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Narratives: the Guilty Secret of Ethnographic Film-Making?

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> *And if at times [the documentary editor] begins to feel that editing is less a creative act than a mutilation visited upon some defenceless simulacrum of life, he is nevertheless forced by the logic of his craft to acknowledge the distinction between film and reality: that film is about something, whereas reality is not.*
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> Dai Vaughan, 1974.[1]

The film-maker whom we honour with this volume, Dirk Nijland, is surely best known for his films about ritual events, based on in-depth primary ethnographic research by himself or his anthropologist collaborators, followed by meticulous filmic documentation. Although few have been made with the rigour that characterises Dirk's work, films about ritual events dominate the history of ethnographic film-making and there is one very obvious reason why this should be so: how many ethnographic writers could come close to evoking the rich, performative character of a ritual event – the colours, the sounds, music, the sheer theatricality, the 'authorless *mise-en-scène*', as Jean Rouch once called it (Fulchignoni 1981, p. 31) – that is so readily captured on film?

But another, and perhaps less obvious, reason why ritual events should be such a recurrent topic of ethnographic film-making is that they generally have an intrinsic narrative structure which can easily be recycled and used as the basis for the narrative structure of a film. For, as anthropologists have been very much aware since the work of Van Gennep in the earliest days of the discipline, ritual events tend to be of a processual nature, with a self-evident beginning, an equally evident conclusion and a clear progression from one to the other. Moreover, within this overarching narrative, there are often a series of distinct phases, each of which has its own subsidiary intrinsic narrative structure, with a beginning, a clearly demarcated progression and a conclusion. Therefore, in making a film about a ritual event, an ethnographic film-maker need do no more than take these intrinsic narrative structures and with the possible addition of some preliminary explanatory sequence beforehand and perhaps some 'day-after' summarizing sequence at the end, use them to construct the narrative structure of his or her film. In fact, I would hazard the guess that if one were to take all the ethnographic films that had ever been made, one would discover that a large proportion were about ritual events and that the vast majority of these had narrative structures of precisely this kind.

This is not to say that making a film about a ritual event is without its problems, as Dirk and his colleagues have so ably made clear in their contribution to this volume. But if the narrative structure of the main body of the film represents merely a truncation of the intrinsic narrative structure of the real event, then at least as far as the matter of chronology is concerned, the nature of the film's 'claim on the real' is not seriously problematic. This is a great advantage that is not always available to the ethnographic film-maker. In relation to many other topics, in order to develop an effective and coherent narrative, ethnographic film-makers have often found it necessary, or at least advantageous, to alter the chronological sequence of real events substantially, thereby raising a question-mark over the epistemological status of the resulting films.

The guilty secret

In order to ascribe meaning to the events they portray and, in so doing, engage an audience, all ethnographic films, in common with documentary films generally, require some sort of narrative structure that the audience can identify early on in the screening and then follow through to the end of the film. If a film does not have a narrative structure, or if this is very difficult to construe, then there is the risk that the film will come across as merely a sequence of incomprehensible vignettes and the audience will soon get disenchanted. Before this happens, there is considerable evidence to suggest that audiences will attempt to construct a narrative, even if the film-maker has failed to provide one: ever since Pudovkin and Kuleshov's famous experiments in the 1920s, it has been established that audiences tend to narrativize a series of images even when none was intended.[2] But one can only rely on an audience's capacity to synthesize a narrative to a certain extent and for a certain period. Besides, from the point of view of the ethnographic film-maker, one usually wants the audience to construe not just any narrative, entirely randomly, but rather one that corresponds, at least to some degree, to one that one has in mind in creating the film.

When theorists of the fiction film refer to 'narrative', they generally have in mind much more than aspects of structure. Many of these other aspects of narrative are also pertinent to ethnographic film-making. They include such matters as the position from which a story is narrated (for example, is the narration internal to the film, related through the characters, or external, related through voice over?), how characters are developed or deployed (are they fully rounded characters whom the spectator gets to know in some sense, or are they anonymous archetypes?), how the world in which the action takes place is evoked by the adoption of particular cinematographic strategies and styles (involving hand-held or tripod-based shooting, long takes and continuity cutting or montage?) as well as more substantive matters, such as the way in which particular conventional tropes or story-lines are alluded to and the variations in these over time (e.g. Nature conceived as a hostile force to be conquered, as at the time of the making of *Nanook of the North* as opposed to the current trope of Nature as a beneficent force with which any human group should seek to be harmony). But whilst all these aspects of narrative in ethnographic film certainly merit further attention, in this article I shall be restricting myself to structural matters.[3]

Since perhaps as long ago as the 1970s, the orthodoxy in both screen studies and literary 'critical theory' has been to emphasize the role of the spectator or reader in developing a narrative whereby a representational work may be understood (Branigan 1992, p. xi). It is often asserted that not merely are the author's intentions irrelevant in construing the meaning of a work but that the number of meanings that may be construed are potentially infinite since the response of each reader/spectator is necessarily dependent on a wide variety of factors, including not merely subjective dispositions but the particular circumstances of the reading or viewing of the work in question. Famously, Roland Barthes even announced the Death of the Author. In this article, however, I adopt the perspective of an author who is very much alive and who aspires to be an active agent communicating a particular set of meanings through a narrative, even though I recognize that the complete elimination of 'aberrant readings' is not only impossible but not even necessarily desirable since there may well be a rich seam of meanings in one's work of which one is not aware.

All ethnographic film-makers would surely recognize the centrality of narrative to their enterprise and perhaps many might agree with my own view that the ability to define, develop and refine an effective narrative structure through the whole process of making a film, from shooting to fine cut, represents both the most valuable and most difficult to acquire of all ethnographic film-making skills. Yet the development of such narratives raises an important epistemological issue since it usually involves some major authorial intervention in the chronology of the events as filmed in the real world. At the very least, it requires the truncation of that chronology, but as often as not, it also requires some active alteration of the chronology so that the sequence of events in the film is different from the sequence in which they occurred in reality.

This is an issue that is particularly problematic for film-makers who work in the observational or direct cinema manner and whose work is based predominantly on what one might term an 'empirical rhetoric', i.e. in one that involves the direct presentation of visual evidence to support the film-maker's understanding of the social or cultural phenomenon that is the subject-matter of the film. This kind of film-maker appears to be caught in a contradiction: on the one hand, he or she appears to be saying, 'here you are, this is some evidence for my understanding of this world' but on the other hand, at least as far as the chronology is concerned, the evidence has necessarily been 'cooked' precisely in order to present that evidence in a coherent and understandable way. Films based on a more discursive rhetoric, i.e. those structured by a combination of a series of testimonial 'talking heads' and voice-over narration, also require a narrative structure. But this is generally provided by the phases of a verbal argument linking the various elements of the film together rather than by the presentation of the events themselves. Sequences of real events may well be used in such films, but only as supporting evidence, and detached from their original context. As a result, there is not the same degree of potential dissonance between the chronology of the film and the chronology of the original event.

It is perhaps on account of this difficulty that the history of ethnographic film-making is punctuated with attempts to circumvent the implications of authorship that are necessarily involved in the deployment of a film narrative. The strategies have been various. One has been to make films structured by narratives that simply follow the intrinsic narratives of the real events, as in the numerous films about rituals, technical processes and journeys. Another, somewhat more self-conscious version of this avoidance strategy was the 'event-sequence' method first developed by Tim Asch and John Marshall in the early 1960s in relation to Marshall's Ju/'hoansi material. The essential idea underlying this method was that on the basis of the subjects' own categories, the ethnographic film-maker should identify events in the subjects' everyday life with intrinsic narrative structures and then make films that followed these in their entirety. The method did allow one to eliminate moments of redundancy in the edit suite, so these films were actually cut rather than being unexpurgated descriptions of the real event. But these excisions were only supposed to truncate rather than alter the chronology of the real event.[4]

Various problematic aspects of the event-sequence method have been identified and, in practice, it was only applied to small, single-cell events, generally of relatively limited significance within the broader societies of which they were part.[5] But for present purposes, the most significant shortcoming of the method was that it usually entailed placing the interpretation of the significance of the event outside the film, either in the form of a verbal explanation over a preceding montage of still images excerpted from the film, or in accompanying documentation. As Asch's own later development of the method amongst the Yanomami showed, at least as represented by the well-known film *The Ax Fight* (1975), as soon as one seeks to introduce some form of interpretation of the significance of an event into the film itself, this usually requires manipulation of the intrinsic chronology of the event.

A somewhat different attempt to circumvent the implications of a narrative structure was Jean Rouch's strategy of the *plan-séquence*, i.e. to shoot an event consecutively for as long as possible, up to the full 11-minute duration of a 16mm magazine of 400ft. In other words, Rouch's concern was to preserve not only the chronology but also the duration of the event being filmed. But instead of the filming being limited by any inherent narrative properties of the event itself, as in the event-sequence method, in the *plan-séquence* it was limited only by the totally contingent duration of the standard 16mm magazine. The arbitrariness of this duration in itself raises certain questions about the method, but more pertinently to present purposes is the fact it proved no more successful than the event-sequence method in avoiding the superimposition of a narrative on the event represented. This is clearly demonstrated by the most extended *plan-séquence* that Rouch himself ever achieved, which is the one that makes up almost the totality of his film *Tourou et Bitti: les tambours d'avant* (1971) and which consisted of almost a complete 400 ft magazine. For although supposedly shot entirely spontaneously, this short film is structured by a classical narrative form, beginning with a walking shot into a village, discovering a lack (the absence of possession amongst the members of a cult), recording the overcoming of that lack (the arrival of the spirits), before drawing back to end with a wide shot of the setting sun and the children in the audience looking metaphorically into the future.[6]

The lesson of these failures is surely that there is no way to avoid the fact that in making a film one is inevitably involved in the authorial act of superimposing some sort of narrative structure on the events portrayed. Yet, although most practising film-makers would probably acknowledge this and although all spend a great deal of time thinking about narrative structure in the edit suite, the mechanics of doing so are not a subject that we spend that much time writing or talking about, at least not in public. It is as if to admit publicly that we routinely and purposively subject our rushes to chronological manipulation – often radically so – in the interests of producing coherent narratives would be to confess a guilty secret that is best kept under wraps.

This attitude, I suspect, is symptomatic of the more general circumstance that despite the post-modern turn in anthropology generally, we remain in thrall to a lingering residue of positivism in ethnographic film-making and, as a result, tend to believe that any departure from a literal account of reality, other than perhaps on grounds of redundancy, is not really legitimate. But it is surely time to liberate ourselves from this ghost of our natural sciences inheritance and publicly accept that, firstly, all ethnographic films are representations and as such, necessarily involve narrative, and secondly, the development of an effective and coherent narrative necessarily involves interventions in chronology.

Rather than try and avoid the authorial implications of narrative, as in the event-sequence method, or allow narratives to creep unacknowledged into our work, as in the Rouchian *plan-séquence*, I suggest that we should be much more 'up-front' about our use of narratives and through exchanging experiences and views, learn to deploy them as effectively as possible. The first step in this process should be to direct our attention more systematically to how we actually use narrative and in what forms. This is what I shall do in a necessarily summary manner in the remainder of this article.

Intrinsic narratives and the 'classical' formula

The advantage of ritual events as a subject matter for an ethnographic film is not only that they have an intrinsic narrative that can be recycled as a film narrative, but that in this recycling that they can usually be accommodated without much difficulty to what one might call the 'classical' formula for producing readily comprehensible, engaging narratives. This is conventionally traced back to dramaturgical norms developed in ancient Greece and has frequently been described in the theoretical literature on narrative, albeit in a variety of different ways, with a variety of different emphases and degrees of complexity. In the simplest version, the formula is said to consist of merely three phases, a Beginning, a Middle and an End. In this bald form, it has been turned into a mantra-like maxim as to the requirements of all effective documentary film narratives. Phrased in a somewhat more complex manner, it is said that the first of these phases should be that of exposition, in which the characters and general situation are presented. Then a disequilibrating event should unleash the second phase in which a series of further events culminate eventually in some sort of crisis or climax. The resolution of this climax constitutes the third and final stage.

Various further elaborations on this classical formula have been proposed, consisting of five- or even seven-stage variants, but I would argue that these represent little more than a more detailed subdivision of the original three-part scheme. However, one notable feature which some of these more recent variants draw attention to is the potential presence of an element of circularity in the formula whereby the conclusion of the narrative reconnects in some sense with the beginning. Typically, this does not involve a return to a state of affairs that is identical to that with which the narrative began, but rather a return to one that has been transformed by the experience or knowledge acquired in the course of the film. But by reconnecting with the beginning, such narratives can suggest a sense of completeness and hence of closure.[7]

Theorists of narrative disagree fundamentally about the epistemological or ontological status of these various versions of the classical narrative formula. Some, such as Edward Branigan, consider them to be no less than the expression of a fundamental 'schema' of human cognition, whilst others, such as Bill Nichols, argue that they are nothing more than a 'Western' cultural construction that serves the hegemonic purpose of maintaining the distance between the powerful observing Self and the subaltern observed Other (Branigan 1992; Nichols 1992). But whatever the precise status of the variants on the classical formula may be, most authors would probably agree that the formula has been and continues to be very effective as a means of producing narratives that culturally European audiences find engaging and easily comprehensible.

As far as ritual events are concerned, it is easy to see how the typical narrative structure of films on this subject, as described above, can be accommodated to the classical pattern.

If the preliminary explanatory sequence establishing the characters and the general situation with which such films usually begin represents the phase of exposition, then the start of the ritual event proper would represent the disequilibrating event that unleashes the action. The central phase would be the progressively developing action of the ritual event and the narrative climax would be the climax of the event, i.e. the moment when the child is initiated, the spirit of the deceased is bid farewell, the New Year rung in or whatever the case may be. The final stage, the resolution, would deal with such things as the psychological, social or symbolic transformation of the principal participants, the departure of the celebrants, post-mortems the day after and so on.

Although they may not involve quite the degree of performativity or theatricality that a ritual event typically does, there are a number of other types of events of particular interest to anthropologists that also feature intrinsic narratives that can be similarly accommodated without too much difficulty to the requirements of the classical formula. One of these types would embrace a wide range of technical processes, including not just the deployment of machinery to achieve some technical objective, but also such things as the manufacture of artefacts or works of art, the process of sewing, tending and harvesting crops, and the preparation of meals. In this case, the stage of preparing or assembling the raw materials and the presentation of the human agents could correspond to the expository phase, the elaboration of the materials would correspond to the development phase whilst the final emergence of the finished article, harvest, banquet, or whatever it might be would act as the entrée to the resolution phase.

Much the same can be said of journeys, defined widely to embrace such a variety of spatial displacements as pilgrimages, the herding of animals from one environment to another, trading or hunting expeditions by sea or by land, even scientific quests of an anthropological nature.[8] Here the preparation for the journey provides the opportunity to introduce the travellers and their quest, the departure represents the disequilibrating moment, the journey itself the stage of development and the arrival the moment of climax, whilst the transformation in the travellers' general condition or state of mind would typically constitute the resolution of the story.

In short, in making a film about events of this kind, as in the case of ritual events, the ethnographic film-maker can have the best of both worlds since without any great degree of artifice, he or she can tell an engaging story whilst still remaining broadly faithful to the pro-filmic reality. However, whatever its advantages may be, some ethnographic film-makers have made serious objections to the use of this formula, arguing, in common with Bill Nichols, that it is a very particular cultural construction of European origin. Thus to apply it to the representation of the cultural realities of Others, is to misrepresent those realities and to perpetuate European cultural hegemony. Instead, it is proposed, ethnographic film-makers should work together with their subjects to develop narratives that arise from the subjects' own cultural traditions and employ these in the construction of their films.

This argument raises a number of general issues about the politics and ethics of ethnographic film-making that are too complex to tackle in any serious way in this chapter. However, as a first step, I would suggest that it is important to distinguish in this context between the content and form of a narrative. With regard to the content, I would agree that there is every good reason for the ethnographic film-maker to work in conjunction with the subjects in order to establish what they consider important about the phenomenon that the proposed film will deal with and how these issues should be presented and interpreted. There may also be a case, on both ethical and political grounds, for discussing certain stylistic considerations with the subjects. For example, it is possible that in some societies that the degree of penetration of personal space implied by an extreme close-up might be regarded as an abuse of privacy and this could therefore be a stylistic feature that an ethically-aware film-maker might aim to avoid. Or, alternatively, there may be local political considerations to take into account, as Alessandro Cavadini and Carolyn Strachan discovered when making *Two Laws* (1981) with the Borroloola Aboriginal community. In this case, the subjects preferred the use of wide angle lenses, not so much to avoid the intrusion of a close-up lens, but so that those in the immediate vicinity of someone speaking would also necessarily be included, thereby providing authority and confirmation for what was being said.[9]

But with respect to the form of a narrative, as represented by the structural aspects that I have been dealing with in this article, I would argue that the film-maker's primary concern should be to meet the requirements of the eventual primary audience for a narrative that they find comprehensible and therefore engaging. If this eventual primary audience is culturally European, then I see no difficulty in taking advantage of established European conventions of narrative structure in addressing them. I am certainly not convinced that the adoption of the classical formula or some variant upon it serves to perpetuate European cultural hegemony, as Nichols envisages, just as, conversely, I cannot see how the purposive rupturing of these conventions would somehow lead to an alteration of the power relations between film-maker and subjects.[10]

On the other hand, what I am convinced of is that the mechanical application of the classical formula is likely to produce very dull films. If a film becomes merely a pedestrian plod through one scene after another of a ritual event, technical process or journey, the patience of the audience is bound to be tried, however much the film might conform to the classical formula. Regrettably, all too often ethnographic films on these topics turn out to be precisely like this. If we are to avoid this outcome, it will often be necessary to intervene proactively in the intrinsic narratives of the events themselves and give them both meaning and interest through the superimposition of an extrinsic narrative devised by the film-maker.

Stories and Plots

One means of increasing the power of a narrative to engage the audience is to improve the links between the various component links in the narrative chain. Here it is useful to refer to another classical conception about narrative, namely the distinction between a 'story' and a 'plot'. Present-day theorists of narrative have a range of different takes on precisely how this distinction should be drawn but the classical idea is simply that whereas a 'story' describes what happened, a 'plot' describes how it happened. Thus whereas a 'story' merely describes a series of episodes or events, a 'plot' postulates a link between them of some motivational or causal kind and thereby produces a more engaging kind of narrative. If this plot is complex, involving various reversals of fortune and false trails that introduce uncertainty into the development of the narrative and therefore a certain element of drama and suspense, it becomes all the more engaging.[11] So it is that in the typical Western fiction film, the narrative progression from an initial situation to the final conclusion is normally effected by a plot with many twists and turns on the way, even if it still reaches some sort of climax and resolution shortly before the end of the film. Ethnographic films, on the other hand, tend to be more story-like and to be based on a sequence of episodes linked in time or in space that eventually result in a conclusion.

However this is not always the case and some of the most engaging ethnographic films have some element of emplotment. One of the best examples dealing with a ritual event is *Wedding Camels*, David and Judith MacDougall's magnificent film about a Turkana marriage. In this case, the plot consists of the ebb and flow of intrigue about the distribution of the bridewealth livestock during the run-up to the marriage that is finally, if uncertainly, resolved. This plot sustains the interest of the audience through a film that is almost two hours in length. It is also a device that has for more than mere entertainment value since it is through the tensions and arguments that we learn a great deal about the relationships between women and men, the young and the old, and between in-laws that would probably never have come to surface had there not been these disputes over the distribution of the animals. At various points, these disputes become so acute that they appear to put the actual realization of the marriage in doubt thereby creating an element of suspense and drama that further increases the potential for engagement on the part of the audience.

In this regard, we might compare *Wedding Camels* favourably with *The Feast* (1970) by Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon. In this film, in conformity with the norms of the 'event-sequence' method, the various stages of the event are summarized beforehand in a series of a still from the film. Watching the film therefore becomes merely a matter of witnessing the event unfold as foretold in the pre-film summary. Although the film is certainly interesting on account of the theatricality of the Yanomami performances, both in their dances and their trading exchanges, it could have been very much more engaging if we had not been told the outcome beforehand. For, as Chagnon has reported in his various textual accounts, the main purpose of these feasts is to seal an alliance between groups that have hostile relationships with one another and often a history of warfare. As a result, a fear on the minds of both hosts and visitors is that the other party will double-cross them and use the occasion to attack them when their defences are down. But any opportunity that the film-makers might have had to use this uncertainty to increase the complexity of the emplotment of the film is lost by showing us beforehand that the outcome was perfectly peaceable.

When the action of a documentary does not in itself provide the opportunity for the development of a plot based on intrigue and uncertainty, there remains the possibility of increasing the engagement of the audience by introducing a question of some kind at the beginning of the film which is then gradually answered, possibly with the distraction of various false trails along the way. This can then serve to reinforce what one might call the 'ratchet effect' of the normal chronological progression of the film.

This is what I attempted to do in the films that I made in Cuyagua on the Caribbean coast of Venezuela in the mid-1980s, though in retrospect, I appreciate that with greater experience, I could have used this technique to greater advantage. In the first of these films, *Devil Dancers*, which as the name suggests, concerned a cult in which young men dress in devil costumes and dance as a form of votive offering on the day of Corpus Christi. At the height event, as the priest emerged from the Church bearing the altar cross, a man jumped out of the crowd and started abusing him. The devil dancers began to whip him and a fight ensued on the altar steps. Being very inexperienced, I stopped filming because I thought that this was not supposed to be happening and that the villagers would be ashamed of it. It was only when I was approached by one my friends and was encouraged to start filming again that I realized that this unexpected outburst confirmed the local belief that the Devil himself was attracted by the music of the dancing. Far from being merely drunk, as I had assumed, the local people knew that the 'crazy' assailant of the priest, was in fact 'endiablado', possessed by the Devil.

Instead of thinking of this outburst as an irregularity that should not have happened and therefore ought not to have even been recorded, I should have realized that it was a highly revealing moment that drew many different strands of local belief about the event together and, as such, could therefore act as the culminating crisis of the eventual narrative of the film that I proposed to make. I did indeed make some attempt to structure the narrative in this way by subsequently filming the telling of a number of legends about the appearance of the Devil at the dancing and placing these by way of explanation before the ritual event itself in the edited version of the film. But in retrospect, I realize that I should have done more to intrigue the audience at the beginning of the film with the prospect that the Devil would actually appear in the course of the film, whilst leaving them with a question in their minds about what form this appearance would actually take.

The 'hook' and the flash-forward

A device that is now much used by ethnographic film-makers and which can be employed in conjunction with the classical narrative formula to engage the audience is an orientating sequence used before the main title of a film or in association with it. Often referred to as a 'hook', it is commonly said to have originated in television practice, as a means of keeping hold of a viewer who had stayed on watching from the previous programme. As such, it was supposed to contain some particularly dramatic material to capture the attention of a putatively fickle viewer who could change channels at any moment with no more than a touch of the remote control 'zapper'.

Whatever its precise origins, it is now used for a variety of purposes in ethnographic film-making, even though many ethnographic films are made to be watched in cinemas, lecture halls or other such venues where the audience cannot so easily escape. For example, Robert Gardner who has never made his films for television audiences used a very effective 'hook' at the beginning of *Dead Birds* (1963). This consists of a shot of a hawk flying over a Dani village in the New Guinea Highlands whilst Gardner's voice sonorously recounts a local legend that explains how having lost a race with the Snake in mythological times, the Bird was thereafter destined to die. A dramatic cut to a recently killed Dani man being placed on a funeral pyre establishes very clearly the symbolic connection between men and birds, and of both with mortality. The association is also heavily re-inforced by the graphic properties of the title of the film which comes up at this point. It actually comes up in two stages, in reverse order, with 'BIRDS' over the end of the outgoing shot of the hawk, and with 'DEAD' only coming in with the cut to the corpse. After this opening sequence, the film then abruptly changes mode and enters the classic exposition phase, introducing us to the principal characters, Wewak and Pua.

Twenty years later, Gardner was still using a 'hook' in *Forest of Bliss*, though here it consists of a sequence of 11 shots that allude without commentary to a series of symbolic motifs that will be of importance later in the film: dogs, birds, boats passing on the river, tinkling bells, a corpse, a flame burning in a sacred hearth and so on. As in *Dead Birds*, there is then a change of mode on the other side of the title and we are introduced to the principal characters. The only essential difference structurally is that whereas the 'hook' of *Dead Birds* is outside the chronology of the main body of the film, in *Forest of Bliss*, it is placed within it since the shots of symbolic motifs are all in very low light, suggesting that they should be read as referring to events taking place earlier on the same morning on which we will later see the principal protagonists engaged in their ablutions.

In *Tempus de Baristas* (1993), David MacDougall uses the pre-title hook in a somewhat different manner. In this film, which was cut by Dai Vaughan, the hook is also presented as being within the chronology of the film as a whole since it shows an elderly bell-ringer getting up, pulling on his boots and going up the church to ring the bell, presumably to call the faithful to prayer. This overview perspective on the village afforded from the bell-tower is then used to present a montage of establishing shots of the small town in the vicinity of which the action of the film will take place, all covered by the sound of the ringing bells. This gives way to the title and authorial credit, before the film returns to the early morning, this time to present the main characters of the film getting ready to go out for the day's work. In this way, as David himself put it to me, the film-makers 'got two bites at the cherry'.

In my own work, I have used the hook in a variety of ways. In *Devil Dancers*, I used it in a way that has certain similarities to Gardner's use in *Dead Birds*, that is, through voice-over, I presented some of the general themes of the film to come (primarily, that of cultural syncretism) so that the audience would have a key through which to read the film. But I also used it to give a foretaste of the devil dancing they would later see in the event itself. For there is always a risk in a film about a ritual event that the audience will get bored of the expository stage dealing with the build up to the event, however important this may be from a sociological point of view. Through the judicious use of the hook, one can give the audience something to look forward to whilst making an effort to understand the social and cultural context of the event.

The use of the hook to provide a flash forward, as it were, can also be invaluable in a film in which the outcome is already known and is particularly useful in counteracting the 'one-damn-thing-after-another' effect that is the scourge of all historical documentaries. This is how we sought to use it in *We are Born to Survive* (1995), a film directed by Paul Okojie in which I was involved as the producer. This film presents a biography of the then recently deceased Manchester activist Kath Locke and begins with a re-enactment of the song sung at her funeral, *Nkosi sikeleli Afrika*, the anthem of the African National Congress party (and now an anthem of the Republic of South Africa as a whole) The film then cycles back via some 1930s archive and evocative music to an interview in which Kath Locke talks about her early life in Blackpool. Thereafter, the film follows her life in a more or less faithful chronological order, showing how an early encounter with pan-Africanism through the Congress held at Manchester in 1945 had provided her with a means of understanding her experiences as a black person in Britain. At the end of the film, the film returns to the funeral song, but by then it has become clear why it is *Nkosi sikeleli Afrika* that is being sung.

Fictive chronologies

These various devices for increasing the engagement of an audience can all be used in conjunction with a narrative that remains largely derived from the intrinsic narrative of the event itself. However, clearly, not all ethnographic subject matters or topics have an intrinsic narrative that can be so readily transposed into a film narrative as is the case with ritual events, technical processes and journeys. From a narrative point of view, an altogether more demanding challenge is presented when one seeks to make a film embracing a more complex set of circumstances, such as a film that represents a certain period in the life of a community, and therefore covers a number of different types of event, of variable duration and character.

Under these circumstances, unless the film is going to be simply some sort of diaristic assembly of the rushes, which is unlikely to be viable as a coherent narrative, let alone engaging for the eventual audience, it is virtually inevitable that the material will be presented in an order that is different from that in which it was shot. Films of this kind are often ordered on a thematic basis, so it will usually be necessary or at least advantageous to juxtapose material shot at different times and different places to demonstrate their relevance to one another. But then, in the ethnographic film canon at least, it is often the case that this material aggregated on a thematic basis is then re-ordered again on the basis of what one might term a 'fictive chronology', i.e. a chronology that is the invention of the film-maker, but which is modelled on a natural chronology. Moreover, this fictive chronology is itself structured in such a way that it often conforms, at least to some degree, to the classical narrative formula.

In this way, the film-maker can continue to have the best of both worlds. He or she can give thematic coherence to the narrative whilst at the same time engaging the audience by means of a fictive chronology that fulfils the same narrative function of shaping and progressing the action as an intrinsic narrative does in the case of the single cell events described above. These chronological interventions vary considerably in degree and extent in the ethnographic film canon, from subtle adjustments to real temporal sequences to the outright fabrication of chronologies with no bearing on any temporal sequence that was recorded as happening in the real world. Films of this kind obviously raise rather more serious epistemological questions than those that are based on no more than truncation of intrinsic narratives. We will come to these questions later, but first we should examine some actual examples.

The history of ethnographic film is full of examples that would prove this point, but for reasons of space, only a few iconic cases will have to do. We can start with the *Ur*-film of ethnographic cinema, *Nanook*, released in 1923. This begins with a relatively lengthy sequence of scenes establishing the harsh environment and the characters, particularly Nanook who is shown to be not just a 'happy-go-lucky' Eskimo as the rolling titles at the beginning suggest, but also a skilled canoeist, fisherman and brave hunter of walruses. As Brian Winston has pointed out, there is no dominant logic linking these various preliminary expository scenes, they are merely 'iterative', showing how Nanook and life in the Arctic normally is, i.e. the filmic equivalent of the 'ethnographic present' in textual accounts. But then an intertitle suddenly announces 'Winter' and the film goes into fictive chronological mode. All the scenes thereafter are connected by the fact they supposedly take place sequentially in the course of one particular journey. This culminates, in the classical manner, in a crisis when, caught away from base by a sudden snow-storm, Nanook and his family are obliged to take refuge in an abandoned igloo.[12]

The narrative of this film also features an element of circularity, achieved through the deployment of what one might call a 'framing device'.[13] It is well known that in making this film, Flaherty arranged for the construction of a larger than normal igloo with one part of the wall missing so that he would have sufficient room and light to film Nanook and his family inside. Much less frequently commented upon is what he then did with the material filmed in this quasi-igloo to reinforce the fictive chronological structure of the film. The principal scenes in the film derived from this batch of rushes involve the family going to bed and getting up. These actions must obviously have been performed in this order since the Inuit obviously could not have done the getting up unless they had gone to bed first. However, Flaherty then cut the sequence in two and used the first part of the rushes, showing the going to bed, right at the end of the film, when the protagonists supposedly bed down for the night in the abandoned igloo. Meanwhile the second part of the rushes, the getting up, is used prior to the fictive journey that makes up the main body of the film. Although the journey appears on close observation to take place over two days, by showing the family apparently getting up in the morning and going to bed at night, this framing device introduces a element of circularity to the narrative that works to enhance the sense of closure at the end of the film.

The use of such fictive chronologies as the basis for a narrative structure has been the stock-in-trade of ethnographic film-makers ever since. Those employed by John Marshall in *The Hunters* are very well known. Ostensibly this film portrayed the pursuit of one giraffe by four Ju/'hoansi over a period of several days, in the course of which they suffer much hunger and thirst, but finally, when they are almost about to give up, they manage, laboriously, to kill the unfortunate animal with their poisoned spears. In reality though, the film involved several different giraffes and several different men who travelled around with the film-maker in a Jeep with food and iced water. The close up, reverse angle shots of the men throwing their spears at the giraffe at the moment of the kill were taken almost two years after the wide shot of the giraffe being hit with the spears. Although the giraffe did finally collapse as a result of this spearing, she had previously been wounded by a rifle shot from Marshall's Jeep (Marshall 1993).

This entirely fictive chronology is, moreover, shaped by a narrative that is very close to the classical narrative formula. As in *Nanook*, there is a preliminary expository section in which the four hunters are introduced and there are various iterative scenes about everyday life amongst the Ju/'hoansi. The film then goes into full fictive chronology mode as the hunters set out. The hunt itself is subject to considerable emplotment, as they suffer various reversals of fortune, all of which makes the film more engaging, but finally they achieve their goal. This climax is then followed by a resolution phase as the film returns to the camp where the men celebrate and tell the story of the hunt. The skilful use of these well-honed narrative devices proved very successful and as a result, *The Hunters* became one of the ethnographic films most frequently screened on US campuses for many years after its release. But perhaps chastened by the all criticism that he received for having manipulated the original filmic record in making this epic, Marshall then turned to the supposedly author-free procedures of the event-sequence method.

Another example of fictive chronology is provided by a film of a similar vintage that is equally significant in the history of ethnographic film-making, albeit for very different reasons. This is *Chronicle of a Summer* which follows a group of young Parisians through the summer of 1960 and has a tripartite structure which approximates to the classical formula: first, the protagonists are presented to us in the city, as they reflect on their relationships to work, to one another and to the colonial wars going on at the time, then we join them on their summer vacations in the south of France and elsewhere, before they are all brought together again for the climax amidst the autumnal rains.[14] This consists of a bad-tempered screening of a preliminary version of the film, at which the protagonists denounce the falsehood of the representation of themselves. This leaves the film-makers, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, to resolve this climax by ruminating amidst the display cases of the Musée de l'Homme about the nature of cinematographic truth: although the protagonists denounced the film as false, perhaps it revealed a deeper, underlying truth? The film then finally concludes with Rouch and Morin saying farewell on the rain-soaked pavement of the Champs Elysées.

From the witty memoir that Morin wrote shortly after the release of the film, it transpires that this last shot had actually been taken some weeks before the scene in the museum but, due to its valedictory quality, it had been placed right at the end, presumably to provide closure not just to that immediately preceding scene, but to the film as a whole. But this alteration is relatively minor compared to the wholesale manipulation of the overall chronology of the film. For Morin also reveals that a number of the scenes that are presented as having taken place before the summer vacations in the film, actually took place afterwards. Remarkably, these include the celebrated scene with which the film begins in which two of the leading female characters, Nadine and Marceline, walk the streets of Paris asking passers-by, 'Are you happy?' Morin reports that in actual fact this scene was shot towards the end of the shoot but they decided to open with it in the final edit because they felt – with good reason – that it provided an effective entrée into the alienation-at-work theme which forms an important strand of the film in the pre-vacation section (Morin 2003).

Interestingly, the voices of Nadine and Marceline from this opening sequence of the film, as well as music from a mechanical music machine owned by an artistic couple whom they interview, are re-played over the back of Morin as he sets off down the Champs Elysées in the final shot and the credits begin to roll. This is, in effect, an aural framing device that enhances the sense of closure signalled by Morin's departing back (itself a very well established device, of course, much used by Charlie Chaplin amongst many others) by returning the narrative to the beginning and suggesting that everything has been wound up.

But even this major reworking of chronology in *Chronicle* is as nothing compared that which one finds in *Forest of Bliss*, Robert Gardner's portrait of the crematoria of the Hindu holy city of Benares, released some 25 years later. Although the material for this film was shot over a period of ten weeks, Gardner has cut it as if it all occurs within a single 24-hour cycle. In an echo of the 'city symphonies' of the 1920s, it begins at dawn and then proceeds through the day. We may confidently assume then that certain sequences shot in the afternoon are presented as if they occurred in the morning and vice versa. The same may be assumed with sequences shot at dawn and at dusk. This temporal framework fulfils the basic function of all narrative structures, i.e. it carries the audience forward with the aid of almost subliminal sign-postings indicating the progression of day. The return to the dawn of the second day enhances the sense of closure, but in this particular case it also represents an echo of the principle of cyclical reiteration underlying Hindu eschatology.

After the pre-title sequence described above, the film begins in the classical manner with an expository phase as the three main protagonists are introduced, each engaged in their early morning ablutions. There is no disequilibrating moment as such, but the beginning of the progressive stage of the action is marked by a sudden cut to the countryside. This represents the start of a process whereby all the elements for a cremation are progressively drawn together – marigolds, wood, stretchers, the deceased – with the film taking us gradually closer to the cremation grounds. Here, finally, at 'dusk', the film reaches its climax about two thirds of the way through the running time with a few brief shots of a cremation. Unusually, this climax is then extended through a prolonged night-time sequence – a 'dark night of the soul' perhaps, though in my view perhaps a little too long – dominated by presence of a healer chanting in the firelight, apparently on the edge of insanity. Resolution is achieved by the film returning to the dawn and the redemptive chanting of a Hindu priest affirming the reiterative, cyclical nature of life that the narrative structure itself also implies (Gardner and Östör 2001).

Gardner has never claimed to be concerned to reproduce the temporal rhythms of the worlds he represents, so we should not be surprised by the use of this formal narrative strategy. But one also finds re-workings of chronology in the films of even the most scrupulous of observational film-makers, who do care about such matters. They are apparent, for example, in David MacDougall's recent film, *The New Boys*, from his Doon School series, released in 2003. This re-working of chronology is very discrete and is on nothing like the scale that I have described in previous examples, but it is nevertheless surely there since the thematic development of the narrative is just too systematic and coherent for the events concerned to have occurred in reality in the required chronological order.

This film represents the experience of the boarders in Foote House over the course of their first term, but it proceeds by a series of five or six more or less coherent individual days. More importantly perhaps, there is also a classical thematic development. The film begins with an empty dormitory being made ready, with a houseman cleaning a window. After the arrival scenes, there are a number of scenes suggesting normality (lessons, playing draughts, haircutting etc.) but then disequilibrations arise, first in the form of homesickness, later in the form of fighting between two boys. But these are resolved by the patient intervention of the housemaster and are followed by some redemptive scenes of boys having fun by making, eating and talking about food, by swimming and generally anticipating the holidays. The matron makes a summarizing remark that signals closure whilst looking to the future: they are all individuals, not yet Foote House boys, but they will be when they come back after missing their friends in the holidays. The film then winds down with a series of scenes bringing on the end: the last night disco in the dorm is followed next morning by the boys getting on a coach with their cases. In a final cyclical touch taking us back to the beginning of the film, we return to the houseman, who is seen stripping the boys' beds in the dormitory that is now empty once again.

Episodes, themes and variations

All the examples of fictive chronology considered above possess a strong linear quality, though a number of them also feature a certain element of circularity in that the narrative returns in some sense to the beginning, either through the progress of the narrative itself and/or by means of a 'framing device'.

However documentary narrative structures need not always be so strongly linear, as Toni de Bromhead has shown in her insightful monograph on this subject.[15] In this work, she contrasts films with a pronounced linearity, such as *Wedding Camels*, with those that have a more episodic structure. As an example of the latter, she cites, amongst others, Fred Wiseman's film *Hospital* (1970), which in common with many of his other films, consists from a structural point of view of a series of episodes arranged on a theme-with-variations principle, with little or no chronological continuity between the various scenes of which it is composed. In between these two poles, de Bromhead identifies two other types: the 'road movie' and the 'diary film'. These she describes as 'hybrid' because, in a structural sense, they typically consist of a series of episodes that are ordered within a linear principle, this being spatial and temporal in the first case, purely temporal in the second.

All these more episodic forms deserve further exploration by ethnographic film-makers. The theme-with-variations form is particularly appropriate when the rushes do not feature any dominant characters or developing events that either together or in isolation could provide the backbone of a narrative structure. This is a form that in the ideal case should be planned for in advance and shot with a clear idea of what the eventual theme and variations will be, though it is also one that can be adopted if the film-maker returns with rushes that do not lend themselves to a more linear treatment.[16] The 'road movie' form is obviously merely a variant of the journey film, which as I described above, is already a regular staple of the ethnographic film canon. The 'diary film' is perhaps less common, though there are some distinguished examples, such as Melissa Llewelyn-Davies' *Diary of a Maasai Village* (1984), in which the diary plots the visit of the film-maker. No example of an ethnographic film based on the diary of a subject rather than the film-maker immediately springs to mind, and though I imagine that there undoubtedly are some good examples, this is perhaps also a form of which more use could be made.[17]

However, even an episodic film requires narrative development if it is to give some meaning to the sequence of episodes and thereby retain the interest of the audience. In fact, the difference between de Bromhead's 'episodic' and 'linear' forms is more a difference of degree rather than an absolute distinction. One of her examples of the episodic form is *Nanook*, which, as I have described, certainly does have an episodic structure in the early 'iterative' part of the film, but then assumes a distinctly linear character in the latter and main part of the film. Even in *Hospital*, a certain degree of linearity may be detected. For, as Brian Winston has put it, the sequences of the film seem to be arranged 'on a rising curve', culminating with a death, followed by a coda in the hospital chapel and the indifferent traffic passing by outside (Winston 1995, pp. 156-157). As de Bromhead herself points out, the sound of the traffic passing over a grid in this final shot echoes the pumping of a heart machine that featured in the opening sequence, thereby acting as a framing device that returns us to the beginning of the film in the conventional manner (de Bromhead 1996, p. 77). Even if Wiseman himself may not have been aware of this structure, as Winston suggests, it demonstrates the strength of the classical linear formula, either in influencing Wiseman unconsciously or in influencing Winston and other viewers in the construction that they put on his film.[18]

Wherever the origin of the linearity in *Hospital* lies precisely, the important point to underline here is that it is a thematic linearity that governs the film rather than a linearity inherent in the chronology of the events themselves, or in a fictive chronology devised by the film-maker. Provided this thematic linearity is clearly sustained, it is quite possible to cut a film with a narrative that will be comprehensible and engaging even though it does not conform to the conventionally progressive character of a natural chronology.

In the hands of an experienced director, it can even be used to control a number of different chronological sequences in the same film and to move back and forwards between them. In effect, this is the strategy that Paul Watson adopted in the well-known British television documentary, *The Fishing Party* (1985). This film begins with a sequence of four men out on a fishing boat off the coast of Scotland. We then go backwards in time to discover that they are all extremely wealthy and are involved, directly or indirectly, in the City of London finance world. Having established that they are mostly supporters of the Thatcher government and, in varying degrees, completely ruthless in their business dealings, we return to the fishing party to discover that they have become bored with fishing and are now shooting seagulls for their sport. Each part of the film thus comments upon the other. Although this is not exactly an ethnographic film (though it has much in common with one), again the format is one that ethnographic film-makers could contemplate using for their own purposes.

In short, although a normal chronology, whether intrinsic to the event, or the creation of the film-maker, may be one way of structuring a documentary film narrative, a well-conceived thematically linear structure can allow one to break with the rules of a normal chronology and still produce a comprehensible and engaging narrative. Even in ethnographic film-making then, we could acknowledge the validity of that further development of the conventional maxim usually attributed to Jean Luc Godard, namely, that all good films should have a Beginning, a Middle and an End … but not necessarily in that order.

Narrative and the synthesis of an ideal world

The prevalence of manipulations of chronology in ethnographic film-making should not be the subject of gossip, shame or outrage, but simply remind us of the fact that the making of an ethnographic film does not consist of holding a mirror up to the world, but rather entails the production of a representation of it. This representation can never be a literal reproduction of the world and will always be partial, in both senses of the term. Moreover, as a representation, in order to communicate a meaning to the eventual audience, an ethnographic film always requires some sort of narrative organisation and this, in turn, will always involve some form of intervention in the chronology of the real events represented.

Moreover we should remember that the mere fact that ethnographic films are structured by a conventional narrative pattern does not in itself disqualify them from being taken seriously as a means of representing the world. After all, in many well-established fields of academic endeavour that also aspire to make some 'claim on the real', narrative conventions have long been acknowledged as being an integral and necessary aspect of representation. Historiographers, in particular, have paid a great deal of attention to the role of narrative in the construction of historical accounts.[19] Narratives have also been identified as an important means of representation in many other arenas of social science from palaeontology to sociology.[20] Indeed, closer to home, it has long been argued that narratives are an important aspect of representation in text-based ethnography.[21]

In the light of this increased awareness of the narrativized nature of ethnographic writing, it becomes easier to make a case for the legitimacy of narrative manipulation in ethnographic film-making. As Peter Loizos has observed, written ethnography is very rarely a literal record, presenting in real time a single flow of events without interruptions. Usually, an ethnographic

monograph 'is a distillation of a period of fieldwork, and it synthesises hundreds if not thousands of encounters, events, and conversations in order to produce a coherent summary... Written ethnography has to be synthetic and composite; it has to transpose, to decontextualise, and reaggregate. Otherwise, a monograph would have to be a series of field notes pasted together plus a "commentary"'. Even that cornerstone of anthropological literature, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Loizos reminds us, is the product of such a process. For Malinowski himself never actually participated in a kula expedition but wrote it up as if he had, based on a synthesis of first-hand observations of part of the kula exchange ring with informants' accounts (Loizos 1995, p. 313).

In short, rather than think of the account of the world offered by an ethnographic film as a flawed copy, we should think of it rather as an account that is necessarily idealized, just as ethnographic textual descriptions are necessarily idealized in the way described by Loizos. For an ethnographic film also should represent, under the best circumstances, a 'distillation of fieldwork experience'. In order to communicate the nature and significance of that experience, a few small fragments of film or tape on which that experience has been recorded – i.e. the highly reduced number of images and sounds selected from the total collection of rushes – are assembled into a coherent representation in the form of a film. In assembling that representation, the film-maker necessarily relies on his or her own judgement as to what to include and how to present it. But this is something that we should welcome rather than deplore, since it is in making those judgements that the film-maker can bring to bear his or her wider ethnographic knowledge of the world represented in the film, as well as, indirectly perhaps, his or her knowledge of comparative cases and even his or her theoretical inclinations.

It seems to me that the world represented in an ethnographic film might best be conceived as a sort of ideal-type that is in some ways akin to the world represented by means of the 'ethnographic present' in anthropological texts. Although the sequences in a film represent particular moments that actually did occur in reality, they stand by implication for a whole class of similar actions that could have occurred, either before or after filming took place. When assembled into a narrative, they do not represent reality directly but a synthesis of it. Under these circumstances, it does not necessarily matter if the chronology of events presented in the film is at variance with the chronology of events in reality. Does it really matter, for example, that the scene of Nadine and Marceline asking the surprised citizenry of Paris if they are happy in the opening sequence of *Chronicle of a Summer* was actually filmed after some of the sequences that follow it in the film? It could do if, for example, the film alleged that this enquiry directly caused something that occurred later in the film to happen, or it if was used to make some significant point about one event happening before another in time. In either of these cases, it seems to me that an unacceptable degree of distortion would have been involved. But if – as appears to have been the case in reality – the particular vox-pop enquiry could have taken place at any point over the general summer-autumn period in which the film was made, then surely it does not really matter that, for narrative effect and thematic coherence, it has been presented as happening before the summer vacation when in reality it happened afterwards.

In practice, in the majority of instances, the audience will have to take it on trust that the ideal-typical world synthesized by the film-maker has been legitimately arrived at. But if they have some further knowledge of the situation represented and believe the correspondence between the ideal-type and the original to be too remote, if they detect internal inconsistencies, or if they think the interpretations offered are flawed or inadequate, then the audience has every right to criticize an ethnographic film for being inaccurate. But where it is not legitimate to criticize an ethnographic film is for the mere fact of not being a literal copy of the world in a chronological or in any other sense. This would be to misconstrue the nature of the enterprise.

To be continued ...

Many ethnographic text-makers, if not the majority, would probably now accept that their publications are works of literature, and as such, necessarily conform to certain narrative conventions. It seems high time that those of us who make ethnographic films should come to terms with the fact that film-making too is governed by certain narrative conventions. Ethnographic film-makers tend not to think about them in a self-conscious manner, but whether we do so or not, we are nevertheless practically engaged with them every time we make a film. Certainly we cannot hope to achieve some greater degree of truth simply by ignoring them.

Prior to becoming a novelist, Dai Vaughan, whom I quoted in the epigraph, was a documentary editor of great experience who also had the opportunity to observe ethnographic film-makers at close hand, since he cut *Diary of a Maasai Village, Tempus de Baristas* and several other well-known ethnographic documentary films. In writing about these collaborations, he remarks that he found it puzzling that 'ciné anthropologists' should be so concerned to ensure that the inevitable selectivity of shooting should be counteracted - or perhaps 'merely atoned for', he suggests - by the minimum of structuring in the editing, as if the minimum of structuring would somehow afford the maximum of truth. But, as he so rightly comments, 'the antithesis of the structured is not the truthful, nor even the objective, but quite simply the random' (Vaughan 1992, p. 100).

Narrative conventions may or may not be arbitrary; they may or may not be culturally specific. But they are certainly necessary. We should learn how to use them in a more determined manner.

Notes

[1] See Vaughan 1999, p. 21.

[2] In the most famous of these experiments, they juxtaposed an identical image of an actor with a deadpan expression with three different images: a bowl of soup, a woman in a coffin and a girl playing with a teddy-bear. They discovered that not only did audiences assume that the actor was looking at the things in the adjacent shots, but they believed that he demonstrated great actorly skill in adjusting his facial expression in response to each of these subject matters. See Barbash & Taylor 1997, pp. 372-373.

[3] See Bordwell 1985, Bordwell & Thompson 1997 for discussions of a range of different aspects of 'narrative'.

[4] See Asch 1971 and Asch, Marshal and Spier 1973, Marshall 1993.

[5] See Loizos 1993, pp. 17-20 for a more detailed critique of the method.

[6] Although Rouch was very enthusiastic about the *plan-séquence* at the time of *Tourou et Bitti*, in an interview given some twenty years later, he acknowledged that whilst it was valuable in communicating the sense of an event in real time, the *plan-séquence* was 'something of a stylistic exercize' that it would be 'rather silly' to try to realize under any circumstances (Colleyn 1992, p. 42).

[7] The formula proposed by the Russian narratologist Tzvetan Todorov has five stages: equilibrium, disruption, recognition of disruption, attempt to repair disruption, reinstatement of equilibrium. In this scheme, the third stage can constitute as an inversion of the first and fifth stages and the fourth an inversion of second stage. There is also an implicit circularity in that the final stage represents a return to the state of the first stage. Edward Branigan, for his part, has proposed a 'schema' of seven stages: (1) introduction of setting and characters; (2) explanation of a state of affairs; (3) initiating event; (4) emotional response or statement of a goal by protagonist; (5) complicating actions; (6) outcome; (7) reactions to the outcome (see Branigan 1992, pp. 4-5, 14).

[8] See Crawford 1992b, pp. 130-131 for a narratological analysis of the celebrated ethnographic journey film, *Grass* (1925) which shows it to conform very closely to the classical narrative formula.

[9] See the discussion of *Two Laws* in MacBean 1983. See also MacDougall 1992 for a discussion of related issues.

[10] Nichols is a great admirer of the work of Trinh T. MinHa, whose films involve the systematic rupturing of documentary conventions, including the classical narrative formula. Perhaps the best-known of her films which could be broadly construed as ethnographic is *Reassemblage* (1982). But although this film is certainly interesting in that it highlights the nature of some of the conventions underpinning documentary practice, it succeeds in communicating very little about the life of the Senegalese subjects of the film. In this regard, I agree entirely with Peter Crawford when he suggests that the subjects are no more than 'symbolic hostages' of Trinh's critique of what she considers to be the colonial character of Western documentary representation (Crawford 1992a, p. 125). That this kind of self-consciously transgressive film-making could change anything about the world of the subjects, for good or for ill, seems rather unlikely.

[11] In order to illustrate the difference between the two types of narrative in his well-known text, *Aspects of the Novel*, the British novelist E.M. Forster contrasted the statements 'The King died and the Queen died' and 'The King died and then the Queen died of grief'. The first, he suggested, was a mere 'story', whilst the second was a 'plot'. According to Arthur Asa Berger, Aristotle specifically criticized episodic plots in which episodes followed one another 'without probable or necessary sequence' and differentiated between simple and complex plots, the latter being superior and involving reversals of fortune recognized and acted upon by the characters (Berger 1997, p. 22).

[12] Winston attributes particular significance in the history of documentary to this sequence, proposing that whether one adopts the perspective of Todorov (considering narrative as a process of transformation, where the disequilibrium caused by winter is re-established with Nanook finding shelter), Barthes (considering narrative as providing answers to a series of questions) or thinks of narrative in terms of Metz' syntagmatic chain, it is life as narrativized that we witness for the first time in this sequence (Winston 1995, pp. 101-102).

[13] This is similar to what is sometimes referred to in film editor's jargon as a 'book end', an allusion to the twinned sets of weights traditionally used to restrain a line of books on a shelf, with one weight at each end.

[14] It is interesting that there is a similar inside city – outside city –inside city pattern to Rouch's earlier film *Les maîtres fous*, though this may be merely co-incidental. Certainly the relative weighting of the various parts in terms of running time and thematic importance is very different in the two films.

[15] See de Bromhead 1996. This very useful book represents an exception to the general rule that ethnographic film-makers tend not to discuss aspects of narrative structure (a point that she makes herself of documentarists generally, see p. 117). Although the remit of the book is about narrative structure in all types of documentary, she herself holds a doctorate in social anthropology and many of her examples are drawn from the ethnographic film canon.

[16] This is a strategy that I have recommended to students who, for one reason or another, return without the materials to cut a film held together by a single linear narrative thread. The results have sometimes been very successful: an example is the film by Alejandro Navarro Smith, *Scenes of Resistance* (2000) which was selected for screening at many international festivals.

[17] The 'video diaries' format, once very fashionable on British television, could well be applied to ethnographic subjects. This involved giving the subjects small video cameras on which they recorded scenes about their own lives which they thought important as well as interviews with themselves. In 2000, the British film-maker Michael Yorke, who trained as an anthropologist, pitched an idea to the BBC involving the use of video diaries in the making of a film about the major Hindu pilgrimage, the Kumbh Mela. As Yorke himself explained to me, this would have involved giving various different pilgrims a video to record their experiences and then editing these together in the attempt to provide an overall picture of this vast event. In the end, Yorke decided to work with Channel 4, who commissioned a magazine-format programme instead. But the idea remains suggestive.

[18] Melissa Llewelyn-Davies informs me that although she conceived her *Diary* as being primarily episodic in the sense that the link between the various parts was usually meant to be no more than temporal, she discovered that many viewers read the film as being principally a vehicle for following, in a highly linear way, the progress of a court case in which a number of the characters were involved.

[19] See for example White 1973.

[20] On palaeontology, see Landau 1993 and on sociology, van Maanen 1988.

[21] See, amongst many possible references, Marcus & Cushman 1982, Bruner 1986, Hammersley & Atkinson 1995.

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