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Nadine Wanono

**Au vent de l'éventuel,
Following the Winds of Chance**

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In 1974, with the Vietnam War never ending, the Portuguese Revolution began: The Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique fought for their independence. In 1975, the Spanish dictator, General Franco died. My generation, too young to have taken part in the May 1968 revolution in France, nevertheless acquired a deep political consciousness. We were very much attracted to the new political landscapes and new relationships between North and South.

As always, technology accompanies the new political situations, offering alternative visions and possibilities for shaping the world. Just one of the many aspects of the complex, rich legacy of Jean Rouch relates to such necessary and fruitful interactions between technology, innovative narratives, and utopian perspectives.

Kodak and Fuji introduced the Super 8 millimeter camera and young filmmakers started to use this format as a professional medium: It was a time to challenge the state monopoly on information.

After several years of struggling against academic structures Rouch, with Enrico Fulchignoni¹ and Henri Langlois, created a Ph.D. in visual anthropology at the Paris Universities of Sorbonne and Nanterre. The three men were strongly committed to the idea that filmic

description should be included in a formal academic Ph.D. The low cost, lightness, and maneuverability of the Super 8 camera made this new standard an ideal tool for young filmmakers. Rouch soon realized the democratization of access that this new equipment would bring, and he introduced Super 8 cameras to the new students enrolled in the Ph.D. program.

I met Rouch for the first time in 1976. He was sitting on the staircase of the Comité du Film Ethnographique, with his dark blue blazer and blue shirt, smiling as I explained my decision to do a Ph.D. in visual anthropology. I didn't know then that this meeting would change my life, and that the training I was about to undertake would become a life long commitment.

As students, we spent our time watching, feeling, smelling, drinking, and talking about movies as we waited for Jean, always between two flights, three screenings, and an international festival he was taking part in. My life was spent in edit suites, darkrooms, backstage at the Musée de l'Homme, and in the astonishing Parisian cinema, La Pagode—all spaces that took me away, far away, from reality.

But Jean soon persuaded me to go to the Dogon country, where I would meet one of his friends, Ogobara Dolo. In January 1977, I left for my first fieldwork trip among the Dogon. Back in Paris, I screened my rushes for Jean, and he was so happy to see the final sequence I had shot: On market day in Sanga, a group of old men were drinking millet beer and talking about their plans for the next Sigui—and which of them might still be alive then.... Jean was a friend of these old men, who were veterans of the French army. They had a lively, humorous relationship, sharing memories of the cities they had passed through during World War II.

In June 1977, just back from Mali, I decided to go to Barcelona to film in Super 8 the first democratic election after the fall of Franco. A Catalan leader was elected and when I came back with my rushes full of color, movements, and life, Rouch was delighted and

encouraged me to go on, to keep on filming, to never stop. I edited my film in Super 8mm and took part in the first Super 8 festival.

At that time, Jacques d'Arthuis was French cultural attaché in Portugal, and in collaboration with Rouch, he decided to create a workshop in Super 8 for Mozambican students. Along with professional filmmakers, I was asked to join the team because of my extensive training in Super 8.

We left Paris with a Kodak processor for the Mozambicans, so that they would have an independent capacity to process their films outside of the control of the South African apartheid regime. The Frelimo (Front de Liberation du Mozambique), created and led by the charismatic Samora Machel, was the official party at that time. Rouch was thrilled to be pursuing the type of experiment that had been undertaken 50 years earlier by Robert Flaherty and Dziga Vertov. The films were shot in the morning, processed in the afternoon, and screened the same night in public places.

Although some of our students came from government ministries, others were workers and completely illiterate. Teaching cinema to people who didn't know how to read was an exciting challenge. Inspired by the teaching techniques of Henri Langlois, we treated film as a flexible material that should follow the path of the demonstration.

Jean Luc Godard came to Mozambique to establish a direct collaboration between Mozambican government and his production company, Sonimages, to create a new concept of television in opposition to the state television.

Rouch followed our work closely and was always deeply committed to the creation and elaboration of new tools. When the question of how to produce prints locally came up, we were stumped. Rouch, inspired by Flaherty's work, came up with a new system, in collaboration with

Beaulieuⁱ engineers. A belt was devised that synchronized camera and projector: One blade of the projector was modified in order to avoid recording the lines between each frame.

This was the “do it yourself” craftsman side of Jean. Tools were there to be transformed, in order to capture and reveal life’s complexity, richness, and poetry. The control and transformation of his tools was a key aspect of Jean’s work.

When he asked me to go with him to the Dogon country, I got the chance to share his passion and all of his amazing tricks with his camera, his lenses, and the equipment for the feedback session. Jean introduced me to the idea of itinerant cinema in the Bandiagara cliffs, with his favorite car, the Citroen 2CV, and equipped with a 16mm projector and a folding screen.

Inspired by Jacques Tati, who used to watch his films in public theatres to gauge the public’s reactions and then make changes in the final edit, Rouch used the feedback from the Dogon people as an acid test: Changing sequences and modifying the commentary he would write with Germaine Dieterlen². For over 15 years, I regularly screened the seven Sigui films in the villages where the ritual had been held, climbing up the cliffs to the small villages with all the equipment. Fidelity to the field was a key aspect for Jean, and he was always so moved when I told him of the audience reactions and my encounters with some of the old people who had such strong memories of both him and Germaine.

Le premier matin du monde, a film made by Jean and Germaine in 1998, is a perfect example of Jean’s legacy. He was provoked by Marcel Griaule onⁱⁱ the Sirius question: How did the Dogon come to incorporate such impressive knowledge of astronomy into their mythology, specifically, highly advanced information on Sirius B—the white dwarf star, 8.6 light years from Earth, which rotates around the larger Sirius every 50 years. Rouch never gave up the subject and gave his final answer to Griaule 50 years later. On July 27, 1997, the rising of both the star Sirius and the Sun was described from a stone astronomic observatory. As one

should be able to see stars along with the sun, the camera was modified to shoot frame by frame for several hours.

Linking science, technology, and poetry with traditional beliefs, scientific methods, and visionary perspectives, still remains a challenge today for generations of anthropologists.

Merci Jean.

Endnotes

¹ Enrico Fulchignoni was the co-founder of the Comité du Film Ethnographique in 1953 with Jean Rouch, Marcel Griaule, Henri Langlois, Claude Levi-Strauss. In 1969 he published *La civilization de l'Image*, Ed Payot. Paris

² Germaine Dieterlen, was founding member of the laboratory Systems of Thought in Black Africa at CNRS, President of the Comité du Film Ethnographique and a specialist of the Dogon. In 1965, she published *The Pale Fox* .

ⁱ Beaulieu : French company specialized in 16mm and Super 8mm professional equipment.

ⁱⁱ Griaule provoked Rouch with Sirius and it's invisible companion.