THE ADVENTURE OF THE REAL

JEAN ROUCH AND THE CRAFT OF ETHNOGRAPHIC CINEMA

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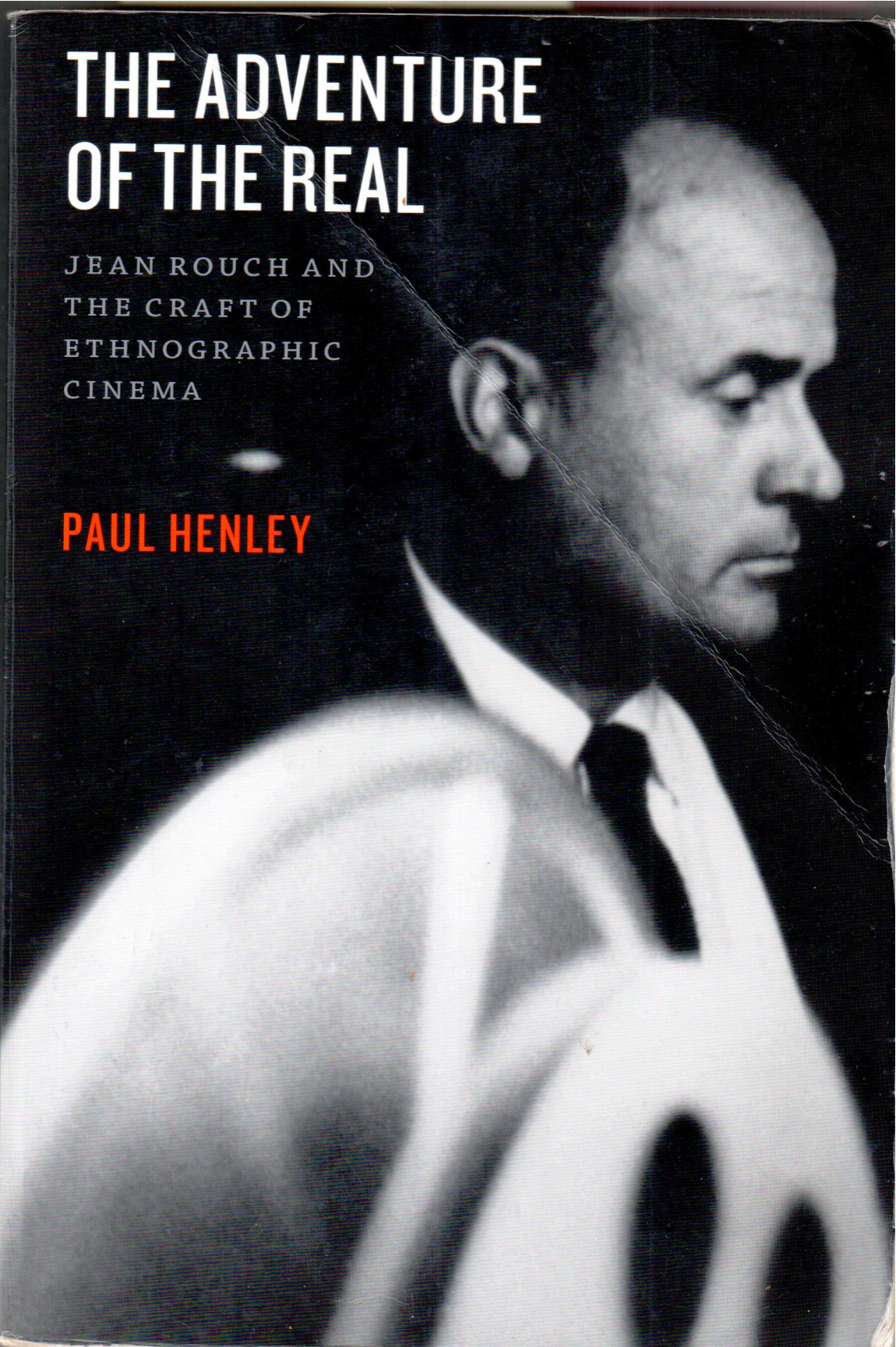

14 : The Fixing of the Truth

What is editing? It's a fixing of the truth. JEAN ROUCH, 1992[1]

In the previous chapter, I suggested that there was something paradoxical about the fact that although Jean Rouch thought that it was essential to work with an editor, he always strove as much as possible to edit in the camera, the logical corollary of which was to make editing in the editing suite unnecessary. There is a similar paradox in his attitude toward the nuts and bolts of editing, which shall be our principal focus here. For, as we shall see, although Rouch may have been a Napoleon of the edit suite, dedicating himself with great energy to the resolution of technical problems, he only availed himself of a limited range of editorial weapons.

As I described in chapter 8, in the course of making *Chronicle of a Summer* in 1960–1961, Rouch became very perplexed about what he called the "devil of editing." As a result of the new portable sound-synchronous technology used in shooting *Chronicle*, the rushes had provided a much more faithful representation of the world than Rouch had been able to achieve in his earlier films. And yet, once back in the edit suite, he discovered, to his dismay, that under pressure from the producer, most of this painstakingly gathered material had to be jettisoned, while what remained was subjected to a radical reordering that showed scant respect for the reality of the original events. Rouch thought that the principles underlying this way of editing had been insufficiently thought through and compared the jettisoning of so much material to the amputation of a limb. The subsequent reordering of the material that remained he compared to Guillaume Apollinaire's practice of composing his poems from snatches of dialogue that he had heard in different bistros or, even more harshly, to the practice of cutting out isolated words from a newspaper and then pasting them together to send an anonymous letter.[2]

In the years immediately following the production of *Chronicle*, as we saw in chapter 9, Rouch tried various experiments to circumvent the dilemmas that the cutting of this film had posed for him. But these did not result in the development of anything like a new grammar of editing appropriate to the cutting of documentary films. On the contrary, they involved rather the minimizing of editorial interventions, relying instead on the inspiration of the cameraperson on location to decide what to include and what to exclude.

These attitudes remained with Rouch for the rest of his life, as exemplified by the rhetorical question-and-answer reproduced in the epigraph to this chapter. Posed some thirty years after his struggle with the "devil of editing" while cutting *Chronicle*, this remark suggests that for all that he subsequently sought to associate his work with Vertov's theory of *cinéma-vérité*, with its associated editorial strategy of montage and the abundant use of special effects, he continued to think of editing not as a means of delivering a distinctive truth about the world but rather as an act whereby, in the process of being transformed, the reality of the world is somehow betrayed.

Interestingly, however, the conclusion that Rouch drew from this, namely, that one should keep editorial interventions to a minimum, he applied only to the cutting of the image track. In relation to the sound track, he continued to be disposed to use the full panoply of tricks of the editor's trade. Furthermore, central to his editorial praxis was the superimposition of a poetic commentary that he always performed himself. So although Rouch may have set great store by preserving the objective integrity of the events represented in the images, the viewer's relationship to those images is always heavily mediated through the subjectivity of his oral performance. In effect, this involved what one might call a fixing of the truth in a somewhat different sense, that is, a fixing as in the final stage of a photographic process, in which a definitive form or coloration is imparted to an image.

The Straight Cut and Progressive Chronology

Not only in his documentaries, but even in his ethnofictions, Rouch showed a marked restraint in the use of visual transitions. He almost always used the straight cut: dissolves, fades, let alone anything so adventurous as a wipe, are virtually unknown in his films. On the other hand, no doubt assisted by his editors, he developed the straight cut into a fine art. Rather than rely, as is the most conventional practice, on moments of stability to make a cut, Rouch learned to use the movement within a shot to assist a transition. In a sense, this strategy was forced upon him by his shooting style. Particularly after he adopted the new technology and became committed to the sequence-shot, his shooting had a ten-

dency to be unstable. It therefore became necessary to turn what might be considered, as one of his editors, Danièle Tessier put it, "an a priori defect in a style" into a virtue and cut according to the rhythm established by the movements of the camera.[3]

A very striking example of such cutting on movement is to be found in one of Rouch's earlier works, *Les Maîtres fous*, which was cut by Suzanne Baron. It occurs about four minutes into the film when a group of *hauka* cult members are seen approaching the camera in a taxi. As the taxi arrives at the level of the camera, there is a cut as it apparently passes the camera and continues down the road. The transition is entirely smooth, and it is only on closer inspection that one realizes that the incoming taxi is green, whereas the outgoing taxi is cream-colored. This remarkable metamorphosis is entirely obscured by the movement through one shot and into the next (fig. 14.1).

Although Rouch intended to invoke Vertov's concept of the *kinoki* in referring to his editors as a "second *ciné-eye*," his editorial style was completely different to that of his "totemic ancestor." Central to Vertov's editing practice was a particular form of montage, of the kind that Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar, in their classic manual on editing identified—even if rather debatably—as "Russian" or "intellectual" montage, that is, a sequence of shots in which each image makes some kind of comment on the adjacent images. They differentiate this from "British and American" montage, that is, a sequence of brief shots that, taken together as a series, merely provide information or context in a time-efficient manner.[4] But Rouch, with a number of significant exceptions, including those from *Les Maîtres fous* that I shall consider below, did not employ montage of any kind in his films. He also usually eschewed the special effects that Vertov absolutely relished, such as slow-, fast- or reverse motion, time-lapse cinematography, split screens, superimpositions, and so on. The only exception that I can think of here is the use of slow motion in the research films that Rouch made in conjunction with the ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget.[5]

Rouch was also very restrained in his manipulation of time in the edit suite. Cuts to different times or places outside the cumulative temporal diegesis of a film are a rarity. In editing his ethnofictions and also *Chronicle of a Summer*, he often departed from the real chronology of the rushes, but they were then reconstructed so as to represent a normally progressive, cumulative chronology within the diegetic world of the film. With the exception of a totally obscure flash-forward at the beginning of his late film, *Madame L'Eau*, I cannot think of any film in which Rouch uses a flashback or flash forward as a "hook" at the beginning of a film.

FIGURE 14.1. *Les Maîtres fous*, A green taxi approaches (*top*) but through cutting on movement (*middle*) most viewers do not notice that it is a cream-colored taxi that emerges (*bottom*).

Usually, a Rouch film unfolds in time in a straightforward, cumulative manner from the first frame to the last.

However, as I have suggested, there are some important exceptions, of varying levels of sophistication. At the simplest level, Rouch does use illustrative cuts to another time and place on occasion, as in his late Dogon film, *Funérailles à Bongo*, when there is a cut from a nighttime shot of the elders chanting the *tegué*, the ancient sayings about the creation of the world, to a long shot of animal skulls that was clearly taken at some other time and place and over which the elders' chanting is continued. There are some more elaborate examples in *The Lion Hunters*, such as when Rouch cuts from the preparations for the hunt to show the hunters some months earlier collecting the plants from which they will make poison to paint on their arrowheads. Later on in the film, as they are preparing their traps, there is an even more startling cut to a metal workshop in Ghana, where an anonymous blacksmith is shown making the traps. But perhaps the best-known example in Rouch's work of such an editorial sortie to another time and place occurs just prior to the famous sequence at the end of *Moi, un Noir* in which Robinson talks about his Indochina experience as he walks along the banks of the lagoon at Abidjan with his friend Petit Jules. This scene begins with them sitting down, looking out over the water, which reminds Robinson of his childhood and leads him to reflect on the contrast between his happiness then and his present troubles. There is then a striking cut to an extended sequence of idyllic shots of children bathing in the river at Niamey, whom Robinson identifies in the voice-over as himself and his friends when he was young.

This last case could almost be considered an example of the rather different form of temporal excursus from the diegesis represented by the dream sequences earlier in *Moi, un Noir,* in which Robinson imagines, first, that he is a boxing champion, and later, that he is being welcomed into the bed of his girlfriend, Dorothy Lamour. But though they are meant to be dreams, in terms of their general visual style, these sequences are entirely realistic and within themselves conform to a conventional cumulative chronology. In this regard, they are no different stylistically from the rest of the film. The same is true of the dream sequence in which Raymond and Nadine get married in *La Pyramide humaine.* It could be argued that this makes them all the more effective since the viewer is not entirely sure until the dreams are over that they are, in fact, dreams. As such, Rouch could be said to be putting into practice the Surrealist project to break down the barrier between dreams and reality. But stylistically speaking, it remains the case that although Rouch may have been inspired by Salvador Dalí and shared the latter's Surrealist attitudes, his cinematic dream world is much less bizarre than the dream worlds that Dalí himself conceived in his collaborations with Luis Buñuel, and later with Albert Hitchcock.

However, there is one film, *Les Maîtres fous*, in which there are numerous exceptions to these generalizations about Rouch's conservatism regarding the manipulation of time. This film has a very tight, tripartite structure, which, in itself, is unusual in his work. But it is the frequent use of montage that is its most distinctive feature. In the first of the three sections, there is a prolonged montage sequence of the kind that Reisz and Millar refer to as "British and American," in which the great variety of different jobs that Nigerien migrants carry out around Accra are summarized in a series of brief shots. The third section, in which the adepts of the *hauka* cult are shown back at their jobs the day after the ceremony, also features a montage sequence. In this case, however, there is a certain "Russian" flavor to the montage since the shots of them working away at their everyday jobs, smiling broadly, are intercut with shots of the same men the day before, in a state of trance, gorging themselves on dog meat with spittle running down their chins. The use of a visual flashback of this kind toward the end of a film to tie up the narrative and achieve a sense of closure is a much-used editorial device, but it is one that is highly unusual, if not actually unique, in Rouch's work.

However, it is in the central and most lengthy section of the film, dealing with the *hauka* cult ceremony itself, that there is the most striking example of "Russian" montage. For the most part, this section is cut in accordance with a conventional progressive chronology of the kind that is very common in Rouch's films. But suddenly, in the middle of this section, there is a cut from the cracking of an egg on the head of the statue of the *hauka* spirit Governor, situated alongside the dancing mediums in trance, to the "real" British governor reviewing colonial troops at the opening of parliament in Accra. This is perhaps the most-discussed cut in the whole of Rouch's oeuvre, though for reasons that I discussed at some length in chapter 7, its precise meaning is debatable. But whatever its significance, there is no doubt that some connection is implied in the juxtaposition of the two shots.[6]

Given Rouch's regular evocation of Vertov, it is tempting to conclude that these examples of "Russian" montage in *Les Maîtres fous* must represent some kind of debt to his "totemic ancestor." But it was not until some years after the cutting of *Les Maîtres fous* that Rouch started to show any particular enthusiasm for Vertovian ideas. Catherine Russell has suggested that these transitions should be considered rather as examples of Eisensteinian "dialectical" montage. This certainly ties in with Suzanne Baron's reported views about the importance of the "punch" delivered by the first frame of a shot, since this was also one of Eisenstein's

editing principles. But whatever the precise nature of these examples of montage may be, the number of exceptions to Rouch's normal editorial praxis in *Les Maîtres fous* is so great that it seems very likely that they were due, at least in part, to the influence of Baron. Sadly, as she is also deceased and Rouch himself, to the best of my knowledge, did not talk or write about this particular aspect of their collaboration, this is a matter that is unlikely ever to be resolved.[7]

The *Trompe-l'oreille* and the "Opium of the Cinema"

Although Rouch barely mentions sound editing in his manifesto-essay "The Camera and Man," it was an aspect of post-production that interested him greatly. Such was the importance that he gave to sound editing that he believed that one should work with two independent edit-suites, one for picture, the other for sound. This indeed was the arrangement that he set up for himself in the Musée de l'Homme, with a film-editing suite fashioned out of a small corner at the head of the stairwell opposite the entrance to the museum cinema (as shown in fig. 13.2 above), while a sound-editing suite was set up in an equally small space, hidden behind the screen of the cinema (fig. 14.2).[8]

In the same way that Rouch set great store by improvisation and experimentation in shooting and picture editing, so he did in sound editing. He particularly enjoyed experimenting with special effects. As Dominique Villain observes, there is something rather paradoxical about the fact that although Rouch was generally averse to using special visual effects, he was very partial to what she calls the *trompe-l'oreille*, literally "ear-fooling," that is, a sound effect intended to persuade the listener into believing something about the soundscape of a scene that is not, in fact, the case.[9]

As one might well anticipate, Rouch did not like to use off-the-peg special sound effects bought from a library and would make a point of recording his own. Sometimes these additional effects would be entirely naturalistic—a tin can rolling on the ground, a child crying, the sound of distant traffic recorded out of the window of the edit suite itself—and they would be used merely to "sweeten," in other words, enrich or touch up the sound track. But in other cases, he intended these additional sounds to have some more metaphorical effect. A well-known example occurs in *Jaguar*: as Damouré travels into Accra in the back of an open-topped truck, he imagines himself being welcomed by crowds of people as if he were some kind of hero. On the sound track, one hears the roar of a crowd cheering and he waves his hand, as if he were a politician acknowledging his supporters, but the picture shows that in diegetic reality, there is barely a soul by the side of the road.

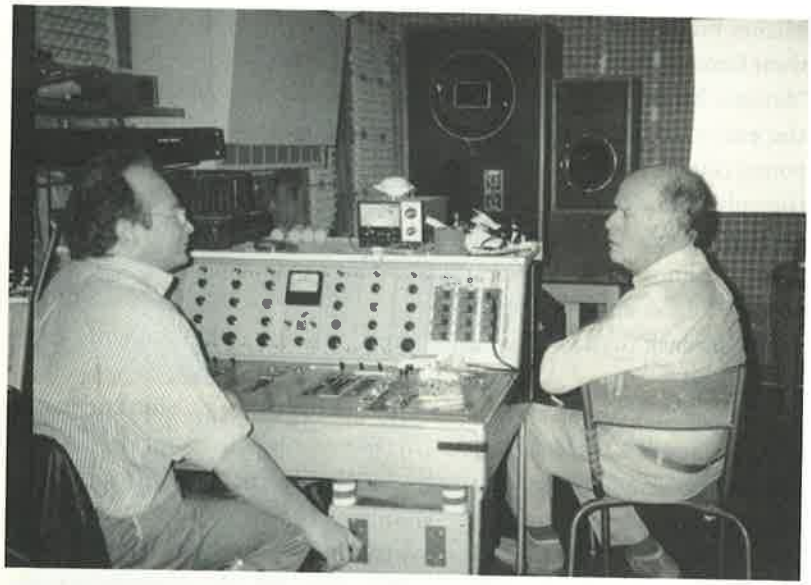

FIGURE 14.2. Rouch in the small sound-mixing suite behind the cinema screen of the Musée de l'Homme in 1990, with Patrick Genet, the sound recordist on a number of his later films. © Françoise Foucault.

Rouch was particularly fond of using the sound of birds and wind in a metaphorical way. Sometimes the "bird" sounds would be of his own manufacture: Villain reports that he once created a "bird" sound by making a recording of feet crunching on the gravel paths of the Jardin du Luxembourg and then playing it back at half-speed.[10] There are some interesting examples of the metaphorical use of both bird and wind sounds in *Madame L'Eau*. Relatively early in the film, as the "shameless Bella shepherd" Tallou flirts with Winneke, the lovely Dutch chauffeuse of their "jaguar" car, there is a lively chattering of tropical birds on the sound track. Tallou gives her a ring, declaring that they will always be brother and sister, but the tumultuous birds suggest that there is another agenda behind the gesture. Somewhat later, Philo Bregstein shows Damouré and Lam around a museum display about slavery in Africa. Even though they are plainly inside, as they look at the gruesome prints on the walls, there is an ominous wailing of wind in the background.

These metaphorical uses of sound effects can be contrasted with what might be termed a "structural" use. These are not common in Rouch's films, but there are a number of particularly striking examples. A relatively simple example occurs in *Chronicle of a Summer*. In the last shot of this film, after Rouch and Morin have said goodbye, and Morin is heading off down the Champs Elysées pursued by the "walking camera" of

Michel Brault, one hears the voices of Nadine and Marceline repeating their famous question from the scene right at the beginning of the film, "Are you happy, Monsieur? Are you happy?" These voices are mixed with the enchantingly melodious music produced by the music box of the young couple, the Cuénets, also featured early in the film, who had been the only respondents to reply positively to Nadine and Marceline's question. Whatever the doubts of the other subjects of the film, the effect, which is almost subliminal, is to make the viewer feel happy, not just on account of the euphonious character of the music, but also because, by taking us back to the beginning of the film, a satisfying sense of closure is achieved.[11]

A somewhat more complex example linking the beginning and end of a film is found in *Les Maîtres fous*. This film opens with a shot, taken from above, of a *hampi*, the large pottery vase that is central to the traditional Songhay *yenendi* rain-making ceremony. Based on a Kodakchrome slide taken in Ayorou by Rouch on his way to the Gold Coast in early 1954, this shot captures an important moment in the ceremony and shows a number of men with a finger placed on the edge of the vase.[12] This image of the epitome of tradition is accompanied on the sound track by calypso-like "highlife" music, which was the epitome of what was then modernity. Right at the end of the film, there is a similar juxtaposition, but this time, the other way around. Here, in the image, the adepts have returned to their everyday lives as laborers digging a trench for the Accra Waterworks company. But on the sound track, there is the plangent wailing of the *godye*, the single string violin by means of which the Songhay call the spirits. In both instances, the conjunction of sounds and images serves to underline a more general point that Rouch sought to make in his migration films, namely, that the Songhay migrants were part of both "modern" and "traditional" worlds and were, in fact, living in both at the same time (fig. 14.3).

This use of nonsynchronous music in *Les Maîtres fous* provides yet another example of how this film is unusual in the Rouchian canon. For, generally speaking, Rouch was highly circumspect about using nonsynchronous music in his ethnographic documentaries, be it intra- or extradiegetically.[13] In "The Camera and Man," he refers to music as the "opium of cinema," declaring forcefully that it "can put one to sleep, lets bad cuts pass unnoticed or gives artificial rhythm to images that have no rhythm and never will have any." The story of his own *prise de conscience* about the inappropriateness of extradiegetic music was one that he particularly liked to tell. As described in chapter 3, it took place in the course of an open-air screening of *Bataille sur le grand fleuve* at Ayorou in 1954, during the same visit in which he took the photograph of the *hampi* used as the

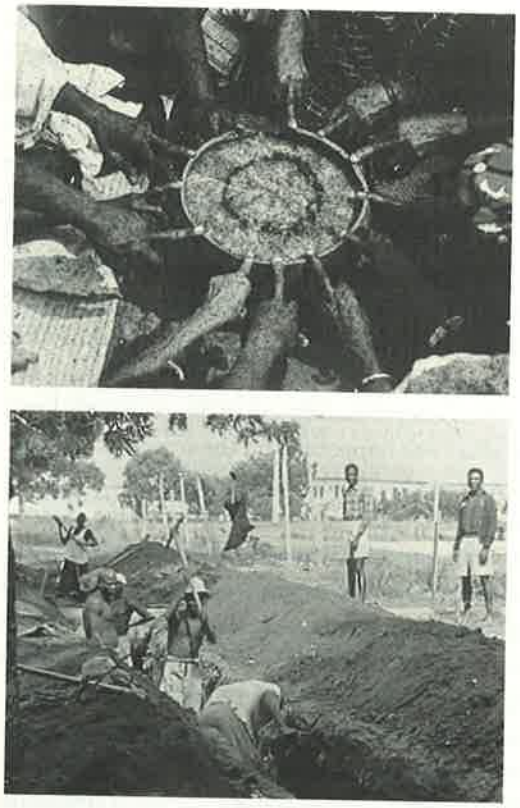

FIGURE 14.3. The aural "book ending" of *Les Maîtres fous*. Over the first image, a scene from the traditional *yenendi* rain-making ceremony (*top*), one hears cosmopolitan "high-life" music; over the last image, showing the migrants' experience of modernity (*bottom*), one hears the traditional single string *godye* violin calling the spirits. Through these juxtapositions, the migrants are shown to be simultaneously living in both traditional and modern worlds.

first image of *Les Maîtres fous*. Even though it was a local hunting melody recorded on the portable Sgubbi, the audience objected to the superimposition of this music on the hippopotamus hunt that is the main focus of the film on the grounds that it would supposedly frighten away the hippopotami. Rouch concluded that thereafter he would have to be more careful in his use of such extradiegetic music. Yet he did not rule it out entirely and in "The Camera and Man," he approves its use if it "really supports an action."[14]

However, Rouch only applied these restrictions on the use of music to his documentaries. In his ethnofictions, there are many examples of nonsynchronous music, mostly in an extradiegetic form. In *Jaguar*, for example, the "Jaguar" hit song provides the leitmotif of the whole film, and is even repeated again briefly in *Petit à Petit*, which is essentially a reprise of *Jaguar*, in order to reaffirm the connection between the two films. But Rouch's most elaborate use of music is surely in *Moi, un Noir*. No doubt encouraged by Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte, who is an accomplished musician as well as the editor of this film, several different kinds of extradiegetic music are combined in the sound track, including a number of Carib-

bean and African songs as well as French ballads sung in an African accent. Working with an editor may often have involved a "harsh dialogue" in Rouch's view, but in this case, it resulted in a particularly melodious outcome.

Narration as Inspired Performance

Although Rouch did sometimes use music in his ethnographic documentaries, much more important in this genre of his filmmaking was narration, which he always performed himself. This narration could fulfill various different functions: it could provide essential contextualizing information, it could offer some interpretation—usually relatively low-key—of the significance of what was happening on the screen or it could paraphrase what was being said or chanted by the protagonists. On occasion, he would also use narration to perform what Tessier rather charmingly calls a "pirouette," by which she means a segue linking together two otherwise rather disparate sequences.[15]

As in all his filmmaking praxis, improvisation was a very important aspect of narration for Rouch, both in the intial conception of the words and then in performing them for the purposes of recording. In general, Rouch was a very able oral performer, even when speaking completely off the cuff. His style of speaking in public, whatever the context, was invariably elegant and poetic: his impromptu commentaries at the Bilan du film ethnographique festival will be remembered by all those who had the pleasure of listening to them. Although he often failed to answer the question and had a tendency to repeat the same familiar stories, the responses that he gave in his many interviews were always engagingly eloquent. All these qualities he brought to the formulation and performance of his narrations.

In the early films, Rouch's narrations have a reedy, declamatory quality and involve an almost exaggerated pronunciation of every syllable, a style that Rouch himself traced to his attendance at the Surrealist poetry readings of Paul Éluard and Jean-Louis Barrault in the 1930s.[16] Later, the narrations became more mellow, but they retained a certain lyrical quality, much admired, it seems, by French listeners, though regarded, it would probably be true to say, with some reservation by Anglo-Saxon audiences accustomed to more dispassionate narrational styles.

For Rouch, dispassionate narration was anathema. In the same way that he believed that effective shooting required intense participation in the world of the subjects, so too did effective narration require intense engagement with the film in its edited form. Just as filmmakers should seek to harmonize their shooting technique to the movements of the protagonists before their lenses, so too should narrators seek to harmonize their tone of voice and style of delivery to the subject matter of the film. In "The Camera and Man," he deplores the dry, supposedly "scientific" voice-overs produced by anthropologists "not wanting to confess their passion for the people they study." Equally unacceptable were voice-overs informed by "an ideological discourse through which the filmmaker exports notions of revolution that he has not been able to act upon in his own country." Both these forms of narration, Rouch believed, undermined the cinematic potential of a film:

> As long as an anthropologist filmmaker, out of scientism or ideological shame, hides himself behind a comfortable kind of incognito, he will ruin his films irreparably and they will join the documents in archives which only the specialists see.

It was precisely because he believed that a successful narration required an intense subjective engagement by the filmmaker that he usually insisted on narrating all his own films, even the English-language versions, despite his self-attributed "bad" English.[17]

As Jeanette DeBouzek has noted, in performing his voice-overs, Rouch assumed a variety of different forms of speech and tones of voice in accordance with which voice he was paraphrasing and/or the context of the particular passage of narration. The overall effect was what she refers to as "a cacophony of mixed voices."[18] These voices include, at one extreme, relatively even-toned ethnographic contextualization and at the other, reiterative paraphrasing of ritual chanting, in which Rouch himself adopts the inspired tone of voice of the protagonist(s). When recording the original French voice-over for *The Lion Hunters*, he learned from the editor, Annie Tresgot, that in order to differentiate these various voices, he should read the contextualizing commentary sitting down, but when he was paraphrasing the chants of the hunters, he should stand up, since this would have the effect of making his voice go up a couple of notes.[19]

But in many instances, the genres of speech overlap in Rouch's narrations as he often provides quasi-sociological commentary in reiterative poetic tones as if it were a ritual chant. An example of this occurs in the last section of *Les Tambours d'avant*, as Rouch seeks to underline the intergenerational continuity represented by the fact that the ceremony is being attentively watched by school-age children. Assuming a poetic timbre, Rouch intones, over the image of the *zima* priests negotiating with the spirit Kure the Hyena:

Sorciers, fils de sorciers, ancêtres de sorciers, d'un pouvoir plus fort que celui des marabouts [Sorcerers, sons of sorcerers, ancestors of sorcerers, of a power greater than that of the marabouts]

After Hadyo, Spirit of the Fulani Slave, has made her entrance, he returns to the theme as the camera withdraws to show the young people looking on from the edge of the plaza:

Pères de sorciers, grandpères de sorciers, les dieux maintenant attendent les sacrifices [Fathers of sorcerers, grandfathers of sorcerers, the gods now await the sacrifices]

The combination of the incantatory style of delivery and the reiteration, coupled with a poetic vocabulary that contrasts with the more sober sociological terminology that one might use when writing about the same event ("sorcerers" as opposed to "mediums" and "gods" rather than mere "spirits"), serves to give the film itself a ritualistic aura that mirrors and echoes the ritual character of the event that it presents.

In his interviews, Rouch liked to emphasize the spontaneity of these narrational performances. He told DeBouzek that they were totally improvised "according to chance, following my unconscious," and she suggests that, as such, they are analogous to the automatic writing of the Surrealist poets.[20] This was a point that Rouch particularly stressed in relation to the narration of *Les Maîtres fous*. He once described this as his first experience of entering the Vertovian ciné-trance, for, as he performed the narration, he felt as if he had been possessed by the process and had assumed a different persona. Certainly, as various authors have noted, the narration is of crucial importance in holding this film together. Others, however, have questioned whether this degree of integration between narration and action could really be achieved on the basis of an entirely improvised voice-over.[21]

A closer examination of how the narration of *Les Maîtres fous* came about reveals that although there was certainly an important element of improvisation involved in the final performance, as so often with Rouch's shooting and editing praxes, there was also a considerable degree of preparation beforehand. Even before he returned from the Gold Coast in 1955, Rouch worked together with one of the priests of the cult to produce an approximate translation of what the mediums were saying, which was often in a difficult-to-understand glossolalic combination of European and indigenous languages. Once back in France, he paraphrased these translations into French and combined these with more informational commentary points to produce a first version of the narration. It was this version that he rehearsed on at least two separate occasions when he screened rough cuts of the film, including the disastrous screening at the Musée de l'Homme and in the more private screening for the Hollywood film noir director Jules Dassin. It seems likely that he would also have rehearsed this version at other screenings of the rough cut to the "freemasonry" of Parisian editors or to his friends. Certainly, by the time he screened the rough cut to Dassin, it must have been reasonably well honed since Dassin suggested that it should be retained and used more or less as it was in the final film. But once Suzanne Baron became involved, as Rouch himself reports, he "began to work on the script with the editor," suggesting further, more carefully considered, refinements. It seems that Baron then took this script and used it as a basis for fine-cutting the image track, thereby accounting for the organic connection between narration and action.[22]

However, even with these adjustments, the narration script was not entirely finalized and in the definitive recording, there was still a need for some element of improvisation since Rouch had not decided how he should end it. The narration was recorded by André Cotin, a highly experienced sound engineer. Cotin encouraged Rouch to stand up and placed a microphone on a stand just below his mouth, carefully adjusting it so that Rouch's voice came out more base than normal. Cotin had heard Rouch perform the narration without using a text at a previous presentation of the film, and for this final recording, he encouraged him to perform it in the same way, making sure that he looked at the screen where a mute version of the film would be playing and speaking as if confiding a secret to the microphone.

Rouch was very nervous since, given the technology of the time, if he had made any mistake or one of the splices on the film had come apart, they would have had to begin all over again. He later recalled how as he began to speak, he felt that he had become possessed by someone other than himself. He could hear himself speaking in a strange voice that reminded him of the reedy voices of Paul Éluard and Jean-Louis Barrault as they performed at the Surrealist poetry reading that he had attended in 1937. It was this that he considered his first experience of the Vertovian "ciné-trance." But although he stammered a little, he managed to get through the whole film in a single take, even finding some words for the ending. These make up the well-known concluding passage in which he speculates whether the *hauka* mediums have found a way of absorbing the "mental disorders" of urban living that Europeans have yet to discover. Although, in retrospect, he considered this passage to be a little "awkward" and would later disclaim the general sentiments underlying it, he was still very pleased with the fact of it, since it had arrived "just like that," confirming once again his Surrealism-inspired faith in the

value of spontaneity. However, it was a spontaneity for which a great deal of groundwork had been laid, and this would become the model for all his narrational performances in the future.[23]

The Master's Voice

When Jean Rouch first started making films, before the advent of portable synchronous-sound technology, there was no way of using the voices of the subjects themselves in an ethnographic documentary, except as postsynchronized voice-over. As described in chapters 5 and 6, this was the strategy that Rouch used very successfully in his ethnofictions *Jaguar* and *Moi, un Noir.* But once more portable synchronous systems became available in the 1960s, Rouch abandoned this post-synchronization strategy in making his ethnofictions and allowed the protagonists to speak in synch.

In the latter part of his career, Rouch also began to use synchronous speech in the series of personal portraits that he shot from the mid-1970s. But prior to that, with one very significant exception, even when synchronous speech was technically possible, he did not make use of it in his documentary films. This point is particularly pertinent to Rouch's Dogon films shot in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which represent his last major corpus of ethnographic work and which I discussed at some length in chapter 11. By this time, synchronous recording of voices on location was well established in documentary practice generally, partly as a result of Rouch's own pioneering efforts in this regard. But throughout this lengthy series of films among the Dogon, Rouch continued to use his own voice to paraphrase everything that his subjects were saying, whether it was ritual chanting or everyday speech. Through the many hours of these films, only on a few very rare occasions does a Dogon subject directly address the camera in synch.

The significant exception alluded to above was, of course, *Chronicle of a Summer*, which is covered from end to end with synchronized speech and is, moreover, widely regarded as establishing a new technical milestone in this regard. The exceptional character of *Chronicle* was something that arose in an interview that Rouch gave at the time of a screening of a selection of his films at the Margaret Mead Film Festival in New York in 1977. The interviewers press Rouch on why it is that the characters in *Chronicle* are shot in close-up, talking about complex ideas whereas in his African ethnographic films, the subjects are often shown in long shots engaged in action rather than speaking. The interviewers put it to him that whereas *Chronicle* emphasizes how its European subjects think, Rouch's ethnographic films on Africa emphasize how the subjects

act. The implicit thrust of the interviewers' questions is that there is an unacknowledged racism in this differential use of synchronous speech. Given Rouch's pioneering role in providing a platform for African voices in his ethnofictions, not to mention the African voices in *Chronicle* itself, this would be a very harsh judgment. But although Rouch acknowledges that the interviewers are "asking good questions" and ones that he has not been asked before, the explanations that he offers are not very convincing.[24]

Although he was not able to mount a strong defense of his practice on this occasion, it would be most unjust to accuse Rouch of racism on this or any other matter. Nor is there any necessity to do so since there are a number of alternative reasons for the difference perceived by the interviewers. The first, and most obvious, reason has to do with language itself. For, true to the anthropological tradition of Griaule and Dieterlen in which he was trained, Rouch conducted most of his work in French. According to his closest associates, although he regularly visited the Songhay-Zerma for over fifty years, he never became entirely fluent in their language. As he himself admitted, he was "not very good at languages."[25] If his knowledge of Songhay was limited, we can surmise that his knowledge of Dogon was even more so. The reason why he was able to give a voice to the protagonists of his ethnofictions was simply that they all spoke in French. Damouré was Sorko, Lam was Fulani, and Tallou was Bella: they all spoke different first languages, but because they were all able to speak French, as could the principal sound recordist Moussa Hamidou, a Zerma, they could all work together on Rouch's ethnofictions.

However, when it came to Rouch's ethnographic documentaries, the great majority of which were about ritual performances of one kind or another, the subjects were clearly not speaking French. In the latter stages of his career, Rouch could have addressed this problem by the use of subtitles. By the time of the publication of "The Camera and Man" in 1975, the use of subtitles had become commonplace in North American ethnographic cinema, following the pioneering use of this device by John Marshall and Tim Asch when they were cutting Marshall's Kalahari material in the early 1960s.[26] But although Rouch is polite about Marshall's use of subtitles in the essay, he explains that he himself does not employ them because firstly, they "mutilate" the image and secondly, they cannot capture all the subtleties of meaning that are typically a feature of ritual speech, referring here to examples from *Un lion nommé "L'Américain"*, which he had recently been cutting. He acknowledges that paraphrasing might not be able to capture all these subtleties either, but argues that the answer is not to resort to subtitling. Instead, he suggests, these more

recondite meanings should be elucidated through a "short pamphlet . . . which should henceforth accompany every ethnographic film."[27]

However, none of these reasons for eschewing subtitles really stand up to close scrutiny. Provided the camera operator leaves room for them at the bottom of the screen, subtitles need not obstruct the image and while they may not capture all the nuances of ritual speech, they are usually more than adequate to capture the essence of most other forms of speech. Even in the case of ritual speech, it would surely be better for the viewer to have some idea of their meaning, even if no more than partial, as opposed to none at all. Although the more arcane meanings of ritual speech could doubtless be thoroughly elucidated in a companion text, the reality is that notwithstanding the many pious statements as to their importance, accompanying texts are very rarely produced by ethnographic documentarists. Certainly none was produced by Rouch himself for *Un lion nommé "L'Américain"*.

In an interview with Colette Piault published in 1996, Rouch came up with yet another reason for not using subtitles, namely, that his often illiterate African subjects would not be able to read them. But as Piault rightly points out, this reason does not necessarily hold much water either. For if the subtitled film was about their own society, the Africans in the audience would not need to read the subtitles anyway: indeed, those audiences would need neither subtitles nor a paraphrasing voice-over to understand the film.[28] On the other hand, as Rouch argued elsewhere, in the multilingual states of modern Africa, by using a lingua franca, even if it was one of the former colonial languages, one would make a film about one ethnic group comprehensible by the members of any other ethnic group, even if they were illiterate.[29]

However, more important than the pros and cons of subtitling per se are the limitations imposed on Rouch's documentary repertoire by his preference for the narrational paraphrasing of his subjects' speech. For while his poetic declamatory style worked reasonably well when he was paraphrasing speech that was itself declamatory and poetic, as is the case with ritual chanting, for example, it was much less stylistically successful when it involved paraphrasing everyday speech, and more or less unworkable in situations in which there were several voices involved. Given that everyday interaction usually does involve several different voices, this effectively prevented Rouch from making any documentaries about everyday life unless they were in French—as was the case with *Chronicle of a Summer*, but very few of his other documentary films.

In his interview with Colette Piault, Rouch acknowledged that perhaps subtitling was not as bad as he had previously averred and he recognized that when he himself went to see a foreign feature film at the

cinema, he preferred a subtitled version to one that had been dubbed. He even acknowledged that the subtitling of his French-language feature films, *Dionysos* and *Madame L'Eau*, into Italian and English, respectively, had actually added to the films because the subtitling had brought out certain meanings that would have escaped the viewer relying on speech alone.[30] But by this stage of his life, Rouch's career as an ethnographic filmmaker was effectively over, and this late conversion to the merits of subtitling, if such it really was, was therefore in vain.

Yet even if this conversion had come much earlier in Rouch's life, it seems doubtful to me that he would have ever have been able to make films about the everyday life of his African subjects anyway. Most prosaically, given his professed linguistic limitations, he perhaps would have had a certain difficultly in following the cut and thrust of their conversations. More importantly, everyday interaction simply did not lend itself well to Rouch's general filmmaking praxis. For this, as I have stressed throughout this part of the book, was all about performance, and on both sides of the lens. But the everyday, for all the dramaturgical metaphors used by some sociologists in describing it, is more about banal strutting and fretting than virtuoso performance. There was little then in the everyday to which Rouch might adjust his own performance.[31]

For Rouch, the very essence of filmmaking was an improvised but highly authored performance at all stages of the filmmaking process: in the field while shooting, in the edit suite while cutting, and in the sound studio while narrating. This authored performance even continued after the films had been released, since, for Rouch, it was very much part of the process of making a film to tour around the world with it afterward and to give improvised verbal performances about its significance at every screening, be it from the front of the cinema immediately afterward, or later in the many interviews that he conceded to his admirers. In short, from start to finish in the making of a film, there was an entirely firm claim to authorship at the heart of the Rouchian praxis. As we shall see in the next chapter, an awareness of this point is crucial to a proper understanding of his conception of "shared anthropology."

16. Devanne (1998).

17. At the time of writing, Yoyotte's latest film was *Deuxième souffle* (2007), directed by Alain Corneau, which represents a reworking of the 1966 film of the same name directed by Jean-Pierre Melville. Among many other recent films, she also cut *Himalaya* (1999), the quasi-ethnographic feature directed by Eric Valli. See http://movies.nytimes.com/person/117714/Marie-Josephe-Yoyotte/filmography.

18. See chapter 6, p. 99.

19. Villain (1991), 86–87.

20. Villain (1991), 88 ; Colleyn (1992), 44 ; Colette Piault (1996b), 156.

21. Jutra (1961b), 40. See p. 138 above.

22. Annie Tresgot, personal communication, November 2008.

23. Villain (1991), 87–88; Philippe Costantini, personal communication, October 2008.

24. Villain (1991), 88.

25. Tessier (1996), 168.

26. Villain (1991), 86.

27. Villain (1991), 33–34. See chapter 12, pp. 257–258.

28. Villain (1991), 16.

29. See *Bregstein* (1978); Taylor (2003), 146.

30. Bregstein (2007), 173.

31. Tessier (1996), 168; Prédal (1996i), 222.

32. A cutting ratio is the ratio of the total duration of the rushes to the duration of the definitive version of the edited film.

33. Villain (1991), 87n.

34. Alan Marcus, director of the Film Studies Programme at the University of Aberdeen, informs me that "shooting ratios in feature films . . . can vary widely, but the norm for a Hollywood studio picture might be from 8 to 1 to 12 to 1. An independent picture would be lower—perhaps 6 to 1" (pers. comm., 2008).

35. Tessier (1996), 168; Prédal (1996i), 221.

36. Tessier (1996), 168–169, Villain (1991), 35.

37. See Villain (1991), 94. Villain reports, no doubt on Rouch's authority, that this encounter took place while Rouch and Baron were cutting *Les Maîtres fous*. But as *Les Vacances de M. Hulot* was released in France in February 1953, and *Les Maîtres fous* was not edited until 1955, I suspect that it might have been the earlier film on which Rouch and Baron collaborated, *Les Fils de l'eau*.

38. See appendix 1, pp. 366–367, for an explanation of the terms "double band" and "married print."

39. Villain (1991), 42–44.

40. Exactly who was responsible for the suggestion that Jaguar should be voiced over by Damouré and Lam remains unclear. According to some sources, this idea originated with Roberto Rossellini after he saw a preliminary version of the film, possibly the same one shown to Braunberger and Dassin (see Mundell 2004).

41. See Fieschi and Téchiné (1968), 17; Colette Piault (1996), 153 and (2007), 46.

42. See Bregstein (2007), 173.

Chapter Fourteen

1. Colleyn (1992), 44. Rouch's exact words in French are "C'est quoi le montage? C'est un trucage de la vérité."

2. Rohmer and Marcorelles (1963), 2–6.

3. Tessier (1996), 168.

4. See Reisz and Millar (1999), 112–113. I am grateful to Lucien Taylor, who read a draft of this chapter, for pointing out the limitations of the Reisz and Miller distinctions based on nationalist labels. Not only are there significant differences between such classical Russian exponents of montage as Vertov and Eisenstein, but their cutting strategies are very different from those of current Russian directors, such as Alexander Sokurov, whose *Russian Ark* (2002) does not contain a single cut. However, if one takes into account the time at which Reisz and Millar were writing and in the absence of any widely accepted contemporary classification of styles of montage, I feel that their distinction, although inadequate, is sufficient for the limited purposes of this chapter.

5. These films include *Batteries Dogon* (1966) *Porto-Novo* (1971), and *Horendi* (1972). See appendix 1 for further details, pp. 397, 390, and 383–384.

6. See pp. 110–113.

7. See Russell (1999), 344; Villain (1991), 88. Luc de Heusch, a close friend and admirer of both Rouch and Baron, believes that her role in *Les Maîtres fous* has been widely underestimated. "Jean was a very good storyteller," he commented to me privately in October 2004, "but he was not really an editor."

8. According to legend, during the Second World War, this space was used by the Resistance network based at the museum for producing anti-Nazi propaganda leaflets.

9. Villain (1991), 42.

10. Villain (1991), 42.

11. One is reminded of Jean-François Lyotard's general comment about narrative that "all endings are happy endings" when they involve the final resolution of a dissonance (cf. Pinney 1992, 26).

12. Rouch (1995c), 427.

13. It is conventional in screen studies to identify two different kinds of nonsynchronous music within a film: intradiegetic (coming from elsewhere within the film, as with the Cuénets's music box in the last sequence of *Chronicle*) and extradiegetic (coming from completely outside the film, as with the "highlife" music in opening shot of *Les Maîtres fous*). See Hayward (2000), 84–85.

14. Rouch (1995a), 93–94. See pp. 64–65 for a more extended discussion of the reasons for the Sorko fishermen's objections. Interestingly, it does not seem to have occurred to either Rouch or the Sorko that the hippopotami would have been frightened off by his commentary voice!

15. Tessier (1996), 169.

16. Rouch (1995c), 427. See chapter 2, pp. 20–21.

17. Rouch (1995), 91–92, 96. Rouch came to insist on narrating the commentary of the English-language versions of his films, after his disappointment with the quality of the narration of *The Lion Hunters,* which was performed by a Canadian voice artist who injected what Rouch considered "false drama" into his performance (Marshall and Adams 2003, 202). However, if this narration is indeed a little awkward, far worse is the English-language narration of *Madame L'Eau.* This narration features many very Rouchian poetic flights of fancy that it would not be easy to translate into meaningful English under any circumstances, let alone for the purposes of a film narration. But what makes this narration particularly painful is the droll and distanced style of delivery adopted by the voice artist. This is very different from Rouch's own engaging manner, which had the effect of carrying the listener over any ellipses in the coherence of what he was saying.

18. DeBouzek (1989), 308. See also Colette Piault (1996), 150–151, and (2007), 44–46, who identifies "at least" four different types of commentary styles in Rouch's work.

19. C. Piault (1996b), 152, and (2007), 46.

20. De Bouzek (1989), 308.

21. Rouch (1995c), 427; Grimshaw (2001), 99; Russell (1999), 224.

22. Devanne (1998).

23. See Devanne (1998); Rouch (1995c), 427; Georgakas et al. (2003), 216. In recording the narration of *The Lion Hunters* a decade later, Rouch also prepared a text based on a rehearsal but then in performance allowed himself to become so possessed by the process that he put the text aside and assuming another persona and another accent, gave himself over completely to the commentary. See Colette Piault (1996b), 152, and (2007), 46.

24. Georgakas et al. (2003), 214–215.

25. Rouch (1995b), 228; see also Taylor (2003), 140–141.

26. MacDougall (1995c).

27. Rouch (1995a), 92–93.

28. C.Piault (1996), b154, and (2007), 48.

29. See Rouch (2003b), 80–81.

30. C.Piault (1996b), 154, and (2007), 48.

31. A very striking demonstration of both the strengths and weaknesses of Rouch's shooting praxis is to be found in the film *Architectes ayorou* (1970). This film features a magnificent improvised sequence-shot of a group of women pounding millet who break into song as Rouch's camera approaches. But the same film also features many wavering sequence-shots, with much awkward zooming in and out, as Rouch attempts to show the architectural features of the village where the film was shot.

Chapter Fifteen

1. Rouch (1995a), 96.

2. Karèche (2004).

3. Godard (1972), 129.

4. Murphy and Williams (2007), 51.

5. Taylor (2003), 139.

6. Georgakas et al. (2003), 214–215.

7. Rouch (1995a), 94–96.

8. Rouch (1995a), 85.

9. See chapter 1, pp. 9–12.

10. Films with credits of this kind include *Cimetières dans la falaise* (1951) and *Bataille sur le grand fleuve* (1952).

11. Fulchignoni (1981), 19, and (2003), 168.

12. Rouch and Hockings (1995).

13. Clifford (1988a), 77.

14. See Clifford (1988a), 80ff.

15. See in particular Griaule (1933a), 10–12, and (1957), 59. See also the Dakar-Djibouti expedition travel journal of Michel Leiris (2008), 146, in which he expresses his fury because he believes that one particular elderly Dogon informant has purposefully misled him: "Amabibè Babadyi really is an old shyster . . . It would not take too much for me to strangle him."