
UNIT 1 ANTHROPOLOGY AND FILMMAKING: THE TEXT AND THE IMAGE*

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to understand

- The relationship between the text and the image in the context of ethnography.
- The process of production of an ethnographic film.

1.1 INTRODUCTION: SOCIOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND FILMMAKING: THE TEXT AND THE IMAGE

The visual whether a photographic image or a film is an important way of understanding culture and society. An image records our everyday lives. They offer us a language that transcends cultural, racial, social and linguistic barriers. A film could be a popular mainstream cinema or a documentary or an ethnographic film. All genres of films help us understand society and culture. For the purpose of the discussion here we will be referring to ethnographic films. As a preliminary way to understand an ethnographic film we can say that it is a non-fiction film. Ethnographic films are the dominant practice amongst visual anthropologists and sociologists. It is supposed to be an authentic account of societies.

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In the following sections we will discuss the relationship between the text i.e. written ethnography and the image i.e. photographs and films. In order to understand the relationship between the two it is important to first know how ethnography as a research tool is developed. We will then discuss the relationship between them.

1.1.1 Why Ethnography?

Ethnography in sociology and anthropology is a research technique that makes a detailed description and analysis of human behavior over a long period of time. The ethnographic method is based on field work. It is a sociological method that explores how people live and make sense of their lives with one another in particular places. The focus is on understanding the lives of people through their everyday interactions, their social organization and other things like the social structuring of the physical spaces. In order to gather data the researcher uses various techniques like the interview method, participant observation, non-participant observation, questionnaires and so on.

The debate between whether the visual or the text is better or are they at par, with one complementing and supplementing the other has been an ongoing one. In order to understand society and culture both the text and the image are important. A common sense understanding of the image is one where it is assumed that seeing is believing. As sociologists we have to examine the proposition that does an image whether a film or a photograph portray the ultimate truth or a version of the truth. We need to understand that visual ethnography is a means of producing knowledge and of understanding the world. We also need to understand the relationship of the text and the image in understanding society and culture. Is the relationship hierarchical one in which one is considered superior to the other or are the text and the image in a relationship based on equality? We cannot assume that the visual has no subtext and that it represents reality as it is. We have to understand the way in which what we read and what we see gets produced.

In order to understand the relationship between the text and the visual medium, it is important to understand the various aspects of development of ethnographic films. The development of ethnographic films is also dependent on the development of ethnographic research. The development of ethnography has an impact on the way the films are shot. Ethnographic techniques influence the way in which we do research.

1.1.2 Production of a Film and an Ethnographical Text

Traditionally, sociology and anthropology have relied on the written word to tell us about societies and social life. Sociology and anthropology follow certain techniques in order to investigate societies. These techniques are varied and include techniques like observation-participant and non-participant, focus group discussions etc. When we gather data it is in a rough format and is often referred to as field notes, the collection of data is dependent on our interest and the research problem at hand. The researcher may spend a few months or a year writing down observations in a notebook. The ethnographer may also record interviews using an audio device. The researcher then goes through the field notes and transcribes the interviews. Once that is done then the researcher analyses the data and starts to put it in a structured format depending on the research problem. There is a lot of

writing and rewriting of the data. Each time the researcher writes she will refer to her field notes and write and rewrite the data.

The rough notes get translated into sentences and paragraphs. The researcher has to work with the data that she has. The only way that she can get new data revisiting the field and gathers fresh data. What we finally read i.e. what is available to the public is the final edited version in the form of a book or an article. What we read is a smooth finished narrative which is not patchy but finished product..

The written texts like the Nuer by E. E. Evans Pritchard (Pritchard, 1940) tell us about the Nuers of Southern Sudan or the Argonauts of the Western Pacific by B. Malinowski (Malinowski, 1922) about the Trobriand Islanders of the Western Pacific Ocean are ethnographies that have been written in the above manner. The monographs that we read are based on field notes of the researcher. Let us try and understand this through an example. For instance, if the research problem was analysis of social interaction between individuals on the basis of the caste system in a village in India then how would we go about it. The researcher would spend several months in the field observing social interactions and the impact of the caste system on these interactions. All observations would be recorded in a notebook. As would be analysed from the perspective of caste based social interaction. If interviews have been recorded, they too would be transcribed. The final written monograph that we produce will be based on observations carried out over a period of time. The researcher collects data from the point of view of the research problem. However the most important data is data that is gathered from the fringes. This data is often gathered through research techniques that are not pre-established. For example one could be relying on the memory of the researcher or the memories of the informant. Heider (Heider, 2006) refers to it as the peripheral vision of the researcher. Writing cultures mean that ethnographers construct narratives. We select some material and leave out the rest.

For instance if we have to illustrate any instance of caste based interaction then the incident that we narrate as if it were a 'true' incident would not be based on but one incident. It would be based on our observations carried out over a period of time and the final incident that we narrate would be based on our observations over a period of time. Often the reconstruction would be based on the peripheral vision of the researcher. This reconstruction is an accepted practice in written ethnographic accounts. In the Argonauts of the Western Pacific Malinowski describes a long trading expedition carried out by the Trobriand Islanders from Sinaketa to Dobu. (Malinowski, 1922), Malinowski had not participated in any such expedition. The account is constructed based on his observations of similar events and also based on the observation of his informants. Such a general reconstruction is accepted practice in ethnography.

Thus when we talk about a written ethnographic text we collect data by a number of techniques. This data is also often peripheral data i.e. data that we have gathered along the course of the fieldwork. The raw data that is gathered is then selectively presented and analysed.

Films too are a way of understanding society. The category of films that we will be referring here are called ethnographic films. The term ethnographic film is difficult to define. The reason is that all films reflect social life. At the outset we have to be very clear that we are not talking about films from a technical

cinematographic angle rather our focus is on understanding how films help us to understand society and culture. It is difficult to have a set criteria to define the ethnographies of a film.

In a film the ethnographer may begin with an idea and a script. He then shoots a footage, edits a footage and finally produces a film. The film that we see is again a reconstructed version of the raw footage. A film is a final product like the written text that is made public by the ethnographer in the form of a book or an article. In a film too the production of a film too involves shooting of a film which we call footage. This footage is then edited and re-edited much like the writing and rewriting of a text. The final story that the film tells us is a finished smooth portrayal like a book. Much of the construction of the film takes place on the editing table and footage shot at different points of time is put together and presented along a continuum.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What is ethnography?

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- 2) How is an ethnographic text produced for public consumption?

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- 3) What is the similarity between the production of a text and a film?

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Activity:

What is an ethnographic film? Can you distinguish between different genres of films?

1.2 DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY: FILMS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

1.2.1 Written Ethnographies

In the 1920s and 1930s a number of monographs were produced. These were based on fieldwork and were of two kinds. On one hand there were serious monographs produced for the academia. On the other hand ethnographies were also written for the general public. Malinowski wrote *The Sexual Life of the Savages* (Malinowski B., 1932) based on his fieldwork amongst the Trobriand Islanders. Margaret Mead along with the serious academic monograph *Social Organization of the Manua* written in 1930 (Mead, 1969) based on her research on the Samoa in 1925-26, also wrote more popular ethnographies on child rearing, education and sex roles. Some of these books also included photographs. However these were not given any importance as a research tool for understanding societies. There were a few exceptions like Bateson and Mead and Gardner and Heider.

1.2.2 Photographs

In the late 19th century and early 20th century photographs were seen as an objective and scientific documentation. Early anthropologists like Franz Boas in the US, Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen in Australia and Bronislaw Malinowski in 1915-1918 used photographs as a part of fieldwork. Photographs were considered to be simply truth revealing meaning that seeing is believing. For example, Malinowski in his book *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* does not say anything in terms of analyzing the photographs. Photographs are considered to be an aid to the memory much like the field notes. Some images are used as an illustration or slides and for exhibitions. Once the fieldwork are made public, the photographs are either put in a museum or are forgotten. Some images or slides were used as illustrations and for exhibitions.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/37/Three_Horses_by_Edward_S._Curtis%2C_1905.jpg

The above image of the Indian is a photograph by Edward Curtis who took around 2000 photographs of the Red Indians between 1896 and 1930. This style of photography is an illustration of how the researcher influences the

image. In “The Vanishing Race” Christopher Lyman argues that Curtis’s work was influenced by a romanticised view of the native Indian. Curtis according to Lyman did not take into account the impact of Western white culture on the Indians. All his photographs depict the Indian as being savages and completely unaffected by the White man’s culture. The photographs depict Curtis ‘view of the “primitive Indian”’. Curtis also made a film on the Kwakiutl Indian. The film has been recently been restored under the title In the ‘Land of the War Canoes’.

The earliest approach to visual anthropology was a positivist approach. It was assumed that the camera portrayed reality as it is. The audio visual technique was considered to be objective, neutral and transparent. It was almost as if reality was captured on the reel without any kind of human intervention or consciousness. A picture was considered to be a worthy portrayal of reality it was an objective data that recorded reality without any kind of biases.

In the mid-20th century Bateson and Mead in 1942 turned to photography after they had written on Balinese culture for a decade. They produced close to 25000 photographs over a two year field work. Bateson and Mead’s book *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* published in 1942 (Mead G. B., 1942) and Robert Gardner and Karl Heider’s *Gardens of War: Life and Death in The New Guinea Stone Age* in 1968 (Heider R. G., 1969) on the Dugum Dani tribe were early attempts at publishing ethnographic photography. They continue to be exceptional pieces of work.

What’s also interesting is the fact that Bateson had done fieldwork among the Iatmul of the Sepik River in New Guinea and written a monograph *Naven* in 1936. However ,the work was hardly read.

The positivist approach to film making has been critiqued by contemporary theorists. They believe that the camera and what it records is influenced by the researcher. Films and photographs are not just about the people being recorded, it is also about the person recording the event. Photographs are seen as socially constructed artefacts – constructed by the researcher as he or she deemed fit. It’s important to understand that a photograph or a film is constructed by the researcher as per a certain paradigm. This social approach to the study of photographs focused on the social context in which the image was constructed and not on the image itself for analysis.

For Mead, the photographs were to be supplemented by the written word. Each frame and each photograph had to be contextualized. In 1942, when Mead and Bateson collaborated they used the photographs to supplement their written work. The photographs were used to fill in the gaps and to address criticisms of their written work. As technology advanced Mead advocated the use of the film camera to record events as we will discuss in the next section. Photographs by themselves were not considered anthropological they had to be supplemented by the written word. By 1970s and end of the 20th century visual sociology as it developed had not focused on the implications of how a photograph could be used for a better anthropological understanding.

1.2.3 Ethnographic Films

Production of ethnographic films for the public was started in 1920s. These films were educational films and of exotic people and were sometimes shot with the help of anthropologists. For example, the Pathe brothers in 1920 with the help of the department of Anthropology in Harvard University produced Edward Curtis' *In the Land of the Head Hunters* (Curtis, 1914). Some of these films were also shot as per scripts. One such film was *Chang* (Cooper, 1927) shot on the lives of people in Thailand, made by Cooper and Schoedsack. The interest of the commercial players led to the production of films that were of the 'natives'. These films were ethnographically considered to be ethnocentric. These films were criticized by anthropologists as being ethnocentric and following a colonialist approach. That means the films were shot just as earlier with the belief that the White man was superior to the natives. The film *Gods Must Be Crazy* (Uys, 1980) based on the Ju/' hoansi of the Kalahari by Jamie Uys was an international hit but was criticized for being ethnocentric and racist. These kind of films were considered to be naïve depictions of culture. They were not considered to be serious ethnography.

In the 1920s and perhaps till 1960s anthropology did not contribute to the development of films. There were a few exceptions like the film by Martin and Osa Johnson *Among the Cannibal Isles of the South Seas* in 1919 (Johnson, 1918) and *Head Hunters of the South Seas* in 1922 (Johnson M., 1922). In 1922, Robert Flaherty, a mining engineer and an explorer produced *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty, 1922) on the Inuit (Eskimo) family of the Hudson Bay. The film was shot in an artificially constructed igloo that was portrayed as a real igloo. Flaherty's second film *Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age* in 1926 (Flaherty R., 1926), was financed by Paramount pictures. *Moana* was on the Savaiim in Western Samoa. These films were not considered to be serious ethnography by anthropologists. *Moana* was shot less than 300 miles from Mead's fieldwork area in Samoa. *Nanook of the North* was made close to the area where Franz an American anthropologist Boas, had done fieldwork. Both Boas and Mead even if they heard of the films they did not give the films any ethnographic importance. They did not attach any significance to the films at all even though they themselves had worked in areas close to where Flaherty shot the films. Flaherty's films were too ethnographic for the world of popular commercial films. His films were not considered significant from a serious ethnographic angle.

Bateson and Mead were the first to use ethnographic films to integrate with and to supplement their written work. The work done by Bateson and Mead was path breaking in several ways however they did not lead to an increasing use of ethnographic films by researchers. Ethnographers still did not consider films and photographs as a serious research tool.

As discussed in the earlier section Mead and Bateson used photographs for their ethnographic work. In addition to the numerous photographs Bateson also shot 22000 feet of 16 mm film footage. His raw footage much like the written field notes of a researcher and was used to produce six films in 1950. Some of these included the films like *Childhood Rivalry in Bali* and *New Guinea*.

After World War II by 1950s anthropological film making gained impetus. In 1952, the International Committee on Ethnographic and Sociological Films

associated with United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was formed. It organized many events including the Margaret Mead Film Festival in New York and the Royal Anthropological Institutes Ethnographic Film Festival in Manchester in 1960s. 1970s and 1980s saw a systematic approach to Visual Anthropology. Three journals- *Studies in Visual Communication* (1974-1985), *Visual Anthropology* (1987) and *Visual Anthropology Review* (1986) were launched.

Apart from institutional efforts film makers like Jean Rouch in France, John Marshall, Robert Gardner and Timothy Asch in America contributed greatly to ethnographic film making. All four of them were trained in anthropology. Some significant films that were made in the 1950s were *The Hunters* (1958) on the hunters and gatherers of the Kalahari Desert by John Marshall; *Dead Birds* (1964) by Robert Gardner about warfare amongst the Dani of New Guinea. Timothy Asch along with anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon made a number of films like *The Feast* (1968) and *Ax Fight* (1971) on the Yanomamo of Venezuela. These filmmakers supported the idea that films were an important anthropological tool and were important in recording data.

The development of technology and synchronised sound also meant that the films could be shot using long shots and entire bodies could be shot. They believed that this footage shot with accompanying written material made the film anthropologically sound. Such films used the observational style of filming. In this style the filmmaker adopts an approach in which there is a belief that the presence of the camera has no impact on the subjects. Such an approach was also called the 'fly on the wall' approach. It was a 'scientific' objective approach. In which the truth was portrayed as it is in sharp contrast to earlier films like those made by Flaherty.

The cinéma-vérité movement believed that they could film the truth without influencing the outcome. Jean Rouch believed that the presence of a camera induced *cine trance* i.e. those being filmed after a while forgot about the camera. The use of portable synchronous sound recording equipment added to the illusion that the film maker was not influencing the outcome of the film. Rouch's idea was to see the world as the natives see it. This led to a participatory style of film making. The cinema and the cinéma-vérité movements or truthful cinema adopted this style of film making. This style of filmmaking is attributed to Jean Rouch and inspired by Dziga Vertov and Robert Flaherty. The filmmaker can be present in front of the camera and can even provoke the subject in terms of a stylized interaction. The role of the camera is always acknowledged. This attempt was to engage with individuals more directly while not reverting to classic exposition interview styles. It allows filmmaker to account for past events via witnesses and experts whom viewer can also see. Sometimes archival footage was also used to reinforce the truth of what was being filmed.

This mode of filmmaking led to the desire to make the conventions of representation themselves more apparent. It wanted to convey the impression that reality is not unproblematic and the reality that we see is only one version of reality. It is the most self-aware mode - its reflexivity makes audience aware of how other modes claim to construct "truth". The idea of a reflexive anthropology openly acknowledged the role of the film maker in influencing the film making process. Reflexivity in ethnographic film making was critical of the portrayal of the disempowered native. It was critical of the representation of the otherness.

David and Judith MacDougall and Melissa Llewelyn-Davies in the 21st century have influenced film making. They have developed a reflexive filming style. The reflexive style of film making was very conscious much like reflexivity in the written word that the researcher has the power to depict and portray the researched in a particular manner. Film makers today are very conscious of the way the films are being depicted. They follow a style of filming in which the film maker does not have complete authority. He will share the space with the filmed and will decide with them the way the film is to be shot and also which shots are to be used. Film makers like Vincente Carelli in Brazil, Eric Michaels in Australia have also made efforts to help the natives produce their own films.

1.2.4 Ethnographic Films in India

Post-Independence the earliest ethnographic films that were made were commissioned by the Information Films of India and later the Films Division. Some of these films were on tribes.

- *Oraons of Bihar* 1955 and *The Martial Dances of Malabar* in 1958, by Paul Zils, a German, was the first to make ethnographic films in India. He was the head of the Information Films of India in British India.
- *The Flute and the Arrow* 1957, by Roman Karmen, a Russian filmmaker and a Swede Aren Sucksdorff. The film was on the Murias of Bastar and was based on fieldwork by Sucksdorff.
- *The Vanishing Tribe*, 1959, by Paul Zils, on the Todas of the Nilgiris.
- *Tree of Wealth*, between 1943 and 1956 under the aegis of Information Films of India, directed by Bhaskar Rao. This was based on the importance of the coconut in the life of the people of Kerala. This film was awarded at the Edinburgh Festival.
- *Close to Nature*, 1967, by Shyam Benegal. It was on tribals in Madhya Pradesh including the Ghotuls.

We see a shift in the themes of films being made in the films of Mani Kaul. He made films on the vanishing folk arts and artistes. In 1953, he made *The Puppeteers*. The film was on the vanishing art of puppeteering and was based on the puppeteers of Rajasthan. In 1977, he made *Chitrakathi*, on the folk artistes of western India.

From 1990s, the ethnographic filmmaking has gathered momentum. These films are on a variety of themes.

- *Main-Taris of Assam*, by Charu Kamal Hazarikais on the tribes of Assam.
- *Gothrasmruti*, by M.A. Rahman, is on the Thaiyyam rituals of the Thaiyya community of North Malabar in Kerala. It is based on an anthropological interpretation.
- *Mithak Bhan (The Disappearing Poem)*, by Sudhanshu Misra is on the lifestyles of the Agarias tribals living in the forests around the Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh.
- *Lyrics of Life*, 1995, by Alok Das on Calcutta from the perspective of the slum dwellers.

- *Buddha Weeps*, 1999, directed by Sri Prakash is on the impact of exposure to Uranium on the health of the people and environment in Jadugoda, located in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand.
- *Colours Black*, 2001, by Mata Murthy on child abuse.
- *In the Land of Hidden Treasure*, 1999, directed by Nilanjan Bhattacharya. The film is on the monastery craft and arts in Sikkim and was commissioned by The Anthropological Survey of India.
- *Bottle Masala in Moile*, 2013, by Vaidehi Chitre is on the ethnic community of East Indians based in Mumbai. It traces the impact of development on their lifestyle and culture. The 38 minute documentary won the Best Documentary Award at the Jeevika Asia Livelihood Documentary Film Festival in 2013. The Bronze Remi award at the Houston International Film Festival in 2013 and several other awards.

Khepar Mon Brindaban, 2014, produced and directed by Ladly Mukhopadhyay. The film traces the journey of a Baul, Gour Khepa, over 35 years. It traces the history of the Bauls of Bengal through Gour Khepa. You can watch a small part of the film on the following link: [linkhttps://youtu.be/ZaPl1JT4SUI](https://youtu.be/ZaPl1JT4SUI).

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How were photographs seen in early anthropology? Illustrate with the help of examples.
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- 2) Write an essay on Margaret Mead's contribution to visual anthropology.
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- 3) Why the ethnographic films of the 1920s were not considered a serious ethnographic works?
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4) What was significant about the films made in the 1950s?

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5) What does the term cinema – verite mean?

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6) Write a note on reflexivity in film making.

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Exercise: Do research on Jean Rouch and Margaret Mead. Watch their films and interviews online.

Watch ethnographic films made in India. Some of the names of the films are mentioned in the preceding section. You could also watch other films.

1.3 THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL JOURNEY OF THE TEXT AND THE IMAGE

Ethnographic filmmaking much like the written ethnographies has evolved from a colonial positivist perspective. The period between 1913-1920 was a significant period in anthropology as it was moving from a positivist natural science framework to a more fieldwork based humanist science in the 20th century. The time at which Malinowski was writing his monograph was also the time that Flaherty made the film on the Eskimos. Flaherty was very much in the tradition of ethnographers like Malinowski. Just like Malinowski stayed with the Trobriand Islanders for his fieldwork, Flaherty stayed with the Inuit and made his film. Malinowski thus established the fieldwork tradition in anthropology and Flaherty did the same for ethnographic films. The tradition of staying with the subject to establish a rapport and to be scientific became prevalent in traditional anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers.

The 1960s and 70s saw the emergence of the structural functional approach in anthropology. This approach believed that by observing discrete everyday events one could make sense of them in the larger anthropological structural context. For example, Gluckman 1958 followed the principle that by focusing on the everyday interactions. One is able to understand the underlying normative structural principles. Film makers like Asch too followed the same principle and filmed events as it happened. This kind of a filming was an observational style of filming in which the assumption was that the filmmaker did not influence the outcome of the film.

The issue that faced the written text and the films was the same. The filming of events as they happened were one part of the story but in order to give it structure it had to be constructed so as to fit into an anthropological model. Hastrup Kirsten uses the concept of thick and thin description put forth by Clifford Geertz to explain that how what is seen in photographs and films i.e. a thin description needs to be supplemented by a thick description i.e. it needs to be culturally contextualised. (Hastrup, 1993) This could be with the help of a spoken or written narrative in the film. In a text behaviour that we observe has to be explained in the context of anthropological concepts.

The filmmaker in order to be taken seriously by the anthropologists started following the norms of anthropology. They developed an observational style of film making very much along the lines of the tradition of observational fieldwork. Just like the text is constructed according to certain principles of structural anthropology films too were constructed in a similar manner. The dilemmas faced by anthropologists of that time were also faced by the filmmakers. It was like a Catch 22 situation. If one is observing the social world out there then either one can portray it as seen by the native that is as if the anthropologist and the filmmaker are within that world. As if they are participating in it. Clifford Geertz refers to it as 'emic'. If he is not in it then he is outside it i.e. 'etic'. The dialectic between the emic and the etic was faced equally by filmmakers and anthropologist. The struggle to be in yet be outside in the larger Western theoretical social framework.

This style of filmmaking and writing was replaced by a more participatory and reflexive style. The reader and the audience are made to understand that the reality as it is portrayed is just one version of the truth. The ethnographer-the filmmaker and the researcher are no longer articulating from a position of power. They also try to articulate the truth as is experienced by the subjects.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Compare the approaches to anthropology and filmmaking in the 1920s-30s. Illustrate your answer with examples.

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- 2) Examine the impact of the structural functional approach on anthropology and film making.

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- 3) What were the dilemmas faced by the anthropologists and filmmakers in the 1970s?

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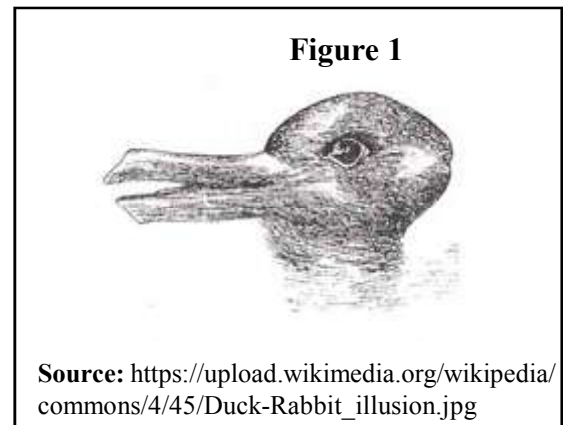
1.3.1 The Relationship Between the Film Maker and the Filmed

In section 1.2.3 and 1.3 we have discussed the evolution of ethnographic filmmaking. Interwoven in this is also the changes in the way that the relationship between the filmmaker and the filmed has evolved.

In the 1920s we saw that the filmmakers had a colonialist approach. Films like *Gods Must Be Crazy* assumed that the presence of the filmmaker had no impact on the filmed. The voice of the film was the voice of the filmmaker. The filmmaker acted like a non-participant observer. In the 1950s we see films like *Dead Birds* and *The Hunters* adopting a fly on the wall approach. The filmmaker assumes that his presence has not influenced the final outcome. This approach was a 'scientific' and a positivist approach.

The cinéma-vérité movement followed the approach of truthful cinema. Here the filmmakers like Jean Rouch, Dziga Vertov and Robert Flaherty believed that their task was to depict the 'truth'. This also meant that the filmmaker was often in front of the camera and the role of the camera was acknowledged. Spiegel points out that the role of the film maker is like that of a 'well-mannered guest' (Spiegel, April 1984) The analogy of a well-mannered guest points out that the filmmaker like the guest tries to become one with the host i.e. the filmed and that his presence is non-intrusive. He interacts and participates in their day to day interaction. The rapport is built to such an extent that it is assumed that after a while the filmed forget the presence of a camera. The filmmaker sees the world as the filmed see it. The method of participant observation is followed in which the filmmaker becomes one with the filmed and may indulge in a stylized interaction. This would involve the filmmaker participating and may be even living with the filmed. The filmmaker may be seen in front of the camera or his voice may be heard. The filmmaker may also stylize an interaction. This was also seen in MacDougall's film *New Boys* (2003). The belief is that the final outcome is not influenced by the presence of a filmmaker.

This kind of a participant observation is approach to filmmaking led to the one in which the filmmaking has become reflexive. This means that one realizes that there are multiple versions of the truth. As MacDougall (MacDougall, September, 1991) puts it 'Whose story is it?' The film maker always faces the dilemma about how to narrate the story.



Whose voice should dominate? Is the story to be narrated from the perspective of the ethnographic film maker or from the perspective of those being filmed? MacDougall (MacDougall, September, 1991) uses the picture in Figure 1 to drive home the point that a film could have several interpretations. Figure 1 could be a duck or a rabbit. A film like the figure could be interpreted in any way that the viewer likes. It all depends on the spatial location-social and physical of the viewer.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

The relationship between the text and the image is a close one. The development of anthropological approaches and the approaches to ethnographic film making have been influenced by theoretical developments in anthropology. We have seen a progress of the text and the films from the positivist approach to the observational, participatory and finally the reflexive mode. The collaboration between the two leads to a much richer anthropology.

1.5 KEY WORDS

- 1) **Bauls:** Ethnic sect of wandering minstrels who spread their message on celestial love through song and music. It's a part of the cultural oral tradition of Bengal.
- 2) **Cine trance:** Those being filmed after a while forgot about the camera. Jean Rouch believed a special creative possession-like state induced through the lens of the camera, involving the filmmaker, her subjects, and her audience.
- 3) **Cinéma-vérité:** A style of film-making characterized by realistic, typically documentary films which avoid artificiality and artistic effect and are generally made with simple equipment.
- 4) **Emic and Etic:** Refer to two kinds of field research done and viewpoints obtained: **emic**, from within the social group (from the perspective of the subject) and **etic**, from outside (from the perspective of the observer).
- 5) **Ethnocentrism:** Ethnocentrism is judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture.
- 6) **Ethnography:** In sociology and anthropology it is a research technique that makes a detailed description and analysis of human behavior over a long period of time.

- 7) **‘Fly on the wall’ Approach:** Fly-on-the-wall documentary-making, the camera crew works as unobtrusively as possible.
- 8) **Peripheral data:** Data that we have gathered along the course of the fieldwork.
- 9) **Positivist Approach:** The earliest approach to visual anthropology was a positivist approach. It was assumed that the camera portrayed reality as it is.
- 10) **Structural Anthropology:** A school of **anthropology** based on Claude Lévi-Strauss’ idea that immutable deep **structures** exist in all cultures, and consequently, that all cultural practices have homologous counterparts in other cultures, essentially that all cultures are equitable.
- 11) **Thick and thin description:** Clifford Geertz described the practice of **thick description** as a way of providing cultural context and meaning that people place on actions, words, things, etc ... **Thin description** by contrast, is stating facts without such meaning or significance.

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Ethnography in sociology and anthropology is a research technique that makes a detailed description and analysis of human behavior over a long period of time. The ethnographic method is based on field work. It is a sociological method that explores how people live and make sense of their lives with one another in particular places. The focus is on understanding the lives of people through their everyday interactions, their social organization and other things like the social structuring of the physical spaces. In order to gather data the researcher uses various techniques like the interview method, participant observation, non-participant observation, questionnaires and so on.
- 2) Traditionally, sociology and anthropology have relied on the written word to tell us about societies and social life. Sociology and anthropology follow certain techniques in order to investigate societies. These techniques are varied and include techniques like observation-participant and non-participant, focus group discussions etc. When we gather data it is in a rough format and is often referred to field notes. The ethnographer may also may record interviews using an audio device. The researcher then goes through the field notes and transcribes the interviews. Once that is done then the researcher analyses the data and starts to put it in a structured format depending on the research problem. There is a lot of writing and rewriting of the data. Each time the researcher writes she will refer to her field notes and write and rewrite the data. The rough notes get translated into sentences and paragraphs. What we finally read i.e. what is available to the public is the final edited version in the form of a book or an article. What we read is a smooth finished narrative which is not patchy but is smooth. In a film the ethnographer may begin with an idea and a script. He then shoots a footage, edits the footage and finally produces a film. The film that we see is again a reconstructed version of the raw footage. A film is a final product like the written text that is made public by the ethnographer

in the form of a book or an article.

- 3) In a film the ethnographer may begin with an idea and a script. He then shoots a footage, edits a footage and finally produces a film. The film that we see is again a reconstructed version of the raw footage. A film is a final product like the written text that is made public by the ethnographer in the form of a book or an article. In a film too the production of a film too involves shooting of a film which we call footage. This footage is then edited and re-edited much like the writing and rewriting of a text. The final story that the film tells us is a finished smooth portrayal like a book. Much of the construction of the film takes place on the editing table and footage shot at different points of time is put together and presented along a continuum.

Check Your Progress 2

- 4) In the late 19th century and early 20th century photographs were seen as an objective and scientific documentation. Early anthropologists like Franz Boas in the US, Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen in Australia and Bronislaw Malinowski in 1915-1918 used photographs as a part of fieldwork. Photographs were considered to be simply truth revealing meaning that seeing is believing. For example, Malinowski in his book. *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* does not say anything in terms of analyzing the photographs. Photographs were considered to be an aid to the memory much like the field notes. Some images were used as an illustration or slides and for exhibitions. Once the fieldwork was made available to the public the photographs were either put in a museum or were forgotten.
- 5) In the mid-20th century Bateson and Mead in 1942 turned to photography after they had written on Balinese culture for a decade. They produced close to 25000 photographs over a two year field work. Bateson and Mead's book *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* published in 1942 and Robert Gardner and Karl Heider's *Gardens of War: Life and Death in The New Guinea Stone Age* in 1968 on the Dugum Dani tribe were early attempts at publishing ethnographic photography. They continue to be exceptional pieces of work. For Mead, the photographs were to be supplemented by the written word. Each frame and each photograph had to be contextualized.

In 1942 when Mead and Bateson collaborated they used the photographs to supplement their written work. The photographs were used to fill in the gaps and to address criticisms of their written work. As technology advanced Mead advocated the use of the film camera to record events.

- 6) Ethnographic films of the 1920s were educational films and of exotic people and were sometimes shot with the help of anthropologists. They were sometimes shot according to a script. These films were ethnographically considered to be ethnocentric. These films were criticized by anthropologists as being ethnocentric and following a colonialist approach. That means the films were shot just as earlier with the belief that the White man was superior to the natives. The film *Gods Must Be Crazy* based on the Ju/'hoansi of the Kalahari by Jamie Uys was an international hit but was criticized for being ethnocentric and racist. These kind of films were considered to be naïve depictions of culture. They were not considered to be serious ethnography.

- 7) In the 1950s the filmmakers like Jean Rouch in France, John Marshall and Robert Gardner and Timothy Asch in America supported the idea that films were an important anthropological tool and were important in recording data. The development of technology and synchronised sound also meant that the films could be shot using long shots and entire bodies could be shot. They believed that this footage shot with accompanying written material made the film anthropologically sound. Such films used the observational style of filming. In this style the filmmaker adopts an approach in which there is a belief that the presence of the camera has no impact on the subjects. Such an approach was also called the 'fly on the wall' approach. It was a 'scientific' objective approach. In which the truth was portrayed as it is in sharp contrast to earlier films like those made by Flaherty.
- 8) The cinéma-vérité movement believed that they could film the truth without influencing the outcome. Jean Rouch believed that the presence of a camera induced *cine trance* i.e. those being filmed after a while forgot about the camera. The use of portable synchronous sound recording equipment added to the illusion that the film maker was not influencing the outcome of the film. Rouch's idea was to see the world as the natives see it. This led to a participatory style of film making. The cinema and the cinéma-vérité movements or truthful cinema adopted this style of film making. This style of filmmaking is attributed to Jean Rouch and inspired by Dziga Vertov and Robert Flaherty. The filmmaker can be present in front of the camera and can even provoke the subject in terms of a stylised interaction. The role of the camera is always acknowledged. This attempt was to engage with individuals more directly while not reverting to classic exposition interview styles. It allows filmmaker to account for past events via witnesses and experts whom viewer can also see. Sometimes archival footage was also used to reinforce the truth of what was being filmed.
- 9) The idea of a reflexive anthropology openly acknowledged the role of the film maker in influencing the film making process. Reflexivity in ethnographic film making was critical of the portrayal of the disempowered native. It was critical of the representation of the otherness. David and Judith MacDougall and Melissa Llewelyn-Davies in the 21st century have influenced film making. Reflexive filming style. The reflexive style of film making was very conscious much like reflexivity in the written word that the researcher has the power to depict and portray the researched in a particular manner. Film makers today are very conscious of the way the filmed are being depicted. They follow a style of filming in which the film maker does not have complete authority. He will share the space with the filmed and will decide with them the way the film is to be shot and also which shots are to be used. Film makers like Vincente Carelli in Brazil, Eric Michaels in Australia have also made efforts to help the natives produce their own films.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Ethnographic filmmaking much like the written ethnographies has evolved from a colonial positivist perspective. The period between 1913-1920 was a significant period in anthropology as it was moving from a positivist natural science framework to a more fieldwork based humanist science in the 20th century. The time at which Malinowski was writing his monograph

was also the time that Flaherty made the film on the Eskimos. Flaherty very much in the tradition of ethnographers like Malinowski. Just like Malinowski stayed with the Trobriand Islanders for his fieldwork Flaherty stayed with the Inuit and made his film. Malinowski thus established the fieldwork tradition in anthropology and Flaherty did the same for ethnographic films. The tradition of staying with the subject to establish a rapport and to be scientific became prevalent in traditional anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers.

- 2) The 1960s and 70s saw the emergence of the structural functional approach in anthropology. This approach believed that by observing discrete everyday events one could make sense of them in the larger anthropological structural context. For example, Gluckman 1958 followed the principle that by focusing on the everyday interactions one is able to understand the underlying normative structural principles. Film makers like Asch too followed the same principle and filmed events as it happened. This kind of a filming was an observational style of filming in which the assumption was that the filmmaker did not influence the outcome of the film.
- 3) The filmmaker in order to be taken seriously by the anthropologists started following the norms of anthropology. They developed an observational style of film making very much along the lines of the tradition of observational fieldwork. Just like the text is constructed according to certain principles of structural anthropology films too were constructed in a similar manner. The dilemmas faced by anthropologists of that time were also faced by the filmmakers. It was like a Catch 22 situation. If one is observing the social world out there then either one can portray it as seen by the native that is as if the anthropologist and the filmmaker are within that world. As if they are participating in it. Clifford Geertz refers to it as 'emic'. If he is not in it then he is outside it i.e. 'etic'. The dialectic between the emic and the etic was faced equally by filmmakers and anthropologist. The struggle to be in yet be outside in the larger Western theoretical social framework.