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Chapter 11

The Viewer Viewed: The Reception of Ethnographic Films*

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Introduction

The role of the audience in the construction of meaning in ethnographic film is a complex one. A proper exploration requires a thorough examination of many undertheorised and unspoken assumptions. On the one hand, there are the large questions concerning the role of the reader/viewer in the construction of meaning. As the focus is narrowed, there are questions about the viewer in relationship to films in general, to films viewed as television, and films as educational components in the classroom. And then there are the questions which pertain to the peculiarities of an anthropological communication. While the reception of ethnographic films may be a somewhat parochial issue, research in this area will undoubtedly be relevant for larger issues, that is, when you gain an understanding of the reception of ethnographic films you are in turn revealing something about the nature of reception of all films.

To comprehend the viewer's relationship to an ethnographic film, it is first necessary to explicate a general theory of pictorial communication that evaluates the relative importance of the producer, the process of construction, the film text, the conditions of viewing and the viewer.

Questions of author, text, and reader or viewer have preoccupied literary criticism, and communication research for some time. Scholarly opinion about the importance of the viewer has vacillated from seeing them as passive recipients, that is, victims of hegemonic messages designed to oppress and repress to representing them as the sole entity responsible for the construction of meaning. Most studies hypothesize audiences in one of three contradictory ways-as an undifferentiated mass, as discreet psychological entities or as oppressed communities who create or should create oppositional readings of texts in their struggle for empowerment. Quantitative methods and psychological paradigms dominate the field. Only a few scholars have thus far evinced an interest in exploring the roles that gender, age, ethnicity or culture might play. As Caldarola suggests, these studies are '...constrained by an inadequate model of cultural experience and by the presumed communicative power of mass media systems' (1990, p. 1). The assumed force of the author and/or the text dominates. It has only been in the last thirty

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years, when reception theories became popular, that the role of reader/viewer was even considered worth investigating. Unfortunately, visual anthropologists, or for that matter, most anthropologists, have contributed little to the debate. As Martinez points out that the postmodern analysis of anthropology has so far paid '...little attention to their reception [ethnographic texts] by the 'general public' or to their linkage with the larger process of the construction of cross-cultural knowledge and cultural identities' (1992, p. 131).

Reception theory is clearly a step in the right direction because it '...recognizes that messages are not inherently meaningful, and that that which is perceived or understood by media audiences depends largely on the characteristics of the audience, rather than the intentions of communicators or any intrinsic features of media programs' (Caldarola, 1990, pp. 3-4). While a critical review of the literature on reader/response, audience, spectatorship, reception, uses and gratification, and reception studies would be

invaluable, it would take us too far from the topic of this chapter. And besides several excellent critical surveys already exist (Caldarola, 1990; Martinez, 1990; Seiter, 1989; and Staiger, 1992).

As an anthropologist I am obviously drawn to any model that argues for the primacy of culture in the construction of meaning. This vantage point, a bias toward theory grounded in culture, eliminates most literary and media criticism, including much that has been written about reader-response and reception. While some writers like Stanley Fish (1980) propose that we understand readers as belonging to 'interpretative communities', few theorists argue for field testing their concepts, that is, doing ethnographies of reception. Most reception theories hypothetically construct the viewer and his/her role in the construction of meaning with no reference to the real world. Literary critics, including the postmodernists (see e.g. Grossberg, 1988), apparently see no need to discover whether there are any actual readers who consciously or otherwise employ the proposed models. Readers are invented rather than discovered. Research in reception consists of sitting in one's study reading or viewing texts and fantasizing about viewers. These models lack the means of verification and instead rely on the elegance of the scholars' argument. During the past decade, the advent of ethnographic studies of television reception (Michaels, 1987; Caldarola, 1990; Kottak, 1990; Lyons, 1990; and Lyons, 1990) suggests that an anthropology of television may soon challenge the mainstream paradigms of communication research.

Symbolic Strategies and Cultural Receptions

I shall here employ an anthropology of visual communication reception model known as symbolic strategies, derived from the ethnographic semiotics of Sol Worth and Larry Gross (1982) and Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication (1967) to give shape to my remarks. It assumes that a film is a culturally coded communicative event designed to function in a particular context. Producers employ various codes they deem culturally appropriate for the context in which they wish the film seen. The producer takes it for granted that viewers share their

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competencies and assumptions and therefore the film will have its intended impact. Lacking a convenient or common means of feedback, producers must hypothesize their viewers' ability to understand with little hope of ever really knowing whether their assumptions are correct. In other words, producers make cultural assumptions about their viewers' cultural assumptions about codes and their contexts.

Viewers have an active, perhaps seminal, role in this process in that they can both imply from and attribute to films, that is, they can attempt to comprehend the film as a symbolic act designed by the producer to be understood in a particular way or they attribute meaning to the film's plot, characters, narrative, etc. based upon their cultural assumptions. Implying from a film or attempting to understand the motives and intentions of the maker appears to be an activity largely confined to specialized viewers like critics, scholars, students in film courses and others esoterically involved in film. Most viewers simply attribute to the film what they already know about the people, places, and events depicted in the film regardless of what the producer intended. In others words, if viewers opt to attribute their cultural assumption to the film, they are able to overlook, ignore, contradict or even misunderstand the producer's meaning.

Research evidence suggests that when the producer's intended message conflicts with the viewer's world view, it is the viewers' attributions that will most likely dominate. Viewers therefore construct a meaning that may be contrary to the producer's intentions. Let me give a concrete, if not, obvious example. It is not very complicated to understand Leni Riefenstahl's intention in her 1936 film *Triumph of the Will*. It is also equally easy to subvert that intention by seeing the film as Nazi propaganda. This oppositional reading is facilitated in two ways: the film can be placed by gatekeepers such as film programmers or teachers in a context that encourages a reading contrary to the one intended by the producer. It is also possible that the knowledge and values of the viewer are sufficiently contrary to the producers as to thwart the producer.

Worth and Gross' perspective argues that the culture of the viewer together with the cultural context of

reception may be the most crucial factors in the construction of meaning. While an ethnographic analysis of the conditions of reception is the logical focus of an anthropology of communication model, it is also necessary to explore the conditions of production, the assumptions of the producer, the cultural expectations encoded in various viewing contexts, and the formal attributes of film as text if we are to understand how a viewer negotiates his/ her cultural expectations with the producer's intended message.

Seeing Relativism vs Seeing Stereotypes

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to point out what I regard as the most serious problem facing ethnographic film-makers and anthropologists who wish to use film to teach. There appears to be an apparent chasm between the intentions of anyone who attempts to communicate anthropological knowledge and the

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interpretive folk models used to understand difference by people in the United States. The goal of all anthropological communication is to make viewers or readers aware/self-conscious and uncomfortable with their ethnocentrism. In other words, the general purpose of an anthropological communication is to alter the relationship between ourselves and the other. Postmodernist critics like Marcus and Clifford wish to add another goal-to make viewers aware of the constructed and tentative nature of anthropological knowledge (Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Marcus and Clifford, 1986). This admonition logically leads us into a discussion of reflexivity-something that I have written about in a number of places over the past years (Ruby 1981). Martinez (1992) has argued that these two goals should be linked. If a film is reflexively open, less authoritative, and multivocal, it may be that viewers will be more able to overcome their ethnocentric tendencies and gain some empathetic feelings for the people portrayed in the film. Based upon his research, Martinez advocates that ethnographic film-makers emulate the reflexive style of Jean Rouch, Barbara Myerhoff/Lynn Littman or David MacDougall:

Although in part merely attracted by 'innovative' forms of representation and/or responding to their need for the author's reflexive mediation to help bridge the cross-cultural gap, spectators manifest more than facile engagement in these films; students seem to accept the invitation to participate actively in discerning the diverse layers of representation. (Martinez, 1992, p. 138)

Mainstream U.S. middle-class culture provides two folk models when contemplating exotic cultures-the noble savage and the ignoble savage. It is popularly assumed that the subject matter of anthropology is exclusively the exotic other, that is, Third and Fourth world people. To put it a bit crudely, anthropologists study partially clothed brown and black people who live far away from their audiences. The noble savage model suggests that the other resides in a cultural paradise of stressless activities, sexual freedom, and ecological balance. If we, the nasty West, would only leave them alone, they could lead idyllic lives. It is a folk rendition and misreading of Rousseau-very popular in the 1960s and 1970s and seen most recently in the *Save the Rain Forest* campaigns.

The opposite but co-existing folk model is the ignoble savage in which the other is viewed as the backward, barbaric simpleton in desperate need of things Western. We will be their salvation-physically and spiritually. It is the nineteenth century 'White Man's Burden' and the basis of the Peace Corps in the twentieth century. All missionaries, whether Christian, capitalist or Marxist are manifestations of this concept.

The moral, political, and intellectual task of the anthropologist is to somehow thwart or subvert these folk models and if we are to follow the dictums of Marcus and Clifford to alienate viewers from their suspension of disbelief so ingrained in

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the realism of cinema and television-not a simple task. To employ the jargon of the Worth-Gross model, anthropological producers' implied meanings should be diametrically opposed to their readers and viewers' attributions. The role of the ethnographic film-maker is to produce programs subversive to their audiences' view of the world and of the media. In its most radical formulation, anthropology's public message should be designed to alter the West's conceptualization of the Other and the construction of knowledge. Viewed from this perspective, the ethnographic film-maker is not merely attempting to educate his or her viewers about the humanity of exotic people but to propagandize for a fundamental alteration of their view of the world. Given the economic and political realities of the funding and distribution, ethnographic film has a difficult battle to fight.

The Producers and the Means of Production

With the dilemma now stated in its most radical form, let me examine, albeit in a cursory manner, the producer and production of ethnographic films in the U.S.: the construction of the text. The world of ethnographic film in the U.S. has become dominated by public television. The educational market, mainly one of rental, while still sizable, is economically unimportant in that few educational institutions have the funds to purchase any but the most inexpensive videotapes. Most teachers I know are forced into violating the copyright laws if they wish to teach with film. No national funding agency provides production monies for films made primarily for educational purposes. The largest grant-giving organization is the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), a government entity with a media program designed to promote the humanities to the public via television. While not all ethnographic films are federally funded and only a small percentage of them are ever broadcast, it is fair to say that the majority of ethnographic film-makers aspire to be part of that system. The possibility of a television national audience with the even greater potential of international broadcasting has an enormous impact of how films are produced from seemingly insignificant things like determining the length of a film (It must be thirty, sixty, or ninety minutes to be considered for television) to assumptions about the ability of an audience to comprehend complex ideas that compete with their cultural predispositions. Virtually all research about television audiences everywhere in the world suggests that viewers' motivation for watching television is the desire to be entertained. It is difficult for me to see anthropology's messages about the importance of culture in determining behavior or the nonjudgementalness of cultural relativity as being entertaining. Anthropologists want to make people aware that difference can be appreciated without ethnocentric judgments. Viewers want to be amused by watching exotic people do strange things.

Some ethnographic/documentary producers attempt to make a living on the basis of the television success of their products. The remainder teach-usually in film departments in universities. Whether or not they continue producing these shows depends upon their ability to conform to the values and suppositions of

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broadcast television journalism. For example, all television producers assume that their viewers will only have one chance to see a program. Audience profiles suggest that the people who watch PBS and more specifically documentaries and ethnographic films are urban, young middle-aged, well educated, primarily European American with little or no knowledge of anthropology. Audiences are motivated to watch these shows because they have a curiosity about people and places exotic to their experience. They are not interested in anthropology *per se*. While I have no hard evidence to support it, I think that the audience for documentary is composed primarily of people who also watch nature films and travelogues. Unlike psychology, most anthropological concepts have not become part of common parlance-for every ten people who can explain what an Oedipal complex is, there is one who knows what patrilineality means. Logically, producers are loath to employ anthropological jargon or to produce anything overly complex that assumes prior knowledge or is sufficiently difficult as to defy closure. The received wisdom is that successful programmer end with a conclusion that gives their audience comfort in assuming that they know something clear and unproblematic. The world of television programs seems at times to be fundamentally different from the world of written anthropology in which most communications are tentative, even uncertain. Anthropological writings are designed for an esoteric audience of scholarly

journals and university press books where a readership of students and fellow scholars seldom numbers more than a few thousand. Even 'best-seller' authors like George Marcus or James Clifford are known to a relatively proscribed circle of intellectuals and scholars. Few anthropologists before or after Margaret Mead have been interested in communicating to a mass audience. Producers make the assumption that film is, by definition, a mass medium.

While it may sound harsh, the truth of the matter is that the production of ethnographic films in the U.S. is market driven. Funds are available primarily because agencies believe there is a television market for the product with viewers who number in the hundreds of thousands if not millions. NEH and PBS are no different than corporate advertisers and commercial television networks. They want programs that will gain a substantial market share and seriously offend no one. I have personal knowledge of film projects that were turned down by NEH simply because the subject had been recently explored in another film, that is, the market had been saturated. When the educational world was more lucrative, similar decisions for funding were made based on the market need to develop certain curriculum. Like everything else in the U.S., schools are regarded as businesses.

The intellectual curiosity that drives many research projects for anthropologists who write does not seem to be a dominant factor here. Seldom if ever do producers make esoteric ethnographic films designed to communicate to a select, sophisticated audience. Independent film-makers outside the world of federal funds and public television tend to be motivated by a desire to explore social, political, and cultural issues that are parallel but separate from the interests of

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most anthropologists. It is rare to find a film project initiated by an anthropologist who wishes to visually represent his or her research findings. The notion that film is a costly mass medium that can only justify itself if the work appeals to a mass audience dominates the thinking of nearly everyone-scholar and producer alike.

No one makes a full time living in the U.S. in ethnographic film production and only a few documentarians like Les Blank and Fred Wiseman survive from the income generated from their work. What livelihood is created is the result of the production of marketable films not in the study of anthropology. Because these independent documentarians have little or no formal training in or knowledge of anthropology, when they are making a film which purports to be ethnographic, they become *de facto* amateur anthropologists. The tradition began with Robert Flaherty and continues to the present with John Marshall, Robert Gardner, and David MacDougall. There are some exceptions like Timothy Asch or Jean Rouch, trained in anthropology and devoted to the creation of an anthropological cinema, exploring ways to use films in the teaching of anthropology and the training of ethnographic film-makers.

Whether a film-maker is an autodidact or academically trained is relevant only because the profession one identifies with often determines ones' loyalties, concept of success, etc. I am arguing that by training, interest, and temperament many ethnographic film-makers primarily look to the world of independent film and public television for approval and not the world of mainstream cultural anthropology. Please do not misunderstand me, I am not making the tedious argument about a conflict between art and science. The conflict between the conventions of successful television documentary realism and a postmodern, post-colonial, and critical anthropology has more to do with epistemological and economical differences than anything else. Anthropologists are in the privileged position of not having to earn a living from the products they produce, most film-makers are.

Films are most often labeled ethnographic because they deal in a sympathetic manner with Third and Fourth world cultures-people popularly assumed to be the subject matter of anthropology. Producers like the general public erroneously assume that the focus of anthropology is people and not abstract concepts like culture or political economy. Films are labeled ethnographic regardless of the producer's intentions or competence. The confusion is further exacerbated when anthropologists on juries in prestigious events like the *Cinema du Reel*, the Margaret Mead Film Festival and The RAI Film Festival give recognition and

prizes to films like *Baka - People of the Rainforest* or *Black Harvest*-films produced without the benefit of any professional anthropological input. An additional factor which causes some films to be labeled ethnographic is the willingness of teachers of anthropology to call any film they can use in their classroom, ethnographic. Apparently one does not have to know anything about anthropology to make an ethnographic film acceptable to anthropologists. The logic of this position could lead us to regard graduate programs as a waste of time. Folk wisdom seems to

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suggest that if your politics are correct, your training or intentions are not relevant.

Because most producers have no formal training in anthropology or in depth first hand ethnographic knowledge of the people they wish to film, they often attempt to make up for this lack by becoming associated with an anthropologist knowledgeable about the culture to be filmed. As advisor or consultant the anthropologist provides field access, serves as interpreter, and sometimes adds an anthropological flavor to the production. Given a lack of production skills, most anthropologists attempt to infuse an anthropological orientation into the film's narration. Many film-makers regard anthropologists as being word-addicted folk who talk films to death. Because producers tend to avoid narration as much as possible, these attempts are not often successful.

NEH has formalized the necessity of collaboration by insisting that a grant recipient have a panel of scholars involved in the production. A panel is required because NEH insists that all films present a balanced picture-a peculiar American paranoia about having too strong of a point of view. This requirement is regarded by some film-makers as inhibiting their artistic vision. Consequently there has developed a cynical subterfuge where in scholars are hired to fulfill the requirements of the funding agency but have little or no significant impact on the shape of the film. I call this the 'rent a scholar' approach. In the U.S., collaborations become difficult, often the anthropologist ends up feeling that his/her research has been popularized to the point of non-recognition. Collaboration between anthropologists and film-makers is, at best, a complex undertaking deserving of a much more complete exploration than is possible here (Hoover, 1992).

Ethnography As Television-The Ethnography of Television

Regardless of the clarity of intention, ethnographic television programs continue to be made and broadcast and appropriated for the classroom. To understand their reception, it is necessary to comprehend the way people make sense out of television in general, and the television documentary as it appears on PBS, the venue aspired to by most producers. I am, of course, consciously excluding the altogether important films made outside the television world such as those by Asch, Rouch, and MacDougall. As significant as they may be, they do not constitute the majority. I am concentrating on the kinds of film one finds on a regular basis at the Margaret Mead Festival, at the annual Society for Visual Anthropology screenings, and those reviewed in the *American Anthropologist*.

Ethnographic films are seen irregularly on U.S. television-occasionally on the popular science series, *Nova* or a National Geographic Special and sometimes as a special series like *Millennium*. In the 1970s a PBS series about anthropology, *Odyssey*, was launched. It failed after two seasons. The British series, *Disappearing World*, is now on the Discovery cable channel-where other ethnographic programs occasionally appear. With the proliferation of cable stations I am cer-

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tain there will be more venues. However, it is highly unlikely that a regular series on ethnographic film will be offered.

No specialized audience has been developed as a consequence of the irregular appearance of

ethnographic television shows. That is, no one has become socialized in the comprehension of conventions unique to the genre, the way, for example, soap opera fans learn to understand the passage of time. In fact, there is no ethnographic film genre on or off television. Television ethnographies have the look of other television documentaries except they are usually subtitled and often the people portrayed do not look like white Americans. Since viewers spend far more time watching television than they do watching films, it is safe to say that they evaluate all moving pictures in terms of the conventions and expectations they acquire watching television. So regardless of whether we wish to understand the reception of ethnographic film on television or in the classroom, we need first to understand how viewers receive and make sense out of television in general.

Without detouring into a discussion of the complexities of conducting ethnographic studies of television viewing, I will generalize from the findings of researchers who have conducted participant-observational studies in naturalistic settings of 'TV talk', that is, researchers watching people watch television in their homes with their families. It is clear that being able to talk about television is a requisite for full membership in many social groups within the family and outside of it. Americans spend a large portion of their leisure time watching television. Discussions of the lives of the fictitious people that inhabit televisionland may be one of the 'safe' topics of conversation in American social life.

How people talk about television and integrate the experience into their lives is conditioned by several pre-television contexts (Liebes, 1984; Lull, 1990; and Morley, 1986). The dynamics of family interaction seems to provide the basis from which an individual develops interpretative strategies. Position in a family unit, age, gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity, and culture all serve to construct the norms for attending to a program, the content of discussion topics, etc. It seems reasonable to assume that the need to maintain our status in these groups is more important than our need to establish our authority to offer alternative readings of the television we watch and therefore most people render the socially preferred reading of what they watched. I am not suggesting that we lock step our way through life as automatons parroting the same views about television. The role of some family members is to always go against the grain with oppositional readings.

In addition, peer groups outside the family provide alternative possibilities. For example, a teenager can view a program about family life with their family and render a 'family-approved' reading. The next day with other teenagers, they parody the same program, savaging the 'official' adult reading. Office workers during a coffee break will offer oppositional readings of their evening's viewing.

The long and the short of it is that if we wish to comprehend how viewers understand ethnographic film, anthropologists are going to have to begin conduct-

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ing ethnographic studies of how people watch television. While there are no studies to provide evidence, it does seem reasonable to suggest that viewers of ethnography on television would tend to employ folk models of the noble and ignoble savage models rather than accept the meaning implied by the program.

An additional result of these television reception studies is that they seem to reaffirm what commonsense tells us about the context of television viewing which also supports the received wisdom of the television industry. Television viewing is fundamentally different from the viewing of a film in a theater or classroom. Whether video watching constitutes a viewing context that differs from television remains to be seen. Television viewers are seldom alone and they almost never only watch television. In a theater or classroom, the room is darkened and your attention is directed toward the film. Anything that might distract your viewing has been minimized. The rattling of popcorn boxes or conversations during a movie are antisocial behaviors. In the classroom, there are potential penalties for not paying attention-students might be tested on their understanding of the film. When people watch television they eat, read, do school work, have discussions, disagreements, even serious arguments, answer the phone, leave the room, etc. In short, they are only paying slight attention. The television industry's assumptions about the level of complexity possible in a television program seems altogether logical. Given the apparent lack of

concentration, any program that challenges the folk models of its viewer is not likely to be successful because it depends that they pay careful attention.

There is a strange lack of fit between the time, skill, and money a professional producer puts into crafting the best program possible and the casualness with which it is received. The context of television viewing certainly should cause us to be skeptical of the success of an ethnographically intended program unless one is content with modest intentions or if the producer sees television as the financial means that make possible the production of a film meant for uses outside broadcast television.

Ethnographic Film in the classroom

When I think back

On all the crap I learned in high school

It's a wonder

I can think at all

And though my lack of education

Hasn't hurt me none

I can read the writing on the wall.

© 1973 Paul Simon, *Kodachrome*

Television is a viewing situation constrained by the norms of family and peer group interaction. There are few incentives to pay careful attention to a program so that one can Reconstruct and critique the form and the content. The

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classroom is different. Teachers are gatekeepers. They set the stage for the screening and can hold students responsible for rendering a particular reading of a film. A teacher can provide interpretative strategies that vary from those students acquire elsewhere. A classroom constructs a very different social world than a living room. The power to set agendas for conversation, establish topics for discussion, the norms for paying attention are now set by the teacher, not a parent. While the consequences for inappropriate behavior in the classroom are far less significant than the consequences for asocial behavior among family members and peers, the immediacy of flunking a course undoubtedly constrains most students into adhering to the teacher-approved reading of the film. Whether the opinions students render inside the classroom are carried with them remains unknown.

This controlled environment is an ideal place to ethnographically explore the reception of films. Because the classroom is a highly controlled site of reception, designing research to determine the fit between the producers' intentions and the viewers' perceptions is relatively easy. In recent years educators and anthropologists have produced a considerable ethnography of education literature. Unfortunately none of it deals with the role of films in the classroom nor has the university classroom been the subject of study.

The most elaborately constructed course in anthropology in the U.S. was entitled 'Man, the Course of Study' or MACOS designed by the Educational Development Center in the late 1960s, during a time when the U.S. government was concerned with and funded projects to improve education. Conceived for the fifth and sixth grades-ten and eleven year olds, the course used films, books, and class activities in very innovative way. Among the components was a unit on the Netsilik Eskimo with films produced by Asen Balicki. The project must have worked because conservative journalists and politicians accused MACOS of teaching children anti-American values. Gilbertson claimed that the course '... explicitly sets out to

develop the notion that man is no more than a sophisticated animal' (1980, p. 54). Peter Dow (1991) has written about MACOS' effectiveness among the children who took the course. While the Netsilik films and Balicki's accompanying monograph were also popular in university teaching, a comparable study was not undertaken of college age students.

To my knowledge only two research projects have been pursued to explore the place of ethnographic film in a university setting. 'In an unpublished study done in 1973, Thomas Hearne and Paul DeVore found that the use of Yanomamo films (Asch, Chagnon) in introductory anthropology was reinforcing students' negative preconceptions of the Yanomamo. After watching the films, students' views evolved from simple impressions and characterizations to well-informed and more complex stereotypes about the 'primitive' (Martinez, 1990, p. 35).

Wilton Martinez has conducted the most extensive study of the reception of ethnographic film by college students at the University of Southern California. While the sample of films he used was larger than those used by Hearne and DeVore, his conclusions were similarly depressing. He discovered that '... most

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students decoded ethnographic films in an 'aberrant' way, with high levels of 'culture shock' and alienation, and with relatively low level of understanding of both film and subject matter' (Martinez, 1990, p. 45).

Students come to ethnographic films with two somewhat unrelated sets of interpretative expectations—one concerned with understanding moving pictures and the other providing a way of dealing with cultural difference. The former is derived from the many hours they have spent passively watching television and the dulling effect of education media. The latter was already described early as twin folk models that are the ethnocentric and racist basis of American society. Anyone wishing to use ethnographic films successfully in the classroom must confront both expectations and attempt to frustrate them. I assume that most teachers of anthropology are aware of the need to deal their students' ethnocentrism. I wonder how many see the need to also deal with their visual naiveté? Many years ago, Marshall McLuhan predicted that the television generation would be a visually sophisticated generation, perhaps that is so and all those pictorially hip students decided to attend some other university than the one I teach in.

It would be comforting to think that the findings in these studies simply reflect the generally poor quality of American university teaching and that if a teacher really spent the time organizing a class in an imaginative way, the students would respond differently. Martinez disagrees. He believes that a student's response is not always positively effected by the design of the course and the context in which the films are shown, 'I have observed that the tendencies, the patterns of response outlined here, do not change very much; they may in degree, but not very much in kind' (Martinez, 1990, p. 46).

Conclusions

I have employed Sol Worth and Larry Gross' reception model (1982) to examine how ethnographic films are understood. I have argued that while the producer's intentions and the way in which they construct the text are important, it is the conditions of exhibition and the viewers that ultimately determine the meaning of the film.

I further suggested that there is an inherent tension between the goals of anthropologists who wish to make viewers self-conscious about their ethnocentrism and their uncritical acceptance of the authority and the assumptions made by television producers about what kinds of programs will funded, broadcast and therefore, succeed. Because producers and not anthropologists determine what we see, audiences are provided with programmer that are more concerned with presenting difference as somehow entertaining rather than with the explication of anthropological knowledge. At best, one can say that ethnographic television programmer present a diluted or implicit anthropological message. Some producers would argue that it is the nature of television that prevents more complex films from being broadcast.

Whether or not the conflict can be solved remains to be seen. Those who wish to produce ethnographic films for television need to confront the problem. Anthropologists need to learn more about television audiences. They must become more knowledgeable about film/video production so as to be able to have the choice of producing on their own or collaborating with professional producers in a more sophisticated manner. Producers need to learn more about anthropology as a theoretical construct so they can understand why anthropologists wish to go beyond mere description. Anthropologists need to not be seduced by the siren song of television-something is better than nothing.

It may be that ethnographic films do not belong on PBS or on any U.S. television system. Some politically and socially conscious producers have decided that the current system of television distribution is too restrictive. They have created alternative means called *Paper Tiger* and *Deep Dish* television. Why do ethnographic film-makers not consider alternative distribution?

Some people, like Tim Asch, would argue that ethnographic film should be produced for the classroom and as esoteric communiques between scholars, that is, be directed to the same audiences and contexts that written anthropology is. Rather than making premature decisions about what the proper venue is for ethnographic films, anthropologists need to address the complexities of pictorial communication as a researchable question. Once more is known about the nature of film communication, it becomes possible to make an informed decision about how these films are to be constructed if producers wish to have their anthropological intentions understood.

Notes

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