the other face of the mirror:
Jean Rouch and the "other"

by
Ricardo Costa

"... it is not exactly exhibitionism: it's a very strange kind of confession in front of the camera, where the camera is, let's say, a mirror, and also a window open to the outside".

Jean Rouch, interviewed by Ian Cameron and Mark Shivas in Movie, nº8, Abril 1963

on this side

Jean Rouch, the Catalan surrealist, the romantic anarchist, the restless zazou, packed one day the cinema in the suitcase of ethnology, which demanded non manipulated cinematic portraits. Accepting to use the camera as a pure eye, an enactment of science, he transgressed the rule, fascinated by seeing beyond the visible (science is averse to fantasy) peeking through the cracks in the image, through the subtle transparencies that the film creates. Sacrificed to ethnology, by whims of fortune, the cinema took possession of it, just as the mirror takes possession of the observer: disruptive, it opened the window to fantasy.
Born in Paris in 1917, Jean Rouch graduated in civil engineering at the *Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées* in the early forties. He left France, his occupied country, in 1941 and went to work in Africa, in Nigeria, an ancient French colony since 1890 and afterwards a British possession until it integrates a formally independent federation in 1960. Being a sympathizer of the resistance, Rouch was forced to move to Dakar the following year. It is here, in Senegal, that one day he saw some of the blacks who worked with him in the construction of a bridge start a ritual when a thunderstorm broke. Fascinated, he initiates in the African mysteries. He returns to Paris after the liberation and starts studying anthropology at the *Musée de l'homme*. His masters are Marcel Mauss, the father of modern French anthropology, and Marcel Griaule, a specialist of the Dogons of Mali, a people who are the custodians of a rich culture and own extraordinary knowledge of astronomy. So he tracks himself a new destiny.

![Marcel Mauss](image1)

![Marcel Griaule](image2)

In 1946 – he is twenty-nine – he buys an old 16 mm Bell and Howell camera at the flea market in Paris, and leaves for Africa with two friends, Jean Sauvy and Pierre Ponty, to make an expedition in canoe: to descend the Niger River from its source onto the sea, a trip financed by sending articles to the *Agence France Presse*.

*Au pays des mages noirs* (In the Country of Black Magicians - 1946/47), his first film, will be the result of this adventure, a somewhat frustrated experience because the director of *France Presse* decides to comment the narrative in the style of *Tour de France* (a bicycle race around France), with
mellow music and exiting wild animals like lions and tigers acting in the savannah. But this exploit serves him well: one day the tripod he uses jumps out of the boat into the water and he has no other choice but filming with his camera handheld, discovering an agility that it hadn’t before. He will remain faithful to this discovery for the rest of his life.

The portrait of these post-war zazous, youngsters dressed up in elegant and distinct style, unfaithful lovers, jazz fanatics confronting in the dance stunts in the basements of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, is made by Jacques Becker in the film Le rendez-vous de Juillet (Rendez-vous in July - 1949)


Some say that Rouch and his friends inspired Becker. Invited by Griaule, who had made two short films in the Dogon country a few years earlier, Jean Rouch decides once and for all to follow the steps of Griaule. He rejects the authorship of Au pays des mages noirs because of the gross intrusions, but accepts the "lesson of film editing", which would be indispensable to him in his future works.

The 16mm handheld cameras used at that time had spring motors, which allowed to film just short shots. The main lesson he draws from the use of these cameras is the need to predict the duration of the shot before rewinding, knowing in advance how the shot will articulate with the next one: planning when filming, providing for the editing beforehand. That is to say: predicting the final result of the filmed matter without doing, as the Master recommended, a "work of art", adhering to the rigorous demands of the ethnographic film, which should not be more than simple annotations, the supplement of the anthropologist's registry book. (3)

He makes two other short films, one on the rites of the Songhay magicians in Nigeria: Les magiciens de Wanzerbe (1948) and another, Circoncision (1949), on a rite of circumcision of the children of Hombori, a village in Mali. In the same vein, in Initiation à la danse des possédés (1949), he tries to unravel a mystery: a Songhai woman from the Tillabéri archipelago is initiated. The movie wins the first prize in the Festival du film maudit (Festival of the Cursed Film) in Biarritz (4), France, organized by Henry Langlois and Jean Cocteau.


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Cocteau


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki0S3B8yS08
Then, changing course, hardworking for five years, Rouch writes a thesis on the African rites of possession, which he will defend at the Sorbonne University. Afterwards he enters the CNRS (Centre national de la recherche scientifique), goes back to Africa and films *Les Maîtres fous* (The Mad Masters – 1954/55), whose liberties Marcel Griaule severely censors. Mysteries are clarified. And more Jean dares...

One of the reasons why the film was censored by the Master, who even talked about destroying it, is transgressing rules, is making a portrait of "degenerate" rituals. And that is true. But the scientist's acumen at the time did not discern the invisible side of that truth. Pondering such questions, a simple truth appears to be obvious: the Africans are possessed by the colonizers. The film itself is a symbol of such a truth: a land stone showing that, without indiscipline, it would not have been the same. That's like the Pale fox in the myth of the world creation. If the fox had not dared, it had not been but a mongrel. In other words, it would not have acquired the gift of guessing.

In this film Jean Rouch, camera in hand, enters the ritual, the camera will be participant. It is owned by the characters it films, in ciné transe, at the same time as the characters are filmed in trance, possessed by the characters the film portrays. What makes the camera move is an impulse, the delirium of unpredictable, the wish of unveiling a phenomenon like that of lovers who do not stop making discoveries. That’s why Jean shoots with no script. He knows that the script is made for avoiding what is not foreseen, for manipulating the film. What he wants is quite different. He searches for the truth that arises, not that which is intruded.

However, the abilities of such a manipulated camera, agile as the fox's eyes, are not enough for him to achieve what he intends: to unveil the invisible. This way of capturing reality joins the technique that Robert Flaherty used when filming Nanouk of the North, something Rouch finds indispensable: showing the film to those who were filmed, so that they understand what is screened (they themselves and the "other", the stranger who registered those pictures). In short, he tries to understand, with the help of the camera, what is intended, or just reveal something which has not yet been seen. As Rouch doesn’t lack humor, he illustrates this principle with a joke. In the film *La chasse à l'hippopotame* (Hunting the Hippopotamus - 1950) he decided to add a music soundtrack to reinforce the drama and the tension in hunting. The hunters criticized him: there can be no noise when hunting. Not only in movies but whenever one follows a hunter.

At the time of the Fourth International Congress on Ethnological and Anthropological Sciences, which took place in Vienna in 1952, Jean Rouch, together with André Leroi-Gourhan, founded the *Comité international du film ethnologique et sociologique*, sieged at the *Musée de l'homme*, Paris, in order to establish links between the "human sciences" and the "art of cinema", for the development of both. Ever since, the Committee would be somewhere a bilateral strength. Curious coincidence. On one side of the bastion, in the Trocadero, at the *Musée de l'homme* (Museum of Man), stands Jean Rouch with revolutionary films. On the other side stands Henri Langlois, with daring dreams, in the French Film Museum (*Cinémathèque française*). Strategic spaces taken by assault, with the Eiffel Tower as a witness ... Futile dreams of an era?
Be that as it may, it is from there that one and the other laced in adventure into great achievements. Langlois, like d'Artagnan, fighting for his lady, the "art of the cinema," Rouch, like Athos, fighting for hers, the "mysterious quality" of the ethnographic film. *Moi un Noir* (Me, a Black 1958) is his new achievement, his first feature film: an ethnographic film... with fiction and stars...

He makes fiction and documentary films. He films without knowing very well what will take place, what will come out of the thing. He films always the same way, even when filming different things. Face to the unexpected, the camera can only have a posture: it has to be attentive, active within its space of action. Rouch films always this way, even knowing that when the surprise escapes, when it does not appear before the camera, the film fails. Such is his bet. He prefers to put a movie at risk than risking to manipulate the truth he seeks.

On *Moi un noir* (I, A Negro - 1958) Godard once said, a statement that everyone quotes: "a stone into the puddle of French cinema, such as *Roma città aperta* (Rome, Open City – 1945) in the world cinema (*A pavé dans la mare du cinéma français comme en son temps Rome, villeouvertedanscelleducinquémmondial*). And he said even more: most of his own films are due to this one. The narrative unfolds in Treichville, an Abdijan's tin neighborhood, in Ivory Coast, with five non-professional actors: one playing the role of Edward Robinson, another of Eddie Constantine, another of Tarzan and an actress playing Dorothy Lamour, all stars of American cinema. Film (fr) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_N70fKoZyU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_N70fKoZyU)
The film was shot without sound and sonorized in post-production, in voice over, with the spontaneous comments of Oumarou Ganda, who played the role of Edward Robinson. Oumarou had made the Indo-China war and always felt that he hadn’t been born to work. His biggest dream in life was to become ... a film actor. Fulfilled his dream, he just couldn’t understand why Eddie Constantine earned 800 million francs in the same job whereas he ... wouldn’t earn a penny. The obsession of Rouch in making common people film stars wouldn’t be without serious consequences.

Edgar Morin, the sociologist who had written a famous paper, *Le cinéma ou l’homme imaginaire* (2), subtitled "anthropology essay", author of another text on movie stars, *Les Stars* (3), former member of the French Resistance, expelled from the Communist Party for being anti-Stalinist, editor of the magazine *Arguments*, admirer of Rouch’s work, proposes him to make a film with the participation of some of his friends: a social fresco on Paris of the 1960s. Rouch responds: *Je ne suis pas un “fresqueur”* (I’m no "frescor" at all) but he accepts. Morin has a compelling argument: he says that, when the nineteenth century was over, it bequeathed two new machines, which would eventually overcome the "sound barrier". One of them, the airplane, gave wings to Man. The other prodigy, the film camera, gave him the vision of a reality that was ground-to-earth, capturing life to reproduce it, to "print" it on film. But soon the airplane would fall into the banal wiseness of the universe of machines, while the camera began to fly, like Saint-Exupéry ascending higher and higher, in a dream sky, into the infinite space of the stars, freeing itself from the Earth, where it would be doomed to become a servant and ... a pure mirror.
Mechanical question: to achieve the effect, he had to perfect the camera. Rouch started filming *Chronique d’un été* (Chronicle of a Summer -1960), with an Arriflex camera, already quite light (weighing about ten kilos) but, in his view, too heavy to ... go beyond the stratosphere. That was not quite the kind of machine that suited him. To get what he wanted, Jean Rouch attacked on two fronts: the construction of a lighter appliance and the adaptation of an auxiliary engine that allowed him to overcome "the sound barrier".

He had in view two prototypes: the KMT Coutant-Mathot Eclair, a camera that was being developed by André Coutant, intended for use in military observation satellites, but which only supported 16 mm film reels lasting three minutes, and a rugged advanced sound recorder, the Nagra, created by Kudelsky in Switzerland, which could be carried on the shoulder of a sound engineer like a vulgar case, which recorded sound on a long magnetic tape reel of reduced diameter. Rouch convinces Coutant to supply one of these cameras with a magazine that supports a roll of film up to 120 meters (about 10 minutes of uninterrupted viewing) and that Kudelsky adapts his recorder to the camera using pilottone - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilottone.

Philosophical question: the process is used successfully. And it becomes universal. Edgard Morin acknowledges that Rouch, overcoming the borders stepped by Flaherty and Vertov, the pioneers, surpasses them in their purposes of "penetrating beyond appearances, defenses, into the unknown universe of everyday life."

The film "is not a documentary", is a research. It is a 'cinematic interrogation experience' : 'an ethnological film in the strong sense of the term: a search for man' (4). It questions the audience using real characters. A simple question is put to people interviewed in the street, anonymous people. "Comment vis-tu?" (How do you live?) is necessarily reflected in the mind of the audience: "What do you do in life?" That is the goal to achieve with twenty-five hours of
rushes. The producers worry and the two authors diverge in editing. Rouch argues: "My position is this: the interest of this story is the film, it is the chronology of the evolution of people depending on the film. The theme itself has no great interest" (5).

Only time may bring precise answers to these questions. What are the effects of the experience? As for the "chronology of the evolution of people in relation to the film," the development of the characters, their journeys, some evidence will soon arise. The Chronicle of a Summer is a film planned to test direct cinema techniques. The first attempts revealed that most people approached in the streets of Paris, unfamiliar with such a novelty, would refuse to be filmed and ran away. Soon Rouch understood he had to be selective. He decided to keep just a few of those who entered the game: Angelo, a worker at the automobile Renault factory, Marceline Loridan – the main character in the film – a Jewish girl who was fifteen when arrested along with her father by the Nazis in April 1944, sent from occupied France to Auschwitz-Birkenau (she had a serial number tattoo on her arm), a journalist at the French television. Mary-Lou (Marilù Parolini), a pathetic married young girl. Jean-Pierre Sergent, an anti-colonialist activist who belonged to the Réseau Jeanson (Jeanson Network) during the Algerian War, a future journalist. Regis Debray, a hardworking twenty years old student at the École Normale Supérieure where he had Louis Althusser as professor. Besides them, there is Nadine Ballot playing an outstanding role. She had starred in La pyramide humaine (The Human Pyramid 1959. Film (fr) https://vimeo.com/54909410, shot in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in
The film relaunches each of these actors, "ordinary people", in a new career, just because they had been movie stars for some days. Angelo, the proletarian, eager to get rid of the "cranks", dismisses from Renault. Crystallizing his revolt, he loses several jobs until his friends, the guilty guys, get him some money to set up a workshop. And there he will stay. Marceline falls in love with adventurous Joris Ivens and goes with him world around to make films. Mary-Lou becomes a set photographer and goes working for Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut and others. Jean Pierre goes filming to Algeria and Latin America. Regis Debray goes to Cuba, where he meets Che Guevara, and then to Colombia, where he will be arrested.

It is essential, Rouch says, the new technique should be rapidly applied before "certain manifestations of threatened cultures disappear completely". Besides – a fact of supreme importance – the talking mirror may be found in cultures of oral tradition. And he wonders: "Where is all this going to end? I must say that I have no idea. But I think that from now on, alongside industrial and commercial cinema and intimately linked to it, there is a certain cinema which is above all of art and research ". (6) And he proclaims: " We contribute indirectly to the birth of what is called the New Wave in France". (7) The oral experience in film, that of direct sound and sequence shot, will be explored extensively by Godard. Morin adresses the issue in a different way. In the film dialogues, he says, each of the characters could be more true than in everyday life and more false at the same time, and that means truth does not snap like a flower branch: "Truth can’t escape contradictions, as there are truths of conscience and unconsciousness, truths that contradict each other " (8). Truth, he says, is a lengthy patience.
Michel Eaton proceeds arguing that first of all they made a film about people talking, rather than playing their lives in front of a camera. That sums up the essential, which has become an inheritance: it was television, more than cinema, to benefit from the experiment. Rouch, on his part, began to explore the toy in his own way. Ten-minute shots with Vertov’s "ear" attached to the camera? "How can that work?" Pure sequences: the camera moves following our eyes, in a reverie within reality, stopping in front of what is most outstanding, letting itself be seized by evidence. From one extreme to the other of this movement, the camera unveils pictures full a content that would escape us otherwise, printing it on the film, its memory.

In order to be truthful when recording reality in the purest form, in a sequence shot, the camera must follow what emerges without losing its point of view. Interrupting the shot and changing the perspective, that would mean cutting, causing a gap in continuity, a time lapse in the action, a break in vision, or a change in perspective that wouldn’t convey to the position of the operator’s body, which would disturb reality and introduce one more artifice, in addition to that of the camera itself: editing.

A sequence shot mirrors an event in real time. Although it can’t escape to the effects of editing, it is the most complete, it contains all the others, it is the single one corresponding to an observer who moves in space, who, without blinking, follows something: a character or an idea. Compared to the others, is the most voracious, the most impure. And that isn’t something without risks. When making a sequence shot in filming a ritual of possession the camera itself is possessed. It is stuck to the rider and to the horse, follows its jumps, its
symbolic gestures, makes a registry of the characters in action, enters in trance as well, then falls into oblivion.

It is the kind of shot that best suits us. It allows us to never let escape the smallest detail. For ever well serving, Jean Rouch adopts it as ethics. It’s a principle that the technical improvement of sound sync cameras consecrated and imposed, but a aesthetical principle as well since, even in fiction, the sequence shot is “our best friend”: it makes us see with no cuts, it narrates with no need of editing. *La Gare du nord* (1964) is a perfect demonstration of that principle: in a sixteen minutes continuous shot, the audience follows (despite the imperceptible trick inside the lift) the agitated awakening of a young woman from the Parisian petty bourgeoisie – Nadine Ballot herself, Rouch’s super star – since she gets out of the bed, has breakfast arguing sourly with his companion until finding herself involved in the suicide of a disturbed gallant she meets in the street 16 minutes later (9) Film (fr) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLAarfmzc

Jean Rouch in conversation with Jacqueline Veuve
the moving thing

The non-visible side of a reality, in one way or another, is always present, embodied in its spectrum. It is something that, escaping observation, can only be discerned by imagination, which belongs exclusively to it – even in science –, a domain that Dziga Vertov, who had studied neural medicine and was a visionary engineer, scrutinized with improved optics and accurate mechanics, with advanced machinery.

The voracity of our eyes facing the parade of the world demands faithful records to capture reality. Jean Rouch, engineer of bridges and roads, leads us into a different time turning his lenses to Africa, the cradle of Man. His eyes are drawn to endangered ancestral characters living in a still “pure” state. Unlike Vertov, who points his camera to the future, Jean Rouch points his to the past, targeting the same person. The figure that Vertov shows with futuristic nuances is recorded by Jean Rouch in portrait, in his oldest appearance. Vertov’s “cine-eye” prefers to portray the construction of the world at a crucial moment in history. Both Flaherty’s “sharing
camera" and Rouch's "direct cinema" portray the deconstruction of worlds in crisis or in risk to be lost. Rouch, alone, associates this insightful ability of a creative camera with the rigor and the objectivity that ethnology, which is science, demands.

Ado Kirou gave us a surrealistic maxim that works: "... si au cinéma la chance vous offre des surprises, ne les refusez jamais ..." (if in movies chance offers us surprises, never refuse them). This is one of the corollaries of the good spectator. Jean Rouch, a fanatic film-goer, goes beyond himself, stubbornly watching the world through the lens. Being an avant-garde cinema lover, he radicalizes the position of the camera. He films knowing beforehand that the image we have just seen has already been erased by the instant which follows. Without filming, everything we see would vanish. On the screen, we not only will be able to make visible the reality that extinguishes but also that one which hides. In filming, we can show things that wouldn’t be seen without the screen, hence Rouch draws one of the principles of his ethics: "... la ciné-transe, chore graphie du tournage en mouvement, ou l’art de filmer comme un possédé " (the cine-trance, the choreography of shooting in movement or the art of filming like a possessed) (9), that’s to say without stopping to push the button while following a certain subject.

Eternizing what is ephemeral before certain things that we still can see but will not be seen any longer becomes a vital issue. Africa: portraying moments of an earlier age of Man at one of his oldest crossroads (at a dramatic moment in history, when his living past, the last vestiges of these ancient ages are extinguished) is one of the motors of the camera. The other is discerning, in the portrait, what in our age we have of similar. That’s to say, expecting surprises. Jean Rouch, a man avid of mystery, affected by surrealist slants, never underestimating surprises, respects the diktats of science. What attempts him is called "visual anthropology". What for certain reasons, taken to the extreme, can be either pure ethnographic documentary or pure ethnofiction.
and the reflex

Showing how an African tradition, inscribed in the myth, appropriates symbols of the other – the European colonialist – interpreting and staging them, a film like *Les maîtres fous* (The Mad Masters) reveals how all this violent and bizarre ritual becomes a therapy. It is the other side of the question that the film shows, a pointing finger, a glimmer of evidence, a door which is opened to a new interpretation, to a new looking, as though it was generated by a sudden push. It is something similar to what happens when a photo questions me: it animates me and I animate it. Roland Barthes talks about that in *La chambre Claire* (Camera Lucida): "This is how you should designate the attraction that makes it exist: an animation. There is nothing animated in photography (nor do I believe in "live" photographs), but it animates me: that’s how adventure begins" (10). In short, it is the same visual pulsion that animates both photography and movies. But that occurs in a different register, on a wavelength different from that in which a picture is already animated photography. In both cases it "moves": it moves out of the picture.

In cinema or in photography the image is contained inside a frame, which acts like a mirror. That picture corresponds to a space within a field that one detects by experience or culture: when I see myself in the mirror I know that, by defect, the image which I receive is inverted. It is through such a filter that the photographed image responds to the questions I put to it or that it shows me, accordingly to my interest, as far as my *studium* is applied to it, as far as I appreciate what I see, what is involved by my eyes, for what that image tells me, on a paper sheet or on the screen of a cinema theater, as the result of an operation generated by a Photographer, the *operator*. (10)

It happens that the *studium* (my applied observation, my status as a *spectator*) is sometimes disturbed by a detail that strikes me, a *puctum*, something intrusive, challenging. Something that, somewhere inside the frame, escaped to the "operator", a strange co-presence. Something that the subtle "thinking eye" added to the picture, as Barthes says: the spoiled teeth of one of the little boys in a New York borough in a picture by William Klein or the detail, "not in form but in intensity",...
that impregnates the disturbing portrait of hatred Lewis Payne [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_Powell_(conspirator)], a young man condemned to capital punishment for attempting to assassinate American Secretary of State WH Stewart [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_H._Seward] in 1865. The punctum here is the immaterial detail that indicates just this: he is going to die.

DEATH IN THE PHOTOGRAPH

on the other side

A portrait gives us not only details of what is in focus but also confronts us with the myths of those who portray, making us "read in the myths of the Photographer", letting us guess which are his tendencies. The same may happen when we find ourselves on the other side of the mirror, what gives us the chance of detecting our own lies.

This is a delicate question: when the ethnographer is the photographer himself and especially when he holds a film camera, the most complex mirror. Still more delicate is the question whenever the Photographer aims at the myths of the other, whom he must respect. How to be strict? How to deal with his myths without mixing them with ours? But ... why not do that, if it may happen they have something in common? To answer this question, Jean Rouch, radical, uses a master key, a passe-partout, a universal principle which he applies to science: 'Il faut croire à la croyance de l'autre' (One must believe in the other’s belief). For the same reason he believes in film, as it is for him the most trustworthy support. This principle ensures the fidelity of the camera to the human eye. In the same way, is ensured by the reliability of the support that records ensuring the fidelity of the pictures to the reality that gave rise to them. Fidelity is due at last to the movie theater, the darkroom where the camera viewfinder becomes a screen. Concerning fidelity, what matters
is going as far as possible, until the place where the other will be found with his purest appearance. For someone who thinks that he must believe what the other believes, it is not surprising that Rouch goes to work believing in the myths of the other and also expecting that the other will believe his ones.

The camera is for Rouch an instrument of discovery, as for Dziga Vertov, who also doesn’t dismiss imagination and poetry. For Rouch it is besides that a utensil that reflects reality with the rigor of science and that immediately interprets it, such as the myth does. Despite being contaminated by the spectra that always escape the Photographer's eye (most of those who frighten Rouch are caused by "aesthetic" temptations of the cameraman in the image composition, something the ethnographer intends as crude as his subject), the camera can however reproduce situations with more accuracy than any other instrument. With a snag: the camera can’t go unnoticed, just in participating it will be responsive. (11)

The image returned by the mirror brings us, in cinema, not only the general aspect of things, but also certain details that escape us with the naked eye, in number and with an efficiency superior to the still photography. It alone, Barthes stresses, releases 'détails qui font le matériau même du savoir ethnologique' (details that constitute the very stuff of ethnological knowledge). If, for the photographer dedicated to ethnology, the observation on the screen (the theater of his studium)
can, in fact, fine-tune one’s view, numerous details that the eye of the camera reveals can bring even greater surprises, especially when, by the ethnologist's demand, the eyes of those who watch and of those who are watched will be fused or confronted on the stage of this dark room.

Entirely free from aesthetic mediations such as the photographer’s taste, from seductions of beauty, from a priori fictional intrusions, from any deforming filter, Jean Rouch's cinematographic writing is, paradoxically, a restless search in the opposite pole.

The beautiful image, he says, is the greatest danger. It was *la belle image* that doomed Narcissus to the eternal sin of vanity. This does not mean that who says so will not dare to take similar risks (we often see Rouch placing the camera in the most beautiful angle). He will risk as well exulting when he sees others be moved by similar temptations. What he loves in movies is a pure beauty, a beauty with no make-up, that he knows doesn't in truth exist, but that he seeks. Knowing well that, once found, it wouldn’t escape the convention that cinema needs in order to keep it alive nor would avoid what the Photographer himself, captive of the camera’s eye (that also falls in love), will irresistibly add to the Beloved.

Mick Eaton says that this contradiction, impossible to solve, is an irreducible choice that Rouch can only overcome "inscribing the personal and the subjective in the body of the film text", that’s to say moving the camera towards it, electing it, a supreme act of love and a deathly temptation for an ethnologist. In other words assuming himself as the ultimate guarantor of the film, of all its truth: the author of the work: someone who has plenty of reasons to know what and when a film, rather than another, must show and be made. (11)

It is an ethical impulse that animates the Photographer and the camera motor. It is he who decides about the pertinence of the image. He is responsible not only for the decision to film, he is as well responsible as the "first observer", responsible to making *mise-en-scène* accurately (pre-editing the film when shooting) but also responsible for the manipulation of the images when editing. In most cases, having
exchanged views with the persons he filmed when the movie is screened, in a sort of feed-back, before doing the same with the editor, a 'second observer' (12), a stranger to what has been shot, a technician who just interferes to help the image pass.

Accounts made, for whom does Jean Rouch film? He said once he films for himself. He also said he films for those who are filmed. But one can’t forget that he said as well he films for everybody. He proved that screening his films every Saturday morning at the Musée de l'homme or, right next to it, at the Langlois’s Film Museum, with free entrance for everyone. Of course, filming for him alone he films for us, since that’s us who watch his films, following him with his own eyes. It is obvious that, filming for the Other, filming for those who have been filmed, he does that for better seeing them. And also for better showing them how they may be seen. Filming for everyone, he does that to show 'that films so exciting as those of Tarzan may easily be made': shooting what there is and not what is intended to be seen. In short, he films by exorcising the parasites in the mirror, polishing it in his own way so that the face on other side is able to reveal a clearer truth.

That’s why he claims for films like his the right to be watched. In Africa, where he is, or here where we are, there are places owning truths that we can’t go out of sight. Once seen in the cinema, at the end of the session, these truths leap out of the room like a wave, creating new images, provoking the word, opening horizons, leading us to other truths, sometimes to important discoveries: seeing on the other’s face which is like ours, what truth is it: how far it the same, in what is it different from one another? Rouch films for that, something which Mick Eaton said and that Deleuze repeated (12): "So that a new truth can be revealed, not the truth of the pro-filmic event, but the truth of the cinema itself," a truth that can only come from it, "the creation of a new reality," the truth of the mirror. Not an "artistic" creation, not a captivating creation, but simply a creation that holds us: a creation in which the spectator (the audience) is not mastered but entertained, in an entertainment of a non-alienating species (thanks to the critical realism theory! https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_realism_(philosophy_of_perception)), a form of entertainment that revolves around a certain truth, something that astonishes us, that is discussed, not a lie. And which is often – even being ignored – a truth to be taken into account.
the lies of the mirror

In taking the cinema out of the case of ethnology, Jean Rouch wouldn’t avoid being touched by its spells. Despite resisting the artist’s temptation, someone who just sees the reflection, he would see two faces in one on both sides of the mirror: his image unfolded in the appearance of another, just one person. That’s to say: two similar persons in just one portrait. (13)

Rouch dares a lot in the quest for the unforeseen, which becomes a cult for him. He is cautious in avoiding the intrusion of parasites, of elements strange to the reality his quest brings about, making the thing appear, more than revealing it. He doesn’t put himself in the skin of a demiurge, his words are not divine. He waives the script like the devil the cross. He flees from lie such as the scientist. He reveals the word such as the Fox, fictioning as the event unfolds inside the truth the actors generate, making the story move forwards: provoking the apparition, as the soothsayers do.

"Ethnographic fictions," that’s so he calls them, "fictions that become reality," drama or comedy: Moi un Noir, Jaguar, La Pyramide humaine (1959), Cocorico, Monsieur Poulet (1975). But did not he also say that Jaguar was a "pure fiction"? In fact, it is not clear what fictions he finds pure or ethnographic because he shuffles the genres and because, for him, everything that has to do with Man is, in one way or another, ethnography or anthropology. Dionysos (1984), Enigma (1986), Folie ordinaire d’un fille de Cham (1987), Liberté, égalité, fraternité et puis après (1990/98), Moi fatigué debout, moi couché (1997), what films are these? Provocations? Which truths do they transmit? And which lies? Undoubtedly, all of them are less the work of an artist than that of an engineer who sets out to open new paths.

"Les tables du renard" (The Fox Tables)
Germaine Dieterlen and the soothsayer
Photo: Musée de l’homme – Paris
Dionysos, for instance, is on one hand the ethnographic documentary of an 'orgy' with no script, with certain friends of Science of Man, filmed by Jean with the iconoclastic purpose of laughing at his own symbols and, on the other hand, filmed as a documentary, illustrating the crazy confusion of a bizarre academic workshop. Gare du nord (1964) – one of the short-film series Paris vu par Jean Rouch, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Jean Douchet, Eric Rohmer, Claude Chabrol and Jean-Luc Godard, a pure fiction which is, perversely, an ethnographic film, a transvestite documentary: the mismatch of the young Parisian couple, full of routines in a world in reconstruction, the city of Paris in the post-war, and the unexpected encounter that beautiful Nadine Ballot has when leaving home for work, a gentleman driving his car in search for adventure. (14) Documentary (it's not just a documentary because the story did not really happen) where everything happens like in a dream, a space where truth happens.

Is not the dream that commands life? Even the life of an anthropologist? Dream: one of the faces of André Breton’s crystal, which does not dispense itself with the science of man and much less with anthropology: transparent and volatile matter, which has some weight and ... a measure. You can't look through the viewfinder of a camera without dreaming, for the simple reason that it was made for that. Put your eye there and soon the movie begins... Not bad, for an ethnologist...


Of course, in realizing that, Jean takes the side of cinema. With good reasons: even contaminated by the ghosts that escape through the window, the camera is the purest gaze that we exercise. It serves well both the poet and the scientist. Well... Seeing things right: what unites and separates them? What do one see that the other doesn’t? One don’t know very well... Maybe the better would that each one starts seeing ... with some respect for what sees the other...

In fact, both work for the same person. That’s why Rouch says there is no rendez-vous without fiction. When we fix the Other, the imagined one (we live with him and he does not leave us!) – we can’t avoid seeing on him what is the story the mirror tells: all that we both need, all we necessary will make together: all as in a child's play.

We can’t help seeing that. About this, what difference between a Dogon priest, an astronomer from the CNRS, or a Jean Rouch when they look at Sirius (13) at dawn? Is it not as if each of them looks, through the different facets of the crystal, the visible face of the same dream? Aren’t they seeing the same thing?
NOTES


(2) Le cinéma ou l’homme imaginaire, Edgard Morin, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1958


(4) Chronique d’un film, in Chronique d’un été, pag. 9, Inter Spectacles, Paris 1962. 
http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0097155803014001001

(5) Jean Rouch in Chronique d’un été, p. 28, op cit.


(7) Ibid, pag. 50

(8) Edgard Morin in Chronique d’un film, pag. 41, op cit. 
Cine-trance (French Ciné-transe) is a term coined by Jean Rouch, who created it to explain that a cameraman filming a possession ritual participates in it the same way as the actors involved in the ceremony. This issue is commented in the article The Drums, the Camera and the Man : « ciné-transe » in Jean Rouch’s cinema https://www.mecon.nomadit.co.uk/pub/conference_epaper_download.php5?PaperID=12309&MIMEType=application/pdf (download text)

(9) Article by Jacques Mandelbaum, Le Monde, 13 June de 1996. 
Not Quite – article by Steven Marchant, Royal Holloway, University of London. 
http://www.screeningthepast.com/2013/06/not-quite/

Jean Rouch was profoundly influenced by the Russian filmmaker of the 1920's, Dziga Vertov. 'Vertov created his own theory of film in response to what he believed the camera was capable of and, in doing so, invented a sort of anatomy of film: the "ciné-eye" (the camera), the "cine-ear" (the radio), the cine-truth (the unique art/truth which could emerge only through film). For Vertov, the reality that the camera was able to perceive was categorically different from that of its human counterpart. '

' Rouch picked up on Vertov's language and used the term ciné-trance to describe the creative state which the observer-filmmaker was able to reach in certain moments of filming. Rouch describes the ciné-trance: "For me then, the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it... it is a matter of training, mastering reflexes as would a gymnast. Thus instead of using the zoom, the cameraman-director can really get into the subject. Leading or following a dancer, priest, or craftsman, he is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear. It is this strange state of transformation that takes place in the filmmaker that I have called, analogously to possession phenomena, ciné-trance.' (CIT: Ciné-Ethnography, 39). 
http://www.maitres-fous.net/glossary.html

' Vertov's driving vision, expounded in his frequent essays, was to capture "film truth"—that is, fragments of actuality which, when organized together, have a deeper truth that cannot be seen with the naked eye. In the "Kino-Pravda" series https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kino-Pravda, Vertov focused on everyday experiences, eschewing bourgeois concerns and filming marketplaces, bars, and schools instead, sometimes with a hidden camera, without asking permission first. ' (Wikipedia)
Our eyes see very little and very badly – so people dreamed up the microscope to let them see invisible phenomena; they invented the telescope...now they have perfected the cine-camera to penetrate more deeply into the visible world, to explore and record visual phenomena so that what is happening now, which will have to be taken account of in the future, is not forgotten. – Provisional Instructions to Kino-Eye Groups, Dziga Vertov, 1926

Kino-Eye, The Writings of Dziga Vertov

Cine-Trance, The Vision of Jean Rouch – Interview at DER
http://der.org/jean-rouch/content/index.php?id=crack_cine

(10) Roland Barthes in La chambre claire, published at Étoile, Gallimard, Le Seuil, Paris, 1980. 'C'est donc ainsi que je dois nomer l'attrait qui la fait exister: une animation. La photo elle-même n'est rien animée (je ne crois pas aux photos “vivantes”) mais elle m'anime: c'est ce qui fait toute aventure' (It is this way that I must name the attraction which makes it exist: an animation. The photo itself is nothing animated (I do not believe in "live" photos) but it animates me: this is what makes any adventure exist).


(12) Mick Eaton, op cit, p. 52, says: «... a cinema in which Rouch plays the shaman, the master of ceremonies at a cinematic ritual, stimulating and entering the trance with his camera as the magician's instrument wielded so that a new truth can be revealed, which is not the "truth" of the pro-filmic event, but the "truth" of cinema itself - cinema is the creation of a new reality».

Gilles Delleuze in L'image-temps, p. 197, Les Editions de Minuit, 1985, Paris, writes this: 'Alors le cinéma peut s'appeler cinéma-vérité, d'autant plus qu'il aura détruit tout modèle du vrai pour devenir créateur, producteur de vérité: ce ne sera pas un cinéma de la vérité, mais la vérité du cinéma' (So, cinema may be called cinema-truth, especially since it has destroyed every model of truth to become a creator, a producer of truth: it will not be a cinema of truth but the truth of cinema).

(13) One of the mysteries of the Dogons of Mali that Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen reveal in their memorable research work is summed up in this: they knew that Sirius, a mythological star for the Egyptians as well, had a satellite – Sirius B – which is invisible to the naked eye, long before an English astronomer of the mid-1900s had discovered. They also knew that Sirius B was composed of a material a thousand times heavier than all the iron on Earth. Science supposes that this satellite would have resulted from a dwarf star, a celestial body that imploded into an ultra-dense matter, on the order of one coin per half ton. http://www.crystalinks.com/dogon.html