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“Film is the longest distance from one point to another.” Robert Flaherty

Shared Anthropology-Cinema & Jean Rouch

My decision for choosing Jean Rouch as the central figure of my short paper, especially in connection with different aspects of documentary and ethnographic filmmaking, is for those who know him a bit more not surprising. The Cinematic Griot as Paul Stoller (1992) calls him or an exuberant and enigmatic person as Steven Feld (2003) remembers him, was a French man Jean Rouch. Many books and papers were written and numerous films were made about him and his work. It is not easy to write something new about this high-spirited man. Nevertheless, I want to pay a tribute to his composition and combination of heart, mind and cinematic eye. Camera in his hands had a very special role. It became a story teller; it showed people's lives, thoughts and feelings; it recorded many events, which are today an inseparable part of a social history; it provided the author and the people with a tool for reflection. His work continues to live in the memory of those who deal with ethnographic and documentary filmmaking. Many remember him as an extraordinary person, as a teacher, who was sharing his love and enthusiasm for visual anthropology wherever he went.

The philosophy I see behind Rouch's films or documentations lies in the feedback he received and was sharing it with his friends, students, colleagues, and those whom he filmed. The films are through the montage and narrative style deeper in articulation of a discourse. The line of time provides his films with space. The 'provocation' used by Rouch created discussions among the audience and those who were filmed, whose children will once ask: Who was that man, who recorded all this? He spent half of his life in France and another half in Africa, especially among the Dogon people in Mali and the people in Niger. Over thirty years, he conducted ethnographic research among the Songhay-Zarma people at the loop of Niger. For his doctorate in anthropology he was supervised by Marcel Griaule. Germaine Dieterlen, a member of the Griaule research team, was for many years Rouch's anthropological collaborator during the times of his involvement with Dogon people and their cosmology. Between 1966 and 1973 he filmed the Sigui ceremony. In the Dogon ceremonial cycle, Sigui occurs every sixty years and lasts for seven years. Nowadays in West Africa it is a common thing to teach about Jean Rouch and to use his films as a teaching tool.

The label Cinema Vérité was coined to characterize a particular style of capturing the moments of reality. Rouch was exploring different issues of reflexivity (*Chronicle of a Summer*, 1961) and was a pioneer in his exploration with ethnographic fiction (*Jaguar* 1967). His films pulled us into diverse aspects of possession rituals, social life and migration. Along with participating camera and feedback he advocated the necessity of a camera being used by people themselves. It is “an extraordinary technique, an ‘audiovisual counter-gift’, which has certainly not yet revealed all of its possibilities ... a ‘participant’ camera will pass into the hands of those who were, up to now, always in front of it. Then the anthropologist will no longer monopolize the observation of things. Instead, both he and his culture will be observed and recorded. In this way ethnographic film will help us ‘share’ anthropology” (1995:98). He pursued the questions raised by *A Man with a Movie Camera* and tried to combine personal and participatory concerns of Robert Flaherty with an interest in process derived from Dziga Vertov. Jean Rouch died in a car accident in Niger, on February 18th, 2004, at the age of 86.

Today’s discussions about visual anthropology, photography and ethnographic film as well as those focused on visual representations are moving towards digitalization, towards so called interactive visualisation, presentation and transmission. Nowadays it is easier and quite comfortable, when one does not need to carry heavy machines, lights, and extra sound recorders, when one is capable to store all recorded material on a small disc or upload it very fast in the virtual space. But I have to agree with Marcorelles who writes: “In the real world, we have forgotten how to look and listen. We pass over things, we use people, we look beyond them or we project our own problems and our own desires on to them. It teaches us, once again, the kind of rigorous, open observation which, through its very existence, fights and improves the increasingly poor fiction that the mass media put out daily to build up our personal mythology” (1973: 95-96).

The difference between reality and fiction in the ethnographic film could be observed in the following Rouch’s films, which I chose and put together. There are maybe some one hundred films that Jean Rouch made. Here, I mainly focused on African ones and not even on all of them. Damouré Zika, Lam Ibrahima Dia, and Illo Gaoudel from Niger are the most famous participants in Jean Rouch’s films. Over the years they not only became cooperators in filmmaking but also long term friends. Though I read many accounts by and about Jean Rouch and saw quite a few of his films, my main source for the filmography, which I present below, was a book edited by Steven Feld. He provides a brilliant annotated filmography of Jean Rouch (Feld 2003: 345-384)

with synopses of most of the films and additional information. Unless otherwise stated, Rouch was the director of every film mentioned below. All of them were made in 16 mm with sound and in colour. For distribution information, contact the Comité du Film Ethnographique, Musée de l'Homme, Palais de Chaillot, Place du Trocadéro, 75116 Paris, France.

Films by Jean Rouch:

In the Land of the Black Magi

Produced by Actualités Françaises. With Pierre Ponty and Jean Sauvy, B&W, 12 minutes, blown up to 35 mm, 1946-1947

Circumcision

Produced by Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and Secrétariat d'Etat à la Coopération, 15 minutes, 1948

Initiation into Possession Dance

Produced by CNRS, 22 minutes, 1948

The Magicians of Wanzerbé

Produced by CNRS and Secrétariat d'Etat à la Coopération, B&W, 33 minutes, 1948

Cemetery in the Cliff

Produced by CNRS and Secrétariat d'Etat à la Coopération. With Roger Rosfelder. Commentary by Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, 18 minutes, 1950

The Men Who Make the Rain, or Yenendi: The Rainmakers

Produced by Institut Français d'Afrique Noire. With Roger Rosfelder, 28 minutes, 1951

Baby Ghana

Produced by CNRS, 12 minutes. The independence of Ghana, 1956

Jaguar

Produced by Film de la Pléiade. Commentary and dialogue by Damouré Zika, Lam Ibrahima Dia, Illo Gaouel, Amadou Koffo. Sound by Damouré Zika. Edited by Josée matarassa, Liliane Korb, Jean-Pierre Lacam, 92 minutes, 1957-1967

The Lion Hunters

Produced by Les Films de la Pléiade / Pierre Braunberger, 90 minutes, 1957-1964

The Human Pyramid

Produced by Film de la Pléiade. Cinematography by Louis Mialle, 90 minutes, released in April 1961

Africa and Scientific Research

Produced by CNRS for UNESCO, 32 minutes, 1962

Little by Little

Produced by Films de la Pléiade in collaboration with CNRS and Comité du Film Ethnographique (CFE), 90 minutes, blown up to 35 mm. There is another version of 250 minutes in 16 mm, 1968-1969

The Clamor of Amani

Produced by CNRS / CFE. With Germaine Dieterlen, 36 minutes, 1970

Funeral at Bongo: Old Anai, 1848-1971

Produced by Service d'Etude, de Réalisation et de Diffusion de Documents Audio-Visuels (SERDDAV) - CNRS / CFE. Codirector: Germaine Dieterlen, 70 minutes, 1972

Homage to Marcel Mauss: Germaine Dieterlen

Produced by CNRS / CFE, 20 minutes, 1977 (in the same year he did Ciné-portrait of Margaret Mead as well. It was produced by CFE and American Museum of Natural History, Sound by John Marshall, 35 minutes)

Sigui Synthesis: The Sixty Year Cycle of Sigui Ceremonies

Produced by CFE / Nippon Audio-Visual (NAV), 120 minutes, 1981

A Portrait of Germaine

Produced by CFE, 35 minutes, double system sound, 1994-1996

Films about Jean Rouch:

Jean Rouch and His Camera in the Heart of Africa

By Philo Bregstein, In cooperation with Dutch Television, 74 minutes

Jean Rouch (TV-Series)

Directed by Jean Brismée and André Delvaux, B&W, 50 min (5 episodes), Radio Télévision Belge Francophone (RTBF), 1962

Civilisation: L'homme et les images (TV)

B&W, 34 min, 1967

Jean Rouch — Premier film 1947-1991

Directed by Dominique Dubosc, A Kinofilm production, 27 min, 1991

L'inventaire de Jean Rouch

Directed by Julien Donada and Guillaume Casset, 32 minutes, 1993

Rouch in Reverse

by Manthia Diawara, 52 minutes, 1995

The New Wave By Itself

Directed by Robert Valey & André S. Labarthe, 57 minutes, 1995

Rouch's Gang

By Steef Meyknecht, Dirk Nijland and Joost Verhey, 70 minutes, 1998

Mosso Mosso : Jean Rouch comme si /Jean Rouch as if...

Director Jean-André Fieschi, 73 minutes, 1998

Cinéma Vérité: Defining the Moment

Directed by Peter Wintonick, The National Film Board of Canada, 1999

Conversations With Jean Rouch

By Ann McIntosh, Produced in collaboration with Documentary Educational Resources, 36 minutes, 2004

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