Fischer   1/6/92

ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Although film has been a central medium of modernity in the twentieth century, anthropology has paid surprisingly little attention to it as either (a) an object of study in the transformations of consciousness of populations across the globe, (b) a tool of ethnography, (c) a vehicle for critical reflection on cultural processes. The goals of this course are (a) reframing past ethnography and anthropology, (b) considering how the tools of "cine-writing" can be used as a tool of ethnographic cultural critique, (c) examining different genres of film-making, paying particular attention to those films made by people about themselves rather than stereotyping others.

Modern fieldwork anthropology was born into an environment in which film was changing the spatio-temporal-visual dimensions of social life. Film, for example, was brought to India and was produced and disseminated not only in urban cinemas bu also in rural traveling shows long before the Malinowskian revolution in anthropology. And yet, oddly, until very recently, anthropology has largely ignored this perceptual world. (Tamil film was consciously used as a political organizing device, with fan clubs serving like ward organizations, and with key actors who were to become chief ministers selecting roles and lines with careful attention paid to their political image -- all this predating, for instance, Srinivas' introduction of British social anthropology into the more sociological and social work styles of social analysis in colonial and postcolonial academia and administration.)

Traditional ethnographies made surprisingly little use even of photography: they usually had only an illustrative "documentary" photograph or two, preferably in black and white; so-called "ethnographic films" (whether in black and white, or color) seem to have been rigidly patterned after black and white photographs with suppression of narratives. The vibrant search by people for reliable information amidst experience, school-learning, travel, myth, religion, prejudice, reason, et cetera, was usually suppressed into pastorals of ecological cycles, stagings of depoliticized rituals, ritualized stagings of conflicts, and frozen art forms. Despite pioneering work in contemporary cultural processes such as Peacock's Rites of Modernization (1968) (about popular theatrical forms in Indonesia), an ethnographical reading of he production of the films and advertising consumed by vast numbers of people during the course of this century is something few ethnographers have attempted, that is, a reading of them in their multiple registers: for the ethnography they display, for the future-oriented cognitive work they encourage, for the comparative perspective on life that people make of them, for the forms of perception they foster.

Three themes: (a) the utilities of thinking about film in terms of cine-writing, that is, as a device that can be manipulated rhetorically in analogous ways to rhetoric in written forms of ethnography for particular kinds of cultural critique effects; (b) cultural codes and genre forms used in different cultural traditions in film making (e.g. Iranian film, Indian film, African film, Maghrebian film, Japanese film, Argentinean film, and maybe a Central European tradition such as Polish film), with attention to reception and/or cultural-historical functions of films where information exists or hypotheses seem worth hazarding; (c) the similarities and differences between traditional ethnographic film and documentary formats.

Attention especially to: (d) reception and/or cultural-historical functions of films; and (e) positionality of film-makers and audiences, e.g., the difference between ethnicity as used by Hollywood and films by ethnics about themselves.

KEY JOURNALS

Camera Obscura
Jump Cut
Quarterly Review of Film and Video (QRFV)

Screen
Visual Anthropology Review
Wide Angle

Ethnog Film Late 20th Cent.

I. CINE-WRITING

Pierre Rouve (producer of Antonioni's "Blow Up"):

"the film is not . . . a docile ape of culture. On the contrary, as Klee would have it, the film
object "gibt nicht das Sichtabare wieder, sondern macht Sichtbar"

there is a film grammar & it is a techno-semantic co-reality
minimal unit = space-time (Zeitraum, chronotype), not mere photograms
viewpoint & relation between photograms semanticizes
Lev Kuleshov in early '20s: same facial expression of the actor Mosjukine
was read as lust, horror and hunger, because of successive
juxtaposition to shots of scantily clad girl, decaying corpse, soup
Eisenstein in "October" (1928) uses a tilted camera shot: conditioned
not by actual gradient of the road, but by intent to signify obstacles
as if portraying figure of speech "uphill struggle"
Jean Epstein's 1928 film of Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher" uses
multiple exposure as rhetorical way of creating enigma, strange,
macabre appearance: candles imposed on trees (look equally tall)
and converge on 3 silhouetted figures on horizon

"pointing the camera at a given target in a given direction is a technosyntactic equivalent
of the verbal recourse to demonstrative pronouns. High or low key lighting is
parallel to the use of adjectival qualifiers. The quantifiable duration of a screen
image acts as a variable intonational stress. Dissolves act(ed) as punctuation
codes."
"semiotically enriched, the Reel enriches the Real"

Keith Cohen:
film provides a double reality:- *eikon*   (iconic, mimesis)
- *phantasma* (fools the eye, montage, trompe l'oei effects)

Raymond Williams, "Cinema and Socialism"
...[Strindberg's plays of the 1890s] are effectively film scripts: involving the fission and
fusion of identities and characters; the alteration of objects and landscapes by the
psychological pressures of the observer; symbolic projections of obsessive states of mind:
all, as material processes beyond the reach of even his experimental theater, but all, as
processes of art, eventually to be realized in film."

Slavoj Zizek:
"what fantasy stages is not a scene in which our desire is fully satisfied, but on the
contrary, a scene that realizes, stages, the desire as such.   Desire is not
something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed: through
fantasy we learn how to desire"
Zeno's paradoxes
Achilles & the tortoise = crossing of - Aesop fable of the hare and the tortoise &
Illiad XXII:199-200 (Achilles tries to catch Hector):
"As in a dream, the pursuer never succeeds in catching up with the fugitive whom
he is after, and the fugitive likewise cannot ever clearly escape his pursuer; so

Achilles that day did not succeed in attaining Hector and Hector was not able to
escape him definitely."
dream paradox of continuous approach to an object that nevertheless
preserves a constant distance
libidinal economy: relation of the subject to the object-cause of its desire
paradox of the arrow that cannot move because at any given moment it occupies a
definite point in space
Odyssey XI:606-7 -- Heracles continually shoots an arrow, but it won't move
like dream: despite frenetic activity, we are stuck in same place
infernal world Odysseus encounters:
Tantalus: every object he obtains loses its use value & becomes pure
exchange value -- the object is not the goal of desire, once an object
is obtained, desire substitutes something else
can never cover a distance X because to do so one must first cover half this distance . . .
Sisyphus: a goal once achieved always retreats anew, source of enjoyment in a
psychological drive is the repetitive movement

Robert Stam:
Hitchcock & Bunuel cohabit the same universes of concern: law & desire, authority &
revolt, the rational and irrational, guilt (both Catholic & Jesuit educated)
but Hitchcock fosters emotional suspence   vs   Bunuel triggers intellectual surprise
thrill of empathy   shocks of recognition
anxiety   doubt
practicing Catholic but refused to   hostile to religion but secretly
see the Pope lest he tell him to   affectionate: plays with
tone down the sex/violence   canivalesque, parodistic liturgy
spectator positioning through point   refuses empathy-inducing techniques,
of view editing -> catharsis   point of view editing, shot-
                                                                    countershot, eyeline matches

II. Cultural Codes & Cultural Critique

Japan

Noel Burch - To the Distant Observer:
". . . it is beyond doubt that Japan's singular history. . . has produced a cinema which is in
essence unlike that of any other nation. This essential difference between the
dominant modes of Western and Japanese cinema, is the main concern of this study.
It is intended, furthermore as a step in the direction of a critical analysis of the
ideologically and culturally determined system of representation from which the
film industries of Hollywood and elsewhere derive their power and profit. It
consequently may be understood as part of a much broader . . .Marxist approach to
art, initiated by Brecht and Eisenstein, and which involves a detour through the
East."
development of Western system of illusionism (aka classical Hollywood style):
took a decade to develop rules of match-cutting: contiguity matching through
exits/entrances with matching directions from shot to shot; reverse field cut;
eyeline matching with spectator as mediator between two interlocutors (by end of
World War I)
was initially a fear that any violation of single frontal theater point of view and
distance would lead to a breakdown of the illusion of reality, that the audience
would become confused.

e.g. William S. Porter - The Great Train Robbery, 1903 - medium close up of
cowboy shooting into the camera -- was delivered to theaters in a separate
roll that could be spliced onto either the beginning or end of the film
fireman saving a mother and child from second story bedroom, shot first from
the street, then from inside a studio reconstruction of the room; fearing
that the audience would be confused if the shots were intercut, he
juxtaposed two complete versions of the action
editing techniques of the West were acknowledged/mastered/used but not adopted
eg Makino's *Chushingura*, 1913 (aka "The 47 Ronin"): camera runs without
interruption thru the entire sequence, front-on like a spectator at a play
seems to ignore Griffith's editing concepts, except did not ignore them: there
are several match-cuts (concertinas), lateral re-framing pans, but
while these devices became banal in the West (not signifiers of anything beyond
continuity, contiguity), in Makino they are dramatic signifiers, like signs
in Japanese theater (eg an oyoma tugging with her teeth at her kimono to
signify weeping)
visual traits of kabuki appear constantly on the screen:
stylized fighting sequences in which no blows are exchanged
backward sumersault to signify the death of a fighter
action stopping *mie*   (tableau vivant)
theatrical make-up: not like in West
in the West, theatrical make up is used to heighten expressiveness; in
kabuki make-up is purely graphic, reduces both expressiveness and
singularity
multiple roles played by the same actor
(in Kabuki, certain plays call explicitly for double roles and spectacular
staging)

Tadao Sato
kabuki had two main kinds of leading men and Japanese cinema inherited them
tateyaku - the noble, ideal, samurai, educated in the Confucian code
Bushido (warrior code) requires sacrificing love to loyalty to lord; often
tales of sacrificing wife or child out of loyalty to lord and despite inner
pain, watch them suffer without betraying emotion
nimaime - a man who could whisper sweet words of love; handsome if not strong;
pure if not clever; kind to heroine, would commit suicide with her
don't tend to get Gary Cooper or Clark Gable types, both strong/intelligent and winners in
love
(though maybe could say John Wayne is something like a tateyaku, while Marcello
Mastroianni is something like a nimaime)

African Narrative Traditions & Film

Manthia Diawara - "Oral Literature & African Film: Narratology in 'Wend Kuuni'"
films use materials of the oral literature to reflect the ideology of the time, not of the oral
tradition: e.g. Wend Kuuni ("Gift of God") achieves closure in a different order
than the oral tradition

European National Traditions

Pierre Sorlin
>Europeans wanted a depiction of indigenous themes related to their own cultural and historical experiences. Provincialism of this desire both sustains and inhibits national studios:
>>less than 10% of films shown are from other European countries
>>more than 40% and up to three quarters are American productions
>These figures are despite the fact that after World War II, Europe production nearly equalled American production, and despite the fact that the cinema industry is an industrial art form which has been internationalized from the beginning with technicians, directors, actors, and capital moving easily from country to country.

differences between national traditions
>1930s - Europe produced more World War I films than Hollywood (and they were different)(did it take a decade to be able to deal with painful memories: 1930s also saw sudden popularity of World War I in other media: autobiographies, plays, novels, photos) Italian films avoided showing World War I fighting; German films focussed on fighting.
>>espionage ignored by Germans and Italians, but fascinated the democracies: was the theme of half the British films and a third of French films
>1950s - resistance films: the secret war
>resistance is depicted as a private domestic activity, while contacts with the Allies are reduced to wireless messages; cinematic images helped comfort national pride (and deepen some prejudices)
>pessimistic: death is almost always the fate of partisans
>these are the most brutal films made in the 1950s: resistance films introduce new images of cruelty and sadism on film. Death in World War I films is portrayed as quick, dramatic, clean; here death is dirty and degrading.

Antonia Lant - gendered genres as ways of constructing audiences, genre of the national subject

>"National identity is nothing if not internationally defined. No cinema *has* national identity; rather it is secured cross-culturally, by comparison with other national outputs, formed as part of a circuit of reciprocated exchange. "
>"The ready perception by contemporary British women of Hollywood cinema [during World War II] as now . . . not speak[ing] to local conditions . . . "Look at the maids in Hollywood films. Do they look as if they've ever done a hard day's work -- they're all glamorous girls dolled up to the nines. You can't just sit there pretending." She . . .perceives the rhetoric of Hollywood now as historically specific and national, rather than universal and natural."
>"National identity is not a natural timeless essence, but an intermittent, combinatory historical product, arising at moments of contestation . . . the stuff of national identity had to be winnowed and forged from traditional aesthetic and narrative forms, borrowed from the diverse conventions of melodrama, realism, and fantasy, and transplanted from literature, painting, and history into cinema. National identity could never be straightforwardly and permanently stated, but instead could emerge only partially, from an insistence on a specifically British nature, definable only through difference from another identity . . . in the cinema, this other place was above all America.

>From the outbreak of war until the end of 1945 there were some 34,750,000 changes of address in England and Wales in a civilian population of about 38 million that generally moved very little . . . influx of European refugees in the late 1930s, the

arrival of European forces -- Free French and Poles -- after the war began, and the G.I. "invasion" of 1942-43.

representations were needed to pull together these differences, to emphasize that the most important divide was between Britain and Germany

focus on films "that can provisionally be called the genre of the national subject: that is, they are linked through an address to their audience as nationally defined.

"Focusing on the home front. . . meant emphasing the psychological . . . and this forced (or allowed) an emphasis on narratives about female experience. . . . surprisingly large number of films made during the later war years that elaborate fictions based on women's emotions,

if there is one area on which these films wish to stake their identity as British, it is their representation of women . . . the maimed, wartime female body as the quintessential sign of recent historical events in Britain.

wartime cinema in Britain asks us to consider how feminity might be constructed differently across different national cinemas . . . British wartime feminity was also defined by comparison to an idea of the American screen woman.

wartime critics urged a new style of realism on British cinema that would be the basis of a specifically British product

Paul Virlio, War & Cinema: The Logistics of Perception
". . . a mass industry, basing itself upon psychotropic derangement and chronological disturbance, was directly applying cinematic acceleration to the realism of the world. This new cinema was particularly aimed at the ever wider public which had been torn from its sedentary existence and marked down for military mobilization, exile and emigration, proletarianization in the new industrial metropolises . . . and revolution. War had everyone on the move, even the dead."

III. Ethnographic film & documentary formats

Antonia Lant - Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema
"War blurred the distinction between documentary and feature filmmaking. . . There was now a freer exchange of personnel between the two limbs of the industry. . . The war was also causing film's entertainment and informational roles to merge." (34

Ana Lopez - "Parody, Underdevelopment, and the New Latin American Cinema"
"The documentary strategies of *Memories [of Underdevelopment*, 1968], however, exceed the simple insertion of documentary material as proofs of authenticity or "realism". The structure of the film itself is predicated on the juxtaposition of the strategies of fictive discourses and the power of the filmic image as document. . . . documentary insertions into the fictive text . . . in a hypertextual movement, they relativize the force of that discourse, of any one discourse, as an indisputable "truth"."

"*The Jackal of Nahueltoro* (1968-9) . . . parodies the mechanisms of "reporting" or documenting by highlighting the dialectic between the (story)*telling* and *showing* the functions of narratives and documentaries in an explicitly dialogical fashion. . . . Positioned as a second-order discourse on an already existing discourse about "the jackal" . . . a *commentary* rather than a *documentary* . . . The sound track . . . is used to give voice to four different kinds of text, four different interpretations . . .

"In *One Way Or Another*, a traditional expository documentary mode, complete with authoritarian voice-over, is set 'beside and against' a realist fictional narrative . . . a fairly standard romance."

IV. Reception and/or Cultural-Historical Functions of Films

perceptual change, reflexivity & cultural critique, parallel texts

Pierre Sorlin
>   Films beget films . . . Each film could be considered a small bit in the huge text of all the already shot movies. But images evolve with societies, and we do not see our surroundings with the conceptual tools people used even half a century ago.
>   When seeing images of their daily life, people understand and appreciate it differently. Partly because youth was staged as such in so many movies in the 1960s, the concept of "youth" (and youth culture) emerged.

Vijay Mishra, Peter Jeffrey, and Brian Shoesmith - The Actor as Parallel Text in Bombay Cinema
>   This explains why Devananad and Shashi Kapoor, Vinod Khanna, and Rajesh Khanna have been great stars in Bombay cinema but have not generated parallel texts. To find that parallel text which vies for place with the film itself (as character to plot), we must go to K.L. Saigal and Ashok Kumar, Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor, and, finally and most recently, of course, to Bachchan who, we suggest, may well be the last of the parallel texts. . . . the mode of production of Bombay cinema . . . itself is undergoing such radical changes that no single actor can become either exemplary or emblematic of Bombay cinema in the near future.
>   We therefore advance the idea that the parallel text is both constructed and carried by the song and dialogue situation. In other words, the star so defined is represented as a feature of the "labor" of memory, a product of the essentially oral traditions of the Indian, as well as a production of the industry.

Marsha Kinder - "Ideological Parody in the New German Cinema"
>   Ideological parody characteristic of New German Cinema works by rewriting stories and genres
>   >   Each new text sacrifices at least one of its central characters through castration, murder, suicide. Such characters are both victim and embodiment of destructive ideological forces. They are double agents, not unified subjects who invite emotional identification, but rather they are ambivalent signifiers whose meanings slide between two systems of signification.
>   Wim Wenders claimed he wanted to stop quoting from other movies: "Whatever film you went to see, it had its nourishment or its life or its food, its roots, in other movies . . . I didn't see anything anymore that was really trying to redefine a relation between life and images made from life."

class and social background

Noel Burch
>   In the West, plebeian tastes were formed by vaudeville, circus, magic lantern, etc.; these were viewed by dominant bourgeois taste as archaic forms suitable only form children and nannies, and as in contradiction to the developed "illusionism" of dominant theater. While early cinema has traces of the plebian forms of art, the introduction of naturalism is in part a class strategy.
>   Is there a realist vocation in cinema?
>   >   In kabuki when a prop is no longer needed, a black clad stage assistant retrieves it. In film, often see the prop disappear at the end of an invisible thread. Why is the stage assistant not retained, given the other practices of stage artifice that were retained? Is this one sign of conflict over the next two decades of defining cinema as more realistic than stage?

Lary May - Screening Out the Past
- With the Jewish moguls on top [in the third stage of the industry's growth], and a large
  ethnic component among the rank and file, the creative personnel were already one
  step removed from the Victorian restraints holding earlier film makers. . . Those
  who created the aura --producers, directors, cinematographers, and set designers
  -- came largely from European or Canadian backgrounds. . . Those who provided
  the models -- actors and actresses -- were overwhelmingly young. Two thirds of
  them were under thirty-five. Moreover, three-fourths of the industry's female
  performers were under twenty-five. This suggests that the youth cult so
  necessary for uplifting "foreign" elements concentrated most heavily on women,
  who were responsible for making sensuality innocent. (189)
- during the 1920s women comprised from one third to one half of the screen writers.
  From the memoirs of several, we can see they were in the vanguard of moral
  experimentation, forging into dress reform, new sexual styles, and consumption. . .
  Their plots overwhelmingly revolved around heroines like themselves.
- Jewish film moguls were ideal middle men for a fusion of styles . . .Zukor . . . capitalized
  on the star . . . who could synthesize moral experimentation with traditional
  virtues. . . . Wall street bankers hedged, and Zukor . . . turned to ethnic financiers .
  . . With the help of A. H. Gianini's Bank of Italy (the future Bank of America) and
  the German-Jewish firm of Kuhn and Loeb . . .
- Cecil B. DeMille was the scion of an eastern elite family
  His father was descended from a long line of Huguenot planters in South Carolina . . .
  took orders to become an Episcopal priest, but shed the clerical collar and turned to
  writing domestic dramas. His mother came from a German-Jewish family and
  apparently converted to her husband's religion; she was active in the circles of
  New York reformers.
  DeMille pioneered a set of marital ethics that the Protestant churches would not
  sanction until ten years later. . . The director knew that this rebellion held a strong
  appeal for women. In fact, over 90 percent of DeMille's films in the late teens and
  twenties were written by female scenarists. .

effects on the arts and philosophy

Keith Cohen
- Modern [written] fiction depends for what it is on a cinematic way of seeing and telling.
- Marx and Freud used cinematic metaphors to explain fundamental concepts
  ideology for Marx - that which forces the subject to see social relations in inverted
  order like in a camera obscura
  projection on a dream screen (Freud)
- Bergson examined at some length the similarity between thought processes and cinematic
  processes to show the constraints fostered by mechanistic epistemology
Fredric Jameson
  Sartre, a movie-goer since age three, tells us that the theory of contingency, the
  experience of [his novel] Nausea, was derived from the experience of film . . .
Roberto Echaverra
  "When Manuel Puig's early novels were published in the late sixties, they shook the
  literary consciousness of the time. He was the first novelist writing in Spanish
  who consistently utilized popular culture and the products of show business in
  order to articulate his fictions. This particular slant of the newer novel was the
  most serious blow to Jorge Luis Borges's notion of literary decorum. Borges's
  fiction consists of a web of allusions to other books, to a universal ever-living

library, a solitary adventure . . . Manuel Puig's books . . . betray a ravenous lower-middle-class appetite for commercially packaged products, especially films made in Hollywood throughout the thirties and forties. . ."

consumer and industrial economy

Mary Ann Doane

". . . at least three instances of the commodity form in its relation to the cinema and the question of the female spectator-consumer. . . . The female spectator is invited to . . . buy an image of herself insofar as the female star is proposed as the ideal of feminine beauty . . . This level involves not only the currency of a body but of a space in which to display that body: a car, a house, a room filled with furniture and appliances. The second type . . . when the commodity is "tied in" in a space off screen by linking a line of clothing . . . It disperses the fascination of the cinema onto a multiplicity of products . . . Finally the third . . . the film itself and its status as a commodity in a circuit of exchange. . . promotes a certain mode of perception . . . adequate to a consumer society . . . initiates a . . dialectic of "being", "having", and "appearing"."

"positioning the laborer as a consumer was also an effective means of countering an emerging resistance to the industrial and corporate structure . . ."

"The commodity tie-up or tie-in is usually closely associated with the materials prepared by the studio's publicity department in order to market the movie, materials which are gathered together in a publication referred to as the campaign book or press book and sent to exhibitors. . . . In sections entitled "Exploitation", the studio experts isolate a particular scene, condensed onto a publicity still (an arrival scene for example) and suggest its affiliation with the appropriate commodity (in this instance, luggage). Metonymy is the trope of the tie-in. The press book constitutes a detailed reading of the filmic text to . . . disseminate the fetishism of the filmic image in a metonymic chain of commodities.

the film frame is a kind of display window; spectatorship a form of window-shopping

Advertising . . . by this time a highly efficient machine . . . was frequently subordinated to the ideological imperative of moving women first into and then out of the work force in a fairly short period of time (the "Rosie the Riveter" phenomenon).

"At the cinema, the consumer glance hovers over the surface of the image, isolating details which may be entirely peripheral in relation to the narrative."