the interaction between Rouch and his primary collaborators, Lam Ibrahima

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[8] Rouch himself referred to this film as a "shared dream" (Rouch, remarks presented to Revisions/ Revisits/ Realities Symposium, American Museum of Natural History, 5 October 1993)

Dia and Damouré Zika, with whom he has worked and been friends since the early 1950s. The Bregstein film in particular shows Rouch interacting with a variety of his African colleagues at the Nigerien film center in Niamey that Rouch has set up to facilitate the work of any filmmaker from Niger who wishes to use the facilities.

Rouch sees the "prime audience" for his films to be "the other person, the one I am filming" (Rouch 1975: 99). Thus his methods are highly responsive to his subjects; he screens his films for them first and takes into account their comments before releasing the films for distribution.[9] In 1975 he presented his vision of the potential of ethnographic film and video:

> "Tomorrow will be the day of the self-regulating color videotape, of automatic video editing, of "instant replay" of the recorded picture (immediate feedback). [The] camera...will pass automatically into the hands of those who were, up to now, always in front of it. Then the anthropologist will no longer monopolize the observation of things. Instead, both he and his culture will be observed and recorded. In this way ethnographic film will help us "share" anthropology" (Rouch: 102).

The flowering of ethnographic film

The period from the late 1950s to the early 1970s was one of expansion and experimentation for ethnographic film. Many practitioners who had their start during this period, such as Timothy Asch and David MacDougall, are now the established ethnographic filmmakers of today. These practitioners explored new uses of film for educational and ethnographic

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[9] On the subject of distribution, many of Rouch's films are difficult to find in North America, and as a result his influence has been more significant in France. See Stoller 1992 for an in depth discussion.

purposes, and were interested in the potential of the medium to document and represent other cultures.

One film format that was experimented with was that of the short (but still edited) film which conveyed some particular aspect of cultural life. Although this form had been present before in ethnographic film and was used by Mead and Bateson as well as Rouch, it was during this period of time that it achieved its greatest prominence. The three most significant expositions of this style are Timothy Asch's Yanomamo films (in collaboration with the anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon), John Marshall's two series of educational films, one about the Pittsburgh police force and one about !Kung cultural life, and the Netsilik Eskimo series for which Asen Balikci served as anthropologist. For each of these projects, footage was shot of different cultural activities and was edited into both short specific films, and longer ones conveying a variety of information about a culture.

Asch took footage of the Yanomamo in 1968 and 1971 and created thirty-nine films, many of which were released for educational purposes (Asch 1993: 5). The short films are between seven and forty minutes and the title identifies the subject of the film, for example *A Father Washes His Children* (1971) and *A Man and His Wife Weave a Hammock* (1971).[10] These films show various aspects of Yanomamo culture including children playing, the taking of psychedelic drugs, the weeding of gardens, a feast, and an ax fight. Asch has stated that at the time the films were being made he thought he could "make an accurate representation and translation of culture" (Asch 1993: 5). The film project was important for recording aspects of Yanomamo

[10] Another film in this series, *A Man Called Bee* (1971) is notable for showing an anthropologist in the field conducting research, one of the few anthropological films to do this.

life that were in danger of becoming completely transformed by the encroachment of alien cultures.

The short films of Marshall and Balikci follow a similar format, usually presenting a cultural process or a specific interaction. The advantage of these types of films is that they remove the problem of attempting to convey a cultural totality with such a limited format. They are also useful for preserving a specific cultural record. The drawback of these films is inherent, however; often they contain too little information, leaving audiences with an inaccurate and potentially damaging view of specific cultural activities Although intended for educational purposes, some films, *The Ax Fight* (Asch 1971) or the slightly longer *The Feast* (Asch 1971) for example, are confusing unless accompanied by supplemental ethnographic materials In this case, a film that is created to overcome stereotypes people have about other cultures may instead reinforce them (Martinez 1992).

Balikci and Asch made other films as well, and have continued to do so until the present. Their approaches to the use of film have changed over the years and reflect a changing awareness of the place of subject involvement. Asen Balikci trained under Margaret Mead and has approached visual anthropology with a deep sense of the importance of cultural preservation. To this end, he was instrumental in creating the Netsilik Eskimo series of films (1967), which provided a visual reconstruction of the pre-contact culture of the Netsilik, among whom Balikci conducted ethnographic research for several years.

He has continued to work with native groups in the North, creating a follow-up film to the Netsilik series, *Yesterday, today: The Netsilik Eskimo* (1971), as well as a film portraying the cultural change of a small Siberian village, *Sireniki Chronicle* (Balikci and Sauvé 1991). In recent years he has

developed a project training people in Siberia to make their own videos. The results of this project have not been published, but a video which I have not seen that chronicles the project (*Siberia: Through Siberian Eyes* 1993) has been produced by a colleague of Balikci's, Mark Badger. Comments that Balikci made in reference to the project at a visual anthropology conference (1992) would suggest that although the project is avowedly collaborative, the underlying issues of relinquishing control to the participants are not being addressed in a fundamental way.

Ethnographic films like the Netsilik series are used to provide examples of the way people in foreign cultures live, as well as to provide a look at the history of all culture. These films were created as "cultural reconstructions" to show the Eskimo way of life to American school children. These films were quite controversial due to their lack of contextualizing commentary, however, and the project was eventually abandoned by the school system (Balikci 1975). As valuable as this series of films is, this type of ethnographic film is problematic when used in contemporary classrooms.

The films show no evidence of the lives of modern day Inuit people, as the filmmakers had the subjects dress in "traditional" clothing, hide appliances such as televisions, and hunt with methods used in the 19th century. These films communicate well the ingenuity of a people that have survived in a harsh environment for thousands of years. They also leave them there, stuck in the past, unaware of the changes that have gone on around them, relics of a vanished time. Balikci did create a film, *Yesterday, today: the Netsilik Eskimo* (1971), which shows many adaptations the Netsilik have made. If this film isn't shown in conjunction with the earlier series or without a more up-to-date perspective provided by an instructor, these films

may leave the misleading impression that this continues to be the way of life for Inuit peoples today.

Tim Asch continues to be a preeminent and prolific ethnographic filmmaker in the years since filming the Yanomamo, and was recently honored with a film retrospective at the 1993 Margaret Mead Film Festival. Asch began his career working with the Marshalls in southern Africa before traveling to Venezuela to film with Napoleon Chagnon the Yanomamo, a group he has continued to work with in recent years (Asch 1993). Since 1978 Asch has worked in Indonesia which has resulted in ethnographic films such as *The Water of Words: A Cultural Ecology of a Small Island in Eastern Indonesia* (1983), as well as a series focusing on a particular Balinese spirit medium, Jero. Accompanying the Jero film series is a written text, *Jero Tapakan, Balinese Healer: an ethnographic film monograph* (Connor, Asch and Asch 1986) that describes the films and provides additional ethnographic description.

Asch's career is notable for his successful collaboration with several anthropologists (Chagnon, James Fox, Linda Connor) in a variety of locales, as well as with his wife, Patsy Asch, who has co-directed many films with him. He has also been instrumental in the spread of the practice of visual anthropology. He set up the Center for Visual Anthropology at the University of Southern California which provides graduate training, and is a consistent innovator in the use of ethnographic films in teaching. He provides a brief overview of his career in *Eyes Across the Water Two* (1993), a collection of papers presented at the 1992 visual anthropology conference at the University of Amsterdam.

In recent years he has become interested in assisting those who are traditionally the subject of films with the means of creating their own films

and videos (Asch 1991). He incorporates the comments of both himself and his subjects in his recent films such as*Releasing the Spirits* (1991), and screens footage for the subjects in the field in order to hear and incorporate their explanations and opinions. His growing attention to the interests of his subjects is paralleled by a similar historical shift in the practice of ethnographic film in which filmmakers have been progressively more aware of the potential of subject involvement.

Further explorations in ethnographic film: Experiments in form

As the practice of ethnographic film became older and more sophisticated, film was no longer seen as merely a tool for recording culture, but rather as a way to create and explore interactions across cultural boundaries. Technology developed to make film and video more accessible, and the potential for subject involvement was expanded as many of the practical constraints that had shaped film as an elite medium were removed. Practitioners also began to feel more comfortable experimenting with forms of presentation, and to explore the telling of individual stories rather than feeling pressured to capture a cultural totality. The political implications of representational practices provided an impetus for ethnographic filmmakers to explore both the theory and practice of the field.

David and Judith MacDougall are examples of filmmakers who maintain a high level of awareness of the concerns of their subjects, and are notable for their willingness to engage themselves with both members of another culture and the filmmaking process itself. Beginning in the 1970s the MacDougalls worked intensely with the Turkana of East Africa, then with Australian Aboriginal communities, and most recently with pastoral peoples

of Sardinia. Their work demonstrates that not all ethnographic filmmakers have shared the feeling that their appropriate role is to be as unobtrusive as possible.

In a 1975 article "Beyond observational cinema," David MacDougall examines the role of the behind-the-scenes ethnographic filmmaker and then argues against it. The position of the ethnographic filmmaker offers "invisibility and omniscience. From this desire it is not a great leap to begin viewing the camera as a secret weapon in the pursuit of knowledge" (MacDougall 1975: 114). Betraying the presence of the filmmaker is considered inappropriate in an ethnographic film "because to pay attention to him is to draw valuable time from the subject at hand" (115). MacDougall acknowledges that this approach has created some extraordinary ethnographic films, but he also warns of its limitations.

> By asking nothing of his subjects beyond permission to film them, the filmmaker adopts an inherently secretive position. He has no need for further explanation, no need to communicate with his subjects on the basis of the thinking that organizes his work (118).

MacDougall connects the removal of the researcher to the power relations that have shaped anthropological encounters. "If not in his personal demeanor, then in the significance of his working method, he inevitably reaffirms the colonial origins of anthropology" (ibid). MacDougall goes on to suggest that the possibility of a "participatory cinema," provides a sound basis for understanding the importance of developing collaborative projects through the medium of visual ethnography. This does not mean however, that assumptions can be made about the nature of shared meanings, particularly those found in constructed visual images. A pan of a landscape that looks empty to a viewer from the West may have layers of political and

historical significance for an Aboriginal Australian. It is the negotiation of both these meanings and ways to present them that can allow representatives of different cultures to grapple with the nature of the image itself, as well as with their approaches to the construction of images and sequences.

MacDougall not only builds a case for producing ethnographic films that attempt to bridge the "separate worlds" between researcher and subject and to produce films that are not "monologues," he argues that doing anything less is a mistake.

> The camera IS there, and it is held by a representative of one culture encountering another. Beside such an extraordinary event, the search for isolation and invisibility seems a curiously irrelevant ambition. No ethnographic film is merely a record of another society: *it is always a record of a meeting between a filmmaker and that society* (119, emphasis added).

I quote at length from this paper because it contains the essence of the basis for collaborative ethnographic filmmaking: that the particular interaction between people of different cultures is worthy of anthropological study. Furthermore, that it is incumbent upon the researcher to hand over the means of representation, and to involve him or herself *and* the subjects in the process of collaboration, in order to overcome some of the unequal power relations inherent in the anthropological encounter. The contribution that the MacDougalls have made toward approaching film in this manner is significant.

Other filmmakers were experimenting with ways to present cultural material that were neither dry and boring nor excessively exoticized. One of the most important filmmakers who has emphasized aesthic presentation in his work is Robert Gardner, a colleague of Marshall at Harvard's Film Study Center. His influence is felt in many ethnographic films that were

associated with the Center. He co-produced *The Hunters* (1956), and was involved in the making of *The Nuer* (Harris and Breidenbach 1970), as well as his own *Dead Birds* (1963) and *Forest of Bliss* (1985). *Forest of Bliss* contains very little contextualizing commentary which is compounded by his use of images that are powerfully symbolic such as the opening scene of feral dogs turning on one of their own.

Gardner's and other "artistic" ethnographic films cause controversy due to the high quality of their aesthetic presentation as it is believed this undermines their worth as cultural documents. *The Nuer* for example has been lauded for restoring "a sense of poetic to the everyday world of another culture" (Nichols 1981: 252), but also criticized for being "without ethnographic integrity" (Heider 1976), and has been known to produce a "visceral" response in viewers (Nichols 1991). The viewer's emotional response to such scenes of beauty and strangeness may create a unintended reading of the text, that is, not strictly on an "ethnographic" level. Gardner's unwillingness to compromise his artistic standards to conform to standards of anthropological accuracy has consistently made him a challenging figure to those who feel the purpose of ethnographic film is to produce an impartial record of another culture.

As a result of the growing sophistication of ethnographic film and its practitioners, some influential books were published, which for the first time collected and presented various views of the field of ethnographic film, by both well-established and up and coming filmmakers. Perhaps still the most comprehensive volume to be published is *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (1975), containing articles from practically every notable ethnographic filmmaker and covering such topics as the value of cultural reconstruction and the use of film as an elicitation technique to the coming presence of video

technology. Also significant was Karl Heider's influential *Ethnographic Film* (1976) which for the first time set out particular rules of ethnographic filmmaking (the use of long pans and natural sound, for example) to guide practitioners. Although the merits of such advice may be debatable, it at least provides a starting place for discussing the nature of ethnographic film, and its existence indicates that by the mid-1970s the field had developed enough to merit its own handbook.

Another significant development in ethnographic film during this period of time is the growing presence of female filmmakers such as Sabine Jell-Bahlsen and Melissa Llewelyn-Davies. Their films often focus on the activities of women, a subject that has been under-represented in ethnographic films. Llewelyn-Davies worked extensively with the Maasai for twenty years documenting women's lives. She was the anthropologist for *Maasai Women* (Curling 1974) and has produced other films, the most recent being *Memories and Dreams* (1992). She brought the details of women's lives to the forefront in ethnographic film during a period when feminist anthropologists were beginning to do the same for ethnography. In other films by Granada Television, such as *Asante Market Women* (Granada 1982), women are shown as strong characters, interacting with men in society as well as inhabiting their own spheres of power and influence.

Experiments in self-representation

Some people became interested in the use of film and video, not from the point of view of filmmakers, but from the perspective of how it could be used by subjects. Thus the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the development of film and video projects that put the means of representation into the hands of

film and video projects that put the means of representation into the hands of the subjects themselves. This was done for different reasons and with varying degrees of success, as demonstrated by two of these projects, the Navajo Film Themselves project and Canada's Challenge for Change program.

Possibly the most famous anthropological example of "collaborative" filmmaking, the Navajo Film Themselves project was conducted in the early 1970s by John Adair, an anthropologist who had worked with the Navajo, and Sol Worth, a film and communications professor. This project resulted in the book *Through Navajo Eyes* (Worth and Adair 1972) as well as several films made by the Navajo students. The book explains the theoretical basis for the project, and provides a detailed description of the participants, methods, and outcomes. The researchers were interested in teaching Navajo students to "make movies" in the hopes of eliciting a particular Navajo way of seeing which would correspond with other cultural traits.

Worth and Adair were surprised at the ease with which the students learned filming and editing techniques, and the high interest they showed in the project. Each of the six participating students made films that were shown to the community, and Worth and Adair describe the films as using certain techniques (the use of slow pans and lack of close-ups for example) they felt were the result of a Navajo way of experiencing the world visually. The ultimate goal of the project was not to empower the student through the use of visual media, but to contribute to the discourse of visual anthropology, and the project was discontinued after the researchers left.

By contrast, the Challenge for Change program that was started by Canada's National Film Board in the late 1960s was specifically designed to empower the participants. As described by Dorothy Todd Hénaut (1991) the

organizers of the project, including Colin Low and George Stoney, wanted to teach people in poor communities "to use film and other media as a tool in social change" (85). Probably the most successful of these projects was the Fogo Island experiment, in which filmmaker Colin Low was invited to Newfoundland to make a film about Fogo Islanders who were scheduled to be moved to a "development town" by government organizers. Because islanders were told they would be allowed to control the presentation and use of their own images, they were willing to cooperate. After seeing the initial rushes, discussion was stimulated in various communities as people began to recognize factors they had in common in their struggle for autonomy.

A similar project was conducted in Montréal in the late 1960s when Challenge for Change approached a local citizen's organization about using video to reach members of the community. In this case, a sub-group of the original committee was set up with members of Challenge for Change to work collectively in an attempt to organize people through the use of video to discover the biggest problems of the community. Hénaut discovered that the most significant factor in raising peoples' involvement and awareness was not the videos themselves but the process of making the videos, in which people were confronted with images of themselves and others in the community expressing similar frustration about current living conditions. The novelty of video at the time was enough of a draw to bring people into meetings and as people began to discuss the videos, they often learned they had other concerns in common as well. Projects of this type demonstrate that often it is not the final product that is important in a collaborative project, but rather the act of people working together.

Recent directions in ethnographic film

In recent years it appears that ethnographic film is growing in popularity, and that it is becoming increasingly difficult to define what an ethnographic film is. Ethnographic film has become increasingly autobiographical, and also in many cases increasingly personal. Filmmakers are reluctant to approach communities with an idea of making a film *about* their subjects, and more and more searching for ways to make films *with* them. The number of written materials about ethnographic film has increased as well. The journal of the Society for Visual Anthropology provides an excellent forum for debate about visual cultural representation, and several books such as *Anthropological Filmmaking* (Rollwagen 1988) and *Film as Ethnography* (Crawford and Turton 1992) continue to refine our understandings of the field.

An important development in the practice of visual anthropology in the last few decades has been the growing relationship between ethnographic film and television. Two series in particular, the Disappearing World series in Great Britain and the Millennium series in the United States, have brought cultural issues to a large audience as well as grappled with issues of representation and subject involvement.

Started in Britain in 1970 by Sir Dennis Forman, a television producer, and Brian Moser, a documentary filmmaker, the Disappearing World series was the first large scale attempt to present issues of anthropological interest to the general public on television (Ginsburg 1992). Although originally intended to provide a record of endangered cultures before they were permanently transformed or lost altogether, the series became a forum for exploring cultural issues, often in innovative ways, in societies not on the

verge of extinction.[11] Many people initially involved with the series as researchers or editors, such as Melissa Llewelyn-Davies and André Singer, became filmmakers and producers in their own right. With the series' initial emphasis on the impact of cultural contact on small-scale societies, the representation of social change has continued to be an important focus, as seen in the films *Trobriand Cricket* (Leach and Kildea 1974) and *The Kayapo: Out of the Forest* (Granada 1989).

The series has provided examples of anthropologists and filmmakers working collectively to produce visual ethnographies that are sensitive to the concerns of the subjects, although this relationship has not always been a harmonious one (Turner 1992). The question of audience accessibility versus a desire to produce reliable ethnographic documents resulted in a focus on individual stories, and the innovative use of techniques such as subtitling of direct speech and purely observational sequences previously felt to be unsuitable for television's mass audiences (Ginsburg 1992). Although some critiques have been leveled at the series for not providing enough ethnographic detail, these same films are the ones most often used in the teaching of anthropology and as such are a valuable resource (Loizos 1980).

The most recent attempt to present issues of anthropological interest on television is the Millennium series, a British and American joint production that aired on PBS in the United States and the BBC in Britain in 1991. Hosted by anthropologist and Cultural Survival director David Maybury-Lewis, the series' ten episodes explore "tribal wisdom and the modern world" by thematically examining issues of interest in the west - love and marriage, identity, the environment - and what the "modern" world

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[11] Contributors to the series often tried to have the name changed because of its implication of cultural loss, but due to its association with a very successful show, the name was maintained until the mid-1980s (Ginsburg 1992).

can learn from the wisdom of tribal people "before it's all gone" (Maybury-Lewis in *The Shock of the Other* (Grant and Meech 1991)), a desire reminiscent of the early Disappearing World mandate. The emphasis of the series is on what western viewers can learn from other cultures, and this is often accomplished through the use of reconstructed dramatic vignettes, each focusing on a specific individual or family and how they approach particular problems and situations. The United States is presented as a culture for comparative study as in the episode *Strange Relations* (Grant and Meech 1991) in which a middle-aged American couple is shown explaining their reasons for choosing to marry (or remarry) at this point in their lives.

As implied by the title, the series suggests a dichotomy between "tribal" and "modern," in which the "tribal" are denied the right to become "modern." In the opening episode, Maybury-Lewis' voyage up the Manu River in search of an "uncontacted" culture is unabashedly reminiscent of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or its visual translation, *Apocalypse Now*. He speaks of the "cozy innocence" of the jungle contrasted with the "rape" of that innocence, represented by a bull-dozer felling a tree. At the last town on the edge of the "virgin" jungle, he describes the "limbo of lost souls" he finds and describes his feeling walking down the main street as if he is in the film *High Noon*. This sequence conveys the idea of anthropologist as hero, coming to document a people before the bad guys destroy them. I would not deny the incredibly deleterious effects cultural contact can have on indigenous societies, but Maybury-Lewis does not go very far in portraying the agency that people can have over their own lives, or suggest alternatives to the dichotomy of pristine culture or apocalyptic change.

According the *Viewing Guide* (1991), the Millennium series differs from ethnographic film in two ways: one, by departing from the "tradition" of

films about a specific exotic culture by thematically organizing the episodes on the basis of "issues that are bedeviling our own society" (6); and two, by focusing on individuals in particular societies, rather than approaching a society as a collectivity (*Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World: Viewer's Guide* 1991). The *Viewer's Guide* also claims the series is collaborative, again in two ways: one, "the tribal people featured in the series were happy to tell the stories that would inform the world about their values" (8), and two, the words of the "tribal people," if not subtitled direct speech, were recorded, literally translated, and then "crafted" into "interior monologues" that were read as voice-overs, often by bilingual speakers of the same language of the subjects, and often during dramatic recreations of the subjects' stories (*Viewer's Guide*: 9). Whether this amounts to "collaboration" is arguable, but the producers do show a sensitivity to the subjects they represent.

In practice, however, after the final edits were made and the series presented, the involvement of the subjects turns out to be rather minimal. Although the words of the subjects were faithfully translated, the avowed goal of the series is to examine what the west can learn from others and the subjects had no say in how their stories would be presented. An anthropologist who worked with the series, Kaj Arham, reports that although the crew was sensitive to the cultural milieu in which they were working, ultimately the desires of the subjects, in this case the Makuna, were not represented. Because the footage was shot and specifically edited to illustrate themes of interest to the producers and Western audience, the interest the Makuna had in having one of their rituals filmed was overlooked.

The storytelling style of the Millennium series, although often presented with the words and accent of a "native," appeals more to viewers of

television romances than to those interested in indigenous forms of knowledge. Maybury-Lewis does not find "the Other" that he purports to be looking for in the opening episode of the series, he finds instead charismatic, likable characters, attractively packaged to be palatable to an audience searching for answers to questions of interest to people in the post-industrial western world.

Concluding remarks

Is this then the pinnacle of ethnographic film? Still representing the Other for the entertainment and edification of those privileged enough to be able to consume such representations? The history of ethnographic film has not been unidirectional. Ethnographic filmmakers often demonstrate contradictory impulses, sometimes even within the same film. The subjects of ethnographic films are people, not a monolithic entity with whom filmmakers can interact in specific patterns. Still, as its history shows, since the beginnings of ethnographic film its practitioners have exhibited not just curiosity about ways to portray the lives of others, but also sensitivity as to the best ways to create these portrayals. This has led to an increased awareness of and interest in collaborative visual ethnography. The theoretical support of such an idea will be considered in the next chapter.

Chapter II: Theoretical context of collaborative visual ethnography

The anthropological legacy of ethnographic film

Why would ethnographic filmmakers strive so hard to make a film appear observational when it often is not? Why do they struggle to remove all traces of themselves and "modern" civilization from the films they make? The basis for this impulse lies in anthropology's reliance on the observational method, and in the discipline's quest to become more rigorous and scientific, rather than a collection of humanistic, cross-cultural anecdotes. Throughout much of its history, anthropology has striven for empiricism, and has equated the visual sense and reliable description with knowledge. This dominant emphasis on seeing has led to the development of methods that attempt to capture some sort of immutable truth that can be accurately described, rather than including the interpretive nature of much ethnographic knowledge.[12] Incorporating personal data or information about the observer, for example, or exploring the relationship between inquirer and informant in the field, makes messy the quest for understanding another culture.

It was long felt, particularly in film, that the mode of representation for ethnographic knowledge should be invisible. That is, if an observer was able to free herself or himself from biases that may cloud judgment, the result would be an impartial account of a culture, and that the method through which this account was reported was insignificant to the resulting product. The facts would be allowed to speak for themselves. We are now becoming aware that this understanding produces ethnographic accounts that are not

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[12] This is the "dominant" history referred to above. Much work has been published in the last twenty years or so and will be discussed further in this thesis.

particularly more accurate than others, and in fact the stance of the legendary distanced observer may be inadequate for close cultural description.

Removing the anthropologist from a cultural account ignores the ideological framework of the researcher and the influence this has not only on the relationship between the researcher and subjects in the field, but also the relationship between the researcher and the resulting ethnography. As Bruce Kapferer (1988) has stated, in order to get out of this dilemma of false objectivity, "Not only must we explore the worlds of others in their ideological formation but we must also be constantly aware of our own ideological positioning and the way it intrudes upon our understanding" (89-90).

The conflation of the mode of presentation with the information presented has had a significant impact on the resulting ethnographic film product. Although many ethnographic films are quite beautiful in their presentation, aesthetics are usually considered secondary to ethnographic accuracy. Soundtracks are often of poor quality and only occasionally include secondary music or other embellishments. This is allowable as these films are usually not meant for general distribution, but this has become a hallmark that characterizes films created for cultural content. In fact, it has been argued that the worse the films look, the less "Hollywood" they seem, and the more authoritative they appear (Burnett 1984; Nichols 1991). A film that is visually pleasing, *Appeals to Santiago* (Metzger and Wilson 1968) for example, is commended for its "superb visual ethnography," but then condemned for appearing to be edited "primarily for artistic effect....When the artistry becomes an end in itself, then film on human behavior can become scientifically worthless" (Collier 1988: 89).

A highly edited product is seen as a sign that filmmakers are turning their attention to elsewhere than the ethnography. An example of this is a critique leveled at Dennis O'Rourke and his film *Cannibal Tours* (1987).[13] One reviewer, Edward Bruner (1989), likes the film in general, but is critical of O'Rourke's editing technique: "I find it especially annoying when what is clearly a single interview is broken up into two or three segments, I suppose for aesthetic effect..." (443).[14] Bruner uses this argument to support his claim that O'Rourke is "not reflexive enough" (ibid), instead of reading this technique as signifying the presence of the filmmaker because it is so precisely edited.

This "sloppiness" of style does not extend to showing evidence of the filming in progress, however. In this respect ethnographic film has paradoxically relied on a convention of feature films - that no reference is made to the camera crew. Because people can be unreliable and inaccurate data collectors, the solution has been to remove them from the picture entirely, thus allowing the illusion of omniscience. Just as the ethnographer removes herself or himself from a written ethnography in order to appear as factual and non-subjective as possible, so too the visual ethnographer has tried to remove herself or himself from the filmmaking process. As in written ethnography, the limitations of this approach are now being keenly felt and ethnographers are exploring new ways to represent as well as re-discovering ways that have been present all along.

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[13] O'Rourke, incidentally, rejects the label of "ethnographic filmmaker" (Lutkehaus 1989).

[14] The fact that this would render the film much more interesting to watch raises a question that must be leveled at much ethnography: Why does such a potentially interesting discipline consistently churn out work that is often undynamic and almost never compelling viewing (or reading) for a mainstream audience? The point is not make a case for "popularizing" anthropology, but rather to ask why inaccessibility has been considered proper in a field that has such a populist ethos.

Theoretical basis for collaborative visual ethnography

A theoretical basis for developing a collaborative approach to ethnographic filmmaking can be found in recent critiques of anthropology. The implications of anthropology's colonial heritage were beginning to be explored in the early 1970s, particularly in such volumes as *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972). The articles in this volume called for a more subjective and radical anthropology that would respond to and play a part in the changing times. Although ethnographic experiments in the 1970s searched for more accurate ways to represent, particularly in the realm of ethnosemantics, this was followed in the 1980s with a resurgence of critiques aimed at the positivist epistemology that had become accepted by many anthropologists. These critiques are discussed in greater length later in the thesis, but this growing awareness and sensitive ethnographies that resulted from this period (Crapanzano 1980; Taussig 1987; Boddy 1989, for example) has put the preceding reliance on objective observation into sharp relief.

In the 1980s, works providing an overview of anthropology have appeared and have refined the questions that anthropologists must answer. Two significant books of this type, *Writing Culture* (1986) and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986) address particular problems of anthropological representation, as well as techniques that might be used to overcome them.[15] These works take as their starting point the idea that anthropology's guiding principle - the representation of one culture to members of another, based usually on first-hand experience - is in crisis.

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[15] Although these works are often referred to as "postmodern anthropology," Pool (1991) claims this is a misnomer used as a rhetorical device by critics who oppose experimental ethnography and its practitioners. Because the authors of recent critiques concern themselves purely with the form of the text, they are in fact modernist.

In *Anthropology as Cultural Critique,* Marcus and Fischer explore what they term an "experimental moment" in the development of anthropology. They present the 1980s as a time in which paradigms are questioned and anthropologists closely examined what their representations mean, both to the audiences of their works and to the subjects themselves. Marcus and Fischer present an array of different approaches anthropologists are working with, including dialogic models, and fit various experimental ethnographic forms into different categories.

The collection of essays in *Writing Culture* examines ethnography as a writing form, with a particular historical development, a variety of specific textual strategies, and definable political implications.[16] The discussion is supplemented by suggestions as to the direction anthropological practice might take. One response by ethnographers to these types of critiques has been to experiment with new forms of ethnography, the most outstanding of these forms being the rise of "dialogic" anthropology.

Marcus and Fischer write particularly about ethnographies that adopt a mode for presenting information based on the actual conversations between researcher and subject. A dialogic ethnography is felt to better reflect the realities of the field experience, as well as convey the researcher's influence on the research setting. Dialogue is used as a metaphor for the research process itself in which each side attempts to communicate ideas and to understand what the other side is expressing. "Dialogue has become the imagery for expressing the way anthropologists (and by extension, their readers) must engage in an active communicative process with another culture" (Marcus

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[16] This is not to imply that practitioners and theorists of the inaccurately labeled "postmodern" school of ethnography all share a similar outlook. Great diversity exists in this volume as can be seen in contrasting the contributions of, say, Rabinow and Tyler.

and Fischer 1986: 30). The authors warn of the negative aspects of this approach which occur when:

> "the external communicative exchange between a particular ethnographer and his subjects [becomes] the most important goal of research, to the exclusion of a balanced, full-bodied representation of communication both within and across cultural boundaries" (ibid).

The ideas embedded in dialogic ethnography are complex and amply covered in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique.* The significance these ideas have for collaborative ethnography is the understanding of the importance of the "communicative process" of fieldwork itself. Collaborative ethnography takes this understanding as the point of analysis, rather than as a mode of presentation. The fieldwork method for dialogic ethnography has as its basis the researcher's assumptions about what path the research should take and the mode in which the final product should be presented. A researcher involved in collaborative research would still have assumptions and ideas but these provide the basis for negotiation and study. These underlying ideas ideally become as explicit as possible, both for the researcher and the subjects/participants.

In contrast with dialogic ethnography, collaborative ethnography seeks to transform the power relations implied in a member of one culture representing another. "The emergent and cooperative nature of textualization also indexes a different attitude toward the ethnographic other and the uses of ethnography" (Tyler 1986: 127). In this manner, the goal of ethnography is shifted from representing one culture for the benefit of another to working with others to create a project of benefit to all parties. Dialogic anthropology strives to present ethnographic material in a way that is faithful to the fieldwork encounter; to situate the questions and comments

of the researcher and subject. Collaborative ethnography seeks to transform the fieldwork process and to examine this process as it occurs; to empower the participants and to create a project or product that contributes to the community being studied.

Experimental modes of ethnography

In addition to dialogic ethnography, the authors of these essays present other more "experimental" modes of ethnography. Most significant for this thesis are what Marcus and Fischer refer to as "modernist texts." These they define as texts which

> arise centrally from the reciprocity of perspectives between insider(s) and outsider(s) entailed in any ethnographic research situation...modernist ethnography is focused primarily on delivering a message by manipulating the form of a text and is radically concerned with what can be learned about another culture from full attention to the enactment of the research process itself (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 67).

These texts start from a point of uncertainty about the form they are going to take with the understanding the form and content will arise specifically out of the encounter itself. This idea has important implications for collaborative visual ethnography for two reasons contained in this description. Although a modernist concern with text is clearly conveyed by this description, certain features can be extrapolated to create a more "postmodern" interpretation that refocuses attention on the discourse surrounding the creation of the event, rather than the textual event itself. One implication of this idea is that the interactive encounter can be a subject of study, and a second is that this interaction is a *process* that can be explored. There is no final cultural product

to be described, but an on-going process of interaction and negotiation that contains underlying cultural assumptions that affect behavior.

This method of working may result in what Tyler (1986) refers to as a "polyphonic text" that is a product of "postmodern ethnography." According to Tyler who is the main proponent of postmodern ethnography, the polyphonic text is one in which the voice of the researcher is not an authoritative monologue, but rather one in a series of presented perspectives. This form reflects the ideas of postmodern ethnography because "postmodern ethnography privileges 'discourse' over 'text,' it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer" (Tyler 1986: 126). Tyler is vague on precisely how a researcher is expected to conform to these guidelines and still engage in meaningful research. It is these particular questions that will be explored throughout this thesis.

Tyler's comments point to the interesting directions collaborative ethnography might take, particularly in terms of the relationship between fieldwork and ethnography. "Polyphony is a means of perspectival relativity...it does correspond with the realities of fieldwork in places sensitive to the issue of power symbolized in the subject-object relationship: he who represents and she who is represented" (ibid: 127). The final ethnographic product is not determined in advance by the researcher but arises out of the relationship among the participants in the ethnographic encounter. It is this collaborative function in the shaping of the "polyphonic text" that distinguishes it from dialogic ethnography, although dialogue may be one of its aspects.

Tyler argues that "because it is participatory and emergent, post-modern ethnography cannot have a predetermined form" (ibid). This idea of having no prior form in mind presents problems when discussing collaborative *visual* ethnography as a form is implied. Even if a form is suggested however, the myriad uses of visual media are so diverse - unedited cultural record, documentary polemic, fiction film, avant garde multi-media presentation - that plenty of room exists for experimentation within the form. Tyler even suggests that no product may result, in which case it may be left to the researcher (or any of the participants) to study the failed interaction, although this may result in a less compelling account. Creating a record of any interaction, failed or not, in which the researcher participates, requires a certain degree of reflexivity embedded in the account.

Reflexivity in ethnography

Reflexivity is important in a collaborative project because the process is influenced by the subjective experiences of the researcher and the participants, and the presentation of this subjectivity is crucial to a record of the interaction. This emphasis on the subjective side of anthropological research is different from the "classical" ethnographic norms in which

> the 'method' of participant-observation has enacted a delicate balance of subjectivity and objectivity. The ethnographer's personal experiences, especially those of participation and empathy, are recognized as central to the research process, but they are firmly restrained by the impersonal standards of observation and 'objective' distance (Clifford 1986: 13).

In collaborative ethnography an understanding of subjectivity is essential to the research process. Some anthropological authors have asserted

the importance of first, understanding one's subjectivity while conducting research and writing ethnography, and second, of presenting this subjectivity reflexively so that it enhances the audience's knowledge of the final product. Adopting a reflexive approach to ethnography involves a "delicate balance" along the same lines necessary for a dialogic approach. Ideally, the use of reflexivity highlights the anthropological encounter and clarifies understanding of the cultural information being presented. The presence of such material should not crowd the ethnography to the point where, to quote a joke, the Samoan says to the new ethnographer, "But enough about you, let's talk about me."

Reflexive anthropological works in the form of fieldwork accounts have supplemented more traditional forms of ethnography for several years (Bohannan 1964; Rabinow 1977; Dumont 1978). These accounts document a researcher's subjective experiences in the field to show the person behind the analytical mask. As Rabinow (1977) has stated:

> I argue that all cultural activity is experiential, that fieldwork is a distinctive type of cultural activity, and that it is this activity which defines the discipline. But what should therefore be the very strength of anthropology...has been eliminated as a valid area of inquiry...which I find radically inappropriate in a field which claims to study humanity (5).

It is incorporating this "strength of anthropology" into ethnography that is an important task for the collaborative ethnographer, for without this inclusion the "full-bodied" nature of the interaction is lost.

Reflexivity in ethnographic film

As has been suggested earlier in this thesis, most ethnographic film has not been reflexive. The inclusion of the filmmaker and a demonstration of the process of making a film has been thought to distract from the essential ethnographic knowledge being presented. Logistically it is a tricky matter as well. How does a filmmaker film herself or himself while attempting to film others? It is possible, and the same arguments in favor of a reflexive approach to written ethnography can be applied to ethnographic film as well.

Ruby has consistently argued for reflexivity in documentary and ethnographic film. "I am convinced that filmmakers along with anthropologists have the ethical, political, aesthetic, and scientific obligation to be reflexive and self-critical about their work" (Ruby 1988: 64). He argues that the inclusion of information about the producer and process is essential to any visual presentation that is attempting to convey a kind of truth, and in fact without it "a sophisticated and critical understanding of the product is virtually impossible" (ibid: 65). Ruby makes a political case for including reflexivity in documentary and ethnographic film. He claims the urge to document other peoples' lives occurs from the "Western middle-class need to...symbolically control the world" (ibid: 71), and that the objects of this control are those in positions where they are powerless to resist.

By using reflexivity, filmmakers disavow attempts to appear tangential to the filmmaking process. Although this technique can be criticized for establishing an "I was there" authority, at least it demonstrates that the subjects of the films don't live in a bubble separate from the world of the filmmaker, through which the camera was able to pass. It can also provide for

a more "open" reading of the film as text, as various levels of interpretation of the film as cultural document are available to the viewer.

A few illustrations of the use of reflexivity can be found in the work of David and Judith MacDougall. One way this technique is used is in the film *Familiar Places* (1980) in which the camera becomes a character, involved in the ritual practices of those being represented. David MacDougall, behind the camera, and Judith MacDougall carrying sound equipment, are actually physically involved when they are anointed with water during the process of filming. This event in the film allows the viewer to be reminded of the presence of the person filming, as well as their own position as spectator. The process of the filming is brought into the foreground and the viewers are reminded that the filmmakers and themselves are entering into an interaction with the subjects that has particular implications for everyone involved.

The MacDougalls have used reflexivity as a technique to comment on their position as outsiders to a culture and how this affects ethnographic filmmaking. In *Lorang's Way* (1979) the main character addresses the filmmakers and the camera (and by extension the audience) and comments that the filmmakers are taking what they can learn from the Turkana culture and returning to their own culture with it, to use it for their own purposes. Lorang notes that because of their status in the world, the filmmakers can come and live in his culture and then return to their own, but that he is unable to do the same. In this statement, Lorang implicates the power relations inherent not only in ethnographic film, but in anthropology as well.

Another case in which filmmakers reveal their presence is provided by a humorous aside in *Releasing the Spirits* (Asch, Connor and Asch 1991). The scene being filmed is of a Balinese funeral procession hurrying along a path.

The comments of a woman running by are translated: "Get out of the way, Linda!" This scene demonstrates not only that the subjects are aware of the filmmakers, but that they can get in the way of the events they are trying to record.

Another technique this film uses is to show internally how the narration was created. The researcher and a group of Balinese are shown watching a scene on a VCR; one of the Balinese begins to explain the scene and then this commentary continues as the footage itself is shown. This technique serves to embody the voice-over, and to show how significant the subjects are in the process of making an ethnographic film. These examples of a few films show that interest of this type has been present in ethnographic film, but has not generally been the primary interest of practitioners of ethnographic film.

This is not to say that reflexivity is always effective, as its incorporation may prove to undermine what a film or video is attempting to demonstrate, or may be used to prove the authoritative stance of the filmmakers or to justify their role in creating a film or video. In the Millennium television series discussed above, the use of reflexivity, although occasionally enlightening, falls into these traps. Reflexivity is useful, even necessary, when it functions to call attention to the process of a product being made by specific producers (Fabian 1971). This does occur during *The Shock of the Other* (Grant and Meech 1991) in which the viewer sees the film crew arriving and is made aware of the impact so many people and so much equipment must have on the people they film. The viewer is also privy to a discussion in which the producers and Maybury-Lewis discuss the ethics of continuing to make contact with a "hidden" culture, in light of the government of Peru explicitly telling them not to do this.

The other type of "reflexivity" present in the series is that of long moments of the show's narrator, David Maybury-Lewis pondering his own existence and what he has and can learn from "tribal peoples." These sequences are not illuminating of the process of making the series but are rather skillfully staged and crafted sequences in which for the most part, even in very personal moments, Maybury-Lewis behaves as if he is not being filmed. This is not really reflexive at all, but rather reflective (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982: 3), and has the effect of contributing to an exoticization of anthropology itself. Aside from the first episode, the rest of the films in the series do not show the impact of the film crew on the stories being made. The characters still continue to act as if the camera was not present. Because the frame of the discourse is so tightly controlled, these reflective asides are not revealing and do not expose the underlying factors in play during the making of the series.

A similar criticism can be leveled at Dennis O'Rourke's *Good Woman of Bangkok* (1991) which, although a very personal film that shows a developing relationship between O'Rourke and a Thai prostitute, never goes far enough in investigating the role of O'Rourke. Although the viewer is aware of O'Rourke's presence as a white filmmaker, he is never implicated as belonging to the same type of power relationships of race and gender that have created the woman's situation.[17] The film portrays in quite a negative way the other white men who come for the availability of Thai women, both to gaze at and have sex with. O'Rourke presents his situation as different (although he certainly gazes at and presumably has sex with a Thai prostitute) because he is in love with her, as if love has the ability to transcend the fact that he comes from a situation of relative power and she from one of relative

[17] For a more postmodern critique of this film, see Rieker 1993.

helplessness. The end of the film goes further in vindicating O'Rourke. A brief epilogue conveys the information that even though O'Rourke tried to help her materially and offered to change her situation, the "good woman" again ends up working in the streets of Bangkok.

In order for reflexivity to be incorporated into ethnographic film in a meaningful way, a way that redresses the relationship between researcher and subject, it needs to be a reflexivity that shows an understanding of complex processes: those that brought about the situation in which a member of one culture is allowed to represent a member of another, but that the reverse is not true. Ethnographic films that situate the ethnographer/filmmaker as well as question her or his role in the representational process are few and far between. In ethnographic filmmaking reflexivity may necessitate giving the camera to the subjects and allowing them to film their interpretation of the interaction. This would involve "a filmmaker putting himself at the disposal of his subjects and, with them, inventing the film" (MacDougall 1975: 122). Twenty years ago David MacDougall wrote that this "possibility remains all but unexplored." This remains largely true today despite projects that have incorporated subject participation, because the researcher/ filmmakers are still not seen as characters in the same way as the subjects.

By putting themselves at the disposal of those they wish to film, collaborative ethnographic filmmakers demonstrate they are willing to enter into a relationship with the subjects contributing as participants. To demonstrate this relationship and their role in it means the filmmakers have to be willing to relinquish a certain amount of control over the process and product. Ruby (1991) argues that "films of shared authority...must be reflexive if they are to be understood as the radical departure implied by the term" (56).

This is required so that the aspects that constitute a complex collaborative project can begin to be understood.

If, as MacDougall suggests, the most ethnographic film can hope for (and the best that it can do) is to portray cultural interaction, than the presence of the researcher/filmmaker is an indispensable part of the product. Allowing the filmmaker to become a part of the film also implies that for at least part of the time the technology of filmmaking will pass through the hands of the "subjects," making them into participants in the research process. People working towards creating their own representations of themselves and their cultures is termed "indigenous media" and is having a large impact on the theory and practice of ethnographic film.

Alternative directions for ethnographic film

The term indigenous media refers to the local production of media - television, radio, newspapers, films and video - by aboriginal groups, in contrast to media imported from the dominant culture.[18] In this thesis, as is typical in visual anthropology literature, I will be referring specifically to visual media unless otherwise indicated. The idea that people can represent themselves is a growing concern for visual anthropology. The Fall 1991 issue of *Visual Anthropology Review* had several articles devoted to the study of indigenous media, including case-study examples from the Kayapo (Turner 1991) and the Yanamamo (Asch 1991). Other than South America, the main culture areas in which indigenous media have received attention are Australia (Michaels 1987; Ginsburg 1991) and the Canadian north (Stenbaek

[18] The term "indigenous media" has been criticized for implicitly marginalizing media made by third and fourth world peoples from that made by more industrialized countries and "mainstream" media.

1988; Roth and Valaskakis 1989). Of primary interest for this thesis are not indigenous media, however, but the impact the presence of such media has for visual ethnography.

What indigenous media represent are the idea that people of all different cultural backgrounds are capable, given a minimal amount of technical input, of creating their own visual representations: the medium is indeed the message. They don't need "us" to represent "them" anymore. This development has been made possible because of the proliferation of communications technology, which has two main aspects: one, that societies in control of the technology are now able to reach, electronically at least, the most remote parts of the world, and two, that the most remote parts of the world are able, in a limited sense, to reach others, or at least to reach themselves. If this technological proliferation has been seen as yet another means of cultural destruction, indigenous media has been seen as a key to cultural survival.

Certain critiques have been leveled at indigenous media (Nichols 1991; Ruby 1991), warning of the dangers that lurk behind the microphones and cameras, but one question in particular is compelling - where does it leave the researcher and filmmaker? What is the appropriate role for ethnographic film? In certain instances, the possibility of collaborative ethnographic film (collaborative in the sense of involving people of differing backgrounds) has been raised as an interesting, although potentially problematic, possibility. Ruby (1991) even goes so far as to assert, "It may be that films of shared authority are an impossibility" (57). If this is true it calls into question the validity of any collaborative visual ethnography, and this needs to be given serious consideration.

Ruby maintains that "cooperative ventures turn into collaborations when filmmakers and subjects mutually determine the content and shape of the film," and "For a production to be truly collaborative the parties involved must be equal in their competencies or have achieved an equitable division of labor" (ibid: 56). He then suggests certain criteria for "judging" a film's collaborativeness. While there is value in delineating ways to examine collaborative projects (and is one of the purposes of this thesis), Ruby's standard of having parties equal in competence is problematic. By what criteria does one judge equal competency? Even if this condition is met, it does not insure that all participants are equally motivated or are contributing equally. Also, as Ruby suggests, if everyone is equal, there is little reason to work together in the first place. The second aspect that Ruby suggests, "an equitable division of labor," provides a firmer base from which to begin to think about collaborative ethnography in practical terms.

How is this equitable division reached? What factors need to be present for collaborative ethnographic film to exist? It would need to involve entering into a relationship with the participants, it would have to be guided by strong ethical considerations about the creation and use of images, and it would necessarily have to be reflexive. Working out a collaborative relationship is, in each instance, an individual proposition.

The most significant problem of entering into projects of this sort is posed by Nichols (1991):

> How can dialogism, polyvocality, heteroglossia and reflexivity avoid the fundamental rebuke of sustaining hierarchical relations and minimizing use-value to others when the questions, technologies and strategies are so heavily of 'our' own devising? (38).

Obviously no simple answer exists to this question. Any proposal that is devised by Western researchers, whether anthropologists or filmmakers, comes up against a fundamental problem: WE are still looking for ways, no matter how "participatory," to look at THEM. This compounds the similarly complex problems of the role of the audience in consuming and interpreting images, as well as questions regarding the nature of the filmic image and how to translate visual meanings across cultures. With specific regard to collaborative visual ethnography, the solution may lie in the complex process of negotiating a relationship among people of different backgrounds with a specific, shared goal. Nichols (1991) suggests that "hierarchical structures designed for the extraction of knowledge...might yield to more fully personal, participatory encounters" (39), and that this might be accomplished in visual anthropology through a "reorientation toward questions of form and their inextricable relation to experience, affect, content, purpose and result" (40). Taking collaboration as a starting point for fieldwork, rather than as a result of decisions of presentation style, can provide this reorientation.

Political issues of collaborative visual ethnography

That filmmakers, merely by their control of the technology, have the power to control the temporal placement of the subject is usually not made explicit in ethnographic films, as often no evidence of the filmmakers can be glimpsed. This raises troubling political questions. When subjects are symbolically distanced from the "modern" world, they not only become candidates for modernization and "development," but are also removed from having control over contemporary issues such as land claims or mineral rights. This connection between political considerations and temporal

distancing is made by Fabian (1983), who describes it as a way to remove people in time that cannot be removed in space, leaving natives open for conquest and occupation. This is true even for ethnographic film, although it has been thought of as a "neutral" medium.

A case is growing for the necessity of allowing subjects of films to be given access to the means of representation. As Fabian (1983), among others, has stated "knowledge is power" and to deny people the right to produce their own knowledge not only is politically "incorrect," it leads to representations that cannot produce a picture of a culture from the inside - which has always been one of the goals of anthropology. Holaday (1991) makes this case even stronger:

> For them [thousands of marginalized communities, the traditional subjects of anthropological investigation], it is a matter of physical and cultural survival to be able to present themselves and their views to those whose decisions affect their environment, their lives and their cultures (4).

This view takes the act of representation as a *political* act, one that affects the subject as well as the researcher. This can be interpreted as leaving no room for the researcher, but a more realistic approach involves the researcher/filmmaker and subject/filmmaker working together with each other's different strengths and resources on projects that can be of benefit to all sides.

This approach may sound idealistic, but actually builds on the relationship already in place between anthropologists and subjects. In the field, the anthropologist needs the subjects (informants) and is in fact entirely dependent on them. In addition to providing the raw material for the researcher's study, the subjects also provide food, shelter, and various other

types of assistance. In return, the researcher draws upon her or his resources to compensate the subject with occasional monetary remuneration, the use of a vehicle, first aid assistance and the like. This type of relationship is well documented in literature on field work (Lawless 1982; Stocking 1983). Collaborative ethnography makes this relationship explicit, and seeks to understand it as an important aspect of the study.

Fabian (1983) has criticized anthropology's "schizogenic use of time" (35). In doing so he identifies an important paradox in anthropological practice: the reality of the field experience contrasted with the writing of an ethnography. Fabian claims that the "experiential" noise of fieldwork that is so important to the life and work of the fieldworker is routinely left out of ethnographies. In the field, the anthropologist exists in the same time as his or her subjects, back home the ethnographer does not. Collaborative ethnography has as its basis the idea that the ethnographer and the subject inhabit a shared world. In fact, the line between ethnographer and subject becomes blurred as a space of interaction opens up and is explored. Exploring this space should be to the benefit of all participants, and should result in new representations of both cultural similarities and difference.

This is the point at which ethnographic film finds itself now. The old methods of representation, of "invisibility and omniscience" are no longer appropriate. The factors are in place which can transform ethnographic film into a dynamic medium for communication across and within cultures. Film and video, with their sensory immediacy and growing accessibility, are uniquely positioned to contribute to anthropology's growth as a discipline. The collapse of barriers between subject and filmmaker presents an array of possibilities for ethnographic film, including the coproduction of visual texts with multi-layers of cultural meaning. This chapter has just touched upon a

few examples of how ethnographic film can be manipulated in certain cases to create an innovative project, and how it can be used to create a new space in which the filmmaker and the subject (as well as the audience) interact.

In an attempt to explore this space, I designed a project with the intent of working collaboratively with entrepreneurs in the Comoros Islands to create a video, the purpose of which is to express their concerns as businessmen in a developing country. The results of this project were this thesis, the accompanying video, *We Lead and Others Follow: Studies of Enterprise in the Comoros* (Folkerth and White 1993), and an increased awareness of the constraints and complexities of the collaborative process. The following chapter will present a brief summary of the video and the project, and the final chapter will create a framework for approaching collaborative projects using both my own experience and those of other film and video makers as well.

Chapter III: Collaboration in the Comoros

The previous chapter suggested the theoretical basis and ethical importance of developing collaborative modes of visual ethnography. Exploring these ideas in a practical setting is another matter, however, and I structured my Masters research to address the lack of literature that makes explicit what it has meant to be collaborative in particular instances. This study cannot be assumed to be representative of all collaborative projects, but it can provide a potentially illuminating example of the collaborative process in a particular setting. It presents specific ideas that are addressed more generally in the final chapter. The tone of this chapter is more informal than the previous ones, reflecting both the field experience and the way it was captured in my notes.

The fieldwork for the study was conducted during a month's stay in the Comoros Islands off the coast of East Africa. The Comoros are an autonomous Islamic nation, having received their independence from France in 1975. The economy of the islands, historically based on a combination of fishing, farming, and trading, has recently become more dependent on the export of a few cash crops including ylang ylang and vanilla (White 1993; Ottenheimer 1985). The country has experienced much economic and political upheaval in recent years, and has become an arena for development projects, including an IMF - World Bank structural adjustment program. Many innovations are being introduced to the local economy, and Comorians are being increasingly exposed to different kinds of media. The Comoros provided a good location to explore my interest in facilitating the creation of a participatory video, one which addressed development concerns from an indigenous standpoint.

Another important factor in my choice of the Comoros as a research site was my personal collaboration with Bob White, a fellow graduate student at McGill University. Bob's specialization is economic anthropology, and he served for two years with the Peace Corps in the Comoros, where he became familiar with the culture and fluent in the language. For his Master's research, Bob looked at entrepreneurs in the development context of the Comoros,[19] and we share an interest in anthropological representation, particularly the representation of African people. We decided to approach funding sources as a team, and were able to obtain funding from a variety a sources,[20] primarily on the stipulation that we would deliver a video suitable for classroom use that portrayed small-scale entrepreneurs in Africa.

The project was thus shaped by several significant and occasionally conflicting concerns: 1) The need to achieve a rapport with each of the participants, all of whom were involved in Bob's research. It was necessary that this be accomplished in a short span of time, and that all the participants have a good understanding of the project in order for them to become involved in its construction. 2) My need to take notes and study the collaboration process as it occurred, to obtain data for my proposed thesis. 3) The need to create a video that was suitable for presentation to our funders, who had culturally specific ideas of what form this may take. This project was not as collaborative as it might have been, given more time and an independent funding base. It was, however, a practical experiment with theoretical ideas that have been developed in this thesis, and can demonstrate instances in which collaboration was successful as well as those times in which communication never quite seemed to be achieved.

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19 For more on this topic, see White 1993.

20 These funding sources are acknowledged in the video credits and include the Zeller Foundation, McGill Associates, and the Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies.

I will present examples of collaboration as they occurred during the Comorian project to illustrate issues of collaborative visual ethnography as they became apparent to me.[21] I use the context of the video because it was the purpose of the project, and because it shows the final results of the process of negotiation. In reviewing this chapter, it is important to keep in mind that what is being presented is fragmentary. They are fragments that have been selected to stand for the whole in as representative a way as possible, but fragments nonetheless. I present my involvement with the participants to the extent that it shaped both the content and form of the video as well as my understandings of what it means to be collaborative. My project description, therefore, is potentially useful but incomplete.

The video, *We Lead and Others Follow* (1993), is thirty-eight minutes long. It is divided into an Introduction and three sections, with each section presenting one entrepreneur's story. The three entrepreneurs are (in order of appearance): Mabuku, a fisherman who recently began transporting and selling fish in mountain villages; Fuad, the principal instructor and founder of the Comoros' first private English school; and Cheikh, who is involved in many businesses and who started the Comoros' first private radio station. Bob is seen and heard in the video quite frequently, and my voice or image is also in each section. The video is in French, Comorian and English, and subtitled in English.

Altogether, almost sixteen hours of footage was shot in the Comoros. Two of the participants were based in Moroni, the capital city, and the other in Shindini, a small fishing village. My estimate is that at least seventy-five

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[21] It was my hope that this thesis could integrate the written and visual aspects of the project, using both unedited footage and the edited video. As the technology needed for this is not widely available currently, I will need to use written words which are inherently inadequate to describe the complex nature of video footage.

percent of the footage was taped by myself. Bob occasionally shot footage, sometimes when I was not present, and the camera was handled by each of the participants at least once, a part of the process which will be discussed in more detail below. I took notes after almost every filming situation about both what had occurred during that specific shoot and my ideas about the collaborative process. I began the editing process in the field by reviewing tapes in the camera, recording details of the footage in my notebook, and taking notes on the entire process. This influenced my feeling about how the project was going and what steps we needed to take to fulfill all our obligations.

The majority of the editing occurred in Montréal following our return from the Comoros, and both Bob and I were involved in every aspect. This process involved minutely logging the footage, (recording the audio and visual aspects of each scene, as well as the time they occur), and taking note of what might be potentially interesting for the video. I also took notes on aspects I remembered about the process of shooting the video, as well as comments on collaborative videotaping in general. We both identified portions that we were interested in seeing again or thought might be appropriate for the video, and eventually assembled a rough-edit of the video that was approximately an hour and twenty minutes long.

This process took nine months, and was accomplished either at our homes or through the Instructional Communications Centre at McGill. Then, using the rough edit and our notes, we created a story board containing all of the sound and visual scenes and cuts. Next, we rented a professional quality video editing machine, which we took to Bob's or used in the editing studio. Preceding this, Bob and our friend Mohammed, a native Comorian, translated all the dialogue that was either French or Comorian into English.

Bob and I reviewed the translations and tried to make them as concise as possible without losing meaning. This process continued during the writing of the subtitles, which was the penultimate step; the last step was the creation of the titles for the video itself. The final editing took a month with a few days on and a few days off, depending on the health of our minds and our finances.

This provides a blanket view of aspects of the video creation that were controlled by myself, or by myself and Bob. Within these rather restrictive parameters the participants were encouraged to become involved in the process during the time I was in the field. Each participant had the project described to him in essentially the same way, and I was very up-front in explaining the constraints on the project, the expectations of the funding sources, and my understanding of potential audiences for the film, which included students and professors of anthropology and business. I told each participant I was interested in his ideas for the form and content of the video, and had many conversations with them concerning their suggestions, both before and during the taping process.

It is difficult to describe the collaboration entered into in this project in general terms, as each interaction was unique to the particular person we were working with, so the cases will be described following the format presented by the video.

The Introduction

The Introduction itself was not created collaboratively with the participants, but it explains our purpose and reflects our relationship with the entrepreneurs. The Introduction to the video was conceived as a way to let

people know our philosophical stance on the creation of the video, and at the same time to convey contextualizing ethnographic data. Immediately following the title, the viewer hears a male voice (Bob's, although he is not identified) over a black screen, situating itself: "Where I come from." This section was chosen because it tells the story of how the video was started, as actually presented to the people at the English Training Centre. Although it is not clearly identified in this manner, the viewing audience is provided with the same information as the participants.

In the first voice-over, the voice discusses the nature of the class system in the United States. By referring to the United States yet showing images of the Comoros, viewers' expectations are challenged about the nature of the images they are seeing, and about their possession of a privileged point from which to view another culture. The style mocks the travelogue/ ethnographic film motif that uses random images from a culture to represent the whole. These images are usually chosen for their exotic or picturesque content. The presentation of our "random" images (children playing on a beach, women dancing in a line, a lemur) is countered with a voice-over discussing various items related to the research and the video, rather than to the images themselves.

When the screen abruptly cuts to black after a moving shot of a mosque is shown, loud drumming is heard.[22] After a few moments of black, a screen containing basic demographic and ethnographic data is shown. The drumming continues through this and a subsequent black screen. During the next panel of images, the voice explains how the funding was obtained for the project, and how the head of the business school was willing to help us

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[22] Very loud, incidentally. We had trouble fixing the audio levels in this section and the drumming is rather startling when it begins.

because he was interested in learning about entrepreneurs in another culture. Again the visuals, a bush-taxi stand, children playing on the beach, a fisherman, do not "match" the words. The images are uncontextualized and unexplained. The children are apparently engaged in play fighting and the fisherman is yelling and gesturing to the camera. The "meaning" of this is not provided. The black space and the drumming start up again, and the informational screens provide further social and economic data about the Comoros.

The next section of voice-over and images explains problems with "our" field, anthropology. The voice-over suggests that filmmakers (like "Jennifer" for example) might go into an area and take footage of the wrong things or of things people might not want to be shown in public. Bob introduces the idea of "collaboration" and says that we want to see if collaboration is possible "If that's possible, we don't know." This provides a lead in for the second sequence of the Mabuku section in which I am seen sitting on a boat explaining that I'm not sure what we are supposed to be doing and that I am just going to wait and see what happens.

Mabuku

The collaboration with Mabuku was based on a very comfortable rapport that developed among Bob, Mabuku, and myself. We stayed at his house in a small fishing village while taping the scenes used in the video. Although his village has no electricity, Mabuku was not self-conscious about the use of the camera and unhesitatingly became involved in the project. Upon my initial meeting with Mabuku, when we approached him with the idea of collaboration, he responded very positively and said that it was better

to work with people than to try to tell them what to do. This theme is echoed in the video when he addresses development agencies at the end of his section by stating that it is important for communities to come up with their own solutions to problems they face.

Mabuku had no trouble coming up with ideas of what to tape, and he states this on camera: "The trip...the trip itself is very important.... and there's the waiting in the markets." He is referring to the trip of taking fish to the mountain villages and the subsequent waiting for customers, which he identified as the most important aspects of his business. We were also able to tape the arrival of the fish catch, although this was difficult to time correctly. In editing the fish boat coming in and Mabuku's subsequent arrival, we tried to recreate the feeling we had that Mabuku was obviously the most important person involved in the business, although he works collectively with several other fishermen.

Mabuku was specific about the logistics of the taping as well. Recording the fish distribution meant shooting footage in small mountain villages in which the sight of white people occasionally created quite a spectacle. Mabuku told me that if anyone was curious about my presence with the camera to say that I was taping the fish tour for him. He also said I should not tape anything other than the actual waiting in the markets and the selling of the fish. In other words, that it would not be appropriate to shoot for general ethnographic material. I did this, and it is reflected in the section being rather narrowly about Mabuku and his business, rather than an exploration of wider aspects of Comorian culture.

Mabuku was consistently very open and expansive about his business, and paid great attention to explaining his vision of the enterprise in which he was engaged. He seemed to welcome the opportunity to speak to an outside

audience, and did so specifically at the end of the section in response to a question by Bob: "What image or message of the Comoros would you like to give to outsiders?" He chose to speak particularly to those involved in aid and development programs, and urges them to incorporate communities in planning programs so that the communities can create "Solutions...to their own problems."

Mabuku also had an idea of the video providing a lasting document that could be shown to his children and grandchildren.[23] Our presence provided him with a large measure of prestige in his village, which is significant for his position as a potential future community leader. Because he relies to a large measure on the goodwill of his own community and those that he visits to maintain his livelihood, our presence could translate into more practical benefits for him as well. During the course of our stay Bob and I had the opportunity to accompany (video camera in hand) the vice-consul of the American embassy on a visit to Mabuku's village to discuss the funding of a generator which would provide the village with much wanted electricity.[24] Although our association with Mabuku and our presence on this visit were coincidental, Mabuku received credit from his fellow villagers for bringing an important presence to the village. This again illustrates the local political issues that can be affected inadvertently through a project of this sort.

Subjectively, our experience with Mabuku came closest to capturing what I would describe as the spirit of collaboration. We had respect for each other's ideas, friction was kept to a minimum, and decisions were arrived at through an understanding of our personal relationships. We were decidedly

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[23] All the participants were provided with copies of the completed video, as well as Bob's thesis.

[24] In retrospect it would have been much more interesting to have Mabuku tape our visit to the village, but unfortunately this did not occur to me at the time.

more dependent on Mabuku and his family's hospitality than he was on us, but he was able to perceive enough benefits from the project for him to commit, for a short period of time at least, a large share of his precious time and energy to it. This relationship was continued outside of the context of the project, as Bob and I also interacted socially with Mabuku and his wife.

English Training Centre

This example provides an interesting twist on the idea of collaboration. We did certainly work with Fuad, principal instructor for the English Training Centre (ETC) about ideas for creating the video, but I'm still not sure if we were ever working on the same project. Fuad was willing to collaborate with us to the extent that he was open to our suggestions and answered our questions, but he never really demonstrated significant interest or involvement in the project. I think this was because although he did see some benefit into entering into a relationship with us, he did not see how the video itself could benefit him, either directly or indirectly.

In return for our taping aspects of the business and attempting to elicit proposals for the project from him, Fuad expected Bob and I to use resources at our disposal to help him with his business. This was not made explicit, but through our conversations it became clear that his expectations included a range of aid from translation assistance and guest lecturing (expectations which Bob easily fulfilled) to helping obtain audio-visual equipment and tapes for the Centre (less easy to fulfill). In other words, we were collaborating with each other, but not always specifically about the video project.

This is not to say that Fuad had no ideas for the subject of the video. He was interested in showing business people in Canada that in the Comoros

it was possible to start a business with extremely limited resources, an idea he felt would surprise them.[25] This was revealed in response to direct questions from me about what he would make a video about for Canadian entrepreneurs, if he was given the opportunity. His interest in this issue is reflected in the video, particularly in a scene in which he provides a tour of the school and points out their limited materials and where they came from. He says: "In the beginning we had nothing...not even the house." He did not, however, suggest ways to show this or use this idea as a starting place from which to develop further ideas for the video.

Fuad also encouraged us to tape the "ETC academic tour," which was appealing to us because of the visual elements involved. The academic tour was an idea Fuad had to take a group of his students around Moroni and teach them English in a practical setting. This idea combined pedagogical content with a way to advertise the existence of the school. Although the idea was Fuad's, it's likely that it would not have occurred if Bob and I had not been willing to help organize it and provide the funding for the vehicle. Fuad was involved in the planning, however, and it was his idea to place a prominent "English Training Centre" sign on the back of the truck we rented.

The presence of the camera (and the white people) added a sense of drama to the event which certainly did attract attention to the school.[26] In this instance, it's hard to separate the event of the academic tour itself from the event of taping the academic tour. Is it possible to tape something with an observational style if that event most likely would not be occurring without

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[25] During the taping of one of Fuad's lectures the class was curtailed by one of the frequent power black-outs. Capturing this on tape provided a dramatic illustration of the types of problems that small-businessmen in this context have to face.

[26] This can be seen in the video during the scenes of the academic tour in which people turn and look at the truck and occasionally yell at the camera. When I mentioned to Fuad (from behind the camera) that people apparently do not like being filmed here, he said "oh they are just joking," although it was apparent to me they were not.

the camera present? It is possible that we went too far instigating action to tape, although it was an idea that Fuad came up with himself, and which ultimately was to his benefit by providing him with a free forum with which to test his ideas for the tour.

Fuad also benefited from the presence of Bob and me as we became involved with aspects of the school, and provided exposure for the school in this way. Bob was able to lend his expertise as an English instructor, and I taped lectures for Fuad to potentially use as a teaching tool, although he did not have the necessary equipment to do this. This last point brings up the issue of our accountability to the participants. If part of Fuad's willingness to participate in the project was his expectation, explicit or not, that he would reap material benefits, how obligated are we to provide those benefits? In this particular case we had no choice; we had no way of providing the school with audio-visual equipment other than making pedagogical tapes and I feel we made that clear. It can also be rationalized in this case that Fuad did, in various ways, gain from his experience of working with us. Still, I felt the issue of expectations was never appropriately resolved and that it got in the way of Fuad becoming more involved with the video.

Tropic FM

The fact that Cheikh was in control of the video process is apparent in the first scene of his segment, in which he directs me to tape the antenna and that is the next thing that is shown. Our collaboration with Cheikh was, again, different than our experiences with the other participants. Although I never felt truly comfortable with Cheikh and it was difficult for me to understand his rapid French, he definitely had no problem giving us

suggestions for the video. It is less clear in Cheikh's case what he expected to gain from the experience, although in Moroni Cheikh is a well-known and wealthy man and perhaps being in a video seemed to him an appropriate reflection of his position. It is a comment on the nature of my data collection as well as our personal relationship; which although friendly was somewhat restrained, that I don't have a clearer idea of his expectations.

Cheikh is a man very much in control, and also one who is aware of his image and position. He was happy to have us interview him, was willing to discuss aspects of his personal history in front of the camera (even those that had caused him legal trouble), and showed us around his radio station. He did not want to participate in scenes that were too spontaneous or that might take up too much of his time. For example, as Bob explains in the video, Bob had an idea to film him on his way do various errands and Cheikh said no. He also didn't allow us to tape him in action on a business day, meeting with various people. He did give us access to his businesses, however, and encouraged us to tape scenes at his video store and nightclub for example.

Although our experience with Cheikh was much more like following in his wake than marching arm in arm, it was collaborative in the sense that it was completely shaped by his experiences and wishes, as well as by his schedule. Cheikh was very comfortable with the camera, more so than the other participants, and became involved with the technical aspects of sound and lighting. Before we taped scenes he would confer with us to make sure that the camera angle was a good one, and that conversations were audible. One time he stopped in the middle of an interview because a light was blinking on the camera and he wanted to make sure this didn't signify some

one of these scenes provides the voice-over for the credits at the end of the video.

The collaborative experience with Cheikh was very professional. He had a limited amount of time to spend on the project and wanted to make sure that this time was well used. The expectations we had about the project were clearly indicated, and within certain parameters he set he was willing to assist us in recording his story. Our experience with Cheikh indicates that as long as relations are cordial amongst participants and people are able to express their ideas, the process doesn't have to be one of discussing every small aspect but rather of each person knowing her or his place and filling the appropriate role.

A general note about the feedback process

One aspect of the study that in retrospect should have been more emphasized was the participants' access to footage that had already been taped and their subsequent responses. They did occasionally view footage, but this was not done in a systematic fashion, nor were their comments recorded, other than in a general way. There were, of course, on-going discussions about the research process, both informally and during conversations designed specifically to talk about research. For a project to maintain a high degree of participation, however, this aspect cannot be ignored. Even if editing cannot be done in the field, most video cameras are equipped with a playback mode that allows one to view footage in the camera. This, combined with a small set of headphones we rigged up, allowed the participants to see and hear themselves, albeit in a small black and white picture.

If this had been used in a more deliberate manner, I would have been able to gauge not only the participants' response to the footage that had been taped, but also how this affected their feelings for the project and the directions in which it should go. When I viewed footage, I would often have ideas for other scenes, or for things I thought should be incorporated or re-shot, if possible. If all the participants had access to this, discussion could be stimulated concerning the nature of the project. This could prove to be a valuable tool, both for ensuring the project is participatory and for keeping peoples' interest high while scenes are being taped.

Concluding remarks

Although our project was not ideally collaborative, it does provide an example of one approach to collaborative visual ethnography. We were operating within considerable constraints, but the subjects' willingness to become involved in the project indicates the likelihood for more successful projects along the lines suggested here. Having a combination of a written record of a project and the visual material of a video creates a way to begin to assess the feasibility of collaborative projects. More written descriptions of film and video projects need to be produced so that people can begin to think systematically about ethnographic collaboration. In addition to the issues that are discussed in the above chapter, several questions rose out of this research that suggested the possibility for constructing a framework through which to approach collaborative visual ethnography. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter IV: The practice of collaborative visual ethnography

My experience with this constrained collaborative project demonstrated to me the many complexities of working collaboratively which are not addressed in the literature. Though I could not have been aware of many of these factors before entering the field, they became apparent to me as I worked, so that an important part of the process was learning about collaboration as I went along. If an understanding of the collaborative process can be made more systematic, researchers can begin to learn from each other's experiences, rather than confront similar problems as if for the first time. This chapter takes this idea as a guiding principle, and uses my own and others' experiences to construct a framework for approaching collaboration. The importance of developing a basis for cross-cultural understanding, the significance of the audience, and potential sites of resistance are examples of topics that need to be addressed to gain a comprehensive understanding of collaborative projects.

Jay Ruby (1991) has suggested the terms "cooperative" and "collaborative" to distinguish projects that are subject-generated and participatory from those that merely ask the approval of the subjects. Rather than this either/or construction, I suggest that collaborative projects can be placed on a continuum, from one extreme of subject involvement to another. In many cases if lengthy passages from a participant are included, the work is considered collaborative, yet the ethnographer still controls the frame and discourse, the form the project takes, and its distribution. Ideally, for a project to be truly collaborative all the participants will have contributed to generating the idea, shaping the form and content, and deciding on a means and method for distributing the final product. This is difficult even in the

best of circumstances however, and many projects that attempt to involve the subjects as participants are unable to meet all these criteria. An understanding of the constraints that are faced by people who attempt collaborative projects can help shed light on the complex factors inherent in endeavors of this sort.

Information available on collaborative visual ethnography is from a small number of articles written about film and video projects by the filmmakers or others, and usually these articles are not written specifically to address the nature of the collaboration. For the most part this discussion will focus on the times the authors have felt that a particular approach seemed to work. The accounts are one-sided, from the point of view of the researcher. I know of no reports of collaborative ventures written from the point of view of those that have been collaborated with, from the subject position. Still, the information that is provided can help point to directions that collaborative projects might take.

It is difficult to get information on the extent to which filmmakers incorporate the subjects of their films into the production process. The act of making a film always requires a certain degree of collaboration, regardless of whether this is a specific goal of the filmmakers. Jay Ruby (1991) has pointed out:

> Most of what I know about cooperative, community and collaborative films is the result of personal contact with makers or hearing them discuss their work at a festival or seminar. Without more concrete information the notion of sharing authority remains more of a politically correct fantasy than a field-tested actuality (56).

Still, in certain instances, filmmakers have strived to involve their subjects or have in other ways explored the boundaries of ethnographic film, and have

made these efforts public. These practitioners have played with the notion of "ethnographic" film by paying attention to film as cinema and by recognizing the potential of this medium as its own mode of ethnography.

Because there is no preexisting paradigm with which to discuss collaborative projects, authors have chosen various ways to reflect upon their projects, each of which provides fragmentary evidence about the aspects of a collaborative venture. This section draws from these studies, as well as the author's own experience, to suggest a generalized framework from which collaborative visual ethnography can be approached. This framework is a loose one, but it is designed to point to areas that are potentially of concern in collaborative projects. Even a cursory look at projects that purposefully involve the subjects in their production demonstrates the great number of factors that need to be considered in a collaborative project. Promoting an awareness of these complexities is the goal of this section.

Three main phases of the collaborative process have been identified, each roughly corresponding with a chronological time period. These phases are: first, the expectations phase involving negotiations and planning; second, the action phase, which includes the actual scripting, taping, and editing; and third, the completion phase, in which the product is distributed, and any other results of the project (groups, etc.) are either continued or disbanded. In practice, these categories overlap, as negotiations are a continual process and some filming may have already begun with the early discussions, (in fact this type of experimentation may prove an impetus for projects), but for analytical purposes these aspects are correlated with general temporal phases.

In addition to my own study, I have examined six cases of film or video projects in which something is known about the nature of the collaborative process. These will be used to illustrate specific issues I raise of concern when

constructing a collaborative framework. A brief synopsis of each will introduce the project and provide some relevant information.

The Navajo Film Project (NFT) was mentioned in the history section and is described in the book *Through Navajo Eyes* (Worth and Adair 1972). This study provides an excellent record of Worth and Adair's efforts to be sensitive to the cultural milieu in which they were working and to take steps to create a comfortable and participatory work environment. It also chronicles the times in which their efforts were less successful, and these examples are helpful as well.

Sabine Jell-Bahlsen (1991) writes of making the film *Mammy Water* (1989) as a collaborative experience. The choice of subject (a particular set of women's rituals in Nigeria) was Jell-Bahlsen's and arose out of her fieldwork interests, but she says the shaping of the film was done collectively, due to other peoples' interest in the film. She points out the choice of subject matter determined the audience for the film, because people in the United States were not interested and people in Nigeria were. She expands this idea: "The choice of subject, then, is the crucial point where we decide for whom we are making a film - this, in turn, determines not only the style of film, but also its chances of getting funded" (Jell-Bahlsen 1991: 25). Her example demonstrates how every aspect of a project is interrelated and how input from various people can take a project into different directions from those originally intended.

Terence Turner is an anthropologist who has worked for several years with the Kayapo of central Brazil, a group that has become well known for their use of visual media, with which they document aspects of their culture as well as record political events. The Kayapo use video strategically and recognize the importance and impact of the image of themselves in native

dress documenting their confrontations with the government and members of the media. In a 1991 article, Turner discusses his involvement with the use of media by the Kayapo, and the mechanisms the Kayapo used to plan and execute a video project.

A case study of participatory video is provided by Tomaselli and Lazerus (1989) who describe their "facilitative approach." This is an example of a highly collaborative and very localized project that is deeply affected by its South African context. The video arose from members of a local community organization approaching a culture and media group at a university to record their upcoming Cultural Day. The video was intended for organizational and educational purposes. A video team was put together made up of four people from the university group and two student members of the community organization, who worked together on all aspects of video production.

An example of a collaborative project that was not very collaborative in practice was a session at the 1991 American Anthropology Association conference titled "Video of and for American Indians: Toward Collaborative Visual Ethnography" at which both University of Southern California student filmmakers and a Lakota woman were present. In a short presentation before the film, the Lakota woman explained that she had invited the filmmakers, with whom she has a personal relationship, to film a naming ceremony she was planning for her children and grandchildren. The film itself was interminable. It contained so much footage that before the actual naming ceremony was shown, most of the audience had left. In spite of this, very little of the video was devoted to explaining the personal and cultural significance such a ceremony had for the Lakota. That this could be used as an example of collaboration shows the wide range of projects this term can encompass.

An example of a collaborative project with a very interesting dynamic is provided by Igloolik Isuma Productions, a video production unit based in the Northwest Territories. Zacharias Kunuk and Paloussie Quilitalik are two Inuit who began making videos to reconstruct certain elements of their culture. Norman Cohn, an independent videomaker, was intrigued by their video style and approached them about working together. Cohn now lives full-time in Igloolik and acts as cameraman for the team. In addition to being collaborative in the sense of people with different cultures and backgrounds working together, the videos are collectively based within the community. The director, Zach Kanuk, is also a leading player in the videos, and members of the community have the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of production (personal communication, Norman Cohn).

The first phase: Expectations

During the first phase, that of "expectations," it is crucial that all the participants attempt to come to an understanding about concrete aspects of the project. This is the phase in which planning takes place. This does not mean that all the participants have to agree; many decisions can be worked out theoretically only so far and will require practical experience to resolve them, but it is important for those involved to discuss their visions of the proposed project and to begin to negotiate these in relation to each other. Many issues will be raised as questions that can only be answered when the following phase, that of action, begins.

In order to start out in a way that would make things the most participatory, ideally the project would be generated by a host community (see MacBean (1983) on *Two Laws*, for example) or through the researcher and a

participant developing the idea together. It is not so unusual to expect that, given a researcher arriving in a community with a video recorder, someone would suggest a way to make use of it, without too much interference. Barring this, we must still assume that a collaborative project is possible, even if the researcher approaches a community or individual with the idea of making a film or video. The way the community is approached can have a significant impact on the process. Worth and Adair relied on Adair's previous fieldwork experiences among the Navajo to propose the project to the community before proceeding, and to let the community decide who would participate. The community in turn was supportive, provided a school to serve as project headquarters, and helped procure some of the funding.

This preliminary phase incorporates several aspects important both to the project itself and to a study of collaboration. One aspect that may influence all further negotiations is the manner in which the initial idea is constructed and expressed, and special attention should be paid to this process. All participants need to have a reason to become involved in a project, or it is likely their interest will wane once the novelty of a new idea wears off. In order to be motivated, participants need to have a clear understanding of personal or community benefits they may derive from the project and a personal commitment to see it through to its conclusion. Using an example from my own study, it was never quite clear exactly what benefit Fuad at the English Training Centre saw in the project itself. Because of this, he never became deeply involved in the project, although he did cooperate fully with us. If all action is at the instigation of the researcher, the project will never be truly collaborative and probably won't withstand the real work necessary to create a film or video.

An example of expectations not converging but films still being produced is provided by the NFT project. Worth and Adair's expectations of the films were very different from that of the students. Worth and Adair saw the films and the process of making them as suggesting an underlying Navajo way of seeing and experiencing the world. The students were just curious about how to make films and their motivation to become involved in the project was based on this and the fact they were getting paid for their participation. The films were an end in themselves for the Navajo students; the researchers saw them as part of an on-going larger discussion on the nature of meaning and image in culture.

Once the idea has been initiated and a commitment made by the participants and the researcher, the field is open for all participants to become involved and to make suggestions. All stages of the project need to be considered, including three aspects of the film or video making process that should be discussed by all parties. These aspects are: the mechanisms of the decision-making process, the format of the production, and the intended purpose and audience for the final product.

The question of how decisions regarding the group can be made consensually and fairly is extremely important. Is the project to be inclusionary or exclusionary? Who may become involved? What type of regulatory system will coordinate all phases of the project and keep things running smoothly? What is the community experience with collective decision making? Is the project small enough that only a few people can be responsible for all aspects? If not, some sort of system will need to be created for arriving at group decisions and allocating available resources.

Questions will arise as to whose story is being told and how this is influenced by the power relations within the group and community. The

researcher may have a specific, possibly subaltern group in mind to work with, but in reality this may prove difficult to arrange. A system of hierarchy with regard to decision making based on factors such as age, status and gender may already be in place in a community. Of course, relations between people will always be influenced by factors such as these and hierarchies may develop in even the smallest of groups. It is the influence of these factors on the decision-making process of which the researcher needs to be aware.

Sometimes the ideals of the researcher and the other participants may be at odds and the researcher's expectations will be changed. Turner (1991) initially describes the Kayapo Video Project (KVP), which he helped to found and procure funding for, as "an optimal way of simultaneously satisfying indigenist, theoretical and general political goals" (72). In this as well as previous Kayapo contacts with video, politically prominent Kayapo took the initiative in conceiving of the project and acquiring equipment, using Turner as a resource person. Turner envisioned a video project that would influence the creation of an up-and-coming generation of socially responsible leaders. What he found in practice, however, was that certain individuals had appropriated community video equipment to serve their own personal aims. In cases where equipment was truly communal, like the village television and monitor, the up-keep was difficult to organize, and even a small repair bill went unpaid for months.

Another aspect to be considered is the format of the production. What type of story is going to be told? Is it to be scripted or "observational"? What are the cultural understandings of fiction and non-fiction? Are there indigenous forms of story-telling that might be expressed? A non-fiction film or video might require more investment by the participants in terms of scripting, props, costumes and the like. Different cultures have different ideas

as to what constitutes a fictional account; certain types of knowledge or storytelling may only be appropriate for particular occasions. These assumptions will have to be brought into the open before planning can take place.

A third aspect to be considered in the expectations phase involves questions of audience and intent. The audience for which the final product is intended may be one of the single most important considerations. Is it going to be made for the community, an external audience, or both? It is important that all parties have a similar understanding of the intended audience or participants may find themselves working toward different ends. Who constitutes an external community that may be interested in the video? Development agencies or government officials? Some sort of general "public" interested in ethnographic issues? How does this influence the planning of the project? Is it possible and desirable to reach a variety of audiences? What is the purpose of the final product? Is it to provide a historical record? Document a land-claims case? Record a popular legend? These questions are intertwined but crucial to any project.

All aspects of negotiation provide sites where a multiplicity of expectations and understandings can be expressed. These situations provide an opportunity for the researcher to review her or his own expectations and assumptions regarding the project, and to evaluate the extent to which she or he has been directing the project up to this point. It may result in the researcher relinquishing control over the situation, to the extent to which this is possible. It is important for the researcher and the participants to be clear about the extent of each others' participation. Tim Asch, in a collaborative project with some Venezuelan researchers went so far as to sign a written contract, stipulating the "terms of [the] endeavor: the specifics of how the

budget would be allocated, and what roles we would each perform" (Asch 1991). In any case, if the researcher is serious about the value of collaboration, she or he needs to be willing and open when entering into a relationship with the participants, and also needs to be sensitive to potential areas of conflict.

One potential area of conflict is the question of a culturally specific filmic style, and for whom it is appropriate. It is possible for one visual document to be potentially of interest to various audiences, and to serve a multitude of purposes. In order for a variety of ends to be achieved in a positive way, and not have potentially conflicting interests threaten the well-being of the project as a whole, it is important that the participants are as open as possible about them and that they can be discussed by those involved. This admonition could prove to be problematic in actual cases, in which real people may find it difficult to talk to each other, especially about a subject that is new to them.

Even in large groups, it is important for each participant to feel that her or his voice is expressed. In certain cases, it may be difficult for the participants to speak openly with each other and with the researcher, or they may feel the researcher has some sort of hidden agenda. Cross-cultural communication, often difficult at the best of times,[27] could prove to be a barrier as well. Sometimes people are not aware themselves of their expectations, and these may change during the course of a project. Still, these areas have to be understood and addressed, and the researcher may be faced with attempting to find and facilitate a communication style with which the participants feel comfortable, or to mute her or his voice so that others may be heard.

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[27] This is amply demonstrated in the "confessional" genre of ethnography which includes Rabinow 1977, Briggs 1974, and Rosaldo 1989.

Beyond these questions of form and intent, however, are others that should be brought up during this crucial phase. One significant one that might prove uncomfortable for the discussants is that of funding and equipment. These practical questions can have a significant effect on the type of format desired and expectations of potential audience. Where is the funding (and equipment) to come from? Often the procurement of necessary resources is the researcher's role. For example, in the Tomaselli and Lazerus study, one-fifth of the funding came from the participating community group and the rest was provided by the university organization, which also provided the equipment, and all labor was volunteer.

A related issue is who is responsible for the distribution and storage of equipment. As Turner (1991) has pointed out and is demonstrated below, the researcher's expectations in these circumstances may prove to be at odds with the reality of a particular culture. Another issue related to funding is the degree to which an obligation to a funder or funding agency will have an effect on the production of the project. As discussed in the previous chapter, the funding source for *We Lead and Others Follow* (Folkerth and White 1993) did have a significant impact on expectations concerning both the subject and presentation of the video.

Turner (1991) describes an incident in which the use of newly acquired video equipment became embroiled in village politics. Turner became acquainted with a young Kayapo cameraman, whom he chose to be the first Kayapo trained in video editing through the KVP. When Turner and this young man returned to the man's village, however, an older Kayapo cameraman with more status in the village publicly protested the younger man's access to the technical training and equipment. This older man "demanded" that the new camera be kept in the men's common-house or in

the house of a chief, rather than in the younger man's house. Turner "felt that in either place it would probably not be well cared for, and reassured B [the older man] and everyone else that the camera was meant to be a communal possession....I eventually managed to win B over" (ibid: 73). As a result of this confrontation however, the younger man became ostracized from his village, and was refused access to the video equipment which remains in disuse in the original community.

This vignette reveals a host of power relations at play, including some of the implications the introduction of video can have for community and individual relations. Turner seems to have been initially unaware that *his* selection of participants in the KVP, not in keeping with community standards of age and status, would have the results it did. He also seems to have been ignorant of the potential importance of keeping the equipment in a (presumably) neutral space in the village rather than in one person's house. The fact that he didn't trust the camera being kept in a public space reveals his own degree of uneasiness about the project. His temporary persuasion of the community indicates that, although when he was present it seemed he held the balance of power, when it came to decision-making about matters related to video, in actuality the community acted according to its own practices.

As demonstrated by the preceding example, in addition to the question of distribution of material aspects of the project, there is a question of human resources as well. Who is to be involved in the project? Who makes these decisions? Exactly what jobs are available? Are participants to be remunerated in any way for their involvement? In the case of our project in the Comoros, instead of directly paying the participants we would provide assistance in indirect ways such as paying the bill if meeting at a restaurant or buying the remainder of Mabuku's fish catch that went unsold. Other

problems may be more serious, as illustrated by Turner's example: could rifts develop in the community as a result of certain people being involved in the project and not others? A project is potentially as inclusive or exclusive as the participants wish, but it is important to at least attempt to ensure that the distribution of potential resources of the project is considered equitable.

It may be that the participants have other expectations that need to be addressed at this point in negotiations. Taken broadly, these may be expressed as: What are the political, economic, and social ramifications of this project, and of the *process* of creating this project? Do any of the participants expect any particular form of compensation? Is there a possibility of this project having some sort of on-going aspect, a community media center for example, or is it conceived of as being an end in itself? Although the answers to these questions may not directly relate to the video or filmmaking process, these surrounding issues may eventually prove the project a success or a failure.

The second phase: Action

The considerations of the second phase, that of the action of creating a film or video, are the practical manifestation of the issues raised in the first phase. In this phase, positions agreed upon during previous discussions are tested, and these will have to be continually negotiated. Complications not previously considered will appear, and a working relationship will have to be forged or the project discarded. This phase has a number of aspects that need to be considered, and various tasks will have to be distributed. The decision-making mechanisms developed in the first phase will be tested during this period. Broken down simply, the components of the Action phase are: scripting, acting, filming, and editing. A learning process will correspond

with each of these, and each has its own separate group of questions that can be raised.

If the video is to be scripted, how is this to be done? Will it be written by an individual or collectively? Is it to be improvised or rehearsed? Is it a verbal interpretation of an oral story? Whose version of the story is to be used? If the script is based on historical sources, or to portray a particular event, is it necessary to conduct research? If it is to be "observational" rather than scripted, who will select what shall be filmed? How directed will the action be? If the video will use "actors," who decides who will participate? If a public event or something potentially sensitive is to be filmed, how will permission to film be obtained? A technique used by both Jean Rouch and the Igloolik Isuma Production company is to direct the actors by providing a setting and a story, and then allow the actors to improvise dialogue. In the Igloolik example, the format and story of the videos are conceived by the Inuit partners in the production team and then the community improvises the dialogue and constructs all the props and costumes.

Even a project not specifically intended to be collaborative in the expectations phase may result in people working collectively in the action phase. This was the case for *Mammy Water*, as described by Jell-Bahlsen (1991). Even though she claims it made it harder to raise funding, Jell-Bahlsen insisted on using a local crew because she thought this would be less intrusive, and would provide labor for Nigerians. Her trust and confidence in Alhaji, a Nigerian cinematographer, allowed her to concentrate on other production elements and provided a comfortable milieu for the subjects which she felt would be reflected in the authenticity and genuineness of the film. She also felt "a cameraman from the country whose culture is being portrayed can reveal subtleties that might escape the outsider" (Jell-Bahlsen

1991: 24), although this rationale is debatable, and one could argue that it essentializes the people of Nigeria.

In addition to the work environment, decisions must also be reached concerning the scale of the production and the way this relates to funding considerations and constraints. What technical jobs need to be assigned? Will separate sound and lights be used? What equipment and/or props need to be obtained? Who is responsible for organizing the crew? Will specialization occur or will each participant learn all aspects of making a film or video? What is the researcher's role: an active participant or a behind the scenes observer?

Once the filming has been completed, equally important questions can be raised with regards to the editing process. What is the availability of the editing equipment? Who makes the final decision in editing choices? What is the role of individual and community feedback in the editing process? In certain circumstances, it may not be possible or desirable to incorporate a large number of people into the editing process. Questions may also be raised with regard to editing style. For example, does the tone of a video lend itself to straightforward cuts or more complicated effects?

As far as choice of materials goes, Jell-Bahlsen (1991) argues that the accessibility of film allows ethnographers to be more responsive to their subjects and to reach out to local as well as wider audiences. She suggests that presenting a film to those who are in it is one of the only ways to check the "accuracy of the images and of the original soundtrack" (ibid: 24), which is important for ethnographic purposes as well as for the people themselves. Throughout the article, Jell-Bahlsen makes an implicit case for the collective and collaborative aspects of her undertaking. However, a paradox of Jell-Bahlsen's approach is her resistance to work with video, thus limiting

participatory possibilities. She assumes a technical crew and a budget of at least 100,000 dollars for each project (Jell-Bahlsen 1988). This level of funding and specificity of activity would preclude her from working on an equal basis with members of most communities.

No matter what decisions are reached concerning the scale and format of production, a learning process will occur, both in terms of working collaboratively and gaining technical expertise. Often the researcher may be in the position of training the participants until they become comfortable with the process and equipment. The researcher's authority may come from nothing more than a greater familiarity with the audio-visual equipment.[28] In this case, the participants would need to be trained on the equipment, to provide them with an understanding of the process that would enable them to feel confident making suggestions and initiating activity.

An important factor at this point would be for the researcher to respect the learning styles of the participants. This could be accomplished in a variety of ways. Even without a deep understanding of the culture, it should be possible for a researcher to experiment and determine which methods are more effective and conducive to allowing the participants to feel comfortable with the equipment. Worth and Adair explicitly address this aspect of their project, and in fact found the times when the group was working and learning together to be the ones which afforded the greatest feeling of camaraderie and collectivity of purpose.

Worth and Adair taught the Navajo students about cameras, filming and editing in a way that was culturally sensitive to the learning styles of the

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[28] It is entirely possible, however, that this is not the case. In the Comoros for example, at every public event that I attended, there were at least one and usually two video cameras recording the event. Video cassette recorders were also becoming increasingly common, apparently a world-wide phenomenon.

Navajo, without dictating to them how film should be approached. The students were encouraged to touch the various parts of the camera and to load the film, which they did with ease (Worth and Adair 1972: 85). The students were also asked their ideas about the best way to mount and store equipment. By suggesting ways to store equipment and where the best materials could be obtained, the class set up their working space as a group and were able to create an environment in which everyone felt comfortable. As the scene is optimistically described: "The lack of fear in relation to new things, the immense drive to get on with the work, and the cheerful way in which everyone cooperated suggested a successful completion of the film experience" (ibid: 77).

In articles that mention how people adapt to equipment, many authors seem surprised by the ease in which students from a variety of backgrounds are able to use film and video equipment, both for recording and editing (Worth and Adair 1972; Tomaselli and Lazerus 1989; Hénaut 1991). If people are committed enough to the project, eventually all the jobs will get done. The ease with which they are accomplished is determined by the delicate balance in relationships of the participants, as well as hard work and luck.

The issues of control and authority are ones that continually need to be addressed, particularly in the action phase. A researcher may find it beneficial to let the participants take control of the project, or they may find this difficult to do. Worth and Adair discuss this aspect of their working relationship by relating an anecdote that illustrates some of the difficulties the researcher has in finding an appropriate role. Worth in particular found the students' unwillingness or unease at filming certain phenomena to be extremely frustrating at times and felt it difficult to relinquish control. The fact that Worth and Adair are so candid about their confusion in their book and that

they do not try to portray themselves as impartial or even always in control is a testament to their honesty and commitment to this project.

In one example from *Through Navajo Eyes* (1972), two sisters participating in the project decided cooperatively to film their grandfather, a well known healer, conducting a ceremony. The authors point to this as the first time Navajos would film one of their own religious ceremonies, so the pressures on the sisters were considerable. The sisters seemed extremely uncomfortable and shot very little footage. As the ceremony, which had been staged just for this shooting, progressed, Worth, who was present to observe the filming, began to get frantic. He started suggesting that the sisters shoot certain things, something the researchers had agreed in principle not to do He began directing what and how they should shoot and finally took the camera to obtain a close-up shot of their grandfather, a film technique that in general the Navajo avoided (Worth and Adair: 156-57). Worth provides a dramatic example of the ideals of the expectations phase not holding up during the reality of the action phase.

Another consideration of the action phase may be the fate of the participants, depending on the context of the project. In the Tomaselli and Lazerus example, the planning phase and the actual taping were unproblematic because the project was so specific and the team from the university was willing to be directed by the community group Unexpected problems were encountered, however, when the student participants who were editing were unable to continue because of political activities and a boycott of the school. One of the students had to go into hiding because of his various political activities and was killed before the final edit of the video This example provides a dramatic illustration of the importance and potential danger of engaging in projects like this in a volatile political context.

The editing process may require as much communal activity as the other aspects of production. In the Tomaselli and Lazerus study, the project involved community feedback during editing. The community group screened a rough edit and made suggestions which resulted in further shooting and editing. The group was able to make editing decisions collectively, due in part to the specificity of the project's aims and audience. The process of creating the video, involving the community as both actors and editors and having public screenings for further public input, was an educational experience for all the participants.

When a so-called participant is not consulted during the action phase, the project can not be described as very collaborative. This was the case of the USC filmmakers and the Lakota community, in the example mentioned above. In a discussion subsequent to the film presentation, it became clear that the Lakota woman's invitation to the film crew was the extent of her involvement, and that she did not participate in the actual taping or editing. When asked about her input, she replied that when shown the final edited version of the video, she thought it should be shorter (an assessment audience members certainly agreed with), but that she accepted that the filmmakers had kept it the length it was because *they* were the experts. No discussion was made of potential empowerment for her or the community, or of the fact the scenes presumably of most interest to her - that of the naming ceremony itself - were buried underneath other non-related to footage. Although this was presented as a "collaborative" venture, the concerns of the woman who was the subject were clearly marginalized.

The third phase: Post-production

The third phase, that which corresponds with the post-production period, is as important as the other phases and also may involve the mastering of new skills, those of networking and distribution. The intended audience should already have been determined in the previous sections, but the question of how to reach that audience may not be so straightforward. Are facilities available to permit a public showing? Who will be provided with copies of the product? Is there a wider audience that can be reached? Who determines if this is desirable and how it is achieved? Are people to be charged for viewing or purchasing the product, or is the goal to reach the widest possible audience? Do people or groups exist that should not see the final product? If so, how is it to be kept from them?

The community may respond in a variety of ways to the final product. Do community members feel they are represented fairly and accurately? It is possible that a film or video could be misunderstood if seen outside of the context in which it was created. When Rouch screened *Les Maîtres Fous* (1957) for the Hauka that were its subjects, concerns that it could be interpreted as harmful to the cult members led Rouch to severely curtail its distribution (Stoller 1992). Is a particular film or video autonomous or is it necessary to have people present it in order to explain what the project was all about? The group dynamics that have been in use all long will continue to be important here, and people with particular skills and contacts may find themselves contributing more to the project than they have previously.

If film, or more likely, video has been used a catalyst in a community project (Hénaut 1991), what happens to the product after the project is completed is perhaps less important than what happens to the group that

created the project. Was a particular goal achieved, or was production merely a stepping stone to some larger project? Are other projects to follow? Is an archive of visual material going to be created? The importance of the researcher's role may be reflected in the state of affairs after she or he has left the project (if this occurs). Do people have the motivation and willingness to continue using film and video as tools in their community? Has a community member become interested in pursuing film or video making as a career? What are the implications of this for the community? How have people been personally affected by the process of making a film or video? What expectations have been challenged? Ideally, a community's experience with a film or video project should leave them with more resources and options than they had before the project.

Although the KVP is not an unqualified success story, it is making progress towards the goal of creating video centers as a political and cultural resource for members of Kayapo communities. Turner (1991) points out that "to the extent that video assumes political and cultural importance, control of its use and its products will become a focus of struggle among community members, or alternatively of contested institutional regulation" (74). As Turner ponders the complexities of providing video access to all Kayapo, his examples point to the importance of a consideration of these constraints. He is unable to describe the best way to attempt to handle these inherent difficulties, but he does recognize the possibility of a relationship in which the goals of indigenous communities, as well as outside researchers can be met.

Video is such a powerful tool that it can transform an entire community. Igloolik Isuma Productions has been very successful in distributing their programs, both to other Inuit communities and to larger audiences through independent television stations in Canada. The

production team has recently contracted for thirteen episodes of a television series that reconstructs family and community life in Igloolik in the 1940s. In addition to being an outstanding cultural achievement, the company has brought considerable benefits to the community in terms of jobs, money, and exposure. The money provided for the programs is spent in the community, with local people helping behind the scenes as well as in front of the camera. Also in Igloolik is a women's video collective that creates portraits of Inuit life from a female perspective. Igloolik Isuma Productions provides an excellent example of the potential for economic development through community video.

Concluding remarks

The projects examined in this section do not have very much in common, other than a filmmaker or researcher's willingness to share authority in a film or video project, and a community's willingness to become involved. The projects do all have similar problems to grapple with: organizing people, securing funding, and settling conflicts. Looking at the ways these problems have been approached in practical situations takes us away from the abstract realm and back to the level of individuals. If these relationships are successfully negotiated, the possibility exists for creating visual ethnography that is truly participatory.

The ability of video to portray community relationships "which contest dominant versions of reality" (Tomaselli and Lazerus: 10) demonstrates the capacity of a collaborative project to reach beyond the boundaries of the resulting video. By taking a systematic approach to collaborative visual ethnography, the lessons of one project can be compared with those of

another. If researchers and filmmakers willing to take a collaborative approach to their projects are provided with ample information before they start, these projects may prove to be more successful. This, in turn, can lead to more opportunities for dialogue and further practical knowledge about this approach to ethnographic representation.

Conclusion

This thesis was motivated by the absence of studies that refer to practical problems of collaborative endeavors. A review of visual anthropology literature suggests the value of taking a collaborative approach to ethnography, but not ways this approach can be implemented in field situations. In order to bring these issues from the realm of the abstract to the realm of practice, it is necessary to have an understanding of how real individuals react in specific situations, and how these reactions become part of the collaborative and ethnographic process.

After conducting a study in the Comoros to explore some of the practical problems of collaboration, a great number of issues and questions became apparent: questions of agency, responsibility, and authority. These issues are referred to throughout the thesis, and a framework for addressing them is suggested in Chapter IV. This framework is meant to provide guideposts to be followed by researchers and others interested in exploring ways to construct, facilitate, and learn from ethnographic projects based on collaboration.

It is clear that collaborative visual ethnography is a complex endeavor; it is also clear that a successful collaborative relationship has to rise from a combination of factors that require negotiation and commitment. Underlying any collaborative project is the necessity of establishing a relationship of trust and creating a project based on a mutual recognition of benefits. Of course establishing this relationship may prove to be very difficult, but rejecting this approach as too problematic does nothing towards resolving the fundamental questions raised by ethnographic representation: Whose story is it? What is the best way for the story to be presented?

In a 1987 article, Marilyn Strathern argues:

> "From a feminist perspective, of course, there can be no collaboration with the Other. This anthropological ideal is a delusion, overlooking the crucial dimension of different social interests. There can be no parity between the authorship of the anthropologist and the informant; the dialogue must always be asymmetrical....They have no interests in common to be served by this purportedly common product" (290).

In addition to essentializing a "feminist perspective," this sweeping dismissal of collaborative ethnography posits one type of process and project, in which the interests of the "anthropologist" are always valued more highly than those of the "informant." While this asymmetry may be the case for many projects, it does not necessarily follow that the same is true for all projects.

Different people can take different approaches to accommodate more than one point of view. Strathern is writing at an abstract level that fails to recognize the potential of individual creativity in overcoming these underlying constraints. As I have suggested in this thesis, it is not possible to remove the differences in class, race, and status that may exist among participants, but a recognition and even exploration of these is possible. Strathern's position forces those wishing to engage in ethnography to choose between representing others in potentially harmful ways, or not doing anthropology at all. Seeing relationships as predicated on difference may acknowledge the power inequalities of the ethnographer/subject interaction, but does nothing towards attempting to address these problems in a practical manner.

Throughout this thesis, an argument for the feasibility and importance of collaborative visual ethnography has been developed. To deny the agency of the subjects of ethnography is as facile as suggesting that talking to subjects is the same as collaborating with them. The collaborative endeavor is

difficult and complex but it is not impossible. Through recognition of these complexities and a commitment to hard work, the process and practice of ethnography can be transformed, and can again represent the strengths of anthropology rather than its weaknesses.

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