

Jenő KUPÓ

Methodological Comments on Filming a Religious Ritual

In my paper I would like to put down some thoughts about the conclusion of recording the church feast in Szeged-Alsóváros. I intend to outline some difficulties we had to face during our research, also summarising the problems appeared in the course of practice.

It was a challenge to carry out a complex task. On the one hand we had to film the events of the feast. On the other hand we were asked to record the practical and professional discussions of the participants at the seminar. The two series of events taking place in different milieu called for different techniques and methods. In my paper I deal with the experiences gained through recording the events of the feast, I do not outline the techniques of the observation of the observers (students and ethnologists taking part in the seminar).

The film research group

There were three persons in our research group. I must admit that neither of us had a qualification in filming. We gained experience by using the video camera of the Department of Ethnology and by reading special literature. Thus we started the work as amateurs. We benefited from our previous film experiences and the knowledge of the field.

According to Husmann there are five different possibilities in the composition of a film research group.¹ In our case two versions were combined: on the one hand

¹ '...Er unterscheidet die folgende Konstellationen: 1. den selbstfilmenden Ethnologen, 2. den Ethnologen mit einem Filmteam, 3. den selbstfilmenden Ethnologen in Zusammenarbeit mit einem wissenschaftlichen Spezialisten für das Feld, 4. den selbstfilmenden Ethnologen, der sich Rat beim Spezialisten holt, 5. ein Filmteam ohne Ethnologen.' BALLHAUS, E.: *Film und Feldforschung. Überlegungen zur Frage der Authentizität in kulturwissenschaftlichen Film*. In: BALLHAUS, E. - ENGELBRECHT, B. (Hrsg.): *Der ethnographische Film. Einführung in Methoden und Praxis*. (Berlin, 1995) 14.

we consulted with the competent ethnologists of a certain topic, on the other hand we made records working independently.

Working only with one camera we had to take turns at fixed intervals. Thus we made the recordings by ourselves, independently from each other. We used three different conception in our work. During the practical work we had the experience of looking at things in a different way, and the differences in basic conceptions. The personality of the ethnologist behind the camera also had an effect. The main problem in our case is to present a coherent process from these three independent series of recordings.

In my opinion it is advantageous that the researchers themselves film. In this way they can show the whole process together with all the important events. However, researchers should record the events with two cameras in order to control each other. We also should have worked in this way to carry out a more objective and effective research.

While working together with an expert we had an easier job, as we could concentrate only on one task, filming: using our 'specific knowledge'.

The scene

During filming we made both interior and exterior shots. On the one hand we recorded the whole series of events taking place inside the church, on the other hand we made shootings outside on the square around the church. As a consequence from the situation inside the church we recorded solely sacral events, while most of the outside shoots were about the profane (except the procession), mainly the events of the fair. In the two scenes we used different techniques of camera usage.

Applied camera positions

During interior shooting we placed the camera on a tripod. Partly it was due to the fact that during the religious services moving around could have been difficult, partly to the better quality we could achieve by using a fixed tripod. The pictures recorded in this way did not 'shake'. Working with the camera in a fixed position the place of the tripod had to be chosen very carefully. From the position we had to have the perfect possible view of the space. However, we were not able to get really involved in the series of events. The fixed position of the camera at the same time limited the freedom of movement of the ethnologist making the recording.²

From a technical point of view there are three different kinds of machine movement used during recording: turning of the apparatus or panning³, crane⁴ and

2 'distanziertbeobachtend' BALLHAUS, E. i.m. 35.

trucking shot⁵. We took advantage of the panning in order to demonstrate and get a good overview of the space. Our usage of crane shot was rather restricted due to the structure of the tripod we used. Instead of the trucking shot we applied a lens with variable focal distance. These type of objectives '.... practically replace the trucking of the apparatus. Though they can produce virtual movements, the camera not changing its position, in fact they enter the depth of the picture bringing the scene close to us.'⁶

Occasionally we did not use a tripod during interior recording. This way of shooting was extremely significant while recording personal intimate feelings. Only in this way could we make really good cuttings⁷ and depict human feelings on film. In the course of recording the target objects (e.g. a nicely arranged bunch of flowers) or a figure expressing human feeling (e.g. a face, or a part of it, folded hands) we can have more intensive effect with close-ups, we can stress the importance of certain parts.

While filming outside we used a tripod in recording long shots. These have a significance in taking in the whole recorded complex. During the procession and some events at the fair we left the tripod behind and moved together with the events in order to have closer shots.

The role of the ethnologist and/or the film-maker

Being a researcher⁸, if the ethnologist intends to shoot a film, can cause a conflict of roles: that of the ethnologist and of the film maker. The roles connected to the different status have different expectations. Thus this can lead to a conflict of roles.⁹ In my opinion finding the balance between the role of the ethnologist and the film maker depends mainly on the personality of the researcher. The film through picture, sound, gestures and music has the possibility to bring close the aspect of certain phenomena which other technical facilities can not achieve. We had to be careful not to overstress certain parts of the recorded events, but to depict the feelings and change of mood of the participants as a part of the scientific research work. It was extremely difficult to keep the balance during night shots, while recording the manifestations of popular religion.

During our research we tried to get as close as possible to the people we studied. Our role working with a video camera as a part of field research was that of the

3 'The camera moving around its own axle...' BÍRÓ Y.: *A hetedik művészet*. (Bp., 1994) 64.

4 'The camera moving vertically, rising and sinking...' *ibid.* 64.

5 'The camera moving on the ground forward, backward and sideways...' *ibid.* 64.

6 *ibid.* 74.

7 It determines the subject of the shot and the arrangement of the material. *ibid.* 48.

8 'Status means a certain position taken in society.' ANDORKA R.: *Bevezetés a szociológiába*. (Bp., 1997) 491.

9 'Role consists of behavioural patterns, rights and duties.' *ibid.* 491.

participant observant. 'The participant observant define themselves as a researcher being in interaction with the participants of the social event, without pretending to act as a participant.'¹⁰ Using a camera did not allow us to act solely as a participant during the research.¹¹ Thus the camera determined the applicable role of the researcher bringing a kind of pressure both on the subjects of the research and the researcher themselves.

The film as a research method

The objectivity of filming as a research method has been under question already for a long time in visual anthropology.¹² The personality of the ethnologist determines to a large extent the film being made. In the case of studying photos Ernő Kunt stresses the documentary, identifying, explaining and reminding functions.¹³ These functions are perceptible also in the case of filming. Moreover in illustrating processes we have unique possibilities by analysing the picture and sound material. I think that due to sensory impressions and many sided applicability, filming should play a more significant role in ethnological researches. Furthermore, combined with computer technology (multimedia, internet) filming can play a mediatory role both towards the professional and the civil viewers.

10 BABBIE, E.: *A társadalomtudományi kutatás gyakorlata*. (Bp., 1996) 309.

11 'Wieso ein Ethnologe, Soziologe und Volkskundler, der sich mit Ansichten und Standpunkten der Untersuchengruppe identifiziert, unbedinkt aufhört, Ethnologe, Soziologe oder Volkskundler zu sein, wie es Kantowsky schreibt, ist nicht einsichtig. Begreifen wir die Übernahme, von Ansichten und Standpunkten gerade nicht Strategisch, sondern als Resultat eines Lernprozesses, dann erscheint die Auffassung, daß der Forscher, der diesen Schritt vollzogen hat, sich zugleich für die einfachere Rolle des Teilnehmers entscheiden hatte, als bornierter Ausdruck eines Wissenschaftsverstandnisses, daß die Standpunklosigkeit zum Postulat wissenschaftlicher Komplexität erhebt.' ROLF, L: *Die Angst des Forschers vor dem Feld. Überlegungen zur teilnehmenden Beobachtung als Interaktionsprozeß*. Zeitschrift für Volkskunde 1981/1. 65.

12 'Der Ethnologe/Filmemacher muß seine eigene Rolle beim Filmprojekt und seine Ziele analysieren und seine Erkenntnisse einem Aussenstehenden visuell vermitteln können.' Engelbrecht, B.: *Film als Methode in der Ethnologie*. In: Ballhaus, E. - Engelbrecht, B. (hrsg.): *Der ethnographische Film. Einführung in Methoden und Praxis*. (Berlin, 1995) 179.

13 KUNT E.: *Fotografie und Kulturforschung*. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Fotografie 1986. 14.