Representation of Indigenous People
Through Documentary and Ethnographic Film
with Particular Reference to the Ju/'hoan Community of
the Kalahari, and the Effect Film has had on Their Lives

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ABSTRACT

While documentary films featuring indigenous people have a long history and include ethnographic films made under educational or scientific auspices, many films about indigenous people have been prone to projection by filmmakers, particularly those with little in depth knowledge of their film subjects. People labeled ‘Bushman’ have, more than any other indigenous people, been portrayed in documentaries in ways which relate more to the fantasies of the filmmaker and those of his or her culture than to the people at the other end of the camera.

In order to investigate this problem, this dissertation employs both an audio-visual component and a written exegesis. The latter considers the problem by examining the evolution of the work of iconic ethnographic filmmaker, John Marshall who, during fifty years of filming the Ju/'hoansi (a.k.a. Kalahari Bushmen), tirelessly invented creative solutions to reduce his own projections and present more truthful and accurate representations of the people in his films.

This exegesis introduces issues of projection and archetype in documentary and discusses historical examples of the ‘Bushman myth’ in documentary before analyzing the evolution of Marshall’s filmmaking career in the Kalahari and his efforts to counter the myth. Throughout the exegesis reference is made to the impact of Marshall’s ideas and philosophy of filmmaking on my own practice.

The audio-visual component consists of the film, *Bitter Roots: the ends of a Kalahari Myth*, which provides an up-to-date insight into the situation of the Ju/'hoansi and attempts to interrogate the Bushman myth through reference to its effect on people's lives. The film references the lifetime efforts of John Marshall to debunk the myth through his films, and bears witness to the many problems faced by the Ju/'hoansi which in many cases are exacerbated by development activities of large international donor organizations whose policies appear to be more in tune with the Bushman myth than with the aspirations of communities on the ground.

Taken together, the two components (visual and written) of this dissertation, argue the case that documentary filmmakers embarking on cross-cultural projects need to become more self-reflective. Particularly in view of inequitable power relations, it is argued that filmmakers entering indigenous territory need to work far more consciously, with self-awareness, empathy and a higher regard for truth as experienced by their film subjects.
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This work has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Adrian Strong

2nd February 2012
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I also acknowledge the generous input relating to the films and filmmaking of John Marshall from members of the ethnographic filmmaking community who graciously agreed to my request for video interviews, namely: Cynthia Close, John Bishop, Patsy Asch and David MacDougall.

I would like to express my gratitude for financial support provided in the form of the Len Dingwall Bursary, which provided me with funds to visit the Human Studies Film Archives in Washington D.C. to research the John Marshall Film and Video Collection.

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ETHICAL CLEARANCE

I hereby confirm that ethical clearance has been granted by Griffith University for all aspects of research during the course of my PhD candidature.

Ethical conduct reports for Protocol Number: ART/02/08/HREC have been submitted and processed by the Griffith University Office of Research in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT i
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii
ETHICAL CLEARANCE iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS v
PREFACE 1
Autobiographical background 1

INTRODUCTION 10
Introductory Statement 10
John Marshall – Background 11
Ju’hoansi and the Bushmen 14
Nomenclature 14
Bitter Roots: Thesis Film 15
Exegesis Structure 17

CHAPTER 1 19
MYTH, ARCHETYPE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROJECTION IN FILMMAKING

Popular Conceptions of the Archetypal in Film 21
The Jungian Conception of Archetype 22
The Experiential Nature of Filmic Images 23
Archetypal Resonance 25
Archetype and Stereotype 27
Symbolic Images and Open-Ended Meaning 28
CHAPTER 2
THE BUSHMAN MYTH IN DOCUMENTARY FILM

Genesis of the Myth in Documentary Film
The Bushman Myth in the 1920s
Symbols of Authenticity in Myth-Making
The Bushman Myth in the 1950s: Van der Post’s Paradise Lost
Making Images Fit the Myth
The Bushman Myth in the 1980s: The Worldwide Blockbuster
1980s Television Embraces the Myth
The Exclusion of History and Politics
Documentary Aesthetics Prevalent in the Bushman Myth
Mybergh’s Autoethnography versus Marshall’s Reality
The 1990s: The Song Remains the Same
Sandface Revisited: Val Kilmer & The Bushman Myth
The Great Dance: Recent Renderings of the Myth
A Permanent Vanishing Act
The Ongoing Authority and Effects of The Bushman Myth
Image versus People: A Filmmaker’s Choice

CHAPTER 3
THE AESTHETICS OF YOUTH:
FILMING JU/HOANSI IN THE 1950S

Life By Myth
Learning by Doing 62
Landscape and Silhouette 64
Structured Absences and Acculturation 67
Polarisation and Negative Projection: The Herero Problem 70
The Faceless Silhouette 72
Robert Gardner and the Old Lady 73
To Face or To Follow? 75
The Apollonian Aesthetic 75
Close Up and Personal 77
Direction and Drama 78
Filming The Hunters 79
Drama, What Drama? 84
The Next Kind of Film… 85

CHAPTER 4 87
FROM NARRATIVE TO SEQUENCE FILMS

The Split with Gardner 88
Narrative Scripts 92
Bitter Melons – A Hybrid Film 94
Genesis of the Sequence Films 96
Innovation in Marshall’s Sequence Films 99
Sense of Presence and Contextual Absence 100
The First Subtitles 101
Reflexivity 101
The Sound of Being There 102
The Paradox of Creative Direction in Sequence Films 104
CHAPTER 5

THE AESTHETICS OF MATURITY

The Years of Absence

A Reluctant ‘Hero’ Returns – for National Geographic

Bitter Melons Revisited

Character is Destiny

Preparing to Return and Film

The Impulse to Return

Returning for People

N!ai, the Story of a !Kung Woman

Centering the Indigenous Voice

The Structure of N!ai

Marshall’s Theory of Slots

Filming with Larger Crews and Multiple Cameras

Cinema Verite versus Fly in the Lens

Thoughtful Shots and Angles

Perceptions of N’ai’s Ballad: “Don’t Look at my Face”

Reactions to N!ai

Putting Down the Camera, Picking up the Shovel

Filmmaker as Activist: The Blunt Instrument of Videotape
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addressing Consequences of Myth-Making</th>
<th>196</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Film Against Myth</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filmmaking as Testimony and Therapy</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future: Culture as Performance or a Shared Anthropology?</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Anthropology &amp; Intertextual Cinema</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Marshall Archive – To Preserve or to Use?</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-visioning a Golden Age in the Digital Present</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juxtaposing the Idyllic Past with a Preferable Present</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last of the Totemic Ancestors</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth, Ethnofiction and Imagination</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filming Truth in the Subject’s Mind</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footprints in the Sand</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**APPENDIX**

Transcript of interview with ≠Toma Tsamko, December 2009
PREFACE

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

As someone with no anthropological training who entered the field of visual anthropology in his forties, my approach could be seen as that of a dilettante who wandered into the field by accident. However, the seeds of my interest were sown two decades previously when I first met (and subsequently worked with) the ethnographic filmmaker and humanitarian John Marshall in Namibia in 1987. After many years of dormancy, these seeds finally began to germinate following Marshall’s death in the spring of 2005. I had just resumed contact with him after many years, partly because I had recently begun teaching myself to use a professional digital video camera and enrolled in various film and video courses in pursuit of a long held aspiration to become a filmmaker. In our correspondence, he had told me about the completion of his magnum opus, *A Kalahari Family*. He promised to forward me a copy of this 6-hour epic, and although the DVDs only reached me after his death, watching the film series inspired an urge to return to the field which I had left two decades before, and also led to reflecting on the responsibilities I bore to the people I had loved and with whom I had lived so closely.

My first experience of Africa was in 1984. That summer, after completing a Masters degree in the UK, a South African friend, whom I had met in a kibbutz in Israel a couple of years previously, invited me to join him in a farming venture in southern Africa. Like John Marshall, I had grown up reading romantic literature about Africa. Whereas his favourite had been a colonial classical: *Jock of the Bushveld*, mine were the novels and travelogues of Laurens Van Der Post. In my late teens I developed a keen if romantically misguided interest in ‘the Bushmen’ as portrayed by Van der Post. I resolved to myself that one day, I would spend time in the Kalahari and meet these remarkable and (as I thought to myself) ‘archaic’ people.

The farming adventure with my friend provided me with the perfect opportunity and, after initial attempts to lease some farm land in the milder climate in Swaziland, we found our budget was more suited to South East Botswana, on the edge of the Kalahari where we attempted to grow vegetables at the start of one of the worst droughts the area had experienced in years. Living in a remote valley, we hardly met any other people. Much as I hoped to meet a ‘Bushman’ I met only a few Tswana and tribesmen known as the Bakgalagadi. Furthermore, the farming enterprise, despite having been a wonderful adventure was not an economic success and within a year I had
returned to the UK, where I put my dreams on hold, worked in the City of London as ship-broker for as long as I could stand it, and waited until an opportunity to return to Africa presented itself.

I returned to Africa in 1986, this time to Namibia. I had made plans to go to Kenya to teach science with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), but just before my final interview took place, I received a call from a Major David Godfrey, previously with the Gurkha regiment, who was now running a development organization (The Rossing Foundation) based in Windhoek. We had met very briefly in Johannesburg when I had applied for a farm manager position at a demonstration farm just outside the Namibian Capital. He was visiting London and made contact to offer me a job at the same demonstration farm. The challenge would be to establish a facility to teach the cultivation of fruit and vegetable in arid conditions to impoverished Namibian farmers whose primary livelihood was derived from livestock. Again I jumped at the opportunity, this time on the other side of the Kalahari, as I hoped I would once again be able to materialize my dream of encountering the ‘Bushmen.’ I was truly still caught up by ‘the Bushman Myth’

In 1987, less than six months after my arrival in Namibia, I was invited to a film screening at TUCSIN (The University Centre for Studies in Namibia). As I recollect, the film being screened was John Marshall’s *Bitter Melons* – a poignant and poetic film about the /Gwi Bushmen in the central Kalahari, shot in 1955. The main character was a blind musician who played haunting melodies on his bow. The mythic chords resonated. I saw and heard the beauty I wanted to see and hear, but was sadly blind and deaf to the true plight of the film’s subjects - the back-story of what had happened to these people. However, my lessons regarding their reality began that day as Marshall himself was present at the screening and told us of the sad fate of the family in the film, death by thirst.

Previously I had heard of John Marshall and seen photographs of him in a book entitled *Testament to the Bushmen* (1985). The book was part Van der Postian myth-making and part journalistic account of the Bushman’s reality by Jane Taylor. Most of the photographs in the book were of ‘Bushmen’ wearing skins, except for a few in the last section which showed the rural slum at Tsumkwe and a recently established farming settlement at /Gautcha, together with a picture of John Marshall lifting a jerry can with a group of Ju’/hoansi. So, armed only with this background knowledge of who Marshall was, after the screening of the film I introduced myself and told him about my long-standing interest in Bushmen as well as my current work, teaching people how to farm in arid conditions and with low water use.
This marked the beginning of a long and deep friendship. Marshall invited me to visit the area of Nyae Nyae which was then known as Eastern Bushmanland and it was here that I was introduced to his ‘Kalahari Family.’ That first night at /Gautcha camp, under the big baobab, with the stars wheeling overhead, he began telling me the story of his involvement with the Ju/'hoansi and his fears for their fate. He recalled his family’s expeditions to the Kahalari in the 1950s, and his subsequent years of exile imposed by the South African apartheid authorities who falsely claimed under the “Immorality Act” that he had committed the crime of fathering a child by a Bushman woman. He told me of his meeting ‘the family’ at the Botswana border in 1974 whilst on a National Geographic shoot – how he heard about what was happening to the Ju/'hoansi, and of his subsequent decision to return with Claire Ritchie to conduct a demographic survey which showed that the death rate (brought about from TB, malnutrition, alcohol fueled violence etc.) was exceeding the birth rate and that people were literally dying out. I heard how he had no choice in the matter. How would you feel, he asked me, if your own parents were suffering like this and risked dying under a system which viewed them as subhuman, little more than wild fauna? In a much less dramatic way, I too became a member of Marshall’s Kalahari Family when N!ai (a key subject in several of Marshall’s films) named me ‘/Gaishay’ after her own son, whom she was missing following his departure to join up with the South African Defense Force as a soldier. By default, my classificatory ‘father’ was N!ai’s husband, /Gunda, a N/um Kxao or ‘owner of medicine’ from whom I also learned a great deal. Their son, ≠Toma, became my classificatory ‘brother’ and very close friend.

My mentoring by Marshall began that first night when he began the process of lifting the mythic veil which had obscured my Van der Postian notion of ‘Bushmen.’ The reality was entirely different and the need for concerted action in a development context very real. By this time (1986), Marshall and Ritchie had established the Ju/Wa Bushman Development Foundation the aim of which was to assist people to hold onto their land and develop a mixed subsistence economy. Food security was sought through small-scale livestock farming and garden cultivation, together with limited foraging (based on scarce resources), and supplemented by small cash incomes from those who had jobs with the government or with the army. I was given a copy of the booklet written by Marshall and Ritchie titled Where are the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae (1982), based on a series of demographic surveys they had conducted in the early 1980s. On the occasion of this first visit, John asked if I would be interested in coming to work up in
Bushmanland for the recently established Foundation. It seemed that my life had been leading up to this moment for years.

My role was to assist in the setting up of new communities and establishing gardens at each one in order to help people not only to develop food security but also to ensure the continued occupation of their land which was under threat from being turned into a game reserve by the South African sponsored apartheid-influenced government ruling in pre-independent Namibia.

I worked very closely with the communities, particularly with the young people. I had several young ‘lieutenants’ who constantly accompanied me, helping me to build on the basic language skills I had been taught by Dr. Megan Bieseles (Megan was an anthropologist who was working as a consultant to the Foundation for a few months each year in the late 1980s). Consequently, I began to develop close friendships with people. My work was motivational, encouraging people to make gardens, as well as generally helping out wherever help was needed, for instance in making lion-proof kraals.

There was some sporadic shooting taking place, mostly by a South African film crew who were documenting farming activities and the establishment of new communities. As a keen photographer myself, inseparable from my Nikon SLR, I took an active interest in the filming.
However, it was in 1987 during a brief visit by Timothy Asch, that I first heard the term Visual Anthropology. Tim was at that time working in the Centre for Visual Anthropology at the University of Southern California. Talking to Tim, I became convinced that this was a field that I would like to enter one day. I spoke to John about my aspirations to get involved in the filming side of things, but his advice to me was that the priority at that time was not with the filming but with the development work and that was where I was really needed.

In retrospect, I believe that it was through the development work and my commitment to helping people that I really developed an understanding of their problems and their issues. If I had attempted to become an ethnographic filmmaker at that time, I would have still been prone to getting caught up in my own projections. I recall one day, traveling back from a village in the west with Tsamko when we spotted a herd of giraffe galloping parallel to our course. He jumped out of the vehicle and shot several arrows. I was right behind him with my Nikon and for many years I regarded those photographs of the hunter and the giraffe herd as my favorite images from my 'Bushman days'. I had not seen Marshall’s film *The Hunters* at that time, but when I took my photographs I was the same age as John was when he edited that film and I had the same young man’s excitement about the thrill of the hunt. Once I also spent a whole day tracking a wounded giraffe with Tsamko (the son of old ≠Toma who had shot the giraffe in Marshall’s film).

![Tsamko ≠Toma shooting a giraffe circa 1987 (©Adrian Strong)](image-url)
I thought I had exorcised the mythic projections about ‘bushmen’ through having worked so closely with the Ju’/hoansi, but I also recall photographs I had taken of my young friends, without their shirts on. I was perhaps, subconsciously fantasizing about the Pleistocene. Subsequently, I felt ashamed of myself for taking those photographs as I began reflecting on my projections and the lies I was telling myself.

Kxwara and /Gaishay by an old Baobab tree near /Gautcha (©Adrian Strong).

My work in the field with the Foundation continued until 1989 when I got married and moved back to Windhoek. However, I remained on the board of the Foundation almost until I left Namibia in 1997, and almost every year I revisited Nyae Nyae in my role as a Foundation trustee.

After leaving the Kalahari, I moved into development aid work and then international business during my subsequent years in Namibia. My connection to my friends in Nyae Nyae became increasingly tenuous as my business activities took up more and more of my time. However, my subsequent decision to study mythology in the United States was partly owing to an attempt to understand the power of myths and mythic projection as they had impacted on the people I knew and loved.

As an immigrant into Australia in 2000, I was forced to once again return to business activities to pay the bills and for a few years I worked in business as an entrepreneur. However, by 2005 I felt I had reached a level of liquidity where I could go back to following my core interests once again and whilst hitherto I had always felt that getting into filmmaking would be prohibitively
expensive, at the age of 42 I bought a digital video camera and embarked on various courses to learn the art.

From 2006 I embarked on a Master’s program in documentary film, coming to grips with the documentary canon. Under the guidance of renowned filmmaker Mike Rubbo, I began to have an appreciation of the observational style of filmmaking, which I adopted in my own filmmaking efforts. Taking a stand on ethical issues at the Queensland University of Technology, which is too long a story to relate here, led me into conflict with the university authorities and by the latter part of 2007, my position there became untenable. During this time I had decided to shift my focus toward ethnographic film rather than the political activist documentary filmmaking Mike Rubbo had been encouraging me to follow. As I mentioned previously, the contact with John Marshall had inspired my thinking along these lines, but whilst on a walking holiday in December 2006, I had a very powerful dream about Marshall and after which I began to make plans to return to the Kalahari.

I also made contact with Marshall’s old company, Documentary Educational Resources (DER) who, in view of my old friendship with John, kindly gave me permission to use extracts from his films to incorporate into my own production which, as I then planned, would make use of my old black and white photographs to tell a story about my time in Nyae Nyae. I also got back in contact with my old friend and erstwhile work colleague, Claire Ritchie, who happened to be planning a trip back to the Kalahari. She encouraged me to go along with her, share costs and make my film about the current situation in Nyae Nyae. The trip was scheduled for the end of 2007. We were joined by Karma Foley, who worked with John Marshall from 1998-2003 as associate editor and associate producer on A Kalahari Family, and Emiko Omori who had shot video in Nyae Nyae in 1980.

I had no definite plan for what I was going to shoot on my visit. Socially, of course I wanted to meet up with old friends and see how they were. I knew that I wanted to get an update on what was happening and travel to some villages to see the impact of changes that had taken place since I worked there some 20 years previously. One of my priorities was to see and understand how the myths about Bushmen had impacted upon their livelihoods, and how their misrepresentation in the media had affected their lives. I knew about this, of course, from my own experience and from Marshall’s film series A Kalahari Family in particular the last part entitled Death by Myth. Also, the visit was a chance to say farewell to John in his ‘home territory’ as it were, since it had
been two years since his death. Claire planned to purchase a cow and arrange for a ‘farewell feast’ to mark his passing together with the community.

While shooting in Nyae Nyae I was very much aware of the spirit of Marshall and in some strange way of attempting to follow in his footsteps. The effect of Marshall’s work on my own filmmaking journey is discussed throughout this thesis.

On my return to Australia, I approached Griffith University to request transferring my Masters level studies in documentary (at QUT) into a PhD and to use the material I had shot in Nyae Nyae as the basis for my thesis film. I proposed that my written thesis investigate the representation of indigenous people through ethnographic and documentary film with specific reference to the Ju/'hoansi and the impact film had had on their lives. I believed this would be a way of making sense of my mentorship under Marshall and be an opportunity to investigate his work further.

I was fortunate to meet up with Dr. Debra Beattie and Professor Paul Taçon who agreed to be my supervisors. On hearing of my interest and experience in filming with indigenous people, Professor Taçon offered me a unique opportunity to work with him on some film projects in Australia as part of his ARC (Australian Research Council) funded project “Picturing Change.” This entailed a program of investigating rock art of the ‘contact period’ – images made by Indigenous Australians following the arrival of first outsiders – (from SE Asia and Europe). My role over two years from 2008 through to 2010 was to accompany expeditions into these remote rock art sites often together with the indigenous Traditional Owners and to record their perspectives and feelings as well as the more academic views of the archeologists concerned. This involved fieldwork in Arnhem Land (Northern Territory), the Pilbara (Western Australia) and Wollemi National Park (New South Wales), as well as parts of Central Australia.

Since 2008, I was also involved in making a documentary, Fantome Island (2011) in far north Queensland, about a leprosarium established in the 1940s for treating indigenous people until its closure in 1973. This film was made at the request of the Palm Island community where I had been working as a media teacher since mid 2007. This project involved working with a number of indigenous people and particularly closely with Selwyn ‘Joe’ Eggmolesse, an indigenous man in his seventies who as a boy in the 1940s and 1950s had been a leprosy patient on the island for ten years. Consequently, throughout the period of my PhD candidature, I was able to continue
my practice as a filmmaker working with indigenous people. All of these film projects have, in one way or another, been informed by my research in the field of ethnographic film.

My research on the Marshall film and written records was facilitated by a travel grant. Obtaining the Len Dingwall Bursary enabled me to travel to the Human Studies Film Archives at the Smithsonian Institution in November and December of 2009. Here I was greatly assisted by the above-mentioned Karma Foley who was also the archivist responsible for the Marshall Collection. This research was invaluable in enabling me to see original footage from the Marshall expeditions as well as numerous documents, letters and papers relating to the evolution of Marshall’s filmmaking.

After moving to the UK in mid 2009, I was also able to meet up with Claire Ritchie, discuss my film with her and obtain valuable feedback at the editing stage. In August 2010, additional useful feedback was provided by participants and conveners at a workshop on Visual Anthropology in Ascona, Switzerland, sponsored by the Centro Incontri Umani. Finally, following an invitation from Professor Peter Loizos to screen a fine cut of my film at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, I am grateful to his anthropology students for their valuable comments and feedback which also helped me move toward the final cut.

In conclusion, I can say that the journey to the point where I begin writing this thesis has been a long one. There have been many helping hands along the way and many people to whom I am utterly indebted. I hope that in writing about John Marshall I am expressing my gratitude for what he taught me, in particular for opening up a cinematic world infinitely more personal and intimate than anything the mythic universe of archetypes can offer. There is a Japanese Buddhist saying: Gi-Ri-Mu-Ge which means, individual-universal no obstruction, but the higher lesson to be learned is: Gi-Gi-Mu-Ge, individual-individual no obstruction. The latter was my great lesson from John Marshall who embodied it in his being and in his filmmaking, and it is a lesson I believe any would-be ethnographic filmmaker would do well to take to heart.
INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

In the last two months of 2007, I shot video footage of a return visit to Ju/'hoan (Bushmen) communities in North-East Namibia where I had lived and worked for two years in the late 1980s. I subsequently edited this footage into a film titled *Bitter Roots: the ends of a Kalahari myth*, which constitutes the creative component of my PhD. During the shooting and subsequent editing of this film, I was acutely aware of the legacy of ethnographic filmmaker John Marshall whose 50-year record of the Ju/'hoansi on film and video is unique and unparalleled in the field of ethnographic film. My research interests grew from studying Marshall’s work and increasingly focused on how indigenous people are represented by filmmakers, and particularly how filmmakers’ projections can undermine the very lives and livelihoods of the film subjects themselves.

The original research question underlying this exegesis asked how, why and with what effect archetypal or mythic images are rendered in films about indigenous people. In view of my own experience and knowledge of the Ju/'hoansi as well as my understanding of Marshall’s increasing concern with the consequences of projection and myth-making by filmmakers upon film subjects, my research evolved into examining the evolution of Marshall’s filmmaking career and the effect his work has had on my own development as a filmmaker. This influence relates primarily to my thesis film *Bitter Roots*, but also to other ethnographic film projects I have worked on in Australia during the course of my PhD studies and to which I make reference throughout this exegesis.

Marshall’s work and his reflections on filmmaking have been a constant inspiration to me. However in this exegesis, I also reference the work of another iconic ethnographic filmmaker, Robert Gardner, whose symbolic rather than literal approach is in many ways opposed to that of Marshall. Gardner’s films have also had a significant influence on my thinking about filmmaking and an examination of his style and approach provides a useful balance to Marshall’s anti-mythic perspective.
JOHN MARSHALL - BACKGROUND

The evolution of John Marshall’s filmic representation of the Ju/'hoansi in the Kalahari provides the framework for my exegesis in as much as his intellectual and filmmaking development can be regarded as a series of lessons to would-be documentary filmmakers such as myself, highlighting the problem of psychological projection (both conscious and unconscious) which can eclipse the reality unfolding on the other side of the camera. As Marshall puts it: “My work as a filmmaker starts from one observation: What the people I am filming actually do and say is more interesting and important than what I think about them” (Marshall, 1993:20).

John Marshall’s film record of the Ju/'hoansi began in the 1950s when, as a young man (aged only 18 in 1950), he first came to the Kalahari on a series of family expeditions organized by his father Laurence Marshall. John Marshall recounted his family’s extraordinary story to me under a moonlit baobab tree in the Kalahari shortly after I met him in 1986. Following a brilliant career as an electrical engineer and successful industrialist, Laurence Marshall (founder and president of Raytheon Corporation until 1949) realized he had been so tied up with his business affairs that he had very little time to get to know his son. As a teenager, John had been fascinated by the African Bush and was enamored by tales of adventure such as Sir Percy Fitzpatrick’s Jock of the Bushveld (1907) and when his father asked him where he wanted to go, his reply naturally was ‘Africa.’

During a sales trip to Cape Town in 1949, Laurence Marshall had been invited to join an expedition to find the fabled Lost City of the Kalahari by a South African, Dr. E. Van Zyl, so the idea of an African expedition was planted in his mind. However, Laurence’s concerns were more realistic and scientific. He approached Harvard University’s Peabody museum and asked what his proposed expedition to Africa might achieve which would be worthwhile and useful to science. The response he received was to find out if there were any “wild Bushmen” left in southern Africa, i.e. any communities who still lived solely by hunting and gathering. The first expedition, a logistical feat in itself, was set in motion in 1950, and after what John Marshall described as a ransacking of the Kalahari from East to West and North to South, the expedition members first heard about a group of people in the north-east region of South-West-Africa (as Namibia was then known), who called themselves Ju’hoansi.

Prior to the second expedition in 1951, which marked the first extended period of time the Marshalls spent living with a Ju’hoan community, Laurence Marshall had assigned each member of his family a task. Owing to the absence of any anthropologists interested in conducting a study of the Ju’hoansi, Laurence’s wife, Lorna Marshall (whose background was in English literature) was given the role of writing a scientific ethnography, his daughter Elizabeth was to write a personal account or novel and John was given the task of filming every aspect of “Bushman” life. In later years, each family member was to receive unique recognition for contributions in their respective areas. Laurence himself was the expedition’s organizer but also took many stills photographs. John, a complete novice to filmmaking was given a Bell and Howell 16mm camera by his father and told: “Don’t direct, John. Don’t try to be artistic. Just film what you see people doing naturally. I want a record, not a movie” (Marshall 1993:19). Following this exhortation,
Marshall’s efforts began with an attempt to document, as scientifically and truthfully as possible, the daily life of the Ju’hoan community with whom the Marshalls were living.

During, the course of his filming in the 1950s, John forged very solid bonds of friendship with a number of Ju/'hoansi, bonds much closer than anyone else in the Marshall family had formed, and he also became fluent in the language. This enabled him to get unique access and insight into the culture through his filmmaking and to gather information which would otherwise not have been possible, including additional ethnographic data which his mother was able to use in her ethnography. Marshall’s friendship with this small band of Ju/'hoansi was to last a lifetime and became the compelling impulse for his trips back, and extended stays in the Kalahari throughout the 1970s, 80s, 90s and 00s, almost up to the year of his death in 2005.

Marshall’s work continues to be referenced in studies and research by many anthropologists and film scholars including Loizos (1993), Ruby (1993), El Guindi (2004), MacDougall (1998, 2006) and Tomaselli (1992, 1996, 1999, 2007). As I have indicated in the preface of this exegesis, I met and worked with Marshall at a critical time in his life when the fate of the Ju/'hoansi really hung in the balance. Marshall was starting to see how the problem of ‘mythologisation’ by filmmakers was beginning to affect the lives of the Ju/'hoansi in very real and tangible ways. As Marshall himself put it:

Until I experienced the projected fantasies from the other end of the camera in the 1980s in Eastern Bushmanland, I had no real idea what Ju/'hoansi, or all of us for that matter, are up against in the media... The fantasies about San people are so deeply embedded and widely held that I thought of them as myths (Marshall 1993:3).

During my first encounter with Marshall in 1986 he sowed a seed of concern in my conscience regarding how indigenous people are represented in film. A quarter of a century later, that long dormant seed has finally borne fruit in the making of my film Bitter Roots, as well as in writing this exegesis, which I hope will add a little more depth to Marshall’s concerns. I hope that in doing so, Marshall’s lifelong work, and especially his call to see through myths projected upon the Ju/'hoansi and to really see and hear the people as they truly are, can be a little more deeply and a little more widely appreciated.
JU’/HOANSI AND THE BUSHMEN

The Ju’/hoansi are possibly the most filmed indigenous people in the world, due in part to the film record Marshall made over 50 years of massive cultural change. The historical significance of this work was recognized in 2009, when this film record, The John Marshall Ju’hoan Bushman Film and Video Collection, 1950-2000, housed at the Human Studies Film Archives at the Smithsonian Institution, was added to UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register. However, Marshall’s films were never made for entertainment or popular appeal but rather for education and cross-cultural enlightenment. As far as the average film viewer is concerned, the word “Bushman” will not conjure up the name of John Marshall or any of his films. Those who have made the word “Bushman” a household name are those who have promulgated a romantic notion of people living as ‘children of nature.’ Films such as Laurens van der Post’s BBC TV series Lost World of the Kalahari (1956), Jamie Uys’s blockbuster feature film: The Gods Must Be Crazy (1980) or more recently the Foster Brothers documentary The Great Dance (2000) all perpetuate the image of Bushman people as essentialist hunter-gatherers while any of their efforts to farm and change their way of life are not portrayed. So great has this perception become that it has even influenced government policy. From the late 1970s, the apartheid government of South West Africa began talking about plans for a game reserve in North East Namibia where Ju’/hoansi were practically regarded as part of the fauna, a tourist attraction dressed up in skins in what John Marshall once described as a plastic stone age. Even after Namibian independence (in 1990) the policy to establish a nature conservancy in the last remaining territory still held by the Ju’/hoansi not only largely ignored but even discouraged the farming efforts of Ju’/hoan communities in favor of a socio-economic base which primarily served conservation and tourism interests.

NOMENCLATURE

The film subjects relating to this exegesis are indigenous people commonly known in popular writing and films as Bushmen. The term Bushmen is laden with a history of imposition of ‘otherness’ (Raper 2010) and has been used, as a term for “the Late Stone Age hunter-gathers who inhabited the subcontinent of Africa for fifty thousand years or more” (ibid). This definition in itself is laden with images of beginnings, ideas of a first people and in itself conveys an archetypal quality connoting a sense of origins. The popular term has come to cover many
different language groups and in Namibia became an official classification of seven peoples speaking different San languages and dialects (Marshall 1993:1). Terms are still problematic as Skotnes points out:

Authors must choose to use the terms Bushman, or bushman, San or hunter-gatherers, Khoisan or Khoesan, !Kun or !Kung, and so on. Each choice is accompanied by a disclaimer, each represents a struggle to settle upon a given label. With each label, a history of use is inferred and a particular identity shaped by popular conception or by scholarship is inferred. These inferences have not been stable and have shifted with time and the politics of naming and identity (Skotnes 2007:45).

According to Raper (2010:182) the term San, once preferred to Bushman, is increasingly perceived as derogatory while the term Bushman is now regarded as more neutral and acceptable, although in view of its historical and mythic connotations full acceptance may take time.

The main focus of this exegesis is upon the Bushman people who live in the North-West Kalahari straddling Namibia and Botswana, in an area traditionally known as Nyae Nyae. These people call themselves Ju/'hoansi. Ju means person, /'hoan means true, correct or proper and si is a plural suffix. Unless otherwise indicated, when the term Bushman is used in this exegesis, it refers to the Ju/'hoansi.

BITTER ROOTS: THESIS FILM

“Death by Myth,” the final part of John Marshall’s 5-part film series A Kalahari Family provided a logical jumping off point for my film Bitter Roots. When I visited Nyae Nyae in 2007, my primary agenda was to ascertain to what extent Marshall had been correct in his fears about what would happen to people in communities if the myths about Bushmen continued to prevail, swaying government and development aid policies toward conservation and tourism and away from farming. While the genesis of this problem is dealt with in Marshall’s film, I felt that some continuation of the film record would, in association with the huge corpus of Marshall’s work, provide further and stronger evidence for the dangers of mythic projection by filmmakers.

I not only wanted to make an update of the record of what had been happening to the Ju/'hoansi, but also to make a documentary that would continue in the tradition of John Marshall. The more I got to know about Marshall’s work, the more I saw that it involved a trajectory towards giving people their own voice and expressing their own concerns and aspirations.
I have always admired commitment to long periods of shooting in the style of observational cinema, a style which Marshall had mastered. However, Marshall once quipped that to be an independent documentary filmmaker one needed either very deep pockets or a topless ego. Economic circumstances meant that, in only ten days of fieldwork in the Kalahari, I was unable to make the kind of longer-term observational film I would have preferred, choosing specific characters to ‘follow’ and to shoot events as they unfolded. I was limited to visiting a few communities and conducting whatever informal interviews I could in an interactive way, using my camera in Rouchian style to elicit responses. However, my close relationships with people forged 20 years previously and the trust in which I was held owing to my previous work in Nyae Nyae gave me significant access, a key component in any documentary.

It is also important to note that in general, the Ju/'hoansi are not uncomfortable in front of the camera and having their lives documented. Partly, of course they have become accustomed to being filmed over many years, but in recent decades, with Marshall’s advocacy filmmaking, people have become more aware of the power of the media and are consequently more proactive in speaking their minds on camera. As a culture, people are anyway used to openly voicing their opinions so this certainly helps in getting their concerns across. It is therefore ironic and unjust that in relatively recent “Bushmen films”, as described in Chapter 2, people themselves are mute or subordinate to the filmmaker’s own voice. My thesis film shows that communities were openly vocal about the problems they faced, clearly aware of the projections that had been imposed upon them, and openly frustrated at the way this appeared to be locking them into a way of life which they no longer practiced nor desired.

Several conceptual themes emerged while editing the material: the politics of development, memory, idealisation of the past vs. current problems, as well as the imposition of myth and its effects on peoples’ livelihood. The title of my thesis film, Bitter Roots, is in part a reference and tribute to Marshall’s film Bitter Melons (1955) but also a reflection on the way the Ju/'hoansi’s hunter-gathering roots have been used to represent them as who/what they are, rather than as who they once were in a historical context. These archaic roots have created a bitterness regarding their present and future as representation of the Ju/'hoansi has locked them in a timeless image, an archetype projected upon them. The film’s subtitle the ends of a Kalahari Myth, refers not simply to the end of the Bushman myth, but to its ends, as in the word ‘intention’: what is intended or meant by the myth, as well as in the sense of both its ends (as one would say for example of a length of rope having two ends): in this case, the origin and outcome of the myth.
I recognise that the film can be regarded as having a strong bias toward advocating farming for Ju/'hoan communities as opposed to nature conservancy and tourism activities. I admit that I was not present as a participant observer in the Ju/'hoan communities for any great length of time, and so it could be argued that I was seeing what I expected to see, and therefore projecting my own ideas into the film. During shooting I was also conscious that I might be asking leading questions about hunting and game conservation as opposed to farming. There is in Ju/'hoan culture a tendency to want to please, to provide the ‘right’ or anticipated answer that the questioner desires. However, I believe this is offset partly by the fact that I had such good access to, and trust from the people portrayed in the film, in part due to my background of working with and helping the Ju/'hoan communities in the past. Furthermore, I think that in parts the film does convey the emotions of frustration and even bitterness felt by some of the Ju'/hoansi concerning their fate and the lack of assistance they have received in recent years with regard to farming activities. I think it is one of the strengths of film as a medium that it can convey emotion in voice tone and facial expressions which cannot be hidden, and therefore gives an added dimension of veracity, laying bare those issues that are most strongly felt.

EXEGESIS STRUCTURE

The first two chapters of this exegesis expand upon themes Marshall identified as problematic for filmmakers. Chapter 1 not only explores the issue of projection by filmmakers, but also examines some psychological dimensions with regard to filmmaking and viewing. In particular, I explore how archetype and myth can sometimes play a key role in documentary films including those made by Robert Gardner and even, in some cases, in Marshall’s own films. Chapter 2 examines the particular context of mythmaking in the context of Bushmen and the Ju/hoansi in particular and how the imposition of “the Bushman Myth” has impacted upon their lives.

From chapter 3 onwards, the structure of the exegesis follows the evolution of Marshall’s work as a filmmaker. Chapter 3 explores Marshall’s early years in the Kalahari during the 1950s, the making of his first film, The Hunters (1957), and his association with Robert Gardner who also visited the Kalahari in 1957/8. I contrast the different approaches of these two filmmakers both with regard to shooting and editing film at the point where their careers diverged in very different directions. Chapter 4 focuses on Marshall’s shift away from a narrative style towards a focus on sequence filmmaking with its associated innovations and impact for ethnographic film. In
particular, I examine the importance of Marshall’s association with the ethnographic filmmaker Timothy Asch during the 1960s and the possible influence of Asch on Marshall’s work as an educator. Chapter 5 explores Marshall’s reaction on his return to the Kalahari as participant in a National Geographic film, *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974), whereby he himself became a film subject in a TV style documentary. This chapter covers the 1970s and early 1980s when Marshall was forced to confront an ethnographic present vastly different from the world he had encountered in the 1950s, and examines how he tackled the complex subject of massive cultural change in his landmark film *N’/ai, the story of a !Kung Woman* (1980). This chapter also considers Marshall’s evolution as a video activist in the 1980s, and how this affected his filmmaking as polemic scripts began to eclipse the importance of filmic images, becoming increasingly used to illustrate a verbal argument. Chapter 6 deals with the entire half century of Marshall’s filmmaking from the 1950s through to the millennium and explores what I have termed ‘epic ethnography,’ the making of Marshall’s magnum opus, the film series *A Kalahari Family* whose final part, *Death By Myth* documents the tragic effects of the Bushman myth upon the mythologized.

Finally, Chapter 7 reflects on Marshall’s legacy not only as far as Ju/'hoansi are concerned but also his effect on a new generation of filmmakers such as myself and also seeks to explore future representation of Ju/'hoansi including possible films made by and for their own community. Each chapter also contains my reflections on Marshall’s filmmaking in relation to the development of my own documentary work. I refer both to the making of my thesis film about the Ju/'hoansi and to my ongoing work with indigenous subjects in Australia.
Chapter 1: Myth, Archetype & Psychological Projection in Filmmaking

*I think that because of my experience in Nyae Nyae most of my work as a filmmaker has been an effort to reduce the myths I project through my camera and impose on other people.*

John Marshall (1993:20)

More than forty years after first starting to film the people living in the Kalahari who call themselves Ju/'hoansi, this statement by John Marshall reflects his deep concern for the effect a film can have upon its subjects. However, the very subject matter with which Marshall engaged as a filmmaker presents a deeper problem of representation. If the myths projected through a camera resonate at a subconscious level with an audience, might not the desire for mythic images override the appeal for a less evocative and grittier reality?

This problem of projecting mythic images presents a dilemma to thoughtful filmmakers seeking to represent their subjects truthfully while at the same time making films crafted with art and imagination. Not only documentary filmmakers but also fiction filmmakers with an interest in realism, and even famous artists, have had to confront this issue and its inherent tensions. The filmmaker Jean Renoir recalled the advice of his father, an impressionist painter who questioned the weight of value given to images from his imagination compared to the externally perceived reality:

If you paint the leaf on a tree without using a model you risk becoming stereotyped, because your imagination will only supply you with a few leaves whereas Nature offers you millions, all on the same tree. No two leaves are exactly the same. The artist who paints only what is in his mind must very soon repeat himself (Jean Renoir 1974:171).

The problem involves recognizing the conflict between an ideal, Platonic, universal and timeless image in the mind and the actual image in front of the eye or camera lens, which is unique and time-bound in a historical context. One only has to type the word “Bushman” into YouTube to view stereotypical images made by filmmakers drawn to the Kalahari by the desire to reproduce images connoting archaic and archetypal origins, but such images rarely show individuality or reflect real lives. Almost two decades after Marshall’s caveat concerning myth-making, the internet bears witness to a plethora of images of stereotypical “Bushman” hunters, dressed in skins, supposedly portraying a way of life unchanged for millennia. Documentary films with such images purport to depict the lives of ‘Bushmen’ living in the Kalahari today but they rarely
enable the audience to get to know real characters, individuals living in the 21st century because to do so might break the spell of exotic otherness. More often we are shown a ‘type,’ conforming to a stereotypical image of how our collective ancestors might have lived in the ancient past.

When such images of ‘type’ are filmed and screened as if denoting current reality, yet were constructed from the filmmakers’ imagination through ‘aesthetic’ mise-en-scène and editing, a deception takes place. It is this deception which Marshall spent much of his life opposing by making films which openly challenge what he came to regard as projection and an imposition of a myth upon the people known as Bushmen, a myth which is explored in Chapter 2.

Unlike fiction films where the director’s imagination shapes the roles and characters portrayed, psychological projection is problematic for documentary filmmakers who are committed to showing their subjects as truthfully as possible. For ethnographic filmmakers working in transcultural contexts, a long and close relationship may develop with their subjects creating a moral responsibility, which magnifies the problem of projection. This was certainly the case regarding The Hunters (1957), John Marshall’s first film about the Ju/'hoansi, which has been cited as an example of myth-making. Certainly it was perceived that way by those inclined more to a mythic rather than historical perception. The poet and cultural historian William Irwin Thompson saw in The Hunters:

a model of the universal form of conflict in values in human institutions. Hidden in the film, as hidden in a fairy tale, is an archetypal structure, a mandala of the species’ specific form of human consciousness (Thompson 1990:93).

Furthermore, as Bill Nichols (1980) points out, Thompson identifies the four hunters as archetypes: the Headman, the Beautiful, the Shaman and the Clown from which he extrapolates a
complex model of human conflict and culture. Nichols expresses shock that The Hunters can be extracted from its historical context to this degree and be construed as a universal narrative. He is also critical of Marshall’s laconic voice-over commentary which he finds reminiscent of Robert Gardner’s Dead Birds (1964) and which he sees as inviting a mythopoetic response. The interpretation of Thompson and anyone who views the The Hunters through a mythopoetic lens, illustrates the hermeneutic problem of films which may resonate with timeless, universal archetypal images whether or not such an intention was consciously present on the part of the filmmaker in the first place.

POPULAR CONCEPTIONS OF THE ARCHETYPAL IN FILM

The word archetype is commonly associated with Jungian thought although the more popular texts concerning film and archetype only began to appear following the influence of the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell on George Lucas and his Star Wars saga in the 1970s. However, current discussion of archetypes in film has now become part of the mainstream. In Hollywood, Christopher Vogler’s The Writer’s Journey became a textbook for screenwriters. This book was inspired by Joseph Campbell’s analysis of mythic narratives, The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Campbell sees mythic narratives as being of universal appeal owing to the archetypal nature of the journey of the hero in the world, which he maintains is structurally parallel to the inner human journey from immaturity to maturity in human psychological development. Such a journey involves a willing, unwilling or initiatory descent into the deeper recesses of the unconscious to effect some deep learning or gather some gift, and a return with the boon which expands consciousness. Clearly, the hero journey does not have to be a literal one, but nonetheless involves a transformation of some kind and, as Carl Jung observed in his first major publication translated as Symbols of Transformation, archetypal content emerging from the unconscious may be experienced as such.

The mainstream Hollywood film industry seized upon this compelling idea which coincided with its commercial ends, and dipped enthusiastically into the field of depth psychology. Screenwriting guru Robert McKee’s Story emphasized the importance of archetypal content to a film’s success:

No matter where a film is made – Hollywood, Paris, Hong Kong – if it’s of archetypal quality, it triggers a global and perpetual chain reaction of pleasure that carries it from cinema to cinema, generation to generation (McKee 1997:3).
Since the 1970s, much of the more popular or accessible writing or analysis has involved a kind of reduction of the archetypal from the symbolic realm which resonates with something emotionally powerful yet ultimately unknowable in the unconscious to a structured formula of the Hero Journey, or a prosaic function whereby, for example, characters in a film are portrayed as certain recognisable forms whereby character A represents say ‘the warrior archetype’ and character B represents ‘the wise sage.’ Stuart Voytilla’s *Myth and the Movies* (1999) expands on Christopher Vogler’s themes and in an analysis of 50 films identifies archetypal characters such as “the shadow”, “the trickster,” “the herald” and “the shapeshifter”. Many similar books have popularised archetypes and archetypal structure more often than not with simplistic formulae.

The flow of interest from the Hollywood film industry towards depth psychology has resulted in a confluence of ideas and concepts that are accessible but lacking intellectual rigor. There has also been a counter-flow with scholars from the field of depth psychology taking an active interest in film albeit mainly fiction film rather than documentary. The *Spring Journal of Archetype and Culture* written by and for depth psychologists titled it’s 2005 issue *Cinema and Psyche* and takes a Jungian perspective on films. Christopher Hauke’s edited collection of essays *Jung and Film* (2005) maintains this emphasis although the updated edition *Jung and Film II: the Return* (2011) includes material on documentary which is a welcome addition since studies in this area appear to have been relatively neglected hitherto. I therefore tread on relatively virgin territory and need to define my use of terms such as archetype before proceeding to analyze the archetypal in documentary films.

**THE JUNGEIAN CONCEPTION OF ARCHETYPE**

My use of the word archetypal takes Jung’s conception as a starting point. However, it is apparent in his interpretation that one cannot define or assign definite meaning to archetypal content per se:

Contents of an archetypal character are manifestations of processes in the collective unconscious. Hence they do not refer to anything that is or has been conscious, but to something essentially unconscious. In the last analysis, therefore, it is impossible to say what they refer to. Every interpretation remains “as-if”. The ultimate core of meaning can be circumscribed but not described (Jung 1980:156).
Jung’s interpretation suggests that an image with archetypal content or character does not necessarily point to a known referent but while originating in the unconscious its power is nonetheless strongly felt and thus has more to do with experience than understanding.

THE EXPERIENTIAL NATURE OF FILMIC IMAGES

The emotional power of some films or of images within a film may resist analysis or meaning, yet resonate at some deep, even subconscious level of experience which might be considered as a subliminal experience of identity. In outlining his theory of art, James Joyce (1967:204-5) suggests that what he terms aesthetic arrest occurs when there is the experience of identification with the archetypal content in the image beheld. Similarly, in discussing ways of seeing, filmmaker and theorist David MacDougall (2006:24) describes the concepts of Darshan in traditional Hindu iconography whereby the deity looks at the beholder and the latter experiences this gaze as a kind of identity. However, most post-modern Western intellectual observers (and film viewers generally) are not used to looking (and perhaps allowing themselves time to feel) so intently. The experience of Joycean “aesthetic arrest” or Darshan-inspired identity may be less common in Western culture or at least not consciously experienced, for as MacDougall (2006:8) points out, we live in a world so dominated by concepts that our attention spans are limited and we worry about what we are supposed to be thinking about, and the very act of thinking interferes with the process of looking. This of course refers to the activity of the conscious mind that is fully awake. However, the mental process involved in watching a film has often been described as being almost akin to a dreaming state, and consequently one might postulate a different order of receptivity to those filmic images with archetypal content.

In her investigation of dreams and dream-like states, Michele Stephens has suggested that the mind has two different kinds of memory registers: one, available to waking consciousness which organises information in terms of verbal categories and semantic understanding, and another connected to imagery in dreams and dream-like states which records and organises all information according to its emotional significance (Stephens 2003:97-8). She describes the latter emotionally coded register as being outside consciousness and being linked to a stream of imagery thought which she has labeled “autonomous imagination.”

Furthermore, psychiatry professor Ernest Hartmann proposes that while emotion “influences all mental activity and imagery” there is evidence to suggest that it “has greater influence on our
cognition and perception in’ states of relaxation, and that it has less influence in our ordinary waking state” (Hartmann 2003:160).

While some academics and scholars might watch an ethnographic film with analytical intellect poised for critique, a more relaxed and dreamy mode of reception might be more common in other viewers. In writing about the reception of Robert Gardner’s ethnographic films, which tend to be saturated with metaphor and symbol, Peter Loizos (1993:139) points out that while these films are widely praised by poets and artists (those who might be more attuned to emotive content and stirrings in their subconscious), most negative comments on these films come from “behavioural scientists and responsible educators” who, one assumes, are more concerned with prosaic meaning than poetic metaphor.

Meaning with regard to symbolic images is not clear-cut and hence the analytical mind becomes frustrated. Knowing or understanding is not the function of a symbol according to Jung:

Every view which interprets the symbolic expression as an analogue of an abbreviated designation for a known thing is semiotic. A view which interprets the symbolic expression as the best possible formulation of a relatively unknown thing, which for that reason cannot be more clearly or characteristically expressed, is symbolic (Jung 1976:474).

This statement is characteristic of Jung’s widely quoted distinction between signs, which he took as pointing to something known, and symbols which he regarded as pointing to the unknown, while being linked to the known, as in metaphor. However, as James Hillman (1977:67) has pointed out, followers of Jung in psychological orthopraxy have, for instance, regarded cats in men’s dreams to mean anima, eggs in women’s dreams connoting fecundity in a literalized simplification which has betrayed the depths of Jung’s ideas. This same kind of simplistic hermeneutic has been used in populist writing about Jungian archetypes in film. Ironically, David Miller (1990:328) has suggested that if Jung were alive today he might well have been closer to the French Freudians and semioticians such as Lacan and Kristeva whose language is peppered with “gappy” unknowing rather than to the American Jungians with all their hermeneutic knowledge.

A clarification of the symbolic is important when analysing the problem of projection in filmmaking which Marshall has raised not least to account for those ethnographic films which are not grounded in the matter-of-fact realism which Marshall preferred. Robert Gardner is an ethnographic filmmaker whose work stands most clearly polarised to Marshall in terms of
referencing the mythic and archetypal. His work is useful to contrast with Marshall not least because the two of them began working on the Kalahari material together in the 1950s before parting ways (see chapter 4). Gardner’s films have been perceptively identified by Loizos (1993:140) as reminiscent of the 19th century Symbolist movement in French painting which, to quote Loizos, believed that “a complex reality can be appreciated through metaphors or symbols, isolated from the flux of events and particulars, and given emphasis by the observer” (ibid).

Loizos suggests that Gardner has been much misunderstood in that “he is not an insufficiently educated realist, but a man who has been consistently unenchanted by realism, and attracted to other modes of representation” (Loizos 1993:141).

ARCHETYPAL RESONANCE

Films such as Robert Gardner’s Forest of Bliss, concerning rituals relating to death in Benares, could be seen as a projection of the filmmaker’s ideas and associations concerning death in more universal, archetypal and mythic terms. Gardner openly admits to having had syncretic reflections before going to Benares.

I remember spending some time in the library looking into Greek mythology and reading again about the river Styx and about Cereberus and other familiar figures in that landscape and saying, my God, you know as I remember Benares, there really is some reason for seeing a parallel here between a Greek and Hindu or Asian idea (Gardner 2001:17).

Forest of Bliss begins with the image of a dog trotting along what Gardner calls the “far shore” and his early thinking about the film shows a recognition for the potential of such images to convey a universal mythological image connoting the inevitability of death.

Before I had even arrived in Benares to begin shooting the film, I thought this shore had a special meaning. I sensed a quite forbidding mystery about it. It was a shore as much in the metaphorical sense as any other, something that all of us must finally reach (Gardner 2001:16).

Although this example of Gardner’s image-making has the quality of resonance with a known mythic form – Cerberus the dog which stands guarding the entrance to the Greek underworld, Glen Slater (2005:6) suggests the archetypal quality of a film is not determined by it being full of recognisable archetypes; instead, he suggests a process of archetypal resonance occurs in moments when the film’s action reveals a universally significant subtext amplified by visual metaphors. According to this understanding, the filmmaker’s art and creative choices are
significant and the archetypal resonance is far more than a matter of the basic story structure or inclusion of types. As Slater summarizes:

Archetypal resonance results from the sum of (the filmmaker’s) choices, choices as subtle as whether a face comes into frame with a sweaty brow, a nervous tick, or a mouth full of food. What becomes a metaphor in film depends on all these contributions. And if, as Vico said, metaphor is “myth in brief” then we must assign much of the mythic quality of film to those who craft each aspect (Slater 2005:9).

The filmmaker is ultimately responsible for whether a film works in an archetypal sense, and this is not always a simple matter. Gardner is clearly a master in this regard. In Forest of Bliss strong images set the mood from the beginning and despite his awareness of images from Greek mythology and the parallels in Benares, his filmmaking reflects a trust of the unknowable spontaneous prompts from the unconscious. Gardner’s powerfully evocative shot of fighting dogs in the mist which he regards as a key image, suggestive of the film’s theme was not, he claims, consciously thought out or planned but on the spur of the moment and came about through hearing dogs snarling behind him. It was this audible cue, according to his account, which tripped off a reflex to spin round and begin shooting (Gardner 2001:167).

Gardner is clearly sensitive to images shot almost by accident, shots which come about through being open to the unconscious, to what happens, to what he calls ‘luck’ (2001:110). This approach might be contrasted with a concrete intention to seek out and shoot images fixed and pre-existing in the mind of the filmmaker. This can result in barren two-dimensional stereotypes where meaning is closed rather than open to imagination, in short, a series of clichés. It is easy enough to film someone dressed up as a “Bushman” in skins but this in itself does not result in what Slater has termed archetypal resonance.

Despite his apparent oppositional approach to Gardner, I believe Marshall was just as sensitive and open to moments and events which played out at an unconscious level. Many of Marshall’s films, including the Pittsburgh Police series, display his genius for subconscious or intuitive ‘knowing,’ which translated into a knack for positioning himself to shoot at the right place at the right time. Furthermore, he was more than capable of incorporating archetypal resonance, especially in his more poetic films such as The Hunters or Bitter Melons and in his intimate sequence films which are examined in Chapter 3. Despite Marshall’s stated opposition to myth-making, his films show that he was not opposed to poetic evocation, or sensitivity to archetypal
images, but rather to stereotypical portrayal which did not reflect reality. It is important therefore to distinguish between archetype and stereotype.

ARCHETYPE AND STEREOTYPE

In terms of narrative, the screenwriter Robert McKee distinguishes between archetype and stereotype hinting that the former has the ability to open consciousness whereas the latter constricts it:

The archetypal story unearths a universally human experience, then wraps itself inside a unique culture-specific expression. A stereotypical story reverses this pattern. It suffers a poverty of both content and form. It confines itself to a narrow, culture-specific experience and dresses in stale, non-specific generalities (McKee 1997:3-4).

However, as Slater (2005:12) has pointed out, despite its forays into depth psychology, mainstream filmmaking, Hollywood in particular is still prone to producing stereotypes as will be further explored in Chapter 2. In an environment driven by Western cultural and commercial norms, where easily digestible packaged products are preferred, a misunderstanding of the archetypal results in a tendency toward films denoting a known, or commonly accepted type – a cliché. Although writing in 1971, the tendencies expressed by Stanley Cavell remain in most mainstream films:

Until recently, types of black human beings were not created in film: black people were stereotypes – mammies, shiftless servants, loyal retainers, entertainers. We were not given, and not in a position to be given, individualities that projected particular ways of inhabiting a social role; we recognized only the role. Occasionally the humanity behind the role would manifest itself; and the result was a revelation not of a human individuality, but of an entire realm of humanity becoming visible (Cavell 1971:33-34).

A stereotype more often than not denotes a role – a known role and more often that not the role is something we observe outside from and separate from our core selves. To become the role oneself is to be a stuffed-shirt, empty of individual identity. The role has a label and an expected or anticipated appearance and behaviour, the stereotypical image has become fixed in meaning, and is no longer open to mystery as in the case of Jung’s understanding of the symbol. The characters in Marshall’s film The Hunters are first and foremost individuals, not Hunters or Bushmen. Similarly in Robert Gardner’s Dead Birds the filmmaker selected characters who showed ways of inhabiting a role which drew on their individual traits. In a letter written to John
Marshall and Timothy Asch while in the midst of shooting *Dead Birds* in April 1961, Gardner explained how he was:

“restricting the leading participants to certain individuals, so that when there is something to see in this culture I will try to arrange that one of these individuals portrays it. Basically I will work with four men (Weyak, Jege Asuk, Aloro, and Hanomoak), four boys (Uwar, Aplegma, Pua and Pelamo), and three or four other figures... I am counting on the culture, or rather these individuals, to write the story themselves” (Gardner 2007:65).

Such comments give primacy to the individual as opposed to the type. In my film *Bitter Roots*, #Toma explains how tourists often asked: “Where are the Bushmen?” assuming he was not one of them since he was acting as (playing the role of) the tourist guide. For such tourists, #Toma was not conforming to the stereotypical role of “Bushman” (the mythic image which Marshall fought against and which has been sustained through many documentary films) because he was not wearing skins or carrying a bow and arrow.

While a role can be recognised on an intellectual level, we do not necessarily identify emotionally with it. It lacks the mystery of the ways of inhabiting a role - of being human. Adonis Kyrou quotes the great filmmaker Luis Bunuel on the importance of this mystery element in film as art.

The essential element in any work of art is mystery, and generally this is lacking in films… A film is like an involuntary imitation of a dream… On the screen, as within the human being, the nocturnal voyage into the unconscious begins... The cinema seems to have been invented to express the life of the subconscious, the roots of which penetrate poetry so deeply. Yet it is almost never used to do this (Kyrou 1963:109-111).

Certain filmmakers, however, have recognized that films communicate to the subconscious as much as the conscious. Don Fredericksen calls this symbolic cinema and suggests that such films include not only commercial narrative and experimental films but documentaries as well.

**SYMBOLIC IMAGES AND OPEN-ENDED MEANING**

As has been described, symbolic images have some felt resonance in the unconscious but do not necessarily denote meaning so much as they connote mystery and identity while simultaneously evoking a certain mood. Concrete images will have a specific context in a film, yet they their meanings are not closed. They act as symbols, which can be expanded, revealing multiple referents suggestive of, yet not specifically defining, new meaning through mythic amplification.
This is what Don Fredericksen attempts to do by examining a mysterious sequence of flying birds appearing in the 10th minute of Basil Wright’s Song of Ceylon (1935). This sequence appears in the film’s closing sequence of Part One: The Buddha. Starting by examining the filmmaker’s experience, Fredericksen quotes Wright’s personal description citing his description of: “extraordinary, inexplicable inner impulses which made me shoot things I couldn’t have logically explained” (Fredricksen 2005:40). Wright claims he shot the flying birds after he had decided to finish shooting for the day, but was somehow forced to shoot them through some internal tension “breaking out into expression, coming from one’s subconscious... I still cannot understand it. I walked into an unconscious process, shot the material and turned it into the film it is” (in Fredericksen 2005:40-41).

Fredericksen finds the shots of the birds puzzling and moving, appearing at the end of a lyric rendering of an annual pilgrimage to “Adam’s Peak,” from the top of which, according to local mythic belief, Buddha departed earth. He hints that the visual journey embodies a spiritual journey up from the ‘flatlands’ and so with the bird sequence, one moves “up into the air” (Ibid: 42-43). He then proceeds to amplify the image with reference to mythic images: representations of gods as birds, as a symbol for the transmigration of the soul, and comparing the ascension to Heaven as reminiscent of the bird-soul-ecstatic flight which Eliade refers in relation to some archaic aspects of Shamanism (1960:105). In noting that all the birds are flying off to the left, he even develops a parallel to bird myths from the Jicarilla Indian tradition, and to Mesopotamian high Neolithic pottery where early images of animals and birds form the ancient symbol of the swastika which is also associated with the Buddha.

While such intuitive leaps and cross-cultural comparisons might appear excessive, they do represent a method (mythic amplification) to explain why certain filmic images have a deep emotional impact which addresses the unconscious as much as the conscious mind. The requirement for trusting such a method does however require some degree of acceptance of Jung’s claims concerning the prevalence of archetypal motifs from ancient myths and fairy tales through to the fantasies and delusions of contemporary people.

Although he never refers to archetypal images as such, appearing to take more interest in Freudian psychoanalysis (Gardner 2007:5), it is clear Robert Gardner appreciated films incorporating realist images which also have the capacity to evoke and plumb the depths of emotional experience. It is no surprise that he was a great admirer of Song of Ceylon: “Each time
[I see it] it reveals new evidence of an astonishing capacity to make images that convey feeling and mood at the same time they are representing, indeed preserving, the world of actuality” (Gardner 2006:332).

The very first shot of Robert Gardner’s film Dead Birds is one such image - a long tracking shot of a bird in flight, taken from higher ground so we see the bird fly across the Baliem Valley. This shot suggests we are entering into mythic territory. Gardner’s opening words in his memorable narration are spoken in a sonorous tone and reinforces the idea that the film inhabits a liminal zone between myth and reality:

There is a fable told by a mountain people living in the ancient highlands of New Guinea about a race between a snake and a bird. It tells of a conquest which decided if men would be like birds and die or be like snakes, which shed their skins and have eternal life. The bird won and from that time, all men, like birds, must die (Gardner Dead Birds 1964).

That Gardner regards the bird as symbolic, open to transcendent rather than literal meaning, is inferred by his original preference for the black and white over the colour version of the film, since such a rendering, as Paul Henley (2007: 36) points out, encourages the viewer to regard the bird’s status as symbolic. In the additional commentary accompanying the DVD of the film, Gardner explains to Lucien Taylor:

…for me that bird is much more a bird in black and white than it was in colour. It’s that flight was much more flight. To see it in some more life-like way in color did not enliven the bird, it burdened the bird with data that was irrelevant to its birdness (Gardner Dead Birds 2004).

While both Song of Ceylon and Dead Birds explore archetypal themes, Gardner’s film is ostensibly about war, death and mourning amongst the Dani of the New Guinea Highlands. The shot of the bird is immediately followed by a shot of the funeral pyre of a Dani man killed in battle. Gardner is making clear in his editing, and in the context of the Dani fable, that the bird connotes an awakening to mortality. This connotes another mythic idea, namely the Biblical idea of the “Fall” following expanded human consciousness of death and the subsequent myth of departure from the Garden of Eden. Gardner’s editing expands the local and parochial denotation of the filmic images, so they resonate with an archetypal or universal idea. Indeed, Gardner writes:

I first went there (the Grand Valley of the Baliem) to describe in words and images people who lived in a place that reminded me of what Eden might be like had such painful pastimes as ritual war not been invented (Gardner 2006:313).
Following Fredericksen’s method, further mythological references could be made to amplify the image of the flying bird over the gardens of the Dani, to expand on why the image has such powerful resonance, especially in conjunction with the narration, but whether the film’s opening image can be regarded as projection on the part of the filmmaker is not completely clear. We are informed that the bird/snake myth is told by the Dani but we never hear this fable recounted by the Dani themselves. Throughout the film Gardner has juxtaposed shots of men with images of birds or bird sounds, men dressed as birds with feathers in their hair and the boy Pua killing and eating a bird, placing feathers in his hair as a sign of his growing towards manhood. Clearly birds are important in the daily lives and consciousness of the Dani, but Gardner’s shooting and editing places Dani daily reality squarely within the framework of their own myth, yet a myth which Gardner’s art subliminally suggests, has resonance with more universal reflections on human mortality.

My own filmmaking has been influenced by the power of Gardner’s images and juxtapositions from *Dead Birds. Esther Remembers* (2008) concerns an Aboriginal elder recalling her early childhood in Arnhem Land (in the Northern Territory of Australia) and her move from the Bush to the Church Mission at Oenpelli. This film also begins with a tracking shot of a bird flying over a billabong and coming to alight on a distant tree across the water while the accompanying soundtrack carries Esther’s voice singing a song in ‘language’ about the white cockatoo. While I assign no single meaning to the image in the film, it is an attempt to convey, through metaphor, the theme of her story: an old person reflecting on the meaning of her life before her own flight through it comes to an end. It is my own clumsy attempt to convey an image connoting acceptance of mortality. The shot immediately following the bird alighting is of a church hall, with the soundtrack of voices singing in a somewhat funereal tone, which at the time of editing I had not realized was also connected thematically to the second shot in Gardner’s film.

In Esther’s case, I was also trying to convey the deep meaning I perceived that the land had for her. In another part of the film, as she tells of her dream of angels singing for her I have juxtaposed another image of birds flying over the billabong, and placed shots of landscape over her voice telling how the angels used to come to her country. I projected my own symbolism into the film because for me it conveyed the subconscious tension I felt concerning her Christianity and her Aboriginality which may or may not be valid, and indeed, might rather reflect my own tension between the two.
I also acknowledge that the image of the flying bird in the film’s context does not relate to any story or myth told to me by Esther. However, as in the bird symbolism in Song of Ceylon and Dead Birds no fixed meaning has been assigned to the symbol and it remains for the viewer to experience the image in his or her own way. It could be argued that in each of the above-mentioned films, there is projection of the filmmaker’s artistic vision, but such deliberately placed metaphorical images laden with mythical import are not essential for symbols to have power in a documentary film.

TRUTH AND SYMBOL IN OBSERVED EVENTS

An image does not have to be overtly symbolic or mythological in order to mine emotional or archetypal depths while at the same time portraying an observed event. In the 18th minute of John Marshall’s film The Hunters, there is a poignant shot of ≠Toma reaching up to some bird nests and pulling out tiny, hardly formed chicks. It is a strong image connoting hunger, but also conveying an element of shame that the hunter cannot bring back anything more substantial. The spirit of pathos is made stronger by Marshall’s narration:

≠Toma took the little birds. He would make some soup from them for his baby. He would cook them with water and she would drink the broth. Neither he nor his wife would take any of it. As he opened the nest, he thought about the game. With good food here and water, why had they moved?.... In some nests ≠Toma found young birds, in others, eggs, and in others, dead young birds. These small birds were very little to take home after a whole day’s hunting (Marshall, The Hunters 1957).

This narration accompanies wide shots of ≠Toma throwing away the nests and dead chicks, a close up of his hands holding a helplessly flapping little chick followed by a close up of his dejected looking face.

Unlike the bird images from Song of Ceylon, Dead Birds or Esther Remembers, Marshall’s bird sequence is not included as a metaphor relating to the human condition, human soul or anything separate from or parallel to the main action of the film, but is part of an observational sequence shot as an event unfolded involving one of the film’s main characters. It lays no claim to being openly metaphorical yet it stays with one as a powerfully evocative image with strong archetypal resonance.
The emotional impact of this sequence upon my own unconscious was such that I had unknowingly, through a kind of cryptomnesia, used a similar sequence progression in my thesis film, *Bitter Roots* (2010). In the 35th minute of my film there is a shot of a boy, #Toma /Ti!kay, cradling a dove (still alive) which he had snared and which he planned to eat even though it would have amounted to very little meat.

![#Toma /Ti!kay’s dove in Bitter Roots (©Adrian Strong).](image)

This shot is followed by a sequence showing /Qui, the son of a great hunter wistfully recalling the exploits of his father while expressing shame in the inadequacy of his own hunting in the new era of the Conservancy whose rules did not allow people to hunt in the vicinity.

![/Qui Nani recalling going hunting with his father in Bitter Roots (©Adrian Strong) ](image)
At the time I edited the film, I had not consciously recognised the echoes of Marshall’s bird scene from *The Hunters*, but in retrospect I believe that it registered subconsciously as an image connoting a kind of noble or aristocratic shame in a Nietzschean sense wherein failure of performance elevates rather than lowers a character’s humanity.

In *Bitter Roots*, I believe there is an archetypal parallel in /Qui’s admitting his failure to follow in his father’s footsteps which manifests as a noble sense of shame. There is a poignancy in this moment – a wistful longing for the unreachable, namely to become a great hunter himself. The nature of the (timeless) archetypal image is that it will not only strike a deep human resonance, but that it will also tend to recur and manifest with new inflections in subsequent moments in history which in these cases were captured and included in two films separated by more than half a century.

CONCRETISED MYTH AND THE CLOSURE OF MEANING

In this chapter, I have sought to explain and even defend mythic images and attempted to explain the power of archetypal images within some ethnographic films even when projection by the filmmaker takes place. However, I believe there is an important difference, between poetic images conveying emotional depth, mystery and open-ended meaning, and the concrete mythologisation of a people whereby the perceived meaning of their culture becomes fixed in terms of visual representation. The people concerned are then turned into stereotypes, and in the case of the so-called Bushmen, these stereotypes bear little if any resemblance to their lives. When the people themselves have little or no power in terms of their own representation severe moral and social consequences can result. This has long been the case with the filmic portrayal of people known as The Bushmen in southern Africa. The next chapter seeks to expand on this specific problem.
Chapter 2: The Bushman Myth in Documentary Film

The sight of any single thing or event entrains the sight of other things and events. To recognize an appearance requires the memory of other appearances. And these memories, often projected as expectations, continue to qualify the seen long after the stage of primary recognition.

*John Berger (1995:113)*

This chapter seeks to explain how the Bushman myth has persisted in documentaries throughout the twentieth century right through to the present day. The myth is rendered from a different perspective in the films discussed, but invariably depicts images of the ‘pristine primitive’ living by hunting and gathering, connotative of archaic beginnings. A static way of life is portrayed as if fossilized in amber, with no participation in history and remaining geographically isolated from all external contact. Ahistoricity and atemporicity are hallmarks of the mythic or archetypal yet no real people or cultures exist in such a space-time vacuum. Explanations for the myth’s power to entrance, despite evidence to the contrary are suggested, and provide a backdrop for subsequent chapters which examine the difficult task John Marshall set himself to debunk myths about Bushmen, once he began to realize their detrimental and concrete effects upon the Ju/'hoansi in particular, and people called Bushmen in general.

**GENESIS OF THE MYTH IN DOCUMENTARY FILM**

In my formative years, my own filmic introduction to the Bushmen was through viewing a repeat of a popular BBC broadcast series, *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (1956). Sir Laurens van der Post’s film and literary travelogue with the same title constituted persistent and powerful myths to the point where for me personally, they became a catalyst to seek out a culture, the imaginative interpretation of which had captured my sensibilities. Undoubtedly my early years, and burgeoning aesthetic awareness were moulded in no small part by the Bushman myth rendered in van der Post’s artistic creations. However, the origins of the Bushman myth as portrayed in film lie much earlier than van der Post and can be traced back almost to the dawn of ethnographic film.

In 1909, barely a decade after Alfred Cort Hadden’s 1998 expedition to the Torres Straits where indigenous male dancers were filmed in what was perhaps the first ethnographic film from the field (de Brigard 1995: 15-16), an Austrian ethnologist, Rudolf Pöch, mounted an eighteen month
expedition to South West Africa where, as Robert Gordon has described (2002: 215), he made a film about the Bushmen as well as accumulating the largest ever collection of Bushmen skulls.

Significantly, in terms of the Bushman myth, Pöch’s primary interest was in pristine Bushmen living a traditional lifestyle. Gordon (2002:214) observes that Pöch’s film only depicts Bushmen dressed in skins, whereas photographs taken on the same expedition shows the Bushmen that Pöch encountered dressed in tattered European clothing. Although Pöch’s film was never distributed in the Anglophone world, and had minimal influence, it is a good illustration of the kind of deceptive myth-making that would shape future films about people labeled Bushmen which continued to be driven by a compulsion to portray film subjects as wild, pristine, close to nature, emphasising their exotic otherness and suggesting a link to the archaic beginnings of the human race.

THE BUSHMAN MYTH IN THE 1920s

The 1925 Denver African Expedition to South West Africa organized by Ernest C. Cadle, as a commercial venture, set out to find the fabled Bushmen of the Kalahari. As Robert Gordon has pointed out in his detailed study of the expedition, Cadle marketed the expedition to his American sponsors by framing it as a mission to find the ‘missing link’ between men and apes, a popular topic following Raymond Dart’s discovery of the Taung Skull (Gordon 1997:16-19). The expedition resulted in an early documentary film titled The Bushmen (1927) produced for commercial release and bought for international distribution by the Pathé organization (Gordon 1997:90). Although the film was not a commercial success, had scant distribution and therefore cannot have had direct influence on later films, historian Lauren Van Vuuren suggests that it does foreshadow subsequent trends in documentaries on the Bushmen (2006:27). In effect the film illustrates the ongoing creation of a morphogenetic field concerning visual depictions of Bushmen.

The Bushmen featured in the film are not Ju/hoansi but the Hei//kom Bushmen who were living in Etosha Game reserve in northern South West Africa, however the mystique of the Kalahari prevails as part of the myth-making. Van Vuuren (2006:34) informs us the film’s final inter-title reads: “In solitude and mystery – lost in the shifting sands of the Kalahari.”
Foreshadowing subsequent documentaries, *The Bushmen* is strongly connotative of a search for archaic beginnings. Van Vuuren describes the film in terms of a journey in both time and space starting with shots of the cities and towns of South Africa and South West Africa before shifting to less familiar, more exotic locations. Another inter-title reads: “A step backward in time – Zanzibar, famous Isle of Spice, a name immortalized by the glamour and romance of the *Arabian Nights.*”

Passing through various black African tribes including the Ovambo people of South West Africa and the Masai hunters of Kenya (featured in a lion hunt), the travelogue section delves into an increasingly ‘wild’ Africa with Bushmen only being introduced almost halfway into the film. The accompanying inter-title as Van Vuuren (2006:35) observes, connotes a descent to primordial, primitive beginnings: “One boundary of the bushman’s domain, the Etosha Pan – forty-five hundred square miles of bottomless mud and slime.” Van Vuuren’s further close reading of the film points out that in shot 323 the inter-title reads: “Very near the bottom of the path extending through the ages – the home of a Heikum [sic] Bushman, just a window of sticks and grass” (Van Vuuren 2006:37).

The sardonic comment on the ‘crudeness’ of Bushmen life is symbolized in the Bushman shelter, which in subsequent films consolidating the Bushman myth becomes a symbol of ahistorical authenticity.

**SYMBOLS OF AUTHENTICITY IN MYTH-MAKING**

My thesis film, *Bitter Roots* bears witness to the continuing resonance of the image of a grass shelter as a symbol for Bushmen ‘authenticity’ to the present day. Approximately 45 minutes into *Bitter Roots* it becomes apparent that the South African filmmaker, Craig Foster, had requested a community at Nǂamtchoa to construct a village of grass shelters purely for his *documentary*, despite the fact that the community live in solid huts, built with poles and thatch, which Ju/’hoansi had been building for decades.

In my film, Nǂamtchoa resident /Ti!kay proclaims that people no longer live as they did in the past, but he cannot argue with the South African filmmaker who pays villagers for their appearance in his film, and tells them he just wants to show how people were living in the past. This clearly shows how the myth of a people portrayed outside history is fostered and illustrates
how little power Ju/'hoansi have in terms of their own portrayal when faced with the power of the myth, backed up by money, power and a seemingly inexhaustible media appetite for images associate with the myth.

Another inter-title from the 1927 film *The Bushmen* reads: “The Art of pottery far beyond his knowledge, the Bushman must depend upon Nature for all domestic utensils (Van Vuuren 2006:37). Objects made from bush materials and incorporated into peoples lives have become the *sine qua non* for imaging the myth, however in most documentaries about Bushmen western goods rarely appear in the frame despite acculturation having taken place. For example, in the afore-mentioned scene in *Bitter Roots*, the South African filmmaker told /Ti!kay that he didn’t want to see Western peoples’ things in his film. Back in the mid-1950s even John Marshall himself was clearing out tin cans from his shots in order to make the Ju/'hoansi ‘look real’ (Marshall 1993:32). In the act of setting out to make a film about ‘Bushmen’ it is almost as if a subconscious checklist of symbols dictates what a filmmaker should and should not include in such a film.

Whereas the 1925 Denver expedition produced a film with a Social Darwinist slant, seeing Bushmen as crude primitives, subsequent films from the mid-twentieth century onward began to spin the myth in a more positive light, seeing Bushmen of symbols of undefiled and spontaneous human nature. The basic features of the Bushmen myth would remain, as a people outside time
and isolated from the world, but the journey of filmmakers would start to reflect their own inward psychological journey.

THE BUSHMAN MYTH IN THE 1950s: VAN DER POST’S PARADISE LOST

Van der Post’s films series *The Lost World of the Kalahari* was based on his expedition to southern Africa in 1954/5. The BBC screened the series in the summer 1956 and according to the van der Post’s biographer, J.D.F. Jones, the corporation declared it a ‘tour de force’ and ‘one of the most successful films we have ever undertaken.’ Jones adds that the BBC ratings for the film series were second only to those for the Coronation (Jones, 2002: 39-40). Writing in *The Spectator* in 1984, Christopher Booker nominated it as ‘the most significant television series ever made’ (quoted in Jones 2002: 225).

Part of the film series’ success in bringing the Bushmen myth to a global audience may lie in how it wove together two myths, synergising them into a narrative structure. As Van Vuuren points out: “Van der Post intersects the mythical image of the Bushman in the Lost World with another fairy tale: that of himself as searcher, frontiersman and explorer who breaks ground both physically and in the realm of the human spirit” (Van Vuuren 2006:74).

Van der Post renders his film series as an archetypal mythological journey: the Bushmen are elevated to mythic figures in a narrative whose subtext can be read as a descent into the human psyche in search for what is ‘forgotten, lost, past.’

This powerful narrative mirrors the archetypal Hero Journey, which Joseph Campbell’s seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, illustrates as the basic structure of many stories and myths from around the world. It can be represented in three rites of passage, namely: separation-initiation-return.

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are encountered there and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (Campbell 1988:30).

An encounter with Bushmen in the Kalahari provides a perfect screen upon which to project the archetype of the hero myth. For a filmmaker whose imagination dominates his filmmaking such
as Van der Post, the Kalahari becomes the ‘region of supernatural wonder’ and the fact that people can hunt with tiny bows and arrows, surviving in such a harsh environment, turns them into the ‘fabulous forces’ of ‘supernatural wonder’.

The hero cum adventurer cum filmmaker then returns to the everyday world with the boon of his exposed footage, ‘proving’ to a Western world divorced from the natural world, that its culture’s redemption is possible through ‘saving the Bushmen’ (as van der Post exhorts at the end of his series).

The first stage of the Hero myth Joseph Campbell designates as the “call to adventure”:

(The call) signifies that destiny has summoned the hero from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may variously be represented: a distant land, a forest… a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state, but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight (Campbell 1988:58).

It is not hard to see how this archetypal narrative structure, when articulated in a documentary film would strike a deep chord of resonance because of its familiarity. What better ‘distant land’ than the Kalahari and what better inhabitants for projecting the image of ‘strangely fluid and polymorphous beings’ than the Bushmen? Part of the reason for the film series’ success is that van der Post not only embarks on an outward journey to Africa, but simultaneously invites his audience on an inward journey in search of a lost world within the human psyche with which contemporary urban people have lost touch.

Psychologically speaking, the word ‘Lost’ in the film’s title might refer not so much to the Kalahari but to a lost connection to the natural world and to spontaneous and integrated human nature. The filmmaker uses the image of the Bushmen to create a symbolic resonance with what he sees as Western culture’s inner loss.

The problem for the film as a documentary rather than as an inward psychological journey is that whereas the traditional myths of mankind may be regarded as fiction which speaks psychological truth to the psyche through metaphor, documentary film, purporting to show reality, concretises the archetypal and projects a psychological truth upon real people, so confusing external reality with psychological insight.
Campbell suggests that the archetypal hero journey in myth often begins in some kind of wasteland, a place of meaninglessness (1988:59). Reflecting the themes of T.S. Eliot’s famous poem, Van der Post experiences a ‘wasteland’ in his conceptualisation of the twentieth century Western world having lost all sense of connection to the spontaneous living natural world, and this becomes his motivation to seek a symbol of renewal which he projects in his film series upon the Bushmen. Whilst not specifically mentioning the symbol of the wasteland, Edwin Wilmsen has suggested that creative films about the Kalahari from the 1950s (in which he includes not only van der Post’s film, but also John Marshall’s Hunters) invented a primal past world as a foil to a post World-War II crisis, where the fear of modernity with its associated threat to humanity and alienation of individuals from society was apparent.

To overcome this threat, a priori human possibilities had to be re-excavated, the primitive in man brought forth again, natural society reasserted… In van der Post’s Lost World, as in John Marshall’s Hunters, these personal and collective crises are fused and resolved in the revelation of ‘Bushmen’ as the Jungian archetype of authentic humanity” (Wilmsen 1995:202-3).

Having been introduced to Carl Jung shortly after the Second World War, Van der Post began to be heavily influenced by Jung’s psychology and subsequently went on to author a book titled Jung and the Story of our Time (1976). Jungian ideas about archetypes and the contemporary state of humankind are apparent in van der Post’s approach to the Lost World. The film series constitutes an exhortation to rediscover the archetype of the ‘pristine primitive’ not only in himself but more generally in Western culture. Parallel to van der Post’s mission to ‘save the Bushmen’ and their way of life is his psychological mission to salvage the inner wild man or woman in the contemporary human psyche.

It is not surprising that Robert Gordon (2003:110) sees a connection between the Bushman myth and American poet Robert Bly’s re-visioning of masculinity The latter is articulated in Bly’s Iron John (1992) which distills psychological truths from a fairy tale connoting initiation into manhood through reconnecting to the archetype of the ‘wild man’ which manifests in differing guises and names in various mythic traditions. Clearly the amalgam of ‘bush’ and ‘man’ has subconscious connotations with the idea of the ‘wild man,’ and a crude and uneducated reading of Bly may indeed have contributed to further consolidation of the Bushmen myth.
While Gordon has conducted detailed research and written extensively on the historical emergence of the Bushmen myth (1997, 2000, 2002, 2003), he remains puzzled at the persistence of what he has recently come to regard as a fairy tale rather than a myth:

“After two decades of attempted revisionism, we should perhaps now see the issue of the noble hunters not as a myth but as a fairy tale, because fairy tales are retold repeatedly, despite solid empirical evidence disproving them... How do people manage to “view” images but not see them? Are there psychological schemata at work that simply reinforce our basic beliefs and fantasies?” (Gordon 2003:107).

I believe Gordon is correct in seeking answers to this conundrum in psychological territory. With the hugely popular success of Van der Post’s film, which was hardly innovative in artistic terms, one needs to look deeper into why such a film had such resonance with the public. I suspect the answer lies partly in the film’s archetypal Hero Journey structure which incorporates and consolidates the myth of Bushmen as pristine primitives, while conflating this with a concretised psychological image of atonement with the natural world.

MAKING IMAGES FIT THE MYTH

The mythic narrative in many films about Bushmen relies on selective viewing which maintains a pretence of people living pristine lives without acculturation while closer examination often demonstrates the opposite to be the case. For example, Edwin Wilmsen has drawn attention to a shot in the latter part of van der Post’s film series which shows a white farm building and evidence of “bare and trampled sand characteristic of areas where cattle congregate, such as farms and wells” (Wilmsen 2002:158).

Furthermore, in episode four of Van der Post’s film series which is entitled ‘Life in the Great Thirstland,’ he uses maps to illustrate the expedition’s route to its final destination, the ‘Sipwells,’ where his ‘pristine Bushmen’ are encountered. However, as Van Vuuren points out, according to the geographic evidence presented, this location is not remote, certainly not in the centre of the Kalahari as the narrative would suggest, but is actually just north and west of the Ghanzi farming district near the South-West Africa – Bechuanaland border which had been settled by Boer farmers since 1898; and where, by the 1950s, most Bushmen lived in poverty as hungry squatters (Van Vuuren 2006:81-2). In seeking to explain such misrepresentations, Wilmsen has suggested that van der Post was seeking a ‘metaphoric’ remoteness rather than a physical remoteness in
order to conform to the image of the Bushman in his imagination. He referred to his experience with the Bushmen as “exploring a great unknown within my own spirit… remembering the great memory” (Wilmsen 2002:159).

When reality contradicts the imagination of a filmmaker, one can only assume that the fiction overrides ‘mere fact’ because the former conforms to the psychological truth of the myth (the quest for an inner pristine nature in the psyche) which, in the mind of the filmmaker, has greater import and he must then, through projection, make the film’s images fit the myth.

The documentary film series of van der Post has come to be been regarded as more about the myths of its maker than about the actual people being filmed (see Barnard 1989, Van Vuuren 2006) and this is most apparent to those who have taken the time to get to know real people living real lives. As anthropologist Alan Barnard has commented:

During my wanderings in the Kalahari, I have always thought van der Post was living in a fantasy world – a world which, for better or worse, bears only passing reference to the mundane world of science and scholarship, or of real Bushmen making a living from the desert… Van der Post’s Africa is no specific Africa; even the Bushmen he describes are not any one specific one of the many diverse Bushman groups. They are the Bushmen of his imagination (in Jones 2002:372).

Part of van der Post’s fantasy involves portraying Bushmen people not as individuals but as part of a natural landscape, a seductive image which even Marshall was prone to in the early days of his shooting in the Kalahari (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, Van Vuuren comments on Van der Post’s embracing an impersonal and mythic association of Bushmen which is inextricably linked to the pristine natural world and isolated from external influence:

…we see in Lost World an emphasis on landscape and the Bushman’s relatedness to their environment. Furthermore, that the environment is edenic and ideally devoid of intrusions from the outside world is similarly foregrounded. Van der Post’s pristine Bushmen live in an Africa where the landscape is god (Van Vuuren 2006:73).

I recognise that I am not immune from such fantasies and have conceded in Bitter Roots that some landscapes in the Kalahari evoked a mythic feeling connotative of collective origins. In my narration 44 minutes into the film I comment:
Some days, waking up at /Gautcha one felt a sense of the primordial almost mythic feeling of beginnings. The feeling became stronger as we headed west across the proclaimed wildlife conservation area to the vast expanse of Nyae Nyae pan (Strong, *Bitter Roots* 2010)

Despite being warned by Claire Ritchie (who provided editorial advice) that I would be accused of myth-making I added this narration together with footage of the Nyae Nyae landscape, in order to show the seductive power of the myth, even to one who is cognisant of its damage and attempting to make a film to debunk it. It would have been dishonest not to admit my own sensitivity to some form of atavistic longing, but in the context of my film, this feeling is balanced by the juxtaposition with the subsequent scene at Nǂamtchoa village which illustrates the very real problems for people upon whom the Bushman myth is projected.

THE BUSHMAN MYTH IN THE 1980s: THE WORLDWIDE BLOCKBUSTER

In the 1980s John Marshall came to appreciate the very real damage that films about ‘Bushmen’ could inflict upon their subjects’ livelihoods when they engaged deeply embedded fantasies about San people which he described as myths (Marshall 1993:1). The release in 1980 of John Marshall’s *N!ai the story of a !Kung Woman* (see Chapter 5) provided clear evidence of what was happening to people called Bushmen and clearly contradicted popular representations, but this had little effect on the popularity of the myth which actually gained momentum and power in the course of this decade.

Although this exegesis is limited to non-fiction, documentary films it is impossible in the context of the Bushman myth, not to mention the impact of the release of South African director Jamie Uys’s feature film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1981) which became the biggest grossing film ever to come out of Africa, its popularity spanning from New York to Paris to Tokyo. By mid-1985 in the USA the film had become the highest earning foreign film ever, earning over 100 million dollars (Van Vuuren 2006:193).

The film’s narrative begins with in a documentary style with an authoritative voiceover describing a kind of lost Eden in the Kalahari (filmed in Nyae Nyae and featuring characters such as N!ai, the subject of John Marshall’s film) where pristine Bushmen drink water from dew-decked leaves, hunt plentiful game, and live in total harmony without conflict until the outside world impacts in the form of Coke bottle dropped by a pilot from a passing airplane. The ‘gift’ is
assumed to have come from the ‘gods’ but when it causes only conflict within the community, the main character N!xau resolves to embark on a journey to the outside world in order to return the offending item to the ‘gods’.

Despite the film’s apartheid slant, which was decried by many academic critics, it might have been less harmful to the Ju’/hoansi of Nyae Nyae (and people called Bushmen in general) had not the director claimed in interviews and press releases that the film was based on fact. Uys claimed that the central character N!xau, threw away the money he was given as payment for acting in the film because he had no use for money despite the fact that prior to Uy’s film N!xau was, according to John Marshall, employed as a cook at the government school in Tsumkwe (Anderson & Benson 1993:162). Moreover, as documented in Marshall’s film N!ai, the Story of a !Kung Woman (1980) fights concerning money were already an increasing problem in Tsumkwe in the late 1970s.

Mainstream film critics such as New York Times’ Vincent Canby chose to ignore the reality and embrace the myth applauding the film for its simple but successful comedy (Davis 1996:93). Meanwhile Uys consolidated the myth further by taking N!xau on a world tour from New York to Tokyo where as an ‘authentic’ Bushman, dressed in skins, he was met by an adoring public. Not surprisingly, tourists then began to arrive in southern Africa to experience first hand the delightfully primitive Bushmen. This influx of tourist dollars in the 1980s provided momentum for official and commercial interests in South West Africa to plan the establishment of a game reserve which would wipe out the recently established farming communities in what was then called Eastern Bushmanland, and force the Ju’/hoansi to become exotic tourist exhibits in what John Marshall came to refer to as a ‘plastic stone age.’

The income generated by the success of Gods in the 1980s had precious little trickle down to real people. Josef Gugler reports of the death of the film star N!Xau from tuberculosis (a disease of poverty) in 2003 and how little circumstances of his life had changed as a result of his stardom: “…his visible wealth consisted of 21 cattle, 11 sheep, two horses, two bicycles, two spades, two rakes and five axes” (Gugler 2004:74).
1980s TELEVISION EMBRACES THE MYTH

The worldwide success of *The Gods Must be Crazy* had greatly raised the profile and acceptance of the Bushmen myth as reality. It had given producers a commercial rationale for developing ‘made-for-television’ documentary films which could mine ethnographic seams for cinematic gold. One such film was Paul Mybergh’s *People of the Great Sandface* (1985), which was produced for Survival Anglia (a producer of natural history features since 1961) and broadcast on Britain’s Channel Four in 1986 and subsequently in the USA.

*Sandface* purports to document the life of band of G/wi Bushmen in Botswana over four seasons. Mybergh claimed in an interview with Keyan Tomaselli that he spent ten years researching and living with various Bushmen groups and finally came to Botswana where ‘the last wild people lived’ (Tomaselli 1989: 26). Mybergh lived with the group and filmed many activities including hunting, gathering, dancing, the making of arrows, garments and bags. Despite his claims of having learned the G/wi language and having a good ‘rifle-mic’ for synch sound (Tomaselli 1989) the only voice in the film is Mybergh’s own, and no subtitles are provided for any words spoken by the G/wi. All their activities are explained by the filmmaker’s ‘voice of God’ narration. As opposed to the Edenic existence portrayed in Jamie Uys’s Gods, this film’s narrative spins the myth differently and features the demise of the ‘last’ Bushmen: a G/wi band’s battle for survival in the harsh dry waterless environment of the central Kalahari, which they eventually lose by deciding to move to a Government settlement and accept the Botswana government’s provision of water and maize meal.

While Van der Post’s film portrays the Bushmen as living in a *lost* world, the constructed narrative in Mybergh’s film portrays the G/wi as the *last* wild Bushmen in the world to give up their hunting and gathering existence and so conveys the feeling of witnessing a unique event – the demise of the Bushmen. However, Robert Gordon’s blistering critique of the film points out that it ignores the wider sociopolitical climate, and is not concerned with history but rather with perpetuating the myth of the wild Bushmen, what he describes as a ‘killer myth’ (Gordon 1990). He concedes that had the film had been made 30 or even 15 years ago it would have been hailed as a masterpiece but he questions the authenticity of the actual footage. Several other filmmakers and anthropologists who had worked with Kalahari peoples were similarly sceptical.
The unnamed water-pump settlement, the final destination of the G/wi in Mybergh’s film features prominently in the 1975 National Geographic film *Bushman of the Kalahari*, (discussed in Chapter 5) which documents John Marshall’s return. According to Gordon’s critique, just prior to that film’s release, it was reported that Myburgh had rounded up a number of former foragers, taking them back to the bush to film their former way of life. If indeed this was the case, it constitutes, in Marshall’s terminology, ‘myth-making by commission’ (see Marshall 1992:171), a re-enactment requested by the filmmaker, but never revealed as such.

THE EXCLUSION OF HISTORY AND POLITICS

Myth-making by omission (Marshall 1992:171) is also prevalent in many films about people called Bushmen and *Sandface* is again a prime example. In this film the historical context of dispossession of people labeled as Bushmen is ignored excepting a bland throwaway line in Mybergh’s narration: “Time and history have taken a toll on their numbers.” Mybergh’s portrayal ignores history and focuses on what is uppermost in his own imagination: namely the archetypal, timeless ‘pristine’ and ahistorical.

The film’s narration introduces the Bushmen and ‘Bushmen culture’ in the past tense:

They *were* the hunters with the poisoned arrows, the people of the healing dance, the painters of Southern Africa’s rock art treasures who *spoke* with a strange clicking tongue, the Khoisan, the Bushmen (*People of the Great Sandface* 1985).

Mybergh’s use of the past tense conjures up images of ‘Once long ago’, the archetypal preface to fairy tales which takes us into another world. Historian of religions, Mircea Eliade has coined the term ‘illud tempus,’ or *that time*, which does not reference experienced time but rather to mythic or sacred time; it connotes the psycho-mythic rather than the historical (Eliade 1954:73).

However, Mybergh’s narration stresses that the Bushmen in his film are continuing to live in the old way if only for the period of his filmmaking, which of course takes place in history, in time. Van Vuuren has suggested this narration may be regarded as: “an inadvertent metaphor for the fact that from the 1960s onwards Bushmen were always *almost* at the moment of complete demise, but for the continuing attentions of the film camera which kept the *images* of hunting-and-gathering culture alive” (Van Vuuren 2006:202).
Images pretending to show the past as if it were the pro-filmic reality, constitute myth-making by commission and those who accuse Mybergh of this (Gordon 1990, Marshall 1992) are supported by historical evidence. According to a government report published in 1986, 90% of Bushmen in Botswana survived on government food relief (in Cassidy et al. 2002:44), suggesting that it was highly unlikely, in the mid-1980s, that there remained isolated unacculturated bands living solely by hunting and gathering as Mybergh’s film claims.

Robert Gordon (1990) has explained the historical context of dispossession of people labeled as Bushmen resulting in their emergence as an impoverished rural underclass a subject upon which Mybergh’s film remains mute.

In the region where Myburgh based his film, this dispossession took the following form. At the end of the nineteenth century, Cecil John Rhodes, British imperialist par excellence (and founder of the Rhodes scholarship), wanting a buffer against any German expansion eastward from Namibia, sent up an expedition that led to the creation of the so-called Ghanzi Block, an area settled by white South African farmers. Among the many - mostly Bushman - people dispossessed by this act were the /Gwi. The aboriginal owners found themselves to be squatters on their own land…. Many Ghanzi Block farmers flouted one of the unspoken laws of the Kalahari - namely, that one person never refuses another water. Indeed, most of them chased Bushman squatters off their land. These Bushmen were driven into the largely waterless central area where the film was made (Gordon 1990:32).

Mybergh’s “isolated band” are never described as having inhabited such a history, nor does the filmmaker mention the context of the 1980s, whereby following the commercial and popular success of The Gods Must Be Crazy, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve became an increasingly popular tourist destination, despite the fact that these visitors experienced disappointment at finding Bushmen not conforming to the image portrayed in Uys’s film or to that created in van der Post’s imagination (Gordon 1990). The sight of Bushmen ‘begging’ (an extension of foraging as Gordon points out), as a rural underclass threatened by hunger and poverty, was not the image the Botswana government wanted to showcase. A further contextual complication in the 1980s was that the Botswana government was keen to export duty-free beef to the European Common Market using the Lome Convention Agreement of 1976. The perceived need to open up more areas for cattle farming combined with the pressure from the European conservation lobby (which voiced concern that ‘Bushmen’ were reducing the game population), resulted in the Botswana government announcing in 1986 that “the reserve would lose its integrity if people were allowed to stay there” (see Gordon 1990). Clearly, during the making of Sandface, most Botswana Bushmen in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (including the G/wi featured in the film) were living under the threat of eviction from the park. Gordon points out that Mybergh’s
film is oblivious to all the complex deal-making occurring during their ‘last days’ and adds: “To proclaim as he does at the conclusion of his film that “You see, no one is to blame” is to display a dishonesty of ethnocidal magnitude” (Gordon 1990).

This kind of contextual omission in Mybergh’s film is an apt example of the failure to incorporate what John Marshall would come to describe as ‘slots’ in documentary film. Marshall’s slot theory is examined in Chapter 5, but basically the rationale behind the idea is that it provides a way of keeping a film’s audience aware of events, circumstances or people which seriously impinge on the film subjects’ lives but which are not apparent in the frame.

The consequences of myth-making by omission are serious. Mybergh’s film gave tacit support to the Botswana Government plan to evict Bushman from the Central Kalahari reserve, because its rendering of the Bushman myth claimed that it had witnessed the last death throws of the ‘true’ Bushmen so there was no ‘true’ or ‘wild’ Bushmen left to save. In contrast to the South West African government’s 1980s plan to create a ‘plastic stone age’ featuring Bushmen, the Botswana government was intent on modernization, regarded the time of the ‘pristine primitive’ as over: the /Gwi needed to be brought into the twentieth century. Mybergh’s film (which includes the Botswana government in the credits) supports the idea that life on a government settlement was preferable to hunting and gathering in the Kalahari – justifying the Botswana government’s actions. Both perspectives are grounded in the mythic fantasy that Bushmen are ‘pristine primitives’ and neither was prepared to countenance the reality of a rural underclass and the historical reasons for its having been ground into poverty and dispossession in southern Africa, despite the availability of films such as John Marshall’s film N!ai, the Story of a !Kung Woman (1980) (analysed in Chapter 5) which illustrated the historical process.

DOCUMENTARY AESTHETICS PREVALENT IN THE BUSHMAN MYTH

Paul Mybergh’s stylised cinematography is typical of a documentary tending toward the archetypal and transpersonal. The only introduction to characters is not as people but through their roles, which are identified as ‘the old lady’, ‘the hunter’, ‘the doctor’, and ‘the hunter’s wife’. The camera shies away from getting to know actual people, rather, as in van der Post’s film, the audience sees only the director’s projections about Bushmen. Real individuals are reduced to shadow representatives of a collective type. Van Vuuren describes some examples of the filmmakers aesthetic:
...in many sequences of Sandface, people’s features are entirely obscured because they are filmed in silhouette against a bright sky. They are filmed smoking around the fire, but the backdrop makes it impossible to identify the gender or identity of the individuals. Twenty-two minutes into the film the women of the band are framed walking off together on a gathering expedition. They are filmed from a low angle against the blue sky, and so their features are lost. When the children play together the camera captures their games at a distance, framed by a flamingo red sky so that they are mere silhouettes dancing in the foreground of a blazing sunset. They are filmed from various angles, but the camera returns to a close-up of the fire around which the people clap and dance. Once again they are silhouetted against the sky and so appear as featureless shapes on the screen Van Vuuren (2006:202).

Poetic such communal and abstract images may be, and evocative of some interior vision, but such images reduce film subjects to mere ciphers, symbols in the filmmaker’s mind. Like archetypes, they become remote and impossible to know as flesh and blood beings we can relate to; indeed by their unknowable nature, such images link the G/wi closer to the primordial beings of Mybergh’s imagination than to the film subjects themselves. The audience learns very little about real people and events being depicted other than what is provided in the filmmaker’s narration. Considering the time Mybergh claims to have spent with the G/wi and his claim to know the language, it is surprising that the film shows such a lack of understanding between himself and his subjects. David MacDougall has made a shrewd observation concerning this kind of situation:

Many films give evidence of the bafflement that has confronted their makers – films suddenly resort to romantic imagery or narration… People are followed almost by reflex, doing things as though those things had a cumulative significance, but the significance never materializes. The camera zooms in on a face which reveals precisely nothing. Worse than showing nothing these false emphases contribute to an image of a world that is mute and off balance (MacDougall 1998:142).

MYBERGH’S AUTOETHNOGRAPHY VERSUS MARSHALL’S REALITY

Myburgh’s film has been the subject of intense criticism and debate, ranging from Robert Gordon’s criticism that it perpetuates the ‘killer-myth’ of the wild Bushman to Keyan Tomaselli’s concession that Sandface is nothing more than Myburgh’s own self-exploration, and ultimately, an autobiography: “Myburgh was searching for his origins, a sense of self” (Tomaselli 1992:212). John Marshall has criticized this perspective as he regards such introspective analysis as eclipsing the importance of the film’s subjects. “Do we really find out anything by exploring our own and
each others’ thoughts and feelings after watching a documentary about people we do not want to learn about?” (Marshall 1992:172).

Marshall’s perspective is of a filmmaker who is more interested in and concerned about the people ‘at the other end of the camera’ than about the film as text or about the filmmaker and asks the pertinent question: “Is Myburg really more interesting than the people at !Kxadi?” (1992:173). No doubt his passionate criticism of Sandface stems partly from his personal experience of filming a band of /Gwi he and his family had stayed with during a visit to !Kxadi in 1955 (where he shot footage for Bitter Melons) and his subsequent return to that area in 1974. Marshall was particularly concerned that the subtext of Myburgh’s film supported the myth that Bushmen could survive in the desert without water. Marshall’s knowledge of the people and the area led him to conclude that, since a tsama melon contained approximately one pint of water, for a G/wi band of 30 people to have survived on moisture from melons for an entire year in their camp, as Sandface alleges, approximately 20,000 melon husks would have littered the filmmaker’s camp and Mybergh’s shots would have been full of them (Marshall 1992:168).

The dangers of the myth of ‘waterless survival’ are all too obvious and, as Marshall has pointed out, it was this myth which had influenced the Botswana government’s decision in 1961 to reserve the Central Kalahari for the Bushmen (Marshall 1992:169). People such as the G/wi were forced into spending much longer periods there and their livelihood became increasingly difficult to sustain. The myth became a ‘killer’ when people died attempting to find water in the Ghanzi farming block when established boreholes in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve became blocked or dried up completely. Marshall had personally learned of this death-by-thirst when he revisited the Kalahari in 1974 (described in Chapter 5), and experiences such as this were instrumental in shaping his passionate attempts to dispel the myths about Bushmen which he saw could only result in further suffering. As he wrote in 1992:

I do not know how the Sandface series will be used in the debate over the future of !Kxadi. I am sure it has been used because it was shown on TV. Real people portrayed on TV as inexplicably proud of living by hunting and gathering without permanent water, and with no wish to develop their subsistence farming economy and send their kids to school can only lose by the deception (Marshall 1992:171).

According to Marshall, Myburg’s deception involved lies both by omission and commission:

He projected virtually all the common myths onto the people in his films: That people called Bushmen were still living by hunting and gathering in the Central Kalahari; that they have some
special ability to live without water, that they not only can live by hunting and gathering but are mystically attached to the dead-end economy; that they have a permanent source of water available to them at some disembodied borehole if they will give up their ancient life and join the larger world (Marshall 1992:171).

By the 1990s Marshall was vehemently opposed to documentary filmmakers making “entertaining” films which perpetuated the Bushman myth and contributed to the dispossession and disempowerment of real people. But his words and even his activist filmmaking failed to stop the powerful momentum of the myth portrayed through the medium of film.

THE 1990s: THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME

In 1996 Hunters of the Kalahari (1995) a primarily re-enacted documentary (with “Bushmen ‘actors’) by Richard Waxman and Wayne Derrick was aired on the Discovery Channel. South African historian Lauren van Vuuren describes the subterfuge in the film:

Cattle, boreholes, old people and Western clothing were removed from the lives of the people filmed so that they could be portrayed as pristine primitives in perfect symbiosis with their environment, completely removed from the harsh realities flowing from the inescapability of their enmeshment in a larger world (Van Vuuren 2006:224-5).

Furthermore, media scholar Keyan Tomaselli describes the film as “trading on the image of San as ‘primitive’” (2002:206). Paradoxically, the consultant hired for the film was anthropologist and San expert, Megan Biesele whom John Marshall had employed as director of the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation in the late 1980s. She subsequently regretted her role but blamed the film’s final form on the machinations of the film’s producer (Biesele and Hitchcock 1999:146-148). Edwin Wilmsen scathing critique of the film warns of the dangers of this film: “These images will be imprinted on the imaginations of viewers, who have hardly heard the voice-over words; and those imprintings will yet again re-validate preconceptions generated by the “Bushman” myth” (Wilmsen 2003:121).

The impact of such made-for-television films with high entertainment value upon the mythologized, are, as has been demonstrated, direct and tangible. With reference to extracts from A Kalahari Family, Wilmsen explains that the Bushman myth retains power to direct policy, and claims that the myth retains it’s power “because it is endorsed not only by words but also the actions of “experts”… pursuing their own agendas” (Wilmsen 2003:121).
It is the “experts” and pursuit of their careers at the expense of local communities that Claire Ritchie criticises in the opening scene of my thesis film. The same point is candidly hinted at by land use planning consultant Neil Powell in Part 5 of Marshall’s film series *A Kalahari Family*. “Donors and money play a big role in Bushmanland and really serve to disempower communities.”

The Ju/'hoansi themselves have seen their hunter-gathering way of life as a dead end. They tell an ironic story of a primordial tug of war between themselves and their black African neighbors. The Bantu peoples’ end of the rope was made of leather and the Ju/'hoan end was made of grass. Their end broke and so God gave them the things of the Bush, whereas the Bantu received cattle. However, as John Marshall’s film *An Argument About a Marriage* (1969) illustrates, Ju’/hoansi were prepared to take great risks even in the 1950s to go and work on white farms in the hope of acquiring goods such as clothes and blankets.

**SANDFACE REVISITED: VAL KILMER & THE BUSHMAN MYTH**

Correspondence in the Marshall Collection, deposited at the Human Studies Film Archive at the Smithsonian Institution, reveal that in 1998, whilst in the midst of making *A Kalahari Family*, Marshall was contacted by Val Kilmer. The Hollywood movie star struck up a friendship with him and asked for PAL copies of all Ju/'hoan films and sequences. It appears that Kilmer was interested in making a feature film about legendary South African figure Adrian Boshier, the subject of Lyall Watson’s book *Lightning Bird* (1982), who walked the length of Africa and supposedly encountered the Bushmen in the 1950s. Marshall’s initial response in a letter to Kilmer dated 4th October 1998 explained that this kind of film would be exactly opposite to the kind he made.

It transpired that Kilmer (who was working with Adrian Boshier’s son, Bowen) wanted Marshall on board as a consultant not only to provide an authentic feel for the Kalahari in the 1950s but also to use Marshall’s own footage from that period. Marshall expressed concern about how his footage might be used and asked for a script or treatment. The response was *The Duiker Hunt Story*, authored by Kilmer and Boshier, a reading of which clearly places it in the mythic tradition with Bushmen portrayed as exotic other. Marshall’s response to the story, written in a letter to Kilmer dated 3rd November 1998 illustrates his sensitivity to the myth being replayed yet again:
I expect you know where I have a major problem with the story – saying the Ju/'hoansi are OF nature and have natural instinctive powers to sense presences like the animal, Adrian, the other clan etc. The head of USAID in Windhoek called Ju/'hoansi “special people” in a “special place”. Translated into USAID/LIFE program this means suppressing people’s efforts to feed and develop themselves by farming and learning so they can pretend to be hunter/gatherers, depend on trickle down, starve, get mad drunk and kill each other while they attract the tourists (Marshall 1998c).

Marshall added a lengthy explanation as to how ‘Bushmen’ would really behave and made suggestions as to how the film could be made to avoid ‘othering’ by having the protagonist, Adrian Boshier, discover that “/Gwikhwe think, feel, learn like anyone else.” Concluding his communication, Marshall promises not to wind off again only if Kilmer would try to project less and learn more.

Following this lecture on debunking the Bushman myth Kilmer never made the film about Boshier. He did however team up with the South African Foster Brothers to make Africa Unbottled (2001) a film about wildlife management in rural areas of Africa. In terms of the next installment of the Bushmen myth, it was the Foster Brothers who continued where Val Kilmer’s efforts left off. Their most successful film, The Great Dance (2000) may have relieved film subjects of their skins, but beneath the guise of Western clothing the underlying theme once again, remained the same.

THE GREAT DANCE: RECENT RENDERINGS OF THE MYTH

In November 2007 in Tsumkwe, Craig Foster informed me that he had recently tried to purchase extracts from John Marshall’s 1950s footage from Marshall’s old company, Documentary Educational Resources (just as Val Kilmer had) for use in a forthcoming documentary. However, the current DER director, Cynthia Close turned down this request because she believed the material would be used in a way to further mythologise the Bushmen and Marshall himself. The Foster Brothers film, The Great Dance (2000) had confirmed her suspicions. The influence of Van der Post is imprinted in the film’s opening sequence with a reference to his adventure romance about Bushmen: A Story Like the Wind (1974).

The Great Dance has been commented on by a number of scholars. Historian Van Vuuren points to the film’s success: it’s international acclaim, a proud South African export, and the second most successful documentary ever released on the South African cinema circuit (Van Vuuren
2006:226). She stresses its focus on the hunter/gatherer culture as “a vehicle for cultural remembrance on the part of its Bushman subjects” and sees the entire film “about what the Bushman informants say about hunting-and-gathering as their cultural identity”. But this is a concretisation of one aspect of their lives and creates a fundamentalist attitude towards them as hunters per se.

While filming in 2007, several of my film subjects including old /Gashay, his grandson at Chokwe (who does not appear in my final edit) and the young /Gautcha boys reminisced about hunting experiences and I could have gone on to make a film about their passion for hunting, but to do this and pretend that this was the prime focus of their lives as does The Great Dance, would be to have constituted mythmaking by omission. Marshall defines this as “when you film a man and his wife who are really going off for a weekend to hunt and gather, but you do not show that the man is in the army and the family is getting their rations from the quartermaster” (Marshall 1993:10).

Van Vuuren has observed that The Great Dance includes all the usual stereotypical mythic images (Bushman hunting, half-naked, at home in vast spaces of the uninhabited desert, Bushmen using bows and arrows and spears, Bushmen trance dancing, Bushmen women clapping and singing, Bushmen eating raw animal innards, Bushman living on minimal water (2009:226). Reviewers Dodd and Sehumi also point out that “the flickering firelight on their glistening dark skins make the Bushmen exotic and romantic, even primordial” (Dodd and Sehumi, 2001:1158).

Van Vuuren excuses this kind of stereotyping because “the images are interpreted through the narration of a Bushman hunter and what he says about hunting and gathering”. Adding to the moral complexity, Dodd and Sehumi (2001:1158) cite evidence that the portrayal of hunting seems to resonate with some San Bushmen viewers themselves. Van Vuuren suggests that it is “not only white male filmmakers who identify and focus on the significance of Bushmen hunting-and-gathering culture” (2006:227). She then asks: “Are the films reflecting something about their Bushman subjects or only something about the ideas and projections of their makers?” (2006:227) and answers in the affirmative in both cases. Nonetheless, certain statements by the protagonist (!Nquate) in the film, such as “Sometimes we feel we have no future” and “our ways of being changed” suggest as Dodd and Sehumi admit, that the San lack agency:
…they have no choice, not only regarding political issues but also in terms of their own lifestyle and cultural practices. Perhaps despite efforts to the contrary, this film can be seen to portray the San as the “primitive Other”, as an undeveloped people, unable to cope with or adapt to modernity (Dodd and Sehumi, 2001:1158).

There is clearly a public appeal for such films as the reception of *The Great Dance* shows. Megan Biesele, who has taken a stance opposed to Marshall’s on representation of “Bushmen” has given the film high praise:

I believe *The Great Dance* is destined to become both an anthropological and a popular classic. From my own ethnographic work on San folklore and religion, I became convinced that despite the greatly changed lifestyles of many San today, a hunting-gathering ethos often remains an accessible part of their cultural repertoire (Biesele 2004:8-9).

While the film is technically outstanding and a *tour de force* of filmmaking per se, to regard *The Great Dance* as an anthropological classic could be seen as devaluing films made by ethnographic filmmakers who have taken the time and trouble to deeply know and understand all aspects of a culture: learning the local language and spending years in the field (in the case of John Marshall, almost a life-time’s involvement with his film subjects) as opposed to months. Robert Gordon comments that the Foster Brothers are unclear about the period of time they spent in the field but he speculates that it was less than three months. He points out that they are similarly vague about their language skills and communication with the San, adding a wry comment: “Apparently mystical empathy was more than adequate” (Gordon, 2003:109).

Such relatively superficial understanding of a culture constitutes a mythic minefield for documentary filmmakers wishing to follow in the footsteps of the Foster Brothers. In 2007 a Namibian filmmaker Andy Botelle showed me his filmic interpretation (using animation, special effects and Western music) of the trance vision of a Hei//om Rain Shaman from Etosha in northern Namibia. His online film (uploaded to Youtube) called *The Awakening*, Botelle (2007) was, he told me, inspired by his intuitive communication with the shaman. He claimed to be going beyond other filmmakers who never ventured to portray a shamanic state of trance other than by filming the shaman himself, or the metaphorical burning embers of the central fire (which I use in my thesis film). Such issues present an ethical dilemma for documentaries which purport to be about reality. In such cases, not only the images, but even the very subjectivity and internal vision of the indigenous ‘other’ is being appropriated for popular entertainment.
Biesele’s suggestion of convergence of the popular and anthropological in *The Great Dance* is problematic not least because in today’s media driven world, the popular has an overriding tendency to simplify and dumb down, but something as complex as a different culture is not simple or easily accessible and requires insight, to see and understand. If other cultures did not need to be unraveled, but could be taken at face value, there would be no anthropology, no anthropological films and a great deal more cross-cultural misunderstanding and racism. The latter even became an issue for some ethnographic filmmakers such as Timothy Asch (who first filmed the Yanomamo people) when films weren’t accompanied by explanatory texts (see Chapter 4) as the research of Victor Martinez (2004) has shown.

**A PERMANENT VANISHING ACT**

One of the latest renderings of the myth appears in *Vanishing Cultures: Bushmen of the Kalahari* (2006), an award-winning documentary as predictable as its title in its portrayal of cliche Bushmen images. According to the film’s website, the background of the director, Paula Ely is in the TV and entertainment industry, and the film certainly shows commercial savvy if not original content. Two generations since Van Der Post’s *Lost World* half a century ago, we are told once again in the film’s closing words: “Without our help, this generation may be the last of this vanishing culture.” However, as has already been discussed, it is only documentaries pandering to the public appeal of the Bushman myth and its associated images (no matter how contrived), which keep ‘Bushman culture’ in a commercially attractive freeze-frame, portraying a permanent vanishing act.

Narrated by the actor Michael York, whose hushed and dulcet tones explain this ‘oldest culture on the planet’ over sotto pan-pipes, the film gives no voice (or subtitled speech) to any of its skin-clad subjects other than getting them to state their names in turn to thrill the audience with the exotic sound of a click language. Perhaps one of the biggest ironies in the film is when one of the white experts explains at 34:30 minutes: “These people are completely disenfranchised. They have no voice, therefore what future do they have?” The filmmaker does not allow ‘Bushmen’ subjects to speak their own thoughts, to say perhaps, what it’s like to have to dress up in skins and pretend to go hunting day after day for an audience of camera-wielding Westerners. It is fairly clear that the filmmaker’s footage was shot in a tourist village where people re-enact the past as if it were the present. In a number of the “Bushmen” images, other tourists with cameras can be seen in the corner of the frame.
The film’s structure consists of a series of comments by white ‘Bushmen experts’ overlaid with
the usual Bushman images. The experts include Chris Brooks, a wildlife conservation expert
turned ‘Cultural Tourism Guide’, Rupert Isaacson a debonair travel writer, and Dr. Megan
Biesele, the key cultural expert who explains “social and artistic technologies” such as egalitarian
sharing, and trance dancing. Her fellow expert’s cultural eulogy, recalls witnessing ceremonies
where cancer, psychosis, depression, broken bones and snakebite have been healed.

While the film attempts to distance itself from the ‘romantic myth’ that Bushmen are still living
pristine lives isolated from the outside world, we are told by Megan Biesele on two occasions
(06:30 and 31:10) that of the approximate 100,000 San people 5% are still living, more or less in
a traditional manner. The narrator then explains (in the present tense) that ‘Bushmen’ use Ostrich
eggshells for storing water, animal skins for clothing, and mud packed vegetation to build huts
(10:54). However, as far back as the 1950s during the Marshall expedition, people were already
recognising the usefulness of tins and bottles for carrying water, and discarding their skins for
western clothing.

The subtext of this documentary is its implicit support for cultural tourism and for the spectacle of
‘Bushmen’. ‘Bushmen’ themselves are not consulted, but one of the white experts explains that
people seem very keen on eco (ethno) tourism as a good source of income. The same expert
enthusiastically explains that the Bushman community came up with the idea themselves and sent
in a proposal to this effect. In the first mention of an actual real place, we hear about Xai Xai in
North West Botswana (opposite the area of Nyae Nyae and also home to Ju/'hoan people) where
hunting and cultural safaris are thriving. The public relations exercise continues with Michael
York explaining that people not only benefit financially from tourism, but also are “given the
opportunity to personally connect with visitors and show them the human side of their rich
culture” (Bushmen of the Kalahari 40:30). The message being given is that without cultural
tourism and without the spectacle of the Bushman myth in action, the Bushmen will cease to
exist. In a tragic twist of the postmodern era, the myth trumps reality. The Bushman myth is
perceived as essential to the survival of real people.
THE ONGOING AUTHORITY AND EFFECTS OF THE BUSHMAN MYTH

As has been demonstrated, many popular documentary films about “Bushmen” follow a similar pattern of myth-making which form a discourse about Bushman that supercedes the reality. Such films have an effect on the general public as well as policymakers and major consequences befall the original film subjects.

In my thesis film, both #Toma the Tour Guide and Arno the Lodge Owner describe tourists’ expectations of seeing “Bushmen” and how disappointed they are when they come to Tsumkwe. According to Edward Said’s thesis on Orientalism such expectations have become programmed by texts and such texts include documentary film. Most films about “Bushmen” only serve to strengthen the myth.

IMAGE VERSUS PEOPLE: A FILMMAKER’S CHOICE

The ethical dilemmas of mythic documentary and implications for its subjects are most severe and hard to contemplate when you know and love the film subjects. Robert Gardner, when filming an old lady in the Kalahari on an expedition with the Marshalls in the 1950s, stated that he loved her, but qualifies this by stating that ‘she suited me’ (Gardner 2006:5). His description of the old lady in his essay “A Human Document” suggests that his love for her, is as an idea, an archetype: “One day as she slept so still was she, it seemed even her death would defy the camera. I realized it was for this I was waiting, for a sign of death, not life, a flower falling back into the earth, not opening out of it” (Gardner 2006:4).

To my mind, this is not the love of a real person, but the love of an image – an archetypal image. As Paul Henley has written of Gardner’s films: “The subjects are of little interest to him as actual embodied individuals; what is of interest is what they signify in some more transcendent way” (Henley 2007:43). The same can be said for most of the documentary makers I have described in this chapter for this issue lies at the heart of the documentary which perpetuates myth rather than reality. For all the aesthetic attractions and inward journeys inherent in the documentary which pays homage to the transcendent, the abstract or the mythic, it invariably risks essentialising, or dehumanising film subjects by imprisoning them in place and time. This is the point which Marshall drives home in Part 5, the most didactic part of A Kalahari Family which is aptly titled Death by Myth. The reality of filmmaking is, as David MacDougall has pointed out, that while in
fiction films, the characters slip away into the past, the subjects of documentary slip ahead into the future, the subjects move on from the film (MacDougall 1998:33). Film subjects do not inhabit a myth.

In my thesis film, the inclusion of young men talking about their hopes and concerns for the future at a site connoting the relics of the past (the destroyed windpump at /Gautcha), takes cognisance of the fact that these people will indeed live on at this place and far beyond the limited timescale of my film.

Tsamko /Tik!kay reflects on his future and his hopes to learn about farming in Bitter Roots (©Adrian Strong).

Perhaps documentary film, like Janus the Roman god of the new year, needs to have two faces: one turned toward the past, to what actually happened in front of the camera, and the other turned toward the future, to the hopes, dreams and expectations of the film’s subjects. If we care enough about our subjects to make a film about them, then surely we should also care about their future. The most outstanding example of a filmmaker committed to this ethic is John Marshall, and it is the evolution of his filmmaking that the following chapters seek to explore.
Chapter 3: The Aesthetics of Youth: Filming Ju/'hoansi in the 1950s

Dad suggests morning light from beyond group 5 or from hill behind group 2 to get smoke rising from different werfts... Nearest group should rise first and the smoke should be slightly apart for drama’s sake... Two cameras constantly filming are necessary for this shot since there must be no breaks. There will be no fill in shots. Dammit, remember to get plenty of fill in material. You have been much too lax about it. This can ruin a sequence as mother points out aptly. Think, Think......... Read this book through and title it “The Book of Qualms.”

John Marshall August 23 1952
The Book of Qualms p 44

LIFE BY MYTH

It is ironic that while much of Marshall’s life was committed to debunking myths about the Bushmen, two of his filmmaker friends have described the unfolding of his life with mythic inflection. Patsy Asch has rendered his initial encounter and subsequent involvement with the Ju/'hoansi in terms of a fairy tale (2007:71), whereas John Bishop has described the “Arthurian hero quest” thrust upon him – his camera taking the place of ‘Excalibur’ (2001:2). He certainly appeared as a larger than life character, yet he was the last person to ever think of himself as a hero, remaining grounded throughout his life in present and tangible reality. However, his dealings with other people could reflect a sense of awe and deep respect, and this I believe informs his documentary work and portrayal of his film subjects. I recall him making a comment about Heine Metzger, a drilling contractor and talented bush mechanic, “It’s people like Heine who make the sun rise each day.” Such a character squeeze contains a mythic poetic quality. Yet Marshall’s colleague Claire Ritchie, on a more prosaic level expressed exasperation at this same man’s inability to keep to any kind of agreed timetable and his endless digressions. Although Marshall decried the practice of mythmaking in documentary, it is ironic that his own perspective often had the quality of ‘seeing through’ a person to something bigger and greater than they might be aware of. This was of course, part of his gift as a story-teller which comes through strongly in his epic film series, A Kalahari Family. Perhaps the challenge any filmmaker must face is to hold the double optic, the tension between that poetic golden image seen by the inner eye and the more prosaic external reality.
LEARNING BY DOING

The background to the 1950s Marshall expeditions, organised by John’s father Laurence, have been well documented by John Marshall himself (1993:22-26). Documents, from the Marshall Collection at The Smithsonian Institution’s Human Studies Film Archive (HSFA Series 6, [Film Philosophy, Notes, & Correspondence: Laurence Marshall]), show that Laurence was intensely interested in the potential and importance of film. Having resigned as Chairman of The Raytheon Corporation in 1950, Laurence set out that same year with his 17-year old son on their first expedition. Review of the original footage from this first African safari (HSFA 83.11.1 [Marshall !kung Expedition I, 1950]) reveals a travelogue with many home-movie style shots. Marshall was new to the camera and the whole process of filming. The expedition footage includes many landscape shots, such as a waterfall on the Angolan border; shots which are dramatic but not otherwise interesting. Marshall puts this down to his frame of mind at the time: “Adventurers, like most TV hosts, are self-absorbed, I can’t think of a single foot of film I shot that was worth using” (1993:25).


The 1951 expedition was the Marshalls’ first extended visit to Nyae Nyae to study the Ju’/hoansi. The legendary instructions given by Laurence to his son were “I want a film record, not a movie.” From the beginning it is clear that Marshall was astute in his choice of subjects. His early footage
from 1951 (HSFA 83.11.2 [Marshall !kung Expedition II, 1951]) shows N!ai, a key figure in his subsequent films, specifically his innovative ethnobiography *N!ai, The Story of !Kung Woman*. She appears as a small girl shot during a ritual (probably a menstruation ceremony according to the shot log notes). She is dressed up, washed and placed in a shelter while the women dance. The style is formal, with tripod-mounted medium or long shots. People appear distant and one assumes that Marshall has yet to negotiate permitted social distance for filming in Nyae Nyae. Some shots are so wide they show shadows of cameraman and tripod: they are what could be described as classically “ethnographic” according to the rules Karl Heider (1976) was to articulate in his attempt to define the genre. Most shots are whole-body shots. Marshall had yet to include the more intimate shots that characterise his more mature shooting style. As John Bishop has observed:

In many ways this first coverage is the most scientific footage he shot. It has the naive quality of asking--Just show me what you do; a question that evolved into--Just let me observe what you do. Huge numbers of short sequences, covered with different screen size and angles, constitute an encyclopedia of Kalahari gatherer-hunters’ technology. The specificity of the subject matter makes it the most researchable footage in the collection (Bishop 2001:2).

![John Marshall shooting footage of a Ju/'hoan man with ostrich eggs](Image courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources).

This kind of footage was, as Bishop has also noted, ideal for the pure ethnographic treatment exemplified in *!Kung Bushmen Hunting Equipment* (1972) (initially catalogued at HSFA as ‘First Film’) and provided ideal material for Lorna Marshall’s commentary. As Bishop noted “The camera work, while beautiful, at this point was third person and abstracted” (Bishop 2001:2).
It is during the 1952-1953 expedition that Marshall (still only 19 or 20 years of age) starts to gain confidence and come into his own as a filmmaker, learning from his mistakes, whilst making harsh judgments on his own work. Any film record is more complete and comprehensible when accompanied by the filmmaker’s written field notes. From August 1952, Marshall kept a journal he titled *The Book of Qualms*, documenting his filmic intentions. Some of his notes and comments are surprising in view of his subsequent philosophy of filmmaking, however I believe an understanding of this phase of Marshall’s development is important as it reflects the genesis of his creative work.

**LANDSCAPE AND SILHOUETTE**

From his journal it is clear that Marshall is visualizing shots to illustrate big archetypal themes – perhaps imitating films he has previously seen about indigenous people. His entry for August 13th 1952 reads:

The Spiritual Connection – The communion of man with nature. This is ours to interpret…. Morning & evening shots and shots of small fires or groups in vast areas (preferably at morning and evening) seem to indicate this communion. Remember the film of aborigines “Churingo” or “Walkabout” and the last shots of people and firesticks and people disappearing over down into the sunset and the shot of the small fire in the shade looking out into the open. Trite but possibly effective. Rather use something else, though (Marshall 1952:13 verso).
Clearly Marshall is mining memories of films which have grand themes running through them and which evoke the universal rather than the personal. Marshall’s early representation of his film subjects (whom he still calls “bushmen”) appears somewhat impersonal and his field notes reflect this. On 21st August 1952 he writes:

…got several runs of bushmen – small figures walking single file in a vast landscape. Tried two techniques to illustrate vastness of land and smallness of men. The first was to shoot the scene with only 1/3 sky or less and the second was the shoot the scene with ½ sky or more (Marshall 1952:33).

Shots of small figures in vast landscapes and sky reduce individuality – although they can be beautiful and seem to be prevalent in feature films, or National Geographic videos. They evoke a canvas upon which the imagination can play, but they do not help us to get to know real people. In 1952 Marshall was still getting to know people. He was making lists of shots he felt he needed, not just of people but of game, birds and even bush fires. Interestingly, Claire Ritchie has observed (personal communication) that when Marshall was editing *A Kalahari Family*, he was reluctant to use the beautiful landscape footage which he had shot with such devoted enthusiasm as a young man in the 1950s. Marshall’s latter reluctance to engage purely with the aesthetic is echoed by David MacDougall:
I constantly feel the need to simplify, to get rid of a lot of the unnecessary baggage of film. I do fight against the easy aestheticization of film images. It’s not hard to get beautiful images – anyone can do it. But it’s usually irrelevant, and it shouldn’t be allowed to get in the way of the subject (MacDougall 1996:376).

In my own experience of filming people in landscape I am tempted to use shots rich in landscape aesthetic but which also carry relevant meaning. In making Esther Remembers, about the memories of an Aboriginal elder in Arnhem Land, I filmed her in the landscape around Oenpelli as the connection to land seemed so important to her. I used footage of her gathering ‘colour’, a dye from a root on a hillside, and gathering pandanus leaves near the billabong to make woven bowls. My final long take was inspired by the scene in Jean Rouch’s Chronique d'un été (1960) where Marceline Loridan walks alone through Les Halles in Paris carrying a Nagra and microphone under her coat recording a soliloquy of sad memories of her father. My own shot depicts Esther wandering off into the Northern Territory landscape – becoming a part of it. Normally such a shot would create distance from the subject, however, in this case, with her wearing a radio microphone, her singing softly and talking to herself there is a simultaneous sense of intimacy. Such juxtaposition through use of personal voice was of course impossible in the early 1950s when Marshall was filming because synch sound was still in the process of being invented.

It could be argued that for most indigenous people as Renee Sylvan (2002) claims, connection to land is important. However, as an ethnographic filmmaker, one needs to be aware of how and why. A Western filmmaker and his/her audience can easily become caught up in the novelty of an exotic location, when an indigenous person is focused on the task of gathering (for instance) in a place utterly familiar to him or her. As Marshall observed in 1952, there is a distinction...
between a romantic or sentimental attachment of a Western eye and a very practical indigenous perspective. At /Gam on 27th August 1952 Marshall writes of the need to get shots without sentimentality but showing things the way they really are to the film subjects:

…shots showing the problem of no food, faces and flat bellies empty – shots of the search – of water. Shots showing joy at small foods found and shots indicating the bushman’s interests, not mine for instance a flower is beautiful but only its root interests the bushman (Marshall 1952:58).

Had Marshall made The Gatherers a film he and Robert Gardner once intended to make, instead of The Hunters (1957), he may have had fewer subsequent accusations of romanticizing Bushmen. It seems almost impossible to avoid a mythic larger-than-life mood when you have men in skins, chasing game in a huge landscape. I use one such visual sequence from The Hunters, in my thesis film, juxtaposing the image of ‘hunter-as-part-of-landscape’ (with all its connotations) with the voice of ≠Toma, grandson of one of the hunters talking about what tourists want to see today.

STRUCTURED ABSENCES & ACCULTURATION

Marshall has identified two kinds of mythmaking in documentary films: mythmaking by commission and by omission (1993:10). My thesis film illustrates the unfolding of the former by showing how the documentary filmmaker Craig Foster had ‘commissioned’ the inhabitants of Nǂamtchoa village to construct a historical Bushman village out of grass to be filmed as if it were the present. Filmmaking by omission would also be apparent if the real village with its cattle kraal, gardens and water tap were not included in the Foster Brothers documentary.

Despite Marshall’s assertions, his footage from the 1950s has come under criticism from Homiak and Tomaselli (1999) for a kind of omission they term “structured absences.” They claim these absences are illustrated by close examination of the complete film record which reveals specific kinds of scenes and pro-filmic events not appearing in the edited films. After their examination of the Marshall film archives, they suggested that a very different picture of the 1950s !Kung emerges from that appearing in either The Hunters or the !Kung San film series which were also edited from material shot in the 1950s.

Tomaselli and Homiak believe structured absences are shaped by many factors including the prevailing scientific paradigm, the gender and subjectivity of the filmmaker and the intended use
or target of the filmmaker (Tomaselli and Homiak 1999). The prevailing paradigm to which they refer is the perspective of Bushmen as “contemporary ancestors,” a Paleolithic remnant of ancient cultures (see Wilmsen 1989:1-32). Such a prevailing weltanschaung might then, the authors claim, tend to erase scenes of acculturation from edited films. While Marshall takes exception to such claims he has admitted his early naivety: “In 1955 I was still cleaning tin cans out of shots to make Ju/'hoansi in Nyae Nyae look real” (1993:32).

J.O. Brew, the director of the Peabody museum who accompanied the Marshall expedition of 1952 notes in his journal for 6th September 1952 how Marshall wanted a picture of some men opening the shin bone of a buffalo they had found and extracting the marrow, but had requested another Bushman to eat some because the other two were wearing European clothes (Brew 1952:195). This does support Tomaselli and Homiak’s point to a certain extent. On the same day, Marshall records the event in his journal, omitting the clothing issue but pointing out that the young man who was asked to eat the marrow could not do so, explaining that he was too young (Marshall 1952:77). The film footage shows the young man bringing the shin bone to his mouth, and holding it there without eating. This is an interesting example of the camera as provoking action (in a Rouchian sense), yielding valuable ethnographic information about marrow avoidance by boys which, while not documented in any of John Marshall’s films, was recorded by his mother, Lorna Marshall in a book chapter on hunting rites (Lorna Marshall 1999:159).

Tomaselli and Homiak (1999) have cited Marshall’s perspective as “an adventurer” but this is the word Marshall used of himself, referring specifically to the first expedition in 1950, prior to meeting the Ju/'hoansi in Nyae Nyae. It is fairly clear that particularly after the /Gam shoot of 1952 his obsession was no longer with the projections of an “adventurer.” His daily routine
involved living closely with the Ju/'hoansi, sharing their pipes, pots, eating meat and bushfoods with them. The richness of his relationships with the Ju/'hoansi was observed by his mother in a letter addressed to Elizabeth “Nana” Marshall dated 15.10.1952: “Whatever bridges can be made between people so different in culture he has made, his relationship is by far the best” (in Speeter-Blaudszun 2001:150).

Having known Marshall well, I do not believe Tomaselli and Homiak’s analysis sufficiently takes into account his unique personality which was far more than a product of his time. The sensitivity of Marshall’s shooting from 1952 onwards is not that of a self-absorbed “adventurer”. To be so self-absorbed, the kind of footage Marshall exposed would quite simply not have been possible.

Tomaselli and Homiak also suggest the ‘cultural isolate’ idea in anthropology had a strong influence in the Marshall family’s selection of the Nyae Nyae region as the most traditional of Ju/'hoan hunter-gatherers. He claims that the representation of !Kung gathered around Herero or European farms as laborers or mixed subsistence economies was ignored by Marshall. However, the issue of laboring on European farms and the consequences of this are clearly demonstrated in Marshall’s sequence film An Argument About a Marriage. Tomaselli also suggests that Marshall ignores the way in which access to water shaped Ju/'hoan life. One assumes (from his
correspondence with Marshall), that Tomaselli is referring to the fact that much of the 1952
Marshall film record of the/Gam waterhole never appeared in any edited film (until A Kalahari
Family which was released in 2002, subsequent to this correspondence) and the fact that Marshall
has described this as the most important permanent water in Nyae Nyae (1993:70). The
settlement at /Gam had indeed been part of Nyae Nyae - an old Ju/'hoan territory (n!ore) where
people had obtained water for generations. However, by 1952 the Herero pastoralists had moved
in, dug a well, and some Ju/'hoansi had become serfs. In a letter reacting to Tomaselli, Marshall
(1996b) vigorously defends his position and points out the geographical separation between
/Gautcha (where most filming took place) and /Gam, as well as the fact that only 4 Ju/'hoansi
worked for the Herero there. From my own experience of working in Nyae Nyae in the 1980s, I
recall the trip from /Gautcha to /Gam took the better part of a day in a 4WD vehicle, although the
distance was only 75km or so.

It certainly would have been interesting if Marshall had made a film based at /Gam, not least
because in the 1950s, it was becoming a critical locale of Herero land expropriation. However,
there was another issue that Marshall might have struggled with. The film might have become
didactic and partisan because it would have inevitably had to deal directly with the Herero
colonisation of the Kalahari. A polemical land rights film might have resulted but such issues
had not come to the forefront of Marshall’s consciousness at that time, other than as vague
feelings of injustice.

POLARISATION AND NEGATIVE PROJECTION: THE HERERO PROBLEM

During the 1952 visit to /Gam Marshall admits in his journal to polarised feelings concerning the
Bushmen and the Herero, which clearly influenced his style of shooting at the time. Projection
through contrived representation is not unusual especially when one seeks to find a human cause
to what appears to be an unfair situation, but the degree to which such projection is conscious is
debatable. While researching my thesis film, I had several characters in mind whom I had
thought could be possible ‘fall guys’, proponents of the Bushman myth. Such figures could have
included the owner of a Bushman curio shop in Windhoek (who was not included in the final
film). The current director of the Foundation was in fact used as a foil to my own position viz a
viz the historical success of Ju/'hoansi cattle farming. As a filmmaker, it is hard, if not
impossible, to avoid some negative representation of a subject who takes up an oppositional
stance to one’s own ethical standpoint (if there is one) even when one is shooting rather than
editing. However, during a screening of my thesis film to anthropology students at London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies in October 2010, comments included the film’s need for a more visible ‘villain’ such as an agent of the World Wildlife Fund. I interpreted this as a felt need to personify the agency which had steered the direction of development away from the grass roots focus and thus creating a focus of negative polarity in the film. Perhaps (at the risk of sounding melodramatic) there was a subconsciously felt need to make visible or concretise an archetypal semblance of the “evil” which had penetrated and polluted an environment of innocence (which resonates again with the Fall from a mythic Eden).

Any constructed film will be influenced to some degree by the accepted norms of narrative – and ‘the bad guy’ is an inherent formula in narrative. However, even in fiction, the best narratives – such as the HBO TV series The Wire (2002-2008) will introduce complexities which help us understand and deconstruct ‘the bad guy’ such that we can also sympathise with his or her plight. Furthermore, reality is far more complex than the construction of a morality play, and as a documentary filmmaker one hopes to avoid being overly didactic or moralising. It is interesting to note however, the demand by an audience for the ‘bad guy’ and Marshall has certainly provided several in Part V, the most controversial section of A Kalahari Family (2002) which I analyse in Chapter 6.

By its very nature, at a subconscious level, film tends to give an individual concrete situation universal validity, thus a shot of a Herero woman becomes easily transposed in the mind of the viewer to mean “all Herero.” Marshall consciously uses this association to get across what he observes as the general attitude of the Herero towards the San. In his notes from August 20th 1952 he describes shooting a tobacco watering sequence featuring a Herero woman named Kavesitwe holding a little pail out abruptly for bushman women to fill.

This shot attempts to illustrate accepted servitude…. There is a shot here of her silhouetted against the sky with bushmen women bending or seated in front of her in low foreground. This was an attempt to illustrate servility and the Herero attitude and the bushmen quiet submission (whimsical submission) does it work? (Marshall 1952:30).

In his journal entry of the same day Marshall notes:

Kavesitwe’s presence in most shots might be a way to introduce characterization into documentary production. Never say outright that she is the main cog in the gear but indicate visually without losing documentary form, by her presence that she is a cog (1952:32).
However, by playing the role of a “cog” the Herero woman is dehumanized by an impersonal portrayal. Clearly Marshall’s moral outrage is manifested in his choice of shooting angle but there is no attempt to portray Kavesitwe’s humanity although she is the only named person in his journal notes. He has a clear opinion of her. A comment on 21st August describes a meat-pounding sequence:

….Pounding the meat, also done by bushmen (both times by same woman – big breasts, hair cut in square, blue belt) is same as Ovambo pounding and also done to rhythm. Two people pound. Kavesitwe, to show off, took the pole from a bushman woman and pounded too. She thinks she’s pretty damn hot (1952:35).

On viewing the raw footage, I noticed that as Kavesitwe throws and catches the pounding pole, she laughs and is clearly performing for the camera but unwitting as to how she is portrayed as arrogant. As a viewer one cannot help but get caught up in seeing Kavesitwe in a negative light even though we have not had a chance to get to know her. However, in Part 4 of A Kalahari Family, Marshall does humanise her, using archival footage of Kavesitwe describing her ‘gentle presence’ (AKF4 36:12) in the old days which was in sharp contrast to the current Herero occupants of /Gam who clearly despised the Ju’/hoansi. They appear as the current ‘bad guys’ as far as the Ju’/hoan perspective is concerned.

Possibly, Marshall’s early impressions of the Herero, initially through the woman named Kavesitwe mirrored those of some Ju’/hoansi. In July 1996, when /Boo Kunta was interviewed by Sonja Speeter-Blaudszun about the old days in /Gam he said:

We thought the Herero were people like the Ju’/hoansi. So they came to /Gam to stay with us and live all together. Then the Herero put the Ju’/hoansi to work. They forced us to work like the small children (…) The Herero wanted to make slaves out of the Ju’/hoansi. This was… why we left G/am (in Speeter-Blaudszun 2001:254-5).

Clearly it was as if Marshall was already starting to see through Ju’/hoan eyes in shooting this footage of the Herero woman. Becoming a participant observer does of course produce a weighted picture, but in this case, it is not balanced by the Herero woman’s perspective.

THE FACELESS SILHOUETTE

In the above example of portraying the Herero woman, Kavesitwe, Marshall uses a silhouette shot. In this time of early shooting of his ‘Cecil B. de Mille phase’ he makes several mentions of
this kind of shot, such as “women against sky” and “low background, walking against sky.” All such shots are impersonal and lack facial details.

Silhouette shots are, like big landscape shots, a National Geographic favorite. They allow space for the imagination to play and can also represent a kind of abstract beauty. In my thesis film, during the dance at the feast for John Marshall, I include short silhouette shots of women against a darkening sky. The shots give texture and atmosphere but are impersonal. The narration I use to accompany the shots is similarly general and abstract – relating to meat distribution and the kinship system. It would have been preferable to have more personal representation of the meat distribution, but in the absence of such shots I used the silhouettes over didactic narration explaining an aspect of Ju/'hoan culture. However, I do admit to being attached to such images as atmospheric and beautiful in their own right.

In his early shooting in 1952, Marshall had not yet developed personal relationships. From his journal entry dated 23rd August 1952, it would appear that he is still caught in abstractions, seeing “Bushmen” in a universal way: “If I were to categorise bushmen now, I would consider them fragile, delicate, brittle, perishable” (1952:42). Such are the first impressions any filmmaker might have on entering a new and unfamiliar situation. People are not seen as individuals and a subjective aesthetic, which reduces personhood to type, overrides any portrayal of real individuals. In 1952 at /Gam, Marshall refers to groups of Bushmen by number and not by name. This is symptomatic of TV crews with little time who go into a situation without specific knowledge. However, as Marshall got to know individuals, he had far greater investment in personal as opposed to universal knowledge and his filmmaking changed accordingly. Without such intimate and personal knowledge, a very different style of filmmaking emerges.

ROBERT GARDNER AND THE OLD LADY

Marshall has written albeit very briefly of Robert Gardner’s participation in one of the Marshall expeditions:

In 1958, when Robert accompanied us to Nyae Nyae, he filmed an old woman named /Gasa who was neglected by the people she lived with. /Gasa was with the people blackbirded by the farmers to Gobabis in 1956 and brought home to Nyae Nyae in 1958. Gardner shot a lot of footage showing /Gasa lying in the dust eating sand (Marshall 1993:71).
I believe a closer examination of Gardner shooting style is important in terms of contrasting this with Marshall’s developing style.

An examination of the Marshall film archives which also contain the material shot by Gardner, shows how his portrayal of /Gasa reveals a poignant sadness. The shots are beautiful but contain a strong element of pathos. This is apparent not simply in the shots of her eating sand. One scene reveals a couple in a house with the old lady sitting out in the rain with her hand to her head. She looks at the hut, slowly moves towards it, dragging her limbs and then collapses in a heap, feeling for her rags to cover her buttocks. The sun comes out and a couple of youngsters leap out of the hut. The light is magical and the shots are powerful. However, there is something disturbing or slightly voyeuristic about this portrayal, reminiscent for example of his later shooting in Deep Hearts (1981) and suggestive of the filmmaker’s own sense of sadness and pathos.

In another sequence, Gardner follows the progress of the Old Lady as she hangs around the Marshall’s expedition truck with everyone else, but it appears that she thinks she will get left behind. There is a strong feeling of despair and impending tragedy that permeates this footage. /Gasa appears to be ignored by the others, and it is as if a darker side of Ju/'hoan society is being portrayed. She looks like a helpless prisoner as she feels her way along the walls of the big truck towering above her, before squatting down on the ground by the big truck tyre. Eventually, a man in a topee hat (Laurence Marshall?) helps her along, supporting her arm and leads her towards the truck. However, the overall feel is of neglect and one certainly gets the archetypal sense of the forgotten crone whom nobody cares about any more.

Marshall was very critical of Gardner’s portrayal of /Gasa (1993:71). He had filmed her from the early 1950s when she was leading her blind sister around with a digging stick, and although she was somewhat isolated after her sister’s subsequent death, Marshall didn’t want to perpetuate another myth about the Ju/'hoansi and preferred his own film record negates Gardner’s projections:

The fantasy that “Bushmen” abandon their old and sick was used against Ju/'hoansi and is still widespread. The film record is a testament to the facts. In 1978 the record shows a woman with leprosy who was carried around in a blanket for fifteen years. Film shot in 1955 shows the best hunter I ever knew, /Qui “Short,” being supported by his wife and family after he lost his leg from a puff adder bite (Marshall 1993:71-2).
TO FACE OR TO FOLLOW?

Many of Gardner’s shots in the sequences he shot of her are not of /Gasa face on but following shots taken from behind. Especially in the absence of accompanying sound, this seems to further distance the viewer from her as a person. I have noticed similar shots in some of Gardner’s other films, such as in *Rivers of Sand* (1974), *Ika Hands* (1988) and *Forest of Bliss* (1986), when he follows his film subjects, and one is not quite sure of whether his film subjects are aware of him or not. This differs from Marshall’s attitude expressed in an interview: “I’ve never shot anything hidden. I’ve never shot anything like spying…. It’s a personal relationship” (Anderson 1993:151). In viewing the 1958 footage, one cannot imagine Gardner having the kind of personal relationship Marshall mentions, especially with subjects such as /Gasa, with whom there would anyway have been a major language barrier.

A reduction in individuality or personhood occurs when one shoots the subject from behind. The most personal aspect, the face, is lost. As David MacDougall points out: “the individuality of faces in films also creates an increased potential for identifying psychologically with them” (MacDougall 2006:9). People have characteristic walks, but walking per se connotes a universal human activity as Bruce Chatwin (1988:227-8) has suggested. Similarly, the figures moving across the landscape in *The Hunters* are not recognisable as persons. Figures shot from behind moving away from the camera create curiosity.

This is most famously portrayed in the feature film *Don’t Look Now* (1973), when the diminutive figure in a red coat drives Donald Sutherland’s character crazy because in his grief-deranged mind, the little red-coated figure reminds him of his dead daughter who was similarly attired when she drowned. The very facelessness of an image creates mystery and fascination. Our imagination is engaged, we start to create images, even projecting the face we want to see, but when the face is absent we struggle to recognise an actual person.

THE APOLLONIAN AESTHETIC

A number of Gardner’s shots of /Gasa are high angle shots which is to be expected since Gardner himself is a tall man. In the filmic image however, such verticality adds an Apollonian distance. In Greek mythology (and archetypal psychology), Apollo is the sun god and metaphorically it is his bright light of intellect which provides illumination of the human condition as well as mastery.
of the arts; yet in all the myths of Apollo he is unable to get close to those he loves. All his attempts to do so end in tragedy. Whether portrayed through high camera angle or psychological stance, the impression is conveyed of /Gasa as a tragic figure, portrayed in beautiful and fine detail. However, metaphorically speaking, the image appears as if seen by a god looking down from Olympian heights upon an all too human scene of pathos which he cannot touch.

In my thesis film, I also film an old woman from a high angle and portray a similar scene of pathos, although by no means as dramatic or desperate as /Gasa’s apparent situation. The image in my film is of Nhauka at Makuri village, preparing bush-foods to stave off hunger. While the high angle was used in a practical sense to illustrate the green bushfoods being mixed and pounded with maize meal in the large mortar by Nhauka, I appear to be following the same Apollonian stance towards her as Gardner appeared to have in his shooting of /Gasa in 1958.

Marshall has also commented on the problem of shooting ‘down’ at people who are less tall, and states how he first learned from cameraman Bob Young in 1973 to shoot looking down through his viewfinder so he could film Ju/'hoansi at the right level (Marshall 1993:43). However, a review of the 1950s footage suggests that Marshall had been able to resolve this problem earlier. In shooting my thesis film, I used a Canon XL2 which also enabled me to look down through the viewfinder while holding the camera cradled against my body. My intention was to shoot more low angle shots. Received wisdom suggests this angle renders people more imposing; however I believe this low angle can also create a stronger feeling of intimacy. This effect has been used widely by the Japanese film director Yasujiro Ozu who invariably shot his movies from a low camera angle. This was particularly suitable inside Japanese houses where people would normally sit on the floor. Ozu’s intimate films about Japanese family life have received praise, among other reasons, for their ethnographic interest (Heider 1976:5). Perhaps the feeling of intimacy is conveyed because low angles provide something of the child’s perspective. In my thesis film, I have filmed Di//ao at /Gautcha village from a low angle as a child might view his mother. I believe this helps the viewer to relate more closely to different aspects of her life including her suffering and her humour. This is very different however, from the head-on direct face-to-camera effect that Marshall uses in his film about N!ai which is far more confronting and which I discuss in Chapter 5.
CLOSE UP AND PERSONAL

In the early 1950s, Marshall is also experimenting by shooting parts of the body. In his journal entry for August 23rd 1952 he writes:

This idea I seem to have developed of expressing the emotions and feelings – intentness, gay, lazy, sardonic, simplicity etc. of a scene by using expressive parts of the body of the subject may or may not work out… In the mangetti sequence, have 4” shot of backs of heads and shoulders walking in a line and in mangetti picking, use shots of side of head and other parts of body to illustrate intentness of food search…. Suggestions which occur to me along the idea of body parts to express feelings are shots of lower parts of face in foreground showing the particular little smile while other people are in the background… Other ideas are hands, women standing back to camera showing the graceful position and kaross and delicate angles (1952:40-41).

In 1952, Marshall is already starting to use close-ups and getting used to permitted social space in Ju’hoan culture. This is developed to an art form in his intimate sequence films shot in the late 1950s such as *A Joking Relationship*, *Men Bathing*, and *A Group of Women* which are discussed in Chapter 4. This technique is also apparent is his camerawork for Fred Wiseman in *Titicut Follies*. Marshall’s intimate close-ups have also influenced my own shooting, for example in the opening sequence of my film when I shoot N!ai playing the stringed instrument (///Gwashi) using close-ups of both her face and hands.
In an interview I filmed with David MacDougall I asked him about his interest in shooting close-ups of hands in *Tempus de Baristos*, and he also pointed out the way parts of the body help to create an intimate portrayal. His reply connoted a perceived holographic link between the parts and the whole: “Maybe there would be a connection in the way in which one might photograph hands, hands representing the whole human being and that particular human being – that was my interest in hands, they are so expressive” (MacDougall pers. comm. 3 March 2009).

Of course one also sees the same interest by Gardner is his film about the Columbian Shaman, *Ika Hands* as his diary entry bears witness: “It is his hands that I have fastened on and that will certainly play a visual role when the time comes to make this film” (Gardner 2006:272).

**DIRECTION AND DRAMA**

In his early shooting in the Kalahari Marshall began, like most filmmakers, with grand plans in his own mind of what he wanted to shoot; ideas that he wanted to project before the scenes he viewed through the lens. He has frankly admitted this and referred to his “Cecil B. De Mille phase.” Marshall’s 1952 journal starts off with planning his shoots in mind-blowing detail for a waterhole sequence at /Gam, even with diagrams showing the movements he proposed of both camera and groups of people. Some plans even involved two cameras running at the same time,
and meticulously thought out notes regarding his subjects as his entry for 24th August 1952 describes:

Their backs as they descend those rocks would be wonderful if they were opposed in motion by group one simultaneously… The second walk in can be stopped, Bushmen permitting repeatedly. If some of the group of four people whom we have in the shots of bringing in water are there, it would be good to keep them together since this may serve as a tie-in with werfts and waterhole. If they are there, it would be important to get a MS-CU of them walking past with waterbags… Promise lots of tobacco if they cooperate nicely. If this sequence works well it will really be wonderful (Marshall 1952:48).

From the journal notes it appears that for these shoots at /Gam tripods were used, one of which was even placed on the vehicle cab roof. One can thus imagine that this style of shooting required people to enter the shots and leave the shot and so would require some direction. However, the post-mortem of the complicated procedures is revealing as Marshall’s diary entry for 25th August 1952 notes:

The first time was a flop because none of the bushmen groups arrived at the right time… The third time we got close-ups. These didn’t come out too well. On the whole this sequence I am afraid, is unsatisfactory. It is an attempt at drama when no drama was involved (1952:49-50).

These words were to have great resonance, for the issue of drama was to come up again later after the main filming for The Hunters had taken place. The critical question is how much drama is infused into the film by the filmmaker?

FILMING THE HUNTERS

Marshall’s famous first film The Hunters (1957) would never have been possible without extremely close access to the Ju/'hoan protagonists. Marshall consciously strove towards this end – his journal entry for 3rd September 1952 reads “If I could get on a relationship where the bushmen would tell me about what they are going to do, if they plan at all, it would be good” (1952:66).

From quite early on he had in his mind the kind of film he wanted to make. On 6th September 1952 he wrote: “The ideal film record would be a nice long picture of each animal doing something interesting and natural. Then a shot of stalking and shooting. Then a shot of tracking and finding the animal and killing it if need be and bringing it into camp and distributing it”
The day after writing this journal entry was the day the giraffe was shot from the jeep which forms the core of the narrative in *The Hunters*.

There was no doubt that a hunting film would not be easy. Apart from all the technical and logistical problems (Marshall was driving the jeep as well as trying to shoot film), Marshall was also very conscious of the need not to interfere with the hunters or slow them down in any way. His journal notes are full of jottings of how to solve various problems. On 6th September 1952 he wrote:

Try Unipod. Keeping cameras in jeep is another problem. Maybe make a bracket on the dashboard for Bell & Howell. Or see if one fits in water can brackets on side or in front – ready to grab. Shoot at anything anyway. Might be useable. The damn kudu, however, always stand in the shade (1952:80).

The fabricated nature of *The Hunters* was pointed out by many anthropologists and scholars and freely admitted by Marshall (1993:36). Perhaps the most salient criticism raised was that the film never conceded the fact that the giraffe was shot (both literally and cinematically) from a jeep driven by Marshall himself. Strictly speaking this would constitute Marshall’s “lying by
omission”. Marshall’s description of the event described in his journal of 7th September 1952 is as follows:

We saw it in the bush and dropped off one bushman to stalk and shoot it. He couldn’t however, because the giraffe ran parallel to the road. We chased it, turned off the road and attempted to come up close to it. The idea was for the bushman to jump out and shoot. However, while we were barreling along after the giraffe, ≠oma slammed an arrow into its rear as it ran and while the car was in motion. After the first arrow was in, decided to let rip and we put in three more arrows still while the car was moving (1952:82).

In order to make the hunt appear more ‘natural’ and take out his own involvement in it, Marshall had already decided on the day the giraffe was shot to stage re-enactments over the next few days when he anticipated tracking it. As he wrote on the same day as the shooting:

If the giraffe is still alive and standing, get ≠oma to pretend to stalk it and shoot it again. Try to have everything done as though the car wasn’t there but don’t bugger them up too much. For instance get water solving problem and get them to make temporary house quarters, if they do that this will indicate the magnitude of the job (1952:86).

In the finished film, Marshall narrates that it is /Qui who runs after and shoots the giraffe in the thigh and the film shows a single figure. However, in his journal, it is ≠oma who shoots the giraffe with two out of three arrows.

A close examination of the film record shows that although the killing scene took place as shown in the finished film, several shots were re-enacted for The Hunters during the 1955 expedition (three years after the actual giraffe hunt) (HSFA 83.11.4 [Marshall !Kung Expedition IV, 1955]). In particular, six shots were taken from in front of the hunters as they throw their spears at the dying giraffe. Such shots would have been impossible at the time as they would have involved too much interference, as well as being highly dangerous; turning one’s back on a wounded animal could result in a vicious or even mortal kick. Another re-enactment shown in the 1955 footage shows a scene of the hunters apparently illuminated by firelight; however with the relatively slow film stocks available in the mid 1950s, it is quite likely that extra lighting, provided perhaps from vehicle lights, may have been used.

However, such re-enactments do not detract from the veracity of the film and as Nancy Gonzalez has pointed out, despite Marshall’s disclaimers about the film being contrived by him both in
shooting and editing, the film still tells important truths about a defunct way of life (Gonzalez 1993:181).

It is interesting to note how Marshall is carefully planning and imagining his shots in advance with the final film in mind. While he takes an observational approach, he is constantly thinking about camera angles, distances and even movement across the frame. His journal entry for 7 September 1952 (the day of the giraffe shooting and the day before serious tracking begins) reads:

Have them always walk from same side of frame – not necessarily from same angle and have about two d.s. and one M.S. – long – showing detail of spoor – particularly when they pick up the spoor. Get shots of spoor and them following it, shots of leaving camera and also approaching it” (1952:85).

Also Marshall is thinking about the drama of the event as it relates to the climax of the kill. On the same day he had also written:

Try to get rising excitement as they approach the kill. Get shots or finding kill and if possible (animal still alive) killing it…. Try to get real feeling of cruelness because of the necessity of the veld. Make the kill even sickening with close-ups of dying eyes and bloody assegais and open mouths (1952:85).

To an outsider, a Westerner unused to such sights, there is an intrinsic, archetypal drama to death and the killing of an animal which strikes a deep nerve and is visually powerful. Judging by his journal entry, it would appear that Marshall was trying to capture this intensity of death, and an element of projection is apparent in his notes. In shooting my own film, I was also conscious of trying to capture this same intensity associated with killing in the slaughter of a cow (for the feast). Subsequently, on further reflection however, it seemed more important to convey the down-to-earth attitude towards killing for meat that the Ju/'hoansi possess, which differs from Western sensibilities. At the time of shooting, my camera lingered on the scene of the cow (which was first stunned and then had its throat cut) with dramatic close-ups of a ‘river of blood’. Perhaps, like Marshall, my confronting the experience of the death of a large animal through the camera viewfinder prompted a certain feeling of cruelty which needed to be conveyed, however for the Ju/'hoansi themselves as I witnessed the event the slaughter was a down to earth, happily anticipated affair with no sentimental qualms about cruelty or regret.
In my first cut of the film, I had wanted to keep this scene in because of the power of the image. However, after discussions with both Claire Ritchie and Patsy Asch who advised me during the edit, I realised my own fascinations and projections were taking precedence rather than an experience of what Ju/'hoansi themselves might be feeling. The subsequent butchering sequence has more relevance in terms of displaying how people interact at a social scene without imposing the shock of a rather bloody killing which might suggest an uncaring brutality on the part of the Ju/'hoansi which does not reflect who they are. In Marshall’s finished film, one does not see the kind of rawness he mentions in his journal, presumably because he too realised the problem of his own projections and became cognizant of the Ju/'hoan non-sentimental attitude toward hunting.

An interesting absence in *The Hunters*, from an ethnographic standpoint is the lack of footage or narration about the return to the village after the first shooting. Presumably, for the sake of narrative continuity, we do not see the Ju/'hoansi returning to the village after the initial shooting of the giraffe. However, in Marshall’s journal, their return is documented, complete with the concern at having discovered that they have shot ‘royal game’ (giraffe) and all the complications this brings for the various parties, both European and Ju/'hoan.

Significant ethnographically, although absent from Marshall’s finished film, is his observation that Ju/'hoan hunters always behave in an extremely glum manner on their return to the village from a hunt despite having been happy on the occasion of the shooting. Furthermore, he learned that after shooting an animal, a hunter does not sleep with his wife, but stays apart, and leaves early the next morning while all are sleeping. He does not eat and drinks only a little water. As Marshall explains in his journal on 15th September 1952:

>This is to insure, by his own abstinence, that the buck will grow sick. He eats nothing and receives no strength so that the buck also will receive no strength and the poison will work as quickly as possible. He says nothing to his wife or the others and keeps the werft quiet. Children are not allowed to play noisily. The others know by this action on his part, that he has shot a buck and they help him keep the place quiet. The women ask no questions (1952:88).

Although being useful ethnographic information, none of this appears in *The Hunters* although it is has been well documented by Lorna Marshall (1999:147,150). This indicates that at this stage, Marshall was not thinking so much in terms of visual anthropology but more as a story-telling filmmaker where the primacy of narrative overrides actuality.
DRAMA, WHAT DRAMA?

In the weeks after the giraffe hunt, which was to become the central part of Marshall’s first film, there were many discussions in the Marshall family about drama or the lack of it in the lives of the Ju/'hoansi. Laurence Marshall points out that there is little “man against nature” drama because the bushmen live with confidence which comes from their power to handle their environment. On 16th September 1952, John Marshall notes in his journal “There isn’t the terrible struggle for food we first imagined” (1952:95). However, the drama of The Hunters is based around this struggle for food, and of “man against nature.” Lorna Marshall’s diary entry for 27-30 October 1952 notes nocturnal discussions between John Marshall and his father on the cinematic dilemma of dramatic dearth.

Laurence and John are talking. The problem being discussed is what dramatic element could be developed in this material for a movie like Flaherty’s film on Eskimos – Nanook of the North. Bushmen do not live dramatically. They don’t encounter changes that are violent or sudden. Their dangers are not pictorial. They are hunger and thirst. And they are not so hungry or thirsty that a drama is bodied forth. They always get some food. There is plenty of water here (Lorna Marshall 1952:274).

Yet, a sense of drama is created in The Hunters, not just in the editing “to drive the story forward,” but through Marshall’s “leafy narration” which he claims to have absorbed from Faulkner (Marshall 1993:36). This narration has been perhaps been most severely criticised by
Eliot Weinberger, who not only sees the narration portraying characters in the film as types rather than personalities, but exposes the overt projection in the film:

Marshall takes the “Voice of God” familiar in most documentaries since the invention of sound, to new heights. Not only does he tell us what the men are thinking… we even learn the thoughts and feelings of the wounded giraffe (“She traveled in an open country with a singleness of mind.” Later, she is “troubled,” “too dazed to care,” and “no longer has her predicament in mind.”) Worst of all, God has been reading Hemmingway: “He found the dung of a kudu. A kudu is a big animal. A kudu would be ample meat to bring home.” The machismo of such spoken prose becomes manifest when the final killing of the female giraffe is described in terms of gang-rape: The men “exhausted their spears and spent their strength upon her” (Weinberger 1994:8).

Whist Weinberger’s critique is extreme and sardonic in tone, it does illustrate the problem of both over-dramatising and projection in documentary and one can see why Marshall subsequently wanted to distance himself from his film, regarding it more as an artistic creation than a true account. However, some critics have regarded Marshall’s rendition of The Hunters as an integral part of his humble attitude toward the Ju/’hoansi in the sense that he viewed them as heroic. As Bishop has written, by using Herman Melville’s iconic novel, Moby Dick as a model, Marshall was showing a profound respect: “He found the same nobility, the same passions, and the same issues of human survival in these new friends halfway around the world, as he did in his own New England heroes” (Bishop, 2001:90).

THE NEXT KIND OF FILM…

A film about gathering was much thought about but never made. A great deal of footage was shot for such a film, and at one point it had been a significant alternative to a film purely about hunters. On 17th September 1952, Marshall writes:

Had qualms about the hunting film. How valuable would it be? Should I concentrate more on veldkos and the uses of the veldkos – technique of preparing etc. and uses of meat rather than the getting the meat itself? (1952:17).

Marshall has already begun to realise the importance of the power of quiet observation for Ju’/hoansi and even suggests to himself on 16th September 1952 that this might best be shown in their search for veldkos (bushfoods) (1952:95). Presumably Marshall’s own powers of observation were also being honed by shooting Ju’/hoansi, a skill that was to become increasingly important to his development as a filmmaker.
In writing about his attempts to film the gathering of palm nuts Marshall is already beginning to articulate the idea of sequence filming which he was to use to such great effect when he began to edit more films from the 1950s footage in the 1960s and 1970s. On 18th September 1952 he wrote:

I attempted to film the whole process which is the only way I see to do a technique like that. The only way to get it accurate is to film all of it. It is short enough and varied enough so that it wouldn’t be ridiculous (1952:101).

The evolution of Marshall’s filmmaking toward sequence filming, which constituted a radical departure from narrative, is explored in detail in the next chapter.
Chapter 4: From Narrative to Sequence Films

As my awareness grew and I began to see events as dramas important to the people involved, I wanted a way to enter ordinary events and film the social worlds within


This chapter examines the shift in Marshall’s emphasis away from a narrative portrayal in which his subjective thoughts and feelings had influenced all his decisions including angles, distances and choices of what to shoot (Marshall 1993:39). In filming The Hunters, Marshall had used a handheld spring-loaded Bell & Howell camera that had to be reloaded in between each twenty-second shot. However, when he returned to the Kalahari in 1955 his shooting technique began to change. This was at least partly prompted by the changes in technology in the mid-1950s which, as John Bishop (1993:223) notes, included the battery powered Arriflex, which enabled longer film bursts, and was equipped with a reflex viewfinder enabling change of focus and framing within a shot. John Marshall has described this as the best camera he ever used and described his shooting from 1955 (the year Laurence Marshall gave him this camera), as becoming closer and more comprehensive (Marshall 1993:40). Marshall’s mastery of the Arriflex enabled him, by the 1957-58 expedition, to focus increasingly on shooting events, rich with the texture of daily life, as they unfolded.

John Marshall starting to shoot more intimate events with his Arriflex
(Image courtesy of Documentary Education Resources).
In this chapter, the reasons for Marshall’s shift away from narrative are discussed as well as the influence of his peers on what came to be known as sequence filmmaking. The innovative nature of Marshall’s new approach is examined with reference to specific sequence films, and the application of these films for educational purposes is explored together with a discussion of the associated dangers of misunderstanding such use engendered.

THE SPLIT WITH GARDNER

In 1954 Robert Gardner began assisting John Marshall, editing *The Hunters* which was finally released in 1957. As has been described in Chapter 3, Marshall had returned to the Kalahari in 1955 where he had shot additional material for *The Hunters* as well as filming the /Gwi people in the central Kalahari, material from which he was later to edit *Bitter Melons*.

The association with Gardner developed further in 1957 when the Film Study Center (FSC) was established with Gardner as its first director and Marshall as associate director until 1960. During the period of the late 1950s, Gardner performed much of the editing work on the Bushman series as Marshall was studying anthropology at Yale University, only returning from time to time until he completed graduate school in 1960. The genesis of Marshall’s move away from a narrative style of documentary toward sequences seems to have occurred around 1959 after his return from the Kalahari with fresh footage of documented events. This was also the year that Timothy Asch joined Marshall and Gardner, a new association which was also to have had significant effect on Marshall’s stylistic shift, as discussed later in this chapter.

Marshall’s collaboration with Gardner at the FSC appears to have involved a number of ideas for narrative films. One such film using footage from the 1952 Marshall expedition, with the working title *The Wildebeest* or *First Buck* was never released or even publicly screened. Both A and B rolls were cut and a complete print was made complete with sound track. As with *The Hunters* no synch sound was used so the film subjects are mute, but an informative anthropological commentary explains how a young man named /Ti!kay shoots his first large antelope and the associated rituals which serves as his transition from boyhood to manhood. Gardner had been the primary editor of this film, working in close collaboration with Marshall. The film was subsequently cannibalised to make *A Rite of Passage* (1972) which Marshall subsequently described as still being narrative in style, but with the feeling of camera as participant observer (Marshall 1993:40). Only the soundtrack of *The Wildebeest* remains in the
Marshall film archive (HSFA 2005.11.51 Series 3). With philosophical reflections forming part of Marshall’s commentary *The Wildebeest* echoes the style of *The Hunters* and was clearly indicative of his ‘narrative period’.

Around this time, Gardner, Marshall and J. O. Brew, the director of the Peabody Museum at Harvard, had received a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to edit 20 films from the Bushman material from the 250 hours of footage shot in the 1950s (Ruby 2000:117). In order to motivate funding for this grant a sequence (featuring a healer’s unsuccessful attempt to cure his relative’s sick child through entering into a mild trance) had been put together by Marshall and Gardner. It was later to be re-edited and released as *A Curing Ceremony* (1959), but at the time, according to Patsy Asch (interview January 2009) this was regarded as no more than a fund-raising promotion. Prior to the arrival of Timothy Asch, who subsequently came to work at the Film Studies Centre, Gardner in particular wanted to make a film called *The Gatherers* to balance the male-dominated focus of *The Hunters* and convey the important role played by women in hunter-gatherer societies. It was Gardner’s intention for the film to be another grand sweep in the narrative tradition. Gardner (1964) has described the plan as following the life of a typical Ju/'hoan woman in her lissome youth, proceeding through her gathering and ending as an old woman (the “Old Lady” filmed by Gardner in 1958). This would have entailed different Ju/'hoan women portraying the same archetypal gatherer.

A seminal moment for Marshall seems to have occurred shortly after Timothy Asch joined the team as a lackey editor at the invitation of Gardner. Marshall had begun to realise that the big narrative film idea for *The Gatherers* was not working: “I thought the film would bend reality too far out of shape” (Marshall 1993:71). He gave the tiresome job of putting all the material back in its original form to Asch. Timothy Asch’s widow, Patsy has recalled that *The Gatherers* contained sequences which were subsequently released independently as *A Group of Women* and *A Joking Relationship*, so parts of the original long form film were preserved (Patsy Asch interview January 2009).

Patsy Asch has also described how Marshall began a close study of his footage and examining what it actually revealed about the lives of people he had filmed rather than thinking in terms of grand ideas and telling a beautiful visual story. Marshall was faced with the question of whether he should continue to make big narrative films, like *The Hunters* or try an alternative approach to
reduce emphasis on his own vision and be more about peoples’ real lives. According to Patsy Asch, he simply could not accept *The Gatherers* as a legitimate representation of the Ju/'hoansi.

At this time, there may also have been an element of Marshall’s wanting to remove himself from Gardner’s influence, since there had been some tensions regarding the latter’s input into the films about the Ju/'hoansi. However, in his subsequent reflections concerning this period (Marshall 1993:139), Marshall also began to realize that his own interest in the medium of film concerned the particular and local as opposed to the universal. His preferred emphasis was on *realism* and it is clear that he no longer wanted to work with the kind of symbolist approach which was to become the hallmark of Gardner’s films (Loizos 1993:139-165).

In a letter Gardner wrote to Marshall on 5th November 1959, the difference in emphasis is already apparent. The divide appears to have grown following Gardner’s first hand acquaintance with the Ju/'hoan film subjects and his personal reaction to the images in his viewfinder as a symbol of a people in decline:

> Until I joined you in Africa, I was, of course, able to see the !Kung only, and quite literally, through your eyes. All my thinking on "The Gatherers" and the other films was tied indissolubly to the effect on me of the photography you had done. When I came to the Kalahari there were, as you can perhaps imagine, a number of rather violent shocks for which my formal knowledge and vicarious experience of the Bushmen had not prepared me. I recognize that all I had to inform me, beyond the acquaintance I have already described, was intuition. In any case, I became engrossed in what I shall call, for want of a better term, the "despair" of these people. As I have told you, my interest is focused on the Bushmen in their decline, in their death struggles, which I see as a sign both of demise and, perhaps, rebirth. The struggle in death is also the new pang of life (Gardner 2007:14).

Gardner’s subjective focus on Bushmen in general symbolic terms was precipitated by his Kalahari experience in 1957/58. By his own admission Gardner was of a melancholic disposition (Gardner 2007:xiii) and his interest in imagery relating to death was to continue in films such as *Dead Birds* (about ritual warfare in New Guinea) and *Forest of Bliss* (about funereal practices in Benares). Moreover, Gardner’s descriptions of ‘The Old Lady’ he had encountered in the Kalahari (2006:1-5) clearly illustrate his focus on the aesthetics of decline and despair and an inclination to seek out symbols of loss, such as the woman he refers to as ‘The Old Lady.’ In the same letter to Marshall, Gardner writes:
In my fascination I seized, somewhat ghoulishly, upon our dear Old Lady. She gave me contact, if only in my mind's eye, with the peace and serenity these people may once have had. "The Gatherers" began, in earnest, as I sat by her side and tried so unsuccessfully to see into her with my camera's eye. The object (the Old Lady) which I grew to love, grew itself into the central figure of a film which would portray the life of a Kung woman, this woman, all gatherers (Gardner 2007:14).

Clearly, Gardner was stamping his authorship upon The Gatherers at an early stage, which did not sit well with Marshall. Furthermore, Gardner’s approach was in direct opposition to Marshall’s evolving preference to show ordinary individual day-to-day lives of the Ju/'hoansi without projecting a symbolic image upon them. While Marshall was studying at Yale, Gardner was also clearly playing with other ideas for the film material and one can sense the artist in him becoming excited about the prospect of making a cinematic experience rather than a documentary.

The Rhythms" - This film is the most speculative of all that I have pondered. The notion grew from a more formal reaction than in my feelings toward "The Gatherers"… As I envisage "The Rhythms," what I would aim for would be a kind of human and actual animation, a series of linked and woven sequences, all echoing each other. Obviously such a film would be valuable less as an exposition of culture than as a study in cinema, one of the aims of the Film Study Center, if nothing else. Yet, still, the possibility remains that with sufficiently keen awareness of the salient and significant physical motions of the !Kung, there would result, in a film such as I am describing, a visual exercise which could impart concentrates or precipitates of social existence. At any rate, the conception is highly cinematic, and its elements are those more of art than what is characteristically the case with documentary film-making (Gardner 2007:14).

Not only was Marshall starting to align himself more with realist documentary rather than cinematic art per se, but he had already begun to see himself as a kind of guardian with regard to the body of Bushmen film material which was hardly surprising in view of the close bonds he had formed with his film subjects. His reaction to Gardner’s letter illustrates this concern.

John Marshall responded to this letter with what I would now call a mixture of concern and irritation. The concern was that I, perhaps anyone, would have the temerity to interpret people and a culture that he knew better than any outsider… His irritation was also understandable, in that he would probably have to abandon graduate school and resume his work as an editor of what was largely his own work (Gardner 2007:15).

Before Marshall returned to Cambridge to continue editing, Gardner continued to edit a few more films it had previously been agreed he should take on. Gardner recalled one of these as being about a musician who, upon the death of his first child, shortly after being born, threw his stringed instrument away and left with the child’s mother on a long journey (Gardner 2007:15). Gardner called the film (which was never released) The Divided Bow. The John Marshall Film
and Video Collection at HSFA (Series 6, !Kung Film List circa 1960, 1972) show this title as one in a list of many. The list was presumably compiled with a view to producing films using the NSF grant. Other titles included:

*The Desert*
*The Largest Tree*
*The Arrow Makers*
*The Ornaments*
*The First Buck*
*The loves of !Nai Marryings*
*The Temple for /Gao (or) The Temple of Legs and Voices*
*The Gatherers*
*The Seasons*
*The Edge or The people in the New Year*

**NARRATIVE SCRIPTS**

Marshall had written short summaries for some of these projects including *The Arrow Makers* and *The Ornaments*. The former pertained to the development of manhood in the culture with the development of the necessary knowledge of hunting, whereas the latter was to be about the development of womanhood.

It is a film about beauty and desire. It starts with the journey of two girls… ≠Nisa & ≠Gisa to the waterhole. They drink and wash… Material about beautification. Earrings. Little girls decked with beads. Old women making beads. Xama with the little boys girls play games. Boys watch. Old women instruct girls on the pan (Marshall 1958-61).

Marshall also wrote lengthy treatments and scripts for a number of the planned films. They are written by hand (and in some cases typed up) with great attention to detail. They not only include vivid descriptions but extensive dialogue as well which presumably was to be narrated. Clearly for Marshall, the dramatic element of ‘story’ was still, at that time, of primary importance. The scripted narratives for projects such as *The Dispersion* and *The Largest Tree* are absorbing, compelling and written in the terse style of Hemmingway. Undoubtedly, Marshall had great talent as a storyteller and could easily have continued in a narrative vein using filmed material to illustrate the stories he had written. However, it is important to note a marked difference between his stories and the Adrian Boshier story, *The Duiker Hunt*, referenced in Chapter 2. Marshall’s narratives were based directly on his own lived experience rather than imagination. In his writing, one can sense his reliving experienced encounters and even trying to think like a Ju/'hoan person. Marshall was at a very impressionable age when he lived and hunted with the Ju/'hoansi
in the 1950s and quite conceivably, he may have begun to think and act like a Ju/'hoan person. Indeed, an American-Ju/'hoan identity crisis was to develop which, according to his widow, psychologist Lexie Marshall (2009 pers. comm.), was to last for the rest of his life. Patsy Asch recalled her first meeting with Marshal in 1954 at his home in Cambridge which illustrates the ease with which he slipped into a Ju/'hoan persona:

A handsome young man was bending over, pointing at the carpet and making odd clicking noises that appeared to be part of a language unlike any I had ever heard. He looked far into the distance, frowned, spoke and dashed around the huge oriental carpet, all the time watching the pattern and pointing at certain designs. It seems to be an elaborate game of charades (Asch 2007:72).

Patsy Asch recalled this tracking performance three years later when watching The Hunters for the first time, and has reflected that this ‘games of charades’ might have been Marshall’s way of getting into character while editing The Hunters (P. Asch 2009 pers. comm.). If this re-enactment was indeed a kind of method acting, it would have drawn on Marshall’s direct experience and deep, even kinesthetically internalised knowledge about what it was like to be a Ju/'hoan hunter. Such deep identification may have also influenced his film-making shift away from a wordy narrative style which described the filmic action from the outside, toward that of a participant-observer, internalising the stance of the camera and placing it inside the action or the community: what Marshall later came to describe as shooting in rather than shooting at.

Even though Marshall’s narrative approach was based on direct experience, his decision to depart from a narrative style was all the more striking because he was so accomplished within that tradition and had experienced success and acclaim with The Hunters. Moreover at the time, the received wisdom, even for ethnographic filmmakers, involved starting off with a script and developing a montage of images to illustrate the story. This had been the starting point for The Hunters: an almost pre-packaged story strong in archetypal content, like Flaherty’s classic film Nanook, concerning ‘man’s struggle to overcome nature.’ However, Marshall not only wanted to leave grand themes behind, he also wanted to avoid telling people about Bushmen through his narration rather than letting the film and its images speak for themselves. This move away from the filmmaker’s narration toward the perspective of his film subjects was based on his desire to portray the Ju/'hoansi more truthfully even though it involved sacrificing filmmaking for wider public appeal.
While shorter sequence films would be used for teaching anthropology (in large part due to the efforts of Timothy Asch), they were rarely shown to audiences in public cinemas and indeed were never intended to be. In light of this, it is significant that in her study of documentary films about Bushmen (which include two of Marshall’s films: *The Hunters*, and *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*), Lauren Van Vuuren (2009) decided to exclude Marshall’s sequence films (*the !Kung Film series*), as she considers the latter to be “ethnographic films made for the purposes of academic teaching or study which draw small audiences” (Van Vuuren 2006:3), and consequently not part of the main documentary canon of films aimed at general audiences. In fact, Marshall himself has conceded that most filmmakers would be unwilling to call a sequence a film (Marshall 1993:134). Nonetheless, Marshall’s sequence films, while never becoming ‘popular’ as such have, through their innovatory nature, and remarkable cross-cultural insight, continued to draw extensive admiration from anthropologists, filmmakers and scholars. Peter Loizos, for example, describes Marshall’s corpus of sequence films as being:

unrivalled in the intimacy and vividness with which it conveyed hunter-gatherer lives, including quarrels, and the dramatic intensity of the rituals needed to effect curing. The ability of Marshall and his coworkers to give his subjects, who were also by this time either friends or people he knew very well, vividness and authenticity, as skilled three-dimensional individuals was at the time unrivalled (Loizos 1993:21-22).

Using sequence films, Loizos continues:

Marshall and Asch broke down the “story” into “something more like a bare, descriptive case-history, as in *The Meat Fight*, or where the on-screen event was a continuous one, with minor excisions, but no transcending synthesis (Loizos 1993:23).

Timothy and Patsy Ash have also commended Marshall’s technique:

Marshall’s sequence films, slices of life of !Kung men, women and children, are models of one way to increase the ethnographic integrity of film. Marshall selected when and what to film, he chose the subject, he chose the angle and focal length; but after he began to film and selected whom to film, he tried to follow their interactions with one another (Timothy & Patsy Asch 1987:333).

BITTER MELONS – A HYBRID FILM

The film *Bitter Melons* was shot on the 1955 Marshall expedition, although not released until 1972. In terms of Marshall’s development as a filmmaker it is of particular interest in that, with its terse narration, it marks a hybrid style between *The Hunters* (shot in 1952/3 and 1955) and the
shorter sequence films which were shot on the 1957/58 expeditions. It is also unique in that the Bushman film subjects are not the Ju/'hoansi, but the /Gwi people living in the central Kalahari grasslands of Botswana. Significantly, Marshall did not have the same kind of relationships with the /Gwi as he did with the Ju/'hoansi and this appears to be reflected in his shooting style, which is more restrained and less intimate with fewer close-ups and more shooting ‘at’ rather than shooting ‘in’ the events portrayed. Marshall did however view this film as closer to reality than The Hunters and wrote: “I thought the film conveyed more reality about the Khwe people than The Hunters did about Ju/'hoansi because we illustrated Oukwane’s music with scenes showing the subject matter of his songs” (1993:56).

Bitter Melons could also be regarded as a kind of experiment for Marshall because while it contains sequences and has been used for educational purposes, it remains one of the most evocative and poetic of Marshall’s films making it more accessible to anyone with an aesthetic sensibility. The theme of struggling in a harsh environment has parallels to The Hunters, yet Bitter Melons has, on the one hand a delicate poignancy and an almost other-worldly feel, while on the other hand, it contains much ethnographic information. The Marshalls were clearly moved by the environment of the central Kalahari which was substantially harsher, in survival terms, than Nyae Nyae.

During the time spent filming in the central Kalahari among the /Gwi people Marshall makes his first reference to the idea of a sequence film although, writing in his 1955 journal, his descriptions of the film he visualises is more along the lines of an abstract and poetic evocation of the land:

This land is dry. Many things live here but there is no water. Never a long cooling drink of water. Thirst is to be the theme of this next sequence film. It is to pervade everywhere and be felt in everything done. The emphasis is focused upon the tightening grasp of a land that does not move nor exert itself. It remains opened and disenchartered…. The land has given up waiting, it is sexless. Its face is turned away from god (Marshall 1955:42).

The film Bitter Melons abandons a narrative form and instead uses a number of sequences framed by the songs of the blind musician, Uxwone. Marshall’s narration of the film begins: “Many of Uxwone’s songs were about the environment he lived in. He sang about important plants and animals, and the constant problem of finding water” (Bitter Melons).

This opening narration defines the film and may also hint at the initial impact the land had upon Marshall himself. Rather than constituting a single ‘event,’’ the film uses depictions of several
daily aspects of the life of the /Gwi, evoking the harshness of a life lived without available surface water. In its poetic evocative character Bitter Melons differs significantly from the sequence films Marshall was to shoot footage for on the 1957-58 expedition, however, the concept of shooting single long take sequences is contained within it. The study guide accompanying Bitter Melons states that the film is divided into 14 sequences. Only a couple of these are focused purely on a single action or event such as setting a snare for a duiker and collecting wild cucumbers. However, these sequences have not yet begun to show people interacting with each other. It is not until material from the 1957/58 footage is edited, when Marshall’s camera participates within events in a kind of communion that truly reflect the genius of his sequence films.

GENESIS OF THE SEQUENCE FILMS

While Marshall was working out his decision to move away from a narrative portrayal Timothy Asch, although himself still learning the ropes of filmmaking and editing, had a significant influence on the birth of sequence filmmaking. In an interview with Douglas Harper, Asch, describes his excitement at seeing the sequences in the raw material of Marshall’s films:

Bob and John had fallen out, and I was left to handle a lot of the material. Bob went to New Guinea and I ran the base back at Harvard. John went to Yale. I looked at all John's material; there were half a million feet of film. I saw that there were sequences there. Margeret Mead had taught me something about sequences in her book, Balinese Character, and in her field methods course, which I had taken and been a TA [teaching assistant] for. I was very impressed with the idea of sequences of photographs, which tell you a story that single photographs don't. John's father [Laurence K. Marshall] had told him when he filmed to film everything and to film in detail. So John had sequences of behavior, like arguments or altercations, or processes, in great detail (Harper 2004:44).

In Asch’s account, it is apparent that the intellectual idea of the sequence film is attributable to a number of sources and that there is an element of co-creation. In the first instance, there was Laurence Marshall’s basic instruction to his son about filming events continuously so it was already in the footage. Clearly Margaret Mead had also planted the idea of sequences (with respect to photographs) in Tim’s mind, and he came to work as a rookie editor at the FSC on her recommendation (Ruby 2000:117). Once there, Asch appears to have had a ‘eureka’ moment but this was the realisation that the actual sequences of social interaction were already there in the footage which was shot in such great detail by Marshall in the first place. Marshall’s screening notes from the 1957-58 expedition not only briefly describe the action in each exposed reel, but
are often accompanied by titles relating to a theme, such as ‘Aggression,’ or ‘Sex,’ which suggests that Marshall himself was thinking about how each reel of footage could be extracted for synthesis into a film demonstrating anthropological insight into aspects of Ju/'hoan culture. For example, the film reel which constituted material for the sequence film eventually released as Men Bathing (1973) is labeled in Marshall’s screening notes as ‘Sex and Men.’ Sexual jokes and hilarious innuendo are key elements of this sequence film.

Through having seen the potential in Marshall’s footage, Asch was able to reassure Marshall that he didn’t need to focus on narrative films, and stressed the pedagogic import of sequence films. In his own words:

I convinced John that it was OK that he wasn’t going to make another thematic narrative film right now like The Hunters. He didn't have to make another long narrative film... he could edit these films first... and then he could take bits and pieces of these and make a bigger film, which was done with N'ait. So we put all our energies into these short films. Gardner thought we were crazy. Joe Brew... thought that we were out of our minds. Both Gardner and Brew were worried because they were responsible to NSF (National Science Foundation) for meeting the conditions of the grant. But Brew supported us because I made such a strong case for it educationally (in Ruby 2000:117).

Despite the radical change in direction Marshall has described how the NSF actually needed little convincing that the new approach was the right one:

One guy at the National Science Foundation, who had funded this project, liked event films. He said “I’m hearing what people are saying to each other; I’m seeing what they are doing; and I’m not listening to John Marshall tell me about who the Bushmen are” (in Anderson 1993:139).

This shift from narrative to event or sequence films mirrored what Colin Young was to remark as the difference between traditional documentaries and observational film “The difference between TELLING a story and SHOWING us something.” Commenting on Bitter Melons, Young writes:

Marshall simply runs his camera and lets us look at what he saw. Apart from reloading or rewinding, he does nothing except watch. We watch too…. We will need help in understanding its significance, but we are allowed to feel it without interference (Young 1995:103).

In my own film, the time I could spend shooting for Bitter Roots was so limited that I was rarely able to shoot Marshall-style sequences, however, there were times when I attempted to shoot an event in this manner such as in the scene 55:15 minutes into my film where a cow is being butchered at /Gautcha. Although this scene has been significantly cut to fit the film, at the time of shooting I saw this as an ‘event’ which would lend itself to the sequence method, and tried, like
Marshall, to use different angles and viewpoints to show what it was like being inside the Ju/'hoan social space rather than standing back as a detached observer. This was notably more difficult to do during the subsequent scene when the women and young girls were dancing, partly because I also felt awkward ‘intruding’ into the event. I did not want to disturb the complex rhythmic game of ‘onion-tossing’ and I had not spent enough time with the women to know that they would be comfortable with my shooting in their midst. When shooting this scene I was reminded of Marshall’s sequence film N!owa T'ama: Melon-tossing game (1970) which is far more complicated that its title suggests. Its introductory narration explains that complex relationships, subtle jealousies and controlled anger are being depicted, but portrayal of these social complexities were only possible because Marshall was able to capture the unfolding of subtle developments through his personal knowledge of the characters concerned and move around accordingly. Marshall has described his shooting technique for this film:

A group of women playing the melon-tossing game in the centre of the village formed an impermanent theatre with an audience of people watching from their houses. The theater had wings from which other women entered the game with panache and into which players departed to pick up their babies. I could shoot the players like a member of the audience with my frame as my stage. I could enter the game and move my stage around using appropriate angles and distances (Marshall 1993:42).

Compared to my own shooting fifty years later my lack of subtextual knowledge concerning complex relationships is apparent. My footage is limited to shooting the ‘impermanent theatre’ as a member of the village audience as opposed to shooting within the event. Ethically, in my mind, the latter would have required consent (even if unspoken), which could only be gained through sufficient familiarity with, and trust by, the film subjects, plus enough knowledge to avoid disturbing the event when positioning the camera to capture different angles and distances.

In shooting the face of the little boy, which is intercut with the dancing women, I could also be accused of MacDougall’s observation that some films show bafflement on the part of their makers and contribute to a world without significance that is “mute and off balance,” where “the camera zooms in on a face which reveals precisely nothing” (MacDougall 1998:142). I remain acutely aware that my shooting in this scene, with its impersonal silhouettes is stylistically more reminiscent of National Geographic aesthetics than the Marshall tradition.

By contrast, The Melon Tossing Game illustrates Marshall’s foreknowledge of what is going to happen next through understanding underlying tensions between key characters and between
family groups. In such situations, it is hard enough to think about angles and distances when subtle shifts in relationships are happening thick and fast. There is a need to shoot from different places, to move around, but the camera’s movement must be motivated by the characters’ shifting moods and community dynamics. Knowledge of this kind can only be gained through having lived a long time with, and become very familiar with the community concerned.

In editing *Bitter Roots*, I also compromised Marshall’s sequence approach by using narration, partly because I felt the film needed to stand on its own. In Marshall’s original sequence films however, in the absence of simultaneous explanation or context, the viewer is forced to think about meaning within the sequence, an excellent foundation for using such films for educational purposes.

The innovatory nature of sequence filming is hard to grasp until one realizes, as Asch has pointed out (in Ruby 2000: 118-119), that in 1960 even those films used for teaching anthropology were long epics such as Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack's *Grass* (1925) and Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon* (1937).

**INNOVATION IN MARSHALL’S SEQUENCE FILMS**

As Peter Loizos has commented, at the time of their production, Marshall’s sequence films were unrivalled in portraying his film subjects with “vividness and authenticity as skilled, three-dimensional individuals” (1993: 22). This would not have been possible if Marshall had not, by the time of shooting, become friends with his subjects, gaining a close knowledge of their habits, idiosyncrasies and relationships. One of the most important aspects of sequence filming was recognising when an event was going to happen and positioning the camera accordingly. Without an intimate knowledge of the subjects, and having an almost intuitive knack of anticipation, this would be impossible.

In a yet unpublished paper, *Dislocation as Method* (draft dated 13.10.2010 emailed to me by the author) David MacDougall has written about “second intention,” a term he learned from a former fencing instructor meaning ‘making an attack on one’s opponent not for point-scoring but to place oneself in a better position to do so. MacDougall applies the analogy to filmmaking – with the idea of moving one’s camera to an intermediate step, making it easier to move into a more valid third frame. He stresses that this is an unconscious intuitive process, whereby one does not know
the outcome, but presumably implicit knowledge of social space is relevant here and this intuited knowledge was one of Marshall’s gifts which he used both in the Kalahari and in his subsequent sequence films shot in the United States, such as the *Pittsburgh Police Series* (1974). As Marshall has observed of himself in an interview with Carolyn Anderson and Thomas Benson:

Very quickly when I come into a place, I don’t know whether it’s vibes or whether it’s the way I handle myself or what I seem to be thinking, I don’t know what it is, but I get into it very fast. I walk into a domestic argument in somebody’s home and start shooting and the whole thing just goes on and happens. I just have a knack at that. It’s just a quality, I guess (in Anderson & Benson 1993:150).

Unfortunately, during the shooting of *Bitter Roots*, there were few occasions when I was shooting in such an intuitive manner. The one possible exception to this was the dancing scene toward the end of the film, when /Gunda enters the frame in trance, shuffling in out of the darkness toward the group of women sitting round the fire. I had known /Gunda well in the 1980s, not only as my kinship classificatory father, but also as a *n/um kxao* (owner of medicine) who still healed people while in trance, so I anticipated his entry (in trance) at some time in the evening and was ready to shoot it. This readiness, however, was probably more of a conscious anticipation than the kind of unconscious second intention to which Macdougall refers whereby, in his words: “…there is a synchrony between the observer and the event, an instinctive sense of what will happen next and a visceral (as well as intellectual) pleasure in responding to it” (MacDougall, *Dislocation as Method* (unpublished draft dated 13.10.2010)).

**SENSE OF PRESENCE AND CONTEXTUAL ABSENCE**

Unlike *Bitter Roots* – which has the trajectory of a journey, each of Marshall’s sequence films related to a specific event so the viewer is not distracted by a bigger narrative (where meaning is constructed), and has to focus on the event itself and its social importance. As Marshall and de Brigard have described:

A sequence may be thought of as a veritable film record of a small event… Sequence filming replaces the ordinary process of shooting and editing a thematic film, or overview, with the attempt to report the events in as much detail for as long as possible…. Films can follow small events closely, letting them take their own time and produce their own content. The result is a sequence notable for the lack of conceptual and contextual framework which other forms of film attempt to supply (Marshall and de Brigard 1995:133-134).
David MacDougall (2006:251-252) recognised the innovations apparent in Marshall’s new approach which drew the viewer into the physical and psychological fabric of events creating a sense of immediacy and presence. Marshall, as MacDougall points out, had realised that a film is a structure largely created in the mind of the viewer.

THE FIRST SUBTITLES

One of the major innovations in Marshall’s sequence films is the first use of subtitles in ethnographic film. Subtitles first appeared in *A Group of Women* (1961) an intimate portrayal of Ju/'hoan women resting with their babies and chatting under the shade of a Baobab tree and *A Joking Relationship* (1962), which shows the recently (and unhappily) married N!ai flirting with her great uncle /Ti!kay. The latter film brilliantly illustrates a Ju/'hoan kinship relationship which permits casual intimacy, emotional release and support. As David MacDougall has pointed out, these subtitled films

…began to give access not only to visible expressions of emotion but also to the intellectual life of their subjects, including the feelings and accounts of personal experiences that might be expressed in the course of their conversations. The introduction of subtitled speech was in fact a crucial step in liberating the ethnographic film from the stranglehold of voice-over commentary. It also made possible a form of ethnographic narrative cinema that was no longer confined to nonverbal behaviour nor dependent upon commentary (MacDougall 1998:116).

REFLEXIVITY

*A Joking Relationship* was also highly innovative as one of the first reflexive ethnographic films, showing evidence of the filmmaker’s presence and his relationship with his subjects. While reflexivity is commonplace today, and self-evident in my thesis film, it was rare in the ethnographic films of the early 1960s. Approximately 5:45 minutes into *A Joking Relationship*, the subtitles show /Ti!kay, N!ai’s great uncle telling her “Come down here you crazy snake!” to which N!ai replies “Does he want me to? Can’t you see he’s waiting?” Shortly thereafter, /Ti!kay observes: “Can’t you see he’s waiting for you to come down? He wants to take your picture while I tumble you.” N!ai then replies “He wants to take me gathering in the truck.” At 11:57 minutes, /Ti!kay asks N!ai: “Can’t you see that #Toma wants you to stay? #Toma, you are merciless! #Toma will give us some food if you stay and dance the Eland dance” (#Toma is the name by which the Ju/'hoansi knew John Marshall). While N!ai and /Ti!kay only occasionally
look directly at the camera, Marshall’s invisible presence is subtly acknowledged in a way which clearly illustrates the relationship between him and his film subjects.

N!ai under the baobab tree in *A Joking Relationship* (Image courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources).

THE SOUND OF BEING THERE

It should be remembered that in the early 1950s, when Marshall shot *The Hunters*, there was no such thing as synch sound. John Bishop (1993: 222-3) has described the mechanics of the first real synch sound recorded on the 1955 expedition when Daniel Blitz (a sound engineer and friend of Laurence Marshall) developed a system which could work under rugged field conditions. As the operation of the camera itself was quite noisy, Marshall had constructed a wooden blimp to shield the sound.

Blimp constructed by Marshall to shield sound of camera (Image Courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources).
The audio recorder was powered by a generator placed far enough away not to pick up noise from the very large microphone which itself had to be placed close to the film subjects yet hidden from view in the bushes (Bishop 1993:223). In his field notebook Marshall made a sketch of the layout of camera, and recording gear.


This mode of operation was used for shooting some footage on both the 1955 and 1957/8 expeditions. Film logs at the HSFA relating to footage for Melon Tossing Game, N'um Tchai, and Bitter Melons confirm the use of this set-up in these films (K. Foley 2011 pers. comm.).

The logistics for recording true sync sound involved the camera being mounted on a tripod, so the footage filmed together with synch sound tended to be static with more formally framed shots as in films such as Bitter Melons (1971), shot in 1955. The Lion Game (1970), shot May 11th 1958, and N!owa T'ama: The Melon Tossing Game (1969) shot April 15th 1958 contain a mixture of synch and non-synch sound. The problems associated with shooting with synch sound included a lengthy set-up time, and having to use a tripod, which by limiting camera movement, prevented rapid change of angle and distance in response to unfolding social interactions within an event. Such limitations may be the reason why more synch sound footage was not shot when filming more spontaneous, intimate social interactions, such as appear in A Joking Relationship or A Group of Women. Watching these films it is also apparent that reaction shots are frequently used.
over the audio, or shots not showing the person speaking which, in the edit suite, would have
been a logical way to ‘fake’ sync from the recorded wild sound. The actual sound set-up for
these intimate films is unclear. From watching the films, one gets the impression that the
situation was very intimate with just Marshall himself and his film subjects. He has described
how he recorded wild sound by hiding an Ampex tape-recorder in the grass or having his friend
Kerelwe Ledimo carry it around (Marshall 1993:41). However, based on my own observed
experience of Ju/'hoan life there are always people around in a village and it is highly probable
that in the 1950s this would also have been the case. So it is possible that the actual
circumstances of filming may not have been as intimate as some of the sequence films might
suggest.

THE PARADOX OF CREATIVE DIRECTION IN SEQUENCE FILMS

With current technology of small portable cameras with mounted microphones it would seem
relatively easy, provided one had access, to shoot intimate scenes of spontaneity, but one needs to
recall the limitations of the technology in the 1950s. Consequently, to shoot a scene well, a good
deal of thought and pre-planning was required and even some creative direction as well.
Although a high degree of intimacy and spontaneity characterises many of Marshall’s sequence
films, the raw footage reveals, for example, that in shooting *A Joking Relationship*, Marshall had
several takes of N!ai walking away at the end of the film (K. Foley, 2011 pers. comm). Although
the date of shooting *A Joking Relationship* has been noted by Foley as being January 20, 1958,
her analysis of the raw footage suggests that in an early assembly of the film, a couple of pick-up
shots and cutaways were shot on February 9, 1958, more than two weeks later: one of /Ti!kay
sitting under the baobab tree and a shot of N!ai walking into the village. Further intimations of
Marshall’s direction of this film appear when close attention is paid to the audio track revealing
what appears to be his voice, whispering in Ju/'hoan, suggesting that he and N!ai were
communicating and collaborating throughout the shoot (K. Foley 2011 pers. comm.) has also
confirmed that notes on the audio tape case pertaining to this footage state that John Marshall’s
voice and camera can be heard on the recording). A born ‘movie star,’ N!ai was (as Marshall has
indicated in Part 1 of *A Kalahari Family*), even from an early age, highly intelligent and self-
aware, subsequently becoming even more conscious of her appearance and its effect on others
(see Chapter 5).
Creative direction of Marshall’s sequence films was not limited to the shoot itself. For example, in post-production of *Men Bathing*, a film which illustrates male bonding with sexual jokes being exchanged between a group of Ju/'hoan men bathing at a rain-filled Nǂama pan, Marshall wanted to augment the recorded wild sound. According to Foley (forthcoming paper), Marshall, Timothy Asch and others, recorded sound effects for this film at the Marshall family farm in Peterborough, New Hampshire. Marshall even recorded himself imitating Toma’s infectious, carefree laughter, the evidence of this consisting of the original sound recordings archived at the HSFA.

While the aim of sequence filming was to record an event as naturally as possible, to give a feeling of ‘being there,’ it seems ironic that Marshall felt it necessary to augment his films through contrived means. However, in an interview with K. Foley (2010 pers. comm.) Bob Gesteland (who accompanied Marshall as a second camera and sound recordist on the 1957/58 expedition), used an interesting metaphor to describe Marshall’s intentions, which were to ‘Xerox Bushman culture through film’. The idea was to create as closely as possible, a perfect or exact replica of Ju/'hoan culture and experience. In view of the technological limitations at the time, to fulfill this goal, Marshall needed to find creative ways of conveying what he perceived as the truth of the event. Clearly there are practical limitations, shooting with one camera and non-synch sound and to ‘Xerox’ each passing moment was clearly impossible. However the enduring relevance of Marshall’s sequence films shows that he had largely fulfilled his goal.

**INTIMACY VERSUS OBJECTIVE DISTANCE**

It could be argued that several of the Marshall sequence films are the most sensitive portrayals of timeless intimacy in the ethnographic film canon. Patsy Asch (2007) has described *A Group of Women, Men Bathing, A Joking Relationship*, and *The Melon Tossing Game* as “gentle depictions of day-to-day relationships between Ju/'hoansi. Most of the images are quite sensual; and, perhaps because the sequences are presented as self-contained interactions and the place is leisurely, suggest a timelessness, or, at least, little concern for time” (Patsy Asch 2007:77).

At a symposium on Documentary and Intimacy at the University of Surrey in September 2010, I screened *A Joking Relationship, A Group of Women* and *Men Bathing* to a number of filmmakers and film scholars. I was interested in discussing the filmmaker’s polar role, both participating in
the intimacy of an event and being an observer of it, for as Marshall described his shooting in an interview with Carolyn Anderson and Thomas Benson:

You’re not thinking of the image you want. You’re thinking about where you are; what you’re getting and what you’re missing constantly… You’re in the middle of an event and you’re just responding. You’re following an event - you’re half part of it and you’re half observing it (Anderson & Benson 1993:144).

My own thoughts were that when a film portraying intimacy is shot in this way, conveyed with an innocent curiosity, and the willing consent of the subjects, it might work as an antidote to the audience ‘othering’ film subjects such as the Ju/'hoansi since intimacy (and intimate humour) negates distance and the abstract “image you want”. I suspect that most of us from a Western cultural viewpoint tend to be more at home with the Apollonian archetype of abstract objectivity than with the embodied intimacy of Eros and this was indeed reflected by criticism by some film scholars at the Surrey Symposium who commented on their discomfort at the display of nakedness particularly with reference to the ‘male gaze’ of the filmmaker.

My own reading of the sensual elements in sequence films such as A Group of Women is that they do not reflect the impersonal aspect of the erotic, what Joseph Campbell has described as the “zeal of the organs for each other” (Campbell 1986:186), but rather the intimate person-to-person playful aspect of Eros with which Ju/'hoansi are far more comfortable. I also felt that Marshall himself embodied this aspect of Ju/'hoan culture and he has himself stated that using Ju/'hoan social space meant getting close to people (Marshall 1993:44). I can recall many instances of his physically moving closer than was normally sociably acceptable (in Western culture) when in dialogue with many people, including myself. Social distance for Ju/'hoansi is very different as Marshall had learned from his Ju/hoan mentor ≠Toma Tsamko who greatly influenced his filmmaking and taught him about Ju/'hoan social space: “He admonished me when I was too close (difficult to achieve with Ju/'hoansi) and laughed when I was too far away” (Marshall 1993:35).
While many feminists have rightly criticised the ‘male gaze’ in the construction of movies, I find this does not apply to Marshall’s sequence films. The intimacy conveyed in these films should be seen in the context of what it was like to be inside Ju/'hoan culture rather than looking in as an outsider. Marshall himself abhorred the idea of the self-obsessed voyeuristic spectator and was sensitive regarding how his role in Nyae Nyae could be perceived. As he wrote in a letter to Keyan Tomaselli dated July 2 1996 “I know its bad news to be a ‘male American adventurer’”.

To counter the voyeuristic viewing of male “adventurers” characteristic of many early ‘Bushmen’ films (described in Chapter 2) which stereotyped people and culture, it was not surprising that in the 1960s the idea was born that sequence films might be used for teaching; however even this had its pitfalls.

SEQUENCE FILMS FOR TEACHING

The potential for using sequence films for teaching anthropology was embraced by Timothy Asch who ran with the concept and made it his life’s work. He was able to see their potential from the start.

I took a lot of John's films, some of which I had edited myself in rough form, and brought them out to Brandeis and taught an introductory anthropology class, which was fantastic. I mean, people were really bowled over. I was young and enthusiastic I suppose, but in a way, I almost never have taught as well, as effectively, as I did with those sequences (in Ruby 2000:119).

To serve the purpose of education, Marshall’s sequence films were prefaced with an introductory narration and accompanying stills from the film which explained the action occurring in the
event. Subsequently, the viewer is given the ‘raw protein’ of the film, which acted as a catalyst for discussion and as a stimulus for further enquiry and deeper learning. In the 1960s, Timothy Asch championed this approach and started developing programs using ethnographic documentary for teaching purposes. However, he soon began to recognise the problems inherent in showing sequence films with insufficient guidance. The ‘raw protein’ of images from observational films without adequate explanation could result in audiences interpreting the films in a negative manner. As Jay Ruby has commented:

Before many ethnographic filmmakers had even embraced observational style, Asch realized that the problem with narrationless observational films about cultural behaviour exotic to Western audiences was that viewers simply lacked the knowledge necessary to understand what they were seeing and, without some assistance, were likely to employ racist stereotypes (Ruby 2000:119).

An example of this problem came about when an attempt was made to use the Bushman sequence films in education for schools. Jerome Bruner, a psychologist at Harvard University, developed the idea for a course called Man, A Course of Study (MACOS). In 1965, Patsy Asch was hired to head the unit and had access to all the sequence films edited by Marshall and Asch. Films such as Debe’s Tantrum and A Joking Relationship were used. However, following a series of summer schools, Patsy Asch decided to pull the Bushman films from the curriculum because teachers were not prepared to confront racism directly. In her own words:

… if you can’t confront racism directly you can’t take small black people and put them into a classroom and not have reinforced racists attitudes. So we pulled the whole thing and it was about three years work. Four years work. But it was the teachers really…. We couldn’t find a way to directly talk about issues of racism in American society and that would be the only reason really to use it. And it’s been a problem with the university too (Patsy Asch 2009 pers. comm.).

However, Marshall’s sequence films continued to be screened in an introductory anthropology course at Harvard to illustrate cross-cultural concepts with many universities following suit. Fadwa El Guindi has commented on the usefulness of Marshall’s sequence films for facilitating translation of disembodied, abstract anthropological concepts into concrete events manifesting in real peoples’ lives:

Some of Marshall’s sequence films, such as The Meat Fight, Rite of Passage or A Curing Ceremony, are direct examples of anthropological categories, such as the notion of “reciprocity” or “avoidance behaviour,” or about cultural institutions or practices, such as exchange, healing, and life cycle transitions. An anthropology teacher can use some of these sequence films, such as A Rite of Passage, which, in fourteen minutes, shows a young man after his first kill in a hunt of a large animal. His father and another relative helped him track and butcher the animal and later distribute the meat among the group. A scarification rite takes place on film, marking the process of transition in which the boy passes to adulthood and to marriageability. This can be used in the
classroom to demonstrate the notion of “rite of passage”, which was introduced by van Gennup (1960 [1909]) as a universal phenomenon, manifested in a real-life situation (El Guindi 2004:99).

In reviewing of *A Rite of Passage*, Thomas Beidelman (1974:691) also commented on how it would have been easy (*but wrong*) to have made the film more dramatic than it is, and the film’s value is in its clear illustration of how, contrary to popular imagination, important rituals are often conducted without solemnity emotion or excitement.

Many unacquainted with life in preliterate societies hold unwarranted stereotypes about the tone and manner in which important ceremonies are carried out; this low keyed and modest film should help rectify any such misunderstanding by students (Beidelman 1974:691).

Clearly the sequence film material did have the ability to reduce stereotyping when good teachers presented them, but even at university level as has been proved by studies conducted by Martinez (2004), there was a high potential for cross-cultural misunderstanding. Timothy Asch was only too aware of this:

The danger Tim saw and one which has been confirmed in studies by his colleagues at the University of Southern California… 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 behaviour in another…. hence the need to have written accompanying monographs…. (Lewis 2004:8).

/Gunda Bo entering a trance as he learns how to become a healer. Similar images which appear in Marshall’s films about healing: *Nuim Tchai* and *A Curing Ceremony* might be seen as exotic and reinforce conceptions of ‘otherness.’ (Image courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources).
In anthropology the relevancy of the visual situated within a “discipline of words” (Mead 1995) has been cause for much debate. However, as the above argument indicates, the visual standing alone is problematic. Peter Loizos (1992) has critiqued the position of observational filmmakers who regard films exclusively as works complete unto themselves or ‘stand-alone texts.’ He supports the tradition established by Marshall, Asch and Heider who produced and argued for the importance of study guides to accompany films which might need further explication. As he points out “It is not at all clear how observational filming of an unfamiliar ritual in an unfamiliar culture could possibly yield up its meaning” (Loizos 1992:54).

Citing an example from fine art Loizos suggests that the symbolism of Botticelli’s ‘Primavera’ cannot be understood simply by looking at the painting. An expert knowledge is required:

So with film: if you bring enough experience or knowledge to the text, you need no help. But all of us need help with most other cultures much of the time. Commentary of some kind, whether in words, or in inter-titles, is often essential if we are to avoid bewilderment and misapprehension (Loizos 1992:54).

There were some sequence films which deeply preoccupied Marshall, drawing him back to the editing room over a period of many years. The most complex film with which he struggled was An Argument about a Marriage shot on May 12, 1958. According to the film record (HFSA 2005:11.45), Marshall’s first edit of the film initially titled The Argument and without any narration was in 1961; he then re-edited the film in 1969 (with subtitles) and again in 1972 when the film was finally released. Futhermore, yet another version of the sequence was edited for inclusion in A Kalahari Family (2002).

An Argument about a Marriage involves an important backstory. In 1958 with help from the Marshalls, a group of Ju/'hoansi returned to Nyae Nyae after having spent several years living as unpaid captive labour on a white-owned farm in the south. A couple of years previously several Ju/'hoansi had escaped from that farm, one man leaving behind his wife who subsequently gave birth to a child by another man. The argument of the film’s title breaks out soon after the return of the wife with her new partner to Nyae Nyae.
There is a cornucopia of anthropological material in this film depicting the complexities of marriage rules and bride service in the traditional kinship system, as well as the nature of conflict and expressions of anger. The film’s climax shows how further escalation is skillfully avoided through wise mediation by ≠Toma (Marshall’s friend and mentor).

Perhaps this film was particularly significant for Marshall, looking back at life in the Kalahari from the distant perspective of America, as it would have kept reminding him that seeds of dramatic change had been sown in Nyae Nyae. It is the first of Marshall’s films where the outside world starts to have an impact and marks a historical turning point. The impact of blackbirding by white farmers would have affected Ju/'hoan sense of security in Nyae Nyae as what had been perceived as a distant threat was no longer so far away. Even as early as 1955 Marshall recalled hearing the concern of his Ju/'hoan friends whilst out hunting with them on a winters morning:

We stopped to have a smoke on the wide, white edge of Nyae Nyae pan. The day was chill. Suddenly N//ami said: “We know they’re coming.” “Yes. The white people will come,” ≠Toma quietly agreed…. “Yo! They’ll take your land!” N//ami was emphatic. I felt the presence of South Africa like the cold from a glacier under the horizon. I told the people with me I would try to help (Marshall 1993:50).

It was not only the white farmers in South West Africa that were of concern. During the 1958/59 expedition, there was also an invasion of Herero cattle herders into /Gautcha. The Marshalls again intervened and as a result of official complaints to the SWA Administration (ostensibly complaining that the invasion was hampering their scientific research), the cattle were destroyed. However, the die had been cast. Change was inevitably coming to Nyae Nyae and Marshall himself couldn’t help but feel he had a deep responsibility to the people who had become far more like family than film subjects. But it wasn’t until the 1970s that he was able to return and find out first hand what had been happening in his absence.
Chapter 5: The Aesthetics of Maturity

*The modern artist fights to contribute to human happiness, truth or justice. He works to improve the world*


THE YEARS OF ABSENCE

For almost two decades John Marshall was unable to return to the Kalahari. The government of South-West Africa had expelled Marshall in the late 1950s for reasons that were not clarified at the time, although Marshall was later to discover (in 1978) that this was linked to an (untrue) accusation that he had fathered a child with a Ju/'hoan woman, which was a criminal offence in the Apartheid era (Marshall 1993:74).

The period of the 1960s and early 70s was a busy time for Marshall, his skills as a cameraman were much in demand. He covered the civil war in Cyprus for NBC (1964-65), shot *Titicut Follies* (1967) for Fred Wiseman, as well as the *Pittsburgh Police Series* (1968-1969). He also founded Documentary Educational Resources with Timothy Asch in 1968 and was, of course, involved in editing and releasing numerous short films for the !Kung Bushmen series (1970-1974). It wasn’t until the end of 1972 that he was able to return to the Kalahari, but the effect of his visit marked another turning point in Marshall’s development as a filmmaker.

A RELECTANT ‘HERO’ RETURNS - FOR NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Marshall’s return to the Kalahari in 1972 was not as a cameraman and filmmaker but as the subject of a film himself. The film *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974), shot primarily in Botswana, was part of a National Geographic series made for CBS and produced by David L. Wolper Productions. It was in tune with the growing demand for films about wildlife and nature in Africa. As has been described in Chapter 2, there was a growing perception of ‘Bushmen’ as very much a part of the natural world. The filmmakers saw Marshall’s return to the Kalahari as the basis for a strong story-line. As Van Vuuren comments:

The idea behind *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, of filming a reunion between Marshall and the Ju/'hoansi after a twenty year absence on the part of the latter from southern Africa suited the
However, Marshall himself was a reluctant participant in this enterprise as extracts from his travel journal reveal. On August 18th 1972, at the President Hotel (in Gaberone), prior to setting out for the Kalahari, Marshall wrote in his diary:

Spent the day getting my “medicine kit.” An “Anthropologist” is supposed to have a “medicine kit” and “cure” the natives thereby “establishing rapport”…. I don’t know – I guess I don’t object as long as they’re paying for it. Having taken the first step, the rest of the way into the pit is simply a matter of gradual acceleration. I feel covered with shit and am getting bluer and bluer (Marshall: 1972a)

_Bushmen of the Kalahari_, rendered as a typical expositional documentary, employed Hollywood actor Leslie Nielson as the ‘voice of God’ narrator, complimenting Marshall’s more personal reflections on his journey. The film follows the ‘adventures’ of Marshall as he journeys into the Kalahari and back into his own past to meet up with old friends. In view of Marshall’s ban from entering South West Africa, Marshall arranges for a couple of Ju/'hoansi whom he meets in Botswana to seek out ≠Toma on the South West African side of the border, in order to give him a message. The meeting takes place after days of anticipation by Marshall and the film crew when ≠Toma finally arrives together with 50 men, women and children. The shot of the long-awaited reunion shows Marshall mirroring ≠Toma’s Ju/'hoan gesture, putting his hand over his mouth in astonishment as both breaking out in laughter and joke about how much people had grown and changed.

Marshall starts showing people the films he had made of them in the 1950s and comments in his narration that he had particularly wanted to see N!ai. He had begun a film study of her aged 6 and last filmed her when she was only 13 years old (his narration carries overlay footage of N!ai from _A Joking Relationship_). His narration records that he remembered a “mischievous and vital child and found a beautiful and mature young woman,” but rather than lingering on the past, he reflects the concern of the Ju/'hoansi over their future fate:

The people could only stay 4 days. We discussed not the past but the new problems of life on the reservation. Kxao said Toma had received one cow from the Government but not the bull. He concluded that progress would be slow. Their concern was with the future. I wondered how long their past would remain in living memory (John Marshall, _Bushmen of the Kalahari_, 1974).
The film has just one sequence paying homage to the archaic past of the Ju/'hoansi when Marshall and ≠Toma briefly visit the Tsodilo hills to look at the ancient rock art of handprints and paintings of animals such as Eland and Giraffe. ≠Toma animatedly exclaims that these were painted by Ju/'hoansi long long ago.

*BITTER MELONS REVISITED*

The narrative of Marshall’s journey in *Bushman of the Kalahari* then moves to the Central Kalahari in Botswana in search of the G/wi people he had filmed for *Bitter Melons*, in particular Marshall wants to find Uxone, the blind musician whose rhythmic and gently melodic songs haunt the film.

In his later reflections on *Bitter Melons* Marshall (1993:57) explained that when he and his family stayed with Oukwane and his group at /Ei hxa o, water was provided by the expedition. This was vital for the group to stay at this location for more than a couple of weeks (*tsama* melons which were the only natural source of moisture at /Ei hxa o would have been insufficient for such an extended stay). At the end of the film, we see the people leaving /Ei hxa to join another group from Okwa valley. Marshall’s narration describes this departure as due to the tsama melons having been finished, adding what he thought was a poignant ending (1993:57) by explaining that Oukwane and his wife decided not to go because they were too “old and finished” to move on.

Marshall was in for a shock when he meets /Giamakwe (Oukwane’s son) 17 years after shooting *Bitter Melons*. In his voiceover, Marshall translates /Giamakwe’s response to his question about his father’s music:

He told me “I left the desert long ago because of thirst. My father is dead, my people scattered. I am here because there is nowhere to go. I don’t remember my father’s music. Why should I?” (*Bushmen of the Kalahari* 22:00).

The voiceover in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* accompanies a shot heavy with pathos and rendered in slow motion. /Giamakwe, dressed in tattered Western clothes, pulls despondently on a cigarette refusing to look at the camera. One senses the poignancy of betrayal in this image and the utter redundancy of film and filmmakers in the face of such tragedy.
This encounter was, I believe, a seminal moment in Marshall’s development as a filmmaker as he was forced to confront the reality of an awful death which he might have helped avoid. It marked perhaps, the birth of a self-directed anger channeled into addressing all romantic renderings of people whose lives were in danger. Reflecting on the past, Marshall writes:

Of course Oukwane and his wife Kutera, did not stay at /Ei hxa o as my narration suggests. The group lived on roots and melons for as long as possible, then they tried to get back to their permanent waters at Ghanzi… Oukwane died of thirst somewhere between /Ei hxa o and Ghanzi (Marshall 1993:57).

The painful confrontation with Oukwane’s harsh reality, death by thirst, would have banished any lingering romantic ideas Marshall might have had about the old hunter-gatherer way of life in the Kalahari, and awakened him to a deep sense of responsibility toward his film subjects which was subsequently to become more important to him than filmmaking itself. As he subsequently wrote: “In 1955 it did not occur to me to find out what really happened to the people I filmed at /Ei hxa o. It also did not occur to me to lie outright in my films” (Marshall 1993:58).

CHARACTER IS DESTINY

To understand Marshall’s reaction to what had happened it is instructive to attempt to understand that his essential character was increasingly fused with his identity as a filmmaker. In the course of the 1972 expedition undertaken forBushmen of the Kalahari, the National Geographic producer had located Kerelwe Ladimo, a Mutawana tribesman and skilled linguist, who had acted as translator for the Marshalls during their 1950s expedition. Ladimo was asked to describe John Marshall’s character.

John is – it’s hard to describe John. His kindness and his feelings are so deep, you cannot describe what John thinks before. He seems to be different from other people, and I don’t know why…. He is too kind. That’s all what makes him so very hard to be described. He is too kind. He feels very sympathy, he’d tender, sympathetic, he is too tender. He feels sorry for everything, and he’s a kind man, he’s a kind man indeed… He’s different from our white man in Africa. Very different ‘cause he likes the black people. If you take John among the black people, and the white people, John likes the black people more than the white people. And bring John to the black people and bushmen, he likes the bushmen more than the black people. I think he feels sorry, mostly he feels very sorry for the poor people. That’s why I say he’s quite different, and I’ve been with him a long time (Ladimo 1972:21).

Ladimo also recalled how in the 1950s, when other people were cold, Marshall would take off his own clothes and cover the Bushmen, or give them his blanket going without one himself. This
extraordinary rich vein of empathy found specific resonance with the people of the Kalahari and was to direct his future course of action. Even in the early 1970s he was thinking of how he could help people in a material way – almost as if he was guilty at having come from a wealthy family with money. As Ladimo commented:

He has got the feeling of spending some money on the bushmen, yes. He hasn’t yet, but he has got the feeling, he even told me about it, and he doesn’t know how to spend the money. I mean really he wants to help the bushmen but he doesn’t know how (Ladimo 1972:25).

In fact, on 9th November after the 1972 shoot, Marshall wrote a memo to the National Geographic filmmakers entitled Some General Anthropological Points regarding Film, Bushmen of the Kalahari, in which he pointed out how the film should show the realities of the contemporary situation of Khwesan speaking people in the Kalahari Basin and accurately reflect their ethnographic and historical past (Marshall 1972b). He clearly wanted the film to be about the current reality and about people themselves rather than a focus on him as some kind of Kalahari hero. However, the actual film narrative ends up very much about the white ‘hero’ John Marshall, rescuing a desperate Kalahari community, by fixing their broken pump at !Khadi and helping them return with their dying livestock to their source of water.

Marshall’s feelings during the film’s production also reveal his jaded perception of National Geographic’s documentary style. In his notebook following the entry where he outlines the ‘end of Ouxone’s story’, he writes: “A dance began. It was kindled by a few children and erupted into a conflagration of joie de vivre. Is there, possibly, another motive? White men with cameras, like the magi bring gifts from afar to Africa where it all began” (Marshall 1972a).

Marshall records his further disgust with the National Geographic approach to filmmaking when he is asked (by the filmmakers) to distribute gifts of tobacco: “It’s a coarse unnerving scene which Jerry starts filming. I walk away in disgust. I won’t be placed, much less filmed in such stupid situations that I didn’t make, other than by the one I’m in already” (Marshall 1972a).

It is perhaps not surprising that Marshall has written so sparingly about his role in the National Geographic film. Despite many further attempts by filmmakers to portray him as a kind of hero of the Bushman he didn’t want to appear as a film subject himself. It was not until many years later when he made the film series A Kalahari Family (2002), discussed in Chapter 6, that he...
finally gave in to the idea of appearing himself in the epic story depicting 50 years of Ju/'hoan history.

PREPARING TO RETURN AND FILM

On his return to the United States in the mid 1970s, Marshall began to look at ways he might usefully resume filming in the Kalahari which would serve some anthropological and educational purposes. As discussed in Chapter 4, Marshall was keen to build on the existing footage from the 1950s to use film sequences in comparative social science and anthropology courses in schools and community colleges. However, when he had visited his Ju/'hoan friends on the Botswana border in 1972 and shown them his films, he had noticed their interpretation of events could add great educational value. As he mentioned in a letter to François Stroh dated July 11 1975: “Their interpretation of one of the sequences changed my understanding of the issue in a dispute about a marriage” (Marshall 1975).

The project for which he initially sought funding support involved returning to Nyae Nyae to show selected sequences shot in the 1950s, record the reactions of the Ju/'hoansi and elicit their interpretations of the events depicted. Apart from the obvious informational value in terms of adding to the record (detailing kinship systems of those appearing in the films, descriptions of artifacts and behavior, interpretations of discussions and disputes) the project also had cognitive and educational functions. It would enable anthropologists to look at the ways people categorised their behavior by showing what they meant to themselves and how social rules were used. In educational terms, it would deepen understanding of the culture by seeing what Ju/'hoansi themselves thought about an event as opposed to the way it might be interpreted by students in a classroom.

Marshall began making plans with anthropologist Nancie Gonzalez who was to formulate questions for people. The project was to be implemented under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution (which had already expressed an interest in including the !Kung film record in its archive) and a research proposal was drafted for the Werner Gren Foundation. However, owing to the time taken for permissions from the South African Government to come through, the project had to be put on hold. In the interim period, Nancie Gonzalez was offered a directorial position at the National Science Foundation, affecting her availability, and another grant came through for Marshall to make a documentary about a shoe factory in Haverhill, Massachusetts.
Consequently, Marshall’s return to the Kalahari had to be postponed until completion of this film titled *If It Fits* in 1978. Finally, Marshall was free to get back to Nyae Nyae and what he witnessed there was to result in a completely new and innovative ethnographic film: *N!ai: the Story of a !Kung Woman*.

**THE IMPULSE TO RETURN**

Although Marshall had returned to the Kalahari (in Botswana) in 1972, his return in 1978 was quite different, firstly because he was returning to make his own film and secondly because he would be filming his close friends from the 1950s, documenting the huge changes that had taken place during his 20-year absence.

Other ethnographic filmmakers have returned to visit former film subjects. Robert Gardner revisited the Danii 30 years after he made *Dead Birds*, but in his case, one has the feeling it was not so much the people themselves that interested him but rather the loss of a culture it had been his own ‘impulse to preserve’ (the name he gave to his autobiographical account of his filmmaking). Gardner has written that his initial intention in going to film in the Grand Valley of the Baliem in 1961 was to depict a place that reminded him of Eden (2006:313) and on his subsequent return he struggled with the dramatic change from what he perceived as a legendary way of life to an ugly tourism-based reality (2006:313). His relationships with his former film subjects are in sharp contrast to Marshall’s whereby his identification with people remains fixed, even 30 years later, in their roles in his film rather than as real people in their current lives. On meeting up with Pua, whom he had known as a boy he asked himself: “Who… is this imposter I’m told is the child who lived, just yesterday, the life of a stone-age swineherd?” (Gardner 2006:314).

Gardner seems unable to accept the reality of peoples’ contemporary lives. He seems disillusioned by Pua’s requests for items from the modern world such as a radio and some well-fitting trousers and cannot believe that people have abandoned their old ways: “How could he or any of my other stone-age friends live without the things that had made their lives so magical?” (Gardner 2006:318).

Gardner had returned to shoot his former film subjects’ reactions to a screening of *Dead Birds* and their old way of life but he expresses disappointment and disillusionment at how unmoved
they appeared and by what appeared to be a complete acquiescence to their changed way of life. His tone is judgmental and suggests that his fascination with their former way of life outweighs sympathy or understanding with their plight as persons caught up in massive culture change:

Part of me felt they had become too willing collaborators in the changes that had taken place in their lives since 1961. How could they tolerate so much compromise with what had been such a compelling life? I may even have thought the film, in some mystical manner, was more real than they themselves and that it might even keep their world from crumbling away entirely. Anyway, bizarrely, the film had become for me a repository for the Dani soul, the amber in which they were in fact embedded (Gardner 2006: 319-320).

RETURNING FOR PEOPLE

Gardner’s reactions are understandable from the perspective of an artist with ‘an impulse to preserve’ and perhaps characteristic of many artistically oriented filmmakers, so enchanted by what they have witnessed and preserved in celluloid that their films becomes more real to them than the contemporary lives of their film subjects. Art eclipses reality and films such as Dead Birds come to be interpreted as an expression of ‘authentic’ essence or soul of a culture to the detriment of the contemporary lives of real people. One might then ask whether people such as the Danii have indeed had their souls stolen by filmmakers, embalmed in a Kodachrome mausoleum.

In 2004, the year before he died of lung cancer, Marshall was interviewed by Romanian TV host Catalin Stefanescu on his show Guarantat 100% and responded to the first question about what it was like filming another culture with the reply: “I don’t shoot culture, I shoot persons.” Similarly, in 1987, at a visual anthropology seminar in India, he had remarked to Claire Ritchie that there is no such thing as an ethnographic film, just documentary films about people (Richie 1987). Marshall disliked the abstractions associated with ‘culture’ but believed that by shooting people he could reveal something about their lives. The cultural situation of the Ju/'hoansi on Marshall’s return in 1978 was completely different from what he had witnessed in the 1950s. However, contrary to Van Vuuren’s analysis (2006:187-88), I believe his decision to film peoples’ current reality and juxtapose it with their past was not based on nostalgia for their past way of life. In my experience of working with him, Marshall’s attitude to the Ju/'hoansi was always more concerned with their present and future and devoid of sentimental reflections about the past. He had already seen the transformation in N!ai, when he met her at the Botswana Border fence in 1972, from the young girl he had so tenderly shot in the 1950s into a mature
woman. However, he was to find the world she now inhabited transformed out of all recognition, and despite the changes in her way of life, I believe his empathy for her and the plight of all Ju’/hoansi outweighed feelings of nostalgia. Clearly, his relationship to her had to change but its strength did not diminish. As David MacDougall has commented: “I think that once a film is finished, you can never recapture the relationship you had with the people that you were filming in the same way. It has got to be transformed to continue” (David MacDougall 2009 pers. comm.).

Unlike Gardner’s attitude on his return, which seems judgmental and almost resentful of the changes in peoples’ lives, Marshall does not lose his respect for his former film subjects. His interest in the people and their desperate plight engages Marshall on an emotional as much as an intellectual level and perhaps this explains why he chose to frame his next film around the biography of a 38-year old married woman whose suffering is so apparent and with whom film audiences can experience empathy, seeing her not simply as a victim but respecting her strength. What comes through strongly in Marshall’s portrayal of the Ju’/hoansi in N!ai is his unparalleled concern for their desperate plight. Marshall has admitted that until 1978, when shooting N!ai, he didn’t care enough about what was happening to dispossessed San peoples in Namibia (Marshall 1993:85). Consequently, the film is fierce in the way it confronts the viewer and prompts the kind of outrage and emotion Marshall himself must have felt on his return.

Like Timothy Asch who returned to Venezuela to assist the Yanomami make videos (Lewis 2004:15) to combat their negative image following publication of Napoleon Chagnon’s influential ethnography, Yanomamö: the Fierce People (1968), Marshall’s return helped to give a voice to people by showing the wrenching changes that had taken place during his 20-year absence as the outside world began increasingly to impact upon the Ju’/hoansi.

Like Marshall, I also experienced a return to Nyae Nyae after 20 years and similarly needed a way to explain what had happened during the past two decades, by trying to illustrate the influence of powerful people and institutions remote in both time and place from my film subjects. Peter Loizos (Loizos 1993:77) has commented that both the narrative and expositional style of N!ai by which the film develops is through the alternation between the past and present, a style I also used in the construction of Bitter Roots. I start my film with an apocalyptic metaphor showing the presence of the past in the present, the ruins of the Baraka settlement and the ghostly remains of what Claire Ritchie describes as a ‘consultancy hotel.’ As Peter Crawford observed
during his first viewing of this sequence at a Visual Anthropology workshop in Ascona in August 2010, the expression (of despair and sadness) on Claire Ritchie’s face says it all, the lost hopes and dreams of the past.

![Claire Ritchie reflecting on the past amidst the ruins of Baraka settlement in Bitter Roots (©Adrian Strong).](image)

Certain themes of Marshall’s N!ai recur in my thesis film as both deal with an apparently ‘golden’ past with the apparent despair of the present. They both deal with the complex influence of the past upon the present and the negative consequences of interventions from the outside world. In the case of N!ai, the changes were much greater and the filming took place during a powerful series of crises impacting the Ju/'hoansi.

**N!AI, THE STORY OF A !KUNG WOMAN**

*N!ai* is possibly one of the most widely viewed of Marshall’s films, having been shown on the American PBS television as part of the Odyssey Series. It also won a number of film festival prizes. It was highly innovative in a number of ways, such as being the first film to illustrate and analyse the historical, political, economic and social forces contributing to dispossession and extreme poverty for the indigenous people of southern Africa. It was also the first ‘Bushmen’ documentary to be structured as a biography of its female subject, including a ‘long view’ timeframe (rare in ethnographic film at that time), with N!ai looking back on her own life with images of her as young as eight years old in 1953. It was also the first film to reveal the complicity of filmmakers in portraying false or distorted images of ‘Bushmen.’ In a sequence showing the making of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, it deconstructed that film’s meaning and revealed its false premises concerning Bushmen.
CENTERING THE INDIGENOUS VOICE

*N!ai* also responds directly to the crisis of representation in anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking brought about by the end of the colonial period and the growing self-determination of indigenous people. Amidst the growing realisation that the indigenous voice should inform anthropological understanding and interpretation, Marshall’s fresh approach gives a strong narrative role to *N!ai*. Her direct address to the camera and audience, tells her own personal story and that of her group while portraying the many disruptive upheavals they have experienced. Although Marshall has a narrative role in addition to *N!ai*, his voice-over gives the audience a wider contextual perspective which is necessary for greater understanding of the current situation. As he has commented, whenever he knows something that nobody else in the film is aware of, he uses his own narration (Marshall 1993:90). Because his narration is used sparingly, Marshall’s voice does not intrude on the highly personal voice of *N!ai*, which carries far more weight both in time and presence.

![N!ai](Image courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources).

Although subtitles are laid down over *N!ai*’s direct address to the camera where she is clearly talking to Marshall, many of *N!ai*’s monologues accompanying Marshall’s footage are translated into English and spoken by the black South African singer, Letta Mbulu. As Peter Loizos has suggested, this device serves to strengthen rather than diminish the strong personal characterization of *N!ai*. Marshall’s previous work on his sequence films had been innovative in
their early use of subtitles to give people a voice. With his filmic construction of N!ai he has gone a step further to facilitate closer (English-speaking) audience identification with his film subject by translating N!ai’s Ju/'hoan words into an English (African accented) voice to effect stronger personalisation and greater identification with character. This marks a definite shift in his filmmaking style. He was to use this same device to portray the perspectives of several Ju/'hoan characters featuring prominently as storytellers in his epic 5 part film series: A Kalahari Family (2002). Karma Foley, the series associate producer, recalled that he once remarked to her on his preference for English voiceover over subtitles that “People don’t go to the movies to read” (Karma Foley 2009 pers. comm.).

According to the study guide for N!ai produced by DER and released with the film, a substantial part of N!ai’s narration was extracted from a series of interviews conducted in 1975 not by Marshall himself but by anthropologist Marjorie Shostak and also from subsequent interviews conducted by anthropologist Pat Draper, part of the 1978 film crew. The incorporation of these transcripts into a continuous narration could be seen as artificially constructing N!ai’s story from disparate parts, however the narrative never loses its strong sense of authenticity as all the words are N!ai’s own.

THE STRUCTURE OF N!AI

Following some initial shots of N!ai’s current life in the Government slum of Tsumkwe as a “TB person” and her introducing herself, the first third of the film describes N!ai’s personal history through her narration which is overlaid with images portraying her old life in the 1950s. Van Vuuren’s analysis (2006:153) stresses N!ai’s ‘nostalgic longing’ for her hunter-gatherer past when people were largely in control of their lives. It should be pointed out, however, that the film also includes traumatic aspects from that ‘golden age’ including her initial abhorrence for her arranged marriage to /Gunda and her unwillingness to consummate it, as well as her great fear of childbirth. She witnesses a suffering mother whose baby is stillborn despite desperate attempts by N!ai’s uncle and his brother, the n/um kxaosi (healers) who go into the ‘half-death’ of trance in an effort to save it. However, this image of indigenous healing and communication with the spirit world stands in ironic contrast to a subsequent scene portraying attempts by Christian missionaries to convert the Ju/'hoansi, now settled at the Government slum of Tsumkwe. Christian Evangelism with all its baggage of sin and abstract ethics fails to make much sense to N!ai and her community.
In depicting the old way of life, Marshall makes good use of footage previously used in his sequence films, including *A Joking Relationship, A Curing Ceremony, N/um Tchai* as well as *The Hunters*. Similarly, I was fortunate in having access to footage from Marshall’s sequences in making *Bitter Roots*. Undoubtedly, having access to such rich archival footage enabled me to layer in additional complexity through comparing images from the past with those from the present.

*N!ai* is structured around what Peter Loizos (1993:77) has termed a ‘narrative armature.’ This term refers to a scene, frequently revisited, where N!ai kneels in a medium shot, facing the camera, wearing a green dress and playing the //gwash, a small stringed instrument (which she also plays and sings in *Bitter Roots*). From within this semi-formal image N!ai alternately sings and speaks to the tripod-mounted camera reflecting on her life and her feelings. The static fixed image contrasts to the hand-held, mobile camera footage elsewhere in the film and adds to the metaphor of stillness within movement. As Loizos has commented, this becomes the only fixed point in a story of massive disruption and change (1993:77). To a lesser degree, in *Bitter Roots*, I used the sequence in which the /Gautcha boys, particularly Tsamko /Ti!kay, reflect on their lives and their memories of the past as a narrative to which the film returns.

Peter Loizos sees the second half of *N!ai* as developing three main themes:

...first, attempts by the South African Army to recruit the !Kung into their ranks to fight against SWAPO (the South West African People’s Organization) guerillas. The !Kung are for the most part reluctant, and there is much irony in their answers. The second theme is that N!ai is the object of jealousy among her group ‘because you and other whites film me and give me money.’ Thirdly, there are the largely negative effects of life in the relocation camp – patronizing treatment by while missionaries, medical staff, game wardens and the distressing drunken fights over money and sexual jealousy among N!ai’s group (Loizos 1993:78).

Loizos sees the film as an unrivalled account of the degradation of a once autonomous people, and regards its innovatory aspect as being that it is not just shot over a single period but has a longer term perspective and so can deal effectively with all the complex problems – the political and economic intrusions which caused so much damage to !Kung society.
MARSHALL’S THEORY OF SLOTS

The degree of complexity involved in the making of N!ai may have been the reason Marshall began constructing his theory of “slots” during its making. N!ai is perhaps the most complex and innovative of all Marshall’s films because it documented such radical changes in the lives of its subjects through the impact of the ‘outside world’ on what had been a relatively isolated existence.

When we shot N!ai, persons and events in the larger world were affecting every aspect of Ju/’hoan life. I knew some of the officials whose decisions were impinging on us, but I did not have access to their deliberations… As we filmed N!ai’s oral history, my mental map began to show some impinging persons and events. I started to try to put the surrounding realities into a context around the window of my camera (Marshall 1993:83).

David MacDougall has observed that Marshall, like Rouch, had come to realise that: “a film is a structure largely created in the mind of the viewer, and that what appears at any moment on the screen forms only a small part of this more extensive imaginative composition” (MacDougall 2006: 252).

For Marshall, it is the unseen, invisible content surrounding the camera that forms part of the reality and content of a film. He came to define slots as the place: “where unseen content is stored in our memories, or anticipated by what we see and hear, while we watch a film” (Marshall 1993:83).

In making a non-scripted observational documentary film where events occurred in real time Marshall realised he could use slots as a substitute for a script whereby the slots themselves determined what events he would shoot. Additional slots would be added as he became aware of their existence, providing further contextual complexity for the film. With a practical example, Marshall explains his theory of visual slots as follows:

Imagine “A,” “B” and “C” are people in an event. We can see all three together in a distant shot. When the camera moves closer, we can see only “A” and “B” in a middle shot. “A” and “B” are usually involved with each other; for example, they may be two people talking together while the film intercuts between them. “C” is someone watching. We know that “C” is present although off screen. When the camera moves to a close-up we can see only “A,” but we know he is talking to “B” and we remember where “C” is located (Marshall 1993:83).
Marshall associates shooting faster with increased action necessitating getting closer to the people being filmed. Withdrawing from the action into a wider shot would slow things down. In wider shots facial expressions are lost and in the editing room cutting will be less rapid. Pulling back was a way of catching up on the action in order to obtain the larger contextual picture where peripheral vision is increased. This allows time for reflection on whatever new slots might need to be filled with new people, places, topics, ideas, themes and fantasies (Marshall 1993:84).

Marshall’s theory divides slots into two categories, visual and story slots. While visual slots are created by angles and distances and constitute a film’s visual equivalent of peripheral vision, story slots are created by the chronology of events in a film (Marshall 1993:83-4). Story slots serve as a reminder that external events, people and ideas, which impact directly or indirectly upon the film subjects, are kept in the mind. It is a way of communicating the complex nature of reality. Recalling the making of N’ai, Marshall describes the way he was thinking about slots:

The South African economy, the SADF, the anger, despair and mounting death rate in Tsumkwe were there before we shot the first foot of film for N’ai. The reality remained after we wrapped the shoot. The presence of slots to fill lets me ask myself “Who is probably dying? Will the army get here? Who among her relatives is most pissed-off at N’ai? What angle can I use to include the furious !U?”(Marshall 1993:85).

In making Bitter Roots, I was also aware of unseen content as slots. Clearly, institutions such as WWF and USAID had been responsible for policies radically affecting how development had unfolded in Nyae Nyae. A brief shot of a WWF employee featured in an early sequence shows him in an authoritative role, brandishing a pointing stick in front of a management structure diagram and telling people how things will be. This constitutes both a visual and story slot regarding the role of powerful donor organisations in what has happened in Nyae Nyae during my absence. For this shot, the associated slot and the idea, I am following Marshall’s advice: “In order to put somebody into the first story slot... the person has to be featured in an event and be appropriately shot to be remembered” (Marshall 1993:91).

Another story slot in Bitter Roots refers to the (unseen) officials in the department of Nature conservation who relocate leopards and lions to the neighboring game reserve (which return to kill more livestock) in preference to dealing properly with the problem and so aid Ju’hoan farming enterprises. Story slots such as these illustrate how, with the compliance of people and institutions, the odds are deliberately stacked against the Ju’hoansi in their unceasing efforts to create a sustainable livelihood for themselves.
The idea of tourism and the (unseen) tourists who wanted to see ‘wild bushmen,’ forms another slot idea as do the (unseen) documentary filmmakers who continue to portray a lifestyle which does not reflect current reality. The spirit of John Marshall himself, whose presence as both filmmaker and humanitarian manifests throughout the entire film, has also been established as a story slot. All these story-slots had to be created in the mind of the viewer as the story developed adding layers of complexity to the film, thus making its content ‘thicker’ through associations with external events, institutions and people.

Marshall’s particular genius in N!ai was to bring together the unseen realities in remote slots with the hidden realities of people’s thoughts and feelings in what he termed a thick event: “In N!ai, the argument between the star, her family and relatives was a thick event because the content of many slots came together” (Marshall 1993:85). According to N!ai, the root of this argument, which occurs towards the end of the film, is not just its superficial appearance, the perceived infidelity of her daughter, but is one with deeper and chronic underlying causes:

So now, when people are jealous, they remember. They are saying that my daughter has slept with a stranger – for money. I am a person who is work. That’s why people lie about my daughter, to hurt me (N!ai – narration in N!ai 42:45).

A spread of worldly goods amassed by N!ai and /Gunda in 1986 (© Adrian Strong)

Through his use of slots, Marshall has shown that N!ai’s wealth has derived from the many changes and outside influences impacting on the people of Nyae Nyae. The wider context of jealousy was described in an earlier part of the film through documenting the old days whereby
the most sought-after commodity (meat), while initially ‘owned’ by the person whose arrow killed the hunted game, was carefully shared to keep tensions at bay. Consequently, old tried and tested social rules were under great strain at Tsumkwe with the introduction of cash. N!ai had been employed by Jamie Uys in making his film The Gods Must be Crazy for which she was paid R.3.00/day. She was also paid R10.00/day by Marshall for participation in his film (Marshall 1993:85). Other new tensions portrayed in the lead up to the flight include the unequal power relationships developed through high army pay for some Ju/'hoansi and the opening of a liquor store where huge sums were spent. The general feeling of anger and helplessness is increased by the attitude of uncaring racist officials. A baby was misdiagnosed by a South African doctor who dismissed its coughing as normal to Bushman living conditions and it subsequently died. The imposed law against hunting on horseback is angrily challenged by Tsamko who described it as like not being allowed to harvest meat from his own garden. Further tensions are brought when soldiers of the South African Army come on a recruiting trip and jeer at a farmer and artist who doesn’t want to fight. All these story slots add to the complexity of tensions in what might otherwise be seen as an isolated family argument. The picture of powerful and detrimental external influences pounding down upon the Ju/'hoansi is overwhelming.

FILMING WITH LARGER CREWS AND MULTIPLE CAMERAS

The situation of filming N!ai would have been very different from how it was in the 1950s. At that time Marshall was primarily shooting on his own (apart from some additional shooting by Robert Gardner in 1958) but in 1978 Marshall had brought in a crew including two other cameramen, Ross McElwee and Mark Erder, as well as an assistant cameraman, Stan Leven. Furthermore, the film credits reveal that sound was recorded by Anne Fischel, Adrienne Miesmer and Stan Leven plus Patricia Draper as sound assistant. Patricia Draper was also the field anthropologist for the film and Adrien Miesmer was co-director of the film together with John Marshall.

A larger crew is bound to have an impact on the style of a film, and certainly the intimacy of the 1950s films is replaced by a different kind of aesthetic. As David MacDougall has pointed out, relationships between film subjects and a crew exist on a notably different level when compared to that established by an individual:
I believe this is partly because a film crew, or even a pair of filmmakers, is seen as having its own internal social dynamic, from which the subject feels, however gently, excluded. As a single individual, the filmmaker is seen to hold less of an advantage and is more exposed and vulnerable (MacDougall 2001:17).

In my own recent filmmaking, I worked as part of crew shooting a feature documentary, *Fantome Island* (2011), but I have always preferred the rapport I could establish with film subjects on my own and feel this can give a more spontaneous and confiding outcome, as portrayed in scenes from *Bitter Roots* when I talk to the /Gautcha boys by the old reservoir or talk one-on-one with /Naishay at his goat kraal.

In terms of shooting the unfolding of complex events, however, clearly much greater coverage is possible by having more than one camera and it is clear why Marshall chose to have a larger crew in making *N!ai* (quite apart from the obvious need to record sound separately from 16mm film cameras) and this decision is justified in his shooting of the previously mentioned fight scene at the settlement at Tsumkwe which involves N!ai, her husband /Gunda and her daughter Hua//a, as well as some other characters. The outbreak of fighting follows accusations of infidelity of N!ai’s daughter, with several people getting involved. The pertinent shot log at HSFA (83.11.8-64) shows not only the complexities of the event being portrayed, but also the complexity of shooting. In one sequence, the cameraman shouts: “Pat, get out of the way!” In filming any complex event the sound recordist might receive such admonishments from a cameraman trying to capture the action without evidence of the filmmakers. However, the complexities of trying to capture unfolding events against a background of heavy drinking and fighting are mind-boggling.
The rushes reveal that in the chaos of the fight Marshall shouts to Ross (McElwee) after the sound of someone getting hit. There are also shots of Marshall filming – which clearly illustrate his trying to film ‘inside’ the conflict. Meanwhile Ju/'hoan kids are using a metal pipe like a telescope pretending to be cameraman themselves (HSFA 83.11.8-64).

The fight scene appears toward the end of N!ai but a review of the raw footage shows some interesting issues and highlights the dilemma of Marshall’s identity and role as a filmmaker directing a crew, yet also someone who is intimately involved with the people he is filming and trying to prevent further fights breaking out.

CINEMA VERITE VERSUS FLY IN THE LENS

Marshall always prided himself in the truth of what he called cinéma vérité, the fly-on-the wall style of documentary more correctly known as direct cinema as practiced by American documentary filmmakers. However raw footage from the N!ai shoot (HSFA 83.11.8-68) reveals Marshall himself clearly intervening in an event as it was being shot. The shot log reveals N!ai beckoning Ross McElwee (cameraman) to follow her. His camera footage shows N!ai walking toward Marshall’s camp settlement where they find an Ovambo man (the cook Marshall had hired) lying on a camp bed. N!ai has a conversation with him and he subsequently gets up from his bed and follows her back to the village. McElwee allows them to go ahead of him towards a group of people including Marshall. Marshall then confronts the Ovambo man. With his camera tucked under his arm he shouts at him in Afrikaans, telling him “I am your boss and you must stay where I say you must stay. Now Go!” Marshall follows him and points, shouting again “Go stay there!” The Ovambo man starts to say something in Afrikaans “No, the women…” upon which Marshall explodes again “I am your boss!” Marshall is clearly very angry, but following the departure of the Ovambo cook he goes straight back to continue shooting N!ai and /Gunda.

Ross McElwee has described the background to, and unfolding of, this fight scene in an interview with Scott Macdonald (1988):

The day I arrived (after an exhausting 16 hour flight through Frankfurt and then south to Namibia, where we finally landed on a stretch of dirt in the middle of the Kalahari Desert), John said, “Well, let’s not shoot today. Let’s just show you the layout.” We started walking around, and suddenly we heard a commotion. A fight had broken out between one of the !Kung men and an Ovambo worker that John had brought with him to be a cook for the camp. They were accusing the cook of having an affair with the guy’s wife. There had been tension between !Kung
people and the Ovambos to begin with, so this was a volatile situation. The argument exploded to include every member of the village; people were screaming and yelling and chanting and crying. We simply had to film it, and I didn’t even know who John felt the principle people were at this point. John said, “Just shoot, shoot whatever is happening.”

The !Kung are a very short people, and I had this odd sense of not being there, of being invisible. An angry !Kung rushed in my direction bandying a large stick, seemingly at me, but actually in pursuit of another !Kung who happened to be next to me. But my presence was never actually acknowledged. I saw a grass hut shaking wildly, and I held the shot of it, and pretty soon the allegedly cuckolded husband’s head breaks through the wall, like a chicken emerging from an egg. He was being restrained by two people on each arm—relatives who were trying to keep him from murdering the Ovamba cook. Meanwhile, his wife is being slapped by her mother. And it was all based on nothing but rumor. Nobody was seriously hurt. We filmed for something like seven straight hours—all stages of the argument, its dissipation, and the lamenting that followed it...it was an amazing experience. Some of that footage was used in N!ai, but edited down (Ross McElwee in MacDonald 1988).

Clearly Marshall did not want to include his own outburst (at the Ovambo cook) in the edited film, however as John Bishop has observed “It is a perfect moment of intersection between the observer and the observed, the observer being observed, and the disintegration of the boundary between them” (Bishop 2001:5).

THOUGHTFUL SHOTS AND ANGLES

Although Marshall used a significant amount of his footage from the 1950s, with his several cameramen he ensured that he was able to shoot many different aspects of contemporary footage, guided by his thinking about slots. For instance, his attention to reflexive detail in the sequence of Tsamko hunting a giraffe on horseback is an interesting contrast to his filming omission in The Hunters. Detractors of that film had accused Marshall of not showing that the giraffe had actually been shot from the jeep carrying the hunters (driven by Marshall). In N!ai, prior to Tsamko spearing a giraffe, Marshall chooses to include shots of Tsamko on horseback chasing the giraffe which are clearly taken from a Landrover (N!ai 29:10). It is obvious from the shot that the camera is inside the vehicle which is bouncing up and down, and the edited sequence shows shots both of the driver and through the Landrover window so the viewer is in no doubt as to where the camera is in relation to the giraffe and to Tsamko.

The sequence following the giraffe hunt shows Tsamko, criticising the law that he is not allowed to hunt on horseback, and reclaiming his right to eat meat harvested from his garden. He is shot from low level in profile against the sky, suggesting the strong sense of his own authority in a
powerful way. This shot uncannily symbolises and preshadows the strong leadership role Tsamko will play in future struggles of his people against South African officialdom and the many other obstacles the Ju/'hoanasi will face in the subsequent history of Nyae Nyae.

PERCEPTIONS OF N!AI’S BALLAD: DON’T LOOK AT MY FACE

The refrain of the film is a return to N!ai singing her ballad about suffering and death, a poetic lament about the state of her life:

Death is ringing me,
Death is stealing from me.
Death is dancing me ragged.
Death, yes, death is stealing from me. Will death steal me too?

The film ends with further verses from this song

My people abuse me.
The white people scorn me.
Death mocks me.
Death dances with me.
Don’t look at my face.
Don’t look at my face.

These final lines have provoked controversy in some anthropological circles. Jay Ruby senses great bitterness and an example of widespread protest by indigenous people about how they are represented by professional image-makers. With specific reference to N!ai he claims: “Some people, traditionally film subjects, are demanding that filmmakers share the authority and, in some cases, relinquish it altogether… The subjects’ demand for some control over how they are represented can be heard almost everywhere in the world” (Ruby 2000:198).

However, Peter Loizos takes a different view:

..it is not at all clear that N!ai meant what Ruby has taken her to mean. It seems equally plausible that as a woman talking about her own happier past days, and aware that she may not live much longer – she has TB, after all – she does not want Marshall to see her at her worst…. Although she does not want to be looked at closely, she shows no reluctance to tell her story, and Marshall respected her request by not filming her in close-up (Loizos 1993:80).
I agree with Loizos in that, like most people, N!ai does not want to be seen at her worst. Furthermore, Marshall has explained the wider context of the ballad, that it wasn’t composed specifically for the film or prompted by it, but reflected the tragedy of her recent personal history:

Her oldest son had died several months before the filming. The baby of her cousin is dying. Her son-in-law, who drinks, has been abusing her daughter Huan//a, who is escaping from her misery by flirting with a member of my staff. N!ai’s husband, /Gunda, is both ashamed of the fighting in the family and feeling left out of the excitement. He is also depressed in his inability to cure. Everybody is hungry (Marshall 1993:90).

Consequently, her life had become miserable and her face, which had brought so much joy to people in the past (as her narration tells, she and her sister used to sing happy songs about her face), only shows pain and sadness reflecting the tragedies unfolding in Tsumkwe. However, although this was a particularly difficult and bitter phase for N!ai, her upbeat, generally optimistic personality prevailed. When I got to know N!ai in the 1980s, I became aware that she had no shortage of vanity, delighting in being given second-hand dresses, wearing necklaces and making herself look beautiful whether for other people or for the camera. One of the final images in my own film, played over the credits, shows N!ai looking at herself in a mirror which has just been presented to her as a gift and laughing as she makes faces at herself.

I understand Ruby seeing N!ai’s song as a metaphor for indigenous people wanting to control aspects of their representation, but I believe that the issue of non-indigenous filmmakers lying about indigenous peoples’ reality is exactly what Marshall was fighting against himself. In view of the long standing relationship between Marshall and N!ai, her ballad is not directed against him and his camera, rather his camera represents a kind of bearing witness to her suffering, a confessional in a therapeutic sense.

When I visited Nyae Nyae, one of my oldest and closest friends ≠Toma, N!ai’s son, came and sat down while I was interviewing his parents and proceeded to tell me (and my camera) a long and tragic story of how he had been exploited by a German filmmaker who had wanted to use him in a ‘Gods-Must-Be-Crazy-esque’ film, and refused to pay him despite promises that he would. This experience began to show me the sense in which the camera, in the hands of a sympathetic friend, can also be a tool of healing as it helps unpack the emotional trauma of a tragic story. I believe that Marshall, in his dialogues with N!ai, may have played this same role as receptacle for the outpouring of grief. The essential ingredient however, was Marshall’s long-standing and close relationship with her. As Loizos has written: “If she had not known him for more than twenty-
five years, and if he could not speak her language, it is very unlikely that a film with such power and pathos could have resulted from their collaboration” (Loizos 1993:80).

REACTIONS TO N!AI

The film N!ai provoked some of the strongest reactions to any of Marshall’s films in view of its strong political content. It was made at a time when anti-apartheid feeling was growing stronger in many western countries. Following the festival screening at the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1985 (when it won the Basil Wright prize), John Bishop recalled the outrage N!ai precipitated, with one outraged African man demanding what could be done. Marshall was not present, but according to Bishop, nobody would leave the screening room until everyone had signed a statement condemning the South African authorities (Bishop 2009 pers. comm.). Audience reactions such as this must have confirmed to Marshall that his films really could affect people and would have justified his decision to move towards an activist role. Subsequently, he would use film (and video) to try to change public opinion hoping to effect change and prevent further suffering and demise of the people he cared so much about.

PUTTING DOWN THE CAMERA, PICKING UP THE SHOVEL

N!ai was the last of John Marshall’s films where he was the principle cinematographer and was to mark a break from his main activities as a filmmaker. His priorities had begun to change from portraying the people of Nyae Nyae to helping them survive the various crises which were unfolding around them. In 1980, he returned with filmmaker and development anthropologist Claire Ritchie to conduct a demographic survey published in 1982 as Where are the Ju/'hoansi of Nyae Nyae? The survey, which included investigations into food and nutrition as well as birth and death rate analysis, confirmed that people were dying faster than they were being born. It proved that the Ju/'hoansi were literally dying out. Adding to this apocalyptic revelation, in the early to mid 1980s Marshall got wind of a government plan to establish a game reserve in Eastern Bushmanland, the last remaining part of Nyae Nyae, which would complete the dispossession of San people in Namibia. Material proof of the plan had been growing even during the making of N!ai as Marshall recounts: “…the evidence was all around us; boreholes were plugged with rocks to deny people water, and pumps had been dismantled to stop settlement. I just didn’t grasp the threat in 1978” (Marshall 1993:90).
Throughout the 1980s Marshall returned with increasing frequency and for longer durations assisting people to settle back onto their land in an attempt to halt the game reserve plan. In 1982, he and Claire Ritchie established the Ju/Wa Bushman Development Foundation (subsequently renamed the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia). The Foundation’s aim was to assist people with developing a mixed-subsistence economy and to hold onto their land. Marshall had switched from being a filmmaker to becoming an activist: in his own words, it was time to put down the camera and pick up the shovel.

Lamenting Marshall’s decision to cease shooting his own footage David MacDougall has commented that his subsequent filmmaking no longer constituted his personal communion through the camera (MacDougall 2009 pers. comm). Claire Ritchie also commented that by the 1980s Marshall had lost the fluency so apparent in his earlier shooting style (Ritchie 2009 pers. comm.). She recalled that it was a difficult time for him in many ways. He had become angry, frustrated and was caught up in a downward spiral of excessive drinking. According to Lexie Marshall, on 14th July 1988, following his return from Namibia, via a visual anthropology seminar in India, a small family group performed an intervention at his home in Peterborough New Hampshire. As a result he spent several weeks being treated at Beech Hill Hospital for alcohol addiction from which he emerged reinvigorated in body and spirit (Lexie Marshall 2012 pers. comm). However, before long, Marshall’s passionate concern for the Ju/'hoansi prompted him to return to Namibia to continue his advocacy work using video (rather than film) in an attempt to bring the reality of the Ju/'hoan struggle to the attention of government decision-makers and non-governmental organizations.

FILMMAKER AS ACTIVIST: THE BLUNT INSTRUMENT OF VIDEOTAPE

In the 1980s, during the time I worked with Marshall in Eastern Bushmanland, his energies were devoted to the work of the Foundation: drilling boreholes, establishing communities with small livestock herds and planting gardens for settlement by owners (and their extended families) of traditional N!ores (areas where people had traditional rights to gather bushfoods). He was also involved in many battles with the South West Africa government authorities. Some of these struggles were documented, not by Marshall but by those he hired to come and shoot for him. Initially, with a crew from Cape Town consisting of cameraman Cliff Bestall and Michael Gavshon on sound, Marshall ensured that the activities were recorded, at first on 16mm film but then, as funds began to run low, increasingly with video.
The mid-1980s were desperate times and Marshall had neither the time nor money nor emotional energy to make the kind of polished and personal films he had made in the past. Instead, together with Claire Ritchie, Cliff Bestall and others he made emergency field reports with the aim of focusing attention on the plight of the Ju/'hoansi and securing funding for the Foundation. *Pull Ourselves Up or Die Out* (1985) and *To Hold Our Ground* (1990) were hastily made.

Heavily scripted drafts in letters and telexes went flying back and forth between Ritchie in Boston and Bestall in Cape Town. John Bishop (who worked for Marshall as a cameraman in the late 1980s) has observed:

As a filmmaker I hated to see the fine cinematography put out from utility grade video transfers, and subtlety abandoned in the editing, but in retrospect I’ve come to feel that we should have been shooting small format video and putting out monthly reports and quickly and cheaply as possible (Bishop 2001:5).

THE DOMINANCE OF WORDS

These activist videos are heavily narrated and do not contain subtitles. Unlike Marshall’s other films, one does not really get to know individual film subjects. Instead, one gets a kind of illustrated lecture describing the desperate situation of the Ju/'hoansi. Much use was made of
extensive inter-titles on black reminiscent of the subsequently ubiquitous Power Point presentation complete with maps showing the extent of dispossession. The soundtrack consists largely of Marshall’s narration during which he also translates and narrates the speech of the various people talking. The emphasis was on presentation of information.

These videos illustrate a dominance of words over image to convey a sense of what was happening to the Ju’hoansi, but the words are narrated by Marshall and the style is didactic rather than aesthetic. Claire Ritchie has commented that as Marshall got older words seem to become more important to him than images (Ritchie 2009 pers. comm.). One wonders whether he felt that images had been deceptive in their portrayal of Ju’hoansi and insufficient to communicate the reality of the Ju’hoansi which had been so eclipsed by mythic images.

Michele Stephen has suggested that as people get older, and their semantic register develops and expands with the acquisition of language, the imaginal system usually fades into the background (Stephen 2003:115). While this might be a simplistic analysis, it appears to resonate with Marshall’s stylistic evolution as a filmmaker during this period, although many other reasons come into play. A contrary evolution appears however in the filmmaking style of Robert Gardner whose trajectory took him from his heavily narrated Dead Birds (1964) to the wordless and almost entirely image-based Forest of Bliss (1986).

THE THOMAS MANN EFFECT

While Marshall’s activist work was necessary and vital to getting a message across, it could not be considered artistic work. It had become didactic, wordy and even cliché in style. There is an interesting parallel in this phase of Marshall’s work with that of the novelist Thomas Mann who was increasingly affected by the development of Nazi Germany. Joseph Campbell (1988:30-31) has identified the early works of Mann as great art, but suggested that he lost the artful ability of his youth to treat all characters and events with equal affection following his family’s suffering at the hands of the Nazis and his exile to the USA. As Campbell put it, the people whom he had come to love – the blond Germans, the Hans and Ingeborg of his Tonio Kruger short story – had, under Hitler, become monsters. While Marshall had never loved ‘whitey’ he had not had to confront the dark shadows of Afrikaner officialdom until his middle age. In an interview for Japanese TV conducted by Yasuko Ichioka in 1988 for her television program Life and Death in the Desert (1988) he stated:
If you love somebody, it’s something that happens to you, and it doesn’t go away. I mean it’s not something you can turn on and off like a faucet. It happened, and it happened to me with a few people here in the 1950s and it didn’t go away, and then when I saw what was happening, I suppose you just, you know, I mean I just didn’t want to see my /un ina and my tsu and my ga dying in rags under a tourist cabin with whitey having a braii-vleis over their graves. I just didn’t want it (Marshall 1988).

According to Campbell (1988:30), following Mann’s exile and his subsequent propaganda work with the US News service (between parts III and IV of this Joseph Tetrology) his writing became clichéd. This prompts the question: does an artist’s work suffer once he becomes a propagandist and activist? In Marshall’s case, I believe that this is not the case and that in his final work he was able to return to greatness as a filmmaker once he began to realise his renewed role as a storyteller but on a much grander scale than anything he had ever before attempted. In the next chapter the unfolding of Marshall’s final work as a filmmaker, his epic 5 part film series, *A Kalahari Family* is explored.
Chapter 6: A Kalahari Family: The Ethnographic Epic

*A Kalahari Family* was his attempt to create the whole history, a combination of his memoir and as complete a record as he could make it showing the connectedness of everything that he knew: the history of South Africa, the contextualized history... He wanted to lay bare the problem his own films created and to show his efforts to fight the power of the myth that he kept reiterating...

Cynthia Close (2009 Interview)

*If I’d known when I started what I was getting into I would have locked the door and thrown away the key. Just going through... like chewing the cud for 50 years, you have this material that you got to go through, because you got to try to tell the story, an honest story, and you got to find the pictures that are going to do it... you chew this thing and chew this thing and chew this thing...*


The final phase of Marshall’s filmmaking career involved integrating past and present material to produce an unprecedented ethnographic epic spanning 50 years of Ju’hoan history. This was filmmaking on a scale different to anything Marshall had attempted hitherto. While *N!ai* was similar in its incorporation of historical depth, *A Kalahari Family* went further by extending the time frame to include multiple voices and experiences from subsequent generations. The film series presents the unfolding history of a people during a period of unprecedented struggle and change, and is possibly the most comprehensive narrative representation of an indigenous people in the history of ethnographic film.

A RELUCTANT RETURN TO FILMMAKING

Marshall himself was not the instigator of the film series that was eventually to become *A Kalahari Family*. As in the 1950s when Laurence Marshall gave his son a camera and told him to document the culture, the genesis of the epic film series involved a sense of duty rather than inner motivation. As John Bishop put it:

In ways he could have no way of appreciating, he had been handed his life’s work, the way the classic myth hero is given a quest. He didn’t ask for it, it was thrust upon him. Without negotiation, he had been made a filmmaker and given the camera (his Excalibur), thrust into the turmoil of other peoples’ lives much different from his own and distant from his home, and charged with telling the Ju’hoa people’s story (Bishop 2001:88).
Although the film series ultimately became an obsession for Marshall which held him captive until completion, during the early days of project development his main focus was elsewhere and he was quite candid about the fact that the idea for making the film series was not his own. In a 1989 interview, Marshall described the film as the brainchild of Claire Ritchie: “it’s really Claire’s movie and what she wants to do is sort of a history, a wrap-up, starting from 1950 to the present day…” (Anderson 1993:157).

Ritchie’s background was in television documentary and current affairs, her previous work having been for Granada Television’s *World in Action* series. Ritchie saw great potential to use the unrivalled historical film record (approximately one million feet of film) to make a TV series which would be seen by far more people than most of the films Marshall had previously made. Apart from *N’ai* (which had been commissioned by Boston Public Broadcasting Association and broadcast in the US and UK) Marshall’s films had primarily been made for specialist anthropologist and academic audiences.

Since 1980, Ritchie had worked with Marshall in the Kalahari, initially conducting a demographic survey in Tsumkwe (which showed an alarming rise in the death rate from disease, malnutrition and alcohol fueled domestic violence). Subsequently they established the Ju/Wa Bushman Development Foundation in 1981, which helped people leave Tsumkwe and resettle on their ancestral lands. By the mid 1980s when I first met Ritchie, she had already formulated a central thematic idea, ‘*Death by Myth*,’ which was the original title for the proposed film series. An introduction to the *Death by Myth* project in the HSFA archives, written by Ritchie and Marshall in 1986 states:

#Toma and his family are the core group who will tell their story throughout the series. Their perceptions – always eloquent, sometimes passionate, wry or humorous, about themselves, their past, the radical changes their lives have undergone, their hopes for a future – form the main thread. A thematic undercurrent, provided by other voices, is that of myth – outsiders’ perceptions of Bushman people – romantic, at times deadly, always pernicious (Ritchie & Marshall 1986:1).

Ritchie felt that by exposing the lies inherent in the Bushman myth, a comprehensive film series made for broadcast television had the potential to change the way people thought about ‘Bushman.’ A made-for-TV broadcast series would ultimately have far greater impact than any of Marshall’s activist videos of the 1980s. While these had their place in helping to prevent the
establishment of a game reserve and help people retain the last fragment of their ancestral land, the deeper problem of the pernicious myth remained to be addressed.

EVALUATING THE BROADCAST OPTION

In 1986 Ritchie and Marshall sent a treatment for the film series to David Hart, a producer at Granada Television, asking his advice as a non-anthropologist TV producer. At this point in time, the project was envisaged as a series of three one-hour films. In a confidential memo replying to Ritchie and Marshall’s proposal, Hart suggested the film be titled *Voices from the Kalahari – a Myth Examined* and that the three films be themed respectively: “Contributing to the Myth”, “The Myth as a Means of Control” and “The Myth Destroyed.” Based on the material presented to him, Hart suggested two stylistic choices, option A: telling the story with multiple voices of all involved, including Marshall himself, and option B: telling the story with no mention of the Marshall family and based purely on the direct experience of the central characters. Hart recommended option A (including Marshall’s own voice) as being more accessible to non-anthropologists and thus more marketable to general TV audiences.

I recall a conversation under the /Gautcha baobab tree in 1987 concerning ideas for the film series when Claire Ritchie explained to me that Marshall had always refused to entertain the idea that ‘The Story’ should be about him and his family. Apparently other filmmakers had approached him, eager to use the ‘The Marshall Story’ angle, but he had dismissed the idea as a phony, Disneyesque, *Swiss Family Robinson* reconstruction. As Cynthia Close, project manager for A Kalahari Family, recalled:

He always said it’s about the people. It’s only about the people. It’s not about me. And he resisted tremendously. Tremendous resistance. I don’t know at what point he kind of…a light bulb must have gone on where he realized he must put himself in (Cynthia Close in *Remembering John Marshall* DVD 2006: 05:40)

Perhaps the advice of Granada Television’s David Hart had began to convince Marshall of the fact that he had become an integral part of the Ju//hoan story. In terms of his own films, Marshall had made his screen debut in *N!ai: the story of a !Kung Woman* (1980), which was shot in 1978. However, his role in that film had been more as a reporter than as someone participating in the on-screen action. From the 1980s onwards, following his establishment of the Ju//wa Bushman
Development Foundation, Marshall began to appear more frequently in front of the camera as an active participant in the unfolding history of the Ju/'hoansi.

In his confidential memo, Hart also warned Marshall and Ritchie about who would control the film material and the production in general if Granada were to get involved in the project:

As with all big institutions they feel that for a minimum fee you should just hand everything over to them and then just let them do it the way they want. In addition they would want to own the final product... Leaving aside the question of finance and control, there are some union issues that Granada have little control over. These include that the crew (camera, editing and production...) would all be in-house Granada TV people (Hart 1986).

While Hart recognised the film series as a very strong project and saw possibilities for a co-production deal he was candid in his warning about potential difficulties associated with such a marriage of convenience, and saw a better option for Marshall and Ritchie to raise funds for the film themselves and retain complete control. Committed independent filmmakers continue to face issues of control under the ‘tyranny of television production’ to this day, the problem having been well illustrated and investigated by Scheelings (2009). While financially lucrative, the loss of creative control is simply not acceptable to many filmmakers.

PERSPECTIVES AND PLANNING

While Marshall was plunging headlong into the development effort in the late 1980s, assisted by Ritchie, myself and other Foundation workers, it was primarily Ritchie who laid the groundwork for the film series as evidenced by a working paper she wrote in 1988. Following on from Hart’s comments, Ritchie recognised two separate audiences for the film series: a specialist academic one and the general public expecting entertainment. This was the same problem initially identified by Brian Moser who devised the Disappearing World series for Granada TV in the 1970s. As Leslie Woodhead, a Disappearing World filmmaker, has commented:

Moser’s intention was to weld that anthropological expertise with the skills of documentary filmmakers in the hope of producing films which would have value for two very different audiences. Our ambition was to address both specialist students of anthropology and that mass of peak-time television viewers who might have switched on with the expectation of watching something closer to “Dallas” than to the debating methods of nomadic herders in southern Ethiopia” (Woodhead 1987:7).
Claire Ritchie saw a resolution to the problem by using the extensive archival material to present a perspective of history unfolding through a narrative structure made personal through the stories told by specific Ju/'hoan characters and their reflections on past, present and future:

The trilogy “Death by Myth” is intended to heal this split and to appeal to both halves of the audience. It will do so by embodying anthropological issues in the immediacy and minuteness of the current lives of the Ju/wasi, with filmic flashbacks into their more traditional life of 35 years ago, and with projections forward into the uncertain and challenging future (Ritchie 1988:3).

According to Ritchie, the greater purpose of the film series was an attempt at understanding one culture by another, but she also saw multiple functions as follows:

1) Intervention – through conscientisation/propaganda of outsiders – to change what is happening; ameliorate their situation; avert disaster (further dispossession; relocation etc.); promote development
2) Empowerment – giving voiceless people a voice, giving subjects access to film
3) Testament – bearing witness to what has and is happening; to their struggle.
4) Education – to expose, demythify, the negative aspects of mythification; to prevent further mythification (of which the media itself is guilty); a redress in the sense of giving back the stolen images (Ritchie 1988:2)

The centrality of Claire Ritchie’s thinking in these ideas, and her commitment to the Ju/'hoansi, was an important consideration in having her take a leading role in my film, *Bitter Roots*. The fact that she had extensive first hand experience attempting to combat the Bushman myth through film as well as assisting people through the grass roots development programme made her the ideal person to explore consequences of the myth into the present day.

**DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

The major characters in *A Kalahari Family* by and large, reflect the people Marshall had got to know during his time in the 1950s and again in the 1980s. However, as Ritchie’s early film notes suggest, for purposes of the film series’ construction, characters could also be seen as holding certain roles: “John Marshall himself is a main character throughout and plays different roles. He represents past and present… as both character and narrator” (Ritchie 1988:11). Two other obvious characters identified in Ritchie’s notes are ≠Toma, the main ‘actor’ in Film One, who “best represents past values” and Tsamko, the main ‘actor’ in Film Three, who “represents the development struggle”. N!ai was considered for the main voice in Film Two but there was concern regarding too much repetition from Marshall’s previous film. She did, however, end up
It is interesting to note that at this early stage of development, more Ju/'hoan women were considered as major characters, including ≠Toma’s daughters Bau and !Ungka (both of whom stayed on in Tsumkwe and married spouses with paid employment in the army and the government respectively). The major problem, however, appeared to be an absence of sufficient historical film coverage. There was almost none of Bau, and apart from early 1950s footage of !Ungka as a baby and young child, there was little contemporary footage of her apart from the fight scene in N!ai, and a short gathering sequence on a visit to /Gautcha in 1984. The third daughter of old ≠Toma, Di//ao, the outspoken sister of Tsamko is surprisingly absent from A Kalahari Family. I had always thought of her as a particularly strong character and included her in my film Bitter Roots. My memories of her in the 1980s was as one of the most forthright and articulate women during the development struggle, especially in her role as elected leader/spokeswoman for /Gautcha village. In Ritchie’s notes she is described as “a forceful personality and articulate… good on womens’ roles and gender relations” (Ritchie 1988:13).

Perhaps because of the deep bonds formed with ≠Toma and other hunting companions in the 1950s, Marshall’s closest Ju/'hoan relationships tended to be with Ju/'hoan men rather than women. It is probable that he spent more time with men on hunting trips and this would have given him better access and opportunities for developing friendships. Furthermore, as a young
man he may have felt more comfortable filming men rather than women. Certainly, this appears to be the case when !U gave birth to her daughter /Ungka ‘Norna’ on 4th September 1952 as Lorna Marshall recorded in her diary:

He (John Marshall) was breathless with surprise and ran over to me. He said !U wants you to take a picture of the baby. I should not as I am a man…… !U allowed me to set up the camera on the tripod. I had not used the Bell-Howell before. John showed me the focus and lens setting (Lorna Marshall 1952:157).

Clearly Lorna Marshall would only have filmed women on special occasions such as this and for the most part, in the 1950s, coverage of men is greater than of women. Clearly, this became a main factor in the choice of main characters for A Kalahari Family. Anecdotal evidence suggests however, that in terms of the filmmaking process, Marshall got on much better with female rather than male colleagues. In a personal letter to his wife Lexie in 1997, he even described himself as leaning more toward the feminine.

One woman who does have a significant role in A Kalahari Family is ≠Toma’s wife, !U. In Ritchie’s working paper she was identified as a main character and described as “alternatively bad tempered and sharp-tongued, sweet and friendly, she is a strong presence and talkative” (Ritchie 1988:13). Her brother ≠Kxao Debe, of similar strong character, was another obvious choice. Introduced in Part 2, The End of the Road as the lame Ju/’hoan hunter who got up and walked after his father appeared to him in a dream telling him to do so, perhaps his most memorable moment is his eloquent curse upon that first road made by Marshall and his father, the road which subsequently brought all the bad things to Nyae Nyae. Kxao develops further as a main character throughout the rest of the series and becomes the last tragic Ju/’hoan voice near the end of the series and in the epilogue. Kxao is an interesting character in whom one can recognise certain traits typical of a forceful entrepreneurial character in any culture. In Ritchie’s working paper he is described thus:

An entrepreneur (in any other society he would be a self-made millionaire) he is able to ‘run’ a cattle post, be a Union rep., hold a job in Tshumkwe and doesn’t miss out on anything. He owns the only donkey left (from lions) in the area and rides it like a Blue Ribbon show horse – Adrian calls him Il Duce. We have him on film in the 50’s (including rite of first kill); in Tshumkwe (working in the school teacher’s house) and a little bit in 1978. He would be very good for illustrating the internal struggle of nobody being able to take orders from anyone else. ≠Kxao finds it hard to agree with anyone and he dominates his small group at //Xaru Ma which split off from /Gautcha because of conflict (Ritchie 1988:13-14).
A Kalahari Family shows Kxao Debe ultimately losing everything despite his unconquerable spirit, and lucidly depicts what people were up against in their efforts to establish their own farms. Not only the ravages of nature (in the form of elephants and predatory lions), but more significantly, powerful donor agencies, which regarded farming as antithetical to their wildlife and tourism agenda, proved too much even for someone who might have been a Richard Branson had he grown up in the West.

Most of the older Ju/'hoan characters in Marshall’s Kalahari family had lived a hunter-gathering existence in the 1950s, what Marshall’s sister, Elizabeth referred to in her book of the same name as The Old Way (2006). However in Part 5 we meet Kxao Moses, #Toma’s youngest son who seems to represent the present and future. Already in the 1980s it was clear that he had no interest in the Bush or even in farming. He began working for the government administration in Tsumkwe (where he was born and grew up). As Ritchie observed in her working document he was always quietly ambitious (he became the Nyae Nyae Conservancy Manager in the late 1990s and a government official thereafter). Like many of the younger generation, Marshall never got to know him well, and so we hear little of his story (or the other Tsumkwe ‘town’ people) which does suggest an element of bias. However, in a letter to Lexie Marshall in 1997 just after completion of the final shoot, he wrote “Kxao Moses and I have had the first real talk we ever had” (Marshall 1997). Marshall was clearly open to hearing more about the Tsumkwe people,
but by this time it was too late and the film series had a clear leaning toward the benefits of living in outlying communities rather than in and around Tsumkwe, which is generally portrayed as a place of sickness and death. A more contemporary perspective of Tsumkwe countering this portrayal might have added complexity, but would probably have only been a minority view of those who had good jobs and stable incomes.

All the main characters mentioned hitherto are part of an extended family with roots in /Gautcha and this is the family from which the film series takes its name. Some of the minor characters in the family such as Crooked /Qui, who appeared as a graceful athlete in The Hunters, serve as a kind of visual glue to link past with present through vastly different experiences affected by external change. We see him in Part 2 being incorporated (unsuccessfully) into the South African Army (AKF2 40:40) which, in its own version of the Bushman Myth believed all Bushmen (as natural trackers) were ideally suited for Bush war. Another of Marshall’s former hunting companions from the 1950s, //ao ‘Shoulders’, is seen in Part 5 (AKF5 1:13:13) as a broken man, drunk, longing for death to take him, reduced to a life of sickness and drink in Tsumkwe after the farming program had lost all support.

WHOSE STORIES?

Clearly, the major characters or voices in Marshall’s epic were people he was closest to and with whose perspectives he felt the most empathy. A question arising out of such choice is whether this makes for better filmmaking? Marshall believed in the possibility of film to show Truth (with a capital T), but in choosing to tell a story out of the mouth of one character as opposed to another indicates a singular aspect of truth-telling, and demonstrates the impossibility of getting all sides of the story especially when the editing decisions are Marshall’s own. Ultimately, Marshall’s “Truth” is truth as he sees it. His motivation however is perhaps a product of his time and resonates with that of the artist John Berger describes in a novel about an exiled artist in the 1950s:

The important artist actually sees how he can improve the world… For the artist the improvement is largely a matter of greater accuracy, in telling the truth as he sees it (Berger 1976:144-5).

By the time the series reaches Part 5, the issue of perspective becomes critical, as characters emerge (largely expatriates or non-Ju/hoan persons) whose views are antithetical to Marshall himself. Marshall has taken sides. My own thoughts are that if a filmmaker has a resonance with
(and love for) the people portrayed, the film communicates this and the audience feels closer to
those characters, awakening a cross-cultural empathy. Through this connection a level of truth is
revealed which would not normally be open to us. If there is no such connection we do not feel
the true essence of a character in a film and his or her worldview. Marshall’s filmmaking is
engaged with the people of Nyae Nyae, although whether all of their perspectives are represented
in his films is questionable as critics such as Biesele (2004) have pointed out.

In my own filmmaking, I have generally worked with characters for whom I have great affection.
Helping to tell their stories has brought me even closer to them. This has certainly been the case
with the indigenous Australians I have worked with in films such as Esther Remembers, Wollemi:
A Land Inscribed with Story and Fantome Island. In making Bitter Roots I had insufficient
footage (and time in the field) to properly develop individual characters, and if I did I would have
liked to have focused on the two men who as late teenage boys were my closest friends back in
the 1980s. Such films concerning individual perspectives by nature lack the complexity of A
Kalahari Family, which, in its epic historical form is by nature fraught with problems of
objectivity.

In making A Kalahari Family, Marshall used extensive interviews as a device to ask people what
they thought about a past event he had filmed. Recalling distant events relies on a good memory
and differs from interviews conducted about contemporaneous events or footage. For example,
much of old ≠Toma’s narration concerning the 1950s derives from interviews Marshall conducted
with him in 1984. Throughout the film series, old memories, peoples’ individual versions of
historical events – are deftly woven into Marshall’s narration.

In an unpublished DVD Marshall made just before he died, entitled Using the Medium, he has
used A Kalahari Family to frame and analyse methods he used in making the series. One of his
inter-titles reads: “Viewing and discussing filmed events with the participants can provide
individual perspectives. It can also uncover underlying motives, patterns and values” (Marshall,
Using the Medium, 2004). If such interviews are recorded and the voiceover is used in the film it
is the character’s own perspective which motivates or prompts the images accompanying his or
her story. In making Esther Remembers, I used the memory of her days as a child coming to the
Mission and found photographs and footage to accompany her account. In making Fantome
Island, a documentary about the leprosarium for indigenous people in Far North Queensland,
there was no real narrative to hang the facts upon until I met Joe Eggmolesse who had spent ten
years on the island as a boy. The narrative could then become personal. A personal historical account is different from a purely observational ethnographic film shot in real time without narration. In the former, one needs to use archival material (whether this be film, photographs or even reenactments) to match memory, and the basic issue for a filmmaker comes down to the material you have to illustrate the past as narrated by the subject. In the case of *A Kalahari Family*, Marshall had access to a huge archival record, much of which consisted of his own observational ethnographic films, which he then transformed through addition of the subject’s recollections in narration or commentary, into a personal historical account.

In terms of whose story is being told, it is both ≠Toma’s and John Marshall’s Kalahari family and through the personal manner of the storytelling, there is a warmth, presenting as an archetypal image of a family hearth or burning fire which invites the audience to join it. The intimate way in which Marshall introduces the audience to this family and gives entry to their world, for all its geographical and cultural difference and distance, is key to the deep feeling of involvement which the series produces.

PART 1 – A FAR COUNTRY

The opening sequence of the film series shows a couple of Ju/'hoan figures wheeling a barrowload of cement across a Kalahari landscape to install a memorial plaque under a baobab tree in memory of Marshall’s friend and mentor ≠Toma ‘Stumpie’. This act is explained as not being a Ju/'hoan ritual, but an idea proposed by Marshall himself. However, for a Western audience this ritual constitutes a universal act of both respect and loss, providing an instant empathy with both Marshall and ≠Toma. Marshall’s voiceover introduction to the people and himself is a gentle, poetic opening and illustrates how much his ideas on filmic communication had evolved since his heavy-handed days of advocacy filmmaking. However, when thinking on the film series begun back in the 1980s, Marshall, who despite being a prolific poet (in written word) was more interested in the overt message than in embedded poetic images. As Ritchie recalled:

John was only interested in content and getting the message across – all a far cry from the young filmmaker in the 1950s who had been told to observe and document, which he did wonderfully, getting the rhythm of place and people, with sensitivity and without an agenda to push. Twenty years later and no time for birdsong or the wind riffling through the grass (Ritchie 2009 pers. comm.).
Claire Ritchie’s working paper on the film series from 1988, outlines Marshall’s initial idea for the opening with its primary emphasis on the development struggle and the problems with lion predation:


Although not credited in Part 1 as an Associate Director, the influence of Ritchie upon Marshall is clear, as if she were trying to lead him back towards his aesthetic vision of the 1950s. Her version (from the 1988 working paper written when ≠Toma was still alive) illustrates this:

The huge white expanse of /Gautcha pan, shimmering in the heat. Two tiny figures traverse it. The sound of wind in the bleached winter grasses intensifies the feeling of space. A babble of voices – the soft clicking sound of Ju/wasi – mingle with the wind. The group sits under the great black baobab at the pan’s edge, waiting for the two figures to join them. As the two draw closer we see a slight brown man carrying a long pole. The other, a European and much taller, carries two dead spring hares. They join the others in the shade and ≠Toma, the old man, talks of another time when he and John Marshall went hunting together 35 years ago when they were both young (Ritchie 1988:9)

Ritchie’s version with its initial emphasis on landscape certainly echoes the pace and mood of the 1950s. As with Marshall’s final version it gives the audience a feeling for the place and provides a gentle segue into the past and the everyday life of the 1950s. As discussed in Chapter 3, and as cogently argued by Hugh Brody (2001), attachment to land goes deep for indigenous people with a hunter-gathering heritage. Unlike those with an agriculturalist or pastoralist heritage (such as the Herero who have often tried to invade Ju/'hoan land with their cattle), Ju/'hoansi had and still have little aspiration to live elsewhere. I believe I have also tried to emphasise this in my film Bitter Roots, with ≠Toma identifying with his n!ore at /Gautcha and the re-emphasis of this link in /Gunda’s spirit-communication with old ≠Toma.

RE-VISIONING THE 1950s

As Timothy Asch pointed out (in Ruby 2000:117), the advantage of sequence filmmaking was that various sequences could be strung together to create a narrative film. Certainly, Marshall made good use of his short sequence films and most of them can be identified in A Kalahari
Family particularly in Parts 1 and 2. Extracts from the following sequence films are clearly identifiable: Baobab Play (AKF1 25:20), A Rite of Passage (AKF1 58:20), An Argument About a Marriage (AKF1 1:06:35), A Joking Relationship (AKF1 1:12:52), N/um Tchai (AKF1 1:14:11), A Curing Ceremony (AKF1 1:16:55), Men Bathing (AKF1 1:21:24), Melon Tossing Game (AKF2 13:10), The Meat Fight (AKF2 37:35).

In A Kalahari Family, the old sequence footage accompanies the unfolding of the story told by Ju/'hoansi themselves as they reflect on the past. Previously, in Chapter 5, I indicated that already in the 1970s Marshall had seen how a greater understanding of sequences could result from their interpretation by Ju/'hoansi, but this does not only refer to sequence films. Early in Part 1 of A Kalahari Family (AKF1 03:25) there is a re-visioning of The Hunters (shot in 1952), prompted by Marshall asking ≠Toma (in an interview shot in 1984) whether he thought so much effort to find one giraffe was practical or if he and his fellow hunters had really tracked it to help Marshall make his movie. This represents a key question for ethnographic and documentary filmmakers, namely whether what was recorded on film would have taken place had the camera not been present. ≠Toma replies that when he saw the giraffe he simply saw meat for his people, and goes on to describe his version of the hunt.

In his gentle probing of ≠Toma for elucidation and greater knowledge of the historic event, Marshall is gently taking back his own projections. He attempts to exorcise his ghost as a youthful mythmaker from The Hunters, a ghost which had long haunted him with its artistic license concerning Ju/'hoan life, a ghost which put thoughts into the minds of his protagonists and feelings into the hunted giraffe. In recounting the story of The Hunters in Part 1 of A Kalahari Family Marshall’s opening narration explains how ≠Toma had shot the giraffe from the jeep (a key fact omitted in The Hunters), and then lets ≠Toma explain the unfolding events with Marshall’s footage providing the images. Ironically, ≠Toma’s account validates The Hunters as an accurate record in terms of a search for meat, and his words even echo Marshall’s anthropomorphism when, after seeing the giraffe tracks, he remembers his own thoughts” “She is thinking for herself – she leaves the others and travels” (AKF1 04:25).

In this early sequence, Marshall also introduces the audience to ≠Toma’s typically Ju/'hoan humour. In typical frank Ju/'hoan fashion ≠Toma describes how Marshall had slept very soundly but too close to the fire, so close indeed that his jacket caught fire, yet Marshall continued to snore (AKF1 06:32). ≠Toma’s jocular imitation of Marshall’s heavy snoring and comic
description of him as an “owner of snoring” immediately brings the two men closer together through memory and humor, but also demonstrates the fact that Marshall’s skin was literally saved by ≠Toma’s extinguishing the fire. This intimate and humorous sequence also brings the audience closer to both characters and serves as a vital strut in the bridge-building between different cultures. This scene is also referenced by Ritchie in Bitter Roots and provides a way of connecting back to the past through the generations, prompting young ≠Toma to recall his grandfather, old ≠Toma.

A TALE OF TWO FATHERS

From the early days, in his journal, Marshall had often referred to ≠Toma as being like a brother to him yet, in some ways he was more like a father or at least a mentor. Marshall was given his Ju'/hoan name ≠Toma Xosi (≠Toma Longface) by ≠Toma, and so referred to him as his “Big Name.” For the Ju'/hoansi “Big Name” also carries the connotation of grandfather or grandmother, since at least one Ju'hoan child will be given the name of his or her grandparent. This custom is also found in other indigenous cultures such as the Inuit as Brody (2001:11-12) has indicated.

John Bishop who worked extensively with Marshall during the shooting of A Kalahari Family as well as working on the Marshall film and video archives has suggested that Marshall was trying to reconcile a personal conflict in which two strong powerful persuasive men represented two father figures in his life (Bishop 2009 pers. comm.). Bishop suggests that although his biological father was a ‘great man’ in an outer, worldly sense and clearly a man of principle, he may have failed the young John Marshall in other ways. What seems clear is that ≠Toma increasingly became his moral or spiritual father. I often heard Marshall explain to me how ≠Toma had taught him all he needed to know especially one phrase which he would often repeat: “What is good is what hurts fewer people less.”

Interestingly in A Kalahari Family, we get an introduction to Marshall’s biological father (the initiator of the Marshall expeditions) after the poignant introduction to ≠Toma who is praised for his perseverance and ability to survive through many traumatic experiences (including wounding by a buffalo, being captured by white farmers and escaping from indentured labour). There is no voice recording of Laurence Marshall (and visuals consist only of photographs) but John’s narration (AKF1 07:58) conveys the sense of pride and awe he had for his father. He proudly
recalls that he was the founding President of Raytheon and recounts his worldly achievements. However, Laurence Marshall only features briefly in Part 1 of the film series and, as has already been discussed, the Kalahari family of the series title refers not to Marshall’s biological family but to his adopted Ju/'hoan family.

The historical perspective of the film series, especially given its epic scope, needs to be larger than that of this one family in Nyae Nyae. This calls not only for Marshall’s narrative voice to give his perspective but also for an external narrator who gives a sense of an impersonal historical perspective of what was happening in the world outside as the lives of individuals in Marshall’s Kalahari family unfolded.

REPLACING IDEALISED LANDSCAPES WITH INFORMATION

In Part 1 of *A Kalahari Family* we hear the first voiceover of the external narrator (AKF1 11:42) who provides contextual background in the form of statistics and maps. This information, which is repeated in each part of the series, is essential to explain and graphically illustrate the geographical extent of the dispossession of the Ju/'hoansi and the historical context. The style is a marked aesthetic improvement from the 1980s activist films (mentioned at the end of Chapter 5) where, as Ritchie has observed, Marshall was fond of adding endless inserts to roll up the screen (2009 pers. comm.). Provision of factual information in this way can minimise impact of the visual medium for as Leslie Woodhead has commented: “film is by nature weak on analysis and ideas, and strong on the communication of feeling” (Woodhead 1987:7). Even during the editing period of *A Kalahari Family*, Ritchie has suggested how Marshall’s preference for words and information over image had been problematic:

The word was still more important… he never saw the need to hold ordinary peoples’ interest or didn’t understand that facts and figures, percentages and maps, made peoples eyes glaze over…. I remember we argued a lot about it during filming and editing. But by that time the pressure of getting the immense amount of material into even six hours was huge. I often got the impression during screening of rough edits that John was illustrating a written text… making pictures fit a script. He had never done that before” (Ritchie 2009 pers. comm.).

Part of the problem with producing a documentary series aimed at the general public about a much-mythologised indigenous people about whom scant accurate information is known, is the need for significant contextual explanation. As Paul Henley has noted, a crucial problem for ethnographic film is how non-visual information, vital in providing a sociological context, is to be
presented (in Woodhead 1987:7). To replace fantasy slots with reality slots in the mind of the audience required breaking down the Brechtian fourth wall through external narration being spliced into the narrative. The relaxed pace of the 1950s life seems so idyllic it feeds the fantasy of the Bushman myth but the narrator brings the audience back to reality.

The narrator explains the broader context of dispossession of hunter-gatherer peoples in southern Africa at this time and the simultaneous colonisation of the Ju/'hoan water point at /Gam by the Herero (AKF1 18:27). Less than ten minutes later after a descent into the personal memories of old ≠Toma and !U in the untroubled microcosm of Nyae Nyae in the 1950s, a world seemingly isolated from the outside world, the narrator relates how first contact with Europeans was perceived by hunter gatherers elsewhere in southern Africa, many of whom were exterminated by white settlers (AKF1 26:18). The contact period rock art shown in the film illustrates this perspective with a man pointing a rifle and another on a horse with a gun. The narration tells how one survivor of the extermination who, when asked what God looks like, replied: “a man with a gun.”

The importance of contact imagery portrayed in rock art has been brought home to me through my filmmaking work with Professor Paul Taçon in various locations throughout Australia. At the contact rock art sites, the indigenous perspective can be seen recorded in rock art as a valid record of the past as effective as if the newcomers and their material culture had been photographed. The way Marshall has included rock art material is pertinent in that most films about Bushmen, if they include rock art at all, focus on the distant past, with images of people in trance, and of animals but not of the important subjective perspective of how hunter gatherer societies depicted Europeans moving into their lands.

PORTRAYING CONTACT

Films about contact between indigenous people and European explorers have always been cause for fascination and have done well in documentary terms, as they are unique and depict never to be repeated events. Such films include Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson’s First Contact (1983), which documents how a group of Irish miners encountered a previously isolated group of New Guinea tribesmen. It uses extraordinary archival footage and interviews as did the more recent film Contact (2009) about Martu Aborigines in the Australian Western desert. However, in A Kalahari Family there is an unprecedented personalisation of contact which conveys an
extraordinary level of intimacy and a strong sense of what it was like to have been there at that
time. The first hand description of the contact experience alternates between the filmmaker’s
mother (Lorna Marshall) on the one hand, and his mentor and best friend ≠Toma ‘Stumpie’ on
the other. This cinematic exchange of first impressions from people from totally different
cultures is remarkable in its clearly candid honesty on both sides, and all the more interesting
from an ethnographic film perspective when we hear how Laurence Marshall described the
expedition’s cross-cultural bridge-building aim by demonstrating a (Polaroid) camera and
describing it as “a box that helps us remember” (AKF1 33:18).

Laurence Marshall with Polaroid camera in Nyae Nyae in the 1950s
(Image courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources).

The emotions inherent in the ‘contact’ experience are embodied through showing the part played
by fear of the unknown on both sides and how it played out on a personal level. ≠Toma explains
that his Ju/'hoan band tried to deal with their fear by dancing (AKF1 34:05). However, Lorna
Marshall’s first impressions of that same dance were full of fear, stemming she reflected, from a
lack of understanding as to what was happening when people went into trance: “I did not know
what hysteria might develop. In another month, the dances no longer frightening but romantically
strange” (AKF1 34:48).

This little sequence is a brilliant evocation of encountering otherness and also shows a parallel
trajectory, in personal terms, as to how the Bushman myth (which originates from projections and
not knowing actual persons) evolves from the feared other to the romantic other. However, the
intimate contact narrative serves to wipe the mythic slate clean as we witness the feelings associated with the encounter from the ‘other’ side of the contact divide.

Lest the audience is still caught up by the ‘otherness’ of the Ju/'hoansi, the film then reminds us once again of our shared humanity through humour. In this instance ≠Toma teases Marshall of his early ineptitude in matters of the Bush: how he ‘married a mouse’ (unwittingly slept with a rodent in his blankets), and fell over a hyena in the night, whilst walking in his underpants and mistaking it for a dog (when there were no dogs in Nyae Nyae).

ETHNOGRAPHIC CORRECTIONS

Marshall adroitly weaves in ethnographic information into the fabric of the narrative but unlike his earliest films, which he narrated throughout, the narrative is now conveyed through Ju/hoan voices. We hear !U explaining that the maker of an arrow owns the meat (from a hunt) and controls distribution (AKF1 40:02), and how Tsamko, her son, was learning that the hardest part of hunting was meat distribution because it served to avoid conflict and keep people happy. This segues smoothly into Tsamko introducing himself (AKF1 41:05). He continues with his identity as a /Gautcha person, an explanation of his the inheritance of his n!ore from his mother.

In Bitter Roots, ≠Toma, Tsamko’s son, explains that he inherited his n!ore from his grandfather. This begs the question of how much Ju/'hoan law has been forgotten by the younger generation because he was talking in the context of his grandfather, and his grandfather married the /Gautcha n!ore owner. Strictly speaking, ≠Toma inherited his n!ore from his grandmother (!U) as did Tsamko. However, the importance of /Gautcha is what is stressed by ≠Toma, just as this is articulated by his father Tsamko who, in A Kalahari Family tells us that his father died at /Gautcha and so will he.

THE AESTHETICS OF FAILURE: THE REALITY OF HUNTING

Throughout the early part of the film series, but particularly in Part 1, just when the audience relaxes into the visually seductive images of the hunter-gatherer way of life, Marshall deconstructs it. Through reflecting on his own experience he shows the reality of failing to get enough food to eat and admits that he only began to understand this reality after three years when he was finally able to keep up with the hunters (AKF1 54:17). He describes a failed hunt where
all three wildebeest were shot but all are lost to other predators. His narration explains what a meager living this really was and how much effort was wasted for very little return. In a far cry from his first film, *The Hunters* (and many subsequent “Bushmen” films such as *The Great Dance* which have in some way imitated it), there is no heroic journey here, but a reflection on the aesthetics of failure.

Myths about Bushmen are not limited to hunting but also include the ‘miracles’ of healing whilst in the ‘shamanic flight’ of the trance dance associated with the *N/um Kxaosi* (owners of medicine). Such ‘miracles’ have been mentioned in Chapter 2 with reference to *Vanishing Cultures: Bushmen of the Kalahari* (2006) in which a white ‘cultural expert’ claims that cancer, broken bones and snake-bite have been healed. This kind of commentary panders not only to a Western fantasy but also to the idea of the shaman’s journey as universally heroic (with successful outcome) as described in Mircea Eliade’s *Shamanism* (1972). However, Daniel Noel describes how Michael Taussig has dispelled this idea:

> The indigenous visionary experiences we have called “shamanism” - a label he dismisses as “a made-up, modern Western category” - do not, Taussig claims, proceed in an orderly fashion like a traditional narrative pattern, as Eliade’s model implies. Such experiences are more likely to entail an open-ended flight (Noel 1997:39-40).

As with hunting, the uncertain outcome also relates to the work of the *N/um kxaosi*. Throughout *A Kalahari Family* we hear the tragedy of babies dying of sickness (AKF2 46:45) or at childbirth (AKF1 1:20:37), and how healing fails to save a life. Through these honest accounts of failure, *A Kalahari Family* conveys, through subtle nuances, the fallacy inherent in romanticising the hunter-gatherer way of life in the Kalahari as some heroic foil to the discontents of modernity. Just as Roger Sandall clearly and cogently makes the rational argument against the romantic retreat from civilization (Sandall 2000), Marshall film series shows the real human cost when children or babies die through inadequate medical attention and highlights the human price of staying in the Bush, however attractive it might appear to outsiders, or even to Ju'/hoansi looking back through the rose-tinted glasses of memory. ≠Toma’s words from the 1950s confirm that it was by no means an easy life but was based purely on survival: “We stay here and do this because if we went out of Nyae Nyae we would be killed or captured” (AKF1 57:55).

Deconstructing the myth of the happy hunter-gatherer was a big part of Marshall’s communication strategy in the film series, as hopefully it was in my own film when I ask N/hauka
at Makuri whether she is eating bushfoods from choice or from hunger. For her there is no choice just as for ≠Toma, in ultimately deciding to leave the hunter-gathering life, it was a matter of survival.

LOST RITUALS

While *A Kalahari Family* does away with any illusions about an idyllic hunter-gatherer past, it does acknowledge an element of loss and nostalgia in the passing of rituals associated with the old lifestyle. To do otherwise might serve didactic purposes, but would detract from the complexities of truth to which Marshall was committed. In a sequence taken from the 1950s footage, Tsamko’s voiceover, from an interview recorded in the 1990s, enthusiastically explains the rituals of scarification associated with a young man’s shooting his first buck, a prerequisite for getting married (AKF1 58:17). Today, Tsamko adds, the young men no longer hunt so they don’t get their cuts but still get married anyway. He ends the sequence with a lamentation: “This makes me sad.” Coming from Tsamko, the key Ju’hoan leader driving development through farming in the 1980s, this statement adds complexity to the central theme of the film series, illustrating the emotional turmoil inherent in giving up the old way of life. However, as is constantly made clear, the sacrifice of some aspects of Ju’hoan culture was in the interests of survival through better food security, and not all aspects of culture are food related. With increasing interaction and the growing impact of the external world came choice. Many little events, which seemed unimportant at the time, were leading up to the end of the old way of life.

THE OUTSIDE WORLD IMPINGES

In *A Kalahari Family*, even more than in *N!ai*, Marshall made practical use of his slot theory and displays his keen interest in the minutiae of history. In 1998 during the editing phase, Marshall had written a historical background for *A Kalahari Family* including an epic chronology of events. What is fascinating about this chronology is that each time division, which evolves from centuries to decades to individual years, lists events of wider historical import with apparently random but simultaneous events in both Marshall’s biological and his Kalahari family, which results in a kind of time and space net, with linked events caught like mating flies in a web. For example early entries read as follows (LKM is Laurence Marshall, LJK is Lorna Marshall):
1911: Toma Tsamko born in waterless n'ore in southern Nyae Nyae. LKM graduates from Tufts with degree in civil engineering. Designs water and sewer system for Hopkington MA. LJK in Pasadena CA…

1918 LKM fights at Chateau Thierry, then at Tresevau. Is one of first victims of Spanish Flue which is probably why he survived… Toma Tsamko remembers people dying of terrible fevers – surely flu – in eastern Nyae Nyae the following winter (1919)

1920: First Herero from Botswana, refugees of German Herero War, settle with cattle at Ju/'hoan permanent waterholes in eastern Nyae Nyae. Service and acculturation of Ju/'hoansi begin. Toma spends dry season watering cattle for Herero at !Kubi. LKM working under high air as engineer in East River Tunnel in NY. Participates in founding Spencer Thermostat.

1942 Witwatersrand Native Labor Association (Rand Mines and SA Government) lay road across northern Nyae Nyae to bring Ovambo labor more quickly to the Rand for massive wartime gold production. Two rest camps for WNLA convoys established at Samangaigai and Cho/ana (Sikarette). Kavango families installed as “Bushman Guards.” Families given goats and cattle. Ju/'hoan groups form around Kavango families at both rest camps.

It would appear that Marshall has set up this detailed chronological web with ‘idea slots’ to show the unfolding of apparently unrelated events in order to try to work out a way of weaving them or their implications into the film series to give the audience a broader picture of how history links people and events. Through the complex interplay of slots, Marshall pulls out strands of history for the viewer to weave together on the cinematic loom, which is both his film and the narrative constructed in the viewer’s mind.

When Tsamko first meets Ovambo people at Cho/ana in the northern part of Nyae Nyae (AKF1 1:01:25), the road made by the South African government and WNLA needs to be explained as having been made to transport Ovambo workers to the South African gold mines. Tsamko’s narration describes his early awakening to the world outside Nyae Nyae through his perception of the Ovambo who appeared extremely powerful. Marshall’s narration (AKF1 1:03:16) starts filling slots far removed from the local Ju/'hoan perspective and explains how, contrary to Tsamko’s perspective, the Ovambo were some of the most oppressed people in southern Africa (in the context of Apartheid). However, they were already forming the political organisation which would ultimately overthrow the South African regime and become the government of Namibia. The next ‘idea slot’ focuses on the booming economy of southern Africa in the 1950s explaining the agricultural expansion in South West Africa and growing need for lowly or unpaid farm-workers. This in turn introduces the next sequence. White ranchers had followed the Marshall vehicle tracks into Nyae Nyae to coerce some Ju/'hoansi to go and work on farms in the south. The background information has been supplied, the relevant slots filled, facilitating a clean
segue into the story which formed the basis of Marshall’s sequence film *An Argument About A Marriage*.

The same kind of slot table used in Marshall’s 1993 essay *Filming and Learning* was reproduced by Marshall in a practical *Outline and Ideas plan* (Marshall 1995), pertaining to Part 1 of *A Kalahari Family*. This document takes the form of a table and uses columns for slot titles including: VOICE, SCREEN, FAMILY, BUSHMEN, HERERO, SOUTH AFRICA, OVAMBO and BEYOND. Whereas voice and screen columns are familiar to TV writers in an audiovisual script, other columns in Marshall’s slot table contain idea slots or remote events, which might impinge on what is happening on screen. For instance, on a horizontal (time) line where the VOICE column contains “Capture by farmers”, the corresponding (i.e. contemporaneous) line for SOUTH AFRICA contains “Boom in Economy. Apartheid = Cheaper Labor”, and the column BEYOND contains “Korean War ceasefire, French in Vietnam, USSR with A Bombs. Crushes Hungarian uprising. West needs more gold, minerals from SA”.

The popular image from chaos theory whereby the flap of a butterfly’s wings has an amplified effect upon events in faraway places is a way of understanding how Marshall’s slot theory attempts to understand the interconnectedness of remote events which ultimately impact on the apparently isolated people of Nyae Nyae. His tabulation of slots was clearly devised to work out a way to illustrate such interconnectedness in his films.

The latter trajectory of the first part of Marshall’s film series involves a sense of gathering clouds, a gradual accumulation of pressure from the outside world upon the delicate bubble of Nyae Nyae. Events were already afoot which not even the Marshalls realised would lead to so much radical change for the Ju’hoansi.

**THE END OF INNOCENCE**

The end of an age of relative isolation and relative innocence of the world outside is paralleled in the latter stages of Part 1 of *A Kalahari Family* by some of the leading characters coming to the end of their childhood during the last Marshall expedition (1957-58). The end of Marshall’s own innocence is also mirrored in his first experience of a death in his Kalahari family. In an interview with !U, he confronts her about the Ju’hoan experience of death – recalling his first experience of seeing a dying baby, to which she replies:
You didn’t want to know about death and our god //Gawa. It is //Gawa who decides if a woman’s son dies before she does … but it’s meaningless, many children died… now you want to ask questions about dying and healing and //Gawa, but really your questions are senseless. It is all just the way things are (AKF1 1:10:27).

The shots overlaying !U’s words show the dying child and what follows is a silent montage showing images of death, a mourning scene with no dialogue or narration which lasts for almost half a minute (AKF1 1:11:14 - 1:11:39). Marshall uses this dramatic silence to mark the end of his own innocence, and his awakening to a darker reality: after 6 years of getting to know ‘the family’ he finally understood what it was to be always thin and hungry and to watch your children die.

The next sequence opens up with Marshall’s words: “We were all growing up” (AKF1 1:11:56). Tsamko (14) and N!ai (13) were in adolescence – flirting with the opposite sex. The landscape of a bunch of teenagers is filled with symbolic heavy clouds pregnant with change. The scene of N!ai flirting with her great uncle /Ti!kay shows her transformation from young girl to young woman. Meanwhile /Gunda adopts his vocation as a N/um Kxao, a healer. All roles are starting to change. The final sequence of Part 1 resembles a visual koan of lost but remembered innocence. The scene of men bathing and joking in Nama Pan in 1958, oblivious to any cares or worries, is possibly the most hauntingly beautiful sequence of images from the entire film series and makes a poignant ending to Marshall’s last days in Nyae Nyae prior to the big changes. Marshall mentions in his retrospective narration how naïve he and Toma’s family had been in not understanding the speed and magnitude of changes that were about to happen.

DOCUMENTING CHANGE: PARTS 2, 3 and 4

It is not hard to see Part 1 as the most aesthetically satisfying in the film series, in view of its poignancy, its beautiful imagery and poetic tone. There is a seductive sense of a timeless pace of life before the changes set in, which all feed into the mythic projection about hunter-gatherers despite Marshall’s constant reminders about the harsh reality they constantly faced. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the timeless 1950s footage with the rawness of the present has been criticised by Wilmsen: “Marshall’s intercutting of historical footage with contemporary squalor makes foraging seem the better development goal… media-enconsed viewers see only the myth and misjudge the misery” (Wilmsen 2003:115). Misery is certainly apparent in Part 2, which shows
people going into decline. Much of the material is taken from *N!ai* and similar themes are developed. One of the most memorable scenes is Kxao Debe’s speech, which references the title of Part 2: *The End of the Road*. While in the Biblical story of Eden, the apple is the symbol of knowledge and downfall, for the Ju/'hoansi in Marshall’s epic, it is the road which has come to symbolise the end of innocence.

I am Kxao Debe and I despise all this. We were kids when you first came to /Gautcha. I am older than you are… There was no fighting in /Gautcha in those days because we didn’t drink //Khadi (beer)... They listened to people like your big name. We could settle things. That was before //Khadi. It was the roads you and your father made that brought us //Khadi. Before your roads came to /Gautcha we had no sugar and no knowledge of //Khadi. Everything came with your roads... (AKF2 37:16).

As Wilmsen (2003:115) has indicated, there are contradictions in *A Kalahari Family*. The ‘old days’ are remembered with affection by Ju/'hoansi and compared positively with the negative present. But a careful viewing of the series shows that the same people (in this case Kxao Debe) who have fond memories of the old times, cannot abide cultural tourists wanting to see people as they were in the past: “I don’t want these white people among us. We must do our own thing. We need to be in control on our own” (Kxao Debe, AKF5 01:19:35). This statement reflects the issue of ownership as it pertains to representation, and the need for Ju/'hoansi to control their own representation which is investigated in the final chapter.

Romanticising the past is partly a facet of human nature: youth is often seen through rose-tinted spectacles. However, when Ju/'hoansi themselves reference their ‘good old days’ in the film series, an audience programmed to accept the Bushman myth, might switch off when contextual information is subsequently provided, hanging onto the words spoken by a Ju/'hoan person who was only doing what we all do. Such moments in a film such as this can unfortunately add ‘ammunition’ to those caught up in the myth, like the trophy hunter Volker Grellmann, who wants to “turn back the clock a little bit” (AKF3 0:42:28)

DESCENT AND ASCENT

For a filmmaker as antithetical to myth as Marshall, there is an ironically mythic narrative structure underlying Parts 2 and 3 of *A Kalahari Family* which also echoes the Biblical book of Exodus: the story of descent and ascent of the Jewish people who go into bondage in Egypt, are
enslaved in city life, and are subsequently led to the promised land, under the leadership of a grass roots leader in the form of Moses.

Part 2 of *A Kalahari Family* is characterised by a downward trajectory, following people leaving their ancestral lands in the 1960s and suffering the depths of despair through alcohol fuelled violence in the government built slums of Tsumkwe in the 1970s. However, in Part 3 we witness the start of a markedly upbeat mood with the burgeoning of a grass roots development movement in the mid 1980s, and the rise of Tsamko as a leader who boosts the confidence of the people as an increasing number of communities are established on traditionally inherited lands (*n!oresi*). For the first time in the series, Part 3 portrays the Ju/'hoansi bravely standing up to authority. They blatantly ignore the police who try to prevent them from erecting a pump for the *n!ore* owners at //Xaru (on a borehole established for elephants) for their own farming use (AKF3 17:35). Furthermore, they overcome the threat of a Game Reserve imposed by the Apartheid Government. This is the kind of dogged determination so characteristic of Marshall himself and raises the question as to whether, and if so, to what degree, Marshall is projecting his own persona (and his own myths), into the film and indeed into history. Would the Ju/'hoansi have been able to deal with some of these problems without him? As a personal witness to some of the events in the 1980s, I can certainly vouch for the incredible tenacity of the Ju/'hoansi in the mid 1980s in terms of establishing their farms against so many odds, including, as I have referenced in *Bitter Roots*, having to fend off lions to defend their cattle and in some cases, killing them with a short stabbing spear. However, by the 1980s as I have already indicated, Marshall had become a key part of Ju/'hoan history and his own life was inextricably linked with the fate of the Ju/'hoansi.

In Part 4, the spirit of optimism continues into 1989 as the newly formed Farmers Co-operative sets out (with Marshall) on a journey to seek out dispossessed Ju/'hoansi squatting on the white ranches and Herero farms in the South. They return with new members including the impoverished brother of the star of *The Gods Must be Crazy*, and subsequently, a very accomplished Ju/hoan farmer, /Qui Chapman. Part 4 culminates in the Namibian elections that SWAPO wins and portrays the Ju/'hoansi jubilant at the outcome. The final scene is of the resettlement of /Qui Chapman on his new farm in Nyae Nyae where he dances for joy. This was the point at which Claire Ritchie, initially co-director with Marshall, wanted the series to end. It is easy to see how this would have shown the Ju/'hoansi in a strong position and an optimistic note – a positive upbeat ending, as opposed to the tragedy which gradually unfolds through Part
5, filmed over the 1990s. However, as will be demonstrated, this final episode has proved to be
the most confrontational and controversial of the series and perhaps has the most lasting value in
contemporary educational terms as witnessed by Professor Karl Heider who has focused his
Ethnographic Film course on N\ai and Death by Myth (pers. comm. 2011).

Before analysing this final episode, it is pertinent to discuss the actual shooting of material during
the late 1980s and 1990s, referencing the accounts of some of the people involved.

THE ROLE OF OTHERS BEHIND THE CAMERA

From about a third of the way into Part 3 of A Kalahari Family, we increasingly see Marshall
himself in the frame, not simply as a filmmaker asking questions, but caught up in the film’s
action. His more active role starts with the scene in which he and a group of Ju’/hoansi are
confronted by police authorities at Xaru while trying to erect a hand pump in the mid 1980s. The
focus on the development struggle after this invariably includes Marshall himself. Once he had
‘put down the camera and picked up the shovel’ he also crossed over to join the people ‘at the
other end of the camera.’

As has been discussed, Marshall himself had pretty much handed over responsibility for shooting
most of the material from the mid 1980s to other cameramen. He was also to rely on footage shot
by friendly foreign crews such as the Japanese company NAV Productions who made the 1988
documentary Life and Death in the Desert. Before NAV filming began, Marshall had primed the
producer, Yasuko Ichioka, ensuring she focused on the development activities of the Foundation
rather than producing yet another romanticised view of the Bushman. In a long fax to Ichioka,
sent in 1987 before she and her crew arrived, he wrote:

How many of your films show the real situations and predicaments of the people you visit? The
last one you made about the Ju/wasi here at /Gautcha when Tanaka dressed people up in skins
and had them play hunting/gathering may have been a good film – I never saw it – but it didn’t
help Ju/wasi much. The more we perpetuate the myth that Ju/wasi still live by hunting and
gathering, or can, or want to, the more we reinforce the attitudes that almost cost Ju/wasi their
land and with it their lives (Marshall 1987).

Not least as a result of Marshall’s communication, the NAV footage used for their 1987
documentary was almost totally focused on the very real development efforts of the Ju/hoansi and
Marshall was subsequently able to use extracts from this footage to good ends in Part 3 of *A Kalahari Family*, particularly the coverage of the borehole drilling and prospecting.

From the early 1980s, Marshall employed mostly South African crews. Cliff Bestall was shooting with sound being recorded by various people including Michael Gavshon (1980-84), Pitchie Rommelaere (1986) and Peter Baker (1987-89). Between 1982 and 1987, Bestall shot 74,193 feet of colour negative film (34 hours, 20 minutes) although Marshall was also shooting in 1984. In 1989, Marshall brought in John Bishop (from the US) who shot 140,529 feet of colour negative film (65 hours). Video also featured more prominently that year with Peter Baker shooting 41.5 hours and additional photography by Paul Weinberg, Cliff Bestall and John Marshall. From 1990 onwards, the crew was predominantly Baker and Rommelaere according to the Marshall Collection online finding aid [http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/fa/marshall.pdf](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/fa/marshall.pdf).

Apart from Ritchie, the only filmmaker who has written much about his experiences of working with Marshall in the field is John Bishop (1993, 2001). Bishop had been hired initially in 1984 to manage the transfer of the Marshall collection to the HSFA at the Smithsonian so he was already familiar with the older footage by the time he was invited to come and shoot for *A Kalahari Family* in 1989. Subsequently in the 1990s, Peter Baker and Pitchie Rommelaere became increasingly important to Marshall who worked closely with them on recording Ju/'hoan history as it unfolded, but neither of them documented their experience of working with Marshall. In the late 1990s, when Marshall was absent, he used cameramen Richard Pakleppa and Lloyd Ross to cover smaller individual events, instructing them remotely, by fax, on what he wanted.

Peter Baker on camera with Pitchie Rommelaere recording sound, documenting a meeting with John Marshall, Kxao Debe and Tsamko Toma talking to a Herero woman (Image courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources).
THE DIRECTOR’S PRESENCE

While shooting in Nyae Nyae, John Bishop had tried to conceptualise shooting the way Marshall did, but when things were busy and events were happening all at once there was no time to think and it was necessary, he recalled, “to fly by the seat of one’s pants” (Bishop 2009 pers. comm.). Bishop has described what it was like shooting for Marshall in 1989, and the whirlwind which was created when he was around: “John Marshall came and went from Windhoek 17 hours drive away, spending about a third of his time in the field and the rest writing in the city. Things moved slowly and predictably when he was gone, and manically when he was there” (Bishop 2001:6).

My own experience echoes that of John Bishop. When Marshall was present, a sense of drama developed and communicated itself to those around him. Undoubtedly, he had a strong sense of history and a feeling for when history was being made. Toward the end of Part 3 there is a sequence of a community meeting showing the process leading to writing up of the charter of the Nyae Nyae Farmers Co-operative. Recollecting his shooting of this event, Bishop has observed how Marshall helped to create an atmosphere of momentous occasion, seeing a direct parallel
with the American Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution (Bishop 2009 pers. comm.). What might have appeared boring to an outsider, a long meeting in the shade of a tree, was alchemically transformed in Marshall’s mind and his passion and excitement communicated to the crew. As Bishop has suggested, in his own mind, Marshall was at the U.S. Constitutional Convention. Following long speeches in Ju/'hoan, he would turn to the camera and translate with tears in his eyes. Bishop admits to being impressed with Marshall’s ability to create an atmosphere where everyone knew they were at an important and interesting moment in history, and this is also conveyed in the latter part of Part 3 which describes the emerging new law relating to Ju/'hoan perception of their land rights.

POWER, SOCIAL AGENCY & THE ETHICS OF SOCIAL PROPRIETY

As is the case with other iconic filmmakers, Marshall, whose personality Bishop has compared to a ‘force of nature’ (Bishop 2009 pers. comm.), sometimes resulted in obsessive attempts to get the desired shots. In Marshall’s case this sometimes involved taking for granted his ‘insider’ status amongst the Ju/'hoansi. John Bishop recalled one such occasion in 1989, filming the funeral of a man called /Gaishay, when Marshall (who had not witnessed a Ju/'hoan funeral before) literally overstepped the mark by asking Bishop to step over the grave to get a reverse angle shot (Bishop 2009 pers. comm.). Bishop, who in all the months he had shot with Marshall had never disagreed with him on the social proprieties of shooting, refused. He had no problem with being close or sitting in between people who were mourning, but to step over the grave would have displayed, he believed, a marked lack of respect. Marshall’s status amongst his Kalahari Family was such that he was often present shooting at very intimate events, such as the death of a child. However, in this case, he was asking someone else, a relative outsider, to take the shot and moreover, this was not Marshall’s immediate ‘family’ but the newly established community at !Ao//’a.

This begs the question of whether, through long association and close proximity, one loses a sense of perspective and respect for one’s film subjects even if one believes one is doing the right thing. Once questioned in an interview on the subject of privacy, Marshall replied:

I never second-guessed myself, you know: “I’ll wait, I’d better not do this. Oh, I can’t show that. Oh, I mustn’t show this. Oh, this is an invasion of privacy. Oh, this is a…” That just gets in the way and makes it impossible. You shoot. You have a relationship with the person you’re

This statement suggests a degree of naivety on Marshall’s part and the degree to which he may have been unconscious of the subtle power relations between himself and the Ju’/hoansi, especially as he was increasingly perceived by people in the 1980s as the source of financial assistance and help. Consequently, for Ju’/hoansi to deny him access would have been very difficult. Homiak has recognised that power relations and social location remain a blind spot for Marshall in *A Kalahari Family*:

This film fails to answer legitimate questions about the relationship between voice and social agency. As a person of perceived power who can advance the interests of certain individuals, Marshall blurs the act of “speaking with” into an act of “speaking for” (Homiak 2003:132).

For Ju’/hoansi as in the case of many indigenous people there is a tendency to please, to say what is expected. Hugh Brody has described this trait amongst the Inuit:

When southerners told Inuit to do things that were against Inuit tradition… the Inuit felt that they had to say yes… White people had things that Inuit needed: guns, ammunition, tobacco, flour, cloth… They had power, and there was no equality (Brody 2001:43).

In terms of reading the signs of what and what not to film, I recall filming a young Australian man of Aboriginal ancestry who began talking about his attempted suicide. My intuition told me it was inappropriate to film and he thanked me afterwards for recognising this, and consequently felt more comfortable with my subsequent shooting (which also covered some fairly intimate revelations). The approach Marshall has articulated would have been to carry on shooting until someone asked him to stop, but I believe that there are times when a degree of internal judgment needs to be exercised, which is also in the interests of developing further trust with the film subject. There are cases when messages are not conveyed openly and I believe it is important to stay sensitive to such subtle nuances. Marshall’s relationship with his subjects was so close and so much a part of his identity that a blind spot may have developed in terms of knowing when and when not to shoot.
Claire Ritchie, who appeared more attuned to these sensibilities, did her best to stop Marshall filming a delicate situation just prior to /Gaishay’s funeral: the return of his dead body to his community. Ritchie, who was driving the vehicle carrying the coffin made sure she arrived after sundown. However, despite her deliberate delay, Marshall’s crew (John Bishop on camera) did end up shooting this sequence (Bishop 2009 video interview). Although this never appeared in the final film series, it does appear in another DVD production: *John Bishop Short Films* (2007), as /Gaishay Returns to !ao≠’a.

In this short film, no sooner does the coffin arrive when /Gaishay’s wife, overcome by grief, throws herself to the ground and rolls in the dust. It is without doubt a dramatic emotional moment and extraordinary footage but presents a dilemma regarding how, when, or even whether, a camera should be used in sensitive situations. In fact, John Bishop used this short film for educational purposes at an ethnographic film workshop at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in Philadelphia in 2009. As a cameraman, Bishop stressed the importance of getting the impact of an event “without exploiting its exotic sensationalism.” He also drew attention to the importance of access and relationship, in his case, of being with someone (Marshall) who knew the people well. However, the thorny issue remains as to whether such open access is actually being exploited through a high level of familiarity.
THE LAST STRETCH – THE 1990s

From 1992, after a two-year break during which time he had re-married, Marshall began returning to Nyae Nyae throughout the 1990s to catch up on what was happening, to conduct interviews with the main characters (for voiceover purposes), and to take a stand against the new Foundation management and its new powerful donors who were abandoning support for farming and shifting policy toward wildlife conservation and tourism. However, even when Marshall was absent from Nyae Nyae, he faxed careful directions to a number of his ‘shooters’ about the events he wanted documented, detailing how he wanted them covered, right down to camera angles and shots in the case of the Conservancy opening festivities (Marshall 1998a). Marshall also requested Lloyd Ross to shoot ‘under cover’ footage of Nhoma camp, a Bushman tourist enterprise in Nyae Nyae. His suggestion was to use artifice: “I think you might be able to film these things and go on a trophy hunt if you said you were making an on spec video of a trip to Bushmanland that could help to promote tourism and trophy hunting” (Marshall 1998b). This illustrates the degree to which, especially in the final stages of shooting A Kalahari Family, Marshall felt somewhat paranoid. In view of his position being diametrically opposed to what was happening on the ground this is not surprising. Like an investigative journalist working on a sensitive exposé of high-level corruption, Marshall started going to some lengths to cover his tracks, and obtain useable footage which could expose the tourism enterprise for what he saw it to be (people dressing up in skins playing Bushmen for wealthy visitors). Using subterfuge marked a departure from Marshall’s previous attitude to shooting: “I’ve never shot anything hidden. I’ve never shot anything like spying” (Marshall 1993:151). By the late 1990s, however, while shooting material for Part 5 of A Kalahari Family, he was deeply entrenched in a partisan position and needed all the visual evidence he could obtain to illustrate the Death By Myth theme and use it to expose those whom he saw as its purveyors.

SHOOTING RATIOS

One of the frustrating things for the cameramen employed by Marshall was knowing that much of the material they shot would never be used. Ever since the 1950s, Marshall had been used to a very high shooting ratio and often didn’t know when to stop. John Bishop has described his own frustrations knowing that for all his efforts to get good footage, not much would find its way into the final film series. He has described the ethos behind Marshall’s film series as a ‘juggernaut of shooting and not a juggernaut of producing.’ Bishop illustrated this with reference to his final
days in Nyae Nyae and his fond farewell to Kxao Debe with whom he had become friends. Marshall quite simply didn’t want to stop shooting and it ended up being a “two magazine goodbye” (Bishop 2009 pers. comm.).

In the larger timeframe, Marshall’s desire for more footage was also apparent. Other people on the project including Bishop and Ritchie thought the film series should close at the elections in 1989 or at Namibian Independence in 1990. However, Marshall was insistent on keeping the cameras rolling because he didn’t think he had told the whole story. In retrospect it appears that Marshall’s intuition was correct, for the 1990s proved not only to be the unraveling of much that had been achieved by the Ju/'hoan communities throughout the 1980s, but illustrated the disastrous impact of development when it loses touch with the grass-roots communities it is supposed to target. As Robert Gordon has written:

Marshall and most viewers… believe that Part Five, Death by Myth, is the most important, if most controversial, of the series. I agree… because it is one of the first attempts to visualize the organizational problems of non-governmental organizations… Much NGO “aid” does not contribute to the prosperity of the recipients, but rather assists in shoring up relations of domination (Gordon 2003:119).

PART 5: DEATH BY MYTH

The beginning of Part 5 of A Kalahari Family starts on a positive note. During Marshall’s two-year absence in the early 1990s, an invasion by Herero pastoralists into Nyae Nyae was successfully dealt with by the Nyae Nyae Residents Council, which, in the newly independent Namibia had been recognised and given full backing by the Government and support from the police. Tsamko is portrayed at the zenith of his role as a statesman for the Ju/'hoan community at the Namibian Lands Conference where he wins the respect of many, including the Prime Minister (AKF5 02:30).

Marshall returns in 1992 and inspects the farming communities including Qui Chapman’s newly established farm which is a model for other communities. Following a reflection upon the changes over the past 40 years, Marshall visits Kxao Debe’s farm where he meets two Italian tourists who believe passionately that Bushmen should have only the necessities of life: enough for living and eating - not many things, just the bare essentials. This is the perfect segue for Marshall to launch into a detailed explanation of the Bushman myth.
THE MYTH ARTICULATED

The sequence on the Bushman myth (AKF5 12:00) makes use of archival footage, photographs and paintings to show early depictions of Bushmen as the poison-arrow wielding ‘feared other.’

Early rendition of the Bushmen Myth: the portrayal as ‘feared other’ (Image courtesy of Documentary Educational Resources).

The myth of the ‘feared other’ evolved in the 1970s into the myth of Bushmen as part of Nature. In the 1980s, this fed the Apartheid government’s grand plan to establish a game reserve in Nyae Nyae which if implemented would have led to starvation. Although the game reserve project was successfully curtailed, the myth was not. Volker Grellmann, a trophy-hunting concessionaire, firmly believes people can survive ‘out there’ with nothing (AKF5 13:32). Marshall then uses the footage of Jamie Uys making The Gods Must Be Crazy (AKF5 13:41), the most famous evocation of the myth, to cleverly deconstruct it, with his voiceover explaining the real backgrounds of the ‘actors’. The fact that this expository sequence on the Bushman myth lasts for 3½ minutes indicates how important Marshall felt it was for the audience to take a step back from their own projections and examine its effects.

The next sequence shows Tsamko addressing the camera with angry gestures proclaiming perhaps the most damming yet insightful statement from an indigenous person about filmmakers and their mythmaking: “There are two kinds of films. Films that show us in skins are lies. Films that tell the truth show us with cattle, with farms, with our own water, making our own plans” (Tsamko ≠Toma AKF5 15:26). This statement was not spontaneous but was reconstructed for the camera. Megan Biesele heard the original comment in 1989 when she was Director of the
Nyae Nyae Development Foundation (Biesele 1999:138). Although recognizing the importance of Tsamko’s words, she has suggested that there are dangers in reframing such events through reconstruction. However in this instance, the angry sentiments displayed by Tsamko in the film were, I believe, completely genuine. In the 1980s I often heard him proclaiming his identity as a farmer, proud of his cattle and his ability to make his living in this way.

THE MYTH MADE POLICY

Subsequently, *Death by Myth* starts to reveal how the myth has played out in terms of development policy in the 1990s. The new training centre at Baraka, which had been imported from South Africa, contains no agricultural or technical training or anything related to food production. Although there are now thirty-five communities, Tsamko’s leadership role begins to fade as the expatriate Foundation staff led by a Windhoek-based German named Axel Thoma, come to dominate policy-making.

Marshall has been accused by many academics in anthropological circles for his demonising of Thoma, as will be subsequently discussed. In the film we see Thoma clearly speaking his mind, and there is undeniable manipulation involved in his trying to persuade people to go back to hunting and gathering. Despite the fact that the Ju/'hoansi had only recently, and very effectively, ousted Herero pastoralists through the recourse to, and with support of the Government, Thoma, in an odd take on the new democratic dispensation following Namibian Independence, tells the Ju/'hoansi that “this country has a government, we are not the government.” He uses the spectre of another invasion, warning them that Nyae Nyae is communal land, not their land. “If we don’t make this area… a wildlife Management Area then the Herero will come with their cows” (AKF5 22:00). He follows this threat with the seduction of big money: “We are so lucky. We might get money from America to help us to buy game… to drill boreholes for game… the Co-op can earn a lot of money from wildlife management” (AKF5 22:51).

We subsequently witness Marshall arguing with Thoma who appears hooked not simply on earning funds from wildlife, but on a more insidious agenda to maintain the ‘culture’ (which in his interpretation appears inseparable from the means of resourcing food, an equivalence inherent in the Bushman myth). He claims support from the Minister of Lands: “Minister Hausiku says he respects hunting and gathering as a land use system of Bushmanland… If we want to maintain
the culture here, we have to get young people to learn it again and maintain it” (AKF5 23:58).
Thoma’s words, through their use of the imperative, not only resonate with the mythic discourse but display, with remarkable clarity, his missionary-like zest: “It is partly our duty to support this idea and possibly to get good hunters here to start educating young children again” (AKF5 25:06). Thoma is supported in his ideas by Dr. Megan Biese, the anthropologist invited by Marshall to run the Foundation in the late 1980s who, when I first worked with her, prior to the influx of big donor funds, had seen the establishment of farming communities as a key priority. She clearly felt that things had changed however in the new Namibia and lays part of the responsibility for this on Marshall’s own shoulders:

By some miracle of media, a lot of which has to do with your films earlier having grasped the imagination of a much wider audience in the world, this group of people has been able to get the microphone of southern Africa to listen to it; and it is leading the way frankly in land-use planning, in this country (Biese AKF5 24:18).

Marshall’s narration expresses dismay that films he shot in the 1950s would be used to influence planning in the 1990s, and his reflections on this folly are accompanied, with no shortage of irony, by iconic images of modernity enjoyed by a new generation of Ju/’hoansi: cars, computers & ghetto blasters:

I wasn’t so keen on having film I shot in the 1950s influencing planning in the 1990s. Even if they could survive, who would want to go back to the old life? Not Kxao Moses with his car, not his wife playing solitaire. Not the kids rocking in the evening (Marshall AKF5 24:41).

THE KITCHEN DEBATE: FOOD AS NECESSITY OR MEDIA SPECTACLE?

There follows a sequence shot in 1992 labeled by Ritchie on the film transcript as the “Baraka Kitchen Discussion,” but which Marshall, with his love of history and puns, referred to as the ‘Kitchen Debate’ referring to the exchange, held in the kitchen of a model American suburban house (on July 24, 1959), between US Vice-President Nixon and USSR Premier Khrushchev, concerning the merits of two competing economic systems.

In the Baraka prefabricated kitchen hut, Marshall debates the future of Nyae Nyae with Meagan Biese, Axel Toma and other expatriate development workers. A handwritten note by Claire Ritchie on the film transcript marks this sequence as “where the rot started”. Axel and the others were simply not interested in Marshall’s concerns and most importantly they appeared not to have
grasped the idea that food security/self sufficiency was the starting point for any kind of planning. If that base was not secure, then any talk of preserving the culture by a return to the high-risk nutritional strategy of hunting and gathering would be a farce disempowering rather than empowering people through the very real fact of hunger.

Over this discussion in the film series, Marshall’s visuals includes footage taken (AKF5 26:56) during a 1992 visit by indigenous Sami and Australian Aboriginal people who had come to Namibia for an indigenous peoples conference. The postmodern spectacle of one indigenous group being filmed by another has a bitter twist in that one group had video cameras and microphones, and the others had meager sticks of honeycomb and numerous bee stings. In the raw footage for this sequence (HSFA 2005:11.12-73) Marshall tries to tell one of the Aborigines: “People don’t do much of this gathering, this is a media event” but his comment does little to detract attention from people (including the Indigenous guests) getting the usual tourist shots. Meanwhile, TV crews ensure the whole event is also being covered for the benefit of mass audiences. Marshall’s rushes from this event, while not depicted in full in A Kalahari Family, act as an illustration of the rising tide of media spin in the 1990s occurring at all levels worldwide as public relations became the must-have for anyone with power to persuade. Seductive media images had become invaluable in swaying public opinion. Scenes of contemporary Ju/'hoansi gathering honey from a baobab tree could easily engage the popular imagination. Conversely, images of Bushmen farming would be a PR man’s nightmare. Television networks interested in audience figures and ratings love the myth, while reality falls by the wayside along with the people living it.

IMPLEMENTING THE MYTH

In 1993, Marshall returns (32:28) to discover /Qui Chapman has been fired by the Foundation and that all farming support has ceased. We get the first insight into the role of the major donor, USAID (US Agency for International Development) and its LIFE (Living In a Finite Environment) program, which is promoting the establishment of a Nature Conservancy in Nyae Nyae. During an interview in which she swings from myth to reality, USAID Director, Barbara Belding, promotes the Bushman myth (of Ju/'hoansi as essentialist hunter-gatherers and therefore natural wildlife managers) as a sound basis for policy while simultaneously (as an aside) recognising it is indeed a myth:
…they seem to have the capability because of their society to do this [manage wildlife], and because traditionally, it was a capability that they had. Sometimes I think there is a lot of myth involved in how much more special the Bushmen relationship with the natural environment was than for instance any other people (Barbara Belding, AKF5 36:24).

This interview Marshall obtained at USAID’s Windhoek office is a clear indictment of the insidious power of the myth. It can drive policy, even though intelligent people in the policy implementation machine clearly understand its fallacy.

A PLAN FILLED WITH LIES

In search of how the policy was translated into action, Marshall gets hold of a copy of the Foundation’s annual report (AKF5 38:20) which both he, and the Ju’/hoansi to whom he shows it, recognise as being filled with lies. He draws attention to a statement appearing in the report that the Ju’/hoan diet consisted of 80% bushfoods, a statistic which according to him had not been true since the 1950s. When Marshall subsequently showed the report to Tsamko, the latter was furious: ‘It’s you who wrote that, you white people. You long hairs do these things. No Bushmen would do these things… No Ju’/hoan tells lies like this!’ (AKF5 43:18). Such lies, if believed by the Foundation and donors would, Marshall explains in his narration, never lead them to assist people to farm and feed themselves. Indeed the $2 million budget in the report was mostly allocated for salaries, vehicles and game purchases but contained no funds for farming assistance.

At a meeting in Baraka between the Foundation, the Farmer’s Co-op, USAID and WWF, Department of Nature Conservation, Thoma explains how US financial support had been granted and a green light given for the natural resource management program in Nyae Nyae to start. The WWF spokesman adds: “We (WWF) are committed to assisting agendas that will assist the Bushmen living the way that they have, in harmony with the natural resources” (AKF5 39:16). The first Ju’hoan voice to be heard at the meeting belongs to Tsamko who is not taken in by the sweet talk from WWF but wants to know what is being done about the problem of lions killing cattle in the communities.

Despite softly toned reassurances from the Nature Conservation officials and Foundation staff that problem lions and leopards would be captured and sold, Marshall’s narration explains that despite extensive studies made on predators throughout the 1990s, none were ever sold or killed for decimating the small Ju’/hoan livestock herds. The policy has remained unchanged into the
millennium. When I shot *Bitter Roots* in 2007, I learned from /Naishay at /Gautcha that leopards and lions were simply captured and released in the adjacent game reserve further north whereupon they returned to prey again on livestock owned by the communities.

By 1993, as the film series shows, numerous consultants were being employed in Nyae Nyae for all manner of studies, the skeletal paper remains of which lie scattered amidst the Baraka ruins, pictured in the opening sequence of *Bitter Roots*. However, as Marshall travelled round the communities he realised how very little real assistance people were getting and how dissatisfied they were. They sought a meeting with the Foundation and wrote a letter signed (marked) by over 200 people. Because other Co-op representatives were afraid of losing their jobs, Tsamko was the only one to sign, but the petition was anyway ignored.

**TOP-DOWN POWER AND PATERNALISM**

Part 5 of *A Kalahari Family* appears to contain significantly more expatriate or non-Ju/'hoan characters. The reason for this is that the ambit of the former now constitutes the fulcrum of power where the future fate of the Ju/'hoansi is being determined, and thus the ‘outsiders’ have become a central part of the unfolding epic.

When Marshall returns in 1994, he observes the multitude of new projects managed by expatriates as well as a new manager, Mark Spoelstra from the Netherlands. However, a real eye-opening hegemonic shift is apparent when Marshall’s attempts to document an almost all-white expatriate meeting at the Waterberg resort, some 300 km from Nyae Nyae, where the future of the Ju/'hoansi and their land is being worked out. At the meeting are representatives from the Foundation, USAID, the Namibian Wildlife and Tourism department and the World Wildlife Fund but only three Ju/'hoansi. Marshall attempts to enter the meeting armed with a small videocamera, offering to contribute, but is prevented from entering or having any involvement whatsoever. The brief encounter is captured nonetheless since, as Marshall’s narration states: “I forgot to turn my camera off.”

Marshall interviews some of the participants after they come out of the meeting and their comments (spoken with a degree of trepidation) are revealing. Barbara Wyckoff Baird of USAID informs the camera in her interview that some of the Ju/'hoan participants had said that hunting and gathering was critical to their food security (Marshall reminds the audience that they all had
well paid jobs, mostly funded by USAID and WWF). Neil Powell, an Australian Land Use planning consultant tells the camera however, that he believes the Ju/'hoansi present had been primed by individuals in the Foundation to say those kind of things (AKF5 50:48). Kxao Moses, Tsamko’s brother expresses his concern about what is being discussed, seeing the threat of another kind of game reserve, however he knows the reality of the new power structure: “The bosses are two whites: Mark and Axel. They make the decisions, they control everything” (AKF5 51:00). Neil Powell then sums up the situation: “Donors and money play a big role in Bushmanland and really serve to disempower communities” (AKF5 51:17). Similar observations were subsequently made in a published paper by another consultant hired by the Foundation in 1994 to work on strategy for controlling impact of tourism in Nyae Nyae (Garland 1999:85).

The segregation between expatriates and Ju/'hoansi in Nyae Nyae in the mid 1990s has been described by Garland (1999:85) and is incomparable to the atmosphere when I worked in Nyae Nyae in the 1980s, a period when the Foundation had very little donor funding. I make the point in Bitter Roots about how closely we worked with people back then. The situation in the 1990s was stirring huge discontent and it is to the credit of the Ju/'hoansi that they eventually took action to effect change.

REVOLUTION AND REPERCUSSIONS

Perhaps the most controversial and widely debated scene in A Kalahari Family, if not the entire Marshall corpus of work, is the scene when, in the course of a meeting lasting several days, the Ju/'hoan Farmers Co-operative fires the Foundation Manager, Axel Thoma and his deputy, Mark Spoelstra (AKF5 58:32). What might be regarded as a defining moment of post-colonialist awakening in Nyae Nyae has, in some academic circles in anthropology, been subsequently downgraded to a distorted representation of Ju/'hoan decision-making.

In 1995, a preview screening (of the still unfinished series) at the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Film Festival resulted in the publishing of an open letter criticising the film by eighteen anthropologists led by Megan Biesele. The objections focus on a particular scene where, as the letter describes:

…young NNFC leaders disgustedly oust development worker Axel Thoma from an NNFC meeting. The views of more conservative Ju/'hoan statespersons, who objected to the ousting are not represented in the film… The filmed NNFC meeting must be understood in the context of communication and power gaps between older and younger leadership factions. The younger
members represent an important departure from “traditional” Ju/'hoan social equity… Elders who were concerned that their minority community was represented as uncooperative toward development feared that they might alienate government planners. Here, the NNFC’s desire to work with promising government initiatives – concerning wildlife management – conflicts with that of Marshall (Biese et al. 1996:15-16).

The letter appears to be a covert defense of the discourse led by Thoma regarding his land use plan for Nyae Nyae. In his published response to this letter, Marshall immediately defended his position and suggested the anthropologists had missed the point:

Whereas the decision to fire the NNDFN management did not arise from a gap between older and younger NNRC leaders, it had a lot to do with money and power… The dismissals followed a shift away from grassroots help for self-support in the communities to a policy of trickle-down from donor money focused on Baraka and from an attempt by Axel Thoma to control Nyae Nyae in the name of wildlife management (Marshall 1996a:15).

Marshall also questioned the source of the complaint in view of the plaintiffs’ letter which proclaimed: “Knowledge of the NNFC’s concerns about A Kalahari Family was gained from staff members [of the NNDFN]” (Biese et al. 1996:15). The staff members were not identified. Furthermore, Marshall believed that the letter discredited the democratic decision-making of the Nyae Nyae Residents Council “To characterize their decisions as the machinations of a few young men is to discredit the NNRC” (Marshall 1996a:16).

In the final version of Part 5 of A Kalahari Family it is quite clear that the NNRC decision to fire Axel Thoma was not simply a generational issue. Old Bo, from Chokwe (who also features as a village elder and successful farmer in Bitter Roots) proclaims: “If you are guilty you are guilty! And you shouldn’t stay with the people. You should get out!” (AKF5 56:56). Old Bo stands with those who want Axel Thoma to leave as does the respected elder /Qui Djo, who started one of the first farming communities at N≠amtchoa. The Council had taken a stand against a top-down approach. It remains surprising and regrettable that more anthropologists had not seen the democratic decision of the NNRC as something to be congratulated rather than criticised.

At the time, Marshall explained his reaction as one of relief that the Council had found its voice: “When the Council fired Axel I hoped that the myth of Ju/'hoansi going back to hunting and gathering had gone with him” (AKF5 59:17). Marshall left Nyae Nyae in 1994 with hope that donors would not listen to people and that support for farming would once again be forthcoming.
TRIUMPH OF THE MYTH

Perhaps the ultimate triumph of the Bushmen myth occurs when the very people who have been mythologised resign themselves and support its implementation. Kxao Moses, who spoke English well, had been sent to conferences around the world in the early 1990s proclaiming the importance of bushfoods for income and income generation (AKF5 59:37). Such footage illustrates how effective USAID and WWF had been in delivering the message that the conservancy would make a lot of money for people. Clearly, the seduction of money and power can occur in any culture but one might ask the question whether it is fair to portray Kxao Moses as an apparent puppet of powerful forces and an opportunist. However, in the following sequence, Marshall shows that it was not only Kxao Moses whose head was turned by the powerful machinations of USAID. Marshall shows a video letter he had received from Tsamko, and we see the latter somewhat belligerently proclaiming: “I, Tsamko am going to make a conservancy in Nyae Nyae! People will have work and make money! Trophy hunters will pay us money, filmmakers will pay us!” (AKF5 1:00:27).

The euphoria does not last long. Marshall questions how much the Ju/'hoansi had really understood about what they had agreed to. It is not long before Marshall receives a letter from Tsamko, an extract of which is quoted from in the film. The main text from the letter, dated 1st November 1996 reads as follows:

The reason why we want you to visit us is very simple, this is because you have worked with Ju/'hoansi for many, many years and sometimes we need your advice or rather sharing some ideas. This new staff of which we are working together don’t have much knowledge about Ju/'hoansi people, that’s why we need you please…. We don’t want people to make decisions for us but we want them to help us with some ideas but not making or telling us what to do (Tsamko ≠Toma et al. 1996).

REGRET

Following this request Marshall returns in 1997 and discovers from /Gunda that many people have abandoned their farms and returned to Tsumkwe. Many people /Gunda explains are dying, caught up in the old patterns of drinking and fighting. There is a disturbing scene of someone lying on the ground getting kicked, reminiscent of the bad-old days footage from the 1970s (AKF5 1:03:13). We then see Kxao Debe in one of the most poignant scenes of the series (AKF5 1:03:17). All his cattle are dead he laments as he limps toward the camera explaining his
dire plight and absence of any assistance. The film cuts back to the 1980s with Kxao Debe proudly showing off the verdant productive garden I remember having helped him set up. “With a garden you have a n!ore” he proudly proclaims. But the cut back to the present shows only a land laid waste by elephants.

Marshall learns of the tragic murder of /Qui Chapman which was never investigated. He encounters Tsamko who in his bitterness doesn’t want to be filmed at first, seeing Marshall as just as another filmmaker who makes money with his films while people suffer (AKF5 1:04:46). However, he eventually opens up and his lament, as he slumps on a water trough at Baraka, expresses the powerlessness he feels, so much in contrast to his prior leadership role:

I know I’m a leader and I know I’m not helping people… People need their pumps fixed, their communities developed but now these whites don’t want that. They control the money. I can’t do the things I used to. I’m useless (AKF5 1:07:25).

TRICKLE-DOWN

The complete reversal of a grass roots approach to development is described in Marshall’s narration. The development program now involves more than thirty-two experts in education, wildlife, tourism management and other areas who have written more than a hundred reports, articles and books. Between 1990 and 1997, we learn that the Foundation received more than US$ 3.5 million, most of it having gone into salaries, vehicles, travel, staff expenses, construction and maintenance of Baraka. The Foundation payroll included Ju/'hoansi as managers, clerks, teachers, mechanics, game wardens, tourist guides but according to Marshall there was little evidence of any training. Clearly farming had been abandoned as something to encourage or strive for. Fewer people were producing any form of subsistence and more people were relying on trickle-down from donors.

The economics of trickle-down from the Conservancy proved meagre with the trophy hunting income of N$120,000 split in half to cover Conservancy salaries, leaving only N$60,000 divided amongst 8000 Ju/'hoan members in the year 2000. Despite the abject failure as a viable source of income, the new WWF consultant, Dyani Berger still upholds the myth upon which the policy is based. She proclaims the aims of conservancy as being to increase the wildlife population and attract more tourists. She regards the Ju/'hoansi as natural wildlife mangers. Meanwhile,
Marshall’s ironic editing overlays her wishful thinking with the gritty reality of Ju/'hoansi in a Tsumkwe bar watching TV.

TRAGEDY

The last Ju/'hoan character we see in the film is Kxao Debe. Against all the odds, he has tried to keep his farm going. With no cattle or garden he survives on melon seeds and has a wild look in his eyes (AKF5 1:19:35). His final words epitomise the steadfastness of the Ju/'hoansi and their connection to land: “No-one else can make decisions about your n!ore. You must make decisions yourself about your n!ore. Your n!ore is what you are” (Kxao Xebe AKF5 1:20:10).

Final shots in The Epilogue include the wreck of Kxao Moses VW Golf (AKF5 1:22:29), a shot echoed at the beginning of Bitter Roots. Similarly, Marshall’s findings on his last visit to Nyae Nyae (in 2004) showed that many Ju’hoansi were still interested in the farming program, a point used as an underlying theme in my own film.

THE PERSONAL COST

The final phase of shooting A Kalahari Family appeared traumatic for Marshall, not least because he was personally witnessing so many tragedies unfolding to people with whom he was so close. In 1997, he visited the Kalahari to shoot some final scenes including his own narration. His wife Lexie had accompanied him and the raw footage shows several takes of narration at old ≠Toma’s memorial with his wife recording sound and ≠Toma (Tsamko’s son) on camera (2005:11.15.26 and 27). Marshall appears exhausted with long hair, a bad cold sore, and dirty clothes. In take after take, he keeps forgetting his lines and appears a man lost, his face mirroring the tragedy of Ju’hoansi such as Kxao Debe, whose fate he had just discovered. After Lexie Marshall had left Nyae Nyae he wrote her a letter in his journal dated October 11 1997:

I’ve tried to live in these two worlds. Now the effort on the ground here is too much for me. The only thing I can do now is to try to bring the world here into the flick. I have to close this world and come home. I have these surges of dedication but they peter out in the weight of peoples little desperate real problems here (Marshall 1997).

Portraying the final stages of the story in A Kalahari Family was a burden Marshall felt hard to carry alone. In post-production, he wanted to bring two of the South African crew, Pitchie
Rommelaere and Peter Baker who had worked closely with him on the final shoot, to Boston to assist with shaping the edit. But in the final event, it was only Marshall himself who could tell the story in the way he wanted it told.

POST-PRODUCTION

During the first summer of post-production, Marshall’s intention was to hand over the editing of *A Kalahari Family* to professional editors, but after going through three highly qualified, award-winning editors and not being satisfied, Marshall realized he had to take over the reins himself (Close 2009 pers. comm.). It was however, the employment of Karma Foley as associate editor and associate producer which proved to be what Cynthia Close has described as a godsend in view of Foley’s unlimited patience, and ability to facilitate the vision for the film which Marshall had in his head.

The soundscape of *A Kalahari Family* was vitally important to strike a balance between authenticity and communicating to a Western audience. Already in *N!ai*, Marshall had used voiceover instead of subtitles, and he had often justified this policy with the comment: “People don’t go to the movies to read” (K. Foley pers. comm.). However, *A Kalahari Family* was far more complex as many more voices were involved. Marshall was assisted in the search for suitable English-speaking voices by Pitchie Rommelaere who had crewed for him in the 1990s. Rommelaere, who had a sound studio in Cape Town, recruited South African actors for the project and also provided useful feedback to Marshall:
Your suggestion about using Kxau Moses as Toma is a good idea but a logistical nightmare. If we take that route we should only use Bushmen as I strongly believe that all the voices should come from one source to achieve a sense of one community (Rommelaere 2000).

As has been discussed in Chapter 5, the issue of actors playing the parts of Ju'/hoan characters does raise issues of truth and authenticity, which is presumably one of the reasons Marshall considered using Toma’s (English speaking) son (Kxao Moses) for his voice. However, once he had been persuaded to use professional actors for all the Ju’/hoan voices, Marshall went to great lengths to ensure the voices were the right fit (Cynthia Close pers. comm.).

There was also the question of the narrator. At an early stage in post-production, ways were discussed of how to make the series more marketable for TV audiences. Notes were made on a conversation with Michael Ambrosino (Executive Producer at the Public Broadcast station, WBGH) on 14th July 1994 following his viewing a demo tape of A Kalahari Family. The notes reveal that Marshall’s intensely personal narration in A Kalahari Family evolved significantly from his earlier efforts and he clearly followed the advice given him:

John’s narration is “terrible”. If John is to narrate, he should have a written script and make it personal, “loosen up”. Don’t speak in the third party (sic). If it’s also your story, tell it like it’s your story. The other alternative is to get a professional narrator (Ambrosino 1994).

The Hollywood actor Val Kilmer (who had befriended Marshall as discussed in Chapter 2) volunteered to freely donate his services as the narrative voice. However, it was felt that having a ‘star’ voiceover would detract from the audience really looking, seeing or getting engaged and would act as a kind of barrier (Cynthia Close 2009 pers. comm.). Consequently, in view of his personal passion and ownership of the story, Marshall’s own voiceover seemed by far the best option, especially as he was subsequently able to narrate in a very personal tone which resonated with his deep involvement in the story he was telling.

MUSIC

The musical themes in A Kalahari Family are subtle yet highly effective in creating a charged emotional tone and mood. All of Marshall’s earlier films eschewed non-diegetic music so this marked a significant shift from his earlier work, reminiscent of Karl Heider’s view that any non-
diegetic sound was mostly a distraction (Heider 1976:74). However, Heider has made a qualified statement on the subject:

The most common sort of music in ethnographic films is folksongs or instrumental music from the particular culture, but usually appearing in quite appropriate contexts… The primary criterion for a sound track should be that it reinforces the visuals by providing information which is very complimentary, or that it at least be neutrally silent and not work in opposition to the visuals by introducing vastly new information (Heider 1976:74).

It is debatable whether *A Kalahari Family* can be strictly classified as an “ethnographic film” in terms of Heider’s interpretation. However, the hauntingly beautiful theme-tune which repeats throughout the series is authentic in that it originated from a piece of music recorded during the 1950s Marshall expeditions, called ‘The Red Partridge,’ which was composed by a talented musician, G/ao /Ui, also known as G/ao “/Uashi” or G/ao music. However, for *A Kalahari Family* the theme was re-arranged by Pitchie Rommelaere in the recording studio to give it more depth and reverberation. The result is music which drips nostalgia for the Kalahari of the 1950s. It is often used with the old footage as a kind of *leitmotif* representing the “old ways”. Marshall employed Nicholas England, the musicologist who had accompanied the Marshall’s on the 1950s expeditions, to work on a string arrangement based on the original tune of ‘The Red Partridge’ (played over credits of each film in the series). While there were disagreements between Marshall and several close collaborators regarding the use of England’s more classical version (Karma Foley, 2009 pers. comm.), Marshall was adamant about using the strings arrangement which clearly meant a great deal to him. An entry from his 2001 journal reads: “Keep Nick’s cello for v special, dramtic occasions – should be reserved” (Marshall 2000). This music was very much Marshall’s personal choice and appears to act as a kind of bridge between his double identities in the Kalahari and New England. It also provides a kind of cultural bridge in a film rich in cross-cultural encounters. A similar use of music as a cultural bridge was effectively used in the title music for the UK Granada TV series *Jewel in the Crown* (1984), about the last years of colonial rule in India with the music reflecting the clash of Victorian formalism and inflexibility as displayed in the British Raj, with the more fatalistic philosophy of India.

**BROADCAST**

Tragically, *A Kalahari Family* still remains to be broadcast to an international audience. It was never broadcast in the US despite a production grant of close to $500,000 having been dispersed in 1996-7 by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (Cynthia Close 2009 pers. comm.).
Marshall’s goal was to get the series on TV, for PBS, and he made an original agreement on the basis of fitting a TV format as a 3-hour trilogy. There was certainly interest from broadcasters. Dan Everett, the Director of Broadcasting for WGBH, a public broadcasting service responded to a proposal sent by Marshall in February 1995:

I was interested to learn more about your proposal to produce a three-part documentary series about a family of Ju/'hoan San people… The series will raise important economic and environmental issues as well as matters of cultural and historical importance. A KALAHARI FAMILY has the potential to be of particular interest to our audience. WGBH would welcome the opportunity to consider the completed film for broadcast on Channel 2 (Everett 1995).

However, in view of the fact that the series wasn’t released until 2002, many of the people who had originally green-lighted the program had come and gone from the various TV companies and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. When the series was resubmitted in its final 6-hour form, it was far beyond the limits of acceptable broadcast format. As Close has commented:

As John went along with the editing process he realized it was too big a story from his perspective and all the things he wanted to include in the film. So he ultimately made a 6-hour series: one 90-minute film, three 1-hour films and one 90-minute film. That did not fly for TV. John got the money and said we were going to do certain things and then John broke the rules. He didn’t really care and said: “This is the story I have to tell and this is how I need to tell it.” He was not willing to compromise (Cynthia Close 2009 pers. comm.).

Close has described how Marshall naively thought the broadcasters would recognise the quality of the work and accept the series in its final form. Since its completion the only country in the world where the film series has been broadcast is Namibia (by the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation). However, in that country it certainly had an affect on those who watched it. At the end of Bitter Roots, a government official in Tsumkwe speaks of how he had been so moved by the film series that he had sought work in Nyae Nyae in order to meet and work with the people he had come to love and respect so much through Marshall’s final opus.

Although PBS had refused to screen the entire film series in its 6-hour format, they did eventually offer Marshall a 1-hour or maximum 90-minute slot He replied that he could not do this, but that he might be able to cut it to 2 hours. He initiated the process half-heartedly, but had no real energy or enthusiasm for the project, and shortly after starting he was diagnosed with lung cancer from which he died on 22nd April 2005 (Cynthia Close 2009 pers. comm.). He never made the shorter version of the series.
MARSHALL’S CRITICS

*A Kalahari Family* clearly has the power to influence the public. The medium of film carries the story in such a way as to touch emotions and inspire action. As one critic has remarked.

By the end of Part 5, Marshall’s initial optimism regarding Ju/’hoansi prosperity has turned to a more desperate hope: that these people merely continue to survive. Ultimately, "Part 5" is the equivalent of a frantic message-in-a-bottle, scrawled onto celluloid and cast over the wall of the Ju/’hoansi’s sociological prison in the hope it may inspire others to take action (Scott Foundas 2003).

Other critics focused on more cerebral issues, and were concerned with what they perceived as problems with Marshall’s representation of the Ju/hoansi and the effect that *A Kalahari Family* would have not simply on the Ju/’hoansi directly, but on those with the power to decide on land tenure in Nyae Nyae.

*A Kalahari Family* screened at numerous international film festivals and won several awards including the Basil Wright Prize at the 8th RAI International Film Festival of Ethnographic Film in London. At the American Anthropological Association Conference in Chicago in 2003, following a screening of the series by the Society for Visual Anthropology, Marshall received the Award for Lifetime Achievement. However, despite reaching this zenith of public recognition Marshall’s filmmaking was heavily critiqued by Kalahari specialists in the anthropological community. As Schrire has noted: “The Kalahari Family symposium treated this astonishing and touching work with a mixture of praise, intellectual distancing, and resentment” (Schrire 2003:161).

There was a history of suspicion of Marshall’s work on the series dating back to 1996 when, following a preliminary screening in 1995 at the AAA meeting in Chicago, as already described, an early cut had drawn sharp criticism and resulted in an open letter to Marshall by no less than eighteen anthropologists requesting him to re-examine the way he had represented the decision-making process of the Nyae Nyae Farmers Co-operative. However, the subtext of the epistolary critique appeared more concerned with *realpolitik* and fears of upsetting the new Namibian Government and powerful development agencies. In a subsequent paper, Megan Biesele, one of the signatories of the letter elaborated her concerns:
Contested development agendas behind the film may have relevance to the NNFC’s bid to have remaining Ju/'hoan land managed as a conservancy under emerging Namibian laws. The preview caused concern in government and development circles in Botswana and Namibia, as it tended to portray the Nyae Nyae community as confused and resistant to development efforts (Biesele & Hitchcock 1999:143).

The criticisms in 2003 followed the same theme and were led by distinguished Kalahari scholar Richard Lee as Schrire described:

Lee criticized Marshall’s presentation of foreign advisors and NGOs. He didn’t exactly come out for the World Wildlife plan to get the San back into karosses, but he certainly objected to Marshall’s portrayal of the NGO advisor Axel Thoma, whose guttural German bombast was shown earning an angry dismissal by his San clientele (Schrire 2003:162).

It seems sad that the portrayal of a firm stand taken by indigenous people against external interests and influence should attract such public condemnation especially from those in a discipline renowned for its reflexivity, and self-criticism. While such criticism is cloaked in language which purports to be protecting the Ju/'hoansi from alienating powerful donors and/or the Government, and thus possibly destabilising their land tenure, an observer outside the academic maelstrom might raise uncomfortable questions about those making such criticisms.

The issue of the extent to which the careers of anthropologists or development workers (who tend to be white) are intertwined with indigenous people and the stands they take is hinted at in the early part of my thesis film Bitter Roots when Claire Ritchie relates how all the paperwork strewn around the abandoned office at Baraka “means” people’s careers. It is disturbing to think that not only the success of documentary filmmakers but the careers of some development workers themselves may even unconsciously be tied to the Bushman myth. However, is this conception true or simply projected into films by Marshall or myself?

CONTESTING MARSHALL’S MONOLITHIC VIEW

Megan Bieseles’s further critique of A Kalahari Family (Bieseles 2004:8-9) overtly addresses Marshall’s lack of complexity in portraying the Ju/'hoansi. Despite Marshall’s attempts to work in many, often subtle influences, Bieseles raises a number of concerns: that no community speaks with one voice (particularly in view of what Bieseles sees as a generational split); the unspoken historical privileging of a single extended family; the relationship between the Co-op (now Conservancy) and the Foundation; the post-independence participation of Government, quasi-
government and non-government organisations and new potential sources of revenue. All these issues, as well as a changing nature of the decision making process have been ignored according to Biesele. However, most of these issues are impossible for a filmmaker to redress since there has to be a limit as to what is included in a film; to include all voices is pure wishful thinking as is a film without some kind of privileging of perspective. At a deeper level, the crux of the matter for Biesele seems to be not so much lack of complexity per se, but rather the fact that Marshall’s vision for Nyae Nyae differs from her own:

Omission of such complexity seems to be in service to John’s monolithic view that agricultural development is the only viable future for the Ju/'hoansi in Nyae Nyae. To deliver this overarching message, the dramatic imperative of the film pits John in personal vendetta against European and American development workers who became involved in Nyae Nyae after John went back to the US around the time of Namibian Independence (Biesele 2004:8).

The same arguments of a lack of complexity could be made of Bitter Roots in that only a very limited number of villages were visited, most time was spent at /Gautcha with ‘the family’ and there was insufficient investigation of the relationship between the Conservancy and the Foundation. Clearly, Bitter Roots is sympathetic to Marshall’s “monolithic view,” however, Marshall was not the only friend of the Ju/'hoansi turned long term resident of Nyae Nyae to hold this view. Rushes from my interview footage with Arno Oosthuizen, the Tsumkwe Lodge Manager who makes his living from the kind of cultural tourism which exploits the Bushman myth, records him stating that farming is the only real way forward for the Ju/'hoansi:

There’s no other way, we are not going to get everyone highly educated. We are not going to get factories here. The people have to farm in the end. Tourism can only support x amount of people otherwise it’s going to be a zoo, so that is not the answer. It can help, the hunting concession can help, but again it’s not the solution. To take the mass of the people, it’s farming. Although I am involved in tourism… farming is the answer: education and farming (Oosthuizen 2007).

CASSANDRA’S CURSE

Ironically Arno Oosthuizen’s words were spoken by the same man who ran (and still runs) the tourist concession at N!homa camp, to which Marshall had sent an undercover cameraman in 1998 to shoot the tourists taking happy snaps of Bushmen in skins. It was indeed a surprise to hear someone whom Marshall might have regarded as being in the ‘enemy camp’ to voice an opinion which echoed his own sentiments. If Marshall had lived to hear these words, he would, I am sure, have felt greatly supported in his fight to try and keep farming assistance going, but perhaps it was his curse not to be believed in his lifetime. Like the Trojan princess Cassandra,
who according to the Greek myths had the gift of prophecy, Marshall was able to see long before other people just how important farming would be to the Ju/hoansi. Yet again like Cassandra, he would not be believed in his lifetime, certainly not by those with the power to help.
Chapter 7: Conclusion: Representation of the Ju/'hoansi post-Marshall

If I make the films, me as a Ju/hoan, all the people will believe. Why should I stand up and lie to myself and say well I am wearing skins? I say I am not wearing skins. So I believe the people will believe that it is true - we are no more in skins... It is not how people now are. So I believe that if I make a film by myself, if I shoot it, I can show it to people and then they will believe.

#Toma Leon Tsamko
Interview December 2007

In my introduction to this exegesis, I began with the research question which motivated my thinking when embarking upon this field of study: the essence of this question being how, why and with what effect archetypal or mythic images are rendered in films about indigenous people. My personal experience of encountering John Marshall in the 1980s and my experience of living and working with the Ju/'hoansi of Nyae Nyae encouraged me to frame the question in the context of Marshall’s extraordinary journey from novice cameraman to making some of the most innovative films in the ethnographic film canon. Throughout his filmmaking career in the Kalahari, which evolved over half a century from the 1950s into the new millennium spanning a period of rapid progress in moviemaking technology, Marshall never ceased being creative and innovative in his approach. However, as I have illustrated in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, his innovations were invariably in the service of what he perceived as a more truthful representation of the Ju/'hoansi. They included the use of subtitled speech, synch sound, sequence filmmaking, direct address to camera and his slot theory. After he had begun to realise the devastating consequences of the Bushman myth which I have described in chapter 2, Marshall was increasingly motivated by a desire to make his audience understand that the Ju/'hoansi were not archetypal shadows locked in a mythic stone-age past, but flesh and blood people struggling with huge cultural change. Clearly, issues arising out of the research question I have posed directly affected the trajectory Marshall was to take in his approach to filmmaking in order to counter the Bushman myth and present a truthful portrayal of the Ju/'hoansi, many of whom, as his final film series clearly shows, had become more akin to family than mere film subjects.

Marshall’s methods and philosophy have affected my own thinking about myth, archetype, projection and cross-cultural filmmaking, which is reflected in my thesis film, Bitter Roots,
particularly in certain sequences such as Toma’s reflections on tourists’ perceptions of ‘Bushmen’, and /Ti!kay’s comments on the activities of a documentary filmmaker ‘constructing reality’ at the village of /Namtchoa as discussed in chapter 2. This final chapter will reflect on Marshall’s experience and the lessons he learned through the various stages of his career as a filmmaker and as a humanitarian helper amongst the Ju/’hoansi and how this impacted my thesis film. The wider legacy of his work is examined in the context of future representation of the Ju/’hoansi by filmmakers, some of whom might include themselves.

MAN AGAINST MYTH?

The intellectual needle and thread running through the fabric of Marshall’s ethnographic filmmaking pierces the veil of a subject rarely broached by practicing filmmakers, and as such is an important aspect of reflexive filmmaking. This thread deals with cross-cultural filmmakers’ often unconscious projections upon indigenous people, which construct and consolidate the Bushman myth, and lead to tragic consequences for film subjects: in this case the Ju/’hoansi of Nyae Nyae.

As he has stated, it was his experiences in Nyae Nyae that brought his awareness to this problem and motivated his lifelong efforts to eliminate any myths he might project through his camera and impose on other people (Marshall 1993:20). Since projection tends to be unconscious or semi-conscious, the first step toward withdrawing one’s projections would be awakening to the fact of what one is doing, something Marshall was quick to realise, resulting in his distancing himself from his first film The Hunters (1957) which had been perceived as revealing ‘Bushmen’ as the Jungian archetype of authentic humanity (Wilmsen 1995:202:3) and which Marshall himself came to regard as being too much a product of his own projections. A second, more theoretical step towards removing one’s projections would be to understand what is meant by archetype in documentary and how it manifests therein.

In chapter 1, I discussed the issues of myth and archetype in documentary film, a genre traditionally associated with representing reality, although defining what constitutes documentary itself, not to mention how to ascertain the truth of reality, constitute ongoing debates amongst film theoreticians. In my analysis I have stressed the complexities involved in any approach to understanding how myth and archetype appear in documentary, and I have defined these terms in a way which attempts to explain the numinous power of images which have what Glen Slater has
described as ‘archetypal resonance’ (2005:9). The use of metaphor is key to the power of such images which are not concretised representations, but subtle inferences which point to what is unknown, mysterious and yet curiously resonant with something (perhaps Kant’s ding an sich) in the philosophical mind and therefore compelling.

As I have indicated in Chapter 1, Robert Gardner is an example of a filmmaker whose style Peter Loizos (1993:140) has described as reminiscent of the 19th century Symbolist movement which was anti-realist and believed that what was considered absolute truth (perhaps reminiscent of Platonic forms or archetypes) could only be perceived indirectly through metaphor. Marshall had been highly critical of Gardner’s style, even during their early association in the 1950s, seeing the latter’s idea for a universal portrait of a typical Ju/’hoan woman (as Gardner had proposed for a film to complement The Hunters, to be called The Gatherers) as bending reality too far out of shape (Marshall 1993:71). However, as has been noted, Marshall’s first film The Hunters (1957), which he had edited together with Gardner, does show a tendency toward a universal narrative. Critics have accorded it mythic overtones and archetypal content as indicated in Chapter 3. Moreover, as has been demonstrated in the same chapter, Marshall’s shooting style in the early 1950s displayed projection of his own myths and thoughts about ‘Bushmen,’ which are also revealed in his journal of 1952/53. By the end of the 1950s, however, Marshall was to shift his thinking dramatically away from that of Gardner. He had become more interested in specific events in particular people’s lives rather than drawing out any grand themes, and his shooting style in the late 1950s reflected this interest, forming the sequence approach he adopted for films which were rich in ethnographic information and could be used for teaching purposes as I have described in Chapter 4.

Marshall’s sequence films rejected a narrative convention and were consequently immune from accusations of projection on the part of the filmmaker. However, to his dismay, they were still open to projection of stereotypes by university level student audiences as the research of Martinez (2004) revealed. Cynthia Close has described how it came as a shock to Marshall when he realised that his films could result in less tolerant attitudes toward otherness and that they had in fact further exoticised the Ju/’hoansi (Cynthia Close 2009 pers.comm.).

Marshall’s deep bond with the Ju/’hoansi was a major motivation for his return to Nyae Nyae in the late 1970s as described in Chapter 5. In his subsequent filmmaking he hoped that film viewers would be able to connect with Ju/’hoan people without either projection of racial
stereotypes or a barrier of mythic projection from himself as filmmaker. His efforts to remove these barriers led to what is perhaps his most innovative film, *N!ai the Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980). Indeed, the very theme driving the evolution of Marshall’s filmmaking might be found in the famous two-word epigraph to E.M. Forster’s 1910 novel, *Howards End* (“Only connect”) which was also concerned with combatting otherness, albeit within the class struggle of turn of the century England.

In making *N!ai*, (1980), the direct eye contact in N!ai’s address to the camera is so confronting that the audience’s connection to the real flesh and blood person who is N!ai, is unavoidable. Although the film’s subtitle describes her as a ‘!Kung woman’, there is no doubting her unique character: she is a particular !Kung woman with her own strong voice, feelings, foibles and idiosyncrasies, certainly no Bushman ‘archetype of authentic humanity’. As I have described in Chapter 5, this film was a major innovation in terms of ethnographic film. It not only elevated the status of personhood and individuality in the genre (countering accusations of a universalist symbolic portrayal), but also made practical use of Marshall’s slot theory, which enabled portrayal of increasing levels of complexity, showing how external influences were effecting continual change in Nyae Nyae. The film was capable of stimulating major reactions of outrage upon audiences, who could empathise with the plight of the Ju/'hoansi, as they faced up to incursion from the South African Apartheid regime in its attempts to coopt Bushmen into its military machine and to portray them not as real people suffering the results of dispossession and poverty, but as projections of a Western fantasy created in the mind of feature filmmakers. In the 1980s, the threat of a game reserve being proclaimed in Nyae Nyae was accelerated by *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1981), a popular film which lifted the popularity of the Bushman myth to the extent that it became a global phenomenon believed by millions.

As described in Chapter 5 this was the time when Marshall began his activist video making in an attempt to contradict the myth with the stark gritty reality. In the late 1980s, in the lead up to Namibian Independence, it was hoped that the new SWAPO Government would support the local initiatives in Nyae Nyae and that people would be able to determine their own future. The initial intention of Marshall’s magnum opus, the film series, *A Kalahari Family* planning for which began in the late 1980s as documented in Chapter 6, was to show that the Bushman myth had been overcome. However, in *Death By Myth*, the final part of the film series, Marshall bears witness to the tragic triumph of the myth, consolidated through its adoption by powerful donor agencies. Policy in Nyae Nyae no longer followed the grass roots community aspirations to farm
in order to maintain a hold of Ju/'hoan land, but was dictated by powerful Western conservationist interests which emphasised wildlife conservation and tourism rather than farming. Why had such a talented filmmaker as Marshall, who dedicated his filmmaking life to the cause, failed in his attempts to dispel the myth through trying to represent reality? Does this fact not demonstrate that the cause has already been lost?

WHY MAKE BITTER ROOTS?

The tragic ending of Marshall’s *A Kalahari Family* prompts concern. It answers the question of what happens to a people who have become mythologised through its stark images of abandoned farms, apathy, hunger and a hopelessness numbed by alcohol. The impact these images had upon me were part of the rationale for making my thesis film: *Bitter Roots: the ends of a Kalahari Myth*. I not only wanted to observe the reality for myself, visiting villages to continue the film record, but I also wanted to see whether Marshall’s concerns regarding a Ju/'hoan future focused on tourism and conservation were justified and whether his vision for the way forward through farming rang true despite his powerful and myriad critics. I also wanted to try to get a first hand account of how people, especially the younger generation, felt about the myths that had been projected upon them, something Marshall himself had not addressed directly even in *A Kalahari Family*. My style of filmmaking was significantly different from Marshall’s although my intentions to reveal truth and dispel the Bushman myth mirrored his own. I was acting more in the role of an interactive journalist, not relying on formal interviews but using my camera as a provocateur to elicit responses, trying to work in the fashion of what Edgar Morin has called the *cineaste-plongeur*, the filmmaker who dives with his camera into unscripted reality.

It is my hope that making my film was more than an academic exercise. The classic anecdote regarding the practical use of filmmaking in the ethnographic tradition appears in the account of Sol Worth and John Adair who were introducing the Navaho to filmmaking in the 1960s. Worth was asked by a wise old Navaho whether making movies would do his sheep any good and was forced to admit that this was not the case, whereupon the old man replied “Then why make movies?” (Worth & Adair 1972:4). However, for the Ju/'hoansi, unlike the Navaho in Worth and Adair’s study, the impact of movies has been huge and the strengthening of Bushman myth through movies have undoubtedly, albeit indirectly, harmed their livestock and their livelihood.
ADDRESSING CONSEQUENCES OF MYTH-MAKING

A relatively recent socio-economic survey of the Ju/'hoan communities by anthropologist Polly Wiessner gives detailed figures on the situation in Nyae Nyae, and gives plenty of hard evidence of the problems of getting enough calories and cash currently faced by Ju/'hoansi. Such problems have been exacerbated through the myth-reinforcing movies about Bushmen: “Myths fostered by the media romanticize the foraging way of life as something to be preserved at all costs” (Wiessner 2003:149). The current picture painted by Wiessner’s survey is one of dependency on food handouts which was far from the case in the 1980s when the Ju/'hoansi were establishing themselves as small scale farmers and were still “owners of the future”.

Although statistics link to quantifiable facts, films can connect to people and their plight in a visceral way. As Wiessner herself points out, referencing both her own research and *A Kalahari Family*, “Figures on subsistence income, social ties and demographic conditions support Marshall’s portrayal of decreasing self-sufficiency, though in comparison to film, these figures are but a pale means of exposition” (Wiessner 2002:158). Since films have been responsible for perpetuating the Bushman myth, film would still seem to be the best medium to counter it.

During my brief visit, I was not able to visit many villages but at those I visited and filmed, I found a similar story to that recorded by Marshall three years before my visit, and a year before his own death. In a report he compiled on 21 villages in Nyae Nyae, for Chokwe village he states:

Protecting installations in villages like Chokwe where people are farming with livestock are the priority. When people are producing a viable subsistence, supporting themselves and not entirely dependent on welfare and chance, confidence revives and community stability grows. Hunger level 0 to 1 at Chokwe. There are 78 residents (one absent): 52 cattle, 33 goats. 4 people have jobs and 4 receive pensions. A good rain crop was partly ruined by elephants. But Chokwe girls – seen here fixing each other’s hair, are concerned with their appearance, not just their hunger… (Marshall, 2004a)

In *Bitter Roots*, the village of Chokwe provided strong visual images that support the case for subsistence farming as the basis for other income generating activities which can build on this, activities such as tourism, conservation and even trophy hunting. However, these latter activities should be seen as secondary. Without the primary establishment of a farming base, hunger and
dependency prevail. It was the Bushman myth that gave rise to the belief that it was still possible for people to subsist on foraging, yet as Wiessner points out:

Nyae Nyae is one of the few conservancies in the world that was formed among a people who have lost the means to feed themselves through basic subsistence activities. This situation cannot be rectified by handouts generated from trophy hunting or wage labor for some 10-20% of the adult membership. In order to preserve the social fabric, every individual must be given the opportunity to support his or her family, assist kin, and work towards a better life (Wiessner 2003:158).

The evidence, both from demographic surveys of diet and from filmic evidence in the villages, points to farming as the basis for food security, just as it had done in the survey conducted by Marshall and Ritchie in the early 1980s (see Marshall & Ritchie 1982). Furthermore, as Marshall demonstrated in *Death By Myth*, part 5 of his film series, which documents the history of Nyae Nyae in the 1990s, it is clear that the reason a strategy of farming assistance had not been followed was a fundamentalist belief in the Bushman myth by those with the power to affect policy in Nyae Nyae. This is why the film medium and message against the myth is so important to get across and why Marshall’s work is so important in this regard. It affects real peoples’ lives.

In terms of communicating the message, Marshall did all he could with regard to film. On a level of practical grass roots development, he was similarly engaged. Even after the completion of *A Kalahari Family*, on his last visit to Nyae Nyae in 2004 he was still busy making recommendations concerning what could be done to protect water installations from elephants, and build up self-sufficiency through farming. His overarching message however, to anyone who would still listen, remained the same: to try and stop people believing in the myth:

The trickle-down policy of “wildlife management” for the tourist and trophy hunting interests is based on the myth that the people of Nyae Nyae are “natural wildlife managers” because of their “culture” and could and should subsist by hunting and gathering. The myth-based policies were backed by large grants to the NNDFN – over US$3,000,000 – from donors like USAID and WWF. The myth and its negative impact on people’s lives can begin to be corrected if the NNDFN and NNC plainly acknowledge that people cannot produce enough to eat, let alone an adequate diet, by hunting and gathering (Marshall 2004a).

Marshall also tried (unsuccessfully) to re-employ Frikkie Farrel, a Namibian farmer who had assisted Ju’/hoansi on practical farming matters in the early 1990s (part 3 of *A Kalahari Family*), asking him to return to Nyae Nyae (Karma Foley 2010 pers, comm.). It was not long however before Farrel himself died in November 2011 (#Toma Tsamko 2011 pers. comm.).
FILM AGAINST MYTH

I believe that my film, Bitter Roots, is carrying on the Marshall tradition not only in trying to portray the plight of the Ju/'hoansi as accurately as possible but also by making a political statement. Just as Marshall’s N’!ai sets itself in opposition to the South African Apartheid authorities, and Part 5 of A Kalahari Family sets itself in opposition to large donor organisations, USAID and WWF, so Bitter Roots is similarly ‘engaged,’ taking up a stance against those whose money, influence or filmmaking has disempowered the Ju/'hoansi, through locking them into the myth that they are essentialist hunter-gatherers and culturally unable to farm.

I have tried to screen the film as widely as possible, including at a number of film festivals. My original intention was simply that the film would encourage audiences to view John Marshall’s films, particularly A Kalahari Family. However, I have found that in its own right Bitter Roots has stimulated debate and even outrage (e.g. at an ethnographic film festival in Taiwan where indigenous people also face enormous challenges) from audiences responding to the way that Ju/'hoansi have been misused and mistreated as a consequence of myth-making. Bitter Roots has also been recommended by anthropologists to be used in teaching courses on indigenous people and the pitfalls of development programs (Rachel Giraudo 2010 pers. comm.). While it was never my original intention to create a film for television, Bitter Roots will, I hope, prove to be a stepping-stone for a broadcast film on similar themes to be made in the future. In view of the fact that Marshall’s A Kalahari Family has not been televised anywhere outside Namibia, there is a real need for films to be shown on television which help dispel the Bushman myth and convey the truth about the Ju/'hoansi and their struggle to control their own destiny.

FILMMAKING AS TESTIMONY AND THERAPY

For me, Bitter Roots as a communication device also faces back towards its film subjects. My return to make the film in 2007 re-opened a door of communication with certain people in the Ju/'hoan community. As Claire Ritchie observed in listing the aims of A Kalahari Family, a key function of the film series was to provide testimony and bear witness (Ritchie 1988:2). When film subjects are filmed and portrayed not as archetypes but as persons to whom the camera bears intimate witness, the camera/filmmaker can act as a kind of therapist, or a confessional vessel, in the form of someone trustworthy who has taken the time, effort and energy to understand people’s problems. Ethnographic filmmaking following the tradition of John Marshall involves a
process of building your film subject’s confidence in you not only as a filmmaker, or
ethnographer but also as a deeply empathetic person. In such cases the relationship becomes
ongoing, the best exemplar of this being Marshall himself whose relationship with, and
commitment to the Ju’/hoansi lasted his entire life.

As I have outlined in Chapter 2, following in the Marshall tradition, it is almost as if one enters
into a relationship of responsibility in choosing to make films which connect with people and
their plight. This is the opposite pole to making documentaries which lock people into an archaic
past through images which lie, whatever acclaim or financial gain such images bring to the
filmmaker. In the tradition established by Marshall, it is the filmmaker himself who becomes
locked, by his own commitment, into a relationship with his film subjects, a relationship which
does not end with the final cut.

I feel a greater sense of personal responsibility towards the Ju’/hoansi after having made the film.
Knowledge is power and power is responsibility. In view of my knowledge of how grass roots
development worked well in the 1980s, and my knowledge of what went wrong, I feel an ongoing
obligation to try to help. Since shooting Bitter Roots in Nyae Nyae at the end of 2007, I have
kept in touch with ≠Toma who has been providing news as to what has been happening in Nyae
Nyae. His latest update is a further indication of how disempowered communities in Nyae Nyae
have become and how a top-down approach to development has been consolidated. On 20th
December 2011 he wrote:

...the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia failed to support and solve problems
within the NNC (Nyae Nyae Conservancy)... It is like there are many advisors which are
confusing the management of the NNC. They are asking money from donors for different projects
of their choice and want us just to accept everything they bring in. They are busy cutting out our
culture. The NNDFN have a relationship with Tsumkwe Country Lodge and they are taking the
decisions what they want to happen in Nyae Nyae must happen and they are not listening to the
community members of the conservancy. I wish you would find donors who are willing to give
money for research on this issue happening between NNC and NNDFN, or find money to invite
some members somewhere and get full report from them about all things about NNC and
NNDFN (≠Toma Tsamko 2011 pers.comm.).

The failure of the NNDFN and donors to really listen to people in the Ju’/hoan communities is as
bad as it was when Marshall visited in 2004. As long as people’s concerns are not recognised and
they are not heard, the future livelihood of the Ju’/hoansi will remain out of their hands and
controlled by those whose perception of them has been transfixed by projections of blinkered
documentary filmmakers as outlined in Chapter 2, which foster the idea that, in Wiessner’s
words, “the Ju/'hoansi do not want, or need, the same standard of living as other rural Namibian citizens or that they cannot forge a similar path into the 21st century” (Wiessner 2003:149).

THE FUTURE: CULTURE AS PERFORMANCE OR A SHARED ANTHROPOLOGY?

The future for fair and truthful visual representation of the Ju/'hoansi does not look promising. John Marshall’s anti-myth crusade was also partially motivated on a dark vision, a fear that in the name of preservation of ‘culture’ the Ju/'hoansi would be reduced to becoming mere performers for Western audiences. As Robert Gordon has described:

If the Ju/hoansi are framed within an NGO conservancy/tourism paradigm, Marshall’s concern is that they will have to perform a degraded form of their allegedly native culture. Such performances before a moneyed audience may commit them, unknowingly and incrementally, to the perpetuation of economic dependence, stunted socio-economic development and power dynamics reminiscent of colonialism (Gordon 2003:111).

One of the promoted advantages of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy was to earn funds from film crews. However, most film crews are on short visits. Budget and time conscious producers already have in their minds the kind of shots they need, most commonly images providing the archaic “Bushman” look. When the prestigious and lavishly shot BBC TV series Human Planet made a program on ‘Hunters’ in 2011, Nyae Nyae was of course on the itinerary of the film crew who shot the usual stock images, reinforcing the Bushman myth. Claire Ritchie has described a sequence from the series shot in Nyae Nyae:

…two guys in skins, one older, the other his 'apprentice', the former assisting the latter on his first kill. They are after kudu so they burn the grass around a pan (aerial shot of small circle of water, which I don't recognise, unless it is up in the Kaudum, or library footage), build a hide and settle down to wait knowing that the kudu have to come and drink. It is a long wait, a leopard passes. Finally a kudu appears, is shot and tracked and they are very happy! …I just glimpsed on the credits: Thanks to the Jo'osi (sic) of Namibia and Estelle Oosthuizen (Claire Ritchie 2011 pers. comm.).

Undoubtedly, payment for this filming would have been forthcoming and generous, but ironically not to the Nyae Nyae Conservancy but rather to Nhoma (tourist) village. This village (outside the Conservancy) is plugged into the tourist circuit through the efforts of Arno and Estelle Oosthuizen (the latter included in the Human Planet credits). Arno Oosthuizen is featured as an interviewee in Bitter Roots, and as noted at the end of Chapter 6, he insisted that farming is the only way forward for the Ju/'hoansi. The ecotourism project he helped established at Nhoma while facilitating an additional form of income for some Ju/'hoansi, also provides substantial
tourist dollars for him and his wife. The problem is that such ‘Bushman’ villages, set up solely for tourists, help to perpetuate the Bushman Myth since filmmakers also use them and the villagers to reconstruct (and represent) ‘reality’ through demonstrations, without admitting them as pure fabrications. Furthermore, despite no footage of Ju/'hoansi running down a kudu having been screened in the series, The Human Planet website alludes to dramatic images reminiscent of the Foster Brothers documentary The Great Dance described in Chapter 2. The website reinforces those images and further reaffirms the Bushman myth:

The San bushmen of the Kalahari are some of the best hunters in the world, not only able to track prey like kudu but often also able to chase them down, over many miles, running only on bare feet. By the time the hunter throws his spear, it is already a fait accompli. The kudu is already on the brink of death, too exhausted to get away (BBC 2012).

One of the key questions regarding the future of the Ju/'hoansi is whether they will be content with trickle-down income, and performing historical reenactments which are presented (or marketed) as current reality or whether they take a more creative role in their own representation. The strong streak of independence, the spirit of Ju/'hoansi contra mundum which people demonstrated in the 1980s, suggests that people could, especially with some assistance, seize the initiative in terms of their own representation.

One way to help reframe perceptions of ‘Bushmen’ and return to the Ju/'hoansi sovereign power over their own representation, would be the emergence of Ju/'hoan filmmakers, especially those who would be prepared to explore their own portrayal in films by outsiders. In Bitter Roots, I elicited #Toma’s wry comments on what he thought of tourists and the whole tourism enterprise in Nyae Nyae. However, such comments by the recipients of tourists’ and filmmakers' projections and fantasies are rare in documentary. Unfortunately, during my visit to Nyae Nyae in 2007 I was unable to visit Nhoma, the ‘tourist village’. This village has no cattle and has been deliberately set up for tourists from which it gets its main source of income. As described in Chapter 6, in 1999 John Marshall had sent a cameraman (Lloyd Ross) to shoot there, to show what a tourist village was like and to follow a ‘Bushman foraging tour’ with Arno Oosthuizen as guide. However, the footage (HSFA 2005.11.17-1) does not include any Ju/'hoan people expressing their thoughts about tourists or how they feel at having to dress up in skins for them. I believe there is certainly potential for a documentary film exploring the Ju/'hoan perspective, looking at the tourists – a kind of reverse ethnography, or even an ironical take on early ‘contact’ with white people in the comical tradition of ‘Barbakiueria’ (1986), a film which has Australian
Aboriginal people landing on a beach and ‘discovering’ white people in a land they claim is ‘Barbakiueria’ (Barbecue Area).

SHARED ANTHROPOLOGY & INTERTEXTUAL CINEMA

In the last scene in Bitter Roots, there is a shot of #Toma shooting with a camera. I included this shot because I feel it expresses some hope for the future representation of the Ju/'hoansi, by themselves. Before leaving Nyae Nyae in 2007, I interviewed #Toma regarding his interests and ambitions in filmmaking (see Appendix for interview transcript). He had gained some experience previously through helping John Marshall, as assistant camera and sound person. However, he was eager to take his limited experience further and to learn to make films himself with and for his community. His interest was not only in the films about the Ju/'hoan community but also about the history of interaction with white people. He explained how the older people in the community “have a lot of stories about how white farmers were treating them in Grootfontein and here in Tsumkwe – and the white police in Tsumkwe – and all other stories about white people” (#Toma Tsamko 2007 pers.comm.).

Since the onset of video in the latter part of the twentieth century, in many parts of the world, indigenous people have taken up the camera themselves but as Faye Ginsberg (1999) has pointed out, far from this trend signaling the death of ethnographic film as a genre, this trend has widened the perspective and possibilities for the genre. Furthermore, in his concept of a ‘shared anthropology, Jean Rouch foresaw a time of:

a mechanical “cine-eye-ear” which is such a “participant” camera that it will pass automatically into the hands of those who were, up to now, always in front of it. Then the anthropologist will no longer monopolize the observation of things. Instead, both he and his culture will be observed and recorded (Rouch 1995a:98).

In the context of multiple voices in ethnographic film, David MacDougall has introduced the idea of intertextual cinema (MacDougall 1998:148). MacDougall envisages that this process of increasing intertextuality will help “to recast the problem of Self and Other more productively as a set of reciprocal relationships” (1998:149). In this context, one would hope that one day, films will be made by Ju/'hoansi, leading to greater awareness of and reflection on the problem of projection upon the Bushman “other” so helping to defuse the power and influence of the Bushman myth. One also hopes that it will be possible in future that Ju/'hoansi will be able to
make use of the Marshall archive material in innovative ways, fulfilling David MacDougall’s prediction that: “We shall see more ethnographic films re-deploy existing texts and incorporate parallel interpretations” (MacDougall 1998:149).

THE MARSHALL ARCHIVE – TO PRESERVE OR TO USE?

In 2009, in a clear recognition of the significance and importance of Marshall’s work in ethnographic film, the John Marshall Film and Video Collection was added to UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register joining some very distinguished documents including the Diaries of Anne Frank, the Magna Carta and the League of Nations Archives. In the climate-controlled vaults of Human Studies Film Archives at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. lie a million feet of film and countless video tapes, John Marshall’s tangible legacy and a priceless gift to future generations of film scholars as well as to the Ju/'hoansi themselves. However, as John Bishop has commented, “People want to be loved not archived” (Bishop 2009 pers. comm.). What he alluded to is that filmmakers following in Marshall’s footsteps might bring this huge amount of remarkable material to a wider audience with the interests of the Ju/'hoansi themselves in mind.

Bishop regarded *A Kalahari Family* as a Homeric epic made up of various threads from the archives, but so many others remain buried with each thread having the potential to create a fractal branch of its own, and potentially, a veritable forest of sequence films. As a filmmaker who has also had access to the archives, I too can see how many untold stories and subtle nuances they contain. The archives not only document Ju/'hoan history but also bear witness from Marshall’s personal perspective, giving a real feeling of what it was like to be there in Nyae Nyae from the 1950s through to the new millennium. It is interesting to note that only in 2009, more than 50 years after he shot footage in Nyae Nyae, Robert Gardner felt moved to make and screen a short film based on footage he shot in 1958 of ‘The Old Lady’ (Harvard Film Archive 2012). However, unlike Marshall, his use of the archival material did not involve working with contemporary Ju/'hoansi, and this is where I believe the most ethical use of the film archives lies, especially with the emergence of indigenous media making and the widening of the audience demographic to include indigenous people themselves.
RE-VISIONING A GOLDEN AGE IN THE DIGITAL PRESENT

Use of the older 1950s Marshall footage, while being highly valuable from both an archival and aesthetic perspective, could risk further problems of projection, depending on how it is incorporated and edited. Edwin Wilmsen for example has criticised the way Marshall’s editing in A Kalahari Family moves back and forth between former seemingly idyllic times and a grittier, less aesthetically pleasing present:

Marshall juxtaposes footage shot in the 1950s, depicting untrammeled, untroubled peaceful foragers, with the very recent footage – depicting the trials and suffering of those same people. Media-ensconced viewers see only the myth and misjudge the misery. Marshall’s intercutting of historical foraging with contemporary squalor makes foraging seem the better development goal. That goal in turn is reinforced by and reinforces distorted wishes of the gullible public, eager for the reassurances of eternal, perhaps exotic, verities (Wilmsen 2003:115).

Guha Shankar makes a similar point:

The scenes of contemporary Ju/'hoansi life are rendered with a relentless realism. (They are shot with wide angle lens, hand-held camera, and hard-edged video clarity). This style deliberately speaks against Marshall’s previous evocative visions of the Kalahari, especially in The Hunters (1957). It offers overwhelming landscapes, solitary bands of Ju/'hoansi eking out a precarious existence under vast skies, enormous distances, and scorching heat. In contrast to those mythic scenes of distant vistas and enormous unpeopled spaces, the contemporary footage fills the eye with less-than pristine borehole diggers, trucks, dead elephants, scrawny cattle, political rallies, tense arguments and warring armies. The new landscape is saturated, smaller, somehow meaner, and now the camera seems to be unable to find the time to linger as it did over the intimate loving interchanges so beautifully depicted, for example, in Marshall’s A Joking Relationship (1962) (Shankar 2003:136).

In any culture, as events and characters slip into the mists of the past, they have tended to become legendary if not mythic. However, the Ju/'hoansi also face further projections of the Bushman myth and the archetype of beginnings connected with a hunter-gatherer lifestyle which is associated in contemporary Western culture as connoting the archaic beginnings of humanity. In the case of A Kalahari Family, it is clear that much of the shooting from the 1980s onwards was done in difficult and often stressful circumstances, because people were going through a difficult time, and not to reflect this would have been to deny the reality at the time. However, some of the more touching and poignant moments in A Kalahari Family do not merit the above criticisms particularly when in Part 1, the old people, Toma and !U, recall their young days with humor and wisdom of old age in the ethnographic present as I have described in Chapter 6.
JUXTAPOSING THE IDYLLIC PAST WITH A PREFERABLE PRESENT

Perhaps to avoid the default position of mythic projection when screening footage of the Ju/'hoansi in the 1950s, juxtaposition with the ethnographic present would need to stress normality, self-sufficiency and even beauty (such as images from present day Chokwe village) rather than a raw struggle for survival. Situations which are prone to projection and myth making need to be edited in with scenes from normal day-to-day activities to prevent exoticisation. An example of this kind of juxtaposition is Jean Rouch’s portrayal of the Hauka ceremony in *Les Maitres Fous* (1955) during which extraordinary behavior takes place in an event which includes people going into a state of possession, foaming at the mouth, while acting out an exaggerated characterisation of their colonial masters followed by the cooking and eating of a dog. This film could be accused of sensationalising the exotic, showing the film’s subjects as less than human and more akin to something mythic and archetypal – reminiscent of a scene from Euripides’ *The Bacchae*. The film’s narration by Rouch helps the viewer to understand that the ‘madness’ in the film’s title: *The Mad Masters* refers not to the film subjects themselves but rather to their colonial masters. Indeed, one becomes aware that the colonial situation per se was the catalyst for this extraordinary ritual which can be understood as a form of psychological defense against an intolerable situation. However, the images are shocking and disturbing. It is only in the last scene when a deflation from the archetypal to the human dimension of the characters occurs, defusing what could otherwise be viewed as a dehumanising voyeuristic movie. Rouch clearly realised this problem after filming the ritual. In the car on his way home from the ceremony, he remarked to his friend Damoure Zika, who had been recording sound: “We really made a very bad film, it’s very cruel” (Rouch 1978:1008). It was at this point when he realized the need to go out the next day and to see what his film subjects were doing. He subsequently filmed them going about their normal everyday life. Their completely normal, happy demeanor was in sharp contrast to their behavior during the ritual and portrayed them as perfectly ‘normal’ people with good mental health, calmly going about their working lives. In this way, Rouch’s film subjects are rescued from being locked into a celluloid myth of Dionysian dimensions.

THE LAST OF THE TOTEMIC ANCESTORS

Jean Rouch once made a deferential reference to his totemic ancestors, those whom he regarded as having pioneered the field of anthropological film, consisting of anthropologists Gregory Bateson, Margaret Mead and Marcel Griaule, as well as filmmakers Robert Flaherty and Dziga
Vertov (Rouch 1995b:217). However, in the context of ethnographic filmmakers today, our totemic ancestors would surely include Timothy Asch, Jean Rouch himself and John Marshall. Robert Gardner tends to be regarded as something of a fallen angel by those championing ethnographic film in view of his subjective and symbolist style, so for purists in the genre, he would lie outside the above-mentioned triumvirate. However, his pioneering films cannot be disregarded which is why I have made so many references to it in this book.

Timothy Asch died in 1994, and Jean Rouch died in 2004, so Marshall’s death in 2005 marked the passing of the last of these three totemic ancestors. As I have indicated in this thesis, there were working relationships between Marshall and Gardner and between Marshall and Asch. But Marshall is perhaps the glue which links these four iconic filmmakers together for he also had a connection with Jean Rouch, a relationship which is particularly revealing. The two men had met several times and even worked together when Rouch made a ciné-portrait of his ‘totemic ancestor,’ Margaret Mead: A Portrait by a Friend (1978), shot at the first Margaret Mead Film Festival in 1977 with John Marshall recording sound. In the films of Marshall and Rouch there is of course a marked contrast in their approach to reality and fiction but one worth investigating in the context of the nature of truth in documentary.

MYTH, ETHNOFICTION AND IMAGINATION

In this exegesis, I have documented Marshall’s quest for truth in his films about the Ju/'hoansi and his emphasis on factual reporting, getting as close to observed reality as he thought possible. This approach differs significantly from that of his friend Jean Rouch whose films often included a fictive, acted element. In an attempt to bring some balance to what could be construed as a view of Marshall as a filmmaker fundamentally opposed to fiction and the blurring of the boundaries between the mythic and the real, it is instructive to reference his views on the work of Rouch which were recorded a year before his death in 2005. In an interview conducted by Brenda Baugh in 2004, the transcript of which is uploaded to DER’s website, John Marshall aired his thoughts on Rouch’s work which included, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, his excitement and interest in Rouch’s ethnofiction. He was particularly impressed with the way Rouch had created his groundbreaking film Jaguar (1957):

When I saw Jean's Jaguar I thought it was obvious to anyone that it was acted. I believe the story is fiction about truth, like most good films; truth is not the same as real. Partly because of the
acting and invention in the film we meet, identify with and live for a little while in the characters of Damouré and Lam (Marshall, 2004b).

Marshall was not anti-fiction per se, but he drew a distinction when it was presented as fact, coming round to his perennial bête-noire: the way Ju/'hoansi had been portrayed and misrepresented.

I love fiction and some fiction films. Fiction gets way inside us to places where documentary can't reach. (For that matter fiction like Uncle Tom's Cabin can trump decades of reporting and change the world.) My problem is when people present fiction as fact. In the 1980s, the South African Broadcasting Company — SABC — aired a news story showing N!xau, star of The God's Must Be Crazy, coming home from a promotional trip in Japan and going off to live by hunting and gathering in the bush. In reality he bought a house in Tsumkwe. Twenty years later Discovery Channel shot a skin flick showing people playing Bushmen with bows and arrows in Nyae Nyae; the show was presented as current reality. These lies take hold and spread widely. A few months ago I met a young man from South Africa working in a video production studio in London. He strenuously believed that N!xau undressed, took up his bow and arrows and went back to the hunting life (Marshall 2004b).

Although Marshall hugely admired Rouch’s work, his experience of seeing how the Ju/'hoansi had been affected by filmmakers playing loose with reality, and fabricating myths, meant that even with regard to Jaguar he expressed some concerns. As indicated above, Marshall appreciated that dramatic truth could tell a larger, more general truth. However, dramatic truth or myth caters to a generalisation, suggesting a general type, sometimes even an archetype, but with such an emphasis what can get lost is the infinitely variable specific human individuality. Consequently, Marshall still has suspicions regarding acting in documentary unless its dramatic content is made absolutely clear:

Should Jean have been more up front about the acting in a cinéma-vérité documentary? Now I think possibly yes; I have a better understanding of why and how we suspend our disbelief. Maybe the right question is: How typical were the characters in the film, and how alike was their story to the stories of the many who went to seek their fortunes on the Gold Coast? (my italics) I'm sure for many people the reasons for going were more bitter, the journeys were harder and the life at the end was only a little better and often worse; but a little better can mean a lot. I still think the film and its makers were right on. They pulled me in and helped me understand (Marshall 2004b).

It would appear that Marshall had a conservative, even a fundamentalist view concerning truth in documentary, and a dogged determination to try to show truth in his films. However, this admission regarding the work of Rouch is a kind of final confession and concession to the complex nature of truth, and his praise of Jaguar is instructive in this regard. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that in Rouch’s Jaguar the acting and distortion of reality, if it can be
called that, derives from the film subjects’ imaginations. With so many films about Bushmen or Ju//hoansi, the distortions are usually manufactured intentionally by the filmmakers themselves, drawing on their own imaginations to project upon film subjects, who become the passive screen or canvas for their artistic creations.

FILMING TRUTH IN THE SUBJECT’S MIND

Incorporating the best insights of both Marshall and Rouch would seem to be a good way to envisage future representations of the Ju//hoansi and cross-cultural documentary more generally. The anecdote of Jean Renoir (mentioned in Chapter 1), about leaves from nature being far richer as examples to paint than a leaf in the painter’s imagination, reflects Marshall’s concerns to focus on the film subject rather than one’s own imagination in order to adhere closer to truth. However, Rouch suggests a further step toward truth is to portray the inner truth experienced by film subjects themselves by including their acted-out thoughts and fantasies dreamed up from their own imaginations.

In his film *Moi Un Noir* (1958), Rouch’s film subjects are four immigrants from Niger who enter the city of Abidjan in search of work. In adapting themselves to this new urban African environment, they adopt nicknames - Edward G. Robinson, Eddie Constantine (in the role of US federal agent, Lemmy Caution), Tarzan and Dorothy Lamour. The fantasies of the film subjects are carried in their nicknames, which are derived from actors and characters of French and American films. Their imaginative lives, fueled by global culture, provide the mythic identities with which to enter a new world of young Africans moving seamlessly, as Gauthier put it: “from the griot to Hollywood, from tribal myths to the mythologies of contemporary societies” (Gauthier 2002:72). By engaging not only with the subjects but also with their imaginations, one is brought even more closely into their world. As Marshall himself was the first to admit: “When the reality is as pulled together and focused as it was in *Moi, un Noir*, Jean didn't need the enhancement of acting to make a film with a knockout punch” (Marshall 2004).

Although Marshall never adopted Rouch’s style, he greatly admired the flexibility in his approach and his ability to create stories. Marshall recalled his comment to himself following Rouch’s *Chronique d’un Eté* (1960) which, although overly modest, shows the extent of his admiration: “That Jean can direct and do anything. This John just shoots” (Marshall 2004). Consequently, I believe Marshall would approve of using Rouchian methods to elicit the inner imaginative lives
of the Ju/'hoansi. Certainly, as a filmmaker one could deepen both characterisation and content if one chose to focus not on images of an imagined past, as so many filmmakers have done with their recreations which are not even acknowledged as such but on the imagined present and future lying dormant in the minds of the Ju/'hoansi just waiting to be revealed.

In the 1980s, my close friend, young ≠Toma, son of /Gunda and N!ai, often enjoyed performing the role of his iconic hero, the Afrikaans singer and comedian David Kramer. His imitation of this character like so many Ju/'hoan imitations was superb and highly comical, both reverential and sardonic. Furthermore, Ju/'hoansi were not averse to acting the parts of those persons closer to home including John Marshall himself. I recall my young friends, /Gaishay (Tsamko’s son) and ≠Toma mimicking gestures and intonation with an accuracy that had me spellbound and in many cases bent double with laughter. It is possible that portrayals of characters such as Marshall will play a part in the mythology Ju/'hoansi create in their own filmmaking at some time in the future. I believe that creative portrayals by Ju/'hoansi of the white people they have encountered in their history would not only enrich the ethnographic and documentary corpus but also do a great deal to release the vital human presence and iconoclastic energy locked in the amber of the Bushmen myth.

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

Tracing the ethnographic film career of John Marshall might be likened to following the tracks of a Ju/'hoan hunter, for Marshall, was as careful and thorough as his old mentor ≠Toma ‘Stumpie’ in astutely observing the world around him and changing his strategy based on what he observed. However, the prey he sought was no animal but something as animated, a film which ‘worked’ and communicated what he perceived as the Truth. Marshall’s first footsteps in this regard began in the Kalahari, and this is also where his tracks come to an end. One comes full circle to a memorial plaque under a Baobab tree at /Gautcha where, adjacent to the memorial he had erected in honor of his friend ≠Toma, a twin memorial stone lies, erected by his widow, Lexie together with his Ju/'hoan family. It reads: ≠oma Xhosi (Longface), John Marshall, Huixxao, Owner of Helping, 1932 – 2005.
Marshall’s help had been on many fronts. Obviously he had helped the Ju/'hoansi hugely, devoting his life and fortune to try to help them hold onto their land, develop a viable subsistence economy and ensure that they were represented truthfully in his films. His urge to help others stretched to almost anybody he came across, and this stemmed as Kerelwe Ledimo noted (in Chapter 5) from his deep feelings and intrinsically kind nature.

His filmmaking was inseparable from his character, which is why so many people were attracted to him and sought to learn from him. Towards the end of his life, Marshall was increasingly interested in teaching young people enthusiastic about filmmaking. According to Lexie Marshall, his widow, he loved talking to film students at film festivals to which in his final years, he was increasingly invited as a guest of honor.

In January 2005, just a few months before he died, I had written to Marshall about my plans to make a career move into documentary filmmaking. He was delighted to hear this news and straight away wanted to suggest some of his ideas and pass on some key lessons he had learned during a lifetime of filmmaking:

I would like to send you something I have been working on about shooting and filmmaking, especially cv filmmaking although some of the observations apply to all filmmaking – like film grammar. It is work in progress and I would welcome any feedback. It is called USING THE
MEDIUM. It uses clips from A Kalahari Family to illustrate observations about shooting and filmmaking with titles pointing out what to look for and why. It starts with using the medium to make a record and goes into the difference between shooting AT events and shooting IN events. It tries to show why standing outside and shooting AT events is no more objective then shooting IN events by getting in and shooting from angles and distances motivated by the participants – i.e. N!ai from /Gunda’s POV then /Gunda from N!ai’s POV and so on. Shooting IN is what involves the audience with the persons in an event (Marshall 2005 pers. comm.).

If there is one metaphor for the way Marshall respected not just his film subjects but also anyone he met, it was that he immersed himself in the moment, in the human interaction. He was never merely a passive observer, even when he was shooting an observational film, but someone who got in, into what was happening, becoming a part of it, more participant than observer. Through a kind of communion with the person at the other end of the camera he was able to portray persons not types in his films. Rather than projecting his own thoughts about his film subjects, there is a direct empathy with them, which comes through in all his movies and also in documentaries for which he was the cameraman, such as Frederick Wiseman’s Titicut Follies (1967). In Marshall’s case, when he was in, he was ‘on’ which is to say, in that state of mind which Jean Rouch called the ciné-trance when barriers between self and film subject break down and there is a deep sense of connection while shooting. As discussed, this deep connection forms the basis of Marshall’s filmmaking. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Marshall was that, unlike most people, because of his background he could have done anything he wanted with his life, but he chose a life in which his potential to connect with people, who in certain ways were so different, was so completely fulfilled. As Cynthia Close put it:

He loved these people and that seems so real and honest. It’s the only answer, the only way you can explain what he did… A large part of a Kalahari Family… it is indeed a family and as messy as real families are. That was his relationship to the people. It was messy, it was familiar, it was intimate and it can only be explained by love. That is what makes John’s work so unique in the whole trajectory of these kind of films. We can talk about David MacDougall and Robert Gardner and all these people who have had experiences with ‘the other,’ with filming in faraway cultures in some cases long term, in the case of the MacDougalls, over very long periods of time, filming people and in some cases the same people. But none of them, at least from what I know, could even be remotely called love. I think that John was capable of really deep feeling for people (Cynthia Close 2009 pers. comm.).

Above all, Marshall wanted his audience to feel what it was like, not just to be there, which was the goal of most observational filmmakers, but to get to know the people being filmed, not as some distant other, but as the kind of person you would also love to meet in the flesh. He enabled his audiences to meet and connect with his film subjects as he had done. This is perhaps the greatest gift of his filmmaking. All documentary filmmakers who seek to make films across the
divide of culture might learn this from him, and their film subjects might be spared the tragic fate of the Ju/'hoansi as a consequence. But in the future there will, I am sure, be some Ju/'hoan, some Bushman filmmaker, inspired by Marshall’s films, ready to pick up the camera and present their own story to the world. Whatever myths or stories they decide to tell, the way they portray themselves will, finally, be of their own choosing.


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