

---

# Timothy Asch and Ethnographic Film

---

Edited by  
E. D. Lewis

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

---

# Timothy Asch and Ethnographic Film

---

Timothy Asch (1932–1994) was one of the best-known anthropologists of his generation and was among a small group of gifted ethnographic filmmakers who defined visual anthropology in the latter twentieth century. He worked with Margaret Mead, John Marshall and Napoleon Chagnon, lived and filmed on every continent except Antarctica, and won numerous international prizes. His work, which includes “The Ax Fight” and more than fifty additional films of Venezuela’s Yanomamö Indians, and filming from Indonesia and Afghanistan, comprises the most widely used resource in the teaching of anthropology today. *Timothy Asch and Ethnographic Film* combines a biographical overview of Asch’s life with critical perspectives, giving a definitive guide to his background, aims, ideas, methodologies and major projects. Beautifully illustrated with sixty photographs, and featuring articles from many of Asch’s friends, colleagues and collaborators as well as an important interview with Asch himself, it is an ideal introduction to his work and to a range of key issues in ethnographic film.

**Contributors:** Douglas Harper, Nancy Lutkehaus, Peter Loizos, James J. Fox, Greg Acciaioli, Faye Ginsburg, Linda H. Connor, Patsy Asch, John P. Homiak, Wilton Martínez, Bill Nichols, Peter Biella, E. D. Lewis.

**Edited by E. D. Lewis**, Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at The University of Melbourne, Australia. He is author of *People of the Source* (1988), and co-producer with Timothy and Patsy Asch of the award-winning film *A Celebration of Origins* (1993).

---

## Studies in Visual Culture

A series edited by Anthony Shelton

---

Volume 1

### **Shadow House: Interpretations of Northwest Coast Art**

*Jonathan Meuli*

Volume 2

### **A Host of Devils: The History and Context of the Making of Makonde Spirit Sculpture**

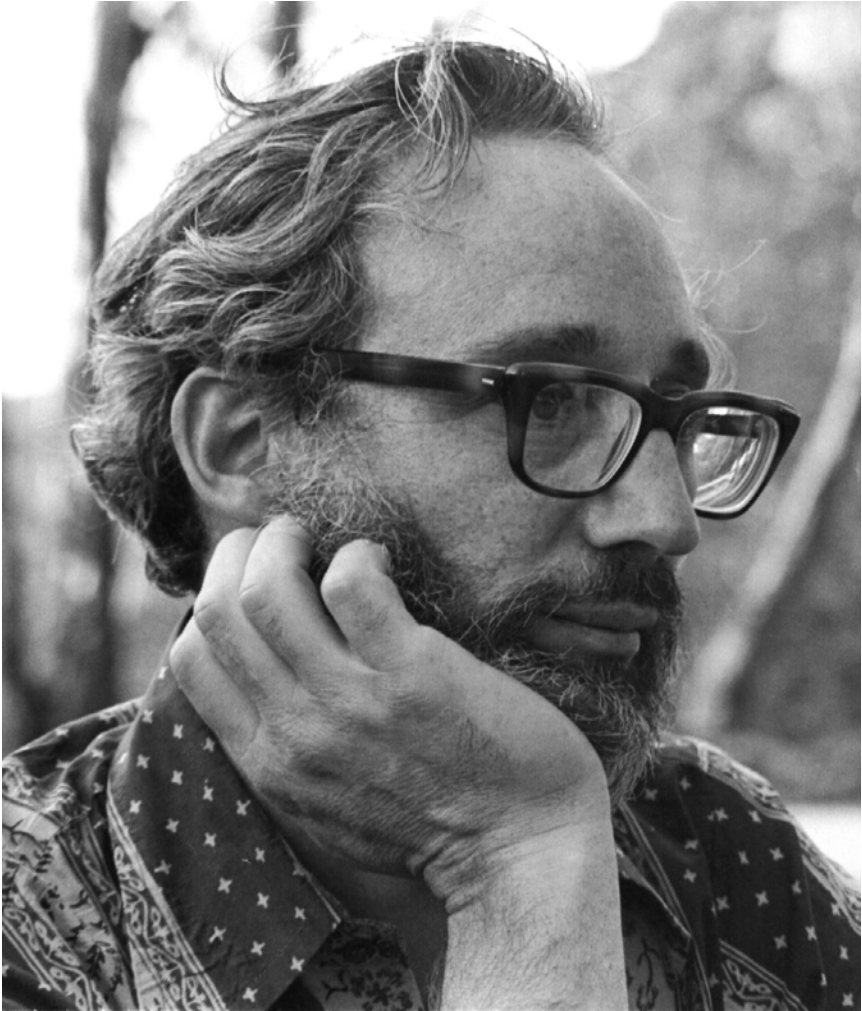
*Zachary Kingdon*

Volume 3

### **Timothy Asch and Ethnographic Film**

*Edited by E. D. Lewis*





*Frontispiece* Timothy Asch, Canberra, Australia, 1980

---

# Timothy Asch and Ethnographic Film

---

Edited by  
E. D. Lewis

First published 2004

by Routledge

11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group*

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004.

© 2004 Routledge, except where otherwise stated.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

A Catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-39068-7 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-63712-7 (Adobe eReader Format)

ISBN 0-415-32774-1 (Print Edition)

---

# Contents

---

<i>List of illustrations</i>	ix
<i>List of contributors</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xix
<i>Preface</i>	xxi
<b>1 Introduction: Timothy Asch in America and Australia</b>	<b>1</b>
E. D. LEWIS	
<b>2 An ethnographic gaze: scenes in the anthropological life of Timothy Asch</b>	<b>17</b>
DOUGLAS HARPER	
<b>3 Man, a course of study: situating Tim Asch's pedagogy and ethnographic films</b>	<b>57</b>
NANCY C. LUTKEHAUS	
<b>4 At the beginning: Tim Asch in the early 1960s</b>	<b>75</b>
PETER LOIZOS	
<b>5 Efforts and events in a long collaboration: working with Tim Asch on ethnographic films on Roti in eastern Indonesia</b>	<b>83</b>
JAMES J. FOX	
<b>6 From event to ethnography: film-making and ethnographic research in Tana 'Ai, Flores, eastern Indonesia</b>	<b>97</b>
E. D. LEWIS	
<b>7 The consequences of conation: pedagogy and the inductive films of an ethical film-maker</b>	<b>123</b>
GREG ACCIAIOLI	
<b>8 Producing culture: shifting representations of social theory in the films of Tim Asch</b>	<b>149</b>
FAYE GINSBURG	

9	<b>Subjects, images, voices: representations of gender in the films of Timothy Asch</b>	163
	LINDA H. CONNOR AND PATSY ASCH	
10	<b>Timothy Asch, the rise of visual anthropology, and the Human Studies Film Archives</b>	185
	JOHN P. HOMIAK	
11	<b>Tim Asch, otherness, and film reception</b>	205
	WILTON MARTÍNEZ	
12	<b>What really happened: a reassessment of <i>The Ax Fight</i></b>	229
	BILL NICHOLS	
13	<b><i>The Ax Fight</i> on CD-ROM</b>	239
	PETER BIELLA	
14	<b>Person, event, and the location of the cinematic subject in Timothy Asch's films on Indonesia</b>	263
	E. D. LEWIS	
	<i>Appendix: Writings and films of Timothy Asch</i>	283
	<i>Index</i>	291

---

# Illustrations

---

## Photographs

Frontispiece	Timothy Asch, Canberra, Australia, 1980	iv
1.1	Tim Asch and magpie, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies verandah, The Australian National University, 1980	5
1.2	Tim Asch and Tana 'Ai ritualists perform a sacrificial rite to “cool” the hut built for the anthropologists’ use during the Tana 'Ai film project. Tana 'Ai, 1980	9
1.3	Dealing with technical problems with recording equipment. Tana 'Ai, 1980	11
1.4	Tim and Patsy Asch making camp, Tana 'Ai, 1980	12
1.5	Tim Asch unpacks the Arriflex camera in the “clean” tent. Watuwolon, 1980	12
2.1	North Country School, 1956	22
2.2	North Country School, 1956	22
2.3	North Country School, 1956	23
2.4	David Sapir by Asch, The Putney School, ca 1950	23
2.5	John Yang by Asch, The Putney School, 1950	24
2.6	Tim Asch by John Yang, California, south of San Francisco, 1951	24
2.7	Tim Asch by Minor White, California	26
2.8	Tim Asch by Minor White, California	26
2.9	Tim Asch by Minor White, California	27
2.10	Minor White by Asch, California	27
2.11	Minor White by Asch, California	28
2.12	Cape Breton	30
2.13	Cape Breton	30
2.14	Kanisaka’s village, Japan	36
2.15	Japan	37
2.16	Man tapping his walking stick for his ancestors. Japan	37
2.17	Boy spinning top, Japan	38
2.18	Japan	38
2.19	Japan	39

2.20	Japan	39
2.21	Japan	40
2.22	Margaret Mead, 1957	40
2.23	Dodoth, Uganda, 1961	48
2.24	Dodoth, Uganda: courting dance	49
2.25	Thomas Beidelman, February, 1984	51
4.1	Tim Asch, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961	77
5.1	Tim Asch and Pak Foe Nalle in Rotinese ceremonial dress, 1977	88
5.2	Tim Asch filming a location shot on Roti, 1978	89
5.3	Timothy Asch filming Petrus Malesi on Roti, 1977	90
6.1	Tim Asch on the journey to Watuwolon, Tana 'Ai, July, 1980	103
6.2	Arrival at the house of Du'a Peni and Mo'an Koa, Watuwolon, July 1980	103
6.3	Asch and Klétus Ipir Wai Brama, the son of the late Source of the Domain, cut climbing notches in a tree trunk, Watuwolon, 1980	104
6.4	Asch filming a location shot of women dancing for the <i>gren mahé</i> ceremonies at the central ritual house of the Domain of Wai Brama, Watuwolon, 1980	105
6.5	Asch filming the dance of the clan headwomen at the central ritual house of the Domain of Wai Brama, Watuwolon, 1980	105
6.6	Patsy Asch and Tim Asch film the clan headwomen of the Domain of Wai Brama as they dance around a rice mortar at the central ritual house of the domain in preparation for the <i>gren mahé</i> rituals, Watuwolon, October, 1980	107
6.7	Asch loads film while Mo'an Koa Tapo looks on, Watuwolon, 1980	107
6.8	Tim and Patsy Asch filming Mo'an Déwa, Mo'an Sina, and Mo'an Koa discussing the exchange of a child between two clans, Munéwolon, 1980	108
6.9	Tim and Patsy Asch filming the discussion of an exchange of a child between two clans, Munéwolon, 1980	108
6.10	Tim Asch writes notes while Mo'an Sina and Mo'an Koa chant clan histories, Watuwolon, 1980	109
6.11	Asch watches the video of a burial with residents of Watuwolon, 1980	115
9.1	Tim Asch filming and Patsy Asch recording film sound with Asen Balikci, Afghanistan	167
9.2	Patsy Asch recording film sound, Afghanistan	167
9.3	Tim Asch with Asen Balikci filming in Afghanistan	168
9.4	Tim Asch and Linda Connor with Jero filming <i>The Medium Is the Masseuse: A Balinese Massage</i>	171
9.5	Tim Asch and Linda Connor filming a village cremation in Bali, 1978	173
9.6	Yanomamö	178

11.1	Tim Asch and Craig Johnson filming <i>Climbing the Peach Palm</i> , 1971	217
11.2	Tim Asch filming <i>New Tribes Mission</i> , 1971	217
13.1	A sample screen from <i>Yanomamö Interactive</i> with quadrants for different instructional purposes.	240
13.2	Contents of <i>Yanomamö Interactive</i> 's menus and options available through the menu buttons	241
13.3	Screen showing Chagnon's first comments on footage of the ax fight	243
13.4	Yanomamö genealogy, first level of detail, showing main protagonists in <i>The Ax Fight</i>	244
13.5	The extreme telephoto lens of Asch's movie camera and Chagnon's 35 mm photograph	246
13.6	Selected still frames from <i>The Ax Fight</i>	257

## Tables

6.1	Sample text of ritual language with full English translations and subtitles	110
14.1	Chronology of filming and post-production for Asch's Indonesia films	268



---

## Contributors

---

**Greg Acciaioli** is Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Western Australia. He has conducted research in Indonesia since 1980 among both highland peoples of Central Sulawesi and the Bugis of South Sulawesi, covering such topics as migration, ethnic interaction, traditional healing, social change and development, and the resurgence of customary institutions under the auspices of Indonesian autonomy legislation. He has taught ethnographic film at both Columbia University and the University of Western Australia. Among his publications on ethnographic film is “Innocence Lost: Evaluating an Experimental Era in Ethnographic Film” in *TAJA (The Australian Journal of Anthropology)* 8 (2): 210–26 (1997). Recent publications on Indonesia include: “What’s in a Name? Appropriating Idioms in the South Sulawesi Rice Intensification Program” in *Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture*, Jim Schiller and Barbara Martin-Schiller (eds.) (Athens OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1997) and “Kinship and Debt: The Social Organization of Bugis Migration and Fish Marketing at Lake Lindu, Central Sulawesi”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 156 (3): 588–617 [2000]. He is editor (with Roger Tol and Kees van Dijk) of *Authority and Enterprise among the Peoples of South Sulawesi* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000). He would appreciate being contacted by any ethnographic film-maker who would like to collaborate on films about the resurgence of customary institutions in Indonesia or related topics.

**Patsy Asch**’s first career was as a teacher who taught all ages, from three-year-olds to high school students, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as well as students in the master’s degree programs in Visual Anthropology and Film Production at the University of Southern California. In the late 1960s, she worked on the development of an anthropology course for ten-year-olds, *Man: A Course of Study*, under the intellectual guidance of Jerome Bruner. Between 1980 and 1999, she was employed as an ethnographic film-maker at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at The Australian National University, where she collaborated on the production of ten films about Indonesia. Tim Asch was the

cinematographer on eight of them. Since Tim's death, she has studied mediation and counselling and now practises privately in Armidale, New South Wales, Australia. Patsy Asch is co-author (with Linda Connor and Timothy Asch) of *Jero Tapakan: Balinese Healer. An Ethnographic Film Monograph* (Cambridge University Press, 1986, and Ethnographics Press, 1996) and is the author of five articles about film and anthropology.

**Peter Biella** received his Ph.D. from Temple University in 1984 and, for the next ten years, worked as an independent producer of ethnographic film and video collaborations, with projects shot in Egypt, Costa Rica, El Salvador and the United States. In 1991 he began an on-going series of publications about the potential of interactive media for ethnography. Biella's collaboration with Gary Seaman and Napoleon Chagnon resulted in *Yanomamö Interactive*, a CD-ROM about Tim Asch's film, *The Ax Fight*, which is the subject of his chapter in this volume. He maintains three large web sites, on Visual Anthropology, the US Supreme Court's ruling about animal sacrifice in Santería, and the Japanese–American Internment of the 1940s. Biella's forthcoming book and CD offer a retroactive, epistemological reconsideration of his first fieldwork experiences which were filmed in Tanzania in 1980. Biella directs a new program for digital ethnographic video and multimedia production in the Anthropology Department at San Francisco State University.

**Linda H. Connor** teaches anthropology at the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia. Awarded a Ph.D. from the University of Sydney in 1982, she has carried out extensive field research in Bali over the last two decades, and has written extensively on traditional healing and cultural transformation in contemporary Bali. With Timothy and Patsy Asch, she is the author of *Jero Tapakan: Balinese Healer. An Ethnographic Film Monograph* (Cambridge University Press, 1986, and Ethnographics Press, 1996), as well as a number of ethnographic films on Balinese healing and cremation ceremonies. Her recent publications include *Staying Local in the Global Village: Bali in the Twentieth Century* (co-edited with Raechelle Rubinstein, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999); *Healing Powers and Modernity: Shamanism, Science and Traditional Medicine in Asian Societies* (co-edited with Geoffrey Samuel, Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 2000); and *Health Social Science: A Transdisciplinary and Complexity Perspective* (with Nick Higginbotham and Glenn Albrecht, Oxford University Press, 2001).

**Professor James J. Fox** was educated at Harvard (A.B. '62) and Oxford (B.Litt. '65, D.Phil. '68). He has taught at Harvard, Cornell, Duke, and Chicago in the United States, and at various European Universities including Leiden, Bielefeld, and the École des Hautes Études. He was appointed as Professorial Fellow in the

---

Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at The Australian National University in 1975 and has since been appointed Professor of Anthropology. He is now the Director of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. Professor Fox taught a course on ethnographic film with Tim Asch at Harvard and collaborated with Asch on two films, *The Water of Words* (1983) and *Spear and Sword* (1988), both dealing with life on the island of Roti in eastern Indonesia. He has also collaborated with Patsy Asch on two video documentaries, *In the Play of Life* (1992) and *Consulting Embah Wali* (2000), which explore the ideas and practices of a Javanese millenarian movement. He is author of *Harvest of the Palm: Ecological Change in Eastern Indonesia* and editor of numerous volumes, including *The Flow of Life: Essays on Eastern Indonesia*; *To Speak in Pairs: Essays on the Ritual Languages of Eastern Indonesia*; *Balanced Development: East Java in the New Order*; *Inside Austronesian Houses: Perspectives on Domestic Designs for Living*; *Origins, Ancestry and Alliance: Explorations in Austronesian Ethnography*; *The Poetic Power of Place: Comparative Perspectives on Austronesian Ideas of Locality*; *The Heritage Encyclopedia of Religion and Ritual in Indonesia*; and *Out of the Ashes: Destruction and Reconstruction of East Timor*.

**Faye Ginsburg** is Director of the Center for Media, Culture and History at New York University where she is also the David B. Kriser Professor of Anthropology. Her research interests include reproductive politics, social movements, and gender; the history of ethnographic film; and the development of indigenous media. Her books on media include *The Social Practice of Media* (edited with Lila Abu Lughod and Brian Larkin) and *Mediating Culture*, both forthcoming from the University of California Press. Among her awards are MacArthur and Guggenheim fellowships.

**Doug Harper** is Professor and Chair of Sociology at Duquesne University. He has held full-time appointments at the University of South Florida and SUNY, and visiting positions at Cornell University, the University of Amsterdam and the University of Bologna. His interests are in cultural sociology, and especially the use of visual methods in ethnography. His three books published by the University of Chicago Press are part of the growing visual sociology tradition. He is also founding editor of the journal *Visual Sociology*, and has edited or co-edited collections on visual sociology for academic presses in Holland and Italy. His articles and books have been translated into French, German and Italian. His current research, with Patrizia Faccioli, is a visual study of Italian culture, employing methods deriving from empiricism through semiotics to existential phenomenology.

**John P. Homiak** has been the Director of the Smithsonian's Human Studies Film Archives and the National Anthropological Archives since 1994. He is a

cultural anthropologist who, for the past twenty years, has done research on the Rastafari Movement both in its Caribbean and global manifestations. He is presently working on two videos, one about Rastafari life in Jamaica entitled *Binghimon* and another on the African–Jamaican tradition of Kumina. He has done fieldwork in South Africa on the globalization of the Rastafari Movement there. Among his recent publications are “Movements of Jah People: From Soundscapes to Mediascape” in *Religion, Diaspora, and Cultural Identity* (John Pulis [ed.], Harwood Publications, 1999) and “The Body in the Archives”, a review of the film *Bontoc Eulogy* by Marlon Fuentes, forthcoming in *Visual Anthropology Review*.

**E. Douglas Lewis** was educated at Rice University and received an A.M. in Anthropology from Brown University in 1975. He received his Ph.D. (1983) for a thesis written while he was a research scholar in the Institute of Advanced Studies, The Australian National University. Since 1977 he has lived and worked in Australia, Indonesia, and The Netherlands. He is Senior Lecturer in the Anthropology Program at the University of Melbourne. Lewis has carried out ethnographic research in Malaysia and on the islands of Flores and Timor in eastern Indonesia and is co-producer with Timothy and Patsy Asch of *A Celebration of Origins* (1993), a film about the ritual life of the Ata Tana 'Ai of east central Flores. His publications include *People of the Source: The Social and Ceremonial Order of Tana Wai Brama on Flores* (1988), a dictionary of the Sikkinese language of Flores co-authored with a Sikkinese collaborator (*Kamus Sara Sikka – Bahasa Indonesia* [1998]), and numerous papers on anthropological subjects.

**Peter Loizos** left Cambridge University in 1959 with a degree in English Literature and was a Knox Fellow at Harvard University, where he studied in the Department of Social Relations in 1959 and 1960. He went on to the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, where he took a Masters degree in Mass Media Communications. After working as a Film Project Manager for Smith Kline & French Laboratories in Philadelphia, he returned to the UK to join BBC TV Channel 2 as an assistant producer and film director, working with the science magazine *Horizon*. He joined the Department of Anthropology in the London School of Economics in 1966 where he completed his Ph.D. in Anthropology in 1974. He has carried out long-term fieldwork in Cyprus and has worked in northern Sudan. He is now Professor of Social Anthropology in the LSE. He is the author of *The Greek Gift: Politics in a Cypriot village* (Basil Blackwell, 1975), *The Heart Grown Bitter: A Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), and *Innovation in Ethnographic Film: From Innocence to Self-Consciousness 1955–1985* (Manchester University Press, 1993) and, with Evthymios Papataxiarchis, he edited *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece* (Princeton University Press, 1991).

**Nancy Lutkehaus** received her Ph.D. in Anthropology from Columbia University in 1984. She is an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Program in Gender Studies at the University of Southern California. She is the Co-Director of the Center for Visual Anthropology at USC and a past editor of *Visual Anthropology Review*. Professor Lutkehaus is the author of *Zaria's Fire: Engendered Moments in Manam Ethnography* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1995) and the co-editor of *Sepik Heritage: Tradition and Change in Papua New Guinea* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1990), *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) and *Gender Rituals: Female Initiation in Melanesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995). She is currently working on a book about Margaret Mead and the media.

**Wilton Martínez** is a Peruvian anthropologist, film-maker, and psychologist. His doctoral dissertation in Anthropology (University of Southern California, 1998) is concerned with the production, pedagogical use, and reception of ethnographic films. He currently lives in Baltimore, Maryland, and works as a lecturer and psychotherapist.

**Bill Nichols** is Professor of Cinema and Director of the Graduate Program in Cinema Studies at San Francisco State University. His *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Indiana University Press, 1991) is a foundational text for the understanding of documentary and ethnographic film. He has also published a follow-up volume, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1994). *Introduction to Documentary* (Indiana University Press) appeared in 2001.



---

# Acknowledgments

---

In 1995, Professor Jay Ruby prevailed upon me to take on the job of editing this book. I wish to thank both him for his early support and Professor Gary Seaman, who initiated the project that resulted in the present volume, for his assistance in the early stages of assembling the chapters. A number of individuals and institutions have materially assisted me in the course of assembling material, checking sources, seeking permissions, and verifying facts pertaining to Timothy Asch's life and work. They include Mr Peter Bunnell of The Art Museum, Princeton University, Ms Cynthia Close of Documentary Educational Resources, Inc., Dr Gregory A. Finnegan of the Tozzer Library, Harvard University, Mr Brian Morgan of The Putney School, Professor David Sapir, and Mr John Yang. The correspondence by email of Professor Douglas Harper helped keep me standing upright in the blizzard of paper in which the project was launched. And Greg Acciaioli read and made helpful comments on several parts of the text.

Mr Richard Sutcliffe of The University of Melbourne provided invaluable research assistance at a crucial juncture in the book's evolution and, more recently, Ms Claudia Damhuis, also of The University of Melbourne, recovered almost forgotten documents from my own files, thereby contributing to my own chapters in the book. In 1998, the Faculty of Arts, The University of Melbourne, provided a small but very helpful project grant for research assistance in the preparation of this book.

Earlier versions of Chapter 9 by Linda Connor and Patsy Asch and Chapter 11 by Wilton Martínez appeared in *Visual Anthropology Review: The Journal of the Society for Visual Anthropology*, volume 11, Number 1 (Spring 1995). They have been revised for publication here and are published with permission of the American Anthropological Association. Chapter 1 draws on material published previously under the title "Timothy Asch: 1932–1994. Anthropologist and Ethnographic Film-maker" in *Canberra Anthropology*, volume 18, numbers 1 and 2 (1995). That material is included here with the permission of the editors of *Canberra Anthropology*. Chapter 13 by Peter Biella is a revision of an article published in 1998 in *Visual Anthropology*, volume 11, pages 145–74 and is published here with permission.

For photographs used in this book, I would like to thank the following copyright holders. Figures 2.1–2.5, 2.10–2.25 and 9.6 are by Timothy Asch, courtesy of Patsy

Asch. Figure 2.6 is by John Yang, and reproduced with permission. Figures 2.7–2.9 are by Minor White, and reproduced courtesy of The Minor White Archive, Princeton University (© 2004 The Trustees of Princeton University). Figure 4.1 is by Peter Loizos and is reproduced with permission. Figures 5.1–5.3 are by James J. Fox, and are reproduced with permission. The photographer of Figures 9.1–9.3 is unknown; they are reproduced by courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. Figure 9.4 is by Patsy Asch, and is reproduced with permission. Figure 9.5 is by Esta Handfield, and is reproduced with permission. Figures 11.1–11.2 are by Napoleon A. Chagnon, and are reproduced with permission from prints provided by Patsy Asch. The frontispiece, figures 1.1–1.5 and 6.1–6.11 are by E. D. Lewis (© 2004 E. D. Lewis).

Patsy Asch has been supporter, reader of this book in manuscript, confidante, springboard of ideas, and unending source of information, photographs, and assistance during this book's gestation. More than these, she has been a close colleague and friend for almost a quarter of a century. Thank you, Patsy.

E. Douglas Lewis

---

## Preface

---

Science – indeed, all knowledge – accumulates and progresses through criticism and the sequential generation of new problems that arise from the solution of prior problems. One corpus of work, itself a solution to a problem or problems, generates new directions of inquiry and new problems to solve. The problem that preoccupied Timothy Asch throughout his career as an anthropologist and ethnographic film-maker and the fundamental problem he bequeathed to visual anthropologists was how best to represent culture visually through film. Those of us who worked closely with him on film projects – Patsy Asch, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, Napoleon Chagnon, Asen Balikci, James Fox, Linda Connor, and myself – and others among his colleagues and students who participated with him in various facets of a complex life and career, learned this directly. Tim helped many of us solve problems arising from our individual research by refining the large problem with which he was always preoccupied and, in each instance, addressing it through his collaborations with us on our own work. For those of us who worked closely with Tim, the adventure of collaboration with a gifted film-maker generated, through the making of film, new lines of research. For others, the products of these collaborations pointed the way to new paths of ethnographic investigation and, in many cases, new paths of scholarship on film itself.

The essays in this volume have been written by a few of Tim's many collaborators, colleagues, and critics. This group may be taken as a small sample of those in the field of visual anthropology who have been directly influenced by Tim's work, and that includes just about everybody, not only professionals in visual anthropology, but all who have studied anthropology in a college or university.

Some of these essays tell the story of collaboration; some point to the ethnography which arose from collaborations with Tim; some address the new problems and lines of research suggested by Tim's work or those that have arisen from a critical examination of it; others take up Tim's devotion to the profession of teaching and his ceaseless search for better ways to use film in teaching students about the human world in which they live. All reflect on the new ways of seeing that each contributor, in his or her particular way, acquired through working with Tim or by close examination of his work.

From 16 to 20 March 1994, the Center for Visual Anthropology of the University

of Southern California in Los Angeles hosted the Margaret Mead Ethnographic Film Festival and Timothy Asch Retrospective. Five of the chapters of this book grew out of papers by scholars who contributed to the special symposium on Tim's work that formed the core of the Festival in Los Angeles. The others were either first presented in November 1995 to a special session of the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Washington DC, or were written for this volume.

Two days of the Mead Festival in Los Angeles were set aside for retrospective screenings of Tim Asch's films and colloquia in which Tim's collaborators, colleagues, and students spoke about various aspects of his work. The event was an encyclopaedic survey of the range of his achievements and even included a session of "Tim stories", of which everyone present seemed to have an inexhaustible supply. Although the disease that was to kill him eight months later was already taking its toll on his energy, Tim sat through almost all of the sessions, interjecting occasionally more or less audible remarks on the proceedings and, from appearances, thoroughly enjoying himself.

At the time of the Mead Festival I had known Tim for nineteen years and had been privileged to have collaborated with him on a project to film large-scale rituals in eastern Indonesia. So I gladly made the trip from The Netherlands, where I was then working, to Los Angeles to participate in that celebratory retrospective of his work. That week in March was the last time I saw him.

Following the Mead Festival, Professor Gary Seaman, Tim's friend and close associate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Southern California, set about compiling and collating the papers presented in the symposium on Tim's work with the view toward publishing them as a *festschrift* for Tim. It is indeed unfortunate that that project could not be completed in what turned out to be the few months that Tim had left. Following Tim's death in October 1994, some of the papers presented during the Mead Festival were published in Volume 11, Number 1 of *Visual Anthropology Review* and Professor Seaman posted abstracts of the other papers on a USC World Wide Web site. Some of us believed that the papers could form the core of the first of what will surely be a number of critical examinations of Tim's films and philosophy of film-making. Then Professor Jay Ruby invited a number of speakers to address *The Legacy of Tim Asch* in a special session of the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association in Washington DC, November 1995, a year after Tim's death. By then, Professor Seaman had decided that he would be unable to complete the editing of the volume of essays. Many of the contributors to the Mead Festival and others with an interest in Tim's work went to dinner after the American Anthropological Association session and, when the decision was taken to proceed with the publication of a collection of papers on Tim's work, I agreed to serve as editor of the volume and to take up the task of seeing the volume through press. Coordinating the work of twelve busy colleagues on three continents and bringing the project to a productive end required much more time than I had first envisaged, but the work is now complete. This book is the result of that collaborative effort.

The book can be divided somewhat unequally into three parts. The first consists of chapters which, in one way or another, recount episodes in Tim's professional life and includes excerpts from long recorded interviews with Tim conducted by Professor Douglas Harper in 1993 and in March 1994. The chapter by Peter Loizos recounts the beginnings of Asch's career in anthropology and film at Harvard University at the beginning of the 1960s, a place and time we now know to have been a pivotal and defining moment in the history of ethnographic film and visual anthropology. James J. Fox tells part of the tale of Tim's years in Canberra and their collaboration in making films on the island of Roti in Indonesia. Nancy Lutkehaus traces the origin of Asch's ideas about teaching anthropology to his participation in the MACOS Project of the mid-1960s. And Chapter 6 is a discussion of the Tana 'Ai Film project, its aims, the problems which arose in our attempt to document a large-scale ritual performance, and some of the solutions we devised for those problems.

The second part consists of explicative and critical treatments of Tim's work and professional activities. In this section, Greg Acciaioli analyzes the tension between Asch's desire to record the indigenous structures of the events he filmed and the restructurings that inevitably result from the process of film-making itself. Acciaioli argues cogently that this problem animated Asch's professional career and traces his development as a film-maker in terms of his experimentation with ways of illuminating both the lives of those he filmed and the essential problem of representation in anthropology. Faye Ginsburg sets out the progression of the ways in which Tim's films responded to developments in wider ranges of the social sciences and social theory during his career. Linda Connor and Patsy Asch address representations of gender in ethnographic film, with particular respect to Asch's work.

The last part focuses on problems that have come out of Tim's work, in one way or another, through the work of his colleagues. John Homiak reviews Tim's support for the establishment of the Human Studies Film Archives in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, where a substantial portion of the footage that Tim shot in his career is now archived. Wilton Martínez examines the surprising results of studies done at the University of Southern California of the reception of ethnographic films among undergraduate students. Bill Nichols reflects on *The Ax Fight* in relation to the vexing problem of the relation of descriptive fact to interpretive frame and, in doing so, revises and expands remarks he made about Asch's film in 1981 in his influential book, *Ideology and Image*. Peter Biella reports on the fulfillment of a long-standing dream of Tim's: the development of a technique for combining still photographs, moving images, and text in a single hypertextual medium. The book closes with a survey of the eight films that Tim and Patsy made in Indonesia in collaboration with James Fox, Linda Connor, and myself and suggests that, as a corpus of work and despite being made with different anthropologists, these films may be the first corpus of ethnological films to come out of visual anthropology.

I shall here, at the outset, declare my colors with respect to the protagonist in this book. In the course of our collaborations, Tim and Patsy Asch came to be close and

valued friends. In our work together, their aesthetic sensibilities, far more acute and more disciplined than mine, complemented my own scientific interests and propensities. In the field Tim saw, whereas my strengths lay in hearing and listening. It is well that our abilities were complements, for the ethnographic work we undertook demanded close attention both to those forms of action apprehended through vision and to those which required an understanding of spoken words to be understood. The work with Tim and Patsy has been the defining and directing episode in my professional career.

Our respect for Tim Asch as teacher, colleague, and friend, and for his work, will be plain to see in each of these chapters. But Tim told his students that his work should be seen not as an end, but as a beginning. It follows that it should be seen also as a challenge to new generations of visual anthropologists, as should the lives and works of all older generations. While this book is mainly a summary of selected aspects of Tim's work, it should invite criticism, and thus further progress in its field. I am sure Tim would have wanted it that way.

E. Douglas Lewis  
Mount Toole-Be-Wong  
Victoria  
Australia  
January 2001

## Chapter 1

---

# Introduction

## Timothy Asch in America and Australia<sup>1</sup>

*E. D. Lewis*

---

From 1968 to his death in October 1994, Tim Asch produced more than fifty ethnographic films about the Yanomamö Indians of Venezuela, transhumant herders in Afghanistan, and the Balinese, the Rotinese, and Ata Tana 'Ai of eastern Indonesia. If one counts *Dodoth Morning*, which he shot in 1961, and footage he shot in Canada which was never made into films for release, he practised his art of ethnographic film-making on three continents and in Oceania. The films in distribution have had a profound influence on the science of anthropology and the way the discipline is taught in universities around the world.

Asch's career as an ethnographic film-maker began in the middle 1960s, just as portable synchronous sound technology for 16 mm production became available to film-makers.<sup>2</sup> Portable synchronous sound was a technology that would revolutionize the representation of ethnographic subjects on film, and Asch's exploration of the new technology's possibilities and his experiments with new techniques in ethnographic film-making helped create the field of visual anthropology and remake the discipline of cultural anthropology. In these explorations and experiments he was colleague, interlocutor and, sometimes, antagonist to a small number of film-makers, including Jean Rouch, John Marshall, Robert Gardner, whose work, it is now clear, defined visual anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century.

Asch was a university teacher and his main aim as an anthropologist was to make films for use in anthropological tuition. These films would illustrate general theoretical problems in the comparative understanding of mankind's cultures, and thereby not only improve the quality of university tuition in anthropology, but establish anthropology as the pre-eminent medium for communication between societies with quite different cultures and foster greater understanding by people everywhere of those whose ways are different from their own.

### **America, 1932–76**

Tim Asch was born in Southampton, Long Island, New York in 1932. He was educated at the North Country School in Lake Placid, New York, and The Putney School in Vermont, from which he graduated in 1951. His classmates at Putney

included the anthropologist David Sapir and the photographer John Yang. Together, they experimented with photography. The experience must have been profound: Asch himself went into photography and film-making, Yang became a photographer, and Sapir has increasingly focused on visual anthropology and still photography in his work.

In his late teens, Asch twice journeyed to California where, during the summers of 1950 and 1951, he studied with the photographers Minor White, Ansel Adams and Edward Weston. Asch has described his relationship with White as that between apprentice and master. He lived in White's household, going out each morning before dawn and again in the late afternoon to take photographs. Evenings were spent developing and printing the day's work. For Asch, this episode was a powerful encounter with an art form in the person of one of its masters. From White he learned aesthetics, techniques and discipline.<sup>3</sup> Patsy Asch has said that one of the things he learned from White and Weston was that his talent lay more in photographing people than landscapes (although his photographic subjects in his last years were largely drawn from nature). If White taught Asch his art, it was perhaps the photographic sequences of W. Eugene Smith that were the strongest influence on Asch's later mastery of documentary cinematography.

In the early 1950s, Asch's newly trained talent found its first expression on Cape Breton Island, Canada, where he lived for seven months in 1952. He returned to the community in 1960 to shoot his first film, and made visits in 1968 and shortly before his death in 1994. A special issue of the journal *Visual Sociology* under the editorship of Douglas Harper (1994) has been devoted to a selection of Asch's Cape Breton photographs.

After a year at Bard College, Asch was conscripted into the US Army in 1953 and served in Japan as a photographer for *Stars and Stripes* and the Japanese newspapers *Asahi Shinbun*, *Mainichi Shinbun*, and the *Nippon Times*. He lived for a time with a family in a rural Japanese village, his subject for an extensive (and as yet unpublished) photographic study. In 1955 he resumed his undergraduate studies at Columbia University. At Columbia he decided to study anthropology and became a teaching assistant to Margaret Mead, who encouraged his interest in ethnographic film.

From 1959 to 1962 he served as a film editor for John Marshall and Robert Gardner in the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, working mainly on Marshall's Ju/'hoansi (Bushman) films. In 1960 he met Peter Loizos, who documents Asch's relationships with Marshall and Gardner in Chapter 4 of this volume. In 1961 he traveled to Uganda, where he worked among the Dodoth as a still photographer and cinematographer for Elizabeth Marshall Thomas. In 1963 he completed the film *Dodoth Morning*, a short film about one morning in the life of a Dodoth family at harvest time.

From 1963 to 1965, Asch undertook a postgraduate course in African Studies at Boston University and studied with Thomas Beidelman at Harvard. After completing his M.A., from 1965 to 1967 he worked, under the leadership of Jerome Bruner, on *Man, A Course of Study* (MACOS), a film-based curriculum development project designed to bring the ideas of anthropology to primary school

classrooms. Asch and his wife Patsy experimented with the Ju/'hoansi footage and the Netsilik Inuit films, which Asen Balikci developed for MACOS. This early work as an editor and on the development of film sequences for teaching contributed to Asch's growing belief in the pedagogical value of short films. In 1968 he and John Marshall founded Documentary Educational Research, a non-profit organization, to produce, distribute, and promote the use of ethnographic and documentary films, in part because no film distributor would agree to distribute all of the sequence films on which he had worked with the Marshalls. In 1971 DER incorporated as Documentary Educational Resources, Inc., which has grown into an international distributor of ethnographic films and promoter of research and development in visual anthropology.

From 1967 to 1976 Asch held teaching posts in Visual Anthropology at Brandeis University, New York University and Harvard University. Whilst juggling fractional appointments in three universities must have been difficult for a man with a young family, his professional situation was one in which there were few obligations of an administrative kind to his employers. He was thus relatively free to experiment with the development of undergraduate anthropology courses oriented toward film and to undertake fieldwork, which he did in 1968 and 1971 when he filmed the Yanomamö Indians in Venezuela in collaboration with Napoleon Chagnon. The years of the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s were thus the time in which Asch refined his thinking about, and his aims for, making films for research and teaching, and he found his first opportunity to put his thoughts about making films into practice in a collaboration with another anthropologist.<sup>4</sup> Loizos notes (Chapter 4) that by the early 1960s, Asch had set out for himself “a coherent and single-minded commitment to ethnographic documentary” and was already well along in “thinking through a programme of filming and classroom work surrounding film”. We can see that in the 1960s Asch had clearly in mind how anthropological films should be made and what he wanted to do; as he himself wrote many years later about his work in Venezuela:

When we first collaborated, Chagnon had a latent idea about the kind of film he wanted to make, whereas I knew exactly what kind of film I wanted to make.

(Asch 1982: 16)

In 1968 Asch began his long and fruitful collaboration with Napoleon Chagnon, with whom he made field trips in 1968 and 1971 to the upper Orinoco valley of Venezuela to film the Yanomamö Indians. The collaboration resulted in at least forty-two films (see the Appendix, this volume: the number of Yanomamö films is difficult to determine exactly), including *The Feast* and *The Ax Fight*, which are ranked by many as among the best ethnographic films ever produced. The films of the Yanomamö series have received numerous awards and many have been staples in undergraduate university curricula in anthropology for over two decades. For a quarter of a century *The Ax Fight* has been a focus in anthropology and cinema studies of critical and theoretical thinking about the representation of culture through visual media. In this book, Nichols re-examines problems of

representation addressed in *The Ax Fight*, Martínez reports research on the reception of the film among undergraduate university students, and Biella recounts an important experiment in transforming *The Ax Fight* into a “researchable film” through hypertext technology.

In 1975, with the sponsorship of the Smithsonian Institution of Washington DC, Asch collaborated with Patsy Asch and the anthropologist Asen Balikci in the production of research footage from which the film *Sons of Haji Omar* was produced. This project marked a major change in Asch’s working methods: Patsy Asch collaborated in the fieldwork and production phases of the Afghanistan project and on the Indonesian projects that followed and was the editor of all of the Indonesia films. Patsy’s intimate involvement with filming in the field and her editorial acuity were important factors in shaping Asch’s last films, all of which reflect post-production dialogues between the Aschs on subjects ranging from how best to make use of particular footage to the basic aims of ethnographic film.

From 1969 through 1973, Asch taught in the Department of Anthropology, Brandeis University. After meeting James J. Fox in 1970 and moving to the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University as a lecturer in 1974, Asch and Fox taught a course on ethnographic film. Their common interest in film led to plans for a collaboration on a film project. Fox left Cambridge, Massachusetts to join the Research School of Pacific Studies (now the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies in the Australian National University in 1975, but the two continued to plan a collaborative film project and in 1978 obtained a grant from the US National Science Foundation which provided partial funding for the work they had in mind.

In early 1976 Tim Asch left Cambridge, Massachusetts to join the Department of Anthropology in the Research School of Pacific Studies as a Senior Research Fellow. He lived and worked in Australia for six years until, in 1982, he took up his last position as Professor of Anthropology at the University of Southern California, where he became the first director of the Center for Visual Anthropology.

### **Australia, 1976–82**

The six-and-a-half years the Aschs spent in Australia were extraordinarily productive. At The Australian National University, Asch was instrumental in bringing into reality what was then called the Human Ethology and Ethnographic Film Laboratory, a unit in the Department of Anthropology. The idea for HEEFL originated with Professor Derek Freeman, the head of the department at the time, who was interested in establishing a laboratory for the ethological study of human behavior and social interaction. HEEFL began with the human ethologists Adam Kendon and Peter Reynolds. With Asch’s arrival, the mandate of the laboratory expanded to encompass ethnographic film-making.

During his six years in Canberra and after his departure for California, Asch collaborated with three Australian anthropologists in the production of research footage and ethnographic films on the eastern Indonesian islands of Roti, Bali, and Flores.



Figure 1.1 Tim Asch and magpie, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies verandah, The Australian National University, 1980.

### ***The Roti project***

Asch's first collaboration at The ANU was with Professor James J. Fox (see Chapter 5). They planned to film large-scale rituals in five eastern Indonesian societies, the first filming to be of ritual contests during the ceremonial season on the island of Savu. As Fox had previously determined, Savunese ritual was spectacle in a way that contrasted with the more restrained oratorical performances which characterized ritual on the nearby island of Roti (Fox 1979). Given the combination of planned choreography and spontaneous improvisation evident in Savunese rituals and the large scale of their performance, Fox and Asch were convinced that film was the best means to document the complex Savunese performances. In the end, delays in obtaining the permits required by the Indonesian government for research and filming prevented Asch and Fox from visiting Savu during the high ceremonial season on the island. So they shifted the site of their first work to Roti. The work on Roti resulted in two films: *The Water of Words* (1983) and *Spear and Sword* (1989). As it happened, a bureaucratic *snafu* in Jakarta resulted in the issue of two research permits, one for filming in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (which includes the islands of Roti, Savu and Flores) and one for Bali. This fortuitous confusion among Jakarta bureaucrats as to the whereabouts of Savu and Roti (see Chapter 5) opened the way for Asch's filming on Bali with Dr Linda Connor, the second of his Australian collaborators.

### ***The Bali project***

On their way to Roti in June 1977, Tim Asch and Jim Fox discovered that Margaret Mead was on the island of Bali attending a Pacific Science Association Conference. Mead planned to visit Bayung Gede, the village in which she had worked in the 1930s. She asked Asch, her former student, to record her visit to the village. On the way to Bayung Gede, Asch and Fox happened to meet Linda Connor, who was

then in the middle of research for her Ph.D. in a village in central Bali. The following year, Fox, who was traveling from Europe, was to meet Asch, who was traveling from Australia, once again in Bali en route to Roti. As Asch told the story, Fox was delayed for several weeks and, worried about the state of his film stock, Asch decided to shoot a few rolls and send them back for processing and examination in Australia. But what to shoot? Asch went looking for Linda Connor, whom he had first met in Canberra before she began her fieldwork and, even though she was (again as Asch told it) in the last, frantic stages of her fieldwork, prevailed upon her to film something in which she was interested and which bore on her research topic. Asch rattled into Linda's village on a superannuated Honda, his camera positioned precariously on the back, gave Linda a brief but intensive lesson in recording synchronous sound and the two of them began filming. The result was the footage which became *A Balinese Trance Seance*. The collaboration with Linda Connor on Bali, which continued with a further season of filming in 1980 and for a number of years thereafter, produced five films. In this book, Linda Connor and Patsy Asch (Chapter 9) analyze their relationships to the Balinese and how they influenced the production of the Bali films, and Lewis (Chapter 14) locates thematically the Bali films in Asch's Indonesian corpus.

### ***Working with Asch in Tana 'Ai: a personal memoir***

I met Tim in the spring of 1975 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where people were still talking about the wondrous festival of ethnographic films that he had screened during the second half of 1974 in conjunction with "Film as Ethnographic Experience", a course on ethnographic film which he and James Fox taught at Harvard. I still have the film list for the evening screenings (which regularly drew 250 to 300 students); it reads like a history of ethnographic and anthropologically oriented documentary cinema. When I arrived in Canberra in March 1977 to begin my Ph.D. research, Tim was one of the first people I met. He was then inhabiting – that is the only word – Room 7239, one of the larger rooms for research fellows in the Coombs Building, which housed the Research School of Pacific Studies.

The room was completely outfitted by Tim, which meant that no one could find a place to park oneself when visiting his lair. Cases and book shelves on wheels, equipment (mostly consisting of wires emerging from and disappearing into gadgets of uncertain provenance and less obvious function), dog-eared and spine-broken books (Tim could mangle a book in ways unimaginable by even the most fatalistic school librarian) and a fog of things (including a hammock) festooned the walls, ceiling, and every square centimeter of floor space. (This is the man who invented a mechanical baby-changer and installed it in a closet of one of his houses.) His first words to me were: "Great! Let's get some coffee. They have the best cookies in the world downstairs." "Downstairs" was the Coombs Building tea room, the "cookies" (I learned to say "biscuits" in Strine; Tim did not) were Arnott's, and the conversation was about film and research. We picked up just where we had left off in Cambridge, even though I never knew whether or not he remembered me.

My involvement in a collaboration with Tim can be traced to our correspondence which commenced not long after I began my Ph.D. fieldwork on Flores in September 1977. In those letters, we exchanged ideas about what we might film, should an opportunity arise to work together. Then, in the last month of my fieldwork in August 1979, the Source of the Domain of Tana Wai Brama, the ritual leader of the ceremonial domain on Flores where I conducted research, announced that the community would in the following year perform a complex of rites in celebration of the founding of the domain. Together these rites are called *gren mahé*, the “celebration of the *mahé*”, the *mahé* being a clearing in a patch of forest where, so the mythic histories of the domain relate, the Domain of Wai Brama was founded.

After completing two years of fieldwork on Flores I returned to Canberra in September 1979. I discussed with Tim the possibility of filming the *gren mahé* the following year. Tim was, at the time, fully committed to filming on Roti and Bali but, as Jim Fox was unable to film in 1980, Tim quickly agreed to the idea. While not part of the original research protocol which Tim and Jim Fox had devised (see Chapter 14), the *gren*, as I described what I had heard of it, had all of the main features of the rituals which they wanted to film: it was large-scale, it was intimately linked both to the mythic origins of society and to contemporary social organization and it was of considerable importance for an anthropologist’s program of ethnographic research. There were only two problems. First, I had never seen a *gren* and so could not say with certainty what it was. Second, the Ata Tana 'Ai plan many things but rarely do them on the dates they specify in advance, and so there was no way of guaranteeing that it would actually be performed in 1980. Nevertheless, Tim enthusiastically signed on. He, Patsy Asch, and I, accompanied by their teenage son Alex and an impressive mound of equipment, arrived on Flores in July 1980 to film the *gren*. The result of our collaboration has been one film in release, *A Celebration of Origins*, and two additional films which, to date, have not progressed beyond early post-production.

Tim Asch was an energetic and inspiring teacher, the best demonstration of the argument that creativity and originality in research contribute directly to effective teaching. Among the many things which he taught his colleagues in anthropology was the necessity of providing students (and professional colleagues) with written ethnography to accompany film. There are two ways to do this. In the first, one can make films on a subject already treated in a written ethnographic work. Thus, *The Water of Words* complements wonderfully James Fox’s earlier book, *Harvest of the Palm* (1977), both the film and the book illustrating the ways in which lontar-palm tapping permeates all facets of Rotinese life. In the second, one can produce a written ethnographic account of the subject of a film. Of the two, Tim himself favored the second. *Jero Tapakan: Balinese Healer. An Ethnographic Film Monograph* (1986 and 1996), which Linda Connor, Patsy Asch and Tim wrote to accompany the first four of the series of Bali films, Tim described as just such an “ethnographic film monograph”. The book contains a précis of the roles of healing and healers in Balinese social life, detailed shot-lists for the films and essays on the making of the films. The book is an unmatched exemplar of what Tim had in mind.

During the early phase of my work with Tim and before we commenced post-production of the Flores films, I often wondered about this apparent paradox in Tim's thinking: he was a consummate ethnographic film-maker who seemed obsessed with the importance of written ethnography. In the editing phase of our collaboration I discovered, through hours of discussion and argument with Tim, the solution of the paradox. Tim saw film as a sensually powerful and thus seductive medium. While it is unmatched as a technique for the iconic recording of human behavior, it is not a good medium for explaining itself, not, at least, without the film-maker stepping out of (or intrusively into) the film to offer explanations of what is going on. Tim deeply mistrusted the "Voice of God", especially when it manifests itself as voice-over narration. The danger Tim saw and one which has been confirmed in studies by his colleagues at the University of Southern California (see Martínez, this volume) is that, in using ethnographic film in teaching, people of one culture often react negatively, even with repugnance, when confronted with vividly moving images of the situationally appropriate but cross-culturally bizarre behavior in another. Since the inherent limitations of cinematic technique restrict the contextualization of images in film itself, the way to illuminate what is going on in film is to write ethnographically about the subject of the film, the actors in the film and the film-making process, and to ensure that the written materials are as easily available to students as the film itself. In this way, film becomes one part of a larger ethnographic enterprise and not an end in itself. Furthermore, only in this way can film contribute to anthropology's aim of bringing people together rather than driving them apart. The key to resolving the paradox was to realize that Tim Asch was first and foremost an anthropologist. For him film was always a tool, one which could be used well or poorly, in the service of anthropology.

Tim believed that the way to ensure that film served anthropology was for the film-maker to step into the background and to eschew the "authored" film. Early in his career, he realized that social life subsists in events, which themselves are composed of sequences of activities in which people do things for particular ends. These activities and the events they constitute can be filmed. Such films, because they are not directed and because the film-maker interposes himself into the activity as little as possible, can both be fashioned into edited films for audiences and can provide the anthropologist with an immensely rich source of ethnographic information.<sup>5</sup> Tim felt that this method was best employed when working with an anthropologist who is ethnographically expert in the community and society in which film is shot and who understands well the activities which become the subject of film (and who knows which questions to ask about them later on).

Collaboration in the production of an Asch film had several distinct facets. First, there was the collaboration with an anthropologist intimately acquainted with the community and people who would be the subjects of a film. Second, there was the collaboration between the film-maker and anthropologist with the people in the film themselves. In the first instance, the film-maker and anthropologist cooperate with the subjects about what to film, when to film, how to work together and over each of the myriad of small problems and opportunities which arise in filming.