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THE USE OF CAMERA IN ETHNOLOGICAL OUTDOOR RESEARCH IN MACEDONIA

Abstract: Visual records of human behaviour with a camera in Macedonia started at the beginning of the 20th century. Ethnologists' interest in the camera has been shown by the production of documentaries in the middle of the 20th century and by attempts for outdoor research using camera in the 60s. The use of camera in outdoor research with the current ethnologists is still at a very modest level. In this text I am going to present my personal experience with the camera during site research, mostly in regards to non-material cultural heritage.

Keywords: camera, outdoor research, ethnology, recording, shot, custom, Macedonia.

Visual records of humans dealing with a camera in Macedonia started at the beginning of the 20th century. From the well-known Manaki Brothers' films it is obvious that they showed interest for ethnological topics like folk customs and everyday life. Their films witness customs and events from the beginning of the 20th century and are precious visual documents about ethnological research in the material and spiritual culture, especially the one of the Macedonians and the Vlachs¹.

In these films we can see male and female line dancing, games, celebrations, of festivals, rural and urban weddings, nomadic movements, funerals, parades, fairs, markets, These first visual recorded documents about Macedonia and the Balkans enable the viewer to feel the atmosphere of those times and to familiarize themselves with part of the life of the people filmed.

Vera Klickova, a veteran in the field of Macedonian ethnology, showed an interest in using a camera in ethnology and shot the first ethnological documentaries, which were produced in the middle of the 20th century by the Ethnological Museum of Macedonia².

Macedonian ethnologists, however, start using the camera in ethnological research relatively late. The first attempt to record the traditional culture was made by Bratislava Rusik Ph.D. ethnologist in 1967. When the "Dzakacari" custom with masks in the Lisice village near Veles was recorded. This is the first recording of a traditional custom made by a Macedonian ethnologist. In the MANU archive, in the B. Rusik foundation, there are two films made by Bosko Trpeski in 1971; one of them is about the folk dress in Kichevo, and the other one is about pottery in the Vraneshtica village, consisting of four parts.

¹ More details about these films can be found in the Catalogue of National Film Foundation 1905-2000, Macedonian Cinematography, Skopje, 2001 p. 15-29.

² More details about these films can be found in the Catalogue of National Film Foundation 1905-2000, Macedonian Cinematography, Skopje, 2001 p. 62, 65, 67, 113, 123.

Unfortunately, even nowadays Macedonian ethnologists make very little use of the camera in their ethnological research, despite the production of these kinds of films being relatively high. What I have in mind when saying this is that the Macedonia ethnologists use the camera only when they want to make a documentary. Outdoor ethnological research with a camera and creation of an ethnological video documentation are a rare occurrence. Not using a camera in outdoor research in these modern times when digital technology is an integral part of everyday life is a real shame and a great loss for Macedonian ethnology and culture in general. As a result of the above said, I can confidently claim that a serious video archive as far as traditional culture is concerned, exists only at the Macedonian National Museum.

The video archive of the Macedonia National Museum contains 53 VHS videocassettes with 300 hours of recordings in total. The majority of the recordings are about blood sacrifice and mask customs in Macedonia. These materials have been digitalized and made accessible to those interested in them. In order to improve the existing situation and to increase the interest in using the camera in ethnological research it is a must for the museums and other institutions, which employ ethnologists, to purchase the necessary equipment as well as to train ethnologists to be able to use it.

Further in this text I am going to present my personal experience with the camera during ethnological outdoor research and how to create ethnological video documentation.

A visual recording of human behaviour does not only consist of note taking (Roush 1995: 95), but also enables the result and the method of note taking to be seen, then the method of working with the camera as well as the skill to be able to show the experience in picture (Barbash, Taylor 1997: 1). It is further said "Film uses experience in order to show experience, more than any other form of art".

These are the basic rules that I try to abide by in my outdoor research with a camera.

In order to achieve this, one needs to be skilful in handling the camera in a similar way to handling a notebook. The sense of comfort while handling the camera is of equal importance in the sense of not hesitating when we need to use it. That contributes both to our self-confidence and to the trust of the people being filmed. Otherwise, both the people that we interview and ourselves will feel uncomfortable.

When I engage into outdoor research with a camera my main aim is to record certain human behaviour; to tell a story related to those events and if possible to analyse them. (Хайдер 2000: 55). In other words, my aim is to discover the hidden (Barbash, Taylor 1997: 61) - my utmost purpose being to create broad documentation.

From my experience with using a camera in outdoor research I have developed a well-defined system on how to recognize and prioritise. All that is due to ethnological education, personal preferences and focus on goal achievement with the visual recording. The first priority is to note the event that I am interested in, in as many details as possible, then to find interesting interviewees, and next to try and find out the relationships within that community and then to visually record what I feel I will need.

This information enables me to predict and expect certain action, which may turn up to be of key importance for the story that I want to present (Хайдер 2000: 110). These details help me to choose shots, which also reveal my viewpoint of the event. However, I never chose shots to make an aesthetic impression, but to present the content of the ethnological information. I chose the length of the shot, the direction and angle of the camera according to the contents of the information that I have. (Barbash, Taylor 1997: 120)

Knowing the order of the events, the chronology, i.e. the screenplay itself, with as many details as possible, as well as knowing the participants in the event, regardless of whether they are direct participants or not, is a must. All this information is essential when deciding what to film and it enables me to notice all-important moments in the event. Without these the recording would be incomplete. In this context I would like to quote A. Balikci who says, "My teacher Margaret Mid told me that the basic rule of ethnographic creation of a film is to be recorded in an objective, unbiased manner and as broad as possible. She was told this by her teacher Franc Boaz: Detailed filming is the basis of anthropology" (Balikci 1989: 4).

When filming I try to be precise and detailed and I do not film only the obvious occurrences, but I also try to get to the core of it.

When I am doing outdoor research, I constantly observe what is happening around me, I talk to the people around me in order to gather as much information as possible, so that I can react accordingly when necessary.

My desire to film every detail, every event, most often consisting of customs, sometimes make me think that I should not turn off the camera at all, which of course is impossible. This desire, which very often becomes a necessity, has a positive influence on motivation and creativity and inspires me to constantly be on the move and to constantly change the angle of the shots.

This requires physical fitness because the long hours outside with the camera in hand can be very tiresome and requires strength and concentration, which is very important if you want to be in control of the situation.

The people that I film often see the camera as challenging and often causes them to behave or act in a manner that is not characteristic for the event that I am filming, for example singing songs that are not customary for that event. Therefore, great concentration is needed and the information gathered is of great importance.

I usually make long shots (Asch 1992: 199), which enables me to film the whole action from start to the end.

Very often I choose an object or a person to be the focus of my recording, which is present in most of my shots. This can be very useful when editing the material, especially when making a documentary because it makes the story easier to manage. For example, in the film "The Stone Shepherd", the main character is a stone, called the stone shepherd, as a main focus of a custom. Whereas in the film "We will come again next year", the main character is Grandma Magda, which takes us on a tour through the deserted village of Papavnica in the Radovish region and talks about its past.

After I have done some filming, I check the material in order to see its technical quality or possible mistakes which need fixing.

During the filming I try to establish a rapport with the participants (Barbash, Taylor 1997: 44)³ and to understand and follow the events as closely as possible. This approach, whether I like it or not, usually connects me on an emotional level to the people or the event that I am filming. I think that in this way I gain the participants' trust, which on the other hand gives me better access to the information related to the event or to the relationships in the community that I am interested in. I cannot agree with the opinion that we are going to get a more objective documentation if we just observe, under the ex-

³ Always telling people why you're shooting, and not by accident or at the end.

cuse of not interfering with the natural course of the events. My opinion is that this kind of ‘distant’ filming will only give a distant portrayal of the event and will neither show its core nor will reveal the true characters of the people involved in the event (MacDougal 1995: 124; Asch 1992: 197).

My interest during the filming is not directed only towards the actions related to ethnology like, for example, filming only a custom. I try to get under the surface and to find out people’s passion, attitudes, motifs, (Asch 1992:196) beliefs, relationships, etc. In other words, I try to film the social aspect as well (Barnou 1981: 62).

The camera makes my contact with the people that I want to film easier. People are curious and in general have a desire to be on camera and the relationships that I establish are genuine and usually successful from the start. Sometimes, the camera is like a card that enables me unobstructed movement in events, which include lot of people and, for safety purposes; there is a ban to participate from within, in particular when customs are in question. Thus, the research value of the material is even greater.

In outdoor research I rarely use a tripod. It puts the camera in a fixed position and is in contrast with what is being filmed, like movement, dance, action, etc.

Not using a tripod does not mean unstable shot. I try to hold the camera as stable as possible, trying to diminish the impact of any sudden movements with my shoulder that the camera is resting on, thus enabling a stable shot. All of this enables me to have freedom of movement so that I can react appropriately to the happenings around me and, when using a wide lens, I can be very close to what is happening. In my early stages of working with cameras I considered the tripod totally unnecessary. Later, I realized that it can be used in situations where there is not much movement, and when the event itself requires a calm, stable shot, which can only be achieved by using the tripod.

I rarely use the zoom. I prefer to get closer to the object and to follow the event or action from a closer distance. Of course, I do use the zoom sometimes. I use it when I want to emphasize something or to ‘hide’ something. If there is something in the vicinity of what I am filming, but I do not want to include it in my shot, I simply use the zoom to focus on the activity that is important to me. The use of the wide angle gives more vivid and more stable shots (Barbash, Taylor 1997: 371).

Some ethnologists tend to convince the people that they are filming to behave as if the camera is not there, so that the activity could be filmed without any problems. The people are advised not to pay attention to the camera or the ethnologist and to do their work the way that they usually do it, as if the ethnologist is not there. They try to be invisible by saying “I am not here“.

At the beginning of outdoor work with a camera this approach towards gathering material can become automatic. It seems the best way to achieve the goal – gathering objective data. This approach is motivated by the genuine desire not to influence the events, but to only note, document and nothing else. However, only by telling the participants not to pay attention to the ethnologist and the camera, we have already intervened and that intervention has an impact on the people that we are filming. This desire for unobtrusiveness sometimes causes the feeling of obtrusion.

When I first started using the camera in outdoor research I had the same attitude. But, later I realized that this attitude is wrong because regardless of how hard I tried to convince the people that I was not there, I was. On the contrary, this was counterproductive, they appeared stiff and were looking at the camera, which was uncomfortable for

both them and me, and did not seem natural. I came to a conclusion that it would be the best if I just allowed things to happen as they do and to let people accept me without telling them that they should do that spontaneously (Young 1995: 101) and to let them show their attitude towards the camera and the ethnologist. When I was filming "Selski dzamari – orasacki momci" I literally put the camera at a distance of 10cm for the face of the person, i.e. under the chin of the interviewee, so that during the interview he kept looking at me and at the camera alternatively.

This approach is becoming more common with ethnologists who use the camera in outdoor research, which can be seen at the festivals of ethnological films like the Festival of Ethnological Films in Belgrade, Serbia, Billan du Film Ethnographique in Paris, France, the Festival of Ethnological Documentaries in Kratovo, Macedonia, World Film Festival in Tartu, Estonia, Sardinia International Ethnographic Film Festival in Nuoro, Sardinia, Italy.

Quite often, while working outdoors, I feel the urge to ask people to repeat certain actions, especially if I thought I have not filmed something or I have not filmed it to my liking. This makes for a bad experience because the repetitions are rarely successful simply because the people are stiff and usually are not able to complete the action. What is worse, when repeating scenes it is also possible to omit some very important segments that happened at the moment. From my experience, and from the experience of others, I have learned not to pay attention to what I have not filmed well or completely. I simply continue with the filming.

I do not insist upon a certain style of filming. I adjust the way of filming to the situation that I encounter when outdoors. I can not say that I use a particular style known in the making of documentaries or in visual ethnology like the observing, direct or reflexive style. I do not insist on it, but my favourite is the observing style, which I very often combine with a participating camera. If I think another style is more appropriate, then I use that one.

From my years-long outdoor work with cameras I can say that ethnological outdoor research is incomplete without a camera. When I watch my recordings from the 90's I feel the same as when I am watching the films by Manaki Brothers i.e. I feel the atmosphere of the time. I have never had a similar feeling when reading a text with ethnological content.

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