



CINÉ-TRANCE: A TRIBUTE TO JEAN ROUCH (1917–2004)

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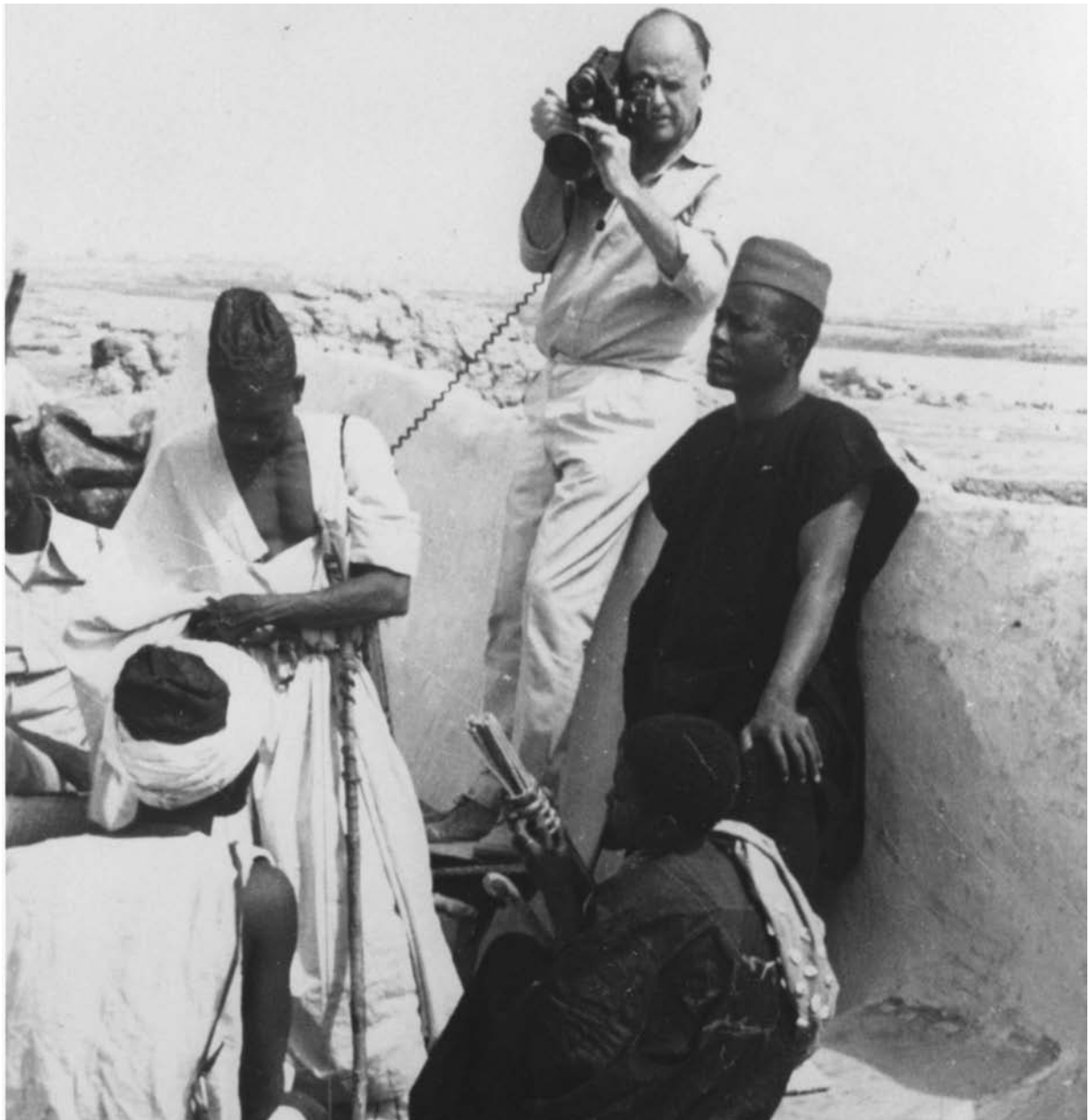


FIGURE 1. Jean Rouch filming Damouré Zika and Lam Ibrahim Dia (*Babatou les trois conseils* 1975). Photo courtesy of Faye Ginsburg.

ABSTRACT This issue's Visual Anthropology Section is a tribute to anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch (1917–2004). In nine brief articles, authors discuss the impact of Rouch's pathbreaking career on ethnographic and documentary filmmaking and his contributions to our knowledge of postcolonial Africa. The authors demonstrate the significance of his work for the larger discipline of anthropology, and commemorate Rouch with personal reflections of their time working with and learning from him. [Keywords: Jean Rouch, visual anthropology, postcolonial Africa]

Dans le bain avec Rouch: A Reminiscence

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PARIS, Feb. 19—Jean Rouch, a French explorer, ethnologist and film director who played a significant role in forging the *cinéma-verité* style, died on Wednesday night in a car crash in the west central African nation of Niger, the French Embassy there said. He was 86. Mr. Rouch (pronounced *roosh*) was attending a film festival in Niger where he first worked as a civil engineer more than 60 years ago. . . . He will be buried in Niger.

Alan Riding, the *New York Times*, February 20, 2004

For those of us whose lives were touched and inspired by the distinguished and iconoclastic French anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch, his death last February was not unexpected: He was 86 years old and had been showing signs of his age. Nonetheless, the news of what actually happened was stunning and, for many, the encounter with it is remembered vividly—a flashbulb memory, as often happens with significant losses. I was on a train on my way to Vassar College to give a lecture—it opened with a quote from Rouch—when my cell phone rang with the news; my husband knew I would want to know right away. Jean had been the teacher, in 1979, who turned me toward anthropology and made me understand the intellectual, aesthetic, and moral creativity the field promised. This, despite my frustration at the time that, in a seminar or screening, he never seemed to answer the question that was asked. Steve Feld, for whom Rouch had also been a foundational mentor early in his career, told me that he heard of Rouch's passing while in Greece, the day after he had picked up a camera to shoot a film for the first time in over a decade.

When I talked to my New York University (NYU) colleague Manthia Diawara—the Malian film scholar and documentary maker who was very close to Jean—he articulated the eerie sense that many of us shared: that Jean had scripted his own death. A car crash seemed the fitting final scene for a life that valorized the antic and unexpected discoveries of the *journal de route*, the genre that distinguishes so many of Jean's *ethnofictions*. The place where the accident occurred, north of Niamey, Manthia explained, was known to be dangerous. It is not far from the location of a scene in his famous film *Jaguar* (1954–67)—as the travelers are setting out, they encounter overturned cars and trucks on the road and congratulate themselves (somewhat ironically) for avoiding the dangers of automobiles by making their long journey on foot. Jean would have known of this risk, but he never played it safe. As anyone familiar with his work

knows, he was always testing the boundaries and creating new stories in the process. He had been declining physically in the years before his death. The man we all knew as someone with boundless energy, constantly on the move, always ready for watching (or making) another film or taking another swim, was finding it increasingly difficult to walk, let alone travel. Indeed, it was surprising that he had made it to the film festival in Niger at all. It seemed right that Jean's life ended in Africa, the place he loved so dearly, riding in a car with his lifelong friends—Damouré Zika, who worked with Rouch on one of his first films and on almost every one thereafter, as well as the cineast Moustapha Allasane, also from Niger. Allasane, like his fellow filmmakers Omarou Ganda and Safi Faye, had worked with Jean on films before starting his own career as one of the key players in the generation that launched African cinema.

A few years earlier, in April of 2000, Jean made his final appearance in the United States for the last of three retrospectives of his work, which I had organized at NYU, through the Department of Anthropology and the Center for Media, Culture, and History. The first, held in 1988, had focused on his work with the Dogon and was held in conjunction with a show of Dogon art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The second, held in 1994, focused on his contribution to ethnographic film and was in conjunction with the Margaret Mead Film Festival at the American Museum of Natural History.

In 2000, I was fortunate to work with Steve Feld, a colleague at NYU at the time. Together, we organized the last of these events: A three-day retrospective of what we called Rouch's "Chronicles of African Modernities." It featured screenings of his major feature-length *ethnofictions*, followed by discussions with Jean and African, French, and U.S. scholars of his work, three of whom are represented in this special section of the *American Anthropologist*: the French ethnographer and filmmaker Jean Paul Colley, and the U.S. anthropologists Steve Feld and Paul Stoller. The event provided New Yorkers a rare opportunity to see six of Rouch's most important works. Most of them had not been seen publicly in the United States for over two decades and, with the exception of *Jaguar*, are not in circulation outside of France. These feature-length works, made from the late 1950s through the 1990s, address the emergence of a distinctive West African modernity—from the end of the colonial period, through the heady period of independence, and on into the complexities and contradictions of the post-colonial era. The acting in all of them is improvised with nonprofessional actors, beginning with his groundbreaking



FIGURE 2. Jean Rouch in an antic moment en route to his retrospective, New York, April 2000. Photo by Françoise Foucault.

works *Moi, un Noir* (1959) and *La pyramide humaine* (1961). Both films are set in Abidjan. The first film is set among migrants from Niger working in the slums of Treichville. The second is a drama created with black and white students in a fictional integrated high school class (a film credited as the precursor to his cinema vérité classic, *Chronique d'un Été* [1961]).

These films were followed by the quartet of works made by “Dalarouta,” an acronym comprising the first syllables of the names of Rouch and his longtime African collaborators from Niger: Damouré Zika, Lam Ibrahim Dia, and Tallou Mouzourane. The films he made with them, for over three decades, provide an almost surreal perspective on the nature of cross-cultural encounters in the postcolonial period, refusing a separation of Africans from Europeans, of modernity from everyday life in the African bush. In a wonderful moment of meta commentary in the last of these films, *Madame L'Eau*, Rouch explains:

When you make a film with Damouré, Lam and Tallou, it's a permanent challenge. We invent situations leading nowhere, we create unsolvable enigmas. So we enter the unknown and the camera is obliged to follow us and improvise, for better or for worse.

The films began with *Jaguar*. Shot in the preindependence 1950s and edited in the 1960s, it chronicles the seasonal migration of young African men from Niger to the

African “Gold Coast” (now Ghana). Next, *Petit à Petit* (1971) shows a reverse ethnographic gaze, as offered by Africans in Paris and Parisians in Africa. *Cocorico, Monsieur Poulet* (1974) is the modern day version of a Niger folk tale. And, finally, *Madame L'Eau* (1993) interweaves the vagaries of development schemes, drought, postcolonial dreams, and encounters between Europeans and Africans.¹

Although we were confident about the film program we had organized, several other concerns surfaced, creating some anxiety prior to the event at NYU. The French anthropologist of Dogon life, Germaine Dieterlen—Jean's close friend and colleague, whom he saw almost daily—had died six months earlier at the age of 96. This cast a shadow over Jean's usual ebullience. Some of the prints of the films with English subtitles were so difficult to find that Françoise Foucault, Rouch's friend and associate at the Comité du Film Ethnographique (Committee of Ethnographic Film), told me, only half-jokingly, that it was all right if Jean missed the flight home, but that the films could not. Veronique Godard, the cultural liaison from the French Embassy, which provided partial support, worried that Jean would not attract the audiences he once did during the peak of interest in New Wave Cinema. Despite all that, the films arrived (although some just moments before their screening time), and Jean was in wonderful form (See figure 2). The screenings were packed, not only with those who had known Jean's work for many years but also with young

people in their 20s—people who, for the first time, were encountering the man, the remarkable films, and his refreshing engagement with anthropology. They seemed just as inspired by the work as I had been two decades earlier. And in the spirit of generativity that shaped Jean's aphorism that "films should give birth to films," the retrospective spurred Steve Feld to produce the excellent collection of writings by, and interviews with, Jean under the title *Ciné-Ethnography: Jean Rouch* (2003).²

Shortly after Jean's departure in April 2000, I talked with my colleague, the anthropologist and Africanist, T. O. Beidelman, about the event. He was impressed, he said, with how Jean seemed to pay close attention to questions asked of him, but almost always gave an answer to a far more interesting query than the one that actually had been made. "Do you think that this is because his hearing is diminished?" he asked. And then I remembered my frustration and annoyance 21 years earlier during my first seminar with Jean. He never seemed to answer the questions put to him, but the replies he gave were what inspired me to pursue anthropology. It takes a long time, I finally understood, to learn to ask the right questions.

Far in advance of contemporary rethinking of both anthropology and filmmaking, Jean was developing an entirely new kind of ethnographic and documentary film practice that blurred the boundaries between producer and subject, fiction and "reality," Europe and Africa, the practical and the poetic, the mundane and the magical, and the audience and the social worlds of film. He understood the necessity of an *anthropologie partagée* before dialogical

anthropology became fashionable. He saw the dialogue as extending far beyond the text and created an anthropology in which "informants" are recognized as friends, colleagues, cultural experts, and primary audiences for work about them. Jean has left us an extraordinary legacy that will help keep the conversation going.

In the final scene from *Chronique d'un Été*, as Rouch and his collaborator on that film, Edgar Morin, pace the halls of the Musée de l'Homme, assessing the results of their film experiment, Morin turns to Rouch and says, as they part, "Nous sommes dans le bain."³ And thanks to Rouch, we are.

NOTES

1. For a full discussion of this film, see Ginsburg 1996.
2. A video archive of all the postscreening dialogues during the event at NYU is available in the research collection of the Program in Culture and Media, Department of Anthropology, NYU.
3. A footnote to the script of the film republished in *Ciné-Ethnography* explains, "The idiom means to have one's hands in things, to be implicated, to be complicit. The English-subtitled print translates this phrase as "We're in trouble," thus closing the film on a considerably less nuanced note (Feld 2003:329).

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Jean Rouch: Hidden and Revealed

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The death of Jean Rouch left a void in visual anthropology that is unlikely to be easily filled. He was at once a respected cultural anthropologist contributing to our knowledge of African ritual life and an important filmmaker who influenced the development of the French New Wave and fundamentally altered the history of documentary and ethnographic film. As Paul Stoller correctly noted, Rouch was a "premature postmodernist" (1992:200). In the 1950s, when anthropology in the United States was still laboring under the fallacies of positivism and objectivity, Rouch was experimenting with sharing authorship with those in his films (*Les Maîtres Fous* 1955), exploring issues of reflexivity that came to a boiling point with *Chronicle of a Summer* (Rouch and Morin 1961), and pioneering in an exploration of what is now called "blurred genres" with ethnographic fiction films like *Jaguar* (1967).

Chronicle is perhaps the best of example of Rouch's profound involvement with the world of film (see figure 3).

After exposing himself to a new way of making documentaries, Rouch invited Edgar Morin—a French sociologist interested in media—to explore the possibility of conducting research with a camera while involving the active participation of the subjects. At the same time, he also invited Jean-Luc Godard's cinematographer, Raul Coutard, and French-Canadian filmmaker Michael Brault, along with others, to join him in an experiment with a new kind of film technology: handheld portable, synchronous sound, 16mm filmmaking. Using the prototype of Éclair's NPR camera, they combined Rouch and Morin's experiment in filmic research with an experiment in a different way of making films. Rouch saw the film as combining the field methods of Robert Flaherty—in his film *Nanook of the North*, where the Inuit actively participated in the creation of their own image—with Dziga Vertov's ideas of reflexivity and the construction of a filmic truth, which he called "Kino Pravda." Rouch called this combination *cinéma vérité*. It is only a slight overstatement to say that the history of film can be divided into the period before and after *Chronicle*.

Out of the making of this film came Rouch's ideas about film and anthropology. Borrowing from Vertov, he



FIGURE 3. Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin in the Musée de l'Homme (Chronicle of a Summer 1960). Photo courtesy of Faye Ginsburg.

suggested that the “ciné-eye” of the camera was a transforming agent that causes people to go into a “ciné-trance”—an altered state of consciousness in which they self-consciously revealed their culture in ways unavailable to the researcher when the camera was turned off, creating “cine-people.” Barbara Myerhoff and I have regarded such a transformation as part and parcel of all ethnographic research, in which those studied become “ethno-people.” In Rouch’s hands, the camera became a provocateur, actively creating scenes of cultural relevance, as do all ethnographers.

Although some of the best cinematographers of the time were involved in the shooting of *Chronicle*, Rouch shot the majority of his other films. Never one to be overly concerned with the technical aspects of filmmaking, some of Rouch’s films appear to be rough looking and even poorly edited. As I heard Rouch say several times, he was not concerned with *la belle image* (pretty pictures). His interest lay in the content of his films. This lack of “slickness” and “polish” has confused those who are mainly interested in what the industry calls “a good film.”

With the exception of *Chronicle*, Rouch’s films are more implicit than explicit. Viewers are expected to figure out

for themselves what Rouch finds unnecessary to explain. His ethnographic fiction films—*Jaguar*, *Petit à Petit*, *Cocorico Mousseur Poulet*, and *Madame L'Eau*—perplex some audiences. They simply do not know what they are seeing and erroneously try to understand the films as if they were straightforward documentaries. I would suggest that many of his films remain a mystery because audiences are either unwilling to make the effort to understand or they lack the knowledge necessary for comprehension. An excellent example of this conundrum is the monumental *Sigui* cycle of films, which chronicle a multiyear series of Dogon ceremonies. According to Rouch, he selected the look or “style” of each film in accordance with his understanding of the “style” of the ceremony. To unpack these films, one needs to be knowledgeable about French anthropology, Dogon culture and ceremonial life, and film history and theory. So far, someone with that range of knowledge has not appeared. [Editor’s note: See works by the late Germaine Dieterlen, as well as the piece in this issue by Nadine Wanono.]

Rouch left us with a lot of unfinished business. Most of his films are unavailable in the United States. His archive is not well organized. Most importantly, the essential scholarship about his work is only just beginning. Paul Stoller’s excellent book, *The Cinematic Griot* (1992), provides us with an understanding of Rouch within the context of French anthropology and its focus on Africa. Steven Feld’s (2003) compilation of Rouch’s writings and interviews, *Cine-Ethnography: Jean Rouch*, contains invaluable documents. We still need a major work exploring Rouch’s films within the context of French film and a detailed analysis of most of his films, similar to what Rouch and Morin did for *Chronicle*. In other words, we are only just beginning to explore the contributions of this extraordinary man.

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Jean Rouch: An Anthropologist Ahead of His Time

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Just before World War II, Jean Rouch attended Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong’s first concerts in Paris, and they had a strong influence on him. When Rouch came back from his first trip to Africa to finish his last year at *École des Ponts et Chaussées*, the national school for engineers in France, it was under the Nazi occupation and the mood was depressing. “We resisted as we could,” he explained to

us, “with the help of the Jazz music. We were wearing the *reefer jacket* as homage to the African American musicians and we were speaking English” (Colley and De Clippel 1999). In 1970, I saw Rouch for the first time when our student association invited him to present some of his films at the University of Brussels. He was wearing that elegant but comfortable *reefer jacket* that he seemed to have adopted for his entire life: blue blazer, open collar shirt, and an ascot. Much later, walking with his camera on his shoulder and evoking his own version of a filmmaker’s choreography,¹

he did not hesitate to use the metaphor of a jazz session. "When a moviemaker gives reality its form," he explained, "it means when he is framing, when he moves, when he shoots or cuts, he is obviously choosing and his master is improvisation. A masterpiece results when he is in sync with the collective inspiration, but it is so exceptional that I can only compare it to the best moments of a jam session between Duke Ellington's piano and Louis Armstrong's trumpet" (Rouch 1981:31).

Jean Rouch is the man who, in the late 1940's and with innocence and courage, introduced 16mm cinema to anthropology—the scholarly pursuit described by Margaret Mead as a "discipline of words." Rouch's first films were immediately given recognition and between 1949 and 1965, he won half a dozen international awards. Jean Rouch was the human instrument of a technical revolution, as were his colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean: film theorists and film directors such as Michel Brault, Ricky Leacock, Don Pennebaker, Albert and David Maysles, and John Marshall. But Rouch was never entirely satisfied with their idea of a direct cinema resting on the potentialities of synchronous sound. He never tried to be the unnoticed observer, the invisible witness, or the neutral narrator. He hated the metaphor of a filmmaker as "a fly on the wall." His camera dove right into the center of the action, changing it, and provoking reaction. It created the reality that it was describing (see Figure 4). Some professional film technicians were irritated by Rouch's imperfect shots, slanting horizon lines, unusual cutting points, and the chaotic allure of films, which were never immune from incidents and improvisation.

These unfinished touches and seemingly uncommercial aspects were precisely what Jean Rouch preferred. Even though his filmmaking style pushed him to the margins of the "real" cinema industry, it did not prevent him from earning awards and the admiration of distinguished film theorists and directors. The film magazine *Cahiers du cinéma*, through reviews from filmmakers such as André Bazin, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, and Jean-Marie Straub, built an image of Jean Rouch as a trailblazing figure. In 1962, Jean-Luc Godard put Rouch's *La Pyramide humaine* (1961) on top of his film list in the *Cahiers*, in second position, between John Ford and Jean Renoir. *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955), *Moi, un Noir* (1959), *La Pyramide humaine*, and *Chronique d'un été* (1961) set a cat out among the pigeons. It was a challenge addressed to the industry professionals—to all the people who thought that they knew how to make films. Had he produced only those four films, he would still deserve to have his name in the history of cinema. He cheerfully blurred the boundaries of "genres." It was not only that he and his Nigerian friends were creating some sort of *ethnofictions*, but within the limits of documentary film, he abandoned the discourse of sobriety, which, according to Bill Nichols, is the principal characteristic of documentary (Nichols 1991:3). For serious philosophical reasons (such as the impossibility of objectiv-



FIGURE 4. Rouch filming Dogon ritual ca. 1972. Photo courtesy of Faye Ginsburg.

ity), Rouch added his desire to enchant himself (as the first spectator of his films) and to enchant the viewers. His films satisfy the obscure need of a viewer who, while watching strange scenes, understands that they work as metaphors for knowledge about the life that shapes the worlds of diverse African communities. As a moviemaker, Jean Rouch essentially counted on his own strength and means. Those means, however, were not the ones of a barefoot researcher. They were, nevertheless, very far from those of commercial cinematographer. Rouch had the privilege of being a researcher, appointed in 1948, by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (French National Center for Scientific Research; CNRS). He was paid to be in the field as much as he could, but the logistics of his films were rather modest: A camera on the shoulder (he hated the tripod), a soundman (ideally a native from the place he was shooting), and an editor.

Because of his very personal conception of the fieldwork, Jean Rouch coped with many of the topics that would be discussed by anthropologists 30 years later: the fragmentation of society, the imperialism of science, the critique of monologism, and the deconstruction of the opposition between fiction and nonfiction. Jean Rouch's anthropology is remarkable on the following points: He exchanged the

objectivist gaze for a “shared anthropology.” The “other” speaks on his own behalf in what Rouch calls an ethnographic surrealism—invoking Ogo, the pale fox of Dogon mythology and the heroic figure of disorder. Rouch affects the field of inquiry and is effected by it. While filming a ritual, he entered into what he termed a *ciné-transe* (ciné-trance) that brought him in the center of the stage. Jean Rouch’s prolific work (130 films, 30 of which were never completed) is impossible to summarize, but it shows a tension between three poles: (1) an ethnographic description (a large number of films shot among the Songhay of Niger); (2) an ethnography dominated by Griaule’s hermeneutics in his work among the Dogon of Mali with Germaine Dieterlen, after Griaule’s death in 1956; and, finally, (3) an experimental mode, foreshadowing the French New Wave of the sixties as well as the discussions in the eighties on reflexivity in anthropology. In his most creative films, he worked with an inspired camera and in an altered state of ciné-trance, often speaking in the first person. He attested to the coevalness of the ethnographic experience—improvising, sharing the status of author, and creating his own cinematographic reality—rather than pretending to describe the outside world.² Rouch had always been convinced that the documentarian’s attitude, his presence, or his affected absence, had important implications on aesthetic and ethical levels. His preferred documentary mode was “interactive,” to use Bill Nichols’s vocabulary. In this mode, the filmmaker and the “actors” themselves take on the consequences of their copresence. Compared with the tradition of neutral observation, it is a complete breach because, for the first time in the history of ethnographic film, the filmmaker dares to engage in a performative act. It is through this attitude and this perspective that we, the viewers, can see what is being shown to us. This mode corresponds to what Rouch called *l’anthropologie partagée* (shared anthropology; for more on this, see Feld 2003). The filmmaker, instead of pretending not to be there, is right in the middle of the action. All of the people present belong to the same instant, the same place, and engage with each other. For Jean Rouch, film was another way of sharing. He always showed the films he made to the people who were in it. He considered the feedback from his subjects an essential element in their exchange. For him, the shooting of Nigerian spirit possession rituals was by necessity an interactive experience because trance and possession result from the interactions between all the people who were present. A clumsy gesture could put an end to the trance. Under these conditions, the presence of a foreign observer could in no way be neutral, and the participants inevitably interpreted his behavior.

For 30 years, the Songhay of the Niger bend had welcomed Jean Rouch and allowed him to film their rituals. As they have said to him in their African French, *tu as duré avec nous* (you have spent a lot of time with us). They accepted him. Rouch’s strange equipment and total absorption in his work probably facilitated his acceptance on the ritual stage.

As soon as he began filming, his personality changed and he became another person. He was with the other people but in his own world, and he was completely focused on his activity. It was as if his magic machine was dominating him. As time went on, his Nigerian friends learned about cinema and integrated it into their own artistic and religious theories. An image hunter, said Jean Rouch, cannot escape from being the object of moral and intellectual speculation in a culture where doubles, images, and shadows play an important role. Even though Rouch believed he was not the one to do it, he thought it would be interesting to study the Songhay theory of a cameraman (see Rouch 1971). Rouch was an author—someone who, through his work, defines a world and invites us to enter into it. And indeed, Jean Rouch never renounced the status of author. Nevertheless, he felt that this position should be shared, and he loved the atmosphere of mutual stimulation and creativity. Marc Piault rightfully notes that, “with *Moi, un Noir*, in one single shot, Rouch and Oumarou Ganda blow up the sacred mountain, from the top of which a trained observer was taking the right to tell the truth of the world” (Piault 1997:18). Piault also believes that nobody doubts Rouch is the author of his films. In the ambiguity of an unequal north–south relation, the notion of “collective authorship” is always looked on as a slight fiction. Coauthors rapidly became, for Rouch, cinematic characters and he remained, himself, the director: He was the one who organized, who distributed, and who gave a form. A truly shared anthropology, which would consecrate equality between all the participants, is probably impossible in its very principle. That said, Rouch has been one of the few who had even tried to share—who tried to give to everyone the opportunity to express themselves.

From this point of view, his ethnofictions are remarkable in that they rest on very long friendships. From 1948 to 1983, Rouch often worked with his friends and accomplices to invent beautiful or funny stories, sometimes only fantasizing about making a film of them, and sometimes actually doing it. For example, the character of Oumarou Ganda in *Moi, un Noir*—a young and rebellious veteran of a rather stupid Indochina war—or the friends of Edgar Morin in *Chronique d’un été*. In all of them, the process is the same: The characters are building themselves up in the course of the film. From his first visit to Africa, Rouch was antiracist, anticolonialist, and antipétainist, which caused him some trouble with the colonial authority in Africa.³ He was very sensitive to the relations he had with the people he wanted to film. He had to feel sympathy and he was a real expert in the use of *sanankuya*, the joking relationship, which helps many people of West Africa avoid tensions and confrontations.

This is why Rouch could not consider the making of film an issue of technical competence. He hated slick films. He had a much greater love of images taken by a moving camera, swimming in social reality as a fish in the sea, rather than perfect shots taken from a distance on a tripod. Such



FIGURE 5. Jean Rouch, Jean-Paul Colleyn, Faye Ginsburg, and Brian Dicubelis in New York, April 2000. Photo by Leo Hsu.

shots, he often said, were pure voyeurism. “This involuntary arrogance in the shooting,” he writes, “is not only noticed afterward by the vigilant viewer, it is really felt as such by the people who are filmed as if it was from a watchtower” (Rouch 1979:63).

In his life and in his work, Rouch was much closer to the French school of ethnography, led by Marcel Griaule, than to George Balandier’s stream of “anthropologie dynamique.” Nevertheless, Rouch was not personally in favor of a real boundary between an ethnology that would “study inside isolated traditional cultures,” as Griaule did, and a sociology dealing with change and the modern world. Rouch was one of the first French anthropologists working in Africa to focus on migration, the city, and marginalized working people in large urban centers. His film, *Les Maîtres Fous*, which created a scandal when it was first projected in the Musée de l’Homme (Museum of Mankind) in 1955, could have been entitled *Oppression et libération dans l’imaginaire*—the name of another trailblazing work by Gérard Althabe (2002), a brilliant anthropologist who also happened to die in 2004. Before having read Mikhail Bakhtin, Rouch and his friends had invented dialogical films. With no need for James Clifford’s, Bill Nichols’s, or Clifford Geertz’s theoretical reflections, he had invented reflexive, performative, and ironic films. He never liked the professional jargon, preferring instead the style of Friedrich Hölderlin and the surrealist poets. Rouch liked the unexpected, and he was a master at using a sense of gentle mockery, which he had learned from immigrants from Niger, in the Accra and Abidjan harbors.

NOTES

1. Jean Rouch preferred the term *filmmaker*. He found that it better suited an anthropologist filming by himself and without a crew than the term *director*.
2. On *coevalness*, see Fabian 1983.
3. Pétain was the head of the government collaborating with Hitler in the occupied France.

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Au vent de l'éventuel: Following the Winds of Chance

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In 1974, with the Vietnam War seeming as if it would never end, the Portuguese Revolution began—the colonies of Angola and Mozambique fought for their independence. Soon after, in 1975, the Spanish dictator, General Franco died. My generation, too young to have taken part in the May 1968 revolution in France, nevertheless acquired a deep political consciousness. We were attracted to the new political landscapes and new relationships between north and south.

As always, technology accompanies the new political situations, offering alternative visions and possibilities for shaping the world. Just one of the many aspects of the complex, rich legacy of Jean Rouch relates to such necessary and fruitful interactions between technology, innovative narratives, and utopian perspectives.

Kodak and Fuji introduced the Super 8 (8mm) camera and young filmmakers started to use this format as a professional medium—it was a time to challenge the state monopoly on information.

After several years of struggling against academic structures, Rouch, with Enrico Fulchignoni and Henri Langlois,¹ created a Ph.D. program in visual anthropology at the Paris Universities of Sorbonne and Nanterre. The three men were strongly committed to the idea that filmic description should be included in a formal academic Ph.D. The low cost, lightness, and maneuverability of the Super 8 camera made this new standard an ideal tool for young filmmakers. Rouch soon realized the democratization of access that this new equipment would bring, and he introduced Super 8 cameras to the new students enrolled in the Ph.D. program.

I met Rouch for the first time in 1976. He was sitting on the staircase of the Comité du Film Ethnographique, with his dark blue blazer and blue shirt, smiling as I explained my decision to pursue a Ph.D. in visual anthropology. I did not know then that this meeting would change my life, and that the training I was about to undertake would become a lifelong commitment.

As students, we spent our time watching, feeling, smelling, drinking, and talking about movies as we waited for Jean, who was always between two flights, three screenings, and an international festival in which he was taking part. My life was spent in edit suites, darkrooms, backstage at the Musée de l'Homme, and in the astonishing Parisian cinema, La Pagode—all spaces that took me away, far away, from reality.

But Jean soon persuaded me to go to the Dogon country where I would meet one of his friends, Ogobara Dolo.

In January 1977, I left for my first fieldwork trip among the Dogon. Back in Paris, I screened my rushes for Jean, and he was so happy to see the final sequence I had shot: On market day in Sanga, a group of old men were drinking millet beer and talking about their plans for the next Sigui—and which of them might still be alive then. Jean was a friend of these old men, who were veterans of the French army. They had a lively, humorous relationship, sharing memories of the cities they had passed through during World War II.

In June 1977, just back from Mali, I decided to go to Barcelona to film, in Super 8, the first democratic election after the fall of Franco. A Catalan leader was elected and when I came back with my rushes full of color, movements, and life, Rouch was delighted and encouraged me to go on, to keep on filming, and to never stop. I edited my film in Super 8 and took part in the first Super 8 festival.

At that time, Jacques d'Arthuis was French cultural attaché in Portugal, and in collaboration with Rouch, he decided to create a workshop in Super 8 for Mozambican students. Along with professional filmmakers, I was asked to join the team because of my extensive training in Super 8.

We left Paris with a Kodak processor for the Mozambicans, so that they would have an independent capacity to process their films outside of the control of the South African apartheid regime. The Frelimo (Front de Libération du Mozambique), created and led by the charismatic Samora Machel, was the official party at that time. Rouch was thrilled to be pursuing the type of experiment that had been undertaken 50 years earlier by Robert Flaherty and Dziga Vertov. The films were shot in the morning, processed in the afternoon, and screened the same night in public places.

Although some of our students came from government ministries, others were workers and completely illiterate. Teaching cinema to people who did not know how to read was an exciting challenge. Inspired by the teaching techniques of Henri Langlois, we treated film as a flexible material that should follow the path of the demonstration.

Jean Luc Godard came to Mozambique to establish a direct collaboration between the Mozambican government and his production company, Sonimages, to create a new concept of television in opposition to the state television.

Rouch followed our work closely and was always deeply committed to the creation and elaboration of new tools. When the question of how to produce prints locally came up, we were stumped. Rouch, inspired by Flaherty's work, collaborated with Beaulieu engineers and came up with a new system.² A belt was devised that synchronized the



FIGURE 6. Nadine Wanono getting feedback in Mozambique, 1978. Photo by Francoise Foucault.

camera and projector and one blade of the projector was modified to avoid recording the lines between each frame.

This was the “do it yourself” craftsman side of Jean. Tools were there to be transformed, to capture and reveal life’s complexity, richness, and poetry. The control and transformation of his tools was a key aspect of Jean’s work.

When he asked me to go with him to the Dogon country, I got the chance to share his passion and all of his amazing tricks with his camera, his lenses, and the equipment for the feedback session. Jean introduced me to the idea of itinerant cinema in the Bandiagara cliffs, with his favorite car, the Citroen 2CV, and equipped with a 16mm projector and a folding screen.

Inspired by Jacques Tati, who used to watch his films in public theatres to gauge the public’s reactions and then make changes in the final edit, Rouch used the feedback from the Dogon people as an acid test—changing sequences and modifying the commentary that he wrote with Germaine Dieterlen.³ For over 15 years, I regularly screened the seven Sigui films in the villages where the ritual had been held, climbing up the cliffs to the small villages with all the equipment. Fidelity to the field was a key aspect for Jean, and he was always so moved when I told him of the audience reactions and of my encounters with some of the old people who had such strong memories of both him and Germaine (see Figure 6).

Le premier matin du monde, a film made by Jean and Germaine in 1998, is a perfect example of Jean’s legacy. He

was provoked by Marcel Griaule on the Sirius question: How did the Dogon come to incorporate such impressive knowledge of astronomy into their mythology, specifically, highly advanced information about Sirius B—the white dwarf star 8.6 light years from Earth—which rotates around the larger Sirius every 50 years? Rouch never gave up the subject and gave his final answer to Griaule 50 years later. On July 27, 1997, the rising of both the star Sirius and the Sun were described from a stone astronomic observatory. As one should be able to see stars along with the sun, the camera was modified to shoot frame by frame for several hours.

Linking science, technology, and poetry with traditional beliefs, scientific methods, and visionary perspectives still remains a challenge today for generations of anthropologists.

Merci Jean.

NOTES

1. Enrico Fulchignoni was the cofounder of the Comité du Film Ethnographique in 1953, with Jean Rouch, Marcel Griaule, Henri Langlois, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In 1969 he published *La civilisation de l’Image*. Ed Payot. Paris.
2. Beaulieu is a French company that specialized in 16mm and Super 8 professional equipment.
3. Germaine Dieterlen, was a founding member of the laboratory Systems of Thought in Black Africa at CNRS, President of the Comité du Film Ethnographique, and a specialist of the Dogon. In 1965, she published *The Pale Fox*.

A Diplomacy of Dreams: Jean Rouch and Decolonization

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An invaluable record of West African societies during an unprecedented period of change. A seminal contribution to the development of cinema vérité. Jean Rouch's filmic oeuvre is both of these things, but it also stands as a testament to an unwavering faith in the transformative power of fantasy and play. Indeed, placed in historical perspective, much of Rouch's work reflects the effort to channel this power through film and to use the process of filmmaking itself as a visionary form of political engagement. This is perhaps especially true of *La pyramide humaine* (The human pyramid; 1961), which, like Rouch's other films made during the period of decolonization, is an explosive combination of avant-garde aesthetics and progressive politics (Feld 2003:8).¹

Begun in summer 1959 and completed in spring 1960, *Pyramide's* production coincided with the dramatic climax of independence movements in Francophone Africa. Between September 28, 1958, and October 18, 1960, France divested itself of 15 African colonies, ending its sub-Saharan empire (Launay 1968:160). In 1960, as the question of redefining the relationship between colonizer and colonized loomed large, President de Gaulle proclaimed, "I consider it absurd and ruinous for colonial people to base their new achievements on the rupture with countries that preceded them in civilization, and opened it to them. . . . Will these new-born sovereignties, these young sovereignties, be acquired and exercised at the expense of the former colonizer . . . or through amicable agreement and friendly cooperation?" (Pervillé 1993:203). Anxious to reaffirm France's continuing role as a global power and lay claim to expanding postcolonial markets, he championed a paternalistic status quo of "friendly cooperation" with Africa.

Meanwhile, the Algerian war cast a pall over French foreign policy. In 1961, as fighting continued, Frantz Fanon published *The Wretched of the Earth*—both a partisan chronicle of the Algerian insurrection, and an optimistic statement of postcolonial chiasm (Fanon 1991). He characterized decolonization as a total rupture, both politically and spiritually, between the colonizer and the colonized, in which violence acts as a cathartic ritual process, allowing once subjugated peoples to become agents in the undoing of colonial dehumanization. In an earlier work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon eloquently described the emergence of a post-racist world in terms of blacks and whites distancing themselves "from the voices of their ancestors so that an authentic communication can be born" (Fanon 1995:187). In 1961, he retained his ideal of authentic communication across cultures and races in a global public sphere, but his

outlook was leavened by a new faith in the transformative expedient of violence.

Rouch's *La pyramide humaine*, released in the same year that Fanon's masterwork was published, suggests an alternative to both neocolonialism and total rupture for mediating the transition to a postcolonial, post-racist era. A veritable product of friendly cooperation between a small team of Africans and Europeans, it also exemplifies authentic communication between them. Further, *Pyramide* represents an important step in Rouch's experimentation with documentary form.² Although he had already used *ethnofiction* as an unconventional means of capturing truth (Stoller 1992:143), *Pyramide* is simultaneously a work of ethnofiction and a documentary account of making ethnofiction—a film within a film, a *mise-en-abîme*.

Rouch initially went to Côte d'Ivoire intending to document interracial relationships in an Abidjan high school but was disappointed to discover "relations between black and white students virtually non-existent" (Rouch 1960:16). Making a virtue out of necessity, he brought together an interracial group of students to write and act in their own fictional film about racial tension at school. Within this germinal idea lay the terms on which Rouch would ultimately judge the film's success: Could artistic collaboration produce an authentic dialogue between the wary teenagers? Although seeking to depict "an Africa in full transformation," with the students as "the true builders of tomorrow's Africa," Rouch was also making a portentous gesture toward a future shrouded in uncertainty.

The fictional story begins with the arrival of Nadine, a newcomer from France. She is surprised that European and African students do not fraternize outside of school and, with the help of her African classmate Denise, convinces both groups to set aside their mutual suspicions (see Figure 7). As old racial boundaries break down, new interracial friendships emerge. Unfortunately, the same qualities of warmth and openness that had allowed Nadine to unite her peers now become liabilities as a number of boys, both black and white, begin competing for her affection.³ The story ends in the tragic death (possibly a suicide) of a heartbroken young man that repolarizes the students. Rouch epilogues: "The film is over, but what happened around the camera is more important. . . . What several years of class had never accomplished a simple film did. . . . For those ten people, racism no longer means anything. The movie ends but the story is not over."

This performative dimension is underscored by a key scene in which the students debate contemporary problems in African politics: South African apartheid, the Algerian war, and French colonialism, more generally. When black students evince a pan-Africanist political consciousness, one of their white peers asserts that Ivoirians should



FIGURE 7. *La pyramide humaine* 1959. Photo courtesy of Faye Ginsburg.

only be interested in their own country. Tensions mount until the discussion seems on the brink of real rancor. Suddenly, the camera pans left, revealing that it is actually filming a projection of the debate on a movie screen, and that the students, along with Rouch, are laughing together in the screening room at images of themselves filmed much earlier. This piece of cinematic legerdemain both emblemizes *Pyramide's* equivocation of generic codes (fiction-documentary) and crystallizes its political message. The incongruity of the bemused group watching their own heated argument reveals the mechanism of the film's production and indexes the small, but seemingly real, public sphere that the filming helped create.

The underlying preoccupations of *Pyramide* appear to suggest how Rouch may have subjectively experienced the African independence movement. Like Fanon (Gibson 2003:4–6), Rouch was radicalized by his contradictory experiences during World War II, by his disciplinary training, and by his disgust at French racism in colonial Africa (Rouch 2003a). But his tremendous personal investment in Africa and his relationships with African friends and collaborators certainly inclined Rouch to conceive of decolonization in terms other than a “total rupture.” At the same time, he was keenly aware that decolonization would forever change anthropology, a discipline forged in the context of colonialism's asymmetrical power relations (cf. Rouch 1971:58). A testament of sorts to Rouch's confrontation with these timely problems, *Pyramide* simultaneously reaffirms the possibility for continuing interpersonal, cross-

cultural discovery between Africans and Europeans and challenges anthropologists to intervene more assertively as mediums for dialogue between peoples.

It is worth pointing out that both Fanon and Rouch considered a transfer in control of the means of representation crucial for colonialism's demise. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon (1965:69–97) hailed the emergence of the first Algerian-run (pirate) radio stations during the war as the harbinger of an emergent, imagined, and national community. For his part, Rouch approached filmmaking as a real-world social intervention, and as an opportunity to put into practice responsible, equitable development based on intellectual collaboration, profit sharing, and the exchange of cultural knowledge and technical expertise (Ginsburg 1996; Rouch 2003b:221). Clearly, both of these critics of colonialism recognized the power of media to transform society. For Fanon, radio was an “instrument of liberation” that “fit together the ‘scattered acts’ of rebellion ‘into a vast epic’ ” (Gibson 1996:278–281). Likewise, Rouch's camera was an instrument for liberating the imagination that fit scattered acts of play into a visionary epic of interpersonal and interracial exchange.

In retrospect, the wars in Indochina and Algeria (inter alia) may give decolonization a patina of inevitability, but in sub-Saharan Francophone Africa, the generally peaceful transformation of the colonies into sovereign states belies years of negotiation and frustrating experimentation (cf. Cooper 1997:406 ff.). Although Fanon's texts have become virtually synonymous with decolonization, Rouch's

La pyramide humaine represents a starkly contrasting—but ultimately complementary—effort to both imagine and create a future beyond that turbulent period. By locating Rouch in a conversation with contemporary voices from the early 1960s, hopefully this remembrance serves to underscore, in part, the creative engagement with issues of historical change both in Africa and in the relationship between Africa and Europe embedded in Rouch's play.

NOTES

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1. For other discussions of this film, see Feld 2003:6–7 and Loizos 1993:53–56.
2. Although the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics often praised Rouch's formal and technical achievements, they downplayed the political content that set Rouch's films apart from the New Wave cinema of the same period (e.g., Rohmer 1961).
3. The film takes its title from Paul Eluard's poem *La Pyramide humaine*, which one of the students reads in class. The poet ponders how his recurrent dreams of Love personified might foreshadow a waking romance. Although this theme reflects the romantic fantasies that motivate the film's central intrigues, on a deeper level, Eluard's dream is an apt metaphor for the film itself—an imagined “romance” between Africans and Europeans that anticipates the development of real relationships.

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Notes on Jean Rouch and French Cinema

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I suspect I might be one of the only contributors to this issue who was never fortunate enough to meet Jean Rouch. While I can't offer memories, I can speak about his films and their importance to French cinema, since these subjects have been central to my own research for several years. What immediately strikes me about Rouch is that the image of his work changes according to the discipline of the person who invokes it. Since the mid-1970s, anthropologists such as Paul Stoller, Jay Ruby, and Steven Feld have eloquently stressed his wide ranging contributions to ethnographic film, his debt to Robert Flaherty and Dziga Vertov, his role as a filmmaking griot, and the deep connections between his anthropological research and films like *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955) and *Jaguar* (1954–67).

Although Rouch is equally respected in contemporary film studies, when we go back to the original French criticism of the best-known part of his career (1950–70), a different picture emerges. French critics tended to discuss Rouch's fictional films (*La Punition*; *Moi, un noir*; *Petit à Petit*) more often than his documentaries. They were drawn to the form of these films instead of their content and linked Rouch with Jean Cocteau, Roberto Rossellini, and Nicholas Ray instead of Flaherty. Rather than focus on his talent as a storyteller, they were fascinated with his attempts to liberate cinema from narrative.

The intense interest surrounding Rouch, especially at *Cahiers du Cinéma*, was due to the fact that his work aggressively interrogated what had been the dominant issue in French film theory since at least 1945: realism, or, more specifically, cinema's relationship to the real world. Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, and full-time critics like Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Douchet were intrigued by the way



FIGURE 8. *Petit à Petit* 1968–69. Photo courtesy of Faye Ginsburg.

Rouch confirmed, prolonged, resisted, and distorted André Bazin's realist paradigm.

Godard and Rivette, in particular, were unstinting supporters of Rouch's work. The former was so moved by *Moi, un noir* that he wrote three articles about it. Each piece went further and further in its praise. Godard began by saying Rouch had made "the greatest French film since the Liberation" and ended by casting *Moi, un noir* as a semi-miraculous intervention by Rouch of Arc: "Like Jeanne of old, our friend Jean set out with a camera to save, if not France, at least French cinema" (1998a:152, 1998b:182). A decade later, Rivette echoed his colleague's enthusiasm, declaring that "Rouch is the force behind all French cinema of the past ten years, although few people realize it . . . all of [his] films are exemplary" (1977:34).

These comments underscore Rouch's influence on the *Cahiers* and, by extension, on the New Wave as a whole. Rouch decisively proved that it was possible to make great cinema outside of the studio system. His films often dealt with contemporary youth, the archetypal New Wave subject, and his aesthetic choices—natural light, nonactors, and real-world locations—soon became their stylistic signatures. The New Wave's enthusiastic appropriation of Rouch's work is clear: Compare Oumarou Ganda's mono-

logues in *Moi, un noir* with Belmondo's in *À bout de souffle* (1960); the preponderance of dialogue in *La Punition* (1962) with the conversations in Rohmer's *La Collectionneuse* (1967); the forcefully long takes in *Gare du nord* (1965) with Rivette's shot-sequences in *L'Amour Fou* (1969). Once more, the films that Rouch inspired had an enormous influence on other directors, from Nagisa Oshima to Glauber Rocha to Martin Scorsese and William Freidkin-era New Hollywood.

Rouch's films were particularly inspirational for young directors since he'd made them with almost nothing. His early fictional works offered an accessible filmmaking model based on an aesthetics of elimination. They discarded the essential elements of mainstream film as quickly as possible, proposing fictions made without relying on actors, crew, equipment, sets, blocking, or scripts. Rouch's cinema was both document and spectacle, and *Cahiers* critics like Feyre-doun Hoveyda and François Weyergans were captivated by this balancing act. They considered Rouch an experimental director and discussed his films in terms of the chances they took. In their reviews, they often placed form over content: Weyergans claimed that although *La Punition* appeared to deal with adolescence, its real subject was "how to shoot in Plus-X on the Champs Elysées after sunset without fill lights" (1961:53).

At the same time, it is important to distinguish between Rouch's early-1960s work and the films he made at the end of the decade. The beginning of Rouch's career is a race toward presence: Capitalizing on new cameras and microphones, each film tries to bring the world closer to viewers. It took years before he had the equipment that was flexible enough to record and respond to life as it happens (see Figure 8), but once he did, there was a notable change in both the style of his films and their reception.

As the technical fetishization of the early sixties cinema *vérité* debates faded, Rouch increasingly focused on duration. Time, more than narrative, became the determining factor in films as diverse as the four-hour version of *Petit à Petit* (1969), *Cocorico Monsieur Poulet* (1974), or even *Couleur du Temps: Berlin Août 1945* (1988). These fictional films (one could also add documentaries such as *Horendi* [1972] to the list) follow meandering, repetitive rhythms. Telling "what happened" is no longer their central priority. In this sense, there is a real difference between these films and the Sigui documentaries Rouch was making at the same time: The latter, which painstakingly record a Dogon ceremony over six years, are concerned with piecing together a master-narrative, rather than pulling one apart.

Rouch's experiments with long-duration filmmaking are especially important since they anticipate major French films of the early 1970s, like Jean Eustache's *The Mother and the Whore* (1973), Philippe Garrel's *Les Hautes Solitudes* (1974), Luc Moullet's *Une Aventure de Billy le Kid* (1971), and Jacques Rivette's 13-hour masterpiece *Out 1: Noli mi tangere* (1971), which explicitly (one of the characters is a thinly fictionalized Rouch) takes *Petit à Petit's* improvisational aesthetic in darker, more claustrophobic directions. Although Rouch is a central figure in late 1960s debates concerning *les nouveaux cinémas*, these connections are underappreciated today because the above films, like all of Rouch's post-1968 work, have become nearly impossible to see. Serge Daney, one of the major critics of this era, ruefully admitted toward the end of his life that "we thought of everything except this: these films could disappear" (1993:300).

At the moment, whole segments of Jean Rouch's career are hard to appreciate, especially outside of France. Let's hope his later films reappear in the future; *Dionysos* and *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité . . . et puis après*, in particular, are beautiful, daring experiments that deserve our attention

just as much as *Les Maîtres Fous*. Fully coming to terms with Rouch's legacy also means being able to see films by African directors like Oumarou Ganda, Paulin Vieyra, Safi Faye, and Inoussa Ousseini; *vérité* efforts from Mario Ruspoli, Richard Leacock, and François Reichenbach; and New Wave works by Rivette and Jacques Rozier. It means returning to the journalistic work Rouch did in the 1940s with Jean Sauvy and Pierre Ponty; it means looking at the connections between his ethnographic shorts and the articles he published on the same subjects in journals such as *Germinal* and *Franco-Tireur*. In this sense, the future looks bright: There is an enormous amount of work to be done across a number of different fields. Ultimately, this work will do more than illuminate the life of an individual. It will help us to understand a conception of cinema and a vision of anthropology that remain vital and relevant now.

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The Work Must Go On: A Tribute to Jean Rouch

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I first met Jean Rouch in the summer of 1976 in Niamey, the capital of the Republic of Niger—a place that he con-

sidered home, a place where, after the tragic car accident that killed him at the age of 86, he now rests. I had arrived in Niger to begin gathering data for doctoral research on the religion of the Songhay people, the very people depicted in Jean Rouch's books and in his celebrated films.

When we met several times that summer for coffee, he was always open and informal. In fact, he went out of his way to help someone who had just begun to walk down the path of ethnography. I was very pleasantly surprised that such an important scholar would take so much time with a neophyte. During one of our encounters Jean Rouch said something that, although deceptively simple, had a profound impact on me.

"I'm happy that you are here," he said. "It's important that the work goes on." With that he slapped me on the back and sent me on my way.

Jean Rouch was, without question, among the foremost documentary filmmakers in the world. What distinguished Jean Rouch's films from those of other documentarians was the blending of artful narrative with scientifically grounded ethnography. This aesthetic fusion was magnificently realized in Rouch's films of *ethnofiction*.

Jean Rouch's path to the felicitous fusion of art and science was a circuitous one. After receiving his baccalaureate, Rouch studied civil engineering at the prestigious École des Ponts and Chaussées. The German occupation of France disrupted his studies, but he managed to take an elective course in ethnography from Marcel Griaule. The war, however, did not keep Jean Rouch from completing his engineering studies in 1941. After graduation, he managed to find work, building roads in the Colony of Niger. He spent the next year supervising the construction of roads in the Nigerien countryside.

In July 1942, Rouch received a telegram from a labor boss that Dongo, the deity of thunder among the Songhay people, had killed ten of his workers. Wondering about the "real" identity of the murderer, Rouch assembled a group of his Nigerien associates and asked them about Dongo. They suggested that Dongo was, indeed, the "devil of thunder" and that the tragic fate of the workers was the result of their non-Islamic "devil worship." One of the Nigeriens, Damoré Zika, had a different perspective on Dongo and "devil worship." He told Rouch that his grandmother, Kalia, a priestess of a Songhay spirit possession troupe, could protect the workers from the ravages of Dongo. Accompanied by Damoré Zika and Kalia, Rouch witnessed his first spirit possession ceremony. Thus began a lifetime of work and reflection on spirit possession in Africa and elsewhere. Accompanied by Damoré Zika, Rouch attended other ceremonies. He wrote to Marcel Griaule, who was then the chair of ethnology at the Sorbonne, for advice on how to proceed with collecting more data. With Griaule's encouragement, Rouch began to document aspects of pre-Islamic Songhay religious life: sorcery, sacrifice, and spirit possession.

After the war, Rouch, Jean Sauvy, and Pierre Ponty became explorers. Following the path of the 18th century Scottish explorer, Mungo Park, they decided to descend the Niger River from its obscure headwaters in Guinea to its extensive delta in Nigeria. They bought dugout canoes and, with some degree of difficulty, managed to complete the

voyage between 1946 and 1947. During their travels, Rouch, a novice filmmaker, shot footage of a hippopotamus hunt near Ayorou, in what is today the Republic of Niger. Because of a broken tripod, Rouch had to handhold his camera. He decided to use the same technique to film spirit possession ceremonies in and around Ayrou. This early footage was transformed into two films, *Au pays des mages noirs* (1946–47) and *La chasse à l'hippopotame* (1947).

As a provisional researcher for the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (National Center for Scientific Research; CNRS), Rouch embarked on doctoral research in Niger and Mali in 1947–48, gathering oral histories about the Songhay past. He also continued to film Songhay ritual life. In 1951, Rouch returned to Niger and Mali once again and shot films on Songhay, as well as Dogon, ceremonial life. In his early films, Rouch's aim was to document social and religious life. In *Les magiciens de Wanzerbé* (1948), he presents a documentary of social life in the famed village of Songhay sorcerers, Wanzerbé. We see children playing as well as a sorcerer gathering materials central to his "science"—nothing extraordinary. And yet, in a sorcerer dance sequence, Rouch documents something not yet known to us—a dancer coughing up a *sisiri*, a metal chain that usually rests in the stomach of a few select sorcerers. How can a person live with a metal chain in his or her stomach? By indirectly posing this question in the film, Rouch compels us to wonder about "magical" possibilities.

In subsequent films, made during the 1950s and 1960s, Jean Rouch used his camera to provoke philosophical and political debate about the deep roots of French racism. These films of "ethno-fiction" included *Jaguar* (1967), *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955), *Moi, un Noir* (1958), and *La pyramide humaine* (1959). In the 1960s and 1970s, Rouch produced the provocative *Chronique d'un été* (1960), the wonderfully humorous *Petit à petit* (1969), as well as a series of unforgettable films (1967–74) that documented the seven-year cycle of colorful and elaborate Dogon *sigui* (world renewal) rituals that occur every 60 years. These masterworks are Jean Rouch's greatest legacy to anthropology and the cinema.

In all of his films, Rouch collaborated significantly with African friends and colleagues. Through this active collaboration, which involved all aspects of shooting and production, Jean Rouch used the camera to participate fully in the lives of the people he filmed as well as to provoke them and, eventually, the viewers into experiencing new dimensions of sociocultural experience. Many of the films of this period cut to the bone of European colonialism, compelling us to reflect on our latent racism, our repressed sexuality, and the taken-for-granted assumptions of our intellectual heritage. They also highlight the significance of substantive collaboration, a research tactic that Rouch called *anthropologie partagée*, in the construction of scholarly knowledge. Through these provocatively complex films, Jean Rouch unveiled



FIGURE 9. Jean Rouch and Paul Stoller at New York University in April 2000. Photo by Françoise Foucault.

how relations of power shape our dreams, thoughts, and actions.

Jean Rouch never stopped making films. He pioneered the technique of *cinéma vérité*, which became the hallmark of documentary filmmaking in the latter part of the 20th century, and which had a profound impact on such notable filmmakers as Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut. His films fused West African mythology to European realities. Throughout his life, Jean Rouch continued to test the limits of his imagination and we are much richer for it.

In March of 2000, Jean Rouch, then 82 years old, traveled to New York University to be the central participant in *Rouch 2000*, a commemoration of his profound contributions to anthropology and ethnographic film (see Figure 9). There were projections of his renowned films on the Songhay of Niger and the Dogon of Mali. Following the projections, he participated in panel discussions. Between screenings he made himself available to film and anthropology students, who, like me a generation earlier, were impressed by his openness, his accessibility, and his unyielding commitment to the next generation of ethnographers and filmmakers.

During a break in the *Rouch 2000* program, I proposed that Jean Rouch and Françoise Foucault, his associate at the Musée de l'Homme's Committee on Ethnographic Film,

accompany me to Harlem where I had been conducting research on West African immigrant life in New York City. After a long taxi ride, we stood at the portal of the Malcolm Shabazz Harlem market, a place where many West African traders, including traders from Niger, had been conducting their business.

A short thin man wearing glasses approached us and said hello in Hausa and in Songhay, the two major languages of Niger. Jean Rouch beamed with delight at the sound of these Nigerien words in central Harlem. We walked into the open-air market, where scores of African traders greeted Jean Rouch with the respect that West Africans typically accord to elders. In the market's courtyard, we sat down at a table. As often happens in West Africa, someone immediately brought us coffee. Someone else offered lunch, Senegalese rice and fish stew. Another trader recognized the French filmmaker who had spent so much of his life in West Africa and word rapidly spread through the market that Jean Rouch was in Harlem. Groups of West Africans from Niger, Mali, and Senegal came over to our table to pay their respects.

"I've seen many of your films," one man said. "I really liked *Moi, un Noir* and *Jaguar*."

One Songhay man from Niger said: "You've always been one of us. You will always be one of us. For us, you are a griot, a storyteller."



FIGURE 10. Jean Rouch and friends. Photo courtesy of Faye Ginsburg.

The traders asked Jean Rouch about his experiences in Niger. The warmth of the conversation soon dissipated the chill in the air. We joked, laughed, and told stories of Africa and of Africa in New York City.

"This reminds me of the old days in Ghana," Jean Rouch said, "when traders made so much from so little. This is *Jaguar* in New York City." By now the effects of the blustery wind were beginning to fatigue the 82-year-old filmmaker and anthropologist. We decided to return to the Rouch 2000 festival. Just before leaving the market, however, Jean Rouch grabbed my arm, looked around the market, and said: "This would make such a wonderful film. Someone should do it. The work must go on."

Remembering Rouch

STEVEN FELD

University of New Mexico

I first encountered Jean Rouch's films in 1972 and was deeply moved by the complex layers of the Africa I saw represented in *Les Maîtres Fous*, *The Lion Hunters*, and *Jaguar*. I wanted to know more. If these were the kinds of films and ethnography Rouch did in the 1950s and 1960s, what could he possibly be doing in the 1970s? I decided to devote a year to filmic anthropology. That was how I ultimately arrived at the Musée de l'Homme in January 1974.

"Yes! Yes! Your passport is stamped!" With a grin, those were Rouch's first words to me, overlapping my clumsy attempt to say something formal in French when we were first introduced on the stairwell to his office, poetically, a converted fire escape. Before I could recover, Rouch disappeared, and with that I learned just how much he was on the move. Exuberant and enigmatic, he could be quite difficult to pin down for even a few moments. During the following semester, I attended his Saturday morning classes at the Cinéma-thèque and the Thursday film séances that he held in the Musée de l'Homme's screening room.

What I most absorbed during those months was Rouch's passion for cinema, his conviction that it was a particularly rich way to do reflexive, shared, engaged anthropology, whether the filmic means were more descriptive, narrative, or fictional. In every setting—from classroom to screening room, editing room to lunch table, or park walks to chance encounters—Rouch oozed the conviction that film could be a centerpiece in a truly creative and alternative anthropology. The anthropology he preached was a borderless one—one that could bend genres, excite participation, rupture expectations, create surprises, and explore every point of juncture between ethnography and fic-

Jean Rouch's greatest contribution was to have created a body of work in which the limits of the ethnographic are the limits of the imagination. In Jean Rouch's universe, ethnographers participated fully in the lives of their others. Dreams became films; films became dreams. Feeling was fused with thought and action. Fusing poetry and science, Jean Rouch showed us the path of wise ancestors and guided us into a wondrous world where we not only encounter others but also ourselves. As the West African trader in New York City said, Jean Rouch was ultimately a griot who told the story of African social life so well that his words and images have enabled the young to uncover their past and discover their future.

Adieu, Jean. The work will go on.

tion, between meticulously close observation and the capacity to dream.

Paul Stoller has aptly evoked this passion by calling Rouch "the cinematic griot" (Stoller 1992). Indeed, that was really Rouch's strongest claim: that a life in anthropology first means the desire to live an experimental and intercultural story, to follow it wherever it leads, and to use every means at one's disposal to tell the tale. A gifted verbal wordsmith, not to mention an adept and subtle writer of everything from symbolic to poststructural to prepostmodern ethnography, Rouch insisted, instead, that cinema was his real and complete voice, his full self. Indeed, his infectious smile, wicked humor, childlike mugging, anarchic juxtapositions, and stern provocations, as well as his tremendous focus and discipline, stare back at me the more I watch his films.

Although the word *auteur* translates awkwardly into English, it was just this—a sense of distinctive authorship—that most marks his oeuvre. Cinema was Rouch's personality: from his technical skill and pride to his filmic mannerisms, innuendoes, nuances, and attitude present in all his work. He always made his own voice and image part of the filmic voice and image of his stories. The legacy of this authorship is clear: Rouch's cinema exhibits an endlessly restless sense of experimental play, mixed with an uncommon mastery of film's realist and nonrealist history and genres.

He was driven and could be hard to pin down: in equal measures fun, even hilarious, and completely exhausting. In the space of exasperating questions, or the desire to just forget talk and dim the lights for the next viewing, he often resorted to one of his favorite aphorisms from Dziga Vertov: "Films must give birth to films." And that is the phrase I will most remember him by.

In fact, in the years following my first encounters with Rouch in the 1970s, we were less and less in contact, and my work moved from Africa to New Guinea, and from film to sound. But we met again, after more than ten years, at



FIGURE 11. Jean Rouch and Steve Feld at New York University in April 2000. Photo by Leo Hsu.

the New York University's Rouch 2000—at the Chronicles of African Modernities Retrospective (see Figure 11). It was a lovely time, full of good feeling, and just after he left New York, I sent him the poem below as a small souvenir of our reencounter.

The enthusiasm so evident at the NYU retrospective led me to dust off some earlier translations I had done and edit a collection of Rouch's essays, interviews, and ephemera. *Jean Rouch, Ciné-Ethnography* was published in April 2003, and when I sent it to him he responded by inviting me to come to Paris to serve with him on the jury of the next *Bilan du Film Ethnographique*. I was greatly looking forward to that next encounter, but it did not happen. Three weeks before the Bilan, I was in Greece, filming again, for the first time in many years. After the first day of shooting the Skyros Carnival, I received a late night phone call from the United States telling me of his death in a car accident in Niger. As Marc Piault so aptly reminisced, Rouch was characteristically late for appointments. Alas, this last time, with a kick of the pale fox, he was early.

To Jean Rouch, NYC, April 10, 2000
 At the Village Vanguard
 we listened to Lou Donaldson play the blues
 and later you said it was funerary music for the
 procession of Germaine Dieterlen's soul.
 Then you told me, "We are lucky, we know that love is

stronger than death."

When I didn't respond you persisted:
 "Is music stronger than death Steve, is anything
 stronger than death, besides love?"

I told you that in New Guinea memory, only memory
 was stronger than death.

"So, yes," you said, "music too is stronger than death;"
 and just then I could see that your eyes, so blue, so clear,
 were absolutely twinkling.

With each word and gesture this time I realized how
 much you embrace the blur,
 how much your own home has become the place
 you've claimed so often in film—
 where a border between fiction and actuality is
 necessarily vague, free;
 where your exact science is sure to find its surrealist
 double.

It was on my mind, but abstractly, all those days with
 you
 how much that double now finds you precisely in
 your own poetics of remembrance.
 But it wasn't real until you kissed me, four times, before
 getting into the car for the airport.

I was so surprised by the affection, and so touched to
 meet you at the crossroads.

The Jean Rouch Tribute Website at DER: A Collaborative Work

BRENDA BAUGH

Documentary Educational Resources

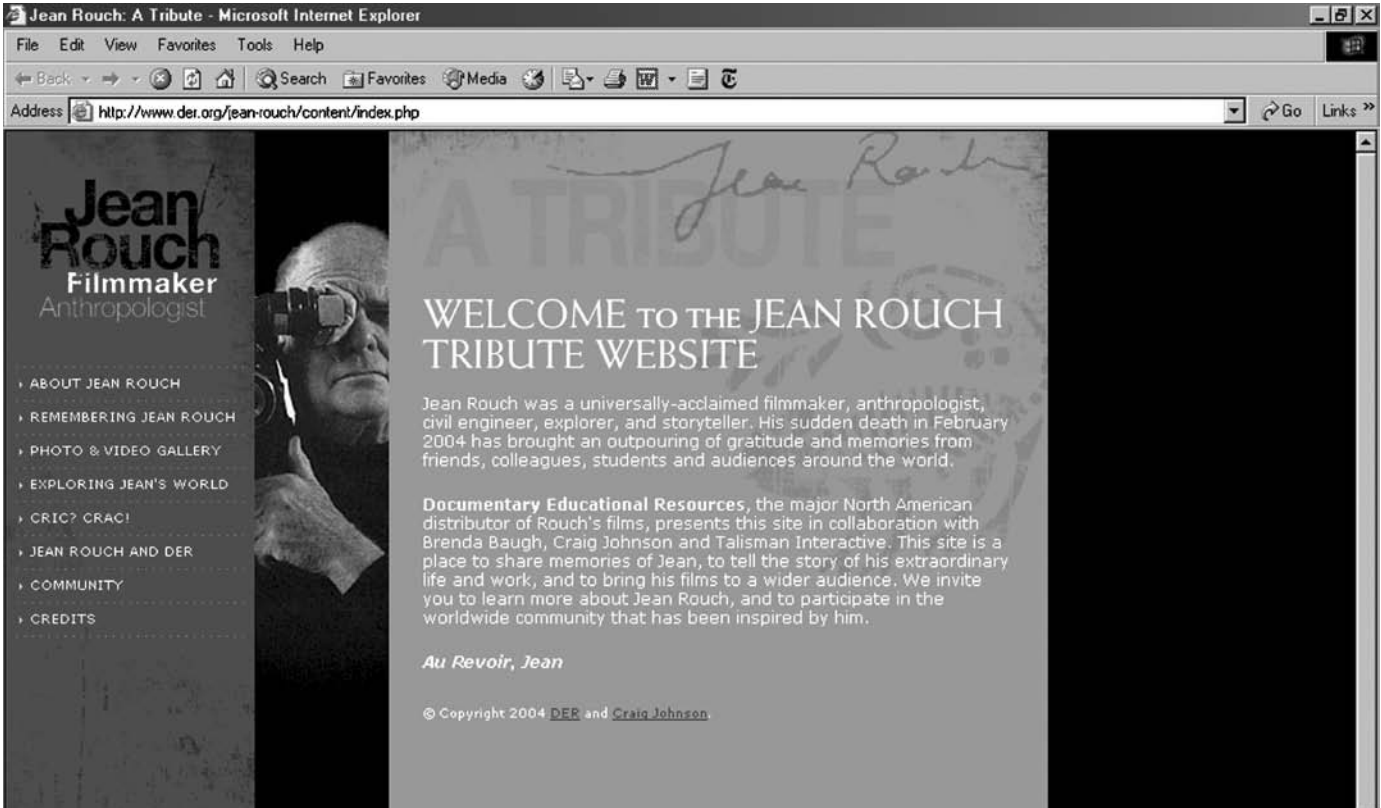


FIGURE 12. Front page of DER's new Jean Rouch website. Courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources.

I first encountered Jean Rouch on February 19, 2004, the day after he died. Looking for a new research and writing project, I had walked into Documentary Educational Resources in Watertown, Massachusetts, to meet with Cynthia Close, DER's director. Cynthia spoke about the company's history, about DER's founder John Marshall, and about his longtime friend and fellow ethnographic filmmaker, Jean Rouch. Cynthia and John were both shocked and saddened by the news of Rouch's death. As we talked, Cynthia had the inspiration that DER should create an online homage (see Figure 12). We agreed to talk again and I left with two books—Paul Stoller's *The Cinematic Griot* and Steve Feld's *Ciné-Ethnography*—and films both by and about Rouch. Almost immediately, I knew I wanted to work on this project of creating an online tribute. I began to immerse myself in the world of Jean Rouch and was drawn in by the details.

In 1946, three friends from Ponts et Chaussées, the engineering school in Paris, descended the Niger River in a dugout canoe. Under the name Jean Pierjean, a combination of each of their names, they sent photos and articles

back to Paris to pay their way. They also made a 16mm film of a hippopotamus hunt that some of their African friends were engaged in. When one of the three—Jean Rouch—lost his tripod in some rapids, they were forced to continue filming with a handheld camera. And, thus, the early history of cinema vérité, a movement Rouch would later spearhead, began to unfold.

Over the next half century, Jean Rouch would go on to chronicle a period of extraordinary change in Africa, from colonialism, through independence, and up to the present. His films give us insights into the life of the imagination in this time period, detailing such aspects as possession rituals, social life, and migration. Among his most influential films are the landmark cinema vérité film *Chronique d'un été*, which was shot in Paris, and the ethnofiction films *Jaguar* and *Moi, un noir*, in which the lines between truth and fiction, and dream and reality, are often blurred. Rouch was clearly present in his films, bringing in elements of improvisation and provocation. Above all, in Jean's films there is a sense of adventure and humor, and a respect for people.

As John Marshall said of Jean, "Underneath it all, he was always about persons."

DER's online homage to Jean Rouch continues to be a great pleasure to work on. Not least among the pleasures has been corresponding with and meeting some of Jean's many friends and collaborators, all of whom have been generous with contributions to the site. Craig Johnson, an admirer and friend of Jean, and his company, Talisman Interactive, contributed the visually rich design and development of the site.

The site features written and multimedia tributes by many of Rouch's friends and colleagues; an interview that I was honored to do with John Marshall about his memories of Jean and the work that they each did in Africa; video clips from films by and about Rouch; previously unpublished articles and essays by Rouch scholars; his filmography and biography; and many photographs. Our hope is that the site will be a place for people to share memories of Rouch and post information about future Rouch-related publications

and events. DER is eager to make more of Rouch's films available to the North American market and will publish distribution news on the site.

A CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The Jean Rouch Tribute Website is both a celebration of his life and work, and a resource for film and anthropology students to learn more about him. This is a living, breathing site that will continue to evolve as we acquire more material. Please send contributions, including texts, photographs, and announcements, to docused@der.org or DER, 101 Morse St., Watertown, MA 02472.

NOTES

DER's (Documentary Educational Resources) Jean Rouch tribute website, at <http://der.org/jean-rouch/>, was presented at the Margaret Mead Film Festival in New York in November 2004. DER is the primary North American distributor for Rouch's films and carries three of his films: *Jaguar*, *The Lion Hunters*, and *Les Maîtres Fous*, as well as several films about Rouch.

Jean Rouch Cited Filmography

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- 1962 *La Puntion*. 58 min. Black and white. Les Films de la Pleiade. France.
- 1965 *Gare du Nord. Segment in Paris vu par...* (Six in Paris). 95 min. Color. France.

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