Ethnographic Film

An Investigation with specific reference to the Bushman Ethnographies of John Marshall

by

Mark J. Kaplan

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
University of Cape Town
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Signature of Author

Mark J. Kaplan, Department of Architecture, August 9, 1985

Certified by

Richard Leacock, Professor of Cinema, Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by

Nicholas Negroponte, Chairman
Departmental Committee for Graduate Students

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on August 9, 1985 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Visual Studies

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of a text and a videotape, entitled Pull Ourselves Up or Die Out.

The written thesis is an examination of the tradition of documentary film making with particular reference to notions of Realism, particularly as revealed in the ethnographic films made by John Marshall. The Marshall material spans a period from 1951 to the present day and relates the changes that the !Kung Bushman of Namibia have been forced to undergo. The material is unique and this thesis elaborates on the conditions and influences that have determined the film makers' strongly personal approach.

The videotape that accompanies this thesis is 3/4 inch U-Matic, 25 minutes long, color, sound and in English, Afrikaans and Ju/Wasi languages.

Thesis Supervisor: Richard Leacock
Title: Professor of Cinema
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1. INTRODUCTION

A new approach to Anthropology has evolved as anthropologists have veered away from an emphasis on studying other cultures and as Anthropology has begun to rid itself of its colonial vestiges. This process has been aided by the new perspectives supplied by Third World anthropologists and in concert with this there has been an evolution in the use of ethnographic film. Without overstating the case, we can say that the first tentative steps have been taken to develop a practice which allows for a two-way flow of information.

I have argued below that certain approaches to film making can reduce distortion to a minimum, the ideological bias of the film maker notwithstanding. The Bushman ethnographies of John Marshall are examples of an approach which seeks to minimize distortion by allowing the Bushman people to speak for themselves and to portray themselves as they choose. I have referred at various times to the Bushman, San, !Kung and Ju/Wasi, and these descriptions are interchangeable.

I have attempted in what follows to contextualize the Bushman ethnographies. Fundamental to the approach adopted is the fact that no film, contrary to appearances, is frozen in time. That is to say, to understand film in general, and any film in particular, we need to look beyond the product itself. Meaning in film is not fixed. It differs according
to the passage of time and of place. We may of course learn a lot by studying the codes and signs contained in all films. This has been the dominant approach to film criticism and borrows heavily on the seminal work on semiotics by Roland Barthes. However, the study of film language (Semiology) suffers precisely because the film as text is not immutable and meaning is therefore not something inherently locked within its form.

We need to go beyond the text to fully understand the very nature of the medium of film. One way of doing this is to define what Jacques Lacan calls the 'structuring absences' of the text, as Cahiers du Cinema have done (1). Cahiers use an approach which seeks to situate film in a specific historic context; it is also an approach which has strongly influenced film theory itself. The argument that follows borrows from this latter approach but does so rather circumspectly for there are many ways to call attention to the operation of the film text.

In the ethnographic films that John Marshall has produced, the editorial devices used often call attention to themselves and thereby invite the critical appreciation and participation of the audience. For the most part however, the Marshall films help to identify a wider truth regarding the !Kung people who come across, not as mere abstractions but as real, living people.
In the argument that follows, reference is constantly made to realism in film. Where I have referred to realist film, I have been describing the operation of documentaries and it is my opinion that all documentaries are ethnographies. Nevertheless, it is true that only certain films are studied within the discourse of Anthropology itself and I have tried to draw attention to this fact.

The relationship between theory and practice in film making is both obscure and complex. It is hoped that the discussion that follows avoids some of the pitfalls that abstraction makes inevitable. It is hoped also that the reader will be encouraged by this paper to see the films referred to. To the extent that this happens, this paper will have achieved an important purpose. By the same token, this paper will help to shed light both on the specific films mentioned and on the nature of the medium itself.
2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE !KUNG BUSHMAN (JU/WASI)

Precious few people link our present conditions of existence with the society of hunters and gatherers. On the African continent a few thousand !Kung (San) Bushman of Namibia remember a hunter and gathering lifestyle that was eradicated over the past two decades.

Thousands of years before the arrival of the white man on the South African continent the San occupied the interior. They presented an obstacle to the Dutch settlers who completely exterminated, by violence and disease, the Bushman people. This extermination of an entire people has no parallel in history. The only survivors were the Bushman who lived in the Kalahari desert. The !Kung that John Marshall worked and lived with from 1951 had been in the region for an estimated 25,000 years. Until the last couple of decades history had virtually stood still for the !Kung. Then, suddenly, they impacted with the modern world. Attempts were made to put them to work but as their whole lifestyle provided an alternative, the settlers set about a rigorous policy of dispossession. Today that process is all but complete. The traditional world of the !Kung has been torn apart.

The old life and the new are represented in the Marshall films. They were made under the ominous eye of the South African administration that rules the region in defiance of
the world community. This too makes these films remarkable. The complex threat that South African rule presents is evident everywhere in the Bushman homeland to which they have been confined since 1959. Violence is everywhere to be seen and the process of disintegration is all but complete. It is difficult to find anything encouraging in the present, and future plans to confine the !Kung to a game reserve bode the absolute end. The only alternative seems to be in the authorities allowing the !Kung to practice cattle husbandry and to establish a mixed economy. To date the authorities have frustrated this alternative which is providing a definite means of subsistence to !Kung only 40 kilometers away but under the control of a Botswana Administration.

John Marshall continues in many ways to bend the South African administration's ear in an attempt to salvage at least something from the mess described above. As the films attest also to the life that was taken from the !Kung - who used to roam over some 15,000 square miles - we are presented with the full tragedy. The films are an angry passionate cry, and powerful as the films are for what they contain, from these images we can also feel something of the nature and the extent of the tragedy that is apartheid.

Laurence Marshall, disillusioned by war and anxious to spend time with his son John, decided to visit the Kalahari desert. In 1950, John Marshall and his father met two Ju/Wasi from the Nyae Nyae area, in Botswana. A meeting was
arranged for the following year and this occurred with the addition of John's mother Lorna and his sister Elizabeth.

As they travelled into Gaucha the Ju/Wasi, frightened by their first sight of vehicles and of white people, ran away. It took two days before a group of some 30 Ju/Wasi approached the Marshall camp. The Marshalls told them that they were interested in learning about the Ju/Wasi way of life as there was absolutely nothing known about them.

The Ju/Wasi had some idea about writing and John explained that the camera did something similar using pictures to help him to remember. Ju/Wasi had of course seen reflections and a few had seen mirrors. The Ju/Wasi also knew of photographs from their relatives living on the farming districts. According to John Marshall,

"They took at face value that we were there to learn about their life and they made very patient and sincere efforts to teach us." (2)

"Ju/Wasi" means well mannered. They call themselves the "polite people". It was out of politeness that the Ju/Wasi did not ask these strangers a lot of questions. They accepted that the Marshalls' would, for they were not Ju/Wasi. At the same time it was also somewhat frightening to confront these white people, even though they recognized that they had come in peace.
3. **TOWARDS SUBJECTIVITY AND A WIDER TRUTH IN FILM**

Before we turn to the impact that the Marshall films have had, we need to examine the nature of film as a medium. Firstly, we will look at the relationship between fact and fiction in film.

Many people actually resist documentaries as they are accustomed to being easily suspicious of manipulations of the truth. It is not a little sad that this suspicion takes place at the same time as there is a popular acceptance of fantasy in film. John Marshall maintains that there is more than just suspicion or scepticism involved here. Accordingly, the issue is not so much with reality or realist film, but rather with the very nature of fantasy itself.

"... No one likes reality, because reality is never good. People like to have their fantasies all the time. And reality threatens fantasy. It isn't scepticism that makes them turn to films that satisfy their fantasies. You can hit those films with a stick but they are gratifying." (3)

It has proven difficult for those who believe in the medium for its capacity to communicate ideas and capture details, to accept that the power of the medium has also clearly demonstrated its capacity to enable people to forget about reality; or, to conform to it in ways that these films suggest is possible.

To fully understand this it is very important to look
beyond the text, film or written, as a self contained unit, or as something that operates in a timeless vacuum. Thus,

"The intentions of the author, the formal operations of the text, the apparent intransigence of the reader (him/herself subject to historical process and change), begin to be reworked into a theory of the relationship between the moment of the author, the moment of the text and the moment of the reader". (4)

Realist film has often been attacked for operating in a timeless vacuum of its own but the calling to task of the realist film maker that has taken place, has often resembled a witch hunt. Film theory can help us make sense of some of the charges often levelled at realist films, but fundamental to any enquiry is the fact that we are in an age where film and television have acquired awesome power, not in the hands of the isolated documentary film maker, but as instruments of powerful institutions and states. This is where the charges might most fittingly be made as these are the institutions on which film makers depend. This has affected not only the content but also the form of documentaries. Accordingly, there is in these quarters a conventional approach to cinematic realism which either purports to be a transparent window onto the world or else represents itself as objective. In most cases when a film does not conform to a limited aesthetic, censorship is guaranteed. Thus, in addition to our understanding the independent film maker deserves our sympathy and our thanks, for his relatively
emasculated efforts are bulwarks against a tide of misrepresentation and fantasy.

We have alluded to the power of mass media. John Marshall's films have to make up for a deafening silence that has emanated from the mass media for whom the plight of the Bushman people has not appeared suitable or sensational enough to warrant serious coverage. Naturally, given the power of these institutions to reach people, the most arduous efforts have been made - with some success to be sure - to get the Bushman material some public air time. This, very schematically, is the situation confronting all independent film makers; yet whether seen by millions or by mere handfuls of people, films convey ideas. Films are steeped in ideology.

"The actual operation of ideology in contemporary society is better illustrated by the cacophony of sounds and signs of a big city street than by the text serenely communicating with the solitary reader, or the teacher or television personality addressing a quiet domesticated audience." (5)

Films contain their cacophony of exterior sights and sounds and they do reveal something of the very operation of ideology in contemporary society that is referred to above. The extent to which this occurs of course depends on the films communicating in ways that are precisely not just serene and under conditions that perhaps force the domesticated audience out of its passive, quiet state. The ideo-
logy of the film maker contextualizes the ideologies of the people in the film and sometimes this may be heavy handed, but at other times the film maker's influence seems to be minimal. While the forms adopted by the film maker contextualize meaning, editorial devices are sometimes employed to an extent which drowns out or sanitizes the cacophony of sights and sounds that the film audience is subjected to. In fact, this is both a problem of form and of the quantity of material which today's audiences are confronted with. The biggest problem, which is actually two problems rolled into one, is that most film viewers are passive consumers by choice, who mostly watch fiction films. However, we are here dealing with films that attempt to provide an alternative, films that use truth to stretch the imagination.

Many radical theorists and film makers have attacked realism itself as being responsible for inducing passivity in the audience. Such critics argued that for film to really succeed it had to "demystify" or reveal itself as artifice. Underlying these criticisms is the conception of the camera as an instrument of ideology. Sometimes arguments that seem to be over form are really arguments over politics and power; sometimes the arguments are not about means or ends, but rather over whether or not these ends can be attained without complete formal breaks from the types of film regarded as "reactionary".

It is easy to arrive at some sort of hiatus in both the
theory and the actual production of film in which either "politics" or "art" tends to be given priority. This has contributed to a confusing and often vague state of affairs. It should be noted however, that theory while it can influence the actual methods used by film makers, has its own specific sphere of operation, and as we have seen its own momentum. Critics most often have precious little to do with "the work of art" itself - argue as they might for one style or another. This has led to,

"...a kind of meat thermometer school of criticism that measured the degree to which a film dealt with the burning issues of the time from the correct perspective. It also allowed for a kind of shorthand criticism..." (6)

Sometimes though, in Jean Luc Godard's terms, it seems like "we are trapped inside a fortress" - be it the films we produce that so often are seen only by moneyed intellectuals or be it because we are unnecessarily arrogant or pedantic as writers.

Godard has repudiated the realist aesthetic though it is difficult to accept that his work presents a complete break from realism. To the contrary. He shares with other film makers a desire to force the audience into a position of being able to understand the text as a whole. Godard's films use documentary techniques in works of fiction to lend authenticity to his films, e.g. his use of interviews and the use of the long tracking shot to create a single layered
image designed to make viewers aware of film as being "... not so much a reflection of reality as the reality of that reflection". (7)

There has never been an absolute distinction between fact and fiction in film. Likewise, it is wrong to argue in terms of complete breaks. Of course film makers, pre-eminent amongst these being Godard himself, will continue to push film in new directions, and as the technology becomes more and more available this must grow. There is however a uniformity imposed on the process beyond the limitations of the film maker and his technology; most of all the uniformity is imposed from without.

While the market place offers improved technology at cheaper and cheaper prices, only certain uses are allowed by the political order of every country. Every country exercises control over the contents of film and television - whether by direct censorship, legislation, withdrawal of subsidy or by the simple threat of action against anything deemed "political". All films reflect a position on "politics", even the most specious and the most escapist. As we have noted, films have a power that is constantly being tampered with.

In the European tradition artistic production has always been subordinated to the interests of a wealthy few. And
today even those films that have radical content often are screened because they make money and because the "threat" they contain can be easily dealt with. At any rate, the forms of artistic production that are encouraged potentially at least can give rise to counter practices in opposition to the state favoured practice. This then is the context within which one attempts to define new methodologies - which are not new so much as hybrid. Young is quite correct when he states that

"... there is no need to argue exclusively for one method. Conferences about method are arguments about power; representatives of one approach are racist about all others. This is obviously a waste of time. If different languages are being used, we just have to learn their rules to avoid confusion." (8)

Finally, let us note that the variety of ideological positions taken up by those theorizing about film are very confusing, as are the variety of methods adopted by film makers - though the film maker's method depends on and defines itself according to his acceptability in the community and according to what is politically possible in that time and place. We need to note that matters have been further confused as film has often been endowed by film maker, subject and theorist alike, with near religious or mystical powers that were thought not only to communicate but somehow also to transform all those it touched (be the result greater wisdom or increased madness).
Though film may be an instrument, we are concerned always with its effectiveness to communicate. As we have argued earlier, film itself is shaped at the moment of viewing. Naturally what people do with the knowledge they derive from viewing a film is quite another thing!

"Art it is said is not a mirror but a hammer; it does not reflect, it shapes. But at present even the handling of a hammer is taught with the help of a mirror, a sensitive film which records all the movements." (9)

It is necessary to say something about the limitations of the power of film as they are revealed at the moment of viewing. Thus,

"As members of an audience we readily accept the illusion of entering the world of a film. But we do so in complete safety... We observe the people in the film without being seen, assured that they can make no claims upon us. The corollary of this, however, lies in our inability to reach through the screen and affect their lives. Thus our situation combines a sense of immediacy with an absolute separation. Only when we try to invade the world of film do we discover the insubstantiality of its illusion of reality." (10)

When an audience watches a film, they accept that they are being exposed to a window onto the world. Doubtless audiences today are more sophisticated than the first audiences who thought that they were about to be struck down by a rushing train, but they still respond to film's power of persuasion. Today's audiences either believe in THE BIG LIE or THE BIG TRUTH.
4. THE BUSHMAN ETHNOGRAPHIES: UNDERSTANDING THE METHODOLOGY

We have earlier traced the broad circumstances under which John Marshall began filming. Much of what the viewer sees in the films he believes, for though the films have their bias, we feel that we are able to make up our own minds about what we see. John Marshall helps the viewer by his very understanding of film: in his films we can see the different approaches he adopts in a pedagogy that allows events and people to speak for themselves. (At the same time there is an avoidance of endless interviews or wall to wall narration.)

In 1951 John Marshall used a camera for the first time. According to John Marshall his first film, *The Hunters*, reveals the following:

"... a distance from people that I think is more than just simply a reflection of the techniques of the day. The conventions of the day in the first place was to use a tripod and in the second place, I had to go through a book on how to make a movie. I learned about establishing shots, mid shots, close shots. This of course influences the quality of the film. With people it took a while - not through bad vibes - to develop a sense of timing, of being able to anticipate... to develop an intimacy not with the people as persons, but with the event, how it moved and when... a kind of rhythm of that society." (11)

A clear increase in confidence on the part of the film maker can be seen by 1953, and by 1955 the camera was a lot closer. This is the case in the film *Bitter Melons* which is
close to being a sequence film in which the camera moves around a continuous social event. Primarily, *Bitter Melons* is a recording of a performance of music and not an ethno- graphic description. The events you do see are tailored around the songs. The idea to shoot events came later after Marshall had been influenced by two neo-realist films that depicted single events. The event or sequence film seemed to offer an authentic way of describing social life.

"You didn't need to go out of the event. You didn't need to have a long story in order to have a film that was powerful and effective and basically more accurate as you were staying within the boundaries of one event instead of jumping around." (12)

By this time it had become obvious to Marshall that it was impossible to represent Ju/Wasi life in stories. Firstly there was just too much to deal with, and secondly, to do so would introduce too many distortions.

"Any time you have a story you are going to bend reality ten times more out of shape than if you do a sequence, though you are already bending it out of shape in a sequence..." (13)

Each occasion that you start the camera you create a story. Stories are linear, they deal with one thing after another and in that sense of course everything is a story. Here however, we are dealing with a methodology which repudiates the imposition of a story from without, that is to say the deliberate, contrived story. Thus, although we are
still dealing with the selectivity of the film maker both as regards the shooting of material and in the editing that occurs after, the event films approximate a feeling for real time. Thus,

"You try not to impose a story, or to take a real event and take two scenes out of it and hook it together with two scenes from somewhere else and think you have any sort of accuracy or the feeling of immersion... The method is very simple, but it is definitely a method which depends on the fact that events have boundaries and these boundaries can be seen and heard and recognized. You can recognize them and the people involved can recognize them. Secondly, when you as film maker are in an event the rules of film perspective apply... you are asking your audience to participate when you go close and when you pull back, their participation falls away." (14)

According to the rules of film perspective, the more the camera pulls back, the slower is the pace of the event. The closer the camera is to an event, so does it become faster, the film maker has to move faster, think faster and is able to interpret more. So too is there an increase in the possibilities for cutting. In case this seems to imply greater opportunities for the film maker to impose a personal view of events, we need to recognize that all realist film is shot from a personalised view. What is different here is precisely the perspective of the film maker for whom the object is to allow events and people to speak for themselves. At the same time, in so doing, these films reaffirm the very personal points of view of the
Ju/Wasi themselves. The result is that people come across as people and the audience is presented with ways of thinking about and interpreting the actions of people in the films. Thus,

"Sequence filming is an attempt to prevent the words and actions of people in a documentary film from being confused with what the audience wants to see and what the film maker wants to say. A sequence may be thought of as the verifiable film record of a small event" (15)

At the same time, the very act of surviving which is what these sequence films reveal, leads to an absorption in the event itself and the camera is forgotten. In all instances this occurs with the consent of the people - if one excludes some sequences with the South African army, though these are exceptions concerning the specific instances of filming "Authority".

The !Kung expressed their needs in many ways to the Marshalls. From the very beginning the Marshall camp's impact on the marginal existence of the !Kung was both dramatic and welcomed. Being filmed was an opportunity all too rare in these parts to be employed. We see in N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman what the impact of this actually is. This adds to our appreciation that the portrayals are sincere and given the obvious ease of people before the camera we become deeply immersed. N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman marks a departure from the sequence film and it
does present a linear story but it is true to the edict of presenting people as individuals. Here again the imposition of the film maker's point of view is limited.
5. ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

It is difficult to really distinguish this form of documentary film making from any others and indeed the point has been made that all films are ethnographic. (16)

Nevertheless, we can accept certain distinctions without at the same time arguing, as do some, that ethnographic film is inherently more "believable" or "scientific" than other forms. Ethnographic film, like the practice of Anthropology itself, has largely been the product of the European tradition, of colonialism. Over the last few decades this has been changing, a change which reflects at the same time a growing self-criticism on the part of film makers themselves. It may be true, as Young (17) suggests, that much of the energy anthropologists poured into film was based on the hope that they could go beyond the subjectivity of their field notes, but it is happily the case that many have stopped to consider the problems of subjectivity in film. Today the cat is firmly out of the bag. Objectivity is a fiction, and film makers are making their audiences aware of this in many ways.

"We feel it is both limiting and naive to pretend the camera isn't there (after all we are there) and believe that the interaction of the film makers with their subjects is a part of the event or process being filmed and as such should be included - not as superficial narcissistic acknowledgement of filmic illusion; but as part of the film's evidence in which the impact of the film maker's presence can be related to the apparent authenticity of what is documented." (18)
This self-criticism was inspired by lessons learnt both "at home" and "abroad". Theory tended to be produced in the culture of the film maker, while the experience he drew on was derived in the terrain of a distant culture. Observational film makers, whether trained anthropologists or not, have always had a hazardous time, e.g. with lack of funds, technological limitations, limited public, academic resistance, etc. In spite of this, the motivation has always been to represent what happened in front of the camera and to convey a wider truth.

Marshall's films are clearly "Realist". They are too the films made by an outsider - though this is a troublesome definition of someone who has shared such a closeness with the people in his films. On occasions, special occasions, the camera was brought out of the box. These occasions were not chosen at whim; nor were they simply and exposition of academic beliefs, nor even of the film maker's artistic sensitivity. To whatever measure these characteristics are applied, it is clear that the overriding concern, the determining force, was the desire to convey a wider truth. The task of conveying a wider truth is however particularly complex.

"Among ethnographic film makers, another restraint is the special reverence that surrounds the study of isolated peoples. The fragility of these cultures and the rarity of filming them turns the film maker into an instrument of history - an obligation which if accepted or even felt must necessarily
weigh down his efforts to pursue specific lines of enquiry." (19)

Robert Flaherty had no training as an anthropologist and though Nanook of the North is a somewhat romantic and only partially accurate depiction of Inuit life, we see here the beginning of a practice continued in later work, to spend long periods of time with the subjects of the films. Flaherty was one of the earliest advocates of subject participation and it was he who introduced many of the cinematic techniques that later became conventionalized in ethnographic film, e.g. use of long shots, long takes and pans. Flaherty, while clearly respecting the integrity of the subjects of his films, was prone to taking dramatic license with events and he has been quoted as saying that "... sometimes you have to lie. One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit." (20) Later advocates of subject participation in documentary film were to endorse these sentiments as they pursued ways of representing reality that both celebrated the personalized view of the film maker and admitted to elements of fiction. As such, Flaherty's films provide landmarks in ethnographic film making and they form a yardstick by which to evaluate approaches to documentary film in general.

John Marshall's films, the Bushman ethnographies, like other films for their part cannot escape the viewpoint and selectivity of the film maker. With some ethnographic films
however, the distortion so introduced calls attention to itself and is of a minor nature. How minor becomes clear when we consider just how distorted are the beliefs that people bring with them at the moment of viewing - especially when the films are as exotic and unfamiliar as are the Bushman films. (21)

Observational film makers developed different strategies in an attempt to be authentic. Once the camera was allowed to roam, new levels of participation became possible between the film maker and the people he was interacting with. We have noted already that filmed events have always been deliberately framed events. We have noted how the documentary has been used to authenticate fiction. By revealing his hand the film maker celebrates this union. Film makers like Jean Rouch for example, exemplify this approach (Chronique). To Rouch the ritual event bore a strong fascination precisely because of its closeness to fiction (Jaguar). He practiced what he called a method of "collective improvisation" and he has also called this method "Ethnographic Science Fiction". (22)

Rouch argued that his method was more honest and egalitarian than the methods of traditional anthropology. He argued that the camera was more valid than the pen as it allowed for a new type of anthropology viz. "Shared" anthropology. Other film makers too saw certain virtue in this new level of collectivization. They advocated a new "type"
of film which became known as "Participatory Cinema".

Participatory cinema defers to the notion of film as having power. Participatory cinema was thought to reduce manipulation and to signify a new redistribution of that power. With participatory cinema, the film maker had been freed from the shadows that had encouraged others to think of him as stealthy and dishonest. Exonerated or not, once production was over the film maker was still faced with his relative powerlessness to get his films screened by the public media. In addition there was opposition within Anthropology itself to the use of film.
We have referred earlier to the sequence films of John Marshall. From the mid-1950's on Marshall had tried, without initial success, to convince the Anthropology fraternity of his approach. While Jean Rouch was being taken seriously in Europe, resistance to film in Anthropology remained strong in the United States. Today, there is a wider acceptance of the use of film in ethnography, and of the participatory nature of this practice, but this acceptance has been hard won and is hardly yet secure. What then is at the source of this conflict?

In the first place, Anthropology as a discipline was uniquely defensive. John Marshall's conflict with Anthropology had to do with the tendency of traditional Anthropology to reduce people to abstractions and to squeeze them into a variety of categories that conformed to the anthropologist's preconceptions and rules.

"The idea that science should not be participatory, that you should be pedantic and stand back and see everything at once is in the first place a fallacious view of science. Secondly, and particularly with film, your purpose as film maker is to involve, to encourage participation." (23)

Of course, if you present people as individuals, the charge is made that these individuals are unrepresentative. However, as John Marshall puts it,
"... if you don't look at people as persons, and as inventors and users of rules, and not as followers of rules in some abstract way, your anthropology is threadbare, it is empty." (24)

John Marshall cites his film The Hunters as an example of a film that fails because it is linear and because it imposes a viewpoint that represents people as acting according to certain rules. The Ju/Wasi are a very practical people, and the film makes them look romantic. Secondly, real hunts were very different from what is shown in the film.

"The hunt just does not go along as the struggle of man against nature and of a single-minded devotedness to the capture of the great giraffe...". (25)

This touches on another problem that John Marshall has with traditional Anthropology which holds the view, the fiction, of the universal ego. Traditional Anthropology presents us with the mythical category of people who all think alike and act alike. Particularly in the early days this perspective,

"... kept being imposed upon people like Ju/Wasi to their great detriment because if you had the image of Ju/Wasi being frozen in time, you believed it and didn't think of people. People change... My concern was to portray Ju/Wasi as people, not as illustrations of an abstract way of life." (26)

Early resistance notwithstanding, ethnographic film
began to find increased acceptance as a sub-discipline of Anthropology with "progressives" who no longer argued in terms of universal truths. This encouraged an interaction between the ethnographic film and the written ethnography that has become quite striking. Both texts were seen to authenticate each other. Film, with its capacity to record detail helped substantiate written descriptions, while the written texts for their part provided a wider context from which to extrapolate meaning from film.
7. MAKING FILMS ABOUT BLACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA / NAMIBIA: SOME BASIC OBSERVATIONS REGARDING CONDITIONS AT THE SITE OF PRODUCTION

We need to be cautious, for we cannot generalize about the veracity of any one approach to film making. Participatory cinema, as laudable as it may be, is not applicable to each and every situation. In certain situations the good intentions of all the participants - the very act of collaboration and the ideas represented - can produce unfortunate repercussions. We are talking of course about conditions at the sites where film production actually occurs.

There is another reason for caution. In South Africa, as the case in point, all forms of film making are subject to tight control. Here, increased access leads to an increase in the risks involved. Balancing this, the actions and opinions expressed in the films are of course an account of what people feel they can say and get away with. So films are made as people on the spot work out a variety of responses to being monitored by the repressive South African regime. To the men who safeguard the status quo in South Africa, film is "evidence" of a decidedly insidious sort. To these custodians reality is quite simple. If you are not for them, you are against them. To these men, a call for participatory cinema sounds rather like a call to arms. At the very least, participatory cinema would be regarded as a likely cover for an even more seditious activity. Yet, for all the control, films are produced and the South African
regime does appreciate that films in and of themselves will not cause their demise.

The government in South Africa has asserted its control over all sectors of life and it has done this mostly by employing a growing number of repressive mechanisms. Its hegemony has always been incomplete as apartheid has continued to be rejected by most South Africans. While the regime relies on force more than consent, it tries also to attain some ideological consensus to its rule. Film and other forms of cultural production have of course been affected.

While it has put a stop to some uses of film, the state has approved and funded films that perpetuated views more to their liking. It has demonstrated a keeness to both use and control film. A subsidy system guarantees the profitability of the industry and ensures the ideological content of the films.

The film industry that is aimed directly at black audiences, exists only on the periphery of the established film industry. Harriet Gavshon (27) has pointed out that this industry has operated "almost as independent film makers in their methods". Lacking a central distribution network, most producers have initiated their own distribution and have made use of church and school halls, and of mobile units with generators. A large percentage of their audience has consisted of children who are most vulnerable to the
contents of the films.

In South Africa censorship is practiced on a differentiated basis - the censorship applied to black audiences is more stringent than that for whites. The scripts of films made in black areas are under scrutiny even before production begins. The fact that stringent censorship is exercised at all is an expression of the regime's lack of legitimacy; but in the case of this industry it has hardly needed to resort to censorship. For as long as the industry has existed, no film has been banned and few cuts have ever been ordered. Encouraged by the subsidy system, the industry exerts its own self-censorship which has proven to be sufficient in and of itself.

In the world of these films there is no mention of politics or race. This fantasy world both emphasizes black social mobility and exults in their "backwardness". These films made for black audiences contain no references to whites.

"The mere image of whites would have the result of drawing correspondences between the fabricated world and the reality of the spectator, and corrode the illusion of the logicality of the narrative." (28)

The "world" of these films is remarkable for what is left out and by looking at these "structuring absences" we can identify sources of tension in the real world. In this way
we can evaluate any film, however removed from the real world it appears to be. These films are perpetuating a policy and a belief that black people have not reached the same level of civilization as whites. This is the ideology that rationalizes the system of exploitation in South Africa.

We move on to look at a recently released film that depicts black and white and !Kung. This film has been made for white audiences in South Africa as well as for release abroad. The film, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (by Jamie Uys) endorses many apartheid fictions. The !Kung Bushman are depicted as innocent children while other blacks are presented as being "savage", "stupid", and "childlike". The slapstick form of the film allows Uys to poke fun at the whites as well, but "fun" is at the same time a rather pernicious distortion when subjects as exotic as the Bushman are concerned.

A picture is presented of the Bushman society as a perfect society in which harmony is only disrupted by contact with the modern world - in the shape of a Coca-Cola bottle. Harmony had traditionally in fact been kept and made manifest in the exchange of gifts from person to person. Engaged in a complex struggle for survival, the !Kung were renowned for their care for each other. They needed to be so caring for, as we see in *N!ai, The Story of a !Kung*
Woman, there was a high mortality rate and life was filled with hazards. People were often exhausted, waterless and hungry. Theirs was a highly mobile existence as they moved according to the distribution of plant and animal resources and water. By contrast, The Gods Must Be Crazy presents an image of Bushman in relatively large and fixed communities. The disruption that follows the introduction of the Coca-Cola bottle is as far removed as possible from the tragedy that had in fact been played out.

Today the !Kung Bushman depend on government handouts and on wages from the South African army. They fight over personal possessions including bottles containing not Coca-Cola but alcohol. We see this very clearly in N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman, but in The Gods Must Be Crazy there is no hint of the real tragedy, and consequently no acceptance of responsibility. The many distortions contained in The Gods Must Be Crazy were of course scripted, directed and acted out for the camera. The !Kung in this film greet each other with gestures that they would not ordinarily make viz. use of European handshake. Even their speech, with extra click sounds having been added in the studio, has been tampered with. Thus, a culture already alien, has been made even more so.
In contrast to *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, the Marshall material provides evidence of the real nature of Bushman life before and during the process of acculturation. Unfortunately, few who go to see *The Gods Must Be Crazy* would have seen Marshall's films or know anything about Bushman culture. This of course reflects the quandry facing documentary film makers generally, as here once again the general public is showing its preference for fantasy.

*N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman* contains scenes of Jamie Uys and his crew doing their own kind of "work among the people". Throughout the takes that we see, Xiang, the primitive innocent of the film, continues to smile at and confound the white crew. And smile he might at the oddities of these men who were paying him to act funny.

The !Kung depicted here are used to being filmed. In *N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman* we see the Ju/Wasi performing for visitors to Tshum!kwi, the administrative centre of the Bushman homeland. By the light of the campfires we see the once proud and independent !Kung facing the cameras of tourists in a pageant that mocks their past and confirms the horrible truth of their present. Marshall characterizes this in *Pull Ourselves Up Or Die Out* which is an update from the field as treating them as "tourist attractions in a plastic stone age". How painful and tragic this is we feel
for the Marshall material reveals both the authentic acts that held the !Kung together in the past as well as the acts that they are paid to perform.

We feel the full negation done to a once resilient people when, for example, we see them in cloth, bow and arrow in hand, posing as hunters. The truth is, as we see in N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman, that the Bushman no longer wear loin cloths or use bow and arrows, while it is rare indeed for them to hunt. In fact, they are precisely prohibited from engaging in most forms of hunting. At the same time, the old social forms that patterned behaviour have broken down and violence and dependency is everywhere at hand.

Revealed throughout the Bushman ethnographies is a marked contrast between past and present. Regarding both past and present, the extent to which the camera has penetrated events, and has been easily accepted, is staggering. The early material takes us as close as one can be to the events themselves. There is in the later material too an acceptance and trust of John Marshall's presence. In N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman, we are brought face to face with the impact of the film maker's presence as a catalyst to that violence which, as we have mentioned, is characteristic of this period. We see how jealousy over payments that N!ai has received from John Marshall and other film makers, leads to arguments and fights. The same individuals who in the early material we see in such a caring relationship to each
other, we now see involved in fracas that often end in deaths.

In An argument about a Marriage we see the effect that the Marshall camp has had in persuading the police to free some !Kung who had been forced to work on white farms. Although people were pleased to be reunited trouble soon erupted between /Qui and Tsamgoa as both claimed Baou as their wife. The argument is complicated and the film raises questions regarding the impact of the white farms, the complexities of the !Kung social structure and about the nature of conflict and conflict resolution among the !Kung. Thus, though anger erupts, #Toma skillfully intervenes and prevents the matter from escalating into violence. This took place in 1955 and forms an obvious contrast to the nature of violence among the survivors of the !Kung, among whom #Toma is numbered.

Many !Kung men have been forced to enlist in the South African army. In the Marshall films we are shown the conditions that make this possible and the responses of the !Kung to these conditions. From #Toma, we are presented with a keen understanding that the men of the South African army are "the owners of death". #Toma discourages his own sons from joining the army and when he has to, he tells us he would "sit at the same pot as SWAPO " (the South West African People's Organization), that is fighting to get rid
of the South Africans in a fight that continues today. The !Kung Bushman have fallen almost incidental victim in this struggle that they could not by any means avoid.

The Bushman ethnographies are extraordinary documents to the changes in !Kung society over three decades. They represent an integration between ethnography and history that is at the same time all the more accessible and moving as they reflect the strong bonds between the individuals in the films and the film maker and thereby ultimately with the individual viewer as well.
9. CONCLUSION

This paper has dealt with the nature of realist film and particular reference has been made to the Bushman films of John Marshall. Only a few films have been specifically mentioned. The surface has barely been touched.

At the same time this paper has been a description of people engaged in a life and death struggle. This is the terrain in which John Marshall learnt how to accurately represent the world of the Ju/Wasi. This learning was on two levels. The first had to do with his understanding of what Ju/Wasi taught him, and the second, of his abilities as a film maker. John Marshall's bond with the Ju/Wasi was broken when the South African administration denied him permission to enter Namibia from 1959-1978.

During the period that John Marshall was forced out, the fate of the Ju/Wasi had been sealed. On his return to the region, Marshall did everything in his power to help the Ju/Wasi, whose ignorance of the wider world has remained profound. Throughout, the Marshall family has been an important link with the outside world. While the Ju/Wasi do not really appreciate how many people there are in the outside world, they have appreciated being heard. The Ju/Wasi have a saying that "People die in silence."

"As the years went on, and particularly over the struggle with the game reserve, people appreciated that it was good to have exposure
in the press and exposure in books and films because it rallied opinion on their side in the struggle to keep their land." (29)

Much of this exposure has been generated by John Marshall. The South African administration has been upset at Marshall's efforts to block the establishment of a game reserve. It is extremely doubtful that he will be allowed back.

The films have to be seen as an expression of the links that bind film maker to subjects in a "common front" against a regime practicing extermination. The most that could be hoped for was a stay of execution. In the meantime the Ju/Wasi for the most part conflicted amongst themselves. Dependency reeks havoc on common fronts. Marshall's relationship with the Ju/Wasi is deep and complex. The films Marshall has produced are accessible and profoundly moving. They are in every sense unique and authentic representations of what really happened to the !Kung.

An attempt has been made to situate the Marshall films and to point to the methodology adopted by the film maker. The personalized view presented by John Marshall attests to his closeness to the Ju/Wasi people he was filming. So too do his broader efforts on their behalf.

Marshall has attempted to immerse the audience in an understanding of a people that are as removed culturally and
geographically from the contemporary Westerner as can be. For example, in *N/Um Tchai* Marshall explains a complex Bushman trance ceremony by explicitly avoiding the lectures of a narrative soundtrack and by choosing instead to repeat the footage itself. Firstly, he uses stills with an explanation on soundtrack and, this done repeats the footage using wildsound. In addition to Marshall's sequence films we have in *N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman*, a wonderful linear film about an extraordinary woman from whom all of us who see the film, learn.

It has not been within the scope of this paper to explore all the threads that emerged as our investigation developed. An emphasis has been placed on contextualizing the production and viewing of documentary film, particularly the Marshall films. It may be argued that in so doing, we have skirted questions relating to the process of editing itself. In the first place there is the fact that the Marshall films reflect an awareness of how easily reality is bent in film. Secondly, we have argued for the need to look beyond the process of editing itself. That manipulation takes place during editing is for us a given and an extension of what transpires from the first moment of filming. By pressing the camera button during filming, the film maker has engaged in the first stage of editing.

The film text is where the audience, amongst whom is the
theorist, bases most of their understanding. Less is known
about the 'moment' of the film maker, and even less about
the 'moment' of viewing. While most film theory assumes the
sanctity of the text, this results in some serious distor-
tions. With care however, theory can provide analytic tools
to look at film but this is so only as long as we have put
these films in the context of the personalised view of the
film maker and as long as we have paid special regard to
what was possible in the real world. Hopefully this paper
goes some way toward promoting an understanding of this.

There is, finally, yet another crucial battle being waged
regarding the distribution of the Marshall films and the
securing of funds to put together material from 1978-1984.
These two related problems are, as we have already noted,
common to the production of documentary film. This then is
the final site of conflict. Television is at least potent-
ially a source for funding and distribution but support has
not been forthcoming from this direction.

It is astounding how many obstacles there are facing the
documentary film maker. It is with humility therefore that
an attempt has been made to assess the power of the medium.
We know that film can move people and it can increase their
understanding of the world. Sadly, television mostly deals
in fantasy, and does its best to block such comprehension.
As John Marshall puts it,
"... it is going to be harder to educate people in this country as the years go on, not easier, because of television." (30)

The history of the documentary is as old as the history of film itself. Both are in their infancy. I do not believe that the end is in sight for the documentary film, but I do believe that we have need for sobering reflection.
1. John Ford's "Young Mr. Lincoln", in SCREEN READER, London, 1977
2. Interview with John Marshall, 1985
3. ibid.
4. S. Harvey, MAY '68 AND FILM CULTURE, p.114
7. J.L. Godard, LA CHINOISE
8. C. Young, "Observational Cinema" in P. Hockings, Op. Cit., p.79
11. Interview with John Marshall, 1985
12. ibid.
13. ibid.
14. ibid.
15. John Marshall, Emilie de Brigard, "Idea and Event in Urban Film" in P. Hockings PRINCIPLES IN VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY, p. 133
17. C. Young, Op. Cit., p.66
20. Karl G. Heider, ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM, pp.6-7
21. An excellent account of the Marshall material and of how it has been used in the classroom can be found in "Images that represent Ideas - The use of films on the !Kung to teach Anthropology" by Timothy and Patsy Asch.
22. E. de Brigard, "The History of Ethnographic Film", p.36
23. Interview with John Marshall, 1985
24. ibid.
25. ibid.
26. ibid.
   I am entirely indebted to Harriet Gavshon for this description of the film industry that aims at black audiences in South Africa.
28. ibid.
29. Interview with John Marshall, 1985
30. ibid.
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