



A Filmmaker's Journal

by Hubert Smith

BOLIVIA

The author describes both his professional methods and his personal reactions to the experience of making ethnographic films in an unfamiliar culture. Smith and cameraman Neil Reichline made six films about the Aymara residents of Vitocota, a village in the Andean highlands of Bolivia.

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Fieldstaff Reports

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The American Universities Field Staff

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Executive Director

About the writer:

HUBERT SMITH, who earned his B.A. and M.A. degrees in Communications and English at the University of Michigan and Ohio State University, has worked three years in public television as director, six years as writer-director in university film production, and has been an independent documentary-ethnographic filmmaker since 1969. His films have won three C.I.N.E. Golden Eagles and two ribbons from the American Film Festival. He is primarily interested in the marrying of documentary film stylisms with the philosophical and methodological approaches of anthropology. He has conducted his recent work in two broad areas: the American family and Latin American Indian groups. Currently a Guggenheim Fellow, he is working on a survey of contemporary Yucatec Maya life and a series of films on the cultural personality of Americans.

In 1971 the American Universities Field Staff launched a film program with the support of the National Science Foundation. Its purpose was to develop and produce a series of documentary films which could be an integral part of undergraduate instruction. Under the overall supervision of Associate Norman N. Miller, twenty-five films were made on five general themes in five cultural areas. The series, entitled Faces of Change, focuses on the roles of women, education, social and economic systems, and the effects of modernization on values in each rural setting—Bolivian highlands, northern Kenya, northern Afghanistan, Taiwan, and the Soko Islands off the China Coast. Hubert Smith, whose essay on the experience of making ethnographic films in an unfamiliar culture is reproduced below, directed six films on the Aymara in Bolivia: Viracocha, The Children Know, Potato Planters, Andean Women, the Spirit Possession of Alejandro Mamani and Magic and Catholicism.

Editor

A FILMMAKER'S JOURNAL

by Hubert Smith

September 1976

The truck coasted to a stop. Still strangers, we got out and stretched, separating with our backs to one another as we urinated. A little truck with five men circling it...we were tiny objects on the face of a vast grassy plain.

One by one we drifted back, reluctant to continue the journey. The Cordillera's peaks were all around but did not dwarf the flat expanse on which we stood. Its surface was laced with paths and here and there, kilometers from us and one another, travelers plodded with herds of pack-llamas. Tiny stick figures, inching along.

I had been surrounded by the roar of the truck engine since leaving La Paz the previous afternoon. The gravel ribbon that skirts Lake Titicaca and the overnight town of Escoma were part of a rush that had begun three months previous when this film job was offered. Now, as we stood and gazed into the distance—suspended 12,000 feet in the Andes...surrounded by silence—I was conscious of having made the first real break with what had gone before. Then, far away, one of the travelers began to play a flute. The melody was simple and haunting. The notes reached us with a body and

immediacy all out of keeping with the player's distance. How could this be? It was my first lesson and one that would remain as the most singular impression of Bolivia—potent and very personal shafts of humanity constantly emerging from a vast physical and psychological landscape.

Later that afternoon the truck churned through the blowing snow of the last and highest pass. We ground down in second gear from 18,000 feet, switchback upon switchback, and dove into a blanket of fog. Renato continued unperturbed—there was no chance of encountering another vehicle.

Popping out of the blue cotton fog, we found the valley spread before us. I asked Renato to stop and we stood on the lip of the road, surveying our home for the next twelve weeks. It was huge...gray-red steep-shouldered slopes, dotted with thousands of potato fields, plunged toward an unseen river miles below, its roar amplified by the valley's crude funnel. The first East-draining component in the Amazon watershed.

Several communities could be seen. Directly below us (although I did not know it then) was



We drove back to the same spot several weeks later and made the shot which begins the film, "Viracocha." Note Neil's reaction to my request that he, "Watch the birdie!"

Vitocota, a community of Aymara Indians where we would do most of the filming. Two kilometers below Vitocota, buried in a cleft with only rooftops showing, lay Ayata, our immediate destination. Again we fell silent and let silence and sound combine. The great walls lifted chicken squawks to our ears. A gleaming white dot marked a school and children's voices sang from inside. Dogs yapped ten kilometers below. We got back in the truck and started down toward Ayata.

* * * * *

Neil Reichline and I are filmmakers. We both live and do most of our work in California, he in the North near San Francisco and I in the Los Angeles area. We had worked together since 1970 on documentary films about American families, spending long hours of observation and filming in their homes. Before that I had spent nine years in public television and in a midwestern university film unit making educational and documentary films. During this experience certain philosophical changes began that eventually led me to Bolivia.

While I had been trained to research and then write or otherwise construct films before I began to shoot them, a series of projects involving powerful human beings as subjects had begun to give me pause. Time and again I found that the reality of their lives *as they lived them* surpassed any scripted versioning of these lives that I could conjure from my mind. I began to step back and permit the natural stream of human interaction to flow unimpeded. Unwittingly I began to behave something like a filmmaker-anthropologist, although my vitae still said I was a "film writer-director."

A series of painful episodes in my personal life created or perhaps nurtured an interest in American family phenomena. Also I felt the topic had never been covered via films of serious ethnographic intent. So, in 1969, I left the university and used my cashed-in retirement funds to finance a year of research and travel. The research involved meeting everyone I could who knew anything about observing the American family. The travel involved a railroading, bus-jaunting trip to Mexico that started a love affair with Latin America.

In 1970, with my money about gone, the National Institute of Mental Health funded a series of films on drug abuse education, and I was called to California to make two of them. NIMH had suffered notable setbacks with its previous filmed propaganda and was willing, even eager, to hear new ideas. I suggested that the American family, the cradle of a child's value systems, could offer exciting possibilities as a film topic. They agreed and a few days later Neil walked in to be interviewed, fresh from a Master's degree program in cinema at the University of California at Los Angeles. Within a month he and I were seated in the darkened living room of a home in Alhambra, California waiting for the morning alarm to ring and wake the family.

There followed four families and five half-hour films. Each film taught us more, but we started with some assumptions of our own. The family is an intricate and often delicate mechanism. I felt it would not easily suffer the usual techno-physical disruption of "making a film" unless we took certain precautions. We pared our crew to the barest minimum, myself running a sound recorder and Neil a camera. Our equipment was the most sophisticated available, light and compact, as inconspicuous as such trappings could be. We did most of the necessary lighting with powerful bulbs in the home's existing fixtures.

But the most important things we did involved how we presented ourselves and the film project to the family. As far as possible we represented what

we were doing as a serious undertaking. It might have been easier to gain their initial consent if we had passed it off as a lark, but I was concerned with long-term issues. This *was* a serious undertaking. They were being asked to give up their privacy as a family and their personal privacies among one another. They had to understand and weigh these factors. In addition, for them to relax at all before the camera I felt they would have to trust us. They might "like" us in a superficial sense if we presented the filming as casual and lighthearted, but they might not feel comfortable in granting such cavalier individuals anything more than a casual and lighthearted look into their family process.

For this reason I took a deep breath and violated a filmic canon that had been drummed into me since college. I not only did not secure a legal release from them, but I drafted and signed a document which gave *them* the right to destroy any or all parts of the film which displeased them.

These overtures were well received by the families we filmed, and we continued "giving up" controls that filmmakers are trained to assume are theirs. We tried to free the family from any real or implied responsibility for the film. This entailed such trivia as feeding ourselves and timing our trips to the bathroom when family members were absent. More important, it involved remaining for hours in a "supportive behavioral presentation"—a state of relaxed but interested observation.



Neil and Hube two years later in California. We'd both lost weight and regrown our beards.

From 7 every morning until 11 or 12 at night, we tried to enter into a symbiosis with the family that assured them we were attending closely to what they were doing. As might be imagined there were stretches of excruciating boredom, but for us to *display* boredom might have made family members feel responsibility for engaging our interest in some way. There were also incidents that affected our emotions. But the people before us were feeling *their own emotions*, and for us to evidence even a subtle judgmental reaction would skew what we were there to film. We developed a number of body attitudes, facial expressions, and minor behavioral presentations (e.g., tinkering with the equipment) to, as much as we could, insure that the family members would be able to discount us and deal with their own lives.

We asked the family not to initiate socializing with us unless they felt they had to. We did this because, in our culture, the withdrawn silence we were displaying is generally understood to mean disapproval. We felt that the family would feel uncomfortable and attempt to dispel this discomfort by making overtures to us and "drawing us in" to a closer and more "approving" posture toward them. These overtures, especially in the first week, could delay their accustoming themselves to the unusual situation. But during that first week we made a special effort to look for these discomforts and to give reassurance.

Even if no such discomfort was evident we found it easy to drop the equipment and socialize from time to time. We needed this contact as much as they did! In addition, a bond is forged between people who are giving themselves over to being filmed and the persons filming them. So far I've maintained contact with each of the four families and, in two cases, close and continuing relationships have developed.

* * * * *

I've written this rather lengthy introduction to an essay about filming in Bolivia for a reason. In the largest sense making a film is a political act. The technocratic peoples tend to study the "underdeveloped" peoples, not vice-versa—it will be some years before a film crew of Aymara Indians or Australian Bushmen appear on our shores. This entering of another society's territory, taking pictures, and leaving with them raises complex and delicate issues.

It is a simple fact of life that such intrusions are generally permitted regardless of their nature. The intruders are given access by reason of deference, courtesy, or the money they are able to offer. But granting access can be far different from permitting the intruder to experience a truly close look at the life of a society. Anthropologists are keenly aware that some informants' eager agreements are not necessarily motivated by a desire to reveal all. Anthropologists are trained to guard against such tainted data. And, when they transmit their findings, they do so generally in print, a medium that allows drawing conclusions from a wide and disparate body of data often accompanied by qualifying footnotes and appendices. But the filmmaker has a unique problem as concerns the reliability of his data. Film is ongoing, with a momentum of its own. It cannot achieve reliability by assembling many examples of a similar phenomena and presenting them with footnotes and appendices—these print conventions are not film conventions. The filmmaker must hope that the *basic data within each frame* is as reliable as it can be. Stated simply, the audience cannot be expected to discount unreliable filmed data.

To move closer to reliable filmed data we have tried to dampen the film craft's tendency to push people around. We felt these efforts were successful in the families we had already filmed and were eager to test them in Bolivia.¹

Most of the foregoing discussion has emphasized the pragmatic: we work in a particular way because we feel the resulting films are the better for it. This is one instance, however, in which the pragmatic and the ethical seem to coincide. After all, if people allow you to film their most private moments and take them away for other people to see, it is only fair that they be given every opportunity to present themselves honestly and without interference.

Finally, such films represent peoples one to the other. They are screened and enter archives to become part of the body of information on who and what a particular people "are." Poor films are a kind of slander. At best they are sad distortions of the marvels of human society; at worst they portray one group as "less human" than another, a dehumanization which can make the persecution or extermination of these groups easier to countenance. Slapdash, frivolous, and blatantly biased films are the most notorious malefactors and they

are still all too common. Most of these are made by nonscientific types such as television or travel "documentary" producers. These films tend to follow dramatic cinema conventions and story lines constructed from a Western tradition. Thus not only are such films' structures and human representations different from what normally takes place, the story that emerges is likely to have little to do with the subjects' lifestyle, world-view, or common expressive modes.

But even trained anthropologists have been guilty of dehumanizing subjects in their otherwise laudable quest for useful filmic data on other peoples. Part of the reason has been technical and logistical. Film equipment has become light and portable only in the past 20 years, and prior to that the sheer physical magnitude of a film undertaking forced anthropologists to "take what they could get." This often meant filming a society's most presentational phenomena such as ritual and ceremony. Attempts to capture more intimate moments were thwarted by individuals who could not be counted on to reveal such moments in the immediate area of the heavy camera and tripod.² Too, sound recording in the field was not really possible until the advent of the portable tape recorder in the early '60s. Silent footage of exotic people could not help but distance them from an audience.

Even after these technical and logistical problems were largely surmounted, most anthropologists continued to make films that dwelt on readily available and often public behaviors while virtually ignoring the intimate fabric of society. They also continued either not to use sound, or they recorded sound and then failed to translate and subtitle the subjects' words.³ Anthropologists are likely to cite the troublesomeness and expense of film as reason for setting "priorities" of subject matter and technical niceties. Filming *is* expensive and it is likely to be troublesome when attempted by non-professionals. But I think there are other more serious factors that result in phenomenalist and simplistic films.

Film is still an adjunct to most anthropologists' work, since data is generally acquired, handled, and transmitted via print. Print is not only the accepted medium of professional interchange, it is the *only* viable route to career enhancement and advancement. Thus the anthropologist who makes a film

usually does so to record specific items rather than to attempt a broad pan-societal description. He is also likely to select items which he, as a print professional, feels have significant filmic potential. But too often his knowledge of what film can do is naive. He selects the same sort of event which has been the stuff of adventure and travel films since 1910. This can be all well and good—rituals, dances, ceremonies *are* usually integral parts of a society's functionings.

It is not so much what he films as what he does *not* film that contributes to dehumanizing other peoples. Are we to believe that exotic peoples have no lives outside the medicine lodge or village dance-ground? How does a New Guinea tribesman react when his daughter is injured? How do an Eskimo couple pass the time on a tedious sledge-trip? Film can capture the mortar of human life as well as the brick. That most anthropologists do not attempt to film such interactions seems astoundingly remiss.⁴

Even the presentational or simple acts of an exotic people are suffused with the stuff of life. How many times have we seen films of rituals, dances, house-buildings or harvests in which the total effect makes one feel that the participants are automatons who *live for* these activities alone? They seem bent on accomplishing the job at hand with a singular intensity. How many of us stop to wonder if this peculiar tone is a truly authentic one?

Far too many of these people have been asked or told to do what is being filmed. They have been impressed that the white intruder wants them to do *that* specifically, no other thing. They bend to their task of performing a ceremony or fashioning a canoe. Helpers or onlookers, too, are similarly instructed and they either assist with muted unease or avoid the main characters completely. The participants are often admonished to simplify things by not talking at all.⁵

Regardless of an audience's open-mindedness they cannot be expected to appreciate what they cannot experience. Moreover, the impression that exotic people go about their daily lives in silence or, at best, uneasy taciturnity is a powerful message in itself. *We* talk and laugh when we dance, *we* make jokes and give advice when we roof a house. *They* do not. What sort of people must they be?

Finally and most importantly, "ethnographic films" of unfamiliar cultures tend to display a lot of "apparent reality." In the absence of clues to the contrary, audiences may assume what they see is the norm.

In actuality the potato harvest among the Aymara in Bolivia can be a time for competition among groups of harvesters, joking and challenging, and even sprint-races to see who can strip a furrow fastest. Canoe-building among the Warao of Venezuela is a complex blend of craftsmanship and mysticism that often involves episodes which stretch the ordinary confines of reality. These rich human elements are at least as much "to the point" as recording *how* a potato leaves the ground or *which* tree the craftsman selects for his canoe.

The Bolivian job was attractive because we would be able to try out our methods in a totally new culture-context. We were entering the region for the avowed purpose of making films and not as a minor part of a traditional anthropological expedition. We would not be stumbling over other investigators who would be employing different techniques from ours, and we did not have a scientific "shopping list" to fill. There were five broad categories for an anticipated five final films, but we had established with the producer that we would work in our usual way—observing and filming. The results of this filming would then be parceled out into the five topics. This mutual understanding was a crucial one.⁶

While we are by no means invisible or passive, we do work hard to permit the people we film to have as much autonomy as possible. Thus, if we could feel little or no pressure to "get" specific material, we could pass this calm acceptance on to our subjects. If we were fortunate enough to encounter a house-building we could film not only the technical aspects of construction but would also be able to include and appreciate the interplay of the workers. We would not have to step over the invisible line that often turns commonplace activities into self-conscious exercises for the benefit of the camera.

In addition, the producer was committed to translating and subtitling all spoken dialogue. Even today "ethnographic films" are made without translations of what the subjects are saying. Our

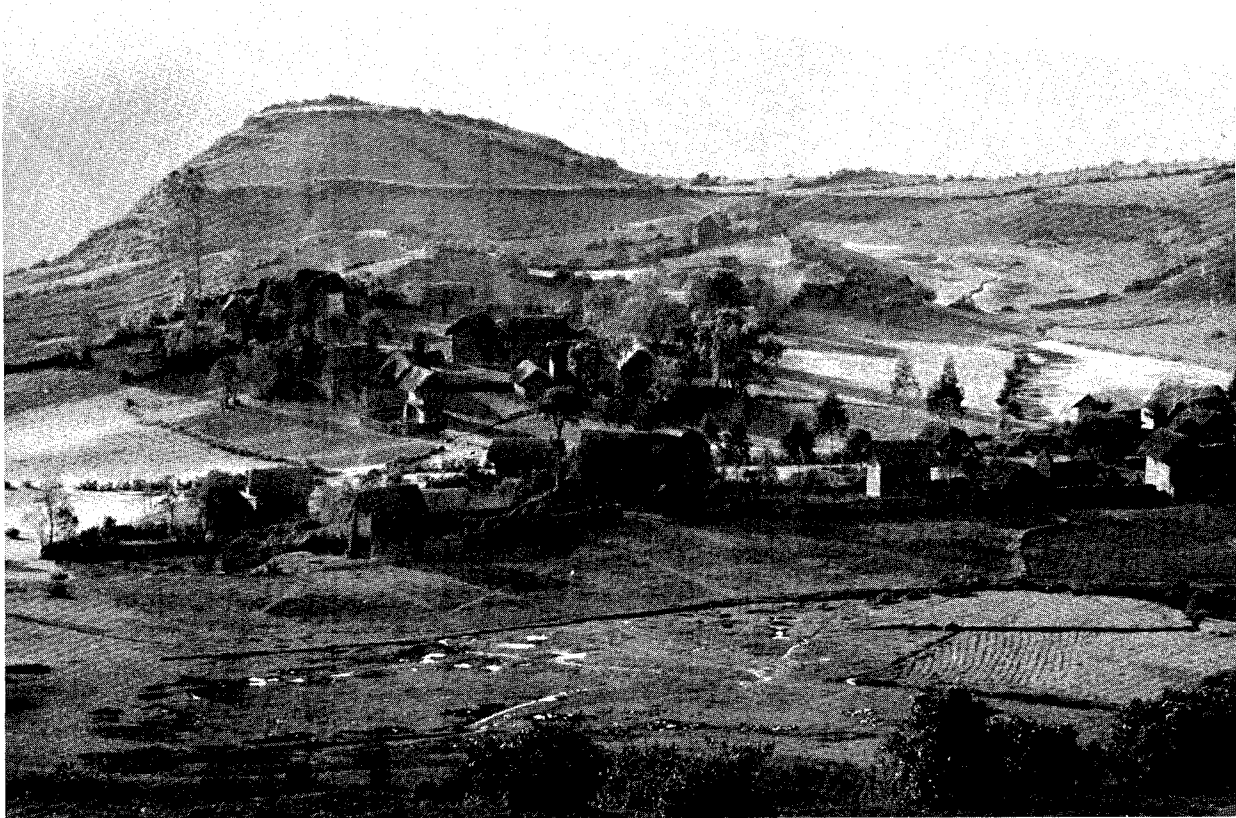
limited readings on the Aymara had left the impression that these Indians were stoic and unimaginative, tight-lipped and even sullen. Would the subtitling be of any use? The important thing was that, if they did speak, they would be permitted to communicate themselves to audiences. It has always seemed strange (and not a little patronizing) to me that peoples could become "known" on film without any access to their spoken expressiveness.⁷

* * * * *

As the truck jounced down the gravel track toward Vitocota and Ayata there was only one serious problem to be faced. Working by ourselves, Neil and I had been able to test and refine our theories of noninterference, but on this project we were to be allied with an anthropologist and a translator. We needed their expertise—they were to be our "eyes" in a strange society. But would they find our methods acceptable? There had been virtually no consultation prior to our leaving the United States, and we had three months to accomplish the five films but perhaps only two weeks to form a tight working unit. There was even less time to get ourselves together for our first days of filming. If we went into our subject community in disarray, this could set an impression which would be difficult to change. To look up and see a cameraman and anthropologist in a heated argument would be pretty unsettling. Anthropologist-filmmaker conflicts are notorious in our business. People being filmed have a right to withhold their trust if they feel those filming them are unprepared to give full attention to the work at hand.

The truck chugged through Vitocota, a community of some 40 households. The Aymara live in two-story thatched adobe houses. The extended family adds houses around a central yard. Cooking and sleeping are done in the lower room, the upper one is used to store foodstuffs. The rest of life takes place in the yard or in the fields. Although our engine had been audible since we entered the last high pass a half hour ago, only a few children stared as we passed.

Two more kilometers and a dozen switchbacks and we were rocking through the choppy cobbles of Ayata. Unlike Vitocota's scattered dwellings, Ayata was laid out more formally. High walls flanked each



Vitocota from the southeast. Vitocota ("Tail-Shaped Lake") is picturesque by our standards. You have to think hard to imagine what life must be like—hard dirt floors, adobe walls, thatched roofs, dark and smoky interiors. Temperatures at night are always cold, often below freezing, and humidity always high. Respiratory problems are endemic.

street and were unbroken save for small doors which opened onto courtyards beyond. The "homes" were two-story galleries that bounded these courts on one or two sides.

The valley society was simple only on the surface. Ayata was a proper "town" surrounded by Indian villages. If you were an Indian agriculturalist you did not live in Ayata. If you were a Mestizo⁸ entrepreneur or landowner you did not live in the countryside, you lived in Ayata. This was the simplistic distinction. In reality the Indian villages were of three types.⁹ Within Ayata there were several social classes and no two people would rank their neighbors identically.¹⁰

Ayata had seen better days. The town was sizable but had an air of decay. Its generator was broken and, when operating, was used only on weekends.

Ours was the town's only vehicle. The few persons visible tended to be middle-aged. Stucco surfaces showed gaping holes, thatched roofs were tattered and, in some cases, collapsing. We were to learn that many of the homes were empty and that the population had dwindled sharply.

There was one small pension on the plaza run by an enterprising ex-Cavalry officer who became our host. He had swept out a few storerooms in a second house and rigged platform beds in them. His wife would do our cooking. If there is sufficient time to accomplish thorough filming plus cook and wash I prefer to live where we film. But this job was on a tight schedule and also turned out to be so physically and emotionally demanding that if we had been faced with doing all our cooking and other maintenance, the work certainly would have suffered.



Ayata's streets tip down the valley wall, level at the central plaza, then plunge again toward the valley depths.

Our group consisted of Neil and myself, the driver, the anthropologist, and the anthropologist's right-hand man and translator of almost a decade. We had barely gotten settled when serious problems arose. The anthropologist was ill. His long-time companion, the translator, was increasingly concerned and so were we. Ayata was shut off from the world without a doctor or a telegraph. Three days after our arrival, the anthropologist came to tell me he was returning to La Paz. On the following morning he and Renato, the driver, chugged back up the valley road.

His departure posed two distinct and important difficulties, the obvious one being our losing his advisership on the Aymara culture. Although he had not studied in this region previously, he had

been in Bolivia for some 20 years and his expertise was considerable. The advisership fell to his translator, Manuel, who held a Master's Degree in Anthropology. Manuel's mother was Aymara, his father an Italian emigrant to Bolivia, and he had been raised on the Island of the Sun in Lake Titicaca.

As it turned out Manuel was an able translator. He was fluent in Aymara, Quechua,¹¹ and Spanish. He had an excellent "feel" for the people and much of our success in gaining entrée to Vitocota was due to him.

But the second problem caused by the anthropologist's departure was to prove the most serious. He left a gap in what had been a workable if not perfect organization chart, making me the leader of the entire project as well as director of the film. Not incidentally all the salary, hiring, and firing were in my hands. My training and skill as an observer of the human experience were considerable but these qualities were amorphous in Manuel's mind. I was a total stranger to Bolivia and not an anthropologist. I was also younger than him by some seven or eight years.

All these matters might not have become important if there hadn't been a basic difference between mine and Manuel's notion of how to make anthropological film. He felt the films could be made by shooting what he had arranged or provoked. There was nothing curious in his attitude. He had worked as guide and translator for several foreign groups including some filmmakers, and each of these visitors had asked him to "set up" interesting or colorful scenes of Bolivian Indian culture. Manuel enjoyed this role and was undoubtedly good at it. The people who were filmed were paid for their trouble and everyone wound up satisfied.

When I outlined our methods, Manuel was taken aback. Passive observational filming requires an initial act of faith. One must "believe" that, by doing nothing, something useful will be accomplished. Manuel, like most males, was accustomed to acting on a situation in order to accomplish a desired end. We could explain our rationale until we were blue in the face but only actual experience could convince him we were right. There was another more mundane problem, too. He had previously convinced the anthropologist not to hire a

second translator to work on transcribing sound tapes to the typed page. Manuel needed the additional money and his ego dictated that he handle all the translating. My plans to spend all day every day in the Indian village would make it necessary for him to work nights on the translations. We would be generating almost 20 hours of tapes and each word would have to be written down.

Our plan not only seemed ridiculously inefficient, it would cause him inordinate amounts of work. To his credit he listened to my ideas with attentiveness and perhaps a grain or two of Latin reserve and cynicism. He did seem genuinely interested that the Aymara be portrayed fairly. He was aware of the pejoratives that permeated much of the literature on them and eager to see a more realistic view put forth. Because of this and perhaps because I've given that same speech¹² so many times, he agreed to go along. I offered to hire another translator from La Paz but he said "no." I think he felt we would come to our senses.

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With the truck and Renato gone to La Paz we were afoot. Manuel thought Vitocota would be a likely spot to film and, since it was only two kilometers up the valley, we took a hike up there. I suppose I thought it would be properly humble to perform the climb and arrive sans vehicle. Manuel was accustomed to 12,000 feet and, although he would have preferred riding, saw it as a minor undertaking. Neil lives on a hilltop in California and he was game. We had our morning bread and sweet coffee, bade the Señora goodbye and set out.

Manuel chewed coca almost all the time as do most adult Andean Indians. The leaves of the plant are tucked between cheek and jaw and sucked on, often with a lump of mineral lime to enhance the effect. Coca is a stimulant that is said to provide both energy and protection against the chill. Neil had some, too. I tried a few leaves but found them bitter.

Manuel and Neil strode up the hill easily as I fell further and further behind. I stopped twice to sag to the ground and gulp air. (On my next trip I chewed coca and walked up the valley with ease.)¹³

On that first morning Manuel and his two gringo charges (one of them staggering slightly) made the rounds of several homes. In each of them we were met with warmth. Blankets were produced and spread in the yard for us to sit on. Coffee, fried eggs, boiled potatoes, boiled corn, and soups were pressed eagerly on us. I even had a glass of cane-juice beer that a proud brewer was readying for the upcoming fiesta.

My mind was trying to enjoy all this hospitality while furiously recranking through what I'd read about the Aymara. I tried to look beyond the smiles for some of the sullenness and stoicism that the experts had said would be there. I was forced on that day and in the subsequent twelve weeks to conclude that some of the writers had been incorrect or biased. It *is* possible that we stumbled into a Bolivian Brigadoon,¹⁴ but not likely.

That I began to operate on the basis of these personal assumptions is more serious than it may sound. The purpose of our trip was to make films for anthropology teaching. Many of the instructors using the films would be Latin Americanists of some experience, and almost all of them would know more about Andean Indians than did Neil or I. Although we had done some reading we could not have "boned up" on this particular valley—as far as anyone knew this region had not been studied previously. While we were impressed with Manuel's facility for dealing with the Aymara and his academic qualifications, we knew that our American anthropologist's leaving would not sit well with some professional academics. For better (or worse) there exists a "proper" set of criteria for the production of reliable data, and we could not easily meet these standards. Not only had we lost our American-trained academic, but our Bolivian-born adviser would be pretty much tied down as translator. By day he would be at our side as we filmed, by night he would be transcribing. He would not be free to move independently from us, verifying the reliability of what we had filmed and collecting ancillary data.

Another not-incidental wrinkle to all of this was the low-key tussle developing between Manuel and myself for control of things. Although I had become his "boss," I was entirely dependent on him to funnel the Aymara language through his mind and into my own. By accentuating his control

of this vital function, Manuel could regain status he felt he had lost. But the disadvantage of such a situation would be his becoming the legendary "single informant" which all anthropologists are warned against.

This tension began on our first visits to Viticota. Although it was slow and sometimes exasperating for him, I had asked Manuel to include Neil and me in his conversations with the villagers. My reasons were twofold. Primarily I wanted to have every item of information available to me. Too, I felt Neil and I could respond more as authentic individuals if we were kept in the picture. Although we would make some mistakes I thought that preferable to our being seen as two smiling mutes at Manuel's side.

Manuel was accustomed to assimilating a long response and then turning to his companion with a brief summation. It became a constant feature of our relationship for me to remind him to translate more and summarize less. Manuel was facing considerable temptation to "present" us with little parcels of information or sequences to film that would mollify our desire to stay on station and observe long hours each day. Those long hours *are* sometimes excruciatingly boring and I was not certain that we could always resist such "gifts" from Manuel. It is a terrible temptation to be offered a juicy tidbit that will not only result in an early beer-break but which might excite the folks back home. After all, there we were in that isolated valley that nobody knew much about. We *could* get away with quite a bit.

In addition, Manuel could not be expected to know what sequences, when filmed, would be intelligible to a viewer and which would not. Certain material "reads" well on film and can be readily apprehended, other material is decidedly obscure on film. While we were learning about Aymara culture and this particular valley, he would have to be learning something about filmic possibilities and priorities.

Fortunately our method of filming was our best protection. If we could manage to stay reflective, observational, and in a supportive relationship with our subjects then we would achieve data of considerable reliability. It might not be "typical"¹⁵ but it would fairly represent what was occurring at that particular time and place. There are a number

of ways in which we endeavored to make what we did as reliable as possible and to clarify what could mislead an audience:

1. Material can be filmed "on the spot" which emphasizes the meaning of the scene. During the will-making scene in "The Spirit Possession of Alejandro Mamani" his son-in-law asks permission of one of the witnesses to go off and play soccer. This was a quick scene and also violated a Western notion of courtesy. How could he walk out on his beloved father-in-law's last will and testament? Neil and I swung around and filmed the son-in-law exiting from the courtyard after getting his soccer shoes from the house. This extra shot of him walking away from Alejandro helps nail the scene down in all its non-Western reality.

2. Participants in a scene can be permitted to speak spontaneously to the camera. During the doctor's scene in "The Children Know" the school-master appears to reluctantly agree with much of the doctor's denunciation of lazy drunken peasants. He did so because he knew that to disagree might cause his children to lose any benefit the doctor might give them. Too, the scene took place in front of a biased and prominent Ayata Mestizo. It would have been unwise for the teacher to argue with the doctor in that setting. We knew the teacher would be mortified and angry and we also felt he should have a chance to "clear" himself. We made sure we trailed along after him and, in the plaza, he turned and unburdened himself in the outpouring that is seen in the film.

3. Another technique is to withdraw from the immediate filming situation, discuss what has been filmed, and go back in with plans to look for specific clarifying material. It was not unusual for Manuel to tell me what had been going on in a particular scene only to learn that he was relating information we had not filmed! This problem lessened as we educated him to the difference between information and information-on-film. In several cases we began filming after an action had begun to unfold. Often this meant that the participants were so well-versed that they had dropped nouns and were using only pronouns. (E.g., "He will take it to him tomorrow." Who will take what to whom?) When we learned that this had occurred, we went back into the situation and waited for a

new and hopefully uninformed participant to arrive. We would film the entire arrival and, more likely than not, the new person would be completely briefed, thus giving the audience an idea of what was going on.

During the film "Magic and Catholicism" the discovery of the broken saint's statue has everyone excited and angry. We missed the very first discovery of the breakage and began filming immediately afterward. The scene was rich but we knew we would have to "fill in" before too long or the audience's exasperation would rise and their interest drop. One of us saw the Central (village leader) approaching. *He* would have to be told the entire story! We filmed his arrival and reaction to the news. Placing the news and his shocked reaction side by side was vital to the scene's intelligibility.

4. A fourth way of enhancing what we shot was to confer each evening about what we had done and what we would do in the future. Although he could not keep directly abreast of each day's output of tapes, Manuel did strive to keep the typewritten translations flowing. The pages would come to me with a column of Aymara on the left, a column of Spanish in the center and a blank column for English to be filled in later. I would scan the Spanish, translate it for Neil, and discuss it with Manuel. We would check and recheck our perceptions against what people were actually saying. It was like assembling a complex puzzle with new pieces being found every minute, each fragment of information "fitting" (or refusing to fit) in a particular way. The case of Alejandro Mamani is typical.

We were impressed with Alejandro from the moment we met him, and as his spirit possession worsened, his increasing threats to kill himself became a subject of great concern. Were these threats empty or serious? Since completing the films we have had Andean scholars tell us that suicide is rare and such threats common and not particularly serious. We asked Manuel and, perhaps because he had immediate contact with Alejandro, he tended to take him seriously. But we felt that Manuel could recognize a good yarn when he saw one, so Neil and I continually reassessed our own feelings about Alejandro. We wondered, for instance, if he was merely seeking attention, why no one smiled when he spoke or otherwise mocked



Alejandro Mamani and his grandson, Lino.

him? We searched the faces of his kin for a clue. They seemed genuinely concerned. When speaking among themselves as they planted a field they did not once display disrespect to Alejandro's anxiety.

We were cautious but remained open to the possibility that what seemed real *was* real. One afternoon, as we drove through Vitocota on our way to La Paz, the schoolteacher hailed the truck and said, "You had better say 'goodbye' to Alejandro. He may be dead when you get back." We learned that Alejandro had become impatient and had asked for the teacher to write his will the next day. The teacher's matter-of-fact manner was a more powerful warning than if he had been agitated, and we dashed to Alejandro's home to find him almost frantic with anxiety. These instances and many others convinced us of Alejandro's sincerity.

I am certain that our *early* interest and sympathy for this man enabled him to trust us in a special way—had we shown ingrained skepticism borne of our previous knowledge of suicide and suicide threats among the Aymara he would have felt differently about us. Had this been the case I am pretty sure the film he literally "gave" us could not have been made. This is not to say knowledge is a bad thing, in fact we could have used a lot more of it. But it is a bad thing when knowledge predicts

and provokes in such a way that it hampers the new knowledge that should come with each experience.

This is the crux of the "reliability" question we faced and continue to face about the Bolivian films. We were not knowledgeable about the details of Aymara culture, yet we are good observers and we exercised constant caution in assessing what we saw and filmed—we would check and recheck everything until we felt comfortable. Most of our "informal" conversations in Bolivia and later in England (where we edited the films) were, in reality, exercises in verification. I came to feel a little like a polygraph. Someone would say something and I'd hear a "ping" in the back of my mind. I'd scurry to the film and translations and look for the referent. The shape of everything we filmed, the tone of each edited scene, the content of each film are the product of thousands of such decisions.¹⁷

* * * * *

We arose each day to the happy crowing of one of our landlord's roosters. After a brief chase around the courtyard it would elude me and, followed by a barrage of rotten oranges, sail into an adjoining yard. I would stumble around, find some good oranges, and squeeze a glass of juice for Neil. The clunk of the glass on the chair beside his platform always woke him and we sipped juice and talked about the day's plans. Manuel and Renato would come down from their room and we would all make morning ablutions at the iron pan under the courtyard's single tap.

We'd go down to the pension on the plaza for breakfast, sip thick sweet coffee and eat small round loaves of fresh bread smeared with tinned jam.

The landlord and his family were always busy, being the most active entrepreneurs in Ayata. The pension was a minor enterprise due to the infrequency of travelers, so the landlord ran a small store, had several agricultural fields, a eucalyptus plantation,¹⁸ and also conducted trading forays. From time to time he would saddle up the horses and go down the valley into the warm Eastern Yungas to buy coffee. Sometimes he would go up the valley and cross into Peru to buy dried mutton. Our landlord's energy, however, contrasted sharply with most of his neighbors who seemed content to live frugally on the proceeds of their lands or to run very basic dry goods shops.

We usually left it up to the Señora to decide on the dinner menu. For one thing we didn't want to pressure her. She had what she had, and if she saw a chance to buy something cheaply, we would eat that. We did grow fond of her roast pork and left a standing order for that dish whenever possible. It was cooked in a large adobe oven in a room of its own behind the gallery we lived in. A pig was butchered and the split carcass slathered with a mixture of "aji" (chile pepper) and cumin seed, so that the roasted flesh was covered by a crisp hot crust of indescribable flavor.

Sometimes we breakfasted in the courtyard outside our sleeping quarters. Renato stands, Manuel breaks bread, Neil sips coffee.



Our filming equipment would be cleaned and ready for the day's shooting and the four of us would grab our appointed articles and climb into the truck. Neil carried an Eclair camera and a single battery belt, I had a Nagra 4.2 tape recorder and a Sennheiser shotgun microphone. Manuel carried a spare battery belt, and Renato brought a case containing two loaded film magazines. This was our full equipment package and with it we could roam anywhere our feet could carry us. There was extra film in the truck plus a black velvet changing bag. If we ran short during the day Renato would hotfoot it back to the truck and reload the spent magazines.

We would churn and bump up out of Ayata. Just beyond the town the road skirted the valley lip, providing an awesome sight each time we passed. The walls could change from a dusky blue in the shade or dusk to a bright ochre in the sun. The valley head, rimmed with snow-mantled peaks, could sparkle in a cloudless sky or loom forebodingly when the fog hung in the valley's grasp. Regardless of the weather the effect was always overpowering.

The road was crossed several times by the more direct footpath between the two towns. Occasionally we would encounter an Indian¹⁹ on foot who would raise his hand in silent greeting, and we would all respond. To "give one's greetings" is an absolutely essential courtesy.

We'd park the truck behind the school and "suit up." This meant Neil getting situated in his battery belt, attaching the power cable, and taking the first light-reading of the day. One of the marvelous things about shooting at 12,000 feet is the constancy of light. Light that arrives on a slant (i.e., before or after zenith) must cut through more atmosphere than noonday sun, and in most civilized lands this means cutting through more smog and haze. In this valley there was no haze and we were 12,000 feet closer to the thinner upper atmosphere than usual, so if the light meter reading was f11 in the sun it stayed there. Shadows, too, were just as consistent. It was not all sweetness and light, however. Because there was little particulate matter in the air to disperse light, shadows tended to be deep as a mineshaft in contrast to sunlit areas around them, causing problems when



I record sound and Neil films a group of Vitocotans planting. Scenes from this day appear in "Viracocha" and "The Spirit Possession of Alejandro Mamani."

photographing the Aymara in the wide-brimmed hats, shaped like inverted soup plates.

Neil cranked out 36,000 feet of film which was virtually flawless, a monumental feat when one considers that the difference in exposure between a long shot and a closeup was often 2 f-stops. That he made such changes virtually undetectable is nothing more than what simple professionalism demands, but in making the footage a seamless whole he eliminated one more element of distraction that might distance the audience from the subject. Crudeness of craftsmanship abounds in ethnographic and documentary film, the culprits often being well-meaning anthropologists "just taking notes." Too, there are the dedicated filmmakers who somehow feel their commitment to content frees them from having to learn or execute their craft. But film is a medium whose physical limitations demand conscientiousness if optimum contact is to be achieved between subjects and audience.

It was rare that our "roaming" in Vitocota was aimless. During the first few weeks we took pains to cover a lot of ground and to see as much as we could, especially varieties of people and interpersonal arrangements. We tried to get a feel for what life was like.

Along the way, however, we were picking up information which we would use later. Certain families, for instance, contained a representative membership of old people, child-bearing couples, and children. These families would provide us likely subjects. We were also making ourselves as

visible as we could, allowing people to become accustomed to the sight of us strolling in the village. We wanted to establish the possibility that we could show up practically anywhere.

It is surprising how swiftly personalities and patterns of behavior become apparent when you are committed to doing nothing but observing. While people are marvelous in their diversity, they are also predictable in ways useful to filmmakers. For instance, certain people express themselves facially more than they do in words, and knowing this we can anticipate the best ways to put their feelings before a viewer. It is also surprising how closely Neil's and my judgments coincided with Manuel's after only a few weeks. If we were in a certain house-yard and observing or filming a particular group we would find ourselves having simultaneous intuitions. We were settling into what we call, for want of a better term, "the dance"—our collective ability to act in concert without engaging in disruptive communications among ourselves.

For example, each shot must start, must have internal changes of emphasis of varying complexity, and must end. It wasn't long before Neil, myself, and Manuel were finding our eyes meeting at the precise moment all of us felt the "need" to start a shot. As the shot progressed and elements came and went, it was common for Neil's left eye, (which was usually closed with his right eye in the viewfinder) to open up and roll toward me just as I turned to direct the lens to include a new person or go closer on a tiny action. Each shot ends with a "slate" (a synchronizing mark and scene number, critically important in the editing room). We take such slates when we feel the essential action has run its course. Time and again I would find myself looking at Manuel just as he gave his affirming nod and then back to Neil whose eye was searching for mine indicating he was ready to take a slate, too.

The foregoing is not a special achievement of our own nor is it mystical. It seems to be the natural outcome of enforced observation, due in part to each person's ability to get in touch with sensibilities that are present in us but rarely used. Enforced observation mandates concentration that many of us are unaccustomed to maintaining. I think it pushes some of our preoccupations aside and permits more subtle stimuli to act on our

senses. Too, the act of engaging in such concentration gives those we observe the security of a set of unified signals from us, assuring them we are holding what they do in high regard and that this regard takes precedence over our personal preoccupations.

I think Manuel felt like a lot of people who are setting out to try enforced filmic observation for the first time. He could not believe that we would see anything like the natural flow of life under the camera's intimidating gaze. He felt there must be a quantitative difference between filmic observation and the single-investigator participant observation that many anthropologists carry out in the field, and his assumptions were understandable, being drawn as they were from having seen stilted and self-conscious films of ethnographic intent. But his conclusion that the fault lay with the people being filmed was in error—the fault lay more often with the filmmakers who created their self-consciousness.

* * * * *

Filmmakers both amateur and professional are conditioned to "get" what they think they want. Man is not the sort of creature that responds naturally when something is being "gotten from" him, particularly if he is observed and filmed at the same time. People being filmed can respond naturally only if everything possible is done to free them from having to do anything *for* the film or the filmmaker.

This is not to say that there is never a time when a researcher might have to provoke or arrange something that might not otherwise occur naturally, but the film viewer should be given a chance to judge the context of such material. It should not be passed off as natural interaction. It is common to turn on the camera *after* the anthropologist asks an elder to instruct a young boy in the ways of the tribe. In such a case the participants and the audience are at a disadvantage, because while the participants' behavior is very close to normal, there is a certain self-consciousness which the anthropologist has introduced by making the request. But the subjects have no way to notify the viewer that this self-consciousness is not a normal feature of their interactions. The viewer has no way of judging either. For all he knows these tribesmen *are* a bit stilted, a trifle arid

in their speech, lacking in tactility toward one another.

But if the camera were turned on to film the anthropologist making the request, what would be the harm? The audience could observe the elder's reaction to the request and gauge how it struck him. They could also draw some conclusions about the relationship between him and the anthropologist. There were several instances in Bolivia in which we endeavored to "construct" some interactions between two adolescent boys. We hid behind the camera and did not film the requests we made of them. When we filmed these scenes we managed to convince ourselves they would be acceptable; however, when we began editing and compared these scenes with the vast bulk of observed natural interactions, we had to eliminate them. They simply did not represent those young men in anything like their usual expressiveness. One scene with them is included and it was one which was *not* provoked. It is the conversation after the soccer game in "The Children Know."

There were a few times when Manuel did what he could to sustain a sequence already in progress for our filming purposes. For instance, as Alejandro Mamani began to assemble his children to make his will, he berated them for withdrawing their support from him. For some reason we did not catch Manuel's signal until Alejandro was well into his chastisement. I had Manuel say something like, "What was that, Don Alejandro?" and thereupon Alejandro reiterated his few opening sentences which were crucial to the audience's understanding of what was going on. But we did not film Manuel asking his question. Old apprehensions die hard.

But the desirability of behaving "self-consciously" was beginning to be felt by us. We made certain we included both answers *and* questions on the screen when I interviewed people. We did not discourage people who spoke to us directly and spontaneously, and we included this in the films. We kept journals (of which this article is a product) and tape-recorded ourselves discussing the satisfactions and frustrations of the work. We even filmed our first meeting with Alejandro Mamani—he approached us to ask if we would look inside his body with our equipment to locate the demons which possessed him. The scene is interesting and revealing, the diminutive Bolivian Indian—his brown skin and tan homespun blending with the

earth, my blond and then hefty mass clad in red plaid towering over him, and Manuel in his crumpled fedora ruminatively sucking his coca and translating between us. Among many other things, the scene seems to say "who" is behind the camera and what their relationship is with Alejandro. In actual chronology this scene directly precedes the first scene of Alejandro in the film itself. Why did I decide to leave it out of the film? As I recall, my thinking was composed of: (1) A concern that colleagues and audiences would think I was on an ego binge, (2) Reluctance to expose some of my Spanish-language fumbles to the same groups, (3) Alarm that my face was so chubby, (4) Concern with the overall length of the film—in that order.

The amount of film one shoots versus the length of the final film is called film ratio. If one shoots 10,000 feet of film and the final film is 1,000 feet long the ratio is 10:1. Unscripted films such as anthropological films or so-called *cinéma-vérité* documentaries are generally expected to come in with ratios of from 30:1 to 50:1. In contrast, scripted projects such as feature films are expected to show ratios of no more than 10:1.

The Bolivia Project ratio was a little better than 6:1 and there is a reason for that. It has to do with how we decided when to turn the camera on and off.

We first try to decide if we can film what is going on in front of the camera clearly enough so that no non-filmic devices (e.g., spoken narration) will be required to make it intelligible. We feel film is better if it is film and nothing else. Certain interactions are perfectly intelligible to a bystander but are almost impossible to put on film so an audience can understand them. For instance, ritual artifacts are passed from person to person during fiestas in Vitocota. We were unable to film one such ceremony satisfactorily because the participants were in the midst of a heated argument inside a house. All one could see was a couple of men framed in a doorway and another man entering the doorway with one of the artifacts tucked under his arm. We could not intrude on their argument and, if we had, the house would have been too dark for filming. We could have asked the men to drop their argument and come out into the yard but that request would have fundamentally altered the very interaction we

were there to film. It would have been a splendid operation but the patient certainly would have died.

Beyond these considerations we tried to give priority to material that was essentially human rather than mechanical. By that I mean we would film such things as planting a field, but we would rather the planting be accompanied by interaction that was revelatory of some human concerns. This can be seen in "Viracocha" and "The Spirit Possession of Alejandro Mamani" as well as in "The Potato Planters." The mechanics of planting are important and interesting but they can easily be assimilated by an audience along with the often fascinating conversations and interactions of the workers.

We could not, however, run the camera for every minute of every interaction. Alejandro Mamani's last will and testament consumed about an hour of actual time, of which we filmed two 400-foot rolls of film or about 24 minutes. On the screen the sequence lasts about seven minutes. If the film budget had permitted we would have loved to film every second. As it was we had to exercise constant care that we did not overshoot one area at the expense of another. How were the decisions made as we filmed an interaction?

For one thing, the people engaged in that last will and testament were no different from humans anywhere else—they repeated themselves a great deal. By that time Manuel was alert to such repetitions and would signal us accordingly. Certain administrative tasks such as the teacher's actually drafting the document consumed a good amount of time, and there is only so much film one can shoot of a man writing. These two primary considerations helped us shoot half of what actually took place.

The decision to start a shot could come from me, from Manuel, or from Neil. If it came from Manuel it usually meant, "This is something I think you should film." It would then be up to Neil and me to "cover" what was going on and make it intelligible. Thus my signals to Neil were the result of ongoing decisions I would be making about how to achieve intelligibility. I would watch the participants and look for camera angles as well as behavior "initiations." We would gain the angle first and then try to start the shot when behavior indications told us

that a significant new element was about to be added.

Suppose we were filming Alejandro's sister as she endorsed her brother's kindnesses to her. Her discourse and the others' reactions to it comprised a block of interactions we wanted to have on film. But I might also be seeing one of the witnesses take a half step toward the teacher, raise a hand, or incline his head upward as if to begin speaking. Seeing that, I would signal²⁰ Neil to change angle and prepare for a shot that included the witness. If another participant's action intervened we would cover that.

More than anything else there is a "feel" one gets for the rhythm of individuals and groups, and once we were in tune with that rhythm we could apportion our shooting fairly intelligently. During the last will and testament there is a circular shot of the buildings and surrounding lands. Neil got this shot from atop a ruined wall overlooking the courtyard. As he comes around on the group below, Alejandro is just telling the teacher with some exasperation that he has given *all* his personal property away previously. Putting Neil on the wall could have lost us some vital material if I hadn't felt that we were at a "resting time" in the ceremony. How did I know? For one thing the agricultural lands had just been allocated, and land was certainly the most vital issue under consideration. Also, the period just prior had been filled with energetic argument, and I thought I sensed everyone was about ready for a lull. I probably took a look at Manuel and his relaxed posture indicated he thought so, too. I wasn't *certain* we could get away with putting Neil on the wall but it was worth a try.

Within all these decisions, however, are the thousands that go through Neil's mind as he shoots. Neil is the kind of cameraman who rarely leaves you out in the cold when it comes time to assemble his footage in the editing room. He can put images on the screen that are not only clear; they have a palpable human dimension that is rare. This quality is a function of his superb technical control coupled with sensitivity and intelligence. Perhaps some day he will write about these internal processes. It is his gift to be able to interpret human interaction on film in such a way as to make it intelligible to nonparticipants, an ability more unusual than many realize. Neil's calmness and



Neil dances with a lady from Vitocota during my birthday party in Ayata. The schoolteacher and other women from Vitocota are in the background. Our unusual social position mandated an unusual guest list—mixed Indians and Mestizos, unheard of outside the patron-client socializing of fiesta, godparenthood, etc. It was a trifle tense but it worked.

humor are additional assets in the field. They help us to ride out frustrations and they inspire trust in those we film. Even though he spoke no Spanish (or Aymara) his very presence communicated and received good feelings.

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The first month of work was vastly enjoyable. Manuel was pleased with the results we were getting, a pleasure which showed in his face when we filmed and in his voice when he described the dialogue we had recorded. The Fiesta of Santiago in Vitocota fell near the end of this first month. It is a ten-day religious/secular grand party that draws former villagers from all parts of the country, doubling the community's population. We were immersed in this maelstrom of music, dancing, prodigious drinking, and intense intrapersonal ritual and socializing for the duration, and the film "Magic and Catholicism" is drawn largely from these ten days.

During the Fiesta we paid periodic visits to the church where the statue of Santiago rested on a litter in the middle of the floor. A group of women kept vigil before the statue and, from time to time, people would come to pay homage to Santiago. We

were in the church when a man stumbled through the circle of women and candles, wrapped his arms around the statue, kissed it, and began to speak to it. Manuel jerked as if he'd been shot. His thumb went up and his eyebrows, too. We turned on the equipment and filmed a rare event—one man's personal version of Santiago's meaning to that community. Manuel was rigid with excitement and his thumb couldn't stop pumping upward. (We could get away with more personal agitation in the fiesta atmosphere without calling attention to ourselves.)

This was a singular opportunity because people don't usually speak about mutually known subjects in such detail. Such things as beliefs and histories usually have to be extracted by requesting some sort of artificial discourse. When one occurs naturally, as did this man's, it is not to be missed. Unfortunately it had to be left out of the film due to its length.

Often we would enter a house-yard, give our greetings, film for a period of time, and then put down the equipment to socialize. We tried to make it clear that "equipment ready" meant we were taking care of business but that "equipment down"

meant we could relax. Aymara hospitality is generous and, had we had the stamina, we would have been fed everywhere we went. As it was we managed to beg off most of the time, but we did make it a point to eat a token snack periodically at each home. Manuel also carried a bag of coca and, as we relaxed, he would share handfuls of this with the men and women. Coca-sharing is a general custom and is usually mutual between the participants, but it seemed a little taxing to expect the Vitocotans to share out coca to such frequent visitors from their meager supplies.

Manuel was comfortable in these moments and it was obvious his personality was appreciated by the villagers. Although his dress and position marked him as a Mestizo, his command of the Indian language and I imagine a host of other clues marked him as sympathetic to the Indians. During these conversations we would enjoy experiencing each other. It was rare enough for whites or Mestizos to socialize with Indians in this geographically isolated valley, and it was even more unusual that outsiders display interest in the common lives of the Indians. The evidence of our interest was not in our words but in our day-by-day presence and attention. As this sunk in we were accorded deepening trust.

Conversations with the Aymara also provided us with myriad types of information, helping us "flesh out" our perception of individuals and situations, or informing us of upcoming events of interest to us. For instance, if a family were planning to plant potatoes on a certain day they might mention this to us in passing, and we could plan to accompany them on that day. If we had questioned them directly, however, we might have affected their plans. The Aymara weigh a host of religious and natural portents before they plant or do any significant agricultural work. They also engage in a system of reciprocal labor. Our evidenced interest might have pushed them to plant on a day they might not have otherwise, or caused them to reshape their work party, possibly by adding friends who would not normally have owed them labor.

As it turned out the Aymara were not likely to make many changes of that sort. As the weeks advanced they displayed interest and courtesy to us

personally but seemed relatively unimpressed by the fact that a film was being made.

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As the shadows lengthened after a day of filming we would begin to think about dinner and some rest. (We had battery lights for night and interior shooting but they arrived in Bolivia in bad shape. We fell back on using kerosene pressure lanterns when absolutely necessary but they were very noisy and offered little light.) We'd usually stop at the school for a few words with the teacher before going down. He was a font of information, could keep us abreast of community doings. He did a demographic survey for us, among other things. In return for his help, we not only provided benches for the school, we also bought medicines and vitamins and donated powdered milk, canned goods, and some space heaters. (The child with the serious lesion in "The Children Know" received a special packet of medicines from La Paz and instructions for their administration by the teacher, but we left before seeing the effects of this treatment.)

The trip back to Ayata each day kept us in sight of the peak Illampu (Sorata) which loomed 21,000 feet over the valley. The sunset was a supercharged jumble of rose and purple. Most days we were chattering animatedly about what we had seen and filmed but this spectacular sight held our eyes. The downhill run took half as long as the morning trip and soon we'd be lurching up the street to our landlord's second house.

An Indian boy of ten lived with the landlord's family as a "godchild." Although he was obviously attached to both adults his status was more like that of servant than son. He was expected to work, did not attend school, and was bereft of playmates. As the picture demonstrates he was a very special personality and our stay in the valley (and our lives) were enriched by San Benito. If he could be free from his chores he would meet the truck and chat with us as we unloaded. He had a breathless charm and lively interest that made it a joy to see him.

For a half hour or so we four would separate and do what needed to be done. Neil unloaded film and boxed it for shipment. I began transferring that day's sound tapes to cassettes for Manuel to use.



Our household poses during my birthday party. We are, left to right, our landlord, their servant, San Benito, my streamer-bedecked self, our hostess, Manuel, and Renato.

San Benito.

Renato usually caught up on his reading. Manuel would either read or knit. We all might take a few jolts of Pisco (Andean brandy) to cap the day.

Night dropped on the valley like a closing shade and we usually had candles burning by six. Neil and I set our room ablaze with seven or eight of them while Manuel and Renato lit their quarters like daylight with the pressure lanterns. They couldn't understand our willingness to give them the lanterns and leave ourselves to use the primitive candles—they had just gotten free of using those guttering tapers, while we had been free of them long enough to want them back again—for awhile at least.

San Benito would rap at our door and stride in with a mixture of shyness and eager expectancy. The Señora had sent him to tell us dinner was ready. Would we come to the pension? We grabbed flashlights and clumped down the cobbles of the dark and lifeless street. One small shop might still be open with a radio muttering and scratching inside. Someone could be playing a flute. We would

open the doors to the pension proper, walk past its two small tables, and back to the warm kitchen. The Señora would be perched on a small stool that gave her the height she needed to command the four pots on the adobe stove. The serving girl fed the fire with brushwood, and San Benito perched in the corner, eager for the meal and the conversation.

Our landlord was a bluff and hearty type who was at once likeable and discomfiting. As a landlord he was excellent although not above indulging in a bit of creative accounting when writing up our bill. In his dealings with his Indian employees and laborers he was a mixture of conscientious employer and overbearing skinflint. To put it mildly he violated our Western sense of fair play, even though we realized we were guests in a country that countenances such dealings. The Señora, too, although sweet and helpful in our behalf, could be observed doing business of questionable ethics with her staff and Indian customers. But this family filled our primary needs perfectly, were easy enough to get along with, and there was never any

doubt in our minds that we were wedded to them for the duration. We tried to keep our social and political activism confined to those overtures which would assist people without prejudicing their lives after we left. It was possible to do that in giving small gifts to the school and by performing acts of kindness when they seem appropriate. But to have chided our landlord for the low wages he paid would have been a useless exercise all around. We were there to make films and if any commentary resulted from our work it would have to be part of the films themselves.

Dinner was a convivial affair conducted in Spanish for the most part. Neil came to understand a great deal although he rarely ventured to speak it. Renato had some English and so the atmosphere was of limited internationalism, particularly when the servants came forth with some Quechua or Aymara. By silent agreement we did not discuss our work in Vitocota and were rarely questioned about it. The mestizos of Ayata never quite understood—or forgave—our interest in “los Indios,” but Latin courtesy prevented getting into possibly unpleasant topics over the evening meal.

Bottles of Bolivian pilsner beer lubricated these suppers which could last two hours. Soup was always first, a rich broth of chicken stock laced with *aji* (hot pepper) and salt. Dried potatoes and quinoa grains made it more substantial. The main course was usually chicken (tough), or dried mutton that had been reconstituted with water and vigorous rock-pounding to increase its pliability. If we were fortunate we had pork, or perhaps fried guinea pig, which is delicate, not unlike rabbit and quite tasty. (Every Indian and Mestizo home keeps a small flock of these animals. They feed on leaves and provide a ready protein source.)

Rice was the usual side dish often topped with a fried egg. A pile of steaming boiled corn sat in the center of the table and we hulled and ate that by hand. Sweet coffee ended the meal.

Discussion ran the gamut from Neil's and my descriptions of our lives in the United States to Renato's hopes for his two young sons. San Benito followed every word and we would delight the Señora by bringing him into the conversation. The landlord's radio provided newscasts and, more often than not, reports of political activity in

Bolivia or nearby Peru, Chile, or Argentina. We solved the problem of our political diversification by scrupulously attacking enemies we could all agree on. Bureaucracy was the fattest target, having no supporters at all.

We could speak feelingly about the Bolivian bureaucracy since our equipment package had been impounded upon arrival by customs. Influential friends had engineered its release but they had neglected to tidy up the proper paperwork. As far as Bolivia was concerned (or would be when we tried to leave), our \$27,000 worth of equipment was contraband. To sort this out, we had engaged a customs agent in La Paz, who also endeavored to bring a box of extra film into the country for us. Each week, when the cargo truck arrived in Ayata, we would look for the film, but although his machinations continued unabated for some ten weeks we never saw the package. We picked it up on our way out of the country.

The customs difficulty fared no better. Before returning to the States, we spent our last five days in La Paz running from ministry to ministry trying to unravel what our “customs agent” had done. As near as we could figure out we were liable for a \$700 duty payment plus confiscation of our equipment. Manuel camped for two full days in the outer office of one minister who finally freed us from our duty payment and, we thought, executed a document that would save our equipment from confiscation.

As it was, when our Braniff flight rolled down the runway, Neil and I could look back and see our equipment piled on a baggage cart near the terminal. It was confiscated just minutes before take-off. Apparently the transgressions committed to solve the incoming impoundment were so blatant that the beleaguered customs agent at the airport that night would not allow our equipment out—for any price. It arrived safely in Los Angeles a week later after a blizzard of cables from me and Braniff's Texas main office convinced Bolivia we were not international dealers in stolen photographic equipment.

Anthropological filmmaking typically involves such problems and, although we plan meticulously to avoid them, we also plan to accept and try to solve them when, inevitably, they occur. In our

more philosophical moments we try and see it as a small tax exacted by host countries for the grander privilege of doing such enjoyable work.

After exploring such topics over dinner in Ayata, we'd troop back up the hill. Manuel would begin translating, listening to the cassettes and typing. Neil would sit on his sleeping platform and clean all his camera equipment. Dirt and dust could not only show up on the finished film, they could clog and stop the intricate mechanism of his camera. If that had happened, which it did not, we could have looked forward to a two-week layoff in La Paz, waiting for replacement parts to come from the United States. I would sit at the small table between our platforms and write out the daily camera reports—shot by shot descriptions of what we had filmed. Sometimes the landlord or San Benito would drop by to chat. If they did, Renato usually heard them and before too long we had a dice game called "General" in full swing.

General is a combination of dice, poker, and tic-tac-toe. Renato belonged to a General club in La Paz and usually trounced us. The game's main purpose was relaxation. A night of General, Pisco, and laughs did wonders. Manuel would usually run into some choice material and come down to show it to us. His eyes always twinkled in proportion to how good he felt it was. Anthropological film is, for me a lot more fun than other documentary forms. You not only have the satisfaction of filming what *looks* good, you later find out in a lot more detail what *sounds* good in that same material. It's a little like having one Christmas at home and another at your grandparents'.

Manuel held up pretty well under his increased work load. From time to time I'd offer to put on another translator but he'd turn this down. Along toward the end of the project he did become less enchanted with spending full days in Vitocota and preferred to spend more time at his typewriter.

Record-keeping is usually tedious although essential. In Bolivia I found it a welcome task—a sort of comfortable period of contact with the certain world of words and numbers.



When possible, I'd try and give him a day while we filmed sequences in which Spanish was the major language.

There was a period of time in Vitocota when he despaired of our coming to our senses and experimented with passive resistance. He would stay on station with us for a period and then move away to lean against a wall or stretch out under a bush. Technically he was still "with" us but he could not translate effectively from a distance—it was his way of telling us he felt the situation we were observing was "not interesting." But he knew from past experience that the only way to create a proper atmosphere was to devote ourselves to patient waiting. "Not interesting" for him had come to mean material that he felt should not take precedence over his translating.

I felt translating could, if necessary, be accomplished after we had left Vitocota and told him we should take full advantage of the few weeks we had left. He was understandably worried about his backlog of work *and* the salary which would stop soon after we finished in Vitocota.²¹ I had seen this coming and had tried to give Manuel what leeway I could, but he and I had miscalculated the

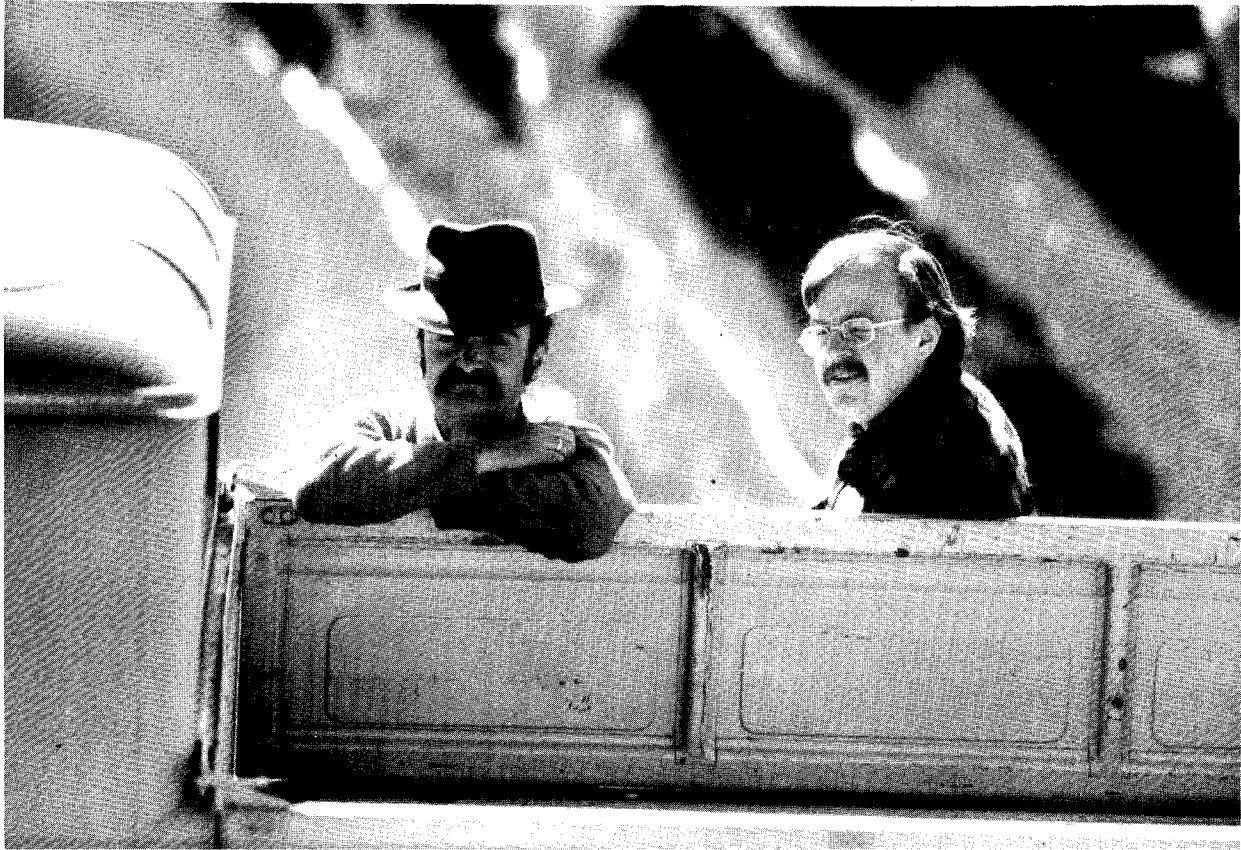
The recorder strap is over my shoulder, the microphone pokes out under my left arm. This is late in our field period and Neil was sensitive to my concern with our growing problems. I don't recall this picture except that I'm seated in front of the Vitocota school. I *do* recall my mood.



synergism of fatigue, competition, pride, and ego which was now threatening the filming itself. I might have forced him to accept help from a second translator but decided against it for two reasons: Manuel's translations were especially complete because he had been present when the tapes were recorded. He knew people, voices, personalities and contexts. Too, hiring a second translator might well provoke more problems than it solved. I tried to communicate with him how seriously I felt about the growing threat. He was finding it difficult to countenance anything like a reprimand. We had never resolved the organizational shakeup which had occurred early in the project, although Manuel had fashioned an accommodation in which he saw himself as our leader and protector as well as colleague and translator. This worked fine until he and I arrived at a point at which I had to play boss to his employee. I talked it over with Neil and decided that we either had to stop filming, take a rest and let Manuel translate, or else spell things out for him. We couldn't continue taking ourselves to the Vitocotans in the shape we were in.

The next afternoon Manuel and I were on the lower valley road to Ayata, looking for a pack-train to come from the river. Neil and Renato were farther up, near the town limit. We could hear the men and animals for some distance and there came a time when we knew we'd have a wait. As Manuel and I sat on some rocks and looked out over the valley, several "Marias" (falcon-like birds) cruised the air currents. I summed things up and explained my concerns. Manuel gazed silently into the distance. The films were suffering, I said, and that was one of the few things I could not have happen. Either he got back into the procedures we had followed successfully or I would shut down the project, go back to La Paz, release him, hire another translator, and return to finish things up. His head jerked around and his eyes met mine for the first time. He looked back across the valley and sighed, "OK, Hube."

I've included this story and some other rather detailed descriptions of the inner workings of our project for a reason. It is easy to assume that *film* work means *film* problems. Such is not at all the case. All work has *human* problems. For us to accomplish the Bolivian films it was necessary to know our film craft well so we could devote the time necessary to the human issues that arose every



Manuel and Hube at the truck. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding this particular picture, it mirrors perfectly my perception of the roles Manuel and I had worked ourselves into during the late stages of the fieldwork.

day. Manuel was, all in all, an excellent translator and intermediary. It was fortunate our little talk had the desired effect because, had it not, I would have been between a rock and a hard place to find another as good as he. The simple fact was, however, that his threat to the human environment of our observations had gotten so great as to outweigh any other consideration.

* * * * *

By 10 o'clock each night the cold forced us into our sleeping bags, where we would read and talk. Our daily life was so rich there was no end of remembering and speculating about what we'd seen and might see. Despite the physical and emotional demands the job presented, each day's contact with the residents of the valley was engrossing and refreshing. As far as I am concerned one of the rarest privileges that could befall us has become our life's work—the chance to know

other peoples in a relationship that is warm and also purposeful.

Just before snuffing the last candle I'd usually haul on my boots for one final excursion. The bathroom was a dirt yard behind our gallery. The landlord's chickens, pigs, and sheep would shuffle nervously when I stepped through the small door. No glimmer of manmade light penetrated here. The black velvet canopy of sky glittered with stars and planets of breathtaking brilliance, cut in two by the bright swath of the Milky Way. This was the quietest time for the valley. In its massive arms slumbered thousands of people. I could feel those many souls, the overpowering sensation of life. We had been permitted to live among them for a short time. We couldn't begin to assimilate more than a fraction of what lay all around us. But there won't be a day for the rest of my life when a face or voice from the valley won't be with me.



NOTES

1. We had not leapt directly from filming in the United States to filming in a Latin American culture. Between 1969 and 1975 I had visited Mexico six times and had filmed there twice, using our methods to document Yucatec Maya society. By 1973 I was fluent in Spanish.
2. The work of Gregory Bateson, Margaret Mead, Robert Flaherty and Edward Curtis displays notable exceptions.
3. The work of Timothy Asch, John Marshall, David MacDougall displays notable exceptions.
4. Part of the problem is, of course, due to the quality of filmic consultation and performance that filmmakers have given their anthropologist colleagues. Filmmakers have often been resolutely insensitive to necessary scholarly considerations. Too often they have actively sought the exploitative film. They have also been impervious to the suggestions that they acquire something more than a superficial knowledge of the people they are to film.
5. Some persons feel uncomfortable seeing silent film in which the participants are obviously talking. Some filmmakers feel that dialogue makes smooth editing difficult. Some anthropologists worry that dialogue which is not "to the point" will distract from a film made to display actions or tasks.
6. These were: (1) A general overview of the society, (2) The mechanisms of enculturation of children, formal and informal, (3) Agriculture, (4) The role of women in that community, (5) A "wildcard" film.
7. We found the Aymara as voluble, wise, humorous, and mentally active as any group we had known or filmed. We have since learned that the body of literature about the Aymara is, for many reasons, unfairly pejorative.
8. Not as much a genetic class as a social one. Mestizos speak Spanish as a hearth language, wear Western dress, and engage in occupations apart from tilling the soil.
9. "Free Communities" held their agricultural lands communally and had done so since the Conquest and possibly before. "Ex-Haciendas" were what remained after quasi-feudal estates had been outlawed by Land Reform. "Haciendas" were estates that remained in operation.
10. "Whites" or "criollos" are Bolivian born individuals of pure Spanish ancestry. "Decentes" or "buena gente" are terms used to describe gentry of high social status.
- "Mestizos" are roughly next in rank. "Cholos" are semi-Hispanized Indians.
11. The major Indian group in Bolivia and other Andean countries.
12. Essentially it is a speech that proposes we take a chance and see what will happen if we film what normally goes on before we step in and start arranging what we think "should" go on.
13. Sucking on the coca leaf is, of course, very much different from ingesting the crystallized derivative of the coca plant, cocaine.
14. A mythical Scots village that appeared and disappeared at 100-year intervals. An anthropologist friend visited Vitocota two years later and reported that it not only existed but that the customs and people dovetailed with the impression presented in the films and my letters to him prior to his journey.
15. Some anthropologists, I feel, tend to be most sensitive to behaviors that reinforce their previous readings, hypotheses, or personal experience at the expense of remaining truly open in a fieldwork situation. Some of what we saw and filmed in this valley is apparently not "typical" of aspects of Bolivian life in other regions. I am not sure if anything is every truly typical. Customs, for instance, may be similar but insofar as they are performed by individuals they are seldom "typical" as complex human expressions.
16. Our sympathy was displayed in friendship and concern, not in siding with him against his children or in mawkish solicitude. He was very much a superior man and such action would have been patronizing as well as unprofessional.
17. If we could not feel comfortable about a scene we simply left it out of the film. It became part of the entire corpus' 36,000 feet deposited in The Smithsonian Institution's National Anthropological Film Center archive. All of this footage has been annotated by me with fulsome notes and explanation. Some film statements that were patent lies were "annotated" by qualifying subtitles, as in "Viracocha."
18. The scarcity of lumber in some regions is so great that trees are owned singly as real property. They are even bequeathed in wills.
19. It has become de rigeur in some Latin American countries to use the term "campesino" in polite conversation. This has

replaced "Indio" which was often, and still is, used as a pejorative or insult by nonIndians. The Aymara of this valley, however, use "Indio" among themselves with a flavor of self-conscious ethnicity. Therefore I use it here.

20. We have a set of hand and eye signals for changing angles and framings. Our "roll" signal is usually just a slight nod or rotating finger. Manuel decided his "roll" signal would be an

upraised thumb held at his waist. He usually accompanied it with upraised eyebrows.

21. Manual had been put on a salary two and one-half times his original. Part of this was to make up for his doing the translations, part of which was to compensate him doing basic field-work such as maps, demographics, etc. He had optimistically predicted he could accomplish all these tasks within the basic 12 weeks.



We owe a profound debt to those generous people of Vitocota who permitted our presence and taught us so much. I am personally grateful for the craftsmanship and friendship of my companions in Bolivia and later, in England. Since the films' completion, I have been enriched, inspired, and personally gratified by a knowledgeable friend, one Dwight B. Heath (and, of course, A.C.).