Chapter 6

Ray L. Birdwhistell, "Lecture at American Museum of Natural History, October 4, 1980"

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This 1980 lecture is the last extended statement by Ray L. Birdwhistell, one of the principal contributors to the Natural History of an Interview. The tone is highly informal and the content wide-ranging, including a number of personal and sometimes dubious anecdotes. The principal theme, however, is the difficulty both of making research films and of looking at them properly. Birdwhistell returns repeatedly to the question of the observer's discipline, or the need to develop new orders of awareness, and comparison is drawn to the stain in microscopy that changes the view entirely despite no change in magnification. Other topics discussed include filming psychiatrists, filming football, the history of ethnographic film, the adoption of new instrumentation, watching movies during the Great Depression, and looking in the mirror. The introduction by Seth Barry Watter puts this lecture in the context of Birdwhistell's career and explains the choices made in editing it for publication.

1 Introduction

Among social scientists, Ray L. Birdwhistell (1918–1994) is probably unique for appearing both at the Macy Conferences and in the funny papers in a single calendar year. Seven months before he lectured on "Kinesic Analysis of Filmed Behavior of Children" in October 1955, his alter ego Professor Fleasong held forth on such topics as "How to Jedge Character" in the cartoon *Li'l Abner* for three consecutive Sundays (Birdwhistell 1956: 141–144; Capp 2003: 83–85). Birdwhistell

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had gained some notoriety beyond academia after the *Introduction to Kinesics* was published in 1952. Few people would have really understood what it was proposing, fewer still the technicalities of kinesic recording. But the world was more than ready for anything that looked like a reliable method of deciphering the body. Kinesics was easily vulgarized, as soon became apparent, and Birdwhistell would long complain of "the popular charlatans of body motion" who made his work seem like a way to pick up women.[1] He himself had designed kinesics in such a rigorous fashion that very few people ever learned its orthography. On the other hand, he felt that a science should be useful – should promote greater understanding – and to that end he used whatever means he could to disseminate the insights of his time-consuming labors. The means he liked best were his own voice and body. The term lecture-performance has now become trendy but it is most apt for Birdwhistell, "who," said a friend, "is a kind of communication medium himself" (Byers 1972: 192). His role in the development of audiovisual sequence analysis has been thoroughly explored in the preceding two chapters. What the following text displays is something of the personality that so captivated audiences, and through this captivation helped to found a new approach.

Entertainment alone would hardly justify inclusion, and in any case Birdwhistell can be experienced in greater fullness in several audiovisual and audio recordings. Rather, this present text of a lecture from 1980 speaks directly to the concerns of the present volume: how to preserve and analyze interaction holistically. It is, in fact, the last known public statement by a foremost representative of the holistic approach. Indeed, after his book *Kinesics and Context* appeared in 1970, Birdwhistell published very little at all; there are only three essays over the course of the following decade, an interview in *The Kinesis Report* with Ray McDermott published in the spring of 1980; then silence until his death in 1994. "The truth is I never liked to write," he told Martha Davis. "I needed and loved audiences."[2]

Several themes emerge in the course of the lecture, which Birdwhistell gave before a screening at the American Museum of Natural History – part of the Mar-

[1] Ray L. Birdwhistell, speaking on "Dr. Birdwhistell's Body Language," Fresh Air with Terry Gross, WHYY, Philadelphia, 29 June 1979. Birdwhistell probably had in mind such books as Julius Fast's *Body Language* (1971), which was usually sold as a mass market paperback with a young woman crossing her bare legs on the cover. Compare Byers (1977: 135): "Ray Birdwhistell once told me that most of the inquiries he got from outside academia were from young men who wanted to learn better tricks for making it with women."

[2] Ray L. Birdwhistell to Martha Davis, undated but after 1988 as Birdwhistell has added "EX-" in his own hand above "The Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania" on his letterhead. Birdwhistell retired from teaching in 1988. Personal collection of Martha Davis.

garet Mead Film Festival held there every year since 1977. One is the advantages as well as the dangers of technological "prostheses" such as the camera. Whatever one thinks of the justifications given elsewhere for the natural-history style of filming used in context analysis, one cannot say Birdwhistell naively accepted the camera as a form of direct access to events. Being aware of its dangers and "gaining control over your instrument" so as to avoid "systematically recording your own precept" is something that requires constant self-questioning. Another theme is the kind of personal history that prepares one for work in mircoanalysis. This subject can be dealt with only through anecdotes but they are nonetheless suggestive for cultural and media history. Some of these anecdotes are familiar from other sources. We know that Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's films were an important early influence, and it is unsurprising to learn that other ethnographic films made impressions on Birdwhistell. But some of these anecdotes are very surprising: that he worked in a small cinema during the Depression, that his father taught him microscopy, that one source for the natural-history style of filming may have been methods for shooting campus football. Some claims – "I had been in vaudeville", for instance – are frankly unbelievable and may have been said in a joking manner to the audience. In the absence of the original audio recording, one cannot be sure.

This brings us to the nature of the transcript itself. It was discovered in the papers of the writer Jane Howard as part of her research for *Margaret Mead: A Life* (1984). More specifically, it forms part of a running typescript commentary of about one thousand pages and is somewhat unusual, in that nearly everything else in the sheaf consists of notes on interviews with Mead's associates. This may be because Howard does not appear to have conducted an interview with Birdwhistell; perhaps the lecture was inserted as its functional equivalent. The document itself shows several peculiarities that an editor must deal with in preparing it for publication. For one, it begins by mixing summary notes with apparently verbatim passages, without clear distinction; but this phenomenon does not seem to occur again. I have dealt with the problem by leaving these beginning lines the way Howard wrote them and simply placing them in italics to mark them off as distinct. The second problem is that it impossible to know how complete the transcription is at any point. Howard often uses ellipses of varying length, from two to five dots – usually, it seems, to indicate a pause or a trailing-off in speech. On one occasion, though, an ellipsis begins a paragraph and this may indicate an omission in the content of the recording, especially as the transition seems rather abrupt. But it is no more abrupt, really, than many of the other transitions in the text as a whole. I have simply removed all ellipses

except those that seem actually to close a sentence, and I render them all as three dots each.

Then there is the difficulty that comes with all attempts to render extemporaneous speech as readable prose. Few people speak in grammatically correct and complete sentences, one sentence after another, and certainly not with the same logical and syntactic consistency that they display in formal writing. Even a practiced presenter like Birdwhistell is prone to trail off, interrupt himself, start over, and sometimes lose the thread entirely. Thus when conference proceedings or transcribed oral histories are prepared, they are usually first submitted to the speakers for correction. Since this is not possible here, an editor is faced with three choices: to let all mistakes stand; to correct them for clarity, but making all corrections known with footnotes and brackets; to correct them for clarity without footnotes and brackets. I have opted for the last procedure so as to avoid making the text an eyesore – in short, to privilege readability. Scholars who desire the *ne plus ultra* in primary sources can consult the original in Howard's papers (Birdwhistell n.d.). The changes, anyway, are not so very many. I have dropped a repeated word here or there, or added an article or preposition where they are clearly intended. I have also freely altered Howard's punctuation, which, being itself an interpretation from an oral source, never had anything sacrosanct about it. Sometimes I have added an entire phrase for clarity and in such cases the addition is placed within square brackets; all bracketed material is to be understood as mine. Often, in the original document, Howard will put words or phrases between forward slashes: this might indicate a lack of clarity in the original recording. I have omitted these slashes as well as any other interjections or queries of Howard's. Abbreviations, shorthand, and symbols have all been regularized.

As for footnotes, these are limited to four purposes: further editorial clarification as seems necessary; brief biographical and background information on people or things mentioned in the text; establishing the factuality of certain claims in relation to other sources; attempts at exegesis of especially cryptic passages and always with reference to other published writings.

2 Ray L. Birdwhistell, "Lecture at American Museum of Natural History, October 4, 1980"

10/4/80, during MM Film Festival, he addresses very crowded room. He looks very well, has apparently recently lost a lot of weight.

Talks of dangers of tape recorder – extent to which it takes over. Problem with computers is that they store things that go into "yes" and "no," bits & pieces, largely about things already stored in words.....must remember that man talks very few moments a day – for hundreds upon hundreds of moments a day when human beings are interrelated, they aren't talking /yet passing/ important, transmissible information

If you confuse the things you fed the computer with the human beings, then you're in trouble. Korzybski many years ago said, "Let's not confuse our maps with the territories."[3] This is multiply true when you turn to one of these *amazing* prostheses, like a tape recorder: a fantastic tool, *almost* as exciting as a plume, a pen, or a lead pencil, a stylus, or a typewriter, or any of the other ways that man extends the product of his observation, the organization of his discipline and his recording, to the point that he's able to use it for storage and for passing to other people who know the code of what gets stored in what.

I even know people who believe in money, and they forget that that's some order of shorthand and regulation, and that to study money is not the way you study economics.

The study of images of people becomes in itself part of the culture we are trying to understand, so that the culture of motion pictures, the culture of tape recording, or incidentally the culture of typewriting – because very few of us have sufficient control not to see the person we're writing to when we try to write an article, and of course it's decent that we do that…I'm not talking about documentaries, documentary people are another kind of people. They're fine, but they're noisy. Any time I look at one of their movies, all I can see is the editor, and the man who does the cutting, and the man who organized the shooting of the picture, and I get into a crowded room – a very crowded room. Any time you fool with the verities of a culture, you get in trouble.

For years when I worked with films of children – particularly sick children – when we were working with child psychiatrists, we always got a guard to stand by the projector because of the number of times we had our film torn up. They could not bear to see the films – because I took immoral pictures, by which I mean ones taken out of the agreement of the conventional style of taking pictures.[4] It's very hard to get a cameraman who'll stay with you if you do that. You've got to

[3] Alfred Korzybski (1879–1950), author of *Science and Sanity* (1933) and founder of the approach known as General Semantics. His work was popularized in the United States by people such as S. I. Hayakawa and Stuart Chase. One of Birdwhistell's first essays, "Background to Kinesics" (1955), appeared in *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, the journal of the International Society for General Semantics.

[4] Not reported in other sources; clearly exaggerated for effect.

have a very strong relationship because in a sense you become offensive to them, because you violate…unless you can make some order of strength, some order of relationship, so that they can take pictures without making noises like a cameraman, without projecting on the world "I am a camera." That's very difficult. It's more than one should ask, I think, very often – which is one of the reasons I have tried very hard never to use a professional cameraman.

Another thing is that I've never taken very many pictures, partly because of the hundreds and hundreds of hours that it takes to look at a minute of well-planned film.[5] Film is not necessarily an economic device; it can be a tremendously expensive device. I should like to talk today about taking films on purpose. Historically, if I can go back…(Can you hear me when I'm over here without a microphone? I really feel much easier, unprosthetized.) I went to undergraduate school at Miami in Ohio and because I had been in vaudeville, I knew some of the Schines.[6] I got the job being assistant manager in a small theatre, only one in town, that stayed open Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. It meant that I saw two films over and over and over – didn't have any ushers, so I was also ushering. It gave me an order of patience because I could enjoy doing the movie with them, taking the various parts. The theatre was small: we leased out the back to lovers. Small town back in the Depression. No one had any money, no one had any place to go: students had to be back in the dormitory at 10 o'clock, so we leased the back, 25¢ per couple. I only got 20¢ an hour. I add this because – to explain the myth of how one becomes an anthropologist. I came to understand film because I spent so many hours with it. I had seen some of the early footage that Margaret Mead was making, by my junior or senior year. Because I was trained for it, I was able to abandon it fairly early. The people who got trained later stayed with it because they weren't trained long enough to see some of the difficulties of dealing with the concepts.

I began very early to get interested in what people were doing when they were taking pictures of one another: what was that about? I was to see my first back-from-the-field film in the early '40s, when Ben and Lois Paul brought their film from Guatemala – before a lot of the people began to be "trained" to go into the field to take film.[7] It had an innocence which does not appear later.

[5]Perhaps Birdwhistell means he did not himself operate a camera often. Hundreds of hours of footage accumulated under his direction at Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute over the course of the 1960s.

[6]Either intended as a joke or a complete fabrication. Birdwhistell did attend Miami University in Ohio. Junius Myer Schine (1890–1971) and Louis William Schine (1893–1956) owned a successful theatre chain during the period in question.

[7]Benjamin Paul (1911–2005) and Lois Paul (1920–1979) were both American anthropologists who specialized in Guatemala. They are not, however, known as ethnographic filmmakers.

One of the great things about Margaret's films is that they were not made for people who made films. They were made to try to explain to people who did not know about culture something about culture. They're not necessarily good research films. They were made with an idea in mind. Margaret was *doing* research when she took them, but many of the films themselves were edited with a very different purpose. They are, in a sense, exhortatory in nature. And it's very hard not to make an exhortatory film, as you will see in the first film here today, which is more a film about research than a research film. The second one that we will see later is a film *made* for the purpose of doing research.

My father taught microscopy.[8] He discovered that he didn't like people, he liked animals – then discovered the animals were attached to people. So he became a bacteriologist, discovered *those* were too big, became a virologist. Was crazy about the microscope – loved the time going into the microscope, when he was grinding telescope lenses (or making violins). He would go into the microscope and not be interrupted; he was so *totally* legitimatized by the microscope. And, incidentally, one of the things we always have to watch out for in any paraphernalia – whether it be a tape recorder or a camera or even a projector – is the extent to which we make it an extension of our own interruptibility.[9] The act of using it becomes confused with the act of utilizing it.

It is very hard in the modern world when a great many students want to walk around with a camera in their hand. See, in my day boys and girls went around with a large book, with their finger somewhere in it, which indicated that they had read it. We are now getting a tremendous number of people who do book

[8]Robert Nevins Birdwhistell (1891–1968) had both MD and VMD degrees. He worked for the Division of Virus-Serum Control, U. S. Department of Agriculture in the 1930s.

[9]Birdwhistell may be trying to say something about the dangers of conventional viewing habits – habits that dictate the moment at which we choose to start and stop recording, or start and stop looking at a film on a projector. This interruption of the stream of behavior would, then, really be a function of our own interruptibility; we let ourselves be interrupted at moments that feel right to us, or when we are bored with what we are seeing. It is customary, for example, when watching a film at home, to wait for the end of a "scene" before pausing to use the bathroom – or simply attend to other things while the film continues to play because the content is deemed unimportant for comprehension. In any case, this problem of seeing in conventional patterns is one that vexed Birdwhistell for many years. Compare Birdwhistell (1970: 150): "First, we have discovered that viewing and listening habits ingrained by a half-century of audience behavior learning tends to control the shapes and sizes perceived by even the most highly motivated research or student spectator. For example, we will tend to register experience in chunks. That is, there seems to be a rhythm of pieces of given shapes and sizes which we, unaware, perceive as the 'something' in 'something has happened'…Performer, recorder, receiver, and spectator accede to a convention. This is difficult to penetrate if one is an investigator, or to vary if one is an artist, and almost impossible to talk about if one is an unconventional spectator."

research by carrying film about and by showing it. If I sound cynical, I'm not really. I'm talking about the difficulty of learning that there is a desperate problem of having to learn how to use film as research. It's as difficult as any other kind of research; all you have is a device that you take records with. The shape and the condition and the culture of the record-taking implants itself between you and your data and becomes a screen.

When I was a very small boy I adored my father, and when he was working with these microscopes – see, this was a period when parents did not have to play with their children, at least fathers didn't. You were supposed to grow up and be an adult; it was not a case where the adult had to come down. But he did look so grown-up using his microscope, and I *wanted* to do it, and I'd say "Daaaddy…" – I talked like that then – "can I look at the microscope, Daddy?" He'd say no. "Mamma! Daddy won't let me look in the microscope!" I could sneak up on it when he wasn't there, but I didn't know how to get the light on.

Finally, after I kept pestering and pestering him, he said, "All right." He called to my mother – whose name was Hattie but he called her Queen – he said, "Queen, the boy has come to the point where he's insisting, so he's going to do it. We'll have no interfering." So I was told that afternoon that, if I looked in it, I'd have to learn how to draw the things I saw. So I looked in…Every afternoon he got home at 4:30, and from 4:30 to 6:30 I sat there and cried because I couldn't get down – I had to be able to copy what was in that microscope. The day came when I drew it and he was pleased with it, and he said, "All right, that's lesson one." And he took a different stain out, put it on the same slide, and showed it to me again. I looked down in there and it was a totally different picture. I am so deeply, deeply, deeply grateful because that was the beginning of my understanding that, if I was ever going to use film, or any other prosthesis – that all you had to do was change the stain, change the small little _____[10] that was between me and that which I had to copy, and it was changed. And I had to know that the mediation was not merely the extension of the prosthesis, the magnification. And I tell you the truth, this is not an apocryphal story, and I almost had to tell it in a drawl, because that was when it occurred.

So that one realizes that any condition that you establish for the recording of behavior is always going to be shaped by the conditions and by the conventionality of observing and recording. That doesn't make it any more impossible than it is with the microscope, the telescope, but it is still not a direct, immediate picture of human experience any more than looking in the mirror is. And I suppose that's the second thing I'd like to talk about. One of the terrible things that

[10]This is as it appears in the original document.

you discover is that you train yourself to look in the mirror – in what looks like an immediate, absolute, totally unfuckuppable thing like a mirror. And you put yourself in front of it and you see something that is shaped by the nature of your relationship with that image – see that you are not a tabula rasa, you are not unprogrammed, that you are patterned because you are human, because you are regular and regulated, because you are predictable in a culture. Then the shapes you see in the mirror become selections out of the conventional relationship with yourself.

The moment that you know that, the moment that you are willing to accept the fact that the mirror gives you not an objective image but a beautiful subjective image, then you are also beginning to be able to deal with the problem of looking even at yourself.

Very early, I was asked to come down to NIMH and watch psychiatrists watching psychiatrists.[11] And it became very clear very fast that none of them were trained to watch relationships; that what they were trained to do was to watch either the patient or the psychiatrist, and to watch them in turn; that, by and large, many of them never looked at the patient. They recorded the patient in their mind, they recorded an image of the patient, and then recorded what they saw within a range of theory: what the psychiatrist was measuring against his own set of values.

I became interested, in the early '40s, in a group that I observed in a factory: a group of people who were doing time-motion studies. And they were working on trying to make more money for management. And I was working a union[12] at the time, and we were hating them, and fighting them, and trying to force them out. And it became perfectly clear, watching them with a small Bell & Howell camera, that they were beginning to segment motion in a different way than I had ever seen. I had been an athlete.[13] So when I got to the University of Louisville, they had just introduced a new thing, which was a camera taking pictures of football players working on the field – and then showing the football players those pictures.[14] No one else could afford it in those days; this came right out of

[11] The National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland, founded in 1949. The specific project Birdwhistell refers to is unknown.

[12] Possibly a reference to a 1948–49 study of union leadership in Kentucky, according to a 1952 CV in box B2, folder 1, Margaret Mead Papers and the South Pacific Ethnographic Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[13] Birdwhistell was "a former high school athlete in Cincinnati", according to an article by Gay Talese written in 1958 but published only recently as Talese (2010: 191).

[14] Birdwhistell taught at the University of Louisville as an Instructor in Sociology from 1946 to 1951, then as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology and Social Anthropology from 1952 to 1956.

the grant.[15] And so what you had was, for the first time, the development of a slow-motion analyzer – very easy to work with, still one of the best things you can work with, because it doesn't destroy the film. The problem with many of the new film-readers and the more fancy devices, if you've ever worked with them, is that either the heat or the sheer manipulation eats your film. Heat begins to warp your film; you begin to have great difficulties.

On that old thing there was a little film counter up at the top.[16] It was inaccurate. Then I learned about the B-roll that Van Vlack and I developed.[17] (Margaret always taught me that if you wanted something, you'd better go out and give lectures to get money. So a B-roll came out of lectures.) A B-roll is a second roll that you develop: a strip of film with nothing but frame numbers on it. Put it together and have it printed at the same time you print your picture so that you always know where that particular picture is.

One of the problems that always comes with working with film is that you don't know what the shapes are in there – because the shape you make of a social act, of what you're taught of the culture, is the shape of the social act.[18] Anyone who's ever taken linguistics knows the sharp break that occurred in their

[15] What or whose grant is unclear.

[16] Possibly the Bell & Howell 173BD "Time and Motion Study" 16mm Projector, which seems to have become available in the early 1950s. It had a Veeder frame counter extending from the arm of the supply reel. It was used in well-known studies by Birdwhistell's associates, such as William S. Condon and Adam Kendon.

[17] Jacques D. Van Vlack (1925–1975), longtime audiovisual technician for Birdwhistell, first at University of Buffalo and then Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute. He appears as author or coauthor on many films shot at Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute. His earlier films such as *Their Little World*, "set in a handicapped children's camp [and about] a boy with muscular dystrophy in his round of activities," have not been found (Turners 1958: 18). Birdwhistell claims, elsewhere, that Van Vlack also had some training in social science.

[18] This may be a reference to the notion of phonemic significance. The voice makes an apparently infinite variety of sounds but only certain parts of this acoustic spectrum emerge as meaningful within a language. Some sounds, though technically different at the level of acoustic production, will not be sufficiently distinct from one another to have meaning for other speakers of the language, and thus the sounds will be perceived as multiple instances of the same phoneme. Compare Birdwhistell (1952: 16): "In other words, we are concerned here not with the extent or degree or kind of difference in activity stimulated by one set of kines as against another. We are concerned with the variation in the kines within a kinemorph which make for some kind of difference in response." He then discusses an experiment in which people were shown expressions that varied in terms of eye, mouth, and nose position until the variation produced, for the informant, a meaningful difference: "Well, that changes things" (1952: 20). Here, in the 1980 lecture, Birdwhistell may be expanding this idea to talk about social psychology more broadly – as Ruth Benedict had done much earlier in *Patterns of Culture* (1934) with her notion of cultures as "segments" from a "great arc" of human possibilities.

head when they began to discover that words were things on paper, and that the subdivisions of an utterance came out of your theory.

And so the development of a theory with which you can deal with a stream of behavior becomes ultimately critical when you are taking a set of still shots: twenty-four frames a second, with the lapsed time in between. A conventional overlap allows you to make this continuous motion…Lovely, lovely thing. [There's a book called] *Experience and Prediction* by Hans Reichenbach, which deals with the theoretical problem of working with trajectories.[19]

In a very real sense, all that you can see in a film is a trajectory. You deal with the cutting, you deal with the connections. You deal with each of those, either out of awareness or in awareness. If you're going to do research with film, gaining control of your instrument – gaining control over yourself – becomes absolutely necessary. Otherwise, you are not merely but systematically recording your own precept, your own prejudgment. Because it is whatever the film is. It's easier when it is people far away because people can't make a liar out of you, but you're not necessarily doing a better job.

I began to get money. We had gone to the State Department and had done a little booklet called *Introduction to Kinesics*. And then it was forbidden. This was at the time of McCarthy, and they suppressed it because they had a line in there, "Mommy, I want to go to the bathroom." So the State Department suppressed it. And Henry Lee Smith, Jr. stole it from the government and sent it to us in Louisville, and we reissued it, and all our first money came from that little pamphlet.[20] So I've always been grateful to McCarthy, without whom we would never have done some of the early research.

We began to go through the pictures. And we began to discover, when we took the pictures back, that it was perfectly possible to take those to a major meeting and lecture about them and talk about things that were not in the picture – and people were very pleased. This was a very distressing thing: not because we were

[19]Hans Reichenbach (1891–1953) was a German philosopher of science, sometimes associated with the Vienna school of logical positivism. *Experience and Prediction: An Analysis of the Foundations and the Structure of Knowledge* was published in 1938.

[20]This story of a suppression and theft is not reported in other sources. *Introduction to Kinesics* was originally printed in photo-offset by the Department of State, Foreign Service Institute in Birdwhistell (1952). Other copies bear the University of Louisville imprint. It later became quite rare and could only be had on microfilm. The line from the book is actually, "Mama. I gotta go to the bathroom" (Birdwhistell 1952: 26). Henry Lee Smith, Jr. (1913–1972) was a linguist and one of Birdwhistell's collaborators who, with George Trager, developed the field of paralanguage. He contributed much to the methodology of the Natural History of an Interview while working with Birdwhistell at the University of Buffalo and had previously advised on the development of kinesics when he and Birdwhistell were at the Foreign Service Institute in 1952.

being bad…but what happened was that once I gave a lecture with the wrong film, and nobody knew the difference. And I went back absolutely shocked. That film, in a sense, fit what I said but it was not what I was talking about. I began to ask myself the question. I began to determine that, since I had a small amount of budget and did not want to be a filmmaker, the thing that I wanted to do was film things that were already studied so I could begin to study them all over again. That is, if I knew from the analysis as an anthropologist and as an observer the world I was observing – if I knew the beginnings and ends, so I wouldn't cut it wrong – [I knew] that I would be able to record things that could be studied because I had them in a natural context.[21]

If one becomes innocent enough to think, for example, that if you record the speech of a language you don't know anything about, that there's no way to cut a piece of tape and know whether you have on it a thousand ideas, or one idea, or half an idea – the moment you begin to penetrate below the level of awareness of interaction, the same thing is happening. You are, in a sense, shooting a picture of an unknown universe.[22] And so, to determine the structure of that shape becomes a wonderfully exciting order of discovery because you are, in a very real sense, beginning to enter a world that no one has been in before in awareness. Not because of drugs, not because you're brilliant, not because you're bright, not because you've intuited, but because you're disciplined.

If you were to take something in the shape of a family, how would you study comparatively to help people see what goes on in a family? So that they would not be stuck with the unbelievable conviction that there was something called a nuclear family? In a society in which you have Adam and Eve as an origin? In which you have two grown-up adults, no kinfolk and no forebears and who then have offspring and see this as a natural unit? It is deep within the myths not only of the society but also in the myths of the social sciences to act as though there were something called the nuclear family which was really nuclear. But how would you look at comparative families – not in order to say that these

[21]Compare Scheflen (1973: 313): "We try to locate a usual activity which people are used to enacting together. We seek participants who are native to the tradition of that transaction and experienced in taking part. And we make our observations under usual and favorable conditions. We prefer to study the transaction at sites where it usually occurs under customary conditions. We have to learn something about the situation to make such decisions. We read the literature about that kind of transaction and talk to colleagues who have worked in that area. Then we interview subjects who are experienced in that kind of transaction. We visit sites where it usually occurs and make preliminary observations."

[22]The original document contains the following clause here after a comma: "as if for example you were multiply magnitude a galaxy and taking pictures of it – it is not within human experience." I did not feel confident venturing a correction that would make this readable.

were different sufficiently, not because you're going to understand *how* they're different – but to know that they're sufficiently different to want to look at them?

That was the reason that Jacques Van Vlack, whose history is an important one, whom I picked because he was not a social scientist – I did not want him shooting pictures of old ideas…He was a great photographer of football games at the University of Buffalo. He was doing a tremendous job of filming because he was able *not* to keep his eye on the ball, and not to film just the ball, but to film the game. That order of sensitivity was what I wanted.

No way to teach a basketball team to play basketball – to take a film always of the ball. You don't follow the ball, you follow the play. The play is a different shape from the ball. The amount you have to know to take a picture of the play is very different than if you kneel down and take a picture of the ball. That means you have to study enough to understand the play before you understand the special variations within the play. And it is those special variations, as well as the things that seem to go beyond that, that…

First film I'm going to show you is a film about filming about filming: families around the world going to a zoo. It ain't a moving picture; it happens to be a record of a speech. Van Vlack and I went to the American Anthropological Association after we had taken the film and cut it, and decided that what we'd like to do is to film me and the audience looking at a film about families in zoos around the world. And only because we wanted to make it clear that it's an exhortatory film, the sound is outrageously bad. The sound that you hear is the sound that comes with very central direction. I should tell you also that we had our cameras confiscated in England, that we were held by the police in France – multiply it around the world. There are countries you can't buy your way out of. So we will see first this film, which is "Zoos Around the World," and at the end we will open for questions, and then we will get ready for the second film – okay?[23]

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[23]The film is actually called *Microcultural Incidents in Ten Zoos* (Birdwhistell & Van Vlack 1971) and records a 1966 lecture at the American Anthropological Association. The second film screened at this event in 1980 cannot be known from context.

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