bringing to light

a history of the australian institute of aboriginal and torres strait islander studies film unit
Bringing to light: a history of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Film Unit

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Master of Arts (Research) Thesis

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Ian Bryson

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Deficiencies in this work are my responsibility and I hope that you the reader will consider this the initial step towards a far larger project. I have only used about one tenth of the material collected in my research — there is still much more to be said but in other contexts.

Ian Bryson
May 1998
[The first objective of ethnographic film] is to ensure an adequate record of ways of life that are passing forever. This is a call to serve history. Such a record is of interest to everyone and will be so in the future, especially to future generations of the people whose life we now record. They surely 'will rise up and call us blessed' (A. P. Elkin on the occasion of his opening address to the 1966 Round Table on Ethnographic Filmmaking in the Pacific Area).

No ethnographic film is merely a record of another society: it is always a record of the meeting between a filmmaker and that society (David MacDougall 1975:119).
This thesis was motivated by a desire to find out what has happened to ethnographic filmmaking in Australia. Why is it that today only a handful of non-Aboriginal filmmakers manage to make broadcast standard documentaries about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and ethnographic filmmaking has been virtually abandoned when Australia was so productive in these areas during the 1960s and 1970s? I wanted to make ethnographic films myself but first I needed to find out why this decline had taken place. This thesis is an attempt to chart this recent history of change and is also a first step in my journey towards finding out what it means to investigate culture visually.

I have chosen the title *Bringing to light* to mean two things. Firstly this thesis is an act of bringing to light a history that I felt was slowly becoming mythologised in part because the ethnographic films of the past are now rarely seen. Secondly, much of the filmmaking discussed in this thesis was motivated by a desire to bring to the light of film the socio-cultural life of Australia's indigenous peoples.
Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been the subject matter of films since the earliest days of cinema. In September 1998, it will be 100 years since members of an expedition from Cambridge University filmed a group of Murray Islanders in the Torres Strait. For over 70 years Aboriginal people across the country, often willingly participated in this filmmaking while others may have complied under varying degrees of duress. The realities of what actually happened behind-the-scenes of many of these early films will, unfortunately, never be known but by the 1970s a major shift occurred in filmmaking with and about Aboriginal people. It came about through a growing awareness by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia of the power of visual media and a self-recognised need for them to speak for themselves, to tell their own stories. Combined with a general disinterest in the visual among Australian anthropologists, this led to a marked decline in ethnographic filmmaking in this country.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies' (the Institute) Film Unit effectively operated between 1961 and 1991.¹ Its operation spanned this dramatic period of change and its history is representative of the shifts in ethnographic filmmaking more generally.

¹ The Institute was renamed the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in 1989.
During this 30-year period, the Film Unit produced one of the most significant bodies of filmic material in ethnographic cinema. While the primary purpose of the thesis is to provide an institutional history of the Film Unit and its work, I seek to illuminate three general issues through this history:

- How it was that ethnographic filmmaking enjoyed such an illustrious position in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies in the past;
- How the various filmmakers situated themselves in relation to the changing paradigms in ethnographic filmmaking; and
- How representational politics impacted on the nature of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia over the last two decades.

The first chapter traces the beginning of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia through the work of natural scientists turned ethnographers. The following chapter looks at how the Institute was formed and how filmmaking became central to its work. The next two chapters are chronological narratives of the work of the Film Unit divided between the two distinct periods in its life. I then turn to an examination of the writing of the two directors of the Film Unit to situate their work theoretically and methodologically. The final chapter considers the present state and future of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia within the context of the rise of indigenous self-representation.

Very little has been written about the history of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia except for the account in Peter Loizos' key text *Innovation in ethnographic film: from innocence to self-consciousness 1955-1985* (1993). In this book, Loizos outlines how in general, the practice of ethnographic filmmaking changed over a thirty year period throughout the world. The product of this mammoth task includes long sections on the work of the Institute's Film Unit and places this work in the context of their contemporaries elsewhere in the world. I have used Loizos' book as a starting point and have modeled my chronology around his. I have also used Loizos' finding that the change in practice over time was one of "from innocence to self-consciousness" as a point of challenge. I have
sought to find out just how innocent the early Australian filmmakers were and whether or not the later filmmakers were as self-conscious about their work as they may have appeared to be. Probably because of the scope of his book, Loizos was not able to expand on his observation that the innovation over time in ethnographic filmmaking here was an epistemological one. What follows in this thesis is an extension of Loizos’ work as I take a closer and longer look at the changes in filmmaking from the perspective of the filmmakers and not so much through a review of their films. It is through this approach that I believe the change in epistemology can be seen more clearly.

What is ethnographic film?

Over the past few years I have presented papers about this research to broad audiences of anthropologists. While I would be talking about a specific aspect of this history, the discussion afterwards would always come back to the central question of what is ethnographic film. It is therefore important to make it clear from the outset how I am using the term and to describe what ethnographic film is in the context of this thesis.

I use two terms throughout the thesis that are similar but not the same — ethnographic film and ethnographic cinema. Ethnographic film is here used to describe those films created by anthropological filmmakers that were motivated by an anthropological or sociological agenda. The looser term ethnographic cinema is used to describe all of those films that are of use to anthropology, including ethnographic film but not exclusively. Although it is regularly defined as a sub-category of documentary, I distinguish ethnographic film from it because ethnographic films deal quite explicitly with humans and the visual representation and explication of their various cultures. It has an internal problematic that, although broadly paralleling documentary film in some ways, deals with non-fiction content specifically within socio-cultural paradigms of knowledge creation. I am quite deliberately locking ethnographic film out of a definition under documentary in order to allow a distinction to be made between the ethnographic films of people like Roger Sandall, David and Judith MacDougall, Ian Dunlop, Tim Asch, Robert Gardener, Jean Rouch and Asen Balicki (to name just a few) and the documentary films of
people like David Attenborough, John Grierson and John Heyer. In a sense, I am also defining ethnographic film historically through a body of work produced by anthropologists and sociologists. Some filmmakers working within these socio-cultural paradigms of knowledge creation may still call their work ethnographic films but more often in the 1990s we see the genre blurring as anthropologist/filmmakers utilise terms like cross-cultural filmmaking (Barbash and Taylor 1997) and ethnographic media (Ginsburg 1995).

So ethnographic film defines film of an historical period. I apply the term retrospectively to certain films but it is also a term that filmmakers used to describe their work as they produced it. There are filmic conventions that have evolved which signify an ethnographic film style such as lengthy observational scenes and wide angle shots of social action. Historically it has a tradition of use and a set of methodologies that situate it broadly within filmic conventions, but like other film genres and styles, conventions change over time or as Nichols (1985:259) so aptly describes the shift:

the dominant modes of expository discourse change; the arena of ideological contestation shifts. The comfortably accepted realism of one generation seems like artifice to the next. New strategies must constantly be fabricated to re-present “things as they are” and still others to contest this very representation.

Genres and styles also change because advancements in technology allow the filmmaker to do things that had hitherto been impossible. Smaller and lighter cameras allowed for more intimate framing, larger film magazines allowed for longer takes and the revolution of synchronous sound allowed for the spontaneous creation of subject through voice. Audiences have also become more sophisticated in their understandings of filmic language through television and constant advancements in special effects and editing technology continue to rewrite the rulebooks on the semiotics of cinema.

To speak ethnographically through cinema is now more challenging than ever before. For this reason I have chosen to define ethnographic film historically but in so doing I am in no way seeking to reduce its potency and veracity for usage in the late 1990s. One of the central conclusions of this thesis is that we have a lot to learn from the ethnographic films of the past and, of course, those still yet to be made.
Camera science and the cinematic apparatus

To understand the intellectual space in which the Institute’s Film Unit was set up, it is helpful to go back to the beginning of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia and to trace its history through to the 1960s. It will be seen that the understandings about the nature of the camera, of the task of anthropology and of the importance of Aboriginal societies and cultures remained essentially unchanged throughout this period. The dominant concern was with the creation of scientific records that documented the practices and ways of life of a people who were seen as unique before they disappeared. The cine camera became an important scientific instrument for this project and through it the notion of the ethnographic film was created.

The first ethnographic footage, which was seen as such by its creator, was that by Félix-Louis Regnault in the Paris spring of 1895. It shows a Wolof woman from Senegal making pots at the Exposition Ethnographique de l’Afrique Occidentale held in Paris. Regnault was a physician who was essentially interested in pathological and criminal anatomy. He used *chronophotographie*, or serial photography, to conduct time and motion studies on humans. The *chronophotographe* was invented in 1882 by the physiologist...
Étienne-Jules Marey who used it to conduct stop-motion studies of animals and humans.\(^2\) Regnault employed this early type of photography and later cinematography to conduct what were essentially anthropometric studies. For Regnault the cine camera was the perfect scientific recording tool:

> Only cinema provides objective documents in abundance; thanks to cinema, the anthropologist can, today, collect the life of all peoples; he will possess in his drawers all the special acts of different races. He will be able to thus have contact at the same time with a great number of people. He will study, when it pleases him, the series of movements that man executes for squatting, climbing trees, seizing and handling objects with his feet, etc. He will be present at fests (sic), at battles, at religious and civil ceremonies, at different ways of trading, eating, and relaxing (Regnault 1923 cited in Rony 1996:48).

Regnault continued to make films about human movement and material culture into the 1930s and became a major proponent for the creation of anthropological film archives (de Brigard 1995; Rony 1996):

> Thanks to [films and photographs], the psychologist, the ethnographer, the sociologist, the linguist, and the folklorist will collect in their laboratories all the manners of numerous ethnicities and will be able to call up life at their will. In analyzing, in measuring these objective documents, in comparing them, in organizing them, they will fix the methods which make up their science, know the laws of human mentality. The ethnographic museum with its collections of objects, films, and phonographic records will become our laboratory and our center of teaching (Regnault 1931 cited in Rony 1996:62).

Regnault’s views resonate not only through the history of ethnographic cinema but with the views of the founders of the Institute and its Film Unit. These perceptions about the use of the cine camera were also evident in the work of the early filmmakers in Australia.

**The beginnings of ethnographic cinema in Australia**

Regnault may be considered by many as the earliest precursor of ethnographic cinema but for Australians, Alfred Court Haddon is held up in similar regard. In 1898, three years after the Lumière brothers had created cinema as we know it, Haddon was filming people on the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait in the far northeast of Australia (see Long and Laughren 1993). As a result, he and an associate, are generally regarded to be the first people to have recorded ethnographic footage in the

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\(^2\) This camera did not produce a projectable image and could be considered the precursor to the motor-wind single lens reflex camera of today.
field (on location). Like Regnault, Marey and many other employers of film at this time and later, Haddon was also a natural scientist and a marine zoologist by profession.

Like much Australian anthropology up until the 1960s the expedition to the Torres Strait was an exercise in salvage ethnography. Haddon explicitly stated as much in solicitations for funds to finance the journey. Urry (1993:74) has noted with regard to these requests for money that Haddon spoke of fast dying out natives and the necessity to record the "anthropological data" that remained. While in the Strait, it appears that Haddon did not expose the film himself but brought along a student to undertake the photographic work. However, Haddon was an accomplished scientific draughtsman, utilising this skill in his taxonomic drawings. He also conducted extensive studies of many regional art collections and therefore had an interest in representations of reality (Urry 1993:73). On this Urry (1993:73) has stated:

"Science"...correctly explained the real world, and no doubt Haddon thought that his own scientific drawings illustrated reality. Haddon's passion for photography and his pioneering work in ethnographic film and music recording must be seen in this light.

Haddon also encouraged his associate in the field of zoology, Professor Walter Baldwin Spencer, to use a cine camera in the field. In planning an expedition into central Australia in 1901, Spencer sought Haddon's advice regarding a cine camera. Haddon's often quoted reply to Spencer illustrates his thoughts on film and goes some way to explaining how another Australian precursor was introduced to cinema.

You really must take a Kinematograph or a biograph or whatever they call it in your part of the world. It is an indispensable piece of anthropological apparatus... I have no doubt your films will pay for the whole apparatus if you care to let some of them be copied by the trade.

On 19 March 1901, Baldwin Spencer and former Postmaster of Alice Springs, Frank Gillen, left Oodnadatta in central-northern South Australia to begin an expedition.

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3 Of this footage of Torres Strait Islanders, only four minutes remains (Dunlop 1983).
4 Haddon (1897) wrote a paper in *Nature* entitled "The saving of vanishing knowledge" which also solicited funds from private sources to aid in the journey to the Torres Strait.
5 The student was Anthony Wilkins according to Dunlop (1983:11).
6 Haddon and Spencer were both contenders for the foundation professorship in Biology at the University of Melbourne but Spencer was chosen and took up the position in 1887 at the age of twenty-six.
7 Original letter from Haddon to Spencer dated 1900 held in Spencer Papers, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. Photocopy of letter held in Baldwin Spencer file, Film Archive, AIATSIS.
8 Gillen was elected President of the Anthropological Section at the meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in 1900.
north across Australia. The intention of the journey was to collect data pertaining to the environment of central Australia, including ethnological information. It appears that the collection of ethnological information was paramount for Gillen as his diary of this journey is filled with social and cultural details about the people they encountered (see Gillen 1968). In the accounts by both Spencer and Gillen, information about Aboriginal social organisation is placed alongside the daily temperature and discussions about the size of blow-flies. Such juxtapositions underline the fact that anthropologists and ethnologists of the time were usually first and foremost natural scientists.

In regard to filming, Spencer noted encountering problems that still occurred well into the twentieth century. Because, for instance, he had little, if any, idea about the way that the ceremonies he filmed were organised he was often left exposing film on the hand-operated camera with nobody in frame. Not knowing what was going to happen combined with a tripod that was fixed in one position left him filming a great deal of the landscape without any people. The camera he used was a Warwick Cinematograph, which he quickly mastered:

There was a native camp out in the scrub, about a mile away from the station, containing some thirty or forty men and women, who had come in to perform a rain ceremony. ... This rain dance gave us the opportunity of experimenting with the cinematograph. It was a Warwick machine and, if not actually the first, was amongst the earliest cinematographs to be used in Australia. It was certainly the first used amongst the aboriginals (sic). A diagram showed how to fix the film in the machine, so as to make it run round, but no instructions had been sent out as to what rate to turn the handle, so I had to make a guess at this. The focusing glass was, of necessity, small and you could only get a sideways and not a direct view of it, but, after a little practice with a blank spool, I felt equal to my first attempt in real life. This was in 1901; the quarter of a century that has elapsed since then has seen considerable improvements in cinematography that have made it, if not a simpler, at all events a more certain method. We had no idea what the rain ceremony was going to be like, so that all that I could do was to stand the machine on one side of the ceremonial ground, which was simply an open space in the scrub, focus for about the centre of it and hope for the best. The lens allowed for a fair depth of focus, but the field of action covered by the natives was large and I had not, as in more recent machines, a handle to turn, making it possible to follow up the actors if they moved about very much from side to side of the ceremonial ground. When the performers came on to the ground I was ready for them, and started grinding away as steadily as I could at the handle, though, at first, the temptation was great to vary the rate of turning to suit the rapid or slow movements of the performers. To be a successful cinematographer, with the machine that I used in these early days, you had to suppress your feelings, and rise or fall to the mentality of an experienced barrel-organ grinder, who, I then realised, must train him or herself to become utterly oblivious of what, I think, is called tempo, if he or she is to be a success. The chief difficulty was that the performers every now and then ran off the ground into the surrounding scrub, returning at uncertain intervals of time, so that now and again, in the expectation of their sudden reappearing, and fearful of missing anything of importance, I ground on and on, securing a record of a good deal of monotonous scenery but very little ceremony (1928:159-160).
One issue that was often overlooked in the usage and conceptualisation of the cine camera as scientific recording device was that of the mediating role of the camera operator. Nowhere that I know of did Spencer or Gillen go as far as Regnault to say that what they recorded was an objective representation of reality but I assume that they shared this view. In one instance Gillen (1968:17) noted in his diary that on April 2 1901, they were preparing to film a ceremony but because the weather was “cloudy and boisterous”, they asked the men to postpone it “until the weather is favourable”. Here was a situation where an event that would have taken place without their presence was affected by the inadequacies of a cine camera and is thus one of the first recorded instances of the demands of filmmaking modifying the performance. Another problem which Gillen (1968:19) noted on April 3 was that the “kine films” were “not long enough to take in a whole ceremony[,] they should be 300ft. (sic) instead of 150”.9 Spencer could only film for a few minutes before reloading which consequently left the final record of the ceremony with gaps in the action. Gillen (1968:18) also called the filming process “getting ...kinematograph records”, further confirming my belief that these men considered the technology as yet another recording device, like the calipers and guages stored on the back of the expedition’s wagon. In line with Haddon’s suggestion, Spencer publicly exhibited the footage from this expedition in the southern capital cities in order to raise money to further his research (see Cantrill and Cantrill 1982).

After a gap of some eleven years, Spencer again took a camera with him on an expedition to northern Australia. Although it seems that during the interim he did nothing significant filmically with the footage he and Gillen secured in 1901, by November 1912 it appears that he had learnt much about the machinations of camera usage:

I spent some time trying to get cinematograph pictures of camp life. It would be quite easy to do this with a small hand machine of which, after a while, they would take little notice, but a large one attracts too much attention and makes their actions rather unnatural. However, I managed to secure some good and characteristic cooking scenes (Spencer 1928:900–901).

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9 Raw stock length was a problem only dealt with in later years when the camera housing size was reduced to accommodate externally fitted film reels.
Contemporaries beyond Australia

Anthropologists and ethnologists beyond Australia were also using the cine camera in their work and documented other kinds of difficulties they faced in getting scientific records. M. W. Hilton-Simpson and J. A. Haeseler published an article in the popular science journal *Discovery* in 1925 which recounted their experiences during fieldwork with Shamiya people in southeast Algeria.\(^{10}\) Their concern with keeping their scientific commitment to the truth intact is well illustrated in this article (Hilton-Simpson & Haeseler 1925:326–327):

> With willing helpers around him, he [the cinematographer] is apt to be tempted to “arrange” various ceremonies, etc., which are not being performed in earnest at the time of his visit. We sternly set our faces against recording anything which was not being done by the natives *for themselves.* Nevertheless, the temptation was strong. ... The natives, performing the ceremony in a half-hearted spirit would probably omit some small demon-scaring act; despite my fairly complete knowledge of the matter I should equally probably, (sic) fail to notice the omission. The result would have been that we be branded as liars by the first scientist who observed the error on our film at home.

Hilton-Simpson noted that the consent of the people was needed for close-ups but lamented that this caused the cinematographer “to be even more of a slave to native caprice than the ethnologist must necessarily be” (1925:326). Haeseler, who was the camera operator during the trip, stated that people being filmed should not be distracted and they should be kept within the field of view of the camera (1925:328). Haeseler went on to point out that “[t]he films in themselves may save a great amount of note taking, for they are, in themselves, unparalleled notes” (ibid.). This was a common perception during this period amongst the filmmakers motivated by science and it serves to provide a distinction between those who simply used the camera to take notes and those who thought they were recording reality.

The other type of filmmaker we see taking ethnographic footage during this period are people working in the Flaherty mode, coming from outside anthropology and making extensively edited, narrative-driven films for general cinematic release. Anthropologists from Haddon to Hilton-Smith and Haeseler were aware of this market and all of them advocated the sale of footage to commercial cinema houses in order to

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\(^{10}\) This fieldwork was during the winter of 1923–24. It was Hilton-Simpson’s sixth visit to the area.
recoup costs. Commercial films, of this type, were made in Australia at this time by people such as Brooke Nicholls (*Kodak's Native Australia* 1922), Frank Hurley (*Pearls and Savages* 1921) and Francis Birtles (*Coorab on the Island of Ghosts* 1922) (see Leigh 1988). So even at a time when the distinction between art and science was fought for, ethnographic cinema during this period was moving between the broad genres of scientific films and entertainment films (see Rony 1996).

**The Board for Anthropological Research**

Within Australia the first institution which first systematically employed film in its anthropological research tool-kit was the Adelaide Board for Anthropological Research in 1926. The Board was an adjunct of the University of Adelaide (where there was no anthropology department at the time) and worked in cooperation with the South Australian Museum. Most of the people involved were natural scientists by training (doctors, dentists, etc.). The filmmaking of the Board occurred between 1926 and 1937 during expeditions to central and South Australia. These expeditions were mainly for biological and natural scientific investigations of Aboriginal people. During this time they produced over ten hours of footage concerning material culture, food gathering and processing, technology, ceremonies and daily life of Aboriginal people, as well as footage documenting their own activities in the field. Other Aboriginal subjects of their filmed work included a couple copulating, slow motion movement, and general camp activity. Most of the films were produced by Norman Tindale, ethnologist at the South Australian Museum, and filmed by the photographer E. O. Stocker, a businessman from Sydney but also an enthusiastic amateur photographer. Still photography was used extensively by members of the Board, mainly as a device for recording body features for later physiognomic analysis. Some of the films were edited and released as expedition travelogues and were given titles such as *Macdonald Downs Expedition 1930* and *Cockatoo Creek Expedition 1931*.11

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11 I have not had access to the films made by the Board or to any documentation about their production except that in the public arena. It would be interesting to find out if these films were exhibited publicly and, if so, why.
Tindale's general report of the 1935 expedition is a good illustration of how film was used on the expeditions. From July through September of that year, their five-man party visited the Warburton Ranges in eastern Western Australia. Stocker exposed about 3900 feet, of 16mm film of which 500 feet was colour. This was all silent. According to Tindale (1936:483), Stocker “secured detailed 16mm cinematographic records of kangaroo and opossum hunting and cooking, grass seed and fruit gathering, winnowing, preparation and cooking, root and fruit gathering, scale insect sugar preparation and ceremonial life”. The “ceremonial life” filmed was of a male subincision which, fortunately for Stocker, took place around midday. He also later filmed a circumcision which again took place during daylight hours. This ritual was similar to one filmed previously in another location but Tindale and Stocker still filmed it.

Over time the expedition members' approach to cinematography became more filmic and less determined by science as they became more familiar with the potential of the cine camera. Tindale and Stocker developed a two-camera filming and editing style, as Leigh (1988:84) has noted, that allowed cutting between camera angles during the editing. Increasingly the members of the expedition filmed their own research activities such as measuring Aboriginal people and making dental examinations. Indeed both Tindale and Mountford wanted more publicly viewable versions of these films made and Mountford even made a proposal to Walt Disney to this end (but nothing apparently came of these attempts according to Leigh 1988).

Charles Mountford, an associate of the South Australian Museum, made two films during the second world war: Walkabout (1940) (also known as Brown Men and Red Sand (1946)) and Tjurunga (1942). The University of Adelaide also supported Draper Campbell's postwar filmmaking for many years and later collaborated with the Institute to allow him to make Ngoora: A Camping Place, So They Did Eat and the series Aspects of Aboriginal life in Central Australia. It was Campbell who later organised for the Institute's

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12 Stocker also filmed the use of camels during the expeditions, probably one of the first instances of this subject in Australia's long fascination with this animal in documentary cinema.
Film Unit to make their first films in central Australia in 1966 at Yuendumu where he himself had made most of his own postwar films.\textsuperscript{13}

Use of the cine camera in Australian fieldwork remained almost entirely in the hands of the physical anthropologists and natural scientists before the second world war. The only exception was Donald Thomson who had a background in the natural sciences followed by a diploma in anthropology who recorded over 8000 feet of footage on Aboriginal life in eastern Arnhem Land. Unfortunately this footage, which received some public screenings, was destroyed in a fire in 1947 (see Peterson 1983). Apart from these recorded uses of motion pictures in anthropology, I am sure that there were many other instances of Aboriginal people being filmed for science and posterity. The Institute's film archive includes footage recorded by missionaries and travellers and an enormous amount of film recorded for the purpose of fiction films. So filming for the purposes of anthropology, especially physical anthropology, was a marginal activity. The representation of Aboriginal people in general documentary films prior to the 1960s was also a rare occurrence and only increased with the arrival of television.

The documentary climate in post-war 1950s Australia

Before the arrival of television in Australia in 1954 the central producer of documentary films was the News and Information Bureau in the federal government's Department of the Interior.\textsuperscript{14} The producer-in-chief of this organisation was Stanley Hawes, a protégé of John Grierson, the most prominent English documentary filmmaker of the period (McMurchy 1994:179). Working for Hawes in the early days were such innovative filmmakers as John Heyer and Ron Maslyn Williams, although Heyer left in the early 1950s to join the Shell Film Unit. Under Hawes' supervision, a program of films was begun which sought to portray Australia and Australians as striving to build a nation as a

\textsuperscript{13} For more information about the Board see Tindale (1986) and Jones (1987).

\textsuperscript{14} It was previously the Australian National Film Board in the Department of Information but this was closed down and transferred in 1950. In 1956 the News and Information Bureau became the Commonwealth Film Unit. The Commonwealth Film Unit became Film Australia in 1973 and was transferred to the Department of the Media. In mid-1987 it became an autonomous government-owned business. In early 1997 a government-commissioned review of funding to the Australian film industry recommended that Film Australia sell off its production facilities and restrict its activities to sales, promotion and marketing. It is anticipated that by July 1998, Film Australia will no longer produce films but that its National Interest Program will continue to exist as a funding body.
single people in the face of adversity. It sought to introduce a new social order through portraits of people working together to build a prosperous nation. McMurchy (1994:180) states, however, that by the mid 1950s a number of factors combined to stultify this program:

At the national level, the pressures of the Cold War, the deadening effects of a seventeen-year reign by the conservative (and royalist) Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, the complacency produced by the achievement of full employment and the smothering of Aboriginal and migrant problems under the blanket rhetoric of ‘assimilation’ contributed to an official climate in which non-conformist views were excluded from the government film production house.

The films coming out of this government organisation were totalising representations of an Australia in a form which could easily be compared to tourist brochures. The Commonwealth Film Unit, as it became known, was certainly not representing Australia as a country going through a troubling period of dramatic social and political change. McMurchy believes that the documentary baton was not taken up until the Australian Broadcasting Commission began to produce the Chequer-board series in 1967. This series, McMurchy (1994:181) says, employed “a ‘living camera’ style and intrusive close-ups as a social probe… [which] opened up issues such as homosexuality, divorce and personal relationships in a new and powerful way for television audiences”.

The production of films in the scientific research mode continued. The general philosophy underlying this approach to filmmaking was spelt out most clearly in 1955 by the founder of the Sydney Scientific Film Society,15 Anthony Michaelis in his book, Research Films in Biology, Anthropology, Psychology, and Medicine (1955). The book was structured as a guide to creating research films, using techniques available to all of the disciplines mentioned in its title. Even with its scientific pretensions, Michaelis recognised that films “lie” (1955:168) but argued that the problems associated with the intrusion of the filmmaker’s subjectivity can be competed with when the camera is employed using a strict scientific methodology. Michaelis further argued that “[i]n addition to providing such openly apparent extensions of knowledge, the cine camera should be considered as an instrument capable of yielding accurate quantitative data, strictly comparable with the

15 William Geddes was a member of this society. Michaelis was also the secretary of the Society until his departure for Europe in the latter half of 1954; see Scientific Film News 28/6/54 (on the occasion of the 41st Sydney Scientific Film Society General Meeting).
anthropometer and the calipers, although its basic unit is time and not length” (1955:230). In the section on anthropology, Michaelis lists films made on Aboriginal subjects and personally acknowledges the assistance of A. P. Elkin and C. P. Mountford, both of whom had made films with Aboriginal people by this time and were associates of McCarthy, the first Principal of the Institute.16

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sketched a history of ethnographic cinema in Australia as it developed from the scientific records of Haddon, Spencer and Gillen. This history has shown that there was little development of the notion of ethnographic filmmaking in social anthropology during the first sixty years of its practice in Australia and what was done, remained in the hands of physical anthropologists and natural scientists. I suggest that Michaelis is representative of opinion on the scientific research film in Australia in the 1950s and early 1960s and that it was conceptions like his which provide the intellectual context in which the founders of the Institute were thinking about film.

16 Michaelis (1955:194-195) like Regnault and later McCarthy, also argued strongly for the creation of anthropological film archives.
Aborigines, film and science

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the intellectual context of the founding of the Institute and the concerns of its first principal, Mr Frederick McCarthy who played a key role in establishing the Film Unit. The key figure in the creation of the Institute is William C. Wentworth, a Liberal politician who was an advocate for Aboriginal issues in political circles. In August 1959 Wentworth wrote a submission to Cabinet calling for the creation of an Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (Wentworth 1959). He presented three reasons for why an Institute should be established. First, he believed that the study of Aboriginal people would shed light on the nature of all human beings. He couched this belief in social evolutionary terms, supporting it with such statements as “[t]hey are probably of Caucasoid stock, and therefore in origin nearer to the white races than are the native peoples of Africa and East Asia” (1959). The second reason for setting up the Institute was that it could help to provide information which would assist in the administration of the assimilation policy. The third reason was that it would help to reduce the stigma generated by foreign academic institutions accusing the Australian government of not doing anything to record what remained of traditional Aboriginal culture before it was too late.¹⁷

¹⁷ Peterson (1990) suggests that Wentworth was referring to the Ford Foundation in the United States.
Throughout the proposal Wentworth emphasised the belief that traditional Aboriginal social and cultural practices were disappearing at a fast rate: “Within ten years there will be nothing but a fraction of a fraction left. It must be recorded now, or it will go unrecorded for ever” (1959). He evoked images of impending doom and of the guilt that his generation would feel when the younger generations knew nothing of what Aboriginal culture and society was. In a 1964 defense of the Institute, Wentworth (in Gorton 1964:8) summarised this belief aptly in parliament when he stated:

I cannot help being reminded of the story of Tarquin and the Sybilline books. When Tarquin was asked to buy a number of books at a high price and refused to do so, the Sybil who had the books burnt one and offered the remainder at the same price. This went on day after day until only one book remained, which had to be bought at the price for which all could have been obtained earlier. We are the trustees for humanity in the last place where these things can be studied. That is how we stand.

Wentworth suggested that film be used as a “mechanical aid” in the recording of Aboriginal culture and saw it predominantly as a tool, the product of which was for posterity. The idea was to make the films before they could no longer be made so that the realities of Aboriginal existence were captured for researchers to work on in the future.

Wentworth made much of the fact that Aboriginal people were in a state of dramatic social and cultural change during the 1950s. He talked about this “period of transition” in terms that make it sound like a social experiment although his motivations appear purely scientific: “primitive people are of interest in the period of transition, because the manner in which they adjust themselves to new circumstances may shed some light upon the fundamental capacity of all people to make similar adjustments, and upon the ways in which this can come about” (Wentworth 1959:1). Peterson (1990:16) sees this attitude as one reflecting the government’s belief in the inevitable success of the assimilation policy. It is also illustrative of how Wentworth was able to legitimate the proposal of the Institute in the minds of his political peers by emphasising the global importance of this knowledge gained through research on Aboriginal people.

It is important to remember the context of Wentworth’s proposal was as a Cabinet submission: it was not something that would have been widely distributed. He may have generalised the importance of Aboriginal people to the nation in the proposal in
order to gain its acceptance by his peers for it may have otherwise appeared a very academic enterprise. He probably had to show practical outcomes — for example: “[w]e may handle the problems of the assimilation of our aborigines (sic) a little better if we know more about their native background” (1959:9) — in order to gain the acceptance he was seeking.

Besides the fact that Wentworth's proposal was based on evolutionary theory, I suggest that Wentworth's agenda for creating the Institute was explicitly nationalistic. While accepting Peterson's (1990) summary that Wentworth was interested in “man and man's nature”, I suggest he was also attempting to incorporate the 'classic' past of Aboriginal people into totalising narrative about what it was to be an Australian. In a sense he was stating that the antiquity of Aboriginal Australia was also the antiquity of non-Aboriginal Australia because 'we' now lived here. 'We' were the next step in the natural occupation of this country and so by salvaging their past; 'we' were salvaging 'our' past.

**The 1961 Aboriginal Studies Conference**

Wentworth's submission to Cabinet was received favourably by his colleagues in the then Liberal government. In 1960, a working party chaired by Professor A. D. Trendall was setup at the Australian National University to investigate the feasibility of such an institute in Australia. One of the working party's first decisions was to charge William E. H. Stanner with the job of organising a national conference on Aboriginal Studies which was held the following year in 1961.

The papers presented at the conference were published in 1963 as the volume *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (Sheils 1963). Stanner's introduction to this volume outlined the events leading up to the conference. In this, Stanner (1963) stated that following Wentworth's proposal, the Vice Chancellor of the Australian National University was requested in July 1960 by a Cabinet sub-committee to organise another committee which would consider the creation of a centralised research institution. Stanner was asked to organise a conference on the state of research in Aboriginal Studies and by January 1961
he had financial support from the Social Science Research Council of Australia and the Commonwealth was also to contribute £6000.

The Conference began on the 15th of May 1961 and was officially attended by over 55 workers associated with the field of Aboriginal studies. Among the attendees were R. M. Berndt, C. H. Berndt, T. D. Campbell, J. B. Cleland, A. P. Elkin, W. R. Geddes, L. R. Hiatt, F. D. McCarthy, M. J. Meggitt, C. P. Mountford, A. Moyle, M. Reay, T. G. H. Strehlow, D. F. Thomson, N. B. Tindale, A. D. Trendall, W. C. Wentworth and D. J. Mulvaney (for a full list see Sheils 1963). After the main papers were delivered, the participants formed smaller groups concerned with their relevant areas of study such as linguistics and social anthropology. Many of the participants saw the study of Aboriginal people as their “duty to posterity” (Stanner 1963:xiv) although Stanner also felt that the product of such an institute “would force a radical revision of many fundamental teachings about man and society” (1963:xv).

The report of the conference was drafted by Professor Percy H. Partridge. In the report the making of films is mentioned a number of times. The Material Culture Committee suggested that because of the present pace of assimilation the making of “motion-picture studies of Aboriginal activities” was urgent (Sheils 1963:463). It suggested that colour films with sound be made of “the ceremonies of Aborigines in such places as the Kimberleys, Cape York, Arnhem Land and elsewhere, to be permanent records of the people’s ritual and aesthetic lives, since preservation of such aspects is possible in no other way” (ibid:475). Both the Linguistics and Ethnomusicology Committees called for the use of film equipment for recording in the field. The report of the Committee on Social and Cultural Anthropology, however, did not mention the use of film at all. This was probably because up until the 1960s in Australia, filmmaking had never really been of importance to social and cultural anthropologists and, as discussed earlier, was generally used only by the physical anthropologists and natural scientists.

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18 Partridge (1910-1988) was Professor of Social Philosophy in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. He was one of Australia’s most respected social scientists.
By December 1961 the Prime Minister Robert Menzies had appointed Professor A. D. Trendall to chair a committee which sought to make “recommendations towards the permanent establishment of a national research organization with the title of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies” (Stanner 1963:xiv). This committee was to become the first Interim Council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and its Executive Member was Frederick McCarthy, then the curator of anthropology at the Australian Museum in Sydney.

McCarthy had become the curator of anthropology at the Australian Museum in 1940 after having worked there for 20 years. He had completed a Diploma of Anthropology at the University of Sydney where he studied under Elkin and Hogbin. He gained exposure in archaeological and anthropological circles when an archaeological dig he conducted at Lapstone Creek (at the base of the Blue Mountains) revealed that there were multiple “culture periods” in Aboriginal prehistory (McCarthy 1948). McCarthy further developed a special interest in rock art and maintained a massive catalogue of rock engravings found in the Sydney region. Beyond these though, it was his passion for museums which led him to remain at the Australian Museum for forty-four years until his departure in 1964.

For McCarthy, a museum was a place for the preservation of collections of material objects and associated information for public instruction and posterity. He was a firm believer in the idea of systematic collecting for scientific analysis and discouraged the collection of artifacts by amateurs. He (1946:29) promoted the idea of “visual instruction” as being central to the work of museums and encouraged the use of film as part of his systematic collection methodology. He stated that “[f]ilms of ceremonies and processes are now part of the modern technique of collecting, and they form an invaluable record of sacred objects which cannot be collected” (1946:33). So in 1946, almost twenty years before his involvement with the Institute, McCarthy saw filmmaking as part of the collector’s toolkit. The above quote also suggests that McCarthy may have believed that filming had the added advantage of allowing the collector to record objects that would be impossible to obtain due to their sacred status. The importance of this motivation will
become apparent later as the Institute did indeed use film to capture the physically uncollectable in the form of secret ceremonies.

Thus, as the founding Principal of the Institute, McCarthy brought with him a long association with the ideals and pedagogics of museums which he applied in earnest to the Institute’s functions. These functions were again spelt out in 1964 when a bill was lodged in Parliament calling for the creation of the Institute as a statutory body.

**The Institute becomes a statutory body**

In May of 1964 a bill for the creation of the Institute was put to the Senate and was spoken to by Senator Gorton, Mr Beazley (Snr) and Mr Wentworth. Although it was not until December 1964 that this bill was enacted, the speeches given in its favour are interesting as evidence that the views of its supporters had changed little during the three years the Institute (in its interim form) had been in operation.

Senator Gorton\(^{19}\) (1964:2) believed that the AIAS would have “[c]ollection as its prime role; the study of materials at leisure is largely for the future and for other institutions”. Gorton (1964:2) also stated that the Institute would not “be concerned with current problems as they affect the Australian aborigine” as “[i]ts work will be scientific and anthropological”. He elaborated this by stating that the Institute was an academic body with a “national viewpoint” and a program “designed to ensure that important material now available is not lost forever” (Gorton et. al. 1964:2). By contrast, Kim Beazley (Snr) supported the creation of the Institute because he believed it could act as a body for providing practical information with regard to the assimilation policy. While he recognised it was not a policy creation body itself, he believed that “it is inevitable, if the government is enlightened, that what the institute does will affect policy, even though that is not its primary aim” (Gorton et. al. 1964:4). Further to this he stated:

I hope that the establishment of this institute will encourage Australian governments to utilize the knowledge of anthropologists, linguists and ethnographers in framing policy,

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\(^{19}\) In a document which is an excerpt from Hansard on the reading of the bill, Senator Gorton is noted as the speaker of the first speech although the original Hansard has Mr. Freeth as the reader. I believe that it was Gorton who wrote it and Freeth may have read it for him in the House of Representatives. In 1966, Menzies retired as Prime Minister, Harold Holt then took up the position but disappeared while swimming in December 1967. Gorton then became the Prime Minister.
particularly educational policy, in relation to the aborigines (sic). 'Conform to us' seems to be the demand made on the aborigines (sic). There seems to be a general lack of technique designed to facilitate aboriginal adjustment to the problem of living with the dominant European society (Gorton et. al. 1964:5).

Beazley believed that the Institute's research could provide the government with the necessary information to help facilitate the "adjustment" of Aboriginal people to the encapsulating society. But this was not accepted by the government and was not an explicit part of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Act (1964).

**The intellectual background of the Film Unit**

As mentioned above, McCarthy had been interested in the use of film in his museum work for nearly twenty years although I have found no record of him being involved with any productions prior to his work with the Institute. The first film he was involved with was in 1962 when he accompanied Wentworth and members of the Commonwealth Film Unit (CFU) to Aurukun to film a series of totemic dances (see McCarthy 1964). His most telling documents about the use of film were written later in 1966 when he was commissioned by Unesco to present a paper about the state of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia at the upcoming Round Table on Ethnographic Filmmaking in the Pacific Area meeting. McCarthy gave a general paper at this gathering (see McCarthy 1966a) as well as providing his commissioned paper to the participants (see 1966b). In the paper McCarthy (1966a:83) gave at this meeting, he set out the aims and objectives of the Institute's Film Unit, which by this time had been running for four years:

> The aim of the Institute's programme is to make accurate ethnographic films of the highest scientific merit for presentation as scientific documents. When edited and produced they range in length from one half to three hours of archive material from which, where there is freedom to do so, general release film are made. But the emphasis initially is on archival material as time is short and there is much to be done. The Institute plans to film from four to five rituals each year for several years to come, and so build up a corpus of illustrative records from which comparative and other studies can be made of dancing, body designs and decor, choreography, and of the elements of rituals. ... The Institute is also anxious to secure an adequate record of Aboriginal daily life and crafts, which is still possible in some parts of Australia.

From this it can be seen that McCarthy saw the Film Unit by 1966 as essentially producing archival records which would be seen as scientific documents, a job that would be made.

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20 The Round Table was held in Sydney from 25 to 29 July 1966. This paper (McCarthy 1966b) was later published in a French volume by Unesco from the conference (see McCarthy 1970). McCarthy received £90 for his efforts.
In his presented paper, McCarthy also considered the issue of filming and screening secret ceremonies, pointing out that the performance and witnessing of ceremonies is the exclusive domain of initiated males and that much care is taken in gaining filmic records of them. He also noted in a positive light that remuneration was often sought for filming ceremonies by the Aboriginal people who performed. He went on to make the statement that “the Institute films ceremonies only incidentally” and that “they would be performed whether filmed or not and are thus normal cultural events. No attempt is made to stage a ritual for filming” (McCarthy 1966a:84). During this period, however, filming ceremonies was one of the major aims of the Institute, as outlined above by McCarthy himself and the statement regarding not staging ceremonies is incorrect. Up until 1966 it may have been the case in some circumstances that the ceremonies would have occurred without the presence of the camera, but by 1967 T. Draper Campbell had drawn the Institute’s Film Unit into filming staged ceremonies mainly in central Australia (pers. comm. Nicolas Peterson). Further to this, McCarthy (1966a:84) stated that “the Institute has decided not to release its ritual films but to retain them as archival records to respect the wishes of the Aborigines, otherwise they will not allow them to be filmed”. Of course he also stated in the above quote that release versions would be made when “there was the freedom to do so”. Within a year however, the Film Unit was producing release versions of all its ceremonial films. This point is discussed later in the context of the conflict that arose between the institutional agenda of the Institute with regard these films and the motivations of the individual filmmakers.

McCarthy also couched the filmmaking agenda in terms of its importance to the nation when he stated in this paper that a “major impetus was given to the filming of Aboriginal life by the Commonwealth Government when it established the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, in 1961, to record and study the Aborigines and their customs as an urgent research task because of the increasingly rapid destruction of their traditional culture” (1966a:81). The Institute’s film program was of vital importance
"because no other organisation, university or museum has the funds or facilities to carry out this work in Australia, and there is no duplication in effort" (McCarthy 1966a:81). McCarthy saw the Institute as the only organisation in the country at that time which had a federal government mandate to film the disappearing practices of Aboriginal people.

McCarthy had prepared this publicly presented paper by viewing 96 films about Aboriginal people that were also supposedly anthropological in focus although many were for general audiences. He accomplished this over a period of months leading up to the Round Table and this was a significant feat in itself. He produced a filmography from this viewing and research which contains abstracts for 182 films, of which he freely admits to only seeing half (McCarthy 1966a:13). As a preface to this filmography, McCarthy included a lengthy introduction about the past and present state of filmmaking and also an analysis of the films through a category system. In this paper he stated that “[t]here is a desire today in some Aboriginal groups to have all of their secret ritual filmed so that future generations may see what the old people did and what the old people were taught by the ancestral spirits” (McCarthy 1966a:2). McCarthy believed that old men wanted films made of secret/sacred rites and in order to accomplish this he took the view that filmmakers must not screen films containing such information to open audiences otherwise the said men will refuse further filmmaking. He did not see this as a problem where the Institute was concerned because he envisaged a restricted archive of these films there. So he balanced the problem of screening restricted information by stating that the Institute films would be “objective visual documents” of a scientific nature and that the films would only be screened to researchers and not the public (McCarthy 1966a:3). It was on these grounds that McCarthy established the Film Unit and charged it with filling the “serious gaps in our film record of Aboriginal life...that of dancing and rituals” (McCarthy 1966a:5).

This was not however the first ethnographic film unit and archive of its kind to be established on the logic of recording cultures undergoing transformation. The Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film in Germany set up the first systematic anthropological film archive in Göttingen in 1952 (de Brigard 1995:29) and the Harvard Peabody Film
Study Center in the United States had begun filming in 1950 (Gardner 1957:350). In fact, by 1957 the Harvard Peabody group had amassed 250,000 feet of colour 16mm film of !Kung Bushmen, exposed over a total of twenty-four months in the Kalahari (Gardner 1957:350). Ethnographic filmmaking activity was occurring elsewhere across the globe and McCarthy would have seen many films and much of the published written materials about them by 1966. The Round Table would have also seen him meet the likes of Robert Gardner and Jean Rouch who would have introduced him to a diverse range of theories on filmmaking. Whether or not he took their opinions on board is another matter for McCarthy continued his program of obtaining rituals and ceremonies until his departure from the Institute in the early 1970s. Suffice to say that McCarthy was at the helm of an Institute which saw the making of scientific film records as one of its primary goals, a goal that had been shared by others interested in Aboriginal studies in the past.

Indeed somebody who may have had a greater impression on McCarthy was a person not present at the Round Table. This was Richard Sorensen, a medical professional who was struck by the fact that every human activity was a non-recurring phenomenon; that it would happen once and every attempt to replicate it by a person would still be different from the last. Therefore whatever was filmed was a representation of a reality, the efficacy of which had as much authority as the next. McCarthy was introduced to the work of Sorensen on the 8th October 1964, by Frank Fenner of the Department of Microbiology, John Curtin School of Medical Research at ANU, who sent Fred McCarthy a copy of a 1962 article written by Sorenson entitled, “Investigation of non-recurring phenomena: the research cinema film”. Fenner’s covering letter to McCarthy reads:

I presume you know of these papers and the concept they embody — it seems to me important that the A.I.A.S. should follow the same procedure with its research films rather than let the preconceptions of the present determine how we discard irreplaceable information.  

Sorenson was involved with the study of neurological diseases such as kuru through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the United States. During 1960 he was associated with Folklore Research Films in New York but then began work with the NIH.

21 Letter from Fenner to McCarthy dated 8/10/64 in AIATSIS file 64/131/1.
It was while working on neurological disorders and child behaviour that Sorenson developed a research film methodology which McCarthy applauded. Sorenson (1967:443) believed that film "might be of unique value to scientific investigation of non-recurrent human events by preserving their visual data for future analysis and for use in the genesis, development, and demonstration of ideas". He created a "film study archive" similar to Regnault's, the concept and methodology of which he believed would be broadly applicable to other areas of ethnographic research. Cinema provided Sorenson (1967:443) with three distinct benefits: stop-motion and slow-motion techniques allowed the researcher to see things that the human eye cannot process (cinema as research aid); it could be used to illustrate something that lends itself especially to visual re-presentation better than any other medium (demonstrative film); and for the "preservation and study of data from non-recurring, disappearing, or rare events" (record or research film). To Sorenson, unedited footage was a scientific document of irreplaceable value — it was another chance to see what happened during particular moments of time.

The deficiency in Sorenson's methodology is in his unwillingness to fully problematise the divide between subjectivity and objectivity in filmmaking. "Film is a unique and most potent tool in the preservation of data from non-recurring phenomena because of its ability to record a facsimile of the visual data by means of objective chemical changes in a light-sensitive emulsion" (Sorenson 1967:446). Film is "undifferentiated information" and it is "this quality which makes film unlike other methods of recording data in which the recording is dependent upon the perceptive and cognitive apparatus of human observers" (Sorenson 1967:446). Almost as an aside, Sorenson (1967:446-448) does point out that the "data" may suffer the "intrusion" of the subjective element, the desires and personality of the filmmaker, but these "selective factors" can be explained away through indicating them in titles, narration, journal articles and accompanying written notes. Sorenson's filmmaking may have been a potent tool for preserving moments in time but its impotence lay in disregarding the control the filmmaker has over the camera, the people being filmed and the entire process itself. Luc de Heusch (in Sorenson
1967:464), a Belgian sociologist and prominent thinker about ethnographic films at the time, said of Sorenson's methodology:

> However objective the film-maker maintains he is, a film always expresses a point of view. The problem of considering the cinema as an autonomous language is evident, and this is what Sorenson seems completely to evade. He remains a prisoner of a myth, that of the cinema's magic eye.

Fred McCarthy's background in museums not surprisingly predisposed him to a collecting approach to culture. During his first few years with the Institute he wanted all of the major cult rituals of Arnhem Land filmed. He was satisfied that Mountford, through the Adelaide Board, had successfully covered Aboriginal daily life and technology and what was lacking was an adequate record of ritual on film:

> This Institute was set up by the Commonwealth Government of Australia to record all information possible about the language, art, music, social, economic and ritual life, the human biology and archaeology of the Australian Aborigines. An extremely important part of our programme is the filming of Aboriginal ceremonies and customs. It is now evident that all film recordings will have to be done within the next five years or so because of the changes being brought about in the life of these people by various influences. The preservation of information about their customs is not only important to Australia, it is in fact a responsibility accepted by the Commonwealth Government. It is also of initial interest to every branch of social and biological science throughout the world, and is of primary importance to human biologists, educationalists, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists. Aboriginal themes are now becoming important in Australian literature. (Frederick McCarthy)

His aim was to collect a complete set of individual and separate ritual films from Arnhem Land before time rendered this task unfinishable and culture in the region was changed by the impending arrival of mining interests. To this end he was guided by Elkin and began the process of making records with the filmmaker Cecil Holmes. When a decision had to be made, McCarthy often decided against filming ceremonies which had already been filmed elsewhere. This was almost certainly for pragmatic reasons such as the expense of filming and wanting to get as complete a coverage as possible before dramatic socio-cultural changed occurred. He also requested the purchase of all objects used in the filmed ceremonies wherever possible and organised for their deposition at the Institute in Canberra. To this end, McCarthy was in some circumstances able to have whole events

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22 Letter from McCarthy to Rev. M.I. Spengler (Superintendent Methodist Mission, Millingimbi) dated 17/5/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11(D).
23 The Institute no longer has an artefact collection as during the mid 1980s most of its collection was handed over to the National Museum of Australia (pers comm Dr. William Jonas).
recorded filmically and also to collect all of the objects made and used by the people in the film.24

Baudrillard (1994:15) in his 1968 *Le système des objects* cited Rheims as stating that “a phenomenon often associated with the passion of collecting is the loss of all sense of the present”. Temporality is eschewed through the process of collecting as the act of collection itself “displaces real time” (ibid.:16). Baudrillard (1994:16) went further to suggest that “[d]oubtless this is the fundamental project of all collecting — to translate real time into the dimensions of a system”. The salvage paradigm, as it has become known, fostered collectors such as McCarthy who incorporated the strategies for collecting objects — his systems — into an institutional methodology for collecting culture on film. Aboriginal presents were neglected and, as was often the case, recreated pasts were recorded for unknown futures, for the researchers of an unknown posterity. Baudrillard (1994:16) also stated that “by establishing a fixed repertory of temporal references that can be replayed at will, in reverse order if need be, collecting represents the perpetual fresh beginning of a controlled cycle”.25 Through the early first phase films the Institute managed to create a system of collecting which allowed the temporally paralleling realities of Aboriginal people to be ignored in favour of creating records which allowed the instant replay of some invented Aboriginal reality at any time.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the background to the founding of the Institute and its involvement in filmmaking. Its program was based around collecting filmic data on Aboriginal ceremonies, material culture, technology and daily life — a life that was expected to come to an end in the near future. McCarthy brought a collector’s zeal to the systematic filming of ceremonial activity as he believed it filled a significant gap in the filmic record of Aboriginal society.

24 The Interim Council Meeting Minutes (Discussions) of 18-19/10/63 noted that McCarthy had sent £100 to Millingimbi Mission to purchase "specimens" used in the Djalambu ceremony filmed by Holmes. Among those items were bullroarers and a 40 foot pole. They noted that the Institute "now has all the material used in both the Millingimbi and Aurukun films".

25 The films of the early period may contain representations of Aboriginal people captured by a system desiring a "synchronic haven" but today these films remain locked in temperature controlled vaults, only having light pass through them for necessary preservation activities.
I have suggested that McCarthy was acquainted with the work of others who were involved with the construction of scientific research film and therefore knew what sort of films he wanted the Institute to produce. To this end, scientific record films fitted well within the context of the Institute's salvage anthropology mandate and the creation of an archive in which researchers in the future could work at their leisure.

26 Others would disagree with this (see author's Interview with Roger Sandall 31/7/95 and 12/11/96).
Capturing a changing culture: the first phase of the Film Unit

This chapter examines the work of the Film Unit from 1962 until McCarthy retired in 1972. It is a chronological account that seeks to provide detail on the people and projects associated with the Unit in this period. The problem for McCarthy in getting his film program going was that the Institute did not have the technical skills or staff to make the films itself so the first films were made through various arrangements with people who were not Institute staff members. The establishment of film making expertise within the Institute did not take place until the arrival of Roger Sandall in 1965. However the base from which the Unit grew was the audio-visual service for researchers established by Peter Hamilton, owner of the Sydney-based music production company, Wattle Records. It is here that the story of the Film Unit begins.

Hamilton had completed an architecture degree after the second world war and while at the University of Sydney he had become interested in film. Before his graduation in 1950 he had been involved with the university film group and also wrote a thesis on the design of a film archive at the National Library in Canberra.²⁷ Through conversations

²⁷ There is unfortunately no record of this thesis at the Fisher Library or the audio-visual section of the Architecture Faculty at the University of Sydney.
with the then principal librarian at the National Library, Harold White, Hamilton was able
to design a practical archive for a growing collection. After leaving university, he joined
the New South Wales Film Council as the librarian of a Joint Coal Board sponsored
mobile film library which travelled the coal fields. This was not unusual at the time, as a
number of primary industry companies were sponsoring film production and distribution,
such as the now famous Shell Film Unit which had John Heyer as its Director. Hamilton
believes that these companies brought a high degree of discipline to documentary film
production and had actually formed a “sub-culture” of industry focused filmmaking.

Hamilton’s position in the New South Wales Film Council was brought to an end
due to his political associations with industrial groups and his promotion of film as a
cultural medium. After this, he decided that he wanted to pursue the production of films
which had a distinctively Australian character. This took the form of making dramatised
and animated films about Australian folk music. Having many friends and associates
involved in this scene, he set up a film production studio in Woolloomooloo, Sydney, but
before long had begun to concentrate mostly on the music recording side of this initiative.
Wattle Records was established and Hamilton began recording and archiving sound,
mainly of Australian folk songs. Hamilton considers this “the precursor to the Institute”
because he also recorded and distributed such works as Sheridan’s *Music of New Guinea*,
Trevor Jones’ *The Art of the Didjeridu*, La Mont West’s *Arnhem Land Popular Classics* and also
the work of the New South Wales based Aboriginal singer Dougie Young. He also
found himself acting as a go-between for early Institute grantees such as La Mont West,
processing their footage and dealing with their sound records made in the field.

With this experience behind him, Hamilton decided in 1962 to proposition the
Interim Council of the Institute to setup a sound and film archive and production facility.
He approached the Interim Council through one of its members, William Geddes,
Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, who was very interested in film
and who was to play a significant role in the development of ethnographic film at the

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28 Interview with Peter Hamilton 4/4/95.
29 Interview with Peter Hamilton 4/4/95.
Institute. Hamilton’s proposal was approved by the Council and he was hired through the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney in a bilateral agreement with the Institute. This meant that in exchange for providing administrative services and space for the unit, the Department of Anthropology could avail itself of the equipment operated and maintained by Hamilton. The Sound and Film Unit was built in the old Deaf, Dumb and Blind Institute building on City Road with a small theatrette, projection room, production room, library, office and storage areas. A secretary and assistant were employed by the Institute to help Hamilton and assist in the production of fieldworkers’ audio and visual material.

At this time there was interest from overseas in the Institute with regard to filming in Australia. In March 1962, Berndt, Elkin and Wentworth each received the same letter from a Milton Fruchtman of Sextant Inc., New York. Fruchtman was planning a series of films on “recognized anthropologists”. In this letter, Fruchtman made the peculiar claim that:

[t]o assist in the delicate task of obtaining accurate material we have developed special techniques which permit unobtrusive filming and sound recording, with the subject unaware of the equipment and technicians.\(^{30}\)

Nothing eventuated between the Institute and Fruchtman. Members of the Institute paid more attention to a letter received in December 1962 from Douglas Oliver, then Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University. Oliver stated that he had seen the films of Mountford, Strehlow and the Commonwealth Film Unit but these had not fitted his needs. He had in mind:

a large amount of footage on all filmable aspects of some particular Aborigine culture, involving close collaboration of ethnographer and film crew working together in the field for periods long enough to obtain footage on an entire annual cycle. From this we expect to construct first of all, a large number of short units on subjects such as physical environment, tool making, hunting, eating and the like, for use in the elementary grades; but anticipate that the uncut original will also provide footage for other pedagogic purposes, including university uses and teaching here and in Australia.\(^{31}\)

Stanner was at that time meeting with Oliver in America and attended a meeting of “cinema specialists” in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Stanner reported in a letter to the

\(^{30}\) Letter from Fruchtman in AIATSIS file 66/94.
\(^{31}\) Letter from Oliver to Trendall dated 20/12/62 in AIATSIS file 66/94. The letter makes no mention of the "Man: a course of study" filming project.
Institute that the money put up for this project by the Ford Foundation for the proposed Australian filming amounted to US$100,000.\textsuperscript{32} Stanner and Berndt were in favour of the project but Barnes was much less hopeful that Oliver would be able to obtain the filmed material that he was after.\textsuperscript{33} Oliver wanted to follow a group of Aboriginal people for an entire year but Barnes believed that at that time very few people lived in the bush all year round. Barnes believed that any attempt at filming "traditional everyday life will have to depend on deliberately anachronistic acting" and in his opinion "a film of traditional aboriginal (sic) life could only be elaborate artifice (sic)".\textsuperscript{34} In any case, Oliver replied in February 1963 stating that he had not as yet received any funding for the project but requested that the Interim Council of the Institute not disapprove the project at this stage.\textsuperscript{35} Later that month the Interim Council granted Oliver’s request for non-disapproval although, like Fruchtman’s proposal, no further positive correspondence was entered into and no film projects eventuated.\textsuperscript{36}

**Early projects**

Four strategies were used to promote film production prior to the establishment of the Institute’s own Film Unit. The first strategy was for a member of the Institute’s staff to collaborate with a film maker from outside the Institute. This was how the first film project was made with McCarthy himself working with Ian Dunlop from the Commonwealth Film Unit. The project was precipitated by news in November 1962 of an intended performance of a lengthy ceremony by people at Aurukun mission on Cape York peninsula. As it turned out they did not film a major ceremony but thirty-eight totemic dances. Dunlop had been working on the Commonwealth sponsored information film *Aborigines of Australia* at this time and was chosen to act as more of a supervisor than a director of this project as he later had very little to do with the editing of the final two films, *Dances of Aurukun* (1964)\textsuperscript{37} and *Five Dances at Aurukun* (1966).\textsuperscript{38} This first large scale

\textsuperscript{32} Letter from Stanner to Institute dated 4/1/63 in AIATSIS file 66/94.
\textsuperscript{33} Berndt also suggested that the Institute seek a controlling interest in the project; letter from Berndt to Institute dated 13/2/63 in AIATSIS file 66/94.
\textsuperscript{34} Memorandum from Barnes to Trendall dated 8/1/63 in AIATSIS file 66/94.
\textsuperscript{35} Letter from Oliver to Trendall dated 8/2/63 in AIATSIS file 66/94.
\textsuperscript{36} Notes from I. C. Meeting held on 20-21/2/63 in AIATSIS file 66/94.
\textsuperscript{37} All film dates relate to release or completion date and not the year they were filmed unless a dual date is given, in which case the first date is the filming date and the second is the release date.
film project initiated by the Institute was simply a process of filming discrete individual
dances for the camera. It was filmed almost entirely in long shot with two cameras using
16mm colour film and correct sound (not synchronous sound). It was essentially a low
level recording activity whose real importance was to cement relations between the CFU
and the Institute out of which other projects would grow.40

Another way in which the Institute sponsored filming was by providing a camera
and film to fieldworkers it was supporting. The first project of this kind was carried out by
Peter Lucich, an anthropologist working at Kalumburu in the Kimberley area of northern
Western Australia.41 He recorded and edited three films, *Dance-Time Kalumburu* (1963/68),
*To Light a Fire* (1963/68) and *String from Human Hair* (1963/68).42 Film was not central to
Lucich's research and as the 1968 completion date shows, Lucich's primary interest was
not in distributing edited versions. However, after editing the footage, Lucich made some
interesting comments about the dancing film:

> It was not possible to make an 'objective' motion picture of the dancing mainly because of
equipment limitations. The clockwork motor on the camera usually ran out in the middle
or even the beginning of a complete dance sequence. This meant that each dance had to
be repeated many times before all the actions had been recorded on film. What appears on
the screen is actually a composite reconstruction of a single dance sequence. There are
seven of these sequences, together with the accompanying music. The film is not a picture
doing, it is my own selected and organised impressions of Kalumburu dancing and its
context. Both sound and vision have been edited. I have tried to convey something of the
dedication which the dancers brought to their work. The notion of objectivity is highly
suspect in the best of circumstances, and no pictures can be fully objective. At the same
time the sequences of actions within each dance do generally correspond with what is
shown on the film. The main difference is that the filmed representations are much
shorter in duration than the actual dances. All the dances shown are secular at
Kalumburu.43

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38 Interview with Dunlop 9/10/96. During this interview Dunlop talked extensively about his early film *Aborigines of Australia* which was not a film for the Institute but an information film commissioned by the government.

39 By correct sound I mean sound that was recorded on location but which is not mechanically synchronised with the camera at the time of filming.

40 Interview with Dunlop 9/10/96.

41 Lucich informed me that the camera was a 16mm Paillard-Bolex with zoom lense (Letter from Lucich to author dated 17/8/95).

42 I have not seen the final film nor does the AIATSIS Film Archive hold a copy that I have been made aware of.

43 Unpublished manuscript "P.H. Lucich Field work 1963-4 CINE FILMS" dated approximately March 1968, provided by Lucich to the author.
Lucich's problems are reminiscent of those experienced by Spencer but he also became aware of the limitations of the camera as a scientific tool.44

A third approach to producing films was to contract a film maker to make films on a prearranged topic without involving any Institute personnel. At the Interim Council meeting in February 1963 there was a long discussion about the Commonwealth government's decision to begin large scale bauxite mining near Yirrkala in Arnhem Land. The discussion mostly centred around the serious impact that the mine would have on Yolngu people in the area and on the country they inhabited.45 In subsequent meetings the sense of urgency increased about recording all details of these peoples' existence before the coming of the mine and it was decided "that the Institute should get in touch with Mr. Cecil Holmes to see if he is carrying out film work there for the Methodist Church" with a view to getting him to undertake the project.46 For the next two years it was this mode of contracting an outside filmmaker without direct involvement of Institute staff in the project, which became the principal way of working.

A fourth approach was responding to a proposal brought to the Institute by an outsider. The main person to work in this mode was Ian Dunlop from the Commonwealth Film Unit with whom McCarthy had made the Aurukun films.

The contract work of Cecil Holmes

In total, Cecil Holmes (1921-1994) filmed five ceremonies in Arnhem Land for the Institute. He was not a prominent filmmaker during his life but he is considered one of the battlers of the Australian film industry (Dunlop 1983:15). As a member of the Communist Party he was not only on the political left but also on the outside of the Australian filmmaking establishment.

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44 From this footage, Lucich also produced two "unedited archival films", *Children at Mowanjum* and *Spear Films A and B*. Apparently the spear sequences, which are probably of spear manufacture, were for Charles Moutford who was going to incorporate them into one of his films.

45 The term "country" is used here in the sense that it relates to land belonging to a particular group of Aboriginal people.

46 Minute 63/11 of the Interim Council meeting held 20-21/2/63; see also Interim Council meeting discussion of "Yirrkala Project" on 30/4/63-1/5/63.
Holmes became a newsreel reporter for the New Zealand Film Unit in late 1945 after serving as a lieutenant in the Royal New Zealand Navy during the second world war. He made a number of films for that Unit such as *The Coaster* (1947) and *Power from the River* (1947). He also made *Fighting Back* (1948) for the trade union movement in New Zealand about a prolonged strike there in 1948. He came to Australia to work with John Heyer’s Shell Film Unit and also worked for the Waterside Workers Film Unit. In 1952 he completed the short film *Words for Freedom* (1952) which traced the history of the trade union movement through the Tribune newspaper. During the 1950s he also made two feature films, *Captain Thunderbolt* (1953) and *Three in One* (1957) as well as running the film distribution company New Dawn. By the late 1950s the Australian feature film industry was in disarray due to the monopolistic tactics of the United States production houses so Holmes began to seek work elsewhere. He fell into conflict with the Australian Communist Party over some passing remarks about Chinese films at a film conference in Perth and this eventually led to him withdrawing from the Party and from running New Dawn. Peter Hamilton and Holmes were well acquainted by this time and their association may have come about through their Communist Party connections.

Holmes stated in his autobiography that while at the 1957 Karlovey Film Festival with his feature film *Three in One*, he was drawn into conversation with a young East German anthropologist about Aboriginal people in Australia. The anthropologist was a student of Fred Rose and wanted to know why Holmes and “other Australian film-makers were not doing something about the condition of Aborigines” (Holmes 1986:47). Holmes had no answer and claimed he was “discomfited” and “ashamed” by this (ibid.). He was embarrassed by how little he knew but returned to Australia with the passion to change this. He also stated in his autobiography that he was drawn to Aboriginal issues because “the fight and flavour” had gone out of the Communist movement and he was therefore “unknowingly” drawn to this because he was seeking another “cause or interest” (Holmes 1986:52).
In 1962 the Methodist Overseas Mission approached him through Richard Mason to make two films in Arnhem Land about their missions. Before flying north from Sydney he rang Fred McCarthy to find out if there was any chance of making films for the Institute while in the area. Holmes (1986:69) said that McCarthy "made encouraging noises, so if there were some rituals or ceremonies taking place in Arnhem Land, he [McCarthy] would get film and tape up in quick time". Holmes (1986:69) was wary of the connection with the Institute to begin with because he considered W. C. Wentworth as "the nation's most energetic red baiter". They apparently had a good relationship however and Holmes (1986:70) believed that Wentworth always supported his endeavours. The Methodists wanted two films to be made on this trip. The first film was to be about a minister called Harold Shepherdson (Sheppy) who used an airplane to visit people in remote parts of Arnhem Land. It was called *How Shall They Hear* and is a public relations film for the Methodist Overseas Mission in which the work of the missionaries is praised.

The second film made on this trip was called *Faces in the Sun*, the brief for which was "non-religious, sociological in substance, an impression of the variety of people and problems that would...extend the knowledge and experience of audiences in Australia about these remote folk" (Holmes 1986:70). In this film Holmes used the technique of getting non-actors to enact roles that had been scripted as he had done in his earlier dramatic feature *Three in One*.

During the filming of these two for the Methodists, Holmes filmed a mortuary ceremony for the Institute at Milingimbi in May of 1963 (*Djalambru*). The Institute provided the Methodists with £1000 to cover the costs of the filming but the later post-production work was directly paid for by the Institute. This was the first time a ceremony...
had been filmed in great detail for the Institute and it is a comprehensive record considering it was made, according to Holmes, with a "footling little camera and a battered old Phillips recorder". This film also stands out in the history of Australian ethnographic filmmaking for it was one of the first times that correct sound was used while filming a ceremony. Unfortunately for the Institute this lack of totally synchronous sound caused continuous editing problems with the release version well into 1964. McCarthy saw another problem in this film in that no anthropologist was there at the time of filming to document the particulars of the ceremony. This led him to write: "This film is a beautiful and valuable account of the ceremony and had it been documented in the way we have the Aurukun films [which McCarthy documented himself] it would have been a most valuable scientific record". It should be added that this mortuary ceremony was of a public nature at the time of filming and in the place it was filmed although certain scenes represented apparently contain images that were restricted elsewhere in Arnhem Land at the same time. The film is therefore now classified as restricted.

In November 1963, Cecily Burton, the Institute Secretary, sent Holmes a letter asking him if he would be prepared to make more films for the Institute. Holmes had by this time moved to Darwin to take up the position of editor at the Rupert Murdoch owned *The Territorian* which was the official paper of the Cattlemen’s Association of North Australia and the Northern Territory Game Shooters Association. It had been decided by the Interim Council at a meeting in October that they could take advantage of Holmes’ presence in Darwin and surrounding areas for any future film work that may have arisen. This would have pleased McCarthy as Holmes allowed him the potential to make films of impending ceremonies as they were learnt about.

By late 1963 however there was still no definite program of filming but the Institute was concerned with getting as many workers as possible into Arnhem Land. Holmes had adapted Douglas Lockwood’s biography of Phillip Roberts, *I the Aboriginal* for

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49 Letter from Holmes to Burton dated 3/10/64 provided by Peterson.
50 Letter from McCarthy to S. Holmes dated 11/3/64 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (c).
51 Letter from Burton to Holmes dated 7/11/63 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (A)/1.
television and had completed its filming by late 1963. During this filming, Holmes also managed to record ceremonial footage at Mainoru, some of which was edited into the final film. Elkin, who had made a record film of a Mardayin ceremony at Mainoru in 1949 had found out about this footage and asked Charles Moses of the ABC if the Institute could have it for their archive. Moses agreed and made a gift of the footage to the Institute, most of which eventually became the Institute film Mainoru. Holmes had already begun working on this material for the Institute and in mid December the Interim Council approved the expenditure of £700 for its editing. The film was finished by January 1964 but due to technical problems it was still being re-edited well into that year.

In January of 1964 Ronald Bemdt had been assigned the role of administering the filming of an Ubar (Uwar) ceremony on Goulburn Island. It was not Bemdt's idea to film it but he was simply put in charge of £1000 granted by Council for its production. Holmes was to film the ceremony and Berndt was to organise most of the pre-production logistics and also to act as the anthropologist during the filming. Berndt and Holmes had met in December 1963 and tentatively planned to meet again in Darwin to organise the filming. However, due to a series of misunderstandings between Berndt and Holmes as

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52 Holmes had been impressed with the book and says in his autobiography that he was taken by "the authentic and lively account of primitive Aboriginal tribal life, initiation, hunting techniques, and so on, a kind of 'inside' look at the very nature of the Aborigine presented in neither slick patronizing journalism, nor in arduous, academic terms" (1986:76). He wrote the script and managed to complete the entire film in a matter of weeks. It was then released by the ABC in 1964 as a documentary although it has been considered by some as one of Holmes' features. It is structured as a series of flashbacks by the main character Philip Roberts, an Aboriginal man who became a health worker in Darwin. Holmes again incorporated the strategy of getting people to act out his dramatised scripts. Roberts himself took six weeks off work to star as himself.

Critic Sylvia Lawson in the November 1964 issue of Nation said of Holmes' I, the Aboriginal "as the whole study of a man in a special situation, the work is gagged and muffled". She went on to say that Faces in the sun seems to her to have contained his best work in documentary, "Mr. Holmes offers no solutions and lays no charges, but by trapping us briefly in their lives, inscribes the problems indelibly". Holmes too became critical of I, the Aboriginal when in 1974 he said, "I don't think that its a very good film. It was too bland... Now one should make a film which would need to be much more candid, much harder, cut much closer to the bone, which that film didn't at the time. It belonged to a time" (Harry Martin interview with Cecil Holmes for ABC Radio recorded off air in 1974. Provided to the author by Andrew Pike, film historian).

53 For information on Elkin's 1949 film entitled Maraian at Mainoru see Elkin 1972.
54 Minute 63/16/f of the Interim Council Meeting held on 13/12/63.
55 See Berndt and Berndt 1992:276-279 for a description of this ceremony.
well as postponement of the ceremony, the filming was called off. By September 1964 however, Holmes was filming an Ubar ceremony on Goulburn Island with the assistance of Jeremy Long, an employee of the Welfare Department in Darwin. Interestingly, Holmes filmed Long speaking about the ceremony which he intended to edit in at the beginning and end of the film. He said that “[f]rom a teaching point of view I feel this could be an effective device — if it is completed. Give the whole thing an air of authority, you actually see the anthropologist involved with the material”. It is perhaps not surprising that this sequence is not included in the finished film since including it would have been in conflict with McCarthy's idea of the scientific record film. Complete records were wanted, including the procurement of the objects used by the people in the ceremony. So in the case of the Ubar and Djalambu ceremonies, the Institute was able not only to collect the filmic record of their performance but the Assistant Director of the Northern Territory Administration, E.P. Milliken, managed to purchase most of the “artefacts” used as well.

An interesting aspect of this film was that it was the first made by the Institute with synchronous sound equipment (possibly the first time it was used in an ethnographic film in Australia) operated by a professional cameraman hired by Holmes. The cameraman was Alan Keen and the sound was recorded by Sandra Le Brun Holmes. It was the job of Cecil Holmes to direct and also to work the clapper-board at the beginning of each scene. Many scenes were rehearsed and others were done twice to allow them to insert footage from additional camera angles. Apparently there were again problems with the sound recording and Keen stated that there was a 20% loss of sync. This loss of

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56 I believe it was this experience which led Berndt to oppose much of the ceremonial centred filming programme of the Institute during the 1960s. Berndt was wary of Holmes' connection with commercial filmmaking activities and throughout all his correspondence regarding this film, he warned his peers in the Institute about the problems that would arise if the Institute was to be seen to be involved in making a profit from their filmmaking. In March 1964 Berndt detailed further difficulties he had with Holmes and with the project in general in a twelve page typewritten report (provided to author by Peterson).

57 Letter from Holmes to McCarthy dated 28/4/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (a).

58 As a note regarding the future of this film, I have noted that Jeremy Long requested that a short open section of this film be made from the original footage. This footage was taken at the participating women's camp and is of their dancing. Long said of this footage: "Such a film could be shown to general audiences of Aboriginals and could perhaps be a useful 'public relations' aid. There are only three main sequences (six titles) that could be so used, apart from the opening 'title shots' of the mission" (Letter from Long to McCarthy dated 18/3/66 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (a)).

59 Letter from Milliken to Burton dated 8/10/64 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (A)/2.

60 Letter from Keen to Institute dated 7/11/64 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (A)/2.
sync may have been due to a confusion between the sound of the clapper and the sound of the clap-sticks. In any case, McCarthy may have appreciated Holmes’ desire to make an aesthetically brilliant film but in the end, technical problems associated with the filming left the Ubar, like Djalambu, with many post-production difficulties. These were difficulties which Holmes did not have to deal with because he did not edit either of these films.61

Holmes’ approach to ethnographic filmmaking

The Institute wrote to Holmes in October 1964 explaining that it was quite likely the Council would have to “work out how it can get the records in a more economical way”.62 The films made by Holmes had become quite expensive in the editing stages due to problems incurred during filming. This and other criticisms led Holmes to defend himself in lengthy letters which outlined his methodology in the field:

There is a very special problem associated with making anthropological films — and I would defer to few people in this country, or indeed anywhere — when it comes to discussing the matter of making films about primitive people. If these films are to be of any use, scientifically, they must be made largely on the terms of the performers themselves. This is a most important fact to recognize. If I were making a conventional documentary I would quite ruthlessly shift people around, make times to suit myself in relation to other parts of the story and generally keep a tight grip. As it is, with the scientific recording, the work must be allowed to unravel. The director, the man in charge, has to defer. He must be withdrawn, otherwise the special qualities of the performances may become blunted. Cynicism may creep in, most dangerous I feel (sic). This deferment in turn produces some technical blemishes — which I might say I anticipated and am only thankful there were not more. Thus sounds of clappers become confused with clapsticks. If it is anyones (sic) fault this is mine. But I very much did not want to give the appearance of bullying the people — you know infinitely better than I how gentle and sensitive the Australian Aboriginal is (unlike some New Guineans for example) — I deliberately let them go at times, knowing there would be some subsequent technical difficulties, when I felt I sensed their especial preoccupation with a particular part of the Ceremony. This is a very hard thing to put ones (sic) finger on, sometimes one is right sometimes wrong. And, too, there are occasions when the first part of a piece of work is blotted out with the presence of the clapper boy (me) and some shouts and directions. It just cannot be helped. Short of being merely slick.63

Holmes was advocating an open and unstructured style of filmmaking because he was told to simply “get everything” and he knew that the films were to be made primarily for archiving and research. In fact it appears that Holmes had very little to do with the editing of his five films which suggests that he saw his work as a director as being one of

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61 Jan Jones worked out of the Commonwealth Film Unit editing these films for the Institute when it was realised that there were problems with the sound.
62 Letter from Burton to Holmes dated 9/10/64 in AIATSIS file 64/11(A)/2.
63 Letter from Holmes to McCarthy dated 23/11/64 in AIATSIS file 64/11(A)/2.
someone who merely recorded what happened in front of the camera. Outside what he was asked to do, Holmes also tried to encourage McCarthy to allow the incorporation of different styles of documentary filmmaking in the films. After the unsuccessful attempt to get the film of Jeremy Long on Goulburn Island explaining certain aspects of the Ubar ceremony incorporated in the finished film he approached McCarthy again in March 1965 with another idea:

For example it occurs to me that you could have an anthropologist interviewing an informant; he could visually demonstrate certain artifacts etc... Rather like they do on TV sometimes and in fact have done on films for years.

Holmes was quite pragmatic about the ceremonial films as he realised that they were not conventional documentaries which were in his mind very selective. He also believed that “the principal virtue of film making for these academic purposes is its capacity for diffusion of information and ideas”. In his autobiography, he reflected on these films at length, speaking about ethnographic film as more a craft than an art and emphasised the importance of making a watchable film:

The technique employed in creating them represented almost a reversal, or inversion, of the conventional. The participants were the directors; they made the decisions about where, when and what part of the ritual would be played. The role of the so-called director, myself, was to be ever ready, day or night, and to anticipate what and how an event might occur. Scientific veracity naturally was the prime consideration, yet there had to be an artistic validity. A film would need to emerge that would still possess unity, be able to involve its audience — students and scholars of ethnography — all over the world.

Film-making of this kind is more a craft than an art. It is basically the recording of an event that must be caught as faithfully as is feasible while it unfolds. The Institute of Aboriginal Studies...is not concerned with the desire of a director to place his personal mark on the film, so one puts to one side any creative ideas that may come to mind. On the other hand, as maximum authenticity is required, rehearsals and repeats for the benefit of the camera must be minimized. It is a case of one take, and that’s it. Thus the director must bring to bear considerable intuitive qualities, as indeed must the cameraman. The sense and rhythm of the ‘scenes’ and ‘acts’ must be followed with intensity, one must not be deluded by pauses in the action, for a performance may not yet be over. And if the camera is cut prematurely then something of great value may be irrevocably lost.

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64 Nicolas Peterson has noted that what is interesting about the work of Holmes during this period is that Holmes was independently working out the cinema verité/observational style at the same time as people were doing so elsewhere (pers comm). This adds to the theory that the rise of these styles had as much to do with changes in technology to lighter smaller cameras allowing synchronous sound as with the particular fermentation of styles amongst like-minded people in Paris and films schools in the United States.

65 Letter from Holmes to McCarthy dated 23/3/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11(D).

66 Letter from Holmes to Burton dated 3/10/64 provided by Nicolas Peterson.
Holmes had a sense of what filming ceremony and ritual was about and on the whole he did not seek to reconstruct what was filmed for the purpose of dramatic impact. He did however encourage people to enact the ceremonies in what he thought was authentic ways, such as by influencing their choice of clothing. He did ask people to perform actions again for the purpose of getting a different angle or because he knew that a technical fault had occurred.\footnote{In an interview with Ken Maddock (31/7/95) who accompanied Holmes as anthropologist while filming the Lorkun, I was told that Holmes asked for people to perform something again because they had danced into a shady area where they became undefinable due to the camera’s exposure settings.} So, despite what Holmes has said about his non-interference with the action before his lens, the authenticity of his product and his claims of scientific veracity, his writing about his films displays the thoughts of somebody who was negotiating or straddling two worlds with opposing sets of demands. On the one hand he was dealing with the requests from McCarthy and the Institute and on the other, he was trying to create a product that would have the best possible outcome for the Aboriginal people he was filming.

It seems that Holmes understood what McCarthy wanted of him as his letters speak of authentic ceremonies and scientific veracity but there is something else being signaled in his intentions. As a professional filmmaker, working for remuneration of any kind would have been welcome but in Holmes’ case, working with Aboriginal people was more of a political act. Holmes may have been recording watchable data for the scientific community but he did it because he was politically committed to providing representations of Aboriginal people that were acceptable to them first and foremost. In a report to the Institute written after filming the Yabudurawa ceremony Homes stated:

> I have found after some years one has to mix patience with firmness. It is a grave error to rush into things waving cameras around. I spend as many hours sitting down with the people chatting about nothing much at all, as I do shooting film. I know that in an authentic Ceremony material cannot be repeated. This calls for a high degree of anticipation and long winded discussions beforehand. The main trouble here is knowing how long something will last. But if the mutual confidence is there and they are convinced you are not going to fail them — or fool them — then things go well. I am very impressed by their grasp of meaning and role of the Institute. They feel that this is part of the long overdue recognition of their existence in the Australian community.\footnote{“Report on Yubadarawa Ceremony” by Cecil Holmes dated 20/6/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11(D).}

Holmes’s work for the Institute came to an end mainly because of cost factors and the desire for more control. In letters from McCarthy, Holmes was told regularly that...
costs needed to be cut and that the Institute wanted to hire its own internal full-time camera person. While there was no film maker at the Institute he obtained contracts from the Institute because he was there — he was their man in Arnhem Land. But once the decision to form the internal Film Unit was made funds were no longer available for externally produced films. In addition to this, Holmes was outside the direct control of the Interim Council which was trying to strengthen the research standing of the Institute and keen to separate itself from the realm of the commercial world. In order to improve the research standing of the films being produced the Interim Council established a committee in February 1964 to manage its productions.

The Film Production Advisory Committee

The first Institute committee formed to deal with film was established in May 1963 specifically to deal with the Aurukun project. Convened by Geddes, it had Elkin, Barnes (Professor of Anthropology at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University) and McCarthy as its members. By February 1964 the Interim Council had reconstituted the Film Committee as it was called with the only replacement being that of Barnes with Wentworth. It was agreed at this February meeting of the Interim council “that proposals for films should be considered by the Committee and presented to Council with recommendations and detailed estimates of costs”. This is the beginning of the committee, later called the Film Production Advisory Committee (FPAC), that controlled more or less effectively the scale, scope and content of film production at the Institute until 1973. Just over a month before the committee’s reconstitution, McCarthy released an official Institute Circular soliciting information about ceremonies that might be filmed. The response from the Institute’s members was good and the Committee began its task of deciding what would and would not be filmed.

Much of the policy groundwork for the film program was established during meetings in 1964. The Committee was reporting to Council on relevant matters and films

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69 Letter from McCarthy to Holmes dated 30/6/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11(D).
70 I. C. Meeting excerpt dated 1/5/63 in AIATSIS file 64/131.
71 I. C. Meeting excerpt dated 21/2/64 in AIATSIS file 64/131.
72 AIAS Doc. 64/93 cited in A. P. Elkin Archive, University of Sydney.
were being edited at a relatively good pace as McCarthy had committed a great deal of the
Institute budget to this end. The FPAC gave the Institute more control over the
productions but what they felt was required was a dedicated film production unit working
within the institutional structures of the Institute. The records show that Holmes had cost
the Institute more money than they expected to pay so there was even more reason to
have their own in-house filmmakers. Early in 1965 the FPAC and the Council took the
crucial decision to hire a full-time in-house filmmaker. This was reported in the Australian
Institute of Aboriginal Studies Annual Report for 1964-65 as: “Council decided to appoint
a full time photographer to make films and still photographs of Aboriginal life and relics”
(AIAS 1965:30).74

Holmes continued work for the Institute between mid May and mid June 1965,
filming a Yabudurawa ceremony at Roper River in Arnhem Land.75 The making of this film
had come about through Denis Daniels, an Aboriginal man from Roper, who recorded a
taped request with Holmes for the film to be made. On the tape, Daniels is cited as
stating that his reason for having the film of the ceremony made was that “we want to
keep our children reminded of these things”.76 No anthropologist accompanied the film
crew of Holmes, his wife Sandra and the cameraman during filming, although Daniels
assumed many of the responsibilities of the task. McCarthy noted in a letter to the
mission Superintendent at Roper that he was told that “the Aboriginal people performed
the ceremony with the greatest possible attention to the traditional detail and form, and
this of course adds to the scientific value of the film”.77 Further to this, Holmes reported
to McCarthy that it was unfortunate that the women wore dresses as they would not “go
for true”.78 From this statement, I would suggest that the film was probably more true
than Holmes expected as people were not prepared to take off their clothes just for the
camera, they were conducting a ceremony regardless. It was further noted by Holmes that

73 See “Film Report” by Peter Hamilton dated 25/6/64 for detailed description of activities in AIATSIS file
64/131.
74 It is interesting to note here that they did not advertise for a “filmmaker” but a “photographer”.
75 See Elkin 1972 for comprehensive documentation for this film. The documentation includes a scene-
by-scene analysis by Denis Daniels who was one of the participants.
76 Letter from Holmes to McCarthy dated 8/2/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (D). I tried to find this tape in the
Institute’s Sound Archive although it was not listed in any obvious places.
77 Letter from McCarthy to Rev. P. Leske dated 7/6/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (D).
78 Report from Holmes to McCarthy dated 20/6/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (D).
the men who performed in the ceremony did not want a copy of the film after it was finished:

On the matter of a copy of the film for the Roper River people...oddly they have said that they do not want one. A good deal is apparently "closed" to many eyes and they do not want any risks in this way being taken. They are well content that the record has been made. It is amazing how quickly the old people cottoned on to the idea of the project. 79

Holmes believed that the Roper people had a good idea about what the Institute’s role was and they felt that the filming was a “part of the long overdue recognition of their existence in the Australian community”. 80 We can never really know why filming appears to have gone smoothly for Holmes and why the people did not want a copy of the film but there is evidence of forces at work which satisfied but also went beyond the salvage agenda which McCarthy had charged Holmes with.

Holmes’ final film for the Institute was of a Lorrkun mortuary ceremony on Croker Island in 1966 after the appointment of the in-house filmmaker. Holmes had heard about the ceremony and informed the Institute of its impending performance. It was filmed with the anthropologist Ken Maddock, a friend of Holmes’, who was working on the Beswick Reserve south of Darwin at the time. The Institute requested Maddock’s presence there because he was readily available and he was also a grantee of the Institute although he had never been to Croker Island before. Maddock said of this particular ceremony:

The Lorrkun of course is not a particularly shall we say advanced ceremony, much of it is filmed away from women but I think in a way its a low-grade ceremony. There’s also an important point that what we saw was not the genuine Lorrkun because they performed the Lorrkun for the real bones of the dead man a little earlier and what was staged was a re-enactment. 81

Maddock believed that because such ceremonies are “highly controlled performances” and that “there is no particular emotionalism involved” the fact that this film is a record of a re-enacted mourning ceremony is unproblematic and that the final product was authentic: “[I]t was quite obvious that this was perfectly authentic in the dancing, the decorations, the singing and generally the attitudes of the people. So they put on a good show and I’m

79 Letter from Holmes to McCarthy dated 12/6/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (D).
80 Report from Holmes to McCarthy dated 20/6/65 in AIATSIS file 64/11 (D).
81 Interview with Ken Maddock 31/7/95.
sue they would have been paid. Maddock's opinion about the unemotional and authentic nature of this ceremony is interesting because it opens up a hole in the detail surrounding this film. Why did they perform a mortuary ceremony again for Holmes? This was to be Holmes' last film for the Institute even though the FPAC had agreed that due to his good relations with people at Roper River, he should film all possible ceremonies there. Due to the restricted contents of Holmes' films I have avoided discussing them here but at present there is a growing interest in them from Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land. Maybe soon we may come to a greater understanding of what Holmes was trying to do in these films.

Dunlop's proposal for the Western Desert

The fourth approach to making films before the Unit was established was to respond to proposals put to the Institute. In fact the Institute received only one such proposal; from Ian Dunlop who was still working at the CFU. In late 1964 he approached the Institute's fledgling film committee with a proposal to make a film documenting the daily life of a family group in the Western Desert. Dunlop was interested in Aboriginal issues and had completed an Arts degree at the University of Sydney where he read anthropology under Ian Hogbin. In his proposal Dunlop emphasised that at that time, families that had been leading a nomadic existence were coming in to the missions and settlements at a quickening pace for a variety of socio-cultural and environmental reasons. He believed that it was an appropriate time to make such a film as the lives of these peoples would soon change. He further mentioned in his proposal that films of desert life had been made in the past but they were generally made with "mission or settlement Aborigines who are no longer living nomadically in their own country". He was looking to make a film of "authentic" Aboriginal peoples untainted by Europeans, living as they would have without any foreign influences. Dunlop went on to say in his proposal that he wanted:

to try to show the daily life of the desert nomad in some kind of completeness, to fit the various activities into a pattern of daily living, to observe not only the obvious activities,

82 Interview with Ken Maddock 31/7/95.
but the subtler and simpler ones; to observe the Aborigine LIVING in his incredibly harsh environment.  

The idea for this project originated in 1957 when Dunlop was filming at the Giles weather station in the Gibson Desert. Balloons and Spinifex (1958), the film he made about the weather station, included two lengthy sections about the (un-named) Aboriginal people who lived in the vicinity. While filming there he often saw from the heights of the Rawlinson Range the distant smoke of travelling families and hunting groups as they moved throughout the country. Unfortunately at this time he was never able to convince the CFU that a film of these people’s lives should be made and in 1957 he felt that there was no hurry. In early April 1964, Dunlop accompanied Jeremy Long, Investigations Officer, Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration, on a patrol into the Western Desert during a holiday from the CFU. It was during this trip that it became apparent to Dunlop, that if he did not make his record soon, “it would be lost forever and a day”. Dunlop joined the patrol as an Institute sponsored photographer and took approximately 600 colour slides and 180 black and white photographs while travelling in Pintupi country west of Papunya. Dunlop’s report written for the Institute on his return is a thorough record filled with anthropological and environmental detail. In fact much of what he saw on this patrol would have informed his intended directions for the filming of People of the Australian Western Desert.

The patrol with Long was a research trip but it also solidified Dunlop’s hope that he might make a film in the desert country, so when he was offered funding from the Institute he gladly accepted. Dunlop’s meticulous collecting skills and his ideas about authentic representations of material culture would certainly have paralleled McCarthy’s and his proposal would have been well received. He initially intended to undertake the project independently of the CFU but his boss Hawes encouraged him to undertake it as

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84 Ibid.
86 In an interview with Ian Dunlop dated 9/10/96, he talked extensively about the filming of Balloons in the Spinifex.
87 Interview with Dunlop 9/10/96.
88 It is interesting to note that this trip with Long occurred just a few months before Long went on to work with Holmes at Golburn Island.
89 Interview with Dunlop 9/10/96.
90 For example, Dunlop records much daily life activity and describes the process of gum preparation and seed cake making which are both illustrated in his filming the following year.
an official co-production project with the Institute. McCarthy and the newly formed Institute Council agreed to this and Dunlop began preparing for his journey. He enlisted the assistance of Robert Tonkinson, an anthropologist from Perth and a cinematographer, Richard Tucker and on the 30th of April 1965 they left Alice Springs heading for Papunya. Dunlop recalled that at that time he knew nothing about 16mm colour film and synchronous sound so he made the choice to film in 35mm silent black and white. He had been brought up in a culture of non-synchronous location sound at the CFU, so his decision to film in 35mm black and white reflected his history and training in government-owned production studios.

Dunlop had been told by MacDougall, a Native Patrol Officer with the Weapons Research establishment at Woomera, that he had recently met up with a family that was still living in the desert. Dunlop and Tonkinson decided that they would look for this family or if this was unsuccessful they would return to Warburton Mission and see if one of the recently arrived families would like to return to the desert for a couple of weeks to film daily activities. Their search for the family was successful with the help of some Pintupi guides and the man Djağamara and his family agreed to be filmed at Bajar well. Their Pintupi guide Andrew, was in an avoidance relationship to Djağamara's wives and the dialect he spoke was different to the family's so communication became a major problem. They filmed with this family until the third day when they returned to the camp to find Djağamara's wives and children gone. Dunlop believes they may have left because they were fed up or the guides may have encouraged them to leave so they could go home but except for another meeting with Djağamara that afternoon, the family were never seen again on this trip. Dunlop was devastated by their departure but he decided to enlist the help of a family from Warburton so as to continue filming. In the meantime, one of the Pintupi guides allowed Dunlop to film a cache of tjurungas and later a site of personal significance to the man was filmed. By this time they had exposed 5000 feet of 35mm film.
After four weeks into the project, Dunlop had gained the assistance of Minma Djuburula and his family who had only nine months before come in from the desert to Warburton Mission. Tonkinson had collected them from the mission and brought them out to Digadiga (Tika Tika) where Dunlop was camped with his cinematographer, Tucker. For a further two weeks the willing Minma and his family re-enacted their daily life for the camera:

Filming with Minma and his family had to be more set-up than it had been with Djagamara. They all wore the bedraggled dirty shapeless cast-off clothes common to most Central Australian Aboriginal settlement dwellers, and as they shared our food their camp was a mess of tins. As I wanted to continue filming in the style we had started with Djagamara the scene had to be dressed and the actors undressed before each day’s filming. This did not worry anyone but it was time-consuming and it meant we were unable to pick up many intimate scenes we otherwise could have filmed off the cuff. It could be argued that we should have shot things as they actually were, but this was not, then, my aim. My aim was to try to re-create an impression of Minma’s life, as it had been only nine months before. With the invaluable help of Paul [another Pintupi guide] we initiated most of the activities filmed, but once an activity was started its course was usually dictated by the actors.92

After two weeks of filming Minma and his family indicated that they wanted to return to Warburton and on the 4th of June they all departed Digadiga. Dunlop created from this footage, a ten part series which is predominantly reconstruction of daily life activities as scientific record.

Dunlop went on this trip with the idea of making a film of the day-in-the-life of these people. In an interview, he recalled his motivation as wanting to make a dramatic reconstruction of their daily life. His motivations and methodology are evident when we were discussing the issue of getting people to take the clothes off they had been given when they came into the mission from the desert for the purpose of filming these reconstructions:

I wanted to make a picture of their life, as far as I could, as they were leading it, in the case of Djagamarra, or as they had led it nine months ago before they came to Warburton, in the case of Minnurra and his family. And the clothes that they were wearing were... the women would be wearing long shapeless dresses, two or three on top of each other all stained with oil, grease, ash and dust. Seeing through my eyes then and I emphasise, because I would now say that there was nothing undignified in what they were wearing, but seen through my eyes then, and seeing through the eyes of most people who would see the films, I thought that (a) this was not traditional life, these were people who had lost contact and (b) they looked like the bedraggled dregs of the earth. I can’t imagine myself not having done that in that situation. To have done otherwise would have been to have

92 “The making of Desert People”, Ian Dunlop, no date, in Dunlop Collection file WD2:12. For those looking for publicly available material on this trip see Dunlop 1966 (Round Table paper).
Richard Tucker with Ian Dunlop filming a close-up of Minma carving (Courtesy: Ian Dunlop).

Paul Porter Jararu looks on as Dunlop and Tucker film (Courtesy: Ian Dunlop).
Ian Dunlop and Richard Tucker actively directing in the first series of the *People of the Australian Western Desert* (Courtesy: Ian Dunlop).
Dunlop and Tucker film a close-up sequence of Djaqamara preparing a kangaroo for cooking with his two children watching on (Courtesy: Ian Dunlop).
Apart from the ten part series, Dunlop wanted to make a shorter film which was his interpretation of a day in the life of these people. This film was to become Desert People and its success launched Dunlop’s career as an internationally renowned ethnographic filmmaker. It is a montage of chronologically and physically different scenes combined to represent a series of sequential moments. Of course Dunlop freely admits this as the case and it was his intention to create such a work from the outset.94

Dunlop was to return to the Western Desert in September 1967, to begin his second series of filming for the People of the Australian Western Desert series. He again secured a joint production agreement between the Institute and the CFU and by late September was at Warburton Mission looking for guides and interpreters.95 He managed to find Minma Djuburula who he had worked with during the 1965 trip and hired him and another man to accompany them. Dunlop had been told that three families were living 270 kilometres north-west of the Warburton Mission in the Taltiwara area. The group headed for this area and met up with the families at Patanja clay pan. For nearly all of October, Dunlop filmed with the three families. This trip appeared to go more smoothly than the first and it provided another nine films for the series.

Roger Sandall and full-time filmmaking at the Institute

While Holmes was at Roper River filming the Yabuduruwa in June 1965, the Institute was in the process of obtaining a full-time filmmaker. In fact, McCarthy even sent Holmes a letter at this time telling him that around twenty applications had come in for the position.96 At this time McCarthy removed Hamilton from his position over

93 Interview with Dunlop 9/10/96.
94 Dunlop Interview 9/10/96.
95 See “People of the Australian Western Desert parts 11 to 19” by Ian Dunlop, dated revised 1974, in Dunlop Collection WD2:17.
96 Letter from McCarthy to Holmes dated 30/6/65 provided by Peterson.
accusations concerning his management of the Sound and Film Section and the two were split, with the sound section moving to Canberra. A relatively unknown filmmaker, Roger Sandall, was offered the newly created position of Film Production Officer. Sandall had heard about the position in a letter sent to him in New York where he had been studying and working for the previous ten years.\textsuperscript{97} Amongst other positions held while in the United States, Sandall worked for a commercial film company editing foreign films for distribution. This entailed adding English language subtitles and removing sections of the films that may have offended the American censors. Sandall studied anthropology in his undergraduate degree in New Zealand where he knew William Geddes. He went on to a Masters degree in film at Columbia University (New York) and stayed to work in the film industry there. Sandall had only made one ten minute ethnographic film (\textit{Mexican Maize} 1962) in Mexico for the American Museum of Natural History before coming to Australia and it is unknown whether it won him acclaim. Sandall was probably successful in securing the position because of his combined training in film and anthropology and in addition he would have been known to Geddes from his university days in New Zealand. Sandall however, informed me that Geddes was opposed to his appointment.\textsuperscript{98}

Before Sandall’s appointment, McCarthy wrote to him in July 1965 and stated that the position of photographer should suit him admirably.\textsuperscript{99} McCarthy was setting out some ground rules in this letter and stated that the Institute was not created to record data on “culture contact problems” and the “film programme is regarded by our Council as a most urgent and important aspect of our work”. McCarthy went on to tell Sandall that their “main programme is to film ceremonies, in between which we plan for the photographer to film crafts, economic life, art and so on”.\textsuperscript{100} Further to this, McCarthy then outlined which ceremonies he wanted filmed in the coming years — all this before Sandall was even offered the job. So it can be suggested that Sandall’s appointment to the position was secure and McCarthy had a work program prepared for him well in advance in which ceremonial life had the central place.

\textsuperscript{97} The question of who told Sandall about the job must remain unanswered as he believes it is irrelevant.
\textsuperscript{98} Interview with Roger Sandall 12/11/96.
\textsuperscript{99} Letter from McCarthy to Sandall dated 7/7/65 in AIATSIS file 65/12.
\textsuperscript{100} Unfortunately I did not note down which ceremonies McCarthy suggested.
McCarthy thought that there had been some improper dealings with regard to
the administration of the Sound and Film Section in Sydney so in the latter half of 1965 he
decided to bring the film production facilities under tighter control by centralising the
archive in the National Library and proposed situating the remainder at the CFU in
Lindfield. It was also suggested to McCarthy by Trevor Jones that the entire Sound
Section be transferred to his department at Monash University in Melbourne. In early
1965, Nicolas Peterson, an anthropology graduate from the University of Cambridge, was
hired to the position of Institute Research Officer in the Northern Territory. Part of
Peterson’s job description was to assist the Film Production Officer with filmmaking
activities in the Northern Territory.

Soon after his arrival in Australia in September 1965, Sandall was asked by
McCarthy to film the making of a series of string figures created by two young men who
were teacher trainees from the Torres Strait. The two men were living in Brisbane at
the time and the film had been initiated by Wolfgang Laade, an anthropologist and
Institute grantee who had been working in the Strait. This was to be Sandall’s first film
and it was to be filmed in the relative luxury of Brisbane. It was filmed in black and
white and it was the first time that a newly purchased Arriflex camera was used. This
camera was central to the new filmmaking program because it allowed for hand-held
synchronous sound filming, a technological breakthrough that had only been made over
the previous few years. The camera work was completed in late 1965 and by March 1966
two finished prints were available, *Sign Language of Saibai Island* (1965) and *Wane: Traditional
String Figures from Saibai Island* (1966). Sandall said of the string figures film that it “is an
example of a minimum budget production” and he “would not recommend that it be
shown as a typical Institute production” because of the poor sound reproduction.

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101 Letter from McCarthy to Jones dated 7/10/65 in AIATSIS file 64/131:1.
102 Letter from Peterson to McCarthy dated 2/8/65 in Peterson files NP:McC. After being appointed to
the position of Research Officer to the Institute, Peterson wrote a proposed program of work in the
Northern Territory to be carried out until the end of the wet season. One of his proposals was “3. Visit
briefly the northern Missions and Govt. Stations to work out a preliminary film programme for 1966 and
1967. I shall also keep an eye out for research possibilities.”
103 One man was from Dauan and the other from Saibai.
104 Letter from McCarthy to Sandall dated 12/10/65 in AIATSIS file 65/12.
105 Letter from Sandall to McCarthy dated 18/3/65 in AIATSIS file 65/12.
Having finished the string figures films Sandall was keen to get into the bush and start filming. His contact in the Northern Territory, Nicolas Peterson, was based in Darwin but was also travelling regularly throughout the Territory. McCarthy and Peterson corresponded at length about potential film programs for 1966 and 1967 in which McCarthy sought a clear statement of ceremonies they could film. While the emphasis was generally on ceremonies, daily-life and material culture films were often mentioned and prepared for.\(^{106}\) While Sandall was waiting for a call from Peterson to begin filming in the Northern Territory, he continued to edit Holmes' *Yabudurawa* footage in Sydney. By late December 1965, McCarthy was becoming anxious about getting Sandall into the field:

> The important thing is to get Roger started. We want films of camp dances and corroborees, string figures, crafts and daily life. Can you suggest where he could begin in this field while awaiting a ceremony? It is difficult to do anything by letters from here.\(^{107}\)

Unfortunately Peterson had been in hospital for almost two months during this time so much of the planning for filming in 1966 was done during a trip by Sandall to Darwin in February.

During the last months of 1965, McCarthy had also entered into negotiations with members of the CFU about guaranteeing a second camera-person when required and obtaining some sort of production space at their headquarters in Lindfield, Sydney. Unfortunately for McCarthy, the chief executive Stanley Hawes was absent and his proxy Denys Brown, was unable to offer the Institute anything of substance.\(^{108}\) McCarthy and Hawes met in late January 1966 when they discussed a proposal by Hawes for the CFU to make all the films required by the Institute.\(^{109}\) Hawes later wrote to McCarthy pointing out the recent appointment of Sandall and noting that nothing could be done to help him until the Institute's Council had come to an agreement with the CFU about producing all of the Institute's films.\(^{110}\) The CFU did not produce any films for the Institute after this date except for those made in a collaborative manner such as the Western Desert series

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106 See "A report to the Executive Committee regarding the size of crew needed for the shooting of synchronous sound films", by Roger Sandall, tabled at Executive Committee Meeting on 12/11/65 in AIATSIS file 64/131:1.
107 Letter from McCarthy to Peterson dated 21/12/65 in Peterson file NP:San.
108 File note by McCarthy dated 24/11/65 in AIATSIS file 64/131/1.
109 File note by McCarthy dated 3/2/66 in AIATSIS file 64/131/1.
110 Letter from Hawes to McCarthy dated 10/3/66 in AIATSIS file 64/131/1.
with Ian Dunlop. I feel that McCarthy did not actually want them to take over production given that he had just created the Unit. However he does seem to have wanted Sandall and the Institute's equipment to be accommodated at the CFU's Lindfield premises in order that Sandall would be in a production environment and so that ties with the Anthropology Department at the University of Sydney could be weakened.

**Sandall's first field projects**

In late April 1966, Sandall was heading north on the Ghan train from Adelaide to Alice Springs for the first filming in the field conducted by the Institute's own Film Unit. Peterson had heard about the holding of a Djungguan ceremony at Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land so they went there first. Arnhem Land was still a priority in the minds of the Institute's Council members and Peterson had also by this time become familiar with the major ceremonial complexes of the region. Peterson wrote to McCarthy once he and Sandall were ensconced at Yirrkala stating that the ceremony was not being performed especially for them but was part of a series of ceremonies that had commenced in September 1965.\(^{111}\) Peterson believed on this first trip in not setting scenes up:

> I have adopted a very different policy from Holmes in film making; ceremonies cannot be staged in the way he does them and be really significant anthropologically for they then become unrelated to daily life and all the critical elaborations and carry overs are lost.\(^{112}\)

This belief of Peterson's contrasts interestingly with Maddock's for he believed that ritual could tell him something about the nature of Yolngu society. Whereas Maddock seems to have believed that ritualised activity is the same from one performance to the next, Peterson conceptualised them as being enmeshed in the wider network of social life and relations. This first filming done by the Film Unit, once edited, was released as *Djungguan at Yirrkala* (1966). From Yirrkala, Peterson, Sandall and the sound recordist Ken Pouncett went to Maningrida (via Darwin) where Peterson had organised for the filming of a Kunapipi ceremony. Between June 20th and July 16th, Sandall exposed nearly four hours of film there which was later cut into the film *Gunabibi* (1968). A conference had been organised by Unesco on ethnographic filmmaking in the Pacific area in late July, so after

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\(^{111}\) Letter from Peterson to McCarthy dated 3/5/66 in NP:McC.

\(^{112}\) Letter from Peterson to McCarthy dated 21/1/67 in NP:McC.
this filming both Peterson and Sandall flew south to Sydney to participate (see appendix 1 for a brief description of the conference).

After returning to the Northern Territory in mid August Sandall and Peterson traveled to Yuendumu where they met up with T. D. Campbell and Murray Barrett from Adelaide University and Bob Edwards from the South Australian Museum. Campbell and Barrett had made films with Warlpiri people at Yuendumu before and in this instance had initiated a project with the Institute’s Film Unit to film two Warlpiri increase ceremonies at sites nearby. McCarthy believed that Campbell would probably never return to Yuendumu after this trip and that this was a good opportunity to continue Campbell's filmmaking work there; Campbell was happy to see this happen. The first filming was at Ngama, a rocky outcrop, and the second was at Ruguri which is a cave. The two films finally cut from the two and a half hours of footage are *Walbiri ritual at Ngama* (1967) and *Emu ritual at Ruguri* (1967). Sandall said of this trip:

The material obtained at Yuendumu is unlike that obtained in Arnhem Land in one important respect: it shows performers and performances in as traditional an aspect as is possible in 1966. This did not come fortuitously, but by actively overseeing the dress, materials, and artifacts used by the performers.

After working on the Kunapipi material later the following year, Sandall remarked in a letter to Peterson:

It is very important that we do this one really well: the material is absolutely exceptional (I have a rough cut of the last events organized, and it has had a shattering effect on everyone who has seen it). Such a performance deserves everything we can do to bring it powerfully to life on the screen.

Unfortunately much of the footage exposed during the daytime filming at Maningrida was damaged in processing as well as there being a shortage of film while there. Because of this, Sandall sought permission from the Council of the Institute to return the following year to film similar material again for the purpose of constructing a composite film. He later discovered that there were also problems with the material

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113 Letter from McCarthy to Peterson dated 4/7/66 in NP:McC.
114 Peterson also exposed three minutes of black and white film showing the behind the scenes of the making of the Ruguri film. This is held somewhere in the AIATSIS film archive.
115 "A report upon the conclusion of the A.I.A.S. Film Unit's field activity for 1966" by Roger Sandall dated 14/9/66 in AIATSIS file 64/131:1. Sandall curiously fails to mention the filming of the Djungguan at Yirrkala in this report.
These photographs give an impression of the pro-filmic event; they show two moments on the one trip of Sandall at work. Above from left Harry Nelson, Adrian Fleming (the elder son of the missionary at Yuendumu), Bob Edwards and Roger Sandall kneeling behind the camera. Taken near Yuendumu 1966 (Courtesy: Nicolas Peterson).

From left Harry Nelson, Bob Edwards, Draper Campbell (baseball cap), Roger Sandall behind camera, Murray Barrett (roof) and Laurie Fitzgerald (sound). The photograph was taken by Nicolas Peterson near Yuendumu in 1966 (Courtesy: Nicolas Peterson).
filmed at the Ruguri cave and was able to return the following year to film the latter half of
the ceremony for the construction of another composite film. This signals a difference in
approach between Peterson and Sandall and is also reminiscent of Dunlop's approach in
*Desert People*. Many filmmakers might defend Sandall's composite films for entirely
pragmatic reasons of cost and in recognition of the enormous technical difficulties
experienced with colour 16mm film at this time. In the end there were trade-offs between
anthropological veracity, cost effectiveness, getting results and filmic quality. Sandall
would probably be the first to admit that composite films were not anthropologically ideal
at the time, but his ready acceptance of them makes it clear that his interest had always
been in making films. As he got further into his filmmaking, that is more away from
recording the footage that McCarthy envisioned to producing film, the scientific
imperative began to blur as he sought to create films of high aesthetic value.

Sandall returned to Sydney with footage for four films of his own and to one of
Holmes that still required editing. He decided that no more filming should be done for six
months and that an editor should be hired to help with the load. His arguments for
another editor, given that Sandall was a competent editor himself, are interesting for they
are in conflict with the institutional goals of McCarthy. As mentioned earlier, McCarthy
was generally interested in Sorenson's approach to gathering large amounts of filmed data
for the future use of researchers and not particularly interested in churning out films for
distribution.\(^{117}\) Sandall was aware of the similar activities of museums and universities but
felt that much of the footage obtained by these institutions was "rarely seen and eventually
forgotten".\(^ {118}\) McCarthy wanted more film and footage for the archives but Sandall did
not want his labours to be lost in the archives and never seen again like the works of so
many filmmakers before him. So in reply to McCarthy's request for a greater expansion of
the filming activities, Sandall stated that there would have to be "an equally radical
expansion of the editing section".\(^ {119}\) Sandall went further in what appears to be an

\(^{117}\) Sandall remarked in an interview with the author that he was under the impression that McCarthy
was in fact interested in making short films for distribution. I have however not found any incidence of
McCarthy pushing for distributable films in the AIATSIS files (Interview with Sandall 12/11/96).

\(^{118}\) "A report upon the conclusion of the A.I.A.S. Film Unit's field activity for 1966" by Roger Sandall
dated 14/9/66 in AIATSIS file 64/131:1

\(^{119}\) Ibid.
assertion of his control over the Unit by requesting that in future at least four months' notice should be given of proposed filming activity. This first year of filmmaking in the field exposed the reality that the scientific imperatives of McCarthy were not going to be realised through Sandall's filmmaking because in practice, they were simply unrealisable with a one-person Film Unit and with Sandall's methodology. Sandall believed that nobody at the Institute had the faintest idea what filmmaking was about and that he would have to assert his knowledge in order to get things done and to enhance and speed up the rubber stamping activity of the Film Production Advisory Committee.\textsuperscript{120}

A year of editing and recognition

By February 1967 Sandall had become so concerned about obtaining the services of an editor that he submitted a lengthy report to the Film Production Advisory Committee on this issue.\textsuperscript{121} In this report, Sandall stated that it was essential, due to the nature of the Institute's productions, that the person who had filmed material in the field should also be present at its editing, for in his view photography and editing were inseparable tasks. For this reason, he did not want an independent editor to be hired who would work unsupervised by him. Sandall believed that the editing of these types of films was "dull and mechanical" and the location of the cutting room in the Institute Building on City Road required an editor to work in a "peculiar social and psychological vacuum" separate from the film production world and members of the University of Sydney Anthropology Department. He added in an amusing aside that the Institute's editing rooms had been likened to solitary confinement. So Sandall himself would probably have preferred, along with McCarthy, the accommodation of the Film Unit at Lindfield with the CFU in order to alleviate the problems associated with working in such a lonely environment.

These editing problems aside, Sandall was able to finish a twenty-three and a half minute release version of \textit{Walbiri ritual at Ngama} in time for its inclusion in the

\textsuperscript{120} The October 1966 AIAS Newsletter reported that apart from the films in production by Sandall and Holmes at that time, F. Woolston and P. J. Trezise had filmed daily life activity of people on Mornington Island for the Institute.

\textsuperscript{121} *A report to the Advisory Committee on Film Production* by Roger Sandall dated 20/2/67 in AIATSIS file 64/131:1.
ethnographic film competition at the 1967 Festival dei Popoli held in Florence. The *AIAS Annual Report* (1967:32) for 1966-67 stated:

> When our films *People of the Western Desert* (sic), *Walbiri Ritual at Ngama* (sic), *Dialambu, Ngoora* and *Yabuduruwa* were shown during the Festival dei Popoli in Florence, February 1967, and later several of them in other European countries, highly favourable opinions were expressed by anthropologists, sociologists, film makers and the world’s press, who insisted that it is essential to maintain the Institute’s film programme on similar lines because of its tremendous scientific and historic value. This was a very gratifying reaction to the results of the Institute’s efforts in its initial five years of existence, and it has encouraged us to believe that our programme has been developed along the right lines.\(^{122}\)

During the previous year’s Round Table, the Institute’s filmmaking had been applauded by the likes of Enrico Fulchignoni and others members of the conference. So much so that Fulchignoni requested that a retrospective of Australian ethnographic films be brought to the Festival. This was done by Ian Dunlop through the CFU and with it, he brought the new Institute films mentioned above. During the 1967 Festival, the films that had been completed to date were again praised by their European audiences. From the above quote, it can be seen that the Institute’s filmmaking was somehow legitimised by its acceptance in Europe.\(^{123}\)

**Sandall’s second field trip**

On August 3rd 1967 the Film Production Advisory Committee approved Sandall’s second filming trip to Central Australia.\(^{124}\) This was after the event for Sandall was already at Yuendumu while this meeting sat to approve his filming program. During this trip to Yuendumu, Sandall filmed with the assistance of Peterson: *Walbiri Ritual at Gunadjari* (1969), *Ngatjakula: A Walbiri Fire Ceremony* (1977) and the material required to supplement the composite release version of *Emu Ritual at Ruguri* (1967). Gunadjari lies about 160 kilometres west of Yuendumu and Sandall noted that the trip would take them five days. It was planned to film the fire ceremony at Lajamanu (Hooker Creek) later that year but on arrival at Yuendumu in late August they found such a ceremony already in

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\(^{122}\) *Ngoora* was made by Mountford and the University of Adelaide with financial support from the Institute.

\(^{123}\) In future years this legitimisation and authorisation through film festivals was something that the Institute used to defend its filmmaking when funding to the Institute was reduced by the government.

\(^{124}\) FPAC minute 67/10 (a) in AIAS Doc 67/599.
Laurie Fitzgerald (sound), Roger Sandall (camera) and two young children at Areyonga 1967 (Courtesy: Nicolas Peterson).
progress and so filmed it. The footage of the fire ceremony was considered technically flawed by Sandall who had, apparently, left a polarising filter on the lens for some of the night-time filming. Sandall was also disappointed with the coverage of the ceremony because he had run out of stock during the spectacular climax of the ceremony. He decided only to edit together an archive version of the print at this time but in 1977 Kim McKenzie, a new member of the Film Unit, edited it into a shorter release version with help from Peterson. At the beginning of September, Sandall and Peterson left Alice Springs for Areyonga where they picked up twenty or so men for a visit back to their country in the Petermann Ranges 700 kilometres to the south-west. This trip resulted in a film of a Pitjantjatjara increase rite, The Mulga Seed Ceremony (1967). The filming of this ceremony was suggested to them by Jeremy Long who accompanied them on the trip.

Widening the film agenda

In early 1968 there was the opportunity to film a Pukamani ceremony on Melville Island but because it was discovered that the ceremony would be performed in an abridged form, McCarthy decided against sending Sandall to film it as such an abridged version did not fit into his idea of what was “suitable for filming”. Cost was also a factor. The information that the ceremony was to be abridged must have confirmed the importance of the project of recording ceremonies before it was too late and certainly resonated with his belief that abridged ceremonies were becoming more common. Such ceremonies, in his view, did not contain enough ‘traditional’ detail worth spending large sums of money on. Such a view certainly restricted the potential for recording the way in which Aboriginal people adapted their religious life to deal with the changing circumstances of their lives. It also further confirms the emphasis McCarthy placed on

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125 See File Note by Boydell dated 8/8/67 and letter from Sandall to Boydell dated 10/8/67 both in AIATSIS file 77/61. Further to this it should be noted that Peterson first thought that this version of the fire ceremony was called Bulawandi (meaning "owl" - one of the mythological characters involved) but it later became apparent to him that it was in fact a version called Ngatjakula, hence the name.

126 Peterson pers. comm..

127 See letter to Institute from I. C. Rodger dated 13/2/68 in NP:Film; telegram to Institute from Rodger dated 22/3/68, file note by McCarthy dated 8/5/68, telegram to Institute from Rodger dated 16/5/68, telegram to Institute from Rodger dated 21/5/68, and letter to Rodger from McCarthy dated 24/5/68 all in AIATSIS file 77/61. Rodger was the Assistant Superintendent of the Snake Bay Settlement on Melville Island at this time.
capturing Aboriginal religious practice that was seen as being as close to pre-contact ('traditional') as possible.

Besides requests and possibilities for filming coming in, like that above from Melville Island, others were solicited from people living in the missions and government settlements. Peterson had heard about an upcoming performance of a Mardyin (Maraiin) ceremony on Croker Island from Jeremy Long and wrote to the superintendent of the mission requesting information. I quote below some of the content of this letter because it illustrates how it was that many of these film projects were initiated.

I am writing to you on behalf of the Institute’s Film Unit to ask about the possibility of filming a Madyin (sic) ceremony that may be held on the Island in June or July. Jeremy Long wrote to me recently about the forthcoming ceremony which is to follow a Lorgun ceremony to be held after the wet... I should add that we are particularly keen to film this ceremony for though it is probably the oldest and most basic in the region it is very rarely held these days because the other introduced cults are more appealing to the younger men who form the body of active participants.

The FPAC had already agreed in October 1967 that in 1968 the Film Unit should attempt the filming of a Maraiin ceremony. McCarthy had also received word from Sandra Le Brun Holmes about the the same ceremony and had decided that the Institute's Unit should film it if possible.

In May 1968, Sandall and Peterson went to Areyonga in central Australia to film the activities surrounding the use of camels by Pitjantjatjara people in the area. Here they filmed material for *Camels and the Pitjantjatjara* (1969), the idea for which had been suggested by Peterson in late 1967. During this stay at Areyonga a ceremony was held outside of the settlement for the site of Kikingura in the Petermann Ranges where the *Mulga Seed Ceremony* had been filmed. A group of Pintupi men who had come to the settlement for "Red Ochre" rituals joined the ceremony and the entire event was filmed by Sandall. The *ALAS Annual Report* (1968:36) for 1967-68 says of this filming that:

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128 Letter from Peterson to Superintendent of Croker Island dated 31/1/68 in NP:Film.
129 FPAC Minutes dated 23/10/67, A.I.A.S. Doc. 67/635, Min. 67/17 (b).
130 Letter from McCarthy to Sandall dated 2/4/68 in AIATSIS file 77/61.
131 "Some considerations and suggestions concerning the Institute's film programme for 1968", Nicolas Peterson, undated, 4pp, in NP:Film. Peterson believes that the idea for this film may have been Sandall's originally (pers. comm. 7/2/97). Peterson saw it as a topic that was not only intrinsically interesting but which could be widely circulated.
no attempt whatsoever was made to interfere with the clothing of the performers or the spontaneous growth and development of the action. The result, scheduled for editing in the coming year, is an unusual example of a fully contemporary ritual event.

Sandall also said of this ceremony:

The Red Ochre mob proved as secretive and impenetrable as might be expected, but once they had finished the main part of their activity we were able to capitalise on their presence: some of them, Pintubi for the most part, became the audience at a ceremony involving a further revelation of Pitjantjara ritual from the Petermann Range area. The group being large, any attempt at “old-time” appearance was abandoned at the outset, and this ceremony was filmed just as it naturally occurred with the performers wearing whatever they chose to. It should contain an unusual amount of spontaneous speech and gesture.\(^{132}\)

I was unable to find a listing in the Institute’s film archive database for an edited version of this ceremony but during the course of my research, I stumbled across a film can labelled Pitjantjatjara ritual at Areyonga. On further investigation, Peterson told me that Sandall had actually finished a release version of the film, which had the working title “Business”, but it was never released. In fact, a short segment from this ceremony was used in the “long” version of Camels and the Pitjantjatjara although this section was later removed due to the restricted nature of the content. So, the one ceremony in central Australia in which the men were actually filmed without any major interference or reconstruction by the filmmaker, was left on the shelf and never seen.

Sandall commented in an interview that even though he thought that this footage was interesting he was not prepared to defend its production and distribution as a stand alone film. Sandall remembers:

> I think as far as the ritual films I was doing, I was concerned with ye olde style ritual film … I think there was already some unease about what could be shown and what could not be shown and I wasn’t going to go into bat for that one. I was prepared to battle for one or two others.\(^{133}\)

Sandall also felt that McCarthy was uncomfortable with the idea of a film about the camels because it was not ‘traditional’ activity so he did not push the idea of the ceremonial film because of this pre-existing tension over the project as a whole. For Sandall it was opportunistic to film something that he considered “totally authentic and spontaneous” but he was not committed to it.\(^{134}\) I believe that Sandall may have felt that this film

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\(^{132}\) Letter from Sandall to McCarthy dated 18/6/68 in AIATSIS file 77/61.

\(^{133}\) Interview with Roger Sandall 12/11/96.

\(^{134}\) Interview with Roger Sandall 12/11/96.
contained action that went beyond anything he had filmed previously in its revelation of religious information and therefore decided that it would not be in his interest to defend this film as one that should be screened.135

Another way in which the film agenda was being widened was through the efforts of people associated with the Institute but not professional filmmakers. Between 1966 and 1969, Robert Edwards, a member of the FPAC, made four films for the Institute. Edwards believed that the FPAC could have been encouraging more filmmaking instead of just rubber-stamping the activities of the Film Unit. In order to prove his point he secured out-of-date black and white stock from the Film Unit and produced four separate films on a very low budget. Edwards was interested in archaeology and rock art so his films focus primarily on these subjects. His films *Prehistoric Rock art of the Cleland Hills* (1968), *Flint Miners of the Nullabor* (1969) and *Aboriginal Arnhem Land* (1969) are accounts of archaeological expeditions and *Aboriginal Canoe Trees of the Murray* (1968) is concerned with the technology involved with producing bark canoes as well as the South Australian Museum's attempts to preserve them. Edwards was the curator of anthropology at the South Australian Museum while he was a member of the FPAC and he later became a Deputy Principal of the Institute.

Edwards' films appear to have been received well but were considered in the same league of the other fieldworkers who were borrowing cameras to make 'amateur' recordings despite the higher production values he employed. Another film made at this time in the same vein was by Peterson who was becoming more interested in the use of film as an anthropological device for investigating broader aspects of social life. Peterson's *Nomads in Clover: Contemporary Murngin Hunters* (1967) was an attempt to use film to explore the daily life of Yolngu speakers in Arnhem Land by focussing on the economy of the people. Peterson believed that the Institute could go on filming ceremonies *ad infinitum* because of the many variations of each, but what he thought was important at this time

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135 Nicolas Peterson remembers differently as he believes that it was he who urged Sandall to film the ceremony because they could not continue until the ceremony was over. Peterson believes that Sandall humoured him by filming the ceremony and that the difficulties with the film relate to aesthetics and the whole reconstructions project.
was the filming of “face to face behaviour in traditional sized and orientated groups living beyond the range of daily domination by European culture”. Peterson’s calls for films other than ceremonial did not fall on deaf ears as McCarthy too was renewing his interest in recording aspects of material culture. McCarthy voiced his interest in this way however:

I have suggested re-orientating the programme next year to include the crafts and economic life which are in greater danger of becoming lost to film makers than are the ceremonies because of the general adoption of European clothes which reach such a state of discolouration and wear that they could spoil a film. We could include the men in nagas and the women in skirts to give a film an air of authenticity, and this of course is the minimum we could expect in these activities in Arnhem Land. We could never hope to get naked savages of the Desert People kind. There are several kinds of films involved. Your [Peterson’s] personal choice for a film of camp life and social relationships is a very good one and could be made at Mirrngadja, but even if the food collecting or other activities are included the emphasis would be on the social aspect and the clothing worries me even though you will argue that this is typical of the present situation. These are the films that social anthropologists need.

McCarthy’s acceptance of the idea of filming aspects of every day social interaction signalled a partial change in praxis brought about by a number of factors including the increasingly problematic matter of how to handle the films of men’s restricted ceremonies, once made.

Regardless of this signalled shift in interest Peterson went to Croker Island in April 1968 to prepare for the filming of the Maraiin (Mardayin) and in July through August, he and Richard Tucker as camera person filmed the ceremony which became The Maraian of Croker Island (1968). Sandall was not involved with the filming of this ceremony. While on Croker, Peterson also took the opportunity to film sea food gathering and turtle hunting. During this period, Sandall returned to Maningrida to obtain supplementary (apparently non-ceremonial) material for the Kunapipi film and it was finished in August that year as Gunabibi (1968).

**Archive versions, release prints and documentation**

Before the Film Unit was established, McCarthy was thinking of film very much in terms of film records rather than edited release prints. The more or less raw film

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136 *Some considerations and suggestions concerning the Institute's film programme for 1968*, Nicolas Peterson, undated, 4pp, in NP:Film.
137 Letter from McCarthy to Peterson dated 3/11/67 in NP:McC.
138 Rod Adamson also came to Croker Island and edited the footage once back in Sydney.
139 Letter from Peterson to McCarthy dated 19/8/68 in NP:McC. I have not seen this extra footage.
footage was to be the research material for the future. Initially the production of release prints by Sandall led to little consideration being given to the extensive body of material accumulating in the archive both from his own work and from others depositing material with the Institute. By 1968 however, Sandall was becoming concerned about the research value of this archival footage if it were not adequately documented.

In October 1968 he wrote a lengthy report in which he outlined exactly what he understood by “documentation” and what he expected from anthropologists in the field. To Sandall, documentation was not just “[c]ommentary and titles, short essays and extended academic papers on the events shown in the film”, it was “a descriptive ethnography in which each sentence and paragraph can be precisely related to every shot or ‘scene’ the film contains”.140 It appears that support for Sandall in the editing stages back in Sydney was lacking whereas his filming trips were conscientiously attended by supportive anthropologists ready for a bush sojourn. The problem lay in the fact that anthropologists such as Peterson and Long had other work to do and undergoing the labours of providing documentation for every section of filmed material was not appealing. Peterson did however provide much of the documentation for the films he worked on with Sandall even though he had left his position at the Institute in July 1968 and was working on his doctorate. Thus, Sandall’s recommendation in this report was that the ethnographers who accompanied Sandall to the field be paid to do this extra work.

The distinction between films for release and archival footage was becoming more significant by this stage. Sandall believed that McCarthy wanted him to make “films” in the mould of Djalambu but McCarthy was equally concerned with the accumulation of research footage with scene-by-scene documentation. This effectively led to the creation of two versions of some of the films: the shorter version which Sandall the filmmaker edited as films for release and the longer archive versions which contained almost everything that was exposed on film in the field. The archive versions required many hours of editing and it was these that Sandall was particularly worried about documenting.

140 *The documentation of films: a report to the Advisory Committee on Film Production* by Roger Sandall (and Rod Adamson), dated 31/10/68 in AIATSIS file 64/131/2.
The interesting thing about these archive versions is that for all the work that was done on them they were rarely seen once they were made and I would go as far as to say that they probably have rarely been viewed by anybody since. In fact, in late 1996, a video copy of the edited archive film *Walbiri ritual at Yambirri* was taken back to Yuendumu for men there to view it. Apart from those people associated with the film at the time of its creation, this is probably the only occasion at which this film has ever been shown to an audience in Australia.

As the year closed Sandall continued editing films back in Sydney. He was hoping to finalise the Kunapipi film by the end of the year and the camel film by early in the new year. At an FPAC meeting in November 1968, Sandall sought the permission of the committee and was granted it to visit Papunya and Yuendumu “to screen films and collect information and documentation”. It is not apparent if he wished to screen the rough cuts of the work filmed in these areas or if he was trying to encourage the men to have more ceremonies filmed but it is assumed that both were meant. Sandall also screened the finished version of *Walbiri Ritual at Gunadjari* to the members of the committee.

**Politics of the secret – a turning point**

Films made about Aboriginal ceremonies in northern and central Australia had by this time been slowly coming back into the communities through school teachers, missionaries and through people like Peterson and Sandall who brought films back to encourage people to let them film again. By showing the films to the Aboriginal people they were made with, it was thought that the people would come to an understanding of what it was the Institute was trying to do and therefore allow more films to be made. It was even suggested that with permission, it would have been helpful to show different Aboriginal groups, films made in distant communities and therefore encourage them to have films made. Holmes had warned McCarthy earlier about the problems that could arise from this and by mid-1967, Peterson had become concerned also. In a letter to

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141 FPAC Minutes, dated 7-8/11/88, AIAS Doc. 68/759, min. 68/23 (a).
McCarthy in July of that year, Peterson wrote of recent disturbances caused by the public screening of David Attenborough’s *Artists of Arnhem Land* and *Desert Gods*.

The former shows the djungguan and the latter the lodge increase ceremony at Ngama. ... I emphasise that Attenborough’s films are the main source of complaint - I have heard of three [screenings] that have taken place this year alone already, one including the Welfare Branch showing the Artists of Arnhem Land at the Darwin SHOW!!!! ... Apart from the moral reasons for not showing the films — that the ceremonies could only have been filmed if the Aborigines believed that they would not be shown publicly there is the very immediate one of our having to go to places where these travel films have upset people and try to get them to cooperate with us on our filming programme.¹⁴² (Emphasis in original.)

The Attenborough films were made by the BBC in the late 1950s for general distribution. Even though the Institute films were in a separate league the fall-out from the screening of BBC style films, as Peterson warned, could have jeopardised the operations of the Institute’s future film projects. A gradual realisation was beginning to emerge that the controlling of the distribution and showing of the ceremonial films was going to be much more difficult than expected and raised unforeseen problems as Aboriginal people from remote Australia started to travel more widely.

Concern over the films containing secret and sacred images and words heightened as 1969 opened. The concern emanated from the public screening of *Emu Ritual at Ruguri* at a News and Information Bureau theatrette (Sydney) in November 1968 after it had won an award in the Ethnographic Film Section at the Bienalle de Venezia in Italy. Two Warlpiri men, Tim Japangardi and Jim Jungari, were invited down from Yuendumu to be present at the screening and to accept the award from the Italian Ambassador with William Wentworth.¹⁴³ Because of the Warlpiri men’s presence it was decided that only men could be present at the screening and all women attendees were asked to wait outside. According to Sandall, a newspaper article appeared soon afterwards describing the screening¹⁴⁴ and the issue of screening secret and sacred ceremonial again became a concern for the Institute.

¹⁴² Letter from Peterson to McCarthy dated 26/7/67 in NP:Film.
¹⁴³ See AIAS Newsletter 2(10) April 1969 p13 which includes a photograph of the Warlpiri men, Wentorh and the Ambassador perusing the award.
¹⁴⁴ Interview with Roger Sandall 12/11/96. I have looked through the Sydney Morning Herald around the time of the screening but was unable to locate the actual article.
An Executive Committee meeting was scheduled for the 11th of February at which film distribution policy was again on the agenda. This time in respect of the American distribution of the Institute’s films and their screening in Australia. D. J. Mulvaney, in his capacity as Chairman, wrote a pre-emptive letter in late January for distribution to the Executive which appealed to the scientific research agenda of the Institute. They were there to collect and make records and the film programme was a part of this agenda. Sandall also contributed a report to the Institute on screening policy in which he claimed that the “narrow ethic of tribal law” was being lifted above “the larger values of science to which, by definition, a research institute is committed”. Sandall’s frustration over the impending increased restriction of the exhibition of his films is marked in this report but this was to be allayed for a time as the Executive Committee came to these conclusions:

The Committee felt that recent Institute films contributed to a greater understanding of the religious life and culture of the Aborigines and that it should be Institute policy to educate the Aborigines to a realisation that the screening of these films added to their own prestige and significance. The Aborigines should be encouraged to liberalise their own attitude to the making and screening of these films and the aim of the Institute should be to resist the introduction into their minds of the question of restrictions.

The Institute should avoid as far as possible restrictive agreements and should consider the making of a film in the light of the restrictions to be placed on its use. Officers negotiating the making of films should be instructed to act within this general policy.

In the light of this discussion the Committee agreed that:

a) the Institute should conclude the negotiations with the Extension Media Center, Berkeley for the distribution of its films as soon as possible and the agreement as previously authorised by Council (Min. 68/43) should be signed. The Committee approved the expenditure of $3,940 on duplicate negatives and sound tracks to be supplied to the Center.

b) the Institute should continue to follow the policy as laid down by Council which is that films of ceremonies shall not be screened in the presence of any Aboriginal women nor uninitiated males of the group or cult participating in the film and that any owner of or participant in the ceremony may veto the screening of the film to any particular audience.

The day after this meeting, Peterson’s contribution arrived in the mail at the Institute. This took the form of a three page report detailing the verbal agreements he had made with the Aboriginal people involved in the filming of the nine secret ceremonies that he

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145 Letter from Mulvaney to Boydell dated 23/1/69 in AIATSIS file 64/131/2.
146 Report from Sandall to Institute dated 5/2/69 in AIATSIS file 64/131/2.
147 Executive Committee Minutes dated 11/2/69, minute 65/5, extract of which cited in AIATSIS file 64/131/2.
had been a party to.\textsuperscript{148} Peterson was no longer working for the Institute and his fears about the films had led him to become critical of the Institute's continued persistence in filming the secret life of Aboriginal people when the exhibition of these films was becoming less and less possible.

In April and May 1969, Sandall again went to Central Australia. During this trip he filmed material that supplemented the final film \textit{The Mulga Seed Ceremony}. According to a report at the time, this filming was conducted at Docker River (Kaltukatjara) with Pitjantjatjara men and "shows a further aspect of the ritual associated with the site of Kikingkura" (AIAS 1969:37). Sandall next went to Yuendumu where he gathered people together for the filming of \textit{Walbiri Ritual at Yambiri} (1969). This was the only ceremonial film by Sandall of which no release version was made and only an archive print exists (at the time of writing). After this, Sandall then went in June to Papunya were a large group of men were once again gathered and transported to another site for the filming of \textit{Pintupi Revist Yumari} (1969). These films contain images and sound that has also been deemed restricted. According to file information, all three of these films continue the trend of taking people away from their camps with the offer of revisiting country for the purpose of filming ceremonies.

\textbf{A change in direction}

It had occurred to others in the past such as Ronald Berndt, that the Institute's filming agenda should be diversified and the problems associated with filming ceremonial life were making this increasingly attractive. In August 1969 Sandall submitted a report to the FPAC which set out his ideas for potential films of secular life. He proposed three films which were: one on Aboriginal stockmen; one on a Pintupi man called Nosepeg and his life on an outstation; and one on daily life on Croker Island which would compliment material already filmed there.\textsuperscript{149} Besides Sandall's desire to diversify film production, this report also signalled a major change in how the films were being conceived. Sandall

\textsuperscript{148} See appendix 2 for a copy of this report.
\textsuperscript{149} "A Report to the Advisory Committee on Film Production" by Roger Sandall dated 11/8/69 in AIATSIS file 77/61. Sandall had met Nosepeg during the filming of \textit{Camels and the Pitjanjatjara}. 
emphasised the importance of preliminary field research for the above mentioned proposed films in order that comprehensive and worthwhile films could be made. This stood in marked contrast to the ceremonial films which were made with very little preparation or preliminary research. He put himself forward as a candidate to research these films before any filming was done and he also expected them to take a number of years to produce.\textsuperscript{150}

Sandall took most of 1969 and early 1970 to clear the backlog of editing that had mounted up. Apart from those release versions already mentioned above as finished during this period, a forty-five minute version of \textit{The Uivar Ceremony} (1969) was made. This period was also spent editing the archive versions of many of the filmed ceremonies: \textit{The Maraiin of Croker Island} (3 hours); \textit{Pintubi Revisit Yumari and Yunala} (2 hours); \textit{Pitjantjara Ritual at Kikingkura} (1 hour); \textit{Pitjantjara Ritual at Arroyonga} (1 hour); and \textit{Walbiri Ritual at Yambirri} (1.5 hours). Two Pintupi men, Freddy West and Nosepeg, were also flown down to Sydney in February 1970 to help Ken Hansen, the anthropological advisor, with the documentation of the Pintupi films recorded the previous year. With this work cleared, Sandall was now free to focus on his newly proposed film projects and by March 1970, he was back in the Northern Territory.

Sandall met up with Peterson and proceeded to Daladjia, a camp near Buckingham Bay in Arnhem Land, where material for \textit{Making a Bark Canoe} (1976) was filmed. Sandall then went on to Snake Bay on Melville Island to film a Pukamani ceremony in May. The only record for this film is the archive film \textit{The Pukamani for Barney Tuk} which was documented by Maria Brandl with editing equipment shipped to Darwin in late April-early May 1971. Sandall came back to Sydney and attended a FPAC meeting in July. At this meeting it was agreed that he be granted money to go towards an intended trip to America for the American Anthropological Association meeting later that year.\textsuperscript{151} In late August and September however, he again met up with Jeremy Long and another trip was taken with Pintupi men to film the restoration of cave paintings and a ceremony

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\textsuperscript{150} See also "A note on the Film Programme" by Roger Sandall, undated, 5 pp, in NP:Film.
\textsuperscript{151} See "A request for travel expenses" by Roger Sandall, dated 14/7/70 in AIATSIS file 64/131/2 and FPAC Meeting Minutes dated 21/7/70 AIAS Doc. 70/983 Min. 70/11.
\end{flushright}
which became *Pintupi Revisit Yaru Yaru* (1972). Also during this year, Rod Adamson filmed material for *The Wiril Canoe* (1971) on Croker Island and Howard Hughes of the Australian Museum was funded by the Institute to film the making of spears and spear throwers at Edward River, Cape York.

The year 1970 ended with Sandall’s visit to America. He was in Darwin during April and May 1971 assisting Maria Brandi with the documentation of the Pukamani footage from the previous year’s filming. Between July and September, six weeks were spent at Coniston Station filming for *Coniston Muster - Scenes from a Stockman's Life* (1975). Sandall then spent the rest of the year editing *Pintupi Revisit Yaru Yaru* (1972). In a report to the FPAC in November, Sandall stated that he was unprepared to work on any other material except the Pintupi film, the Pukamani and the Coniston film which required subsequent research trips to Central Australia. He requested that a camera operator be hired to undertake filming of any projects that may arise. Sandall’s suggested camera operator was Alister Hallum who went on to film at Papunya in early 1972 for the Institute. Lew Parierte, the Institute’s Liaison Officer in the Northern Territory at the time also filmed material that was edited into three films: *Dingari Ceremonies at Papunya* (1972); *Kangaroo and the Earth Oven* (1972); and *Shield Painting - Hooker Creek* (1972).

It was during the first half of 1972 that Sandall was invited to lecture at Rice University in Texas and his film work in Australia came to a standstill. In August 1972, after returning to Australia, Sandall went to Lajamanu in central Australia to meet up with Stephen Wild, an anthropologist who was eager to have the Institute film a Warlpiri ceremony which would take place during a visit to an important site. The resultant film was *Lawari and Walkara* (1976) which is discussed more fully in the following chapter. During this trip, Sandall conducted an interview to camera between the Warlpiri man Derby Tjampitjimpa and Nicolas Peterson which was edited into an unreleased film titled *Derby Tjampitjimpa Interview No. 3* (1972).

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152 "The Film Programme, Staff and Equipment, 1972-73: A Report to the Advisory Committee on Film Production" by Roger Sandall, approximate date November 1971 in AIATSIS file 66/72/2.
The end of the first phase

In December 1972, a new Principal of the Institute, Peter Ucko, arrived from England to replace McCarthy. He immediately set about re-organising the Institute and by mid-1973, Ucko had decided to centralise the Film Unit in Canberra. Sandall did not want to move and was fortuitously offered a position in the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, by Geddes. His services were to be retained by the Institute however for a further three years as this new position was partly funded by the Institute. By the close of 1973 the Film Unit was in disarray. Until then it had really only been a one-man-show, being run by Sandall on his own with the occasional contracted editor and helpful input from collaborating anthropologists. McCarthy had retired from the Institute in mid-August 1972 and staff numbers at the Institute in Canberra had dropped to around twelve people. Sandall spent his days during this period simply trying to edit in between attending to the Film Unit’s general administrative matters.

McCarthy had promoted filmmaking during his time with a collector’s zeal in an attempt to record for posterity all of the major rituals of central and northern Australia (without any emphasis on south-east Australia). Holmes and Sandall created a body of ceremonial films and archival footage that to an extent, accomplished McCarthy’s wishes; in total seventeen films of sacred ceremonies were filmed and archived. Dunlop filmed extensively the daily life of Ngaanyatjarra speaking people of the Western Desert and this too exists in an archival form with documentation. Within the Film Unit however, a critical tension developed between Sandall and McCarthy that centred around the issue of what the Film Unit was actually supposed to be producing. These two men came at this issue from completely different backgrounds and each was forced to accommodate the other in the act of producing films within the agenda of the Institute. On reflection, I believe it was the tension between making record footage and research films of pedagogic value on the one hand and films of high aesthetic and grammatical value on the other that produced a body of film work that continues to live an ambiguous life. McCarthy’s aims for scientific records were contradicted in practice as Sandall’s aims for a body of work
with filmic integrity led him to venture outside the boundaries of science and to work more with the signifying practices of his chosen medium of representation.

These filmmakers recognised the problems with continuing in the salvage method of anthropology and Aboriginal people themselves were becoming more concerned about the revelation of secret/sacred information on film. The first phase of filmmaking was therefore brought to an end through a broad set of concerns that were bearing down on the discipline of Aboriginal anthropology in general. With the advent of land rights in the Northern Territory, salvage anthropology became less relevant and the direction of Australian anthropology changed markedly. Salvage work did continue in other disciplines such as linguistics and archaeology, but less and less in anthropology. The following chapter traces how it was that the changes in the wider political and social climate both within Aboriginal Australia and more widely Australian anthropology combined to redirect the Film Unit away from its previous goals of research into a people that was seen to be losing culture and towards the investigation of a culture in transition.
Recording culture in transition: the second phase of the Film Unit

The year 1973 not only saw the resignation of Roger Sandall from the Film Unit and its removal to Canberra but also the abolition of the FPAC. Further to this the new Whitlam Labor government ushered in a period of rapid change in Aboriginal affairs, increased political activism among Aboriginal people and the foundations of a pan-Aboriginal movement all of which impacted on the Film Unit and the kind of work it undertook.

The problems surrounding the recording and documentation of secret and sacred ceremonial life were solved by the virtual cessation of the making of such films, with only two made in the 1970s, although the issues to do with their screening and distribution have remained significant down to the present. In the place of problems created by recording secret ceremonies came problems originating in representational politics that focussed on how the Institute was to balance the new demands for Aboriginal self-representation while continuing to make its own films.

During this second phase there was a preoccupation on the part of the filmmakers with the use of the camera as agent in the translation and transmission of
Aboriginal cultures. There was also a move away from the filmmaking style of the omnipotent camera as Aboriginal people were seen to be interpreting and translating their culture to the filmmakers – they were asked questions and their replies were included in the body of the film. Relationships between those behind the camera and those in front of it were seen to develop on film and a more intimate way of representing Aboriginal people was practiced. This is particularly interesting when one considers the fact that the first sync-sound interview to camera conducted by the Film Unit only occurred in 1972. Regardless of these changes within the methodologies of the Film Unit, the Institute more broadly continued to maintain its preservationist agenda (especially with regard to rock art) well into the late 1970s, creating yet another situation of methodological conflict in which the filmmakers operated.

The new Principal, Peter Ucko, an archaeologist by profession, had previously been the Chair of the Film Committee of the Royal Anthropological Institute in London and had cultivated a keen interest in the development of ethnographic filmmaking. He had arrived a month before the Whitlam Labor government was elected to Federal Parliament, breaking a 23 year reign by the Liberal Party. The new government owed some of its election success to its positive stand on Aboriginal land rights and initiated a number of reforms in government policy towards Aboriginal people. The Institute received a massive boost in its operating budget under the new government and Ucko was able to turn this small academic institution, dominated by white male academics, into a large research organisation with increasing Aboriginalisation as a primary goal. In moving the Film Unit to Canberra Ucko effectively disbanded it and with Sandall’s resignation he left himself free to recreate it as he saw fit.

In Sandall’s place Ucko was to appoint David and Judith MacDougall and Kim McKenzie whose time at the Institute forms the focus of this chapter. Before discussing their work however, it is necessary to begin with a consideration of Sandall’s last films.
Sandall’s final films

In late 1973 the Institute advertised for a permanent filmmaker to fill the vacancy left by Sandall’s move to the Anthropology Department at the University of Sydney. He agreed to finish editing the projects which he had started – the Pukamani footage filmed on Melville Island in 1970, footage of bark canoe building, the film from Coniston station and the ceremonial film made near Lajamanu with Warlpiri (and two Gurindji) men – as well as to remain available for film projects for a further three years. Two of his final films, *Coniston Muster* (1975) and *Lawari and Walkara* (1976), mark a shift in Sandall’s filmmaking style.

The Coniston film is about relations between white pastoralists and Aboriginal people in central Australia at a time of mounting concern across the country about who owned the land. Sandall used interviews with a white property “owner” Bryan Bowman and the head Aboriginal stockman on the property, Coniston Johnny for different views. Johnny also narrated much of the action in English where no interviews took place. Sandall not only used interviews but he also provides his own commentary and intertitles to pose questions which were apparently put to the interviewees. Overall, the film is tightly constructed following a narrative about black/white relations and connections to country. Aboriginal people speak directly to camera in this film, a simple though effective device that Sandall had not used in his previous unrestricted films even though he had the synchronous sound equipment which allowed this.\(^{153}\) Sandall had taken an hour long rough-cut of this film to America and while there he realised that it had to be shortened for impact, so on his return he edited *Coniston Muster* down to its present length of 25 minutes.\(^{154}\)

In contrast, *Lawari and Walkara* was more closely related to his previous ritual films. Stephen Wild, the anthropologist who was present during the filming, requested Sandall to film a site visit by Warlpiri men near Lajamanu in the Northern Territory. It eventuated that the site that Wild expected the men would want to be taken back to was

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153 Although there is the unreleased film *Derby Tjampitjimpa Interview No 3*, recorded at Yuendumu in August 1972, in which the entire film is an interview between Nicolas Peterson and Derby.
154 Interview with Roger Sandall 12/11/96.
not chosen by them and they asked to be taken elsewhere. In a sense, they began directing their own film. They decided to go to two sites which required the involvement of two Gurindji men from a station north of Lajamanu. Some sort of political power play was underway between Warlpiri and the Gurindji men but Sandall was not made aware of it before beginning to film. Wild was asked to get the Gurindji men and the filmmaking began. Wild informed me that Sandall requested that the men perform ceremonies naked at a time when this was a rare occurrence and that much of the ceremonial action was directed by Sandall. Wild believed that Sandall was unaware of the political machinations that were underway during the filming between the Warlpiri and Gurindji men and it was not until nearly every word was translated by the linguist Lothar Jaagst and by Wild that the story within the film became apparent to him. So Sandall made a ceremonial film in the style that he used in the late 1960s but because he was now prepared to have the dialogue translated it was the only ceremonial film made by him with subtitles.

Wild was excited by what Sandall had filmed and he began writing a book which centred around the political use of the filmmaker and the film by the Warlpiri men. However, Sandall did not release this film until 1976, a time when because of its content, it would definitely not have been seen by many people. The film was also apparently used as “evidence” by Gurindji and Warlpiri in a joint land rights claim to the land seen in the film in 1979 although it is not mentioned in the published claim book. Sandall's filmmaking style did change therefore but it evolved at a speed which mirrored the changing climate of Aboriginal politicisation in central Australia. I believe that with the Lawari film, Sandall had entered a new phase of filmmaking which presented Warlpiri culture and social organisation in a never before seen way. Unfortunatley the new politics of the Institute meant that the film was not circulated at all.

Sandall did attempt to do something more with the 1970 footage of the Pukamani ceremony held for Barney Tuk on Melville Island. In early 1973 he discovered that some of the original negative of this footage had been lost by the film lab over the intervening years. Maria Brandl had documented a print of the original material with some

155 The book was never finished.
men from Melville in Darwin in 1971 so an archival record of the footage is available but it was not released in any other format (see Brandl 1974). If the negatives had not been lost and a final film had been made, this would have been the only unrestricted ceremonial film filmed and edited by Sandall. The final film to be edited by Sandall was in 1976 entitled *Making a Bark Canoe* which was filmed at Buckingham Bay in Arnhem Land just before he attended the Pukamani ceremony on Melville Island. This is a short technology film in which the making of a canoe from the bark of a tree is shown in detail, although Sandall does show what place the canoe has in the lives of the people at that time. Also during this period he made two films outside Australia, *Jimmy Stephens Speaks* (1975) filmed in the New Hebrides, *Social Dramas on Vanuatu* (1975) and one in Australia with Sharon Bell entitled *Weddings* (1976).156

**An inter-regnum: Curtis Levy**

Shortly after Sandall’s departure, Curtis Levy was contracted on an independent basis to make films for the Institute while Ucko reassembled the Film Unit. Levy began because a request had come to the Institute from a community for a film to be made of a ceremony. After this first film, he went on to make a further four films, two of which were not community requests. Levy, an Australian, began in television documentary in the mid 1960s. Prior to working for the Institute, he worked for Reg Ansett’s Channel 0 as an assistant producer on a weekly programme called *Pacemakers*. He did not have a background in anthropology nor tertiary training in filmmaking but secured a position at ABC television as a director through the success of his award-winning film *Close Your Eyes and Hold Your Stomach*. It was during this period in the early 1970s, while Levy continued work for the ABC, that he made his films for the Institute.

The first film made by Levy was *Lurugu* (1974). Levy had become friends with an Aboriginal man called Dick Roughsey who was working in Cape York with Percy Trezise, an adventurer and raconteur. He had earlier proposed a film about these two men and their explorations of Cape York to the ABC but the project was turned down. Trezise

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156 Sandall later went on to produce a film for Sharon Bell entitled *Four Women* (1978) which was made in Sri Lanka.
later phoned Levy and asked him if he would film an initiation ceremony on Mornington Island. Levy agreed and Trezise and Roughsey said they would organise the film’s funding through the Institute. Roughsey was a member of the Institute at the time and was also on the board of the Aboriginal Arts Board. With Peter Ucko absent, Robert Edwards who was at this time the Deputy Principal of the Institute as well as the Chief Executive of the Aboriginal Arts Board, soon got the project underway. Roger Sandall was offered the project at some stage by Edwards but turned it down due to other work commitments. Levy contacted Edwards about making the film for Roughsey and Trezise but as an independent project where Levy could control the material and produce a release version for television as well as one for the Institute. Edwards, however, wanted Levy to work exclusively for the Institute so that they could retain control over the footage that could potentially contain material of a sensitive nature. On his return Ucko asked the anthropologist John von Sturmer to accompany Levy and his crew to Mornington Island. After brief negotiations, the filming took place during the last week of June 1973. Levy’s crew included Geoff Burton as camera operator and the equipment was borrowed from the ABC where the final film was edited after working hours. Lurugu covers the preparation for and enactment of an initiation ceremony on Mornington Island. This particular ceremony had apparently not been performed for fourteen years and it was recognised by the participants as an attempt to revive it.

By December 1973, Levy had not finished the release version of Lurugu but had completed an archive version with von Sturmer. It seems that by this time the energy behind the production of this film had waned somewhat, apparently due to a lack of interest from the Mornington Island community. Von Sturmer and Levy had only been asked to make the film and were not its proposers — the original proposition came from Roughsey — so there was little impetus for them to finish a release version quickly. Levy, von Sturmer and Ucko did however decide that three versions of the film would be made: the long archive version, a version made explicitly for the men involved on Mornington

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157 Von Sturmer had been teaching Aboriginal anthropology at the University of Queensland, a position which had been partly funded by the Institute.

158 Geoff Burton has gone on to become one of Australia’s most recognised cinematographers. Dean Semler, another of Australia’s leading cinematographers, worked with Ian Dunlop at Yirrkala and in Papua New Guinea during the 1970s.
Island (and not for researchers), and a public release version which was proposed for television (but was never broadcast).\(^{159}\) Editing of the release version was finished in early 1974 and von Sturmer took it to Mornington Island for clearance. Approval of this version was given in July 1974 by the men on Mornington although Dick Roughsey later wrote to Ucko in May 1975 stating:

This is just to say in writing to you, because of some of the questions and statements being made by Aborigines down South, that it was the Mornington Island people who asked the Institute to come and make a film of the initiation ceremony. We sent a message stick to you and the man who actually sent it is now dead. Many of us have now seen the film and think it very good.\(^{160}\)

Roughsey wrote this letter because the release version of *Furugu* was met with mixed reactions at the time of public release by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people.\(^{161}\) Ucko too was uncertain about the film but allowed the production of the public release version. The problem in some people's eyes was that the film could be seen to make it appear that the Mornington Islanders did not know their own culture but if anything this makes the film more telling as we see people actively manifesting and creating culture. This film is also important both because of its content, the revival of a ceremony not held for fourteen years, and its context, the Lardil's need to express culture in "traditional" terms in order to engage in a newly politicised Aboriginal Australia which required them to define themselves in such a way. The motivation for its creation was one that recurred within a number of the films made during the 1970s which involved the use of non-Aboriginal filmmakers by Aboriginal people themselves to speak to the outside world about their traditions and culture (such as *Waiting for Harry* and *Familiar Places*).

\(^{159}\) File note by Ucko dated 16/12/73 in AIATSIS file 73/86.
\(^{160}\) Letter from Roughsy to Ucko dated 2/5/75 in AIATSIS file 73/86.
\(^{161}\) Levy screened *Lurugu* in Melbourne in February 1975. Attending the screening was a group of Aboriginal students from Swinburne College of Technology. After the screening a number of these students expressed their dislike of the film. One student, Carol Dowling, wrote in their student newspaper: "I was quite let down by these films. I didn't feel them to be capturing real the Traditional Ceremonies of my people, but a very tainted version of them. I feel very strongly about my heritage and anything that stands to ridicule the Aboriginal Culture should be removed. However as illustrations of how the Europeans have screwed up the Traditional Customs, these films are very good. They are definitely not a true and full picture of the real thing" (in Mureena undated). A non-Aboriginal critic read the film in a similar way: "What is recorded is a slow and not entirely successful process of of trying to remember what to do and how to do it. And when after many a compromise some vague semblance of a once-sacred rite has been pieced together and is in progress it is submitted to the mockery of the arrival of a lorry load of red-necks from the local mission, the men waving eskies and Japanese cameras, the women in hair curlers" (Brian Hoad, "Looking at the past and the future", *Bulletin*, March 15, 1975:47-48).
After his involvement with the filming on Mornington Island, von Sturmer went on to work for the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation (December 1973) which was involved with the organisation of a cultural festival at Lockhart River community on Cape York Peninsula. A request had been made to the Institute by the community to sound record the entire festival. Levy heard about this and decided that he would like to make a film from this event and so approached the Institute for funding. This was approved at the eleventh hour by Ucko. According to a report by Athol Chase, another anthropologist present at Lockhart, the community had made a formal request to the Institute for the production of a film and prior to Levy’s arrival, rules were set out by people in the community as to how the film would be made. The rules as read to Levy were that he had to get the permission of each “field boss” to film each song or dance performed; there was to be no artificial light and therefore no night filming; each group had the right to veto their performances from being included in the film; and each group was to receive a copy of the finished film. As stated in a report by von Sturmer, another requirement requested before filming was that archival versions of each dance be made and “for control of access to the archival version to be in the hands of the group itself, through its leader(s) or his (their) appointees”. The final release version contains an interview with one of the Aboriginal organisers, Jerry Pascoe, interspersed between footage of the songs and dances which are supported by overtitles and commentary. The right to veto dances was taken up by some members of the Lockhart community who requested that one particular dance be removed from the film because it was believed that its public performance was the cause of an influenza epidemic that went through the community soon afterwards. This is an excellent early example of collaborative filmmaking in which the various communities managed to maintain some control over the filmmaking and the finished film.

162 The Institute’s technical officer Bryan Butler did attend and made a complete audio recording of the Festival.
164 John von Sturmer, “Report of screening of ‘Lockhart Festival’ Film at lockhart and at Aurukun, January 1976”, in AIATSIS file 73/159. Von Sturmer drew up a list of appointees who had rights over these archival films and this is available in the report.
165 See the Chase (ibid.) report for more information about this.
The finished film was finally taken back to Lockhart River and Aurukun in January 1976. Ucko, Warwick Dix (Deputy Principal), Peter Sutton, Percy Trezise, Levy, von Sturmer and Chase all attended the handover of copies of the film to members of each community that participated in the Festival. According to the reports of Chase and von Sturmer, the finished film was received with enthusiasm and appreciation in both Lockhart and Aurukun. The reports reflected on people's reactions to seeing and hearing particular dances but did not refer to people's impressions of the overall structure of the film. In this film Levy tried to investigate a number of issues while also providing a record of the dances that were performed. It is in this dual purpose that his narrative message of the need to keep cultural identity strong through festivals gets lost. As a record film of a series of dances however, it was successful in the eyes of the performers themselves. The final film was released as *Lockhart Festival*.

In April 1974 Levy was requested by Ucko to film a Pukamani ceremony on Melville Island. Sandall had previously filmed the Pukamani for another Melville Islander, Barney Tuk, and there had in fact been several recordings of the same type of ceremony previously made by other filmmakers. An important man had been killed and his father, Geoffrey Mangatopi, wanted the "old-style" mortuary rites to be held for him (Brandl 1974). Geoffrey Mangatopi had heard about the Institute's filming of ceremonies and made a request that this Pukamani be filmed because it was to be a proper one. Brandl (ibid.) has noted that the people involved emphasised the "traditional" mode of enacting this ceremony and also stated that even if it was not a normal Pukamani as they were held in 1974, much of their contemporary world is evident in the film. So this film became a statement about the importance of the dead Mangatopi man and of the strength of tradition within the Managatopi family rather than just a record of a ceremony. The Mangatopi family used the fact that a film was being made to strengthen their position within their community. *Mourning for Mangatopi* was released in its final revised version in November 1975.

Levy had a long-time interest in the Aboriginal painter Albert Namatjira ever since he worked on an earlier film about the painter for the Commonwealth Film Unit.
He had been planning to make a film about Namatjira and had obtained Arts Council funding to conduct research in central Australia. Since early 1974, Levy had been in contact with Rex Ziersch at Hermannsburg, an Aboriginal community just over one hundred kilometres west south-west of Alice Springs, where Namatjira had lived. He had also been in contact with Keith Namatjira, a son of Albert, who lived at the Artist's Camp on the outskirts of Alice Springs. He intended to make a film for the Institute regarding the outstation movement from Hermannsburg but Levy also took this opportunity to make a film about the Namatjiras in Alice Springs. In his proposal for these films, Levy initially saw them as one film about the diaspora from Hermannsburg due to the decrease in Mission authority. This was based on the fact that on one hand there were the people moving to outstations but on the other, there were those that moved to the town camps of Alice Springs. By August 1975, Levy had organised the funding for the films and he and his crew were soon in Alice Springs.

The first film to come from this trip was *Sons of Namatjira* (1975/75). This was made at Levy's own request and without the input of an anthropologist. They filmed over a ten day period in the Artist's Camp which was originally set up by Albert Namatjira. Because of the short amount of time allowed them in Alice Springs, Levy “set-up” a number of events. He said of these occurrences:

> Set-up situations were only “set-up” in as far as I would arrange for various people who normally visited the artists camp to come at particular times, so that we would be sure to be there to film their visit. There was no attempt to influence the course of discussions or transactions, and once at the camp these interactions went on, as far as I could perceive, in much the same way as they would normally. Except of course, the camera would make some of the white people a little more self conscious and aware of their behaviour that they would be without the presence of the film crew. ...Practically every situation in the film is “set-up” in this way, except for those sequences involving the tourists.

In many ways this paralleled the filmmaking of Roger Sandall when he would take men to sites in buses to conduct ceremonies. But in this case, Levy was stage managing on a smaller scale. Because of his interest, Levy spent a lot of time with the Namatjiras in the camp, especially Keith Namatjira. Through this a trust relationship developed, according

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166 Levy received a grant from the Australian Council for the Arts in December 1973 to undertake script development and research for a film about Albert Namatjira which included a trip to Alice Springs.
167 Curtis Levy "Hermannsburg Film", undated, 5pp, provided by Levy to author.
168 Curtis Levy "Sons of Namatjira", undated, 2pp, provided by Levy to author.
to Levy, and the members of the camp cooperated fully with the crew. It stands out as Levy’s most interesting film for the Institute, perhaps because of his personal interest in the people and the inclusion of himself surreptitiously in the film, an important factor that is absent from his other films. It is probably more true that the film strikes the audience as an excellent example of documentary filmmaking because of its constructed narrative and because of its sympathetic treatment of urban Aboriginal people.\(^{169}\)

After filming in Alice Springs, Levy went to Hermannsburg and then out to the area where the family of Gustav Malbangka were establishing their outstation. The footage recorded there was finally edited in 1977 as *Malbangka Country*. Levy sees this as the film that he was least happy with.\(^{170}\) This was to be the last film that Levy made for the Institute as Ucko had recruited two new filmmakers for the reconstituted Film Unit.

Levy’s position was in some ways similar to that of Holmes because he operated outside the institutional structure of the Film Unit. Unlike Holmes, however, Levy did not think of his films as scientific records nor did he have a long term commitment to making films with Aboriginal people. He did not consider himself an ethnographic filmmaker but he was and continues to be a maker of documentaries.\(^{171}\)

### The re-establishment of the Film Unit

The Film Unit was re-established in mid-1975 when David and Judith MacDougall arrived in Canberra to join the Institute. Prior to their arrival in Australia they had both been filming in Kenya where David received a letter from Peter Ucko asking if he would be interested in applying for the position of Director at the Institute’s Film Unit. After an exchange of correspondence, Ucko organised for David to fly to Canberra from Kenya for an interview. Their filming had been brought to a halt due to a camera motor burning out in Turkana so David took the opportunity of the interview to get the motor fixed in Sydney with the assistance of Roger Sandall.

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\(^{169}\) It was not seen positively by all however as Moore and Muecke (1984) have stated that *Sons of Namatjira* does not make it clear enough to the audience how it should be read.

\(^{170}\) Interview with Levy 21/3/95.

\(^{171}\) Ibid.
The Institute had advertised for a director of the Film Unit in the major Australian newspapers and in England. Over twenty applications were received from around the world. MacDougall arrived in Canberra from Nairobi in early May 1974, for an interview at which the second phase of Institute’s filmmaking was conceived. Commenting on this interview which he had with Peter Ucko, Nicolas Peterson, Ian Dunlop and Anthony Forge, MacDougall recalled:

I went to the interview but was obviously jet-lagged from this long trip via Bombay and Peter Ucko and the others more or less set out a kind of description of how they thought the unit should be set up and operate. At that point I really didn’t care and I said no I think that’s really the wrong approach altogether and if I were to do it, I’d do it this way and this way and this way. And I set out my program.173

Peter Ucko recognised that the MacDougalls were rising stars in the international field of ethnographic cinema and the committee, according to Nicolas Peterson, was enormously impressed by their film, *To live with herds* (1972) made in Uganda in 1968. The seeing of which immediately clinched the offer of the position. The new Film Unit was to made up of three people in total, both of whom David MacDougall could appoint. It was assumed from the outset that Judith MacDougall would be the second member of the Unit.

The MacDougalls had met at the University of California, Los Angeles, where they both completed degrees at the film school. It was their later studies at the UCLA Ethnographic Film Program which first took them to Uganda where *To Live with Herds* (1968/72), *Under the Men’s Tree* (1968/74) and *Nawi* (1968/70) where filmed. During the early 1970s, while teaching at Rice University, David went to Kenya to film *Kenya Boran* (1972/74) with James Blue and then both the MacDougalls went to northern Kenya for over a year. It was during this second trip that *The Wedding Camels* (1974/77), *Lorang’s Way* (1974/79) and *A Wife Among Wives* (1974/81) were filmed.

In August 1975, Ucko requested that David MacDougall film another Pukamani ceremony on Melville Island. The request for this ceremony to be filmed came from the dying man himself, Geoffrey Mangatopi, the man who had requested the film made by

172 Due to matters of privacy and legal requirements, I have decided not to include the names of other applicants for this position. It would obviously be interesting to compare who was competing for the position but getting permission from all of the applicants to do this is a task beyond the scope of this thesis.

173 Interview with MacDougalls 14/11/95.
Curtis Levy. Ucko had met him earlier that year when he went to Melville Island to present the film *Mourning for Mangatopi* to them (see following photographs). The film that Ucko handed over was of the Pukamani for the son of this old man who was then dying. It was now almost time for this old man's own Pukamani and Ucko honoured his request that it be filmed. Ucko may also have felt personally obligated to allow this ceremony to be filmed because of his meeting with this old man. In any case, MacDougall flew to Melville Island where he met up with the anthropologist Maria Brandl to begin filming. Brandl was not available for the entire ceremony and MacDougall was only assisted by the sound person Bryan Butler and Curtis Levy, who accompanied them because of his prior association with the family. This was to be the third Pukamani ceremony filmed by the Institute on Melville Island and the final film *Good-bye Old Man* was completed in 1977.

MacDougall was obviously thrown into filming this ceremony and he had little time to prepare. Regardless of this he quickly managed to find a focus for his filming. The old man's daughter was interviewed to-camera at length and her story about her father became a central thread in the edited film. A participant in the ceremony was chosen (because he spoke good English) to provide narration over the edited film, allowing MacDougall to provide an interpretation of events from the point of view of a participant. This central point of view is Thomas Woody Minipini's but we are also provided with a personal insight into Geoffrey Mangatopi's life through the testimony of his daughter. Considering the hurried beginnings of this film, the final product is informative and emotionally strong (see photographs of MacDougall filming and Thomas Woody editing on following pages).

In November 1975 Kim McKenzie joined the Film Unit to take up the remaining position of Assistant Director. McKenzie had completed an arts degree (with honours in drama) in Adelaide and had worked on two fiction films soon after leaving university. He later worked on *Down the Wind* (1975 Chrysallis Films) before joining the Institute.
The presentation of a 16mm copy of Mourning for Mangatopi on Melville Island. From Left Peter Ucko, Maria Brandl, Mangatopi and Jaquie Lambert (Courtesy: AIATSIS Pictorial Archive).

The film in the can is a record of the Pukamani ceremony for this old man's son. He is close to death in this photograph and asks Ucko to make a film of his Pukamani once he is gone. The Pukamani for this man became Goodbye Old Man (Courtesy: AIATSIS Pictorial Archive).
David MacDougall, Bryan Butler with heavily wrapped microphone and Maria Brandl with spare film magazine during the filming of Goodbye Old Man (Courtesy: AIATSIS Pictorial Archive).

David MacDougall filming the Pukamani ceremony on Melville Island for the film Goodbye Old Man (Courtesy: AIATSIS Pictorial Archive).
In both of these photographs, Thomas Woddy Minipini and David MacDougall work on the editing (above) and narration (below) of *Goodbye Old Man* at the Film Unit in Canberra (Courtesy: AIATSIS Pictorial Archive).
McKenzie was interested in becoming a zoologist but was offered the position at a time in his life when working for the Film Unit was a very attractive proposition.

McKenzie's first job for the Institute was to edit the footage which Roger Sandall had filmed of the Ngatjakula fire ceremony with Warlpiri people at Yuendumu in 1967. Sandall had not edited the footage into a finished film because he did not believe he had managed to adequately cover the event on film and because, in his view, there was a problem with the picture quality. Sandall was in the process of moving all of the Institute's negative and print stock from Sydney to Canberra and McKenzie came across the footage during the task of organising the accessioning of all the Institute's negative and print stock. McKenzie was enthusiastic about the footage and Sandall told him he was welcome to edit the footage with the help of Nicolas Peterson. Peterson has suggested to me that there was pressure on the Institute at this time to show some footage of unrestricted Aboriginal ceremonial life. This material was the only footage that Sandall had filmed which was of an unquestionably public nature and was therefore suitable for public screening. Peterson saw further value in the footage in that the social structure underlying the ceremony is quite explicit. It was therefore perfect for a short didactic public release film.

The MacDougalls had wanted to increase awareness of ethnographic filmmaking within the Institute as well as in the Australian filmmaking community. As a part of this objective, David MacDougall and Robert Layton, an anthropologist, held a two day workshop in early April 1976 entitled “Styles in Ethnographic Film-making” at the Institute. It was a low-key event which brought together researchers and filmmakers from within Australia but seems to have had little impact on the profile of ethnographic filmmaking at the time.

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175 Interview with Nicolas Peterson 9/5/95.
176 MacDougall and Layton gave papers at this workshop. See Layton 1976 and David MacDougall, "Opening remarks by David MacDougall at Ethnographic Film Workshop", edited transcript, unpublished, 24pp, in AIATSIS file 74/217.
A new filming strategy: fieldwork on Cape York

What the MacDougalls hoped to incorporate into the film production methodology of the Film Unit was the taking of extended periods of fieldwork in much the same way they had done in Africa. This strategy was markedly different from that employed by Sandall who rarely spent longer than a couple of months outside Sydney at a time. Of course Sandall operated the Film Unit essentially on his own and the MacDougalls had Kim McKenzie and other members of staff to maintain the Unit in their absence. Regardless of the reasons for difference, it was a strategy that was to dramatically change the direction of film production at the Institute.

During late May through early July of 1976 the MacDougalls toured around Cape York looking for communities in which to conduct long term fieldwork projects. They felt that Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had been under-represented by the Film Unit in the past and so this trip was to educate themselves and to see if any communities would be interested in having two filmmakers and their young son around for a while. They visited Yarrabah, Hopevale, Bloomfield River, Edward River, Aurukun, Lockhart River, Hammond Island and Thursday Island. Cape York was chosen because many researchers were active in the area at this time, events occurring there were seen to be of historical importance (mining), there had been little film work done prior to this, and because Aboriginal people in the area were interested in filming. They had decided that Aurukun, Hopevale and Edward River would be the best communities because “[e]ach presents an opportunity to make valuable records of a community in transition, and in each film could also serve as a useful catalyst for the community itself (sic)”. Although each community was interested in having films made they decided on Aurukun because of the social impact of mining and the transition from mission to government administration; its social and cultural vitality; its mission history; and because of the support offered by key members of the community as well anthropologists working in the area. David MacDougall added that “it was quite a lively and vital community with a

178 Ibid.
very strong sense of itself". It was an interesting place at the time because of the growing interest in it by the state government, the value of the mineral resources near the township and the conflict between the federal and state governments over its governance. So for the MacDougalls, Aurukun held potential because a certain tension existed there which was enlivening social interaction between members of the community. In a letter to a member of the community David MacDougall suggested:

I agree with you that Aurukun would be an extremely interesting place to be during the next year or so. A lot may happen. From our point of view, film could play a part not only in recording what happens but in helping it turn out for the best.

MacDougall probably thought that having a film crew there that was seen to be on the side of the community would provide them with political support. He was proactively placing himself and their intended project in the political milieu of the community; an action that was hinted at in his earlier paper on participatory cinema (MacDougall 1975). Aurukun also had a strong outstation movement at the time and ceremonies were still being performed regularly.

It was not until September 1977 that the MacDougalls arrived at Aurukun for an expected year long stay. They had brought their young son Colin with them and converted an old cafe for their house. By mid October they were invited out to Cape Keerweer where Peter Sutton, an anthropologist/linguist researching his PhD., was mapping land for Angus Namponan and his family. They filmed over a four day period and the result was *Familiar Places* (1980) which was directed by David. This film is narrated by Sutton in the same fashion as Coniston Johnny narrated *Coniston Muster* and Thomas Woody Minipini narrated *Goodbye Old Man*. They talk over the film as it is screened and this is intercut with the original sound. In *Familiar Places*, David MacDougall edits in a moment when he and Judith MacDougall are included in the activities of the Namponan family. Because the country they were on belonged to Chrissie Namponan, she had to

179 Interview with MacDougalls 14/11/95.
180 Letter from MacDougall to Bailey dated 9/7/76 in AIATSIS file 66/94/2.
181 In March 1977 David MacDougall and McKenzie went to Bachelor in the north of the Northern Territory to film the meetings by Aboriginal people over the developing issues surrounding the Ranger uranium mine and for the inauguration of the Northern Land Council. The film that came from this was *To Get That Country*. The Institute also sent its technical officer Bryan Butler, who used an early model video camera to record all of the meetings.
introduce strangers to the spirits of her land. In doing this, the MacDougalls are shown participating in the event: a very effective reflection of their intellectual project.

During their reconnaissance trip to Aurukun in mid 1976, members of the community had raised the idea of filming a house opening ceremony. These ceremonies were common throughout the whole community at the time and many people took photographs at them. In mid November 1977, a prominent member of the community, Geraldine Kowangka, was having her house reopened after the recent death of her husband. Judith MacDougall took on the role of director for the film that ensued, *The House Opening*. Over a six day period, the MacDougalls followed the preparation and enactment of this cleansing ceremony through the central character Geraldine. Geraldine wanted the film made but was unable to speak during the ceremony because of a speech taboo so the MacDougalls were left on their own to follow the action. As in the previous films where a participant narrated the action post-factum, Geraldine Kowangka provided a descriptive commentary which was intercut with the location sound during editing.

At this time, the Queensland government was seeking to take over completely the administration of Aurukun, and another Uniting Church-run community at Mornington Island, in order that they may turn them into ordinary shires. This would mean that the land would lose its status as Aboriginal reserve land creating tensions not only in the community but more widely — including between the state and federal governments. By March 1978 the MacDougalls were focussing on this impending takeover and the community's deliberations about what to do. David said of *Takeover*, the film they made about these events:

That whole film galvanised us and the situation and the whole community. It was a chance for us to, in a sense, do something for the community directly by documenting everything that happened so far as we could. Of course it was an opportunity to follow an extraordinary political event from the perspective of the community. We saw the importance of it as evidence. That if anybody questioned later what had happened the film could in some ways stand as evidence.

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182 Interview with MacDougalls 14/11/95.
The community Council also saw the filming as providing “proof” of what the Queensland government was doing to them through the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs and also a “a public voice” for themselves.

The MacDougalls were unable to follow events to the very end because they were required back in Canberra in April 1978 to finalise the organisation of an international conference at the Institute in May. Nevertheless they captured some key moments in the community’s struggle to oppose the creation of the shire including an incident involving the federal minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Ian Viner, making promises to the community which were subsequently broken by his government. Peter Ucko and the MacDougalls thought that this material should be seen by the public so they gave it to the ABC who broadcast it nationally. This activism on the part of the Institute placed both Ucko and the MacDougalls in a difficult situation because the Institute came within Viner’s portfolio. They had embarrassed their own boss. Fortunately there were no long term repercussions from this action.\(^\text{183}\)

The MacDougalls returned to Aurukun at the end of the year to make a film about one of the oldest and biggest outstations near Aurukun although they ended up at Ti Tree station which was quite small in comparison. Their camera log books show that the MacDougalls spent the longest time in days filming at this outstation which suggests that it gives a broader picture of the people there than the previous three which basically only cover events. The final film *Three Horsemen* reflects the amount of time that the MacDougalls spent with the people at Ti Tree outstation in its expression of familiarity between filmmakers and subjects and its deeply meditative observational although not distancing style. In early December the MacDougalls left Ti Tree and later returned to Canberra. The editing of *Three Horsemen* was postponed after returning to Canberra due to the death of Ian Pootchamunka, the young boy who became a focus of the final film.\(^\text{184}\)

\(^{183}\) David MacDougall recalled in an interview with me (14/12/96) that there were some memos that were written stating that it was because of this action that difficulties were had getting the following year’s budget through.

\(^{184}\) David MacDougall had got to the stage of mixing sound for another film on the Ti Tree outstation but it was shelved.
The 1978 Institute film conference

In early May 1978 an eight day conference on ethnographic film was held at the Institute. It was seen as a follow up conference to the 1966 Unesco Round Table on Ethnographic Film in the Pacific Area and the 1968 UCLA conference on ethnographic film. It was initiated by the MacDougalls but much of the administrative matters involved in its smooth running were carried out by Michelle Day and Kim McKenzie as the MacDougalls were at Aurukun. The conference was not explicitly on filmmaking in Aboriginal communities but had a global focus on the state of ethnographic filmmaking practice at the time.185

Many international guests attended such as Jay Ruby, James Blue, Karl Heider, Peter Loizos, James MacBean, Bill Nichols and Colin Young (see photographs). Some of the Aboriginal participants in attendance were Clive Scollay, Marcia Langton, Bobbi Sykes, Narritjin Maymuru, and Thomas Woody Minipini. Through this event, the MacDougalls were interested in both raising the profile of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia and advancing debate about it. They were also interested in expanding the network of filmmakers in Australia who worked with Aboriginal people and communities.

Some Aboriginal people at the conference were concerned about the lack of Aboriginal participation and it was only during an impromptu plenary that Aboriginal voices were heard. This meeting was chaired by Marcia Langton and David MacDougall undertook the position of secretary. Langton began by explaining “that the reason for calling the meeting was to record, in the form of resolutions, the feelings and sentiments — particularly of Aboriginal people — of the past few days”.186 During the meeting, Karl Heider proposed that:

because of the power of film and video tape in creating and affirming cultural strength and integrity, because of the damage caused by systematic exclusion of Aboriginal peoples from access to this power, the Ethnographic Film Conference 1978 strongly urges concerted and well financed programmes to give Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal communities access to film and video tape. These programmes should be coordinated through such organizations as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and should

185 Unesco’s participation would have guaranteed a Pacific and Australian focus for the conference but Unesco withdrew their support during the final stages.
186 "Minutes of the Ethnographic Film Conference 1978 held at the Institute at 4:30 pm - Friday 19 May, 1978" given to the author by Ian Dunlop but also held in the Institute’s library.
include training, production and distribution, with special attention to economic, cultural, political and moral needs of the Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{187}

This was later issued as a press release by the participants and encapsulated the belief by the Aboriginal participants that they had been excluded from the production process and reflected their unhappiness with the funding situation for indigenous filmmaking in Australia. What it also signalled was the growing interest in film and video among Aboriginal people and a recognition of its power to influence opinion. Calls were made for the funding of training programs for Aboriginal people and for the provision of equipment to communities. A code of ethics was also discussed (but was not formalised) for filmmakers wanting to work with Aboriginal people. It was proposed by Clive Scollay that the guiding principle of this code be “that the outcome of all film-making projects amongst Aboriginal people be in the first instance of benefit and contribution to the contemporary Aboriginal society”.\textsuperscript{188}

The conflict brought out into the open at the conference, reflected changes both within the Institute and more significantly in the external research and political environment. It was held on the cusp of the transition of the Institute from a conventional academic research institute ‘doing research on Aboriginal topics’ to a new institution that fully recognised the need for Aboriginal involvement and substantial control of a collaborative research agenda. The conference was held for non-Aboriginal academics and filmmakers but it was held at and sponsored by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. For Aboriginal people taking an increasing interest in the research agenda, the conference highlighted their marginalisation underlining the ambiguous position of both the Film Unit and the Institute. Aboriginal people I have spoken to who attended the conference have said that it was an unsuccessful conference. Contrary to this however is the view of non-Aboriginal filmmakers who attended who have said that it was a meeting of great importance to ethnographic cinema in Australia.

On reflection, David MacDougall suggested that he was naïve about the extent to which everything Aboriginal was politicised. He had expected a normal academic

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
A panel discussion at the Institute's 1978 Ethnographic Film Conference. From left: Roger Sandall, Peter Sutton, Karl Heider, Bill Nichols and Jay Ruby (Courtesy: AIATSIS Pictorial Archive).

An informal discussion during the 1978 Ethnographic Film Conference. Faces in view from left: Clive Scollay and Peter Leizos (Courtesy: AIATSIS Pictorial Archive).
conference which brought together passionate like-minded filmmakers from around the world to explore the vexing issues of the day. However, he now realises that it was not possible to have a free and frank discussion of such highly charged issues with such a mixed group of participants. He also noted that many who attended, mainly but not exclusively Aboriginal people, were not interested in ethnographic film per se but “were interested in film simply as a political tool, as a way of getting a message across rather than actually being people who had a passion for making films, [and] the expressive qualities of films”.  

The MacDougalls were to respond to these emerging disjunctions in the research and filming agenda in two ways: first by introducing a training program for Aboriginal filmmakers and second by a change in focus in their own work. From 1979 onwards the Institute began a training program beginning with a short course for two Torres Strait Islander men, Trent and Dimple Bani, on video camera techniques run by Bryan Butler. Out of this experience came a video called *The Importance of Torres Strait Islander Singing and Dancing*. Later the Film Unit took on three trainees, first Coral Edwards, then Wayne Barker and Ralph Rigby. Coral Edwards made a film about tracing her own family history called *It's a Long Road Back*. This experience partly led her to establish Link Up, an organisation that helps to reunite members of Aboriginal families who had been separated. Barker was from Broome in the north-west of Western Australia and had started as a trainee in the Sound Section of the Institute before working in the Film Unit. Barker went on to make the film *Cass: no saucepan diver* while at the Institute and is now an independent filmmaker. Rigby too now works as an independent filmmaker.

**McKenzie's *Waiting for Harry* and other projects**

In 1979, McKenzie who had been running the Film Unit while the MacDougalls were in Aurukun, left for Arnhem Land to research and film what was to become *Waiting for Harry* with Anbarra people and the anthropologist, Les Hiatt. The idea for *Waiting for Harry* came from Frank Gurmanamana, an Anbarra man from Maningrida, when he

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189 Interview with MacDougalls 22/12/95.
190 Peter Barker recorded sound.
was in Canberra viewing earlier Institute films. McKenzie believed that a film of Anbarra ritual would continue the tradition of filming rituals that existed at the Institute although he wanted an unrestricted film that would be for both undergraduate students and Anbarra audiences. He did not want it to be an illustrated lecture film and sought to give the audiences "a greater kind of access to the people who are subjects of films". McKenzie was wanting to do something different from the outset but he still had creating an archival record of the event as a central objective. During the ceremony it became apparent to McKenzie that their filming seemed to have become an integral part of the whole event and subject to negotiation and manipulation like other aspects of the ceremony. McKenzie made this interesting comment about the filming:

My memory of that shoot involves a dramatic change part way through the filming. That change was seeing the direction the film would take. Until that point, I thought it would be a chronological catalogue of the ritual with a human face - a filmic description of the ritual. What brought about the change was everybody's increasing worry that the ceremony might not come together and reach a conclusion. We all shared this worry, and it seemed there was a real chance that it might all come to nothing.

It seems obvious now, but at the time it was difficult to decide that the film worth making was about what was really happening - worries and all. Instead of just sharing the concerns, I began to film them. It was quite a distinct change in the filming. That's why the majority of the film we see as WAITING FOR HARRY is from some weeks into the events. The real challenge of working in this type of film making is whether you've been able to deal with the unpredictable.

The finished film, which was well received at Maningrida and was later awarded prizes at film festivals, launched McKenzie to prominence and the film remains one of the Institute's most popular. So in the midst of rising consternation among some about filming Aboriginal people, it was possible to create a film that successfully mediated the politics of representation while still managing to communicate something important about Aboriginal culture.

During the first half of 1980, the MacDougalls went to England to edit the last film in their Turkana trilogy, *A Wife Among Wives*. On their return they continued to edit material filmed at Aurukun, while dealing with Film Unit administrative matters. In 1981,

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191 Information about this film is taken from an interview with McKenzie conducted in November 1988 by Jo Dougal and Rod Lucas which was reproduced in their unpublished manuscript "Picturing the Real". This was part of the Film Teaching Materials Project conducted by the authors through the Institute during the late 1980s (see Dougal and Lucas 1988).

192 Ibid.

193 Ibid.
McKenzie and the trainee, Wayne Barker, went back to Arnhem Land to film. Barker recorded sound on this trip, the final film of which, *Spear in the Stone* (1981/1983), follows the investigations of an archaeologist (Rhys Jones) and shows the production of stone spear points near a cave called Nilibitji. As had been increasingly becoming mandatory in Institute films, all dialogue was translated in this film providing the viewer with an insight into how people actually related to the rocks and the land from which these spear points were being made. The men in the film are also shown telling McKenzie and Barker that they could not film particular areas and sites because of their spiritual significance to the men. This is illustrative of the recognition that people in the bush had that filmmakers had to be controlled and more importantly, that they could be controlled.

During 1981, McKenzie also edited *Yorky Billy* which was a short film compiled out of interviews with a part Aboriginal man of the same name who had lived in the East Alligator River region of Arnhem Land all his life. McKenzie had set out to interview the man about the impending arrival of uranium mining in the area but after talking with him for a while, Yorky Billy's life story soon became the focus of the film. McKenzie had not set out to make a film about this man but he felt that the man’s story was a rich and poetic narrative that translated well when expressed filmicly. The film did however receive criticism and was even considered to have “racist overtones” by one Aboriginal academic.

The Film Unit's major support staff member at this time, Michelle Day, told me that when not sitting at the Steenbeck editing films most of the MacDougall’s time was spent writing reports, justifying budgets, attending meetings and dealing with public requests for information. During 1981 and 1982, the Institute underwent a major review by R. J. Walsh and much of David MacDougall’s time was spent writing a submission to the review. This involved justifying the existence of the Film Unit which was always vulnerable when funds were short or there were problems at the Institute because it was

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194 During the early 1980s the Institute was commissioned to conduct a study of the social impact of uranium mining of Aboriginal people in the East Alligator region of the Northern Territory. The earlier film, *To get that Country*, focused on Aboriginal people in the same area and their responses to the Fox Inquiry into the development of the Ranger uranium mine. Yorky Billy was to be a part of a larger institutional interest in the impact of uranium mining in the area.

expensive to run and somebody would make the case that others outside the Institute should be making the films. Walsh (1982:5) however found in favour of the Film Unit in his review when he recommended that “it should remain as part of the Institute” and the “Council should approve the Unit’s program for making films on the advice of the professional staff of the Film Unit”.

This was also a time when the films of the previous phase began to haunt the Institute. In June of 1981, a committee involving Nicolas Peterson, Roger Sandall, Michael Mace (an Aboriginal man on Council) and the Principal recommended that the Institute try to buy back prints of restricted films sold to non-academic organisations or individuals outside of Australia. In addition to this, the committee recommended that the Extension Media Center in Berkley restrict its loans of films on secret and sacred ritual to university groups only. Screenings of these films in Australia had ceased and there was a ban on importing those sold overseas back into Australia. Pressure from Aboriginal organisations and individuals as well as the arrival of a new Principal in Eric Wilmott left the MacDougalls reconceptualising what the future subject matter of the Film Unit could be.

**Filming life in southeast Australia**

During 1981-82 the MacDougalls felt a certain pressure to make films about Aboriginal people in the southeast of Australia. History had shown the Film Unit, as an institutional adjunct, to have been somewhat negligent in its recording of Aboriginal life in the southeast and seeing that the Film Unit was physically based there, it was important to correct this lack of coverage. Besides this external pressure they also wanted to work closer to home so they began conducting research on a film considering Aboriginal family contact (social) workers. This took them both all over New South Wales looking for people who would be interested in participating in a project involving the same long-term fieldwork methodology employed at Aurukun. They eventually settled on a New South Wales Aboriginal cattle station. Judith MacDougall said of this endeavour:

The people I met had a definite idea of the political potential of having films made but they didn’t really have much of an idea about what they’d be made about. I think it was a
bit uncomfortable in some ways trying to think about what the films would really be about.\textsuperscript{196}

Aboriginal people in the southeast were thinking of film very differently to those people the MacDougalls had worked with in more remote areas. Many politically orientated films had been released around this time and had been widely seen such as \textit{Lousy Little Sixpence} (1982) and \textit{Sister, If You Only Knew} (1975). Film in the documentary sense then was seen as a potential proactive political tool and many non-Aboriginal filmmakers were using it to promote issues as opposed to using it to explore culture visually. In fact, narrow political polemics were very much the flavour in Australian documentary during the early 1980s when considering Aboriginal issues — a style of filmmaking that the MacDougalls were trying to avoid. It therefore took the MacDougalls some time to finally find what David has called, a "manageable film subject"\textsuperscript{197} in Collum Collum Station. They had travelled around much of northern New South Wales visiting such places as Box Hill, Ballina, Lismore, Casino and had thought for a while that they may work in the Aboriginal community at Woodenbong. They eventually went to Baryulgil in north-east New South Wales where they met up with Sunny Bancroft, his family and employees who worked a cattle station called Collum Collum as an Aboriginal enterprise.\textsuperscript{198}

Just how the MacDougalls came to choose the station and the people they did is an issue that has intrigued me. David believes that he cannot pin down exactly how they chose Collum Collum but it was a mixture of a number of factors as well as luck. Their research trip around New South Wales alerted them to the fact that the Aboriginal people at Baryulgil had not been settled or missionised. Equitable relationships apparently existed between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people there which contrasted dramatically with the history of dispossession in many other areas of New South Wales. The MacDougall's continuing interest in people living in pastoral worlds is another significant factor in the selection of Collum Collum Station. David has suggested that it was a continuation of ideas initiated in \textit{Three Horseman} although the choice follows a lengthy interest in making

\textsuperscript{196} Interview with MacDougalls 22/12/95.
\textsuperscript{197} Interview with MacDougalls 22/12/95.
\textsuperscript{198} Baryulgil had been the site of an asbestos mine owned by James Hardie Industries and people in the area were starting to voice their concerns about health problems at the time of the MacDougall's arrival. Again they could have chosen this site because there was the potential of a socially inflammatory "issue" but asbestos is not mentioned in any of the final films from the project.
films with people who work with animals as a livelihood. There was a sense of optimism at Collum Collum propogated by Sunny Bancroft which infected not only the other people working the property but also the MacDougalls. David said of Sunny:

I remember the day we went to visit and Sunny was there, he was talking, he just came in and he was so self-assured and so eloquent and charming. As a filmmaker you see a person like that and think, wouldn't it be wonderful to make a film about this person.\(^{199}\)

The early 1980s was a period of much change for Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. Of particular importance to Aboriginal people working on the land was the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission's operation of buying back land for communities to run enterprises. Collum Collum was a part of this process and at the time of choosing a film site its future was under negotiation. So the MacDougalls saw potential in filming there and Sunny Bancroft, his wife Liz and others such as Smithy wanted them to film because they felt that it would positively enhance their negotiations with the Land Fund. Judith has said that the people at Collum Collum wanted a film:

about their own cattle station and then those events that threw them into some conflict with the money people in Canberra happened. I suppose we knew they were going to happen but they really wanted a film about their own enterprise.\(^{200}\)

The MacDougalls became emotionally involved in the success of the station and in the lives of the people living and working there. David believes that for himself and Judith the focus of the final films was:

very much on the transmission of culture and on behaviour and how adults in a community like that come to decisions, how they reach consensus, or how power is shared and exercised, and how traditions are passed on even if they aren't explicit obvious Aboriginal traditions there is nevertheless often a very strong underlying I think Aboriginal view of the world.\(^{201}\)

From June to November of 1982 and from April to June 1983 they stayed at Collum Collum station. The films made from these periods were Collum Calling Canberra (1982/1984), Stockman's Strategy (1982/1984), A Transfer of Power (1982/1986) and Sunny and the Dark Horse (1982/1986). The central film was Collum Calling Canberra which was made in the mould of Takeover. It follows the events surrounding the negotiations with the Aboriginal Land Fund over the future of the station. It is the most conventional

\(^{199}\) Interview with MacDougalls 14/12/96.
\(^{200}\) Interview with MacDougalls 22/12/95.
\(^{201}\) Interview with MacDougalls 22/12/95.
documentary film out of the four whereas the second, *Stockman's Strategy* is more experimental. In *Stockman's Strategy*, the MacDougall's crystallised their notion of expressing visually people's transmission of knowledge through a portrait of Sunny Bancroft, a portrait which parallels that of the man Lorang in their earlier film *Lorang's Way*.²⁰² In this film Sunny tells the audience about his world and he is shown interacting with his staff and others.

*A Transfer of Power* is a meditative assessment of an incident in which Smithy calls into play a series of obligations in order to change the engine in his car. It is a relatively short film but it manages to aptly portray the passage of time in rural life and how friends, neighbours and relatives are called upon to lend a hand when needed. I think in this film more than any other, the MacDougall's manage to describe visually how Aboriginal kinship obligations in this part of Australia are established and enacted. The final film from this series was *Sunny and the Dark Horse*. It was filmed as a documentary but during the editing process it became a docu-fiction through the input of Sunny himself. The MacDougall's took to Sunny at the beginning of the project because of his infectious personality and his extraordinary abilities as a storyteller. This film allowed Sunny to employ his story-telling skills and to express himself more personally through a semi-fictional narrative about his love for racing horses at picnic carnivals. It was a courageous film for the MacDougall's to make at the time (edited in 1986) and signalled a swing away from what could then be called traditional ways of doing ethnographic filmmaking.

On Collum Collum station, the MacDougall's lived in a caravan next to the homestead in which they had set up their equipment. Every morning they would come in to the homestead early, turn on the lights and be ever ready to film. From the beginning, Sunny and his wife, Liz, were enthusiastic about the presence of Judith and David in their lives. Liz was especially co-operative and had a sense for potential dramatic moments as she would run around turning the camera lights on when she felt that something should be filmed. Sunny too became fascinated with the process of filming their lives and would

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²⁰² *Lorang's Way* was edited in Australia and finished in 1979. It won the First Prize at the Cinéma du Réel later that year.
often watch the rushes over and over again. In contrast to their earlier projects at Cape York and in Kenya, this was, I believe a more intensely personal project as language and population size were problems that did not effect their filming and they lived very closely with the one family in the one place.

At this time Kim McKenzie and Wayne Barker had also moved their focus to the southeast filming at Bennelong’s Haven in Kempsey, another New South Wales town. Their film, Giving it a Go (1982), examined the daily running of an alcohol rehabilitation centre for Aboriginal people on the mid-north coast. This signalled a definite move away from films on remote Aboriginal people which again may have been part of a wider institutional agenda to quell criticism and pressure from politically active Aboriginal people in the south-east of Australia. Judith MacDougall stated with regard to this criticism that:

there was a certain pressure on us from the Aboriginal contingent that came into contact with us at the Institute. ... And certainly people were beginning to express dissatisfaction that every film about Aborigines was about remote Aborigines; which was true. You never saw Redfern and you never saw the whole rural scence which was enormous and terribly important historically.

Winding down of the Film Unit

After Ucko left the Institute to return to England in 1980, Warwick Dix took his place. While Ucko had taken a major role in the re-creation and running of the Film Unit, Dix, a school teacher by profession, seems not to have had much influence over it at all. Following Dix, the next Principal Eric Wilmott, distanced himself further as he was not a supporter of ethnographic filmmaking and saw film as primarily a political tool (pers. comm. Lambert). Wilmott’s arrival coincided with increased financial stress within the Institute which saw the Film Unit come under closer scrutiny. Filmmaking was expensive and the lack of support from the Principal meant there were constant threats to its existence.

203 Interview with MacDougalls 14/12/96.
204 More pragmatically, filming in the southeast could have just been less expensive.
205 Interview with MacDougalls 14/12/96.
During 1985 McKenzie again ventured to the top end of the Northern Territory. A pattern has been emerging in his filmmaking which was quite different to the MacDougalls. He was not interested in anthropological filmmaking per se but his films exhibit a desire to discuss people's relations with land through discussion about people's history of involvement with the land. In this case, *Something of the Times* (1985), McKenzie tries to tell the viewer something about the times of the water buffalo hunters in the region of what had become the Kakadu National Park. The main participant in this film is the non-Aboriginal man Tom Cole who by this stage was quite elderly. McKenzie brings him back to the places where he had been in the 1930s and 40s during the booming water buffalo hunting days. Cole is brought back to visit Aboriginal people who had worked for him in the past and his presence acts as a catalyst for the illication of stories from the people they visit. While there, a buffalo camp was recreated for the national park authorities (they were creating a site for tourists to the park to visit) and its construction was filmed. This activity along with the use of old photographs enabled McKenzie to explore people's memories individually and also as a group — a subtle and delicate task completed with great sensitivity.

In January or February of 1986, David MacDougall collaborated with a former Film Unit trainee, Coral Edwards on a film about linking up stolen generation children with their natural parents. He accompanied Edwards and two of her colleagues (Peter Read and Robin Vincent) on a typical trip to Sydney from Canberra. The object of this trip was to document on film what it was that the organisation did and to avoid what could have been a simple survey of the organisation's work. David MacDougall did not prepare for this filming although he and Judith had previously researched the effects of government family dispersal policies and the role of missions in the southeast of Australia. So David had a good understanding of the social issues that he would be filming. Peter Read had some film training, as did Coral Edwards and all of them considered the exercise an experiment of sorts in documentary filmmaking. *Link-Up Diary* was filmed over a week and could be interpreted as a "road-movie". David MacDougall thought of it:

In a way, the film was a kind of sequel to, or you could see it as a sequel and counterbalance to *Lousy Little Sixpence* which had been made about the same subject but which was constructed completely out of interviews and old photographs and archival footage.
So I guess I saw it as a kind of observational answer to that kind of documentary construction as well as getting at the subject in a different way.\textsuperscript{206}

*Link-Up Diary* was to be the last film made by either of the MacDougalls for the Institute. In 1988 they were awarded an Australian Film Commission Documentary Fellowship which allowed them to take unpaid leave from the Institute. They spent nearly two years away from the Institute (1988-1989) during which time they made *Photo Wallahs* in India and David took up a fellowship at the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University. During 1988, while the MacDougalls were in India, the Film Unit was officially closed down and their positions were moved to the Research Section of the Institute. They were still employed by the Institute and their central role was still to make films but they no longer had a separate identity within the Institute’s structure. McKenzie took up a position within the Publications Section and he too was allowed to continue making films.

Although the Film Unit was no longer in operation, McKenzie was able to make two final films, *Full Circle* and *Make it Right*. The first was made in 1987, when McKenzie went to the Northern Territory to make a film about cattle station life. After some problems with his original site, he ended up at Borroloola, an Aboriginal community in the north-east of the Northern Territory. Life on cattle stations had always been of interest to McKenzie as he had worked on many before working as a filmmaker. This connection with the lifestyle allowed McKenzie to paint an intimate historical portrait of the Aboriginal people’s involvement in the cattle industry in that region. *Full Circle* has a sensitivity which was lacking from Sandall’s *Coniston Muster* but each was an apt interpretation of life at the time. The last film made in this second phase, *Make it Right* (1988), was also the last made by McKenzie. McKenzie, accompanied by Wayne Barker, filmed events surrounding the 1988 Barunga Sports Festival in the Northern Territory. At this festival, the then Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke, made the statement that his Federal government would soon make a treaty with indigenous Australians after he was presented with the Barunga Statement.\textsuperscript{207} This film follows the events surrounding the

\textsuperscript{206} Interview with MacDougalls 22/12/95.
\textsuperscript{207} Another broken promise.
writing and painting of the Barunga Statement and its presentation to the Prime Minister as well as general scenes of life at Barunga and the concurrent sports festival.

In 1991 the MacDougalls resigned from the Institute. Shortly beforehand David MacDougall had begun a project with Kim McKenzie about Bentinck Islanders but no film was ever made. Soon after this, David MacDougall began filming in Sardinia and a complete break was made between the MacDougalls and the Institute. Kim McKenzie remained at the Institute and is at the time of writing, still an employee.

The second phase of filmmaking was marked by a move away from the objective of making scientific records of cultural practices and towards one of recording and documenting the lives of individuals, families and communities undergoing change. The beginning of the second phase coincided with a dramatic shift in Aboriginal politics which also paralleled major changes in Australian federal politics with the switch from a long running conservative government to a very liberal Labor government. During the 1970s, the politicisation of Aboriginal issues permeated the agenda of the Film Unit and brought changes to meet the new politics. This involved filming only those aspects of life suggested or requested by the Aboriginal people concerned and undertaking the training of Aboriginal media workers in order to enhance access to avenues for self-representation. The only filmmaker who was affected by this change was Roger Sandall as he bridged the two phases (although he did not actually conduct any filming in the field during the second phase). The others such as the MacDougalls, McKenzie and Levy, began within the politics of the second phase and made their films within the boundaries imposed by these politics.

I have shown what sort of films these filmmakers made and how they went about making them during the second phase. The aim of the following chapter is to discuss in more detail the theoretical approaches to filmmaking of Roger Sandall and David MacDougall during the two phases.
Methodology: a comparison of views

In this chapter I analyse the writings of Roger Sandall and David MacDougall to try to make evident the shifts in ethnographic filmmaking in Australia during the life of the Film Unit. Although this is only a comparison of the views of two individuals who were essentially contemporaries, what I hope to bring to the fore is the way in which and the extent to which their views were shaped by the social and political world they operated in. The chronological account of the previous two chapters has indicated the broad nature of these changes, here I will explore them in greater depth. This exploration will show that the move away from the scientific record approach in the Institute’s filmmaking had as much to do with the de-colonisation of Aboriginal Australia as it did with the intellectual agency of the filmmakers. I also want to make clear, however, that filmmakers like Sandall and the MacDougalls managed to be progressive within the structures that confined and defined them and which eventually led both of them to cease to make films in Australia.

This consideration of their individual approaches also serves to focus attention on how and why the Aboriginal people in these films were represented in the ways they were. This is an exegesis of the process behind the product. Peter Loizos (1993) argues in
his book *Innovation in Ethnographic Film* that the shift in practice came about through the loss of epistemological and theoretical innocence in ethnographic filmmaking — that people like Roger Sandall were somehow innocents with cameras. I will argue to the contrary that filmmakers such as Sandall were far from innocent and that Loizos’ perceived movement to a self-consciousness in filmmaking is too simple an account of the changes that took place in the 1970s and 1980s in Australia.

**Roger Sandall**

When Roger Sandall arrived in Australia for the first time in 1965, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote Australia were still heavily under state control. Working within a government statutory body such as the Institute allowed Sandall and anthropologists such as Peterson and Maddock, relatively easy access to Aboriginal communities throughout the Northern Territory. It was not until the early 1970s that Aboriginal politics began to affect Sandall’s filmmaking so during his initial years at the Institute he was able to concentrate on making records of a rapidly changing culture in what was then a physically remote Australia. What he did with these records is the substance of the following section.

Sandall produced the greatest proportion of the Film Unit’s films. On occasions when I have spoken with Aboriginal people about the Film Unit, an initial reaction is generally a reference to Sandall’s ceremonial films. This reaction is generally a negative one but it serves to suggest that his films are well known but probably never seen — their reputation precedes them. Nearly all of his films except *Camels of the Pitjantjatjara, Bark Canoe, Sign Language, Wame, Coniston Muster* and *Ngajakula: A Walbiri Fire Ceremony* (as camera person) are today restricted to being viewed only by initiated men who live in or near the communities where they were filmed. This restriction is enforced most strongly in the Institute’s own Film Archive where the original negatives, prints and video copies are kept. So the films of the Unit’s most prolific filmmaker are also the least seen.

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208 This access was of course dependent on the approval of the Northern Territory Administration, but this was rarely if ever denied to workers from The Institute and never denied to Roger Sandall.
Sandall is an economical writer when it comes to discussing film and much of his work is in the form of short replies to conversations that he was having with his peers in which he is defending his work. His ideas about ethnographic filmmaking varied little during the peak time in which he wrote about his work, from around 1968 to 1976. After this period he moved totally away from filmmaking in Australia (except for one film as producer on urban weddings with Sharon Bell) and concentrated on lecturing in anthropology at the University of Sydney.

One of his first papers, written in 1968, was a comment on the notion of reductionist cinema, a reflection on what he saw as the problems associated with the growing use of close-ups. He made the point that due to improvements in technology, cameras were getting smaller and so was their field of view resulting in a loss of seen physical context in the frame. Camera users were getting closer because they could. Sandall (1968a:9) believed that this “presents an atomistic level of phenomena from which the shape and significance of higher levels of organization have been excluded”. He called this reductionist cinema because he saw it as reducing the amount of visual information in which the subject of the film could be contextualised. Sandall’s preference for wide-angle photography in his films is therefore based on the view that the more there is in the frame, the more information there is for the viewer. Although it might be said that Sandall made good use of wide angle photography because he was uncertain about what might happen next in the ceremonies, it is more accurate to say that it reflected his social anthropological training and that he was interested in group composition and the social context of action. This argument about whether whole bodies in social contexts are better than close-ups and partial views of subjects became quite common in writing on ethnographic filmmaking during the 1970s. It was only the first of a string of papers in which he emphasised the informational content of ethnographic film focusing on structure and form rather than interpretation and meaning.

It is interesting to note that in the Cavadini and Strahn film, *Two Laws*, the Aboriginal people involved apparently chose to have the film made in wide-angle.
In one of his longer papers, "8 p.m. in the Malinowski Room", Sandall (1968b) tackled the history of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia, amateur filmmaking, the role of anthropologists with filmmakers and the importance of the editorial task to the finished film. Sandall advocated the use of film by amateurs and saw value in the intimacy of their product as opposed to that of the professional documentary crew of the past. He drew the line on them when it comes to the concept of "film" and "a film". Amateurs "film" but lack the skills for the finished production of "a film". He went on to claim that having an anthropologist in directorial control "goes without saying" and the role of the professional filmmaker was to suggest practical advice and to recruit personnel.

Most of the desert ceremonial films Sandall made can be considered re-enactments. He followed the Balikci and Brown model used in the Netsilik filming in which reconstruction was limited to giving the Inuit their own then obsolete tools and telling them to do as they pleased. Sandall said that "[f]rom my experience during two years filming Australian Aboriginal ceremonies, this is clearly the way which best accommodates two not always harmonious goals: those of recording traditional activity and of preserving the spontaneity without which the Aboriginals (sic) become mere players acting out a scenario of primitive life" (Sandall 1968b:671).

The most telling part of this paper is a long section about the process of editing these films. In the section quoted below Sandall provides a detailed account of the procedure by which he edited the Mulga Seed Ceremony. He tells of how he created filmic order out of the ceremonial footage which had an inherent order based in its structure as an event with a beginning, a middle and an end. I take it as a given that the persona "editor" in the following passage is Sandall:

Ceremony is by definition 'formal' activity, and the film editor's task is to reconstitute its original form from the many separate pieces of picture and sound brought back from the field. To take an example from my recent experience - the second day of the 'Mulga Seed Ceremony' of the Pitjantjara - it will be found that within the hour or two spent 'painting up' before the final dance two distinct structural elements can be discerned. First there is the linear progressive structure of the pictorial decorative activity. This proceeds from the grinding and mixing of red ochre and its bodily application to the grinding, mixing, and application of white paint in more delicate superimposed designs. Second there is the cyclic repetitive structure of the sound. The singing of a certain song is followed by a period of silence, of talk, of jocularity: then the song is repeated.
Now whereas it is possible to shorten or 'cut' dialogue without producing a jarring auditory effect, it is impossible to cut the rigid melodic structures of music. So the editor is faced with a problem: his songs are of fixed and inflexible length while the interstitial talk yields to easy abbreviation. Despite this he must strive to retain the proportions of the whole. Of the thirty or so songs which are actually sung during the painting-up the cameraman will have filmed perhaps ten. Of these, five will be chosen for the film. They are not entirely repetitive: a change does make itself heard. As the painting progresses and the time for the performance of the dance comes nearer the singing has more spirit and may even change slightly in key. The talk, too, becomes more animated. On the screen these developments will have been contracted in time by about 1:6, yet the same rhythm of development, the same proportions of song and talk must be preserved.

With the start of the dance the editor finds himself faced with the hardest problems of all. The freedom permitted during interludes of talk vanishes. Now sound and image are coterminous and parallel. From 100 yards away, in line abreast, twelve men are dancing toward another dozen seated singing on the ground. The movements of the dancers match closely the measures of the song. Here the editor must strive to preserve the harmony and proportion of two interrelated structures, that of the action of the dance and the music of the singers, providing meanwhile a variety of views, close, medium, and distant, which give the completest possible pictorial account of the event.

Such work as this takes days of listening to music, counting bars and measuring phrases, determining the proportion of song to talk and comparing it to the original tape recording in extenso. Yet after creating as far as he is able a microcosm of the original event an editor will sometimes hear rumbles of discontent regarding ‘art’. There seems to be some confusion here; or perhaps a failure to recognize that a film, like other didactic forms such as a lecture or an academic paper, is necessarily governed by rules of composition. It remains a source of surprise that men who would reject out of hand a scientific paper marred by weak logic, poor expression, graceless style, will gaze amiably at its equivalent upon the screen.

This may be because scientists often give a quasi-objective status to images on film which obscures the way these are actually formed. There is certainly no one-to-one relation of appearance and reality. A cameraman makes a myriad choices as he observes a scene, choices which an editor later refines. In the final result, moving from large general views to the close study of details, the presentation upon the screen parallels the flow of the mind from general to particular, from premise to conclusion, and the symbolic expression of this movement in the syntax of expository prose. The skills of the professional film maker are dedicated to order of this kind. Like the scientist, he is bound by the laws of intelligible discourse. These apply whatever the subject to be shown, and his art is at their command (Sandall 1968b:671-672).

I have quoted this passage at length because it illustrates the tension that existed between Sandall as filmmaker and the institutional goals of the Institute. He was trying to explain in detail how he made the editorial choices in his release films in order to alleviate some of this tension. Sandall was a complex filmmaker. I feel that at one level he did want to make scientific record films but at another level he wanted to make aesthetically pleasing representations of religious performances, so there was the tension between himself and people like McCarthy. From this passage it is also clear that Sandall was highly sensitive to the sound structure of the events he was filming. Curiously, however, he failed to translate the dialogue in any of the early films. In a short paper written in 1969 he explained that the reason for this was that he believed it would produce “semantic noise”. This, he
argued, was because "sound and image are structurally discrete" and indeed "may actually be in conflict with each other" (Sandall 1969a:18) because while sound recording is an inclusive process, image recording is an exclusive process. Sound and vision once recorded are structurally different. What the sound person hears is not always what the camera person sees. So Sandall suggested that the editing together of these two structurally different elements can cause conflict and thus noise or confusion. Somewhat contradictarily he pointed out that this is generally not the case with ceremonial activity because the audience can see people talking or singing and the audience can also hear them as a synchronous event. From his point of view the difficulty with ceremonial films was that the omni-directional microphones he used were poorly suited to recording such group activity because the dialogue was never easily distinguishable. Consequently, he claims, he never had the option of translation.  

Sandall expanded this discussion of the elementary differences between sound and vision in the context of the nature of the editing process which he suggested also cuts up speech into semantic noise. The sound recordist may have only caught half a sentence and if this is cut with another different half a sentence then there would just be garbled information after translation. Sandall believed that the translation of such speech would detract from what the director was trying to convey about the action. More pragmatically it would seem the problem was that in most circumstances he probably had little idea what people were saying and this bothered him. So at the time he defended the absence of translated dialogue in his films by stating that it was just noise and would distract the viewer from the structure of the ceremonial activity. In retrospect, he also put this absence down to poor sound recordings and the problem of getting somebody to translate the dialogue.  

Sandall only used narration in one ceremonial film, *Walbiri Ritual at Ngama*. He later published in 1969 in the *ALAS Newsletter* a more theoretical, though short, piece

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210 Interview with Roger Sandall 31/7/95.
211 It is also telling to recall that Sandall worked as a film editor and subtitler in America before coming to Australia so any argument about the primitiveness of subtitling technology and its difficulty in application would be unfounded because of his extensive experience.
212 Interview with Roger Sandall 31/7/95.
entitled “Illustration v. validation in ethnographic films”. Sandall later published a similar though more general article in Australian Book Review (Sandall 1970). This article was critical of the development of television documentary which favoured illustrative modes of presenting images as opposed to the validative which Sandall advocated.
With regard to photographic veracity, Sandall turned to the point that films are generally judged on how they can be used after they are produced but he questioned the how of cinematography in the field. Sandall picked up on this point because the Sorenson (1967) paper just mentioned did not touch on the issue. Sandall (1969b:16) said that “[o]bservation always involves a ‘witness point’; and in theory every observation has an optimum witness point, the selection of which is of paramount importance”. Sandall’s problem with view point, be it the philosophical or the mechanical viewing position of the camera, is that in his work of visual ethnography, these positions, in many circumstances, are impossible to locate in advance (Sandall 1969b:16). Even with the help of an anthropologist in the field, knowing where to place the camera is often a very difficult task, throwing the issue of viewing position into chaos. He claimed Sorenson had no idea about this difficulty and surmises that “‘veracious’ cinematography depends on circumstance” (Sandall 1969b:16):

At every turn unintended effects lead to misinterpretation. An exposure error with colour film will turn brown men black and vice versa. A low, wide-angle camera position which may have been chosen in order to accentuate a background will necessarily exaggerate the height of people nearby. A last minute miscalculation when a dancer reaches the climax of his performance may mean that an entire episode lacks an end. All of which should suggest that when a documentary film-maker sits down to fill out a box [on a questionnaire] marked veracity, his answer, however piously expressed amounts largely to a declaration of intent. (Sandall 1969b:16)

In November 1970 he published an article in the Program in Ethnographic Film Newsletter, on how he had been in recent years, trying to “unite certain aesthetic principles with scientific needs” (Sandall 1970a:3). Sandall’s claims that overuse of close-ups led to a reductionist cinema are developed to situate loose framing in a dramatic tradition of usage championed by Orsen Welles. Sandall claimed that his usage of wide angle paralleled that used in much dramatic cinema which sought to provide greater context to social interaction and the way people relate to their surroundings and other characters. He claimed that:

the more that can be seen at one time of each character’s behaviour (sic) within a group, the more credible the statement of dramatic relationship. For the anthropologist, the more social data packed within the frame the more valid the generalisations he can derive. The dramatist seeks to persuade in order to justify the suspension of disbelief. The anthropologist seeks to persuade in order to validate belief. (Sandall 1970a:1)
Sandall went on to comment that there had also been a recent convergence in the use of longer takes in both dramatic and documentary filmmaking: “to those with a critical eye for evidence the unbroken scene is the more persuasive” (Sandall 1970a:2). For him, the longer the take, the more “solid evidence” (ibid.) it contains. From this it seems that Sandall continued to uphold the quantitative terms while beginning to acknowledge the aesthetic elements at work in his ceremonial films. He was filming stunning ritualised activity enacted by men in amazingly beautiful landscapes; no matter how hard he defended his work as science, he could hardly resist the aesthetic beauty of what he had captured. He was talking mainly about the shorter release versions and not the archive versions which were rarely mentioned by him in his writings.

Sandall had elsewhere been critical of television documentaries and their representations of non-western peoples (see 1970b) but in a 1971 article in the Program in Ethnographic Film Newsletter he again took a poke at them from another angle. In the paper, “To shock or not to shock”, he claimed that television documentarists were destroying difference, they were making “the strange familiar, to show the unique as an aspect of the general, to reassuringly reveal even the most bizarre or violent customs as sharing much in common with our own” (Sandall 1971a:6). Sandall (ibid.) noted at the beginning of the article that when screening the Gunabibi film, many people were struck with what he called “culture shock” because in this film “clues to meaning are both rare and ambiguous”.214 Here Sandall was again advocating an anti-interpretative position in ethnographic filmmaking in order to maintain a sense of the disorientating rawness that the observer may have experienced at the actual event, indeed he was verging on talking about his films as experiential media, something that he was to later pick up on.

In 1972 Sandall published a paper in the British Film Institute's journal Sight and Sound. He considers this to be one of the first comprehensive papers on the notion of observational cinema to be written in which he firmly stated that direction inhibits and observation frees (Sandall 1972:194).

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214 The Gunabibi film was being shown to anthropology students while Sandall was visiting the United States. See his discussion of this in Sandall 1971b.
In 1975, one of the first tomes on ethnographic filmmaking praxis was released in Paul Hockings’ edited *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. Sandall’s (1975:125) contribution to this, “Ethnographic film documents”, opened with the telling line: “[e]thnographic films are today at a watershed”. Many of the words may have changed but Sandall again reiterated the same views but this time proposing that the product of his style of observational filmmaking be called a film document. Although never explicitly stated in this paper or in his previous ones, I believe that much of his approach is drawn from his experience filming ceremonies for the Institute. So in a way, these papers are elaborate explanations of why he did the things the way he did. I can see Sandall in his office thinking back over the films he had made at the close of his relationship with the Institute and writing:

> Instead of being smoothly adapted to the educational plains they tend to have the awkward craggy forms of the cultural topography they record, the unique events they show, a tendency which follows from their consistently favoring observation rather than interpretation, validation rather than illustration, a holistic concern for intact units of social behavior which contrasts with the reductionist bias of older cinematic techniques, and a respect for the claims of the subject of ethnographic enquiry to his own identity and language rather than the assimilative claims of the educator and his needs. (Sandall 1975:125)

In one long sentence, Sandall summarises his beliefs accumulated over ten years of filmmaking in Australia. What this paper also suggests is that his theoretical development was hobbled by the fact that he rarely made anything else but ceremonial films. His views to date were all derived from the experience of filming singular events that had a start and a finish, followed a pattern that could be determined beforehand, occurred in the one place with little movement and required an editing style which required little socio-cultural interpretation because ceremonies are singular entities in themselves.\(^\text{215}\) Sandall (1975:128) claimed that:

> [e]xperience teaches that in any film which hopes to to be of enduring value the absence of intrusive theorizing is more often a virtue than a fault. Indeed, the contemporary theory of Aboriginal ritual is so highly speculative that in the series of films of ceremonies made by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies it has seemed essential to avoid imposing notions which may very soon sound distinctively out of date.

\(^{215}\) There is of course his *Lawari* film which sought to expose some of the background negotiations behind the organisation of a ceremony but this film was rarely seen after its completion and is now totally restricted by the Institute.
Sandall went on in this article to create a distinction between the didactic instructional film (the illustrative; the interpretative) and the document film (the observational record; uninterpreted evidence) by reflecting on a review of one of his films by Nancy Munn (1970). He claimed that it is in the observational character/quality of the documentation film that films such as his *Emu Ritual at Ruguri* take “students on a field trip to the desert and enables them to witness events at first hand” (Sandall 1975:129). He suggested that this may cause culture shock but this can be avoided through “sound instruction and extensive preparatory reading” (ibid.:130). Sandall was claiming that his release version ceremonial films were never made to be instructional films, full of interpreted data for use in class rooms. To him they were filmic documents that required the interpretation of the observer who had prepared by reading other sources about the ceremonies before viewing the film. Sandall did not make them as stand alone ethnographies but constructed them as watchable or observable data.

Sandall wrote one final paper while still at the Institute In July 1976. In a scathing article in *Encounter*, written in reaction to the Institute beginning to severely restrict the screening of his films in Australia, he declared that the Institute was no longer doing science but practicing religion (Sandall 1976:44). This article signalled Sandall’s dislocation from the emerging politics of Aboriginal Australia and the changes within the Institute brought about by Peter Ucko. Up until then he had been avoiding the relationship between what he was doing and politics in general because he was doing something outside the realm of the political. On the other hand, the incoming filmmakers, David and Judith MacDougall, saw the incorporation of politics as central to their early methodologies. Now, of course, the visual representation of Aboriginal people is a highly politicised arena.

**The MacDougalls**

David and Judith MacDougall are the most prolific and important ethnographic filmmakers in the anglophone world today (Barbash and Taylor 1996:371).
Unfortunately, Judith MacDougall has published none of her thoughts on the films that she has made with her husband in Australia so the focus here is on David MacDougall’s extensive writings on ethnographic film. He has rarely reflected specifically on his work in Australia (except in published interviews and MacDougall 1994) and published only a small number of papers during his time with the Institute. Conducting a review of all of his writings is not possible here but what is done, as was the case with Sandall above, is to review what he wrote while employed by the Institute.

His early written work deferred always to a tradition of ethnographic filmmaking, a tradition of which he firmly saw himself a part (see MacDougall 1969). It seems that MacDougall although working within the paradigms of ethnographic filmmaking, was always trying to push its boundaries to discover and experiment with new ways of interpreting culture through film. The MacDougalls were filmmakers first. It was with this conscious acknowledgement of and subscription to the endeavour of ethnographic filmmaking that they came to Australia. On the eve of their arrival in Australia, David MacDougall (1975) had published in *Principles of Visual Anthropology* his paper, “Beyond observational cinema”. It was in this paper that MacDougall seemed to cut his ties with the observational approach to filmmaking and where much of the theory behind the MacDougalls’ approach to the Aurukun filming are implied. This paper is important not because it was written while working for the Institute but because it represents MacDougall’s thinking and intentions in the years immediately before his arrival.

The paper reads like a manifesto for the future and contains all the hallmarks of a Kuhnian paradigm shift. Neatly juxtaposed after his mentor, Colin Young’s paper, titled “Observational cinema”, MacDougall (1975:112) sought to examine the “self-denying tendency of modern observational cinema”. For MacDougall, observational films are those like Tim Asch’s *The Feast* and Sandall’s *Emu Ritual at Ruguri*:

They are “observational” in their manner of filming, placing the viewer in the role of observer, a witness of events. They are essentially revelatory rather than illustrative, for they explore substance before theory. They are nevertheless, evidence of what the filmmaker finds significant. (MacDougall 1975:110)
The observational filmmaker, in this desire to place the audience as witness, seeks a position which renders them invisible in the final film. The filmmaker's intentions of being all seeing and knowing endows the final film with the perceived quality of being a representation of an event captured in its totality (MacDougall 1975:114). MacDougall (ibid.:116) acknowledged that while some remarkable films have been made using this style many founder because of their passivity and the inability of the filmmaker "to bridge the separation between himself and his subjects". Science stands in the way and it is the scientific belief in the veracity of the camera that MacDougall (ibid.:117) believed "parallels the fallacy of omniscient observation". So MacDougall (ibid.:118) saw observational filming as based on scientific notions, as did Sandall, and noted that those using the observational method would be "cut off from many of the channels that normally characterize human inquiry" (ibid.):

He is dependent for his understanding (or for the understanding of his audience) upon the unprovoked ways in which his subjects manifest the patterns of their lives during the moments he is filming them. He is denied access to anything they know but take for granted, anything latent in their culture which events do not bring to the surface.

The same methodological asceticism that causes him to exclude himself from the world of his subjects also excludes his subjects from the world of the film. Here the implications are ethical as well as practical. By asking nothing of his subjects beyond permission to film them, the filmmaker adopts an inherently secretive position. He has no need for further explanation, no need to communicate with his subjects on the basis of the thinking that organizes his work. There is, in fact, some reason for him not to do so for fear it may influence their behavior. In his insularity, he withholds the very openness that he asks from his subjects in order to film them. (MacDougall 1975:118)

What lies beyond the faults of the observational approach for MacDougall was a method he called participatory cinema.

Here the filmmaker acknowledges his entry upon the world of his subjects and yet asks them to imprint directly upon the film their own culture. ...By revealing his role, the filmmaker enhances the value of his material as evidence. By entering actively into the world of his subjects, he can provoke a greater flow of information about them. By giving them access to the film, he makes possible the corrections, additions, and illuminations that only their response to the material can elicit. Through such an exchange a film can begin to reflect the ways in which its subjects perceive the world. (MacDougall 1975:119)

In participatory cinema, a process of collaboration is entered into between the filmmaker and the subject. MacDougall further discussed this method by citing the work and views of Jean Rouch whose *Chronique d'un été (Chronicle of a Summer)*, amongst others, epitomised the style of filmmaking that MacDougall was advocating. Continuing through a discussion of Rouch's work, MacDougall criticised the anti-interpretative record makers and
questioned the value of their films. He believed that Rouch saw “broad salvage anthropology, based upon no defined perspective, as more hazardous to the future understanding of extinct societies — and therefore to an understanding of man — than a study in which the investigator is passionately and intellectually involved” (MacDougall 1975:120). From this MacDougall (ibid.) suggested that meaning can be gained through this style of filmmaking only if the recognition of the subject and their input develops “into a genuine conversation” and is not merely an empty gesture.

MacDougall (1975:122) concluded this paper by suggesting a further step that could be taken utilising the participatory approach — “a filmmaker putting himself at the disposal of his subjects and, with them, inventing the film”. To an extent, I see this thought crystallised in the beginnings of the MacDougall’s long-term film project at Aurukun. This paper showed that David MacDougall came to the Institute fully aware of the flaws and failings of the observational approach and its scientific pretensions; an approach that had been used at the Institute for the previous ten years.

Soon after arriving at Aurukun, David MacDougall set about finishing his contribution to the 1978 edition of *Annual Review of Anthropology*, “Ethnographic film: failure and promise”. In this paper he sought to analyse the current state of ethnographic filmmaking as he saw it. The failure of ethnographic film to him was that it had not yet become as important to mainstream anthropology as its progenitors had thought it would. The promise lay in the ability of ethnographic film to go beyond the strictures of written anthropology to provide *encounters* with people in filmic *cultural documents*. It paralleled his earlier article in its signals for new ways of doing ethnographic filmmaking but he was also able to describe in detail his theory on how the film itself could be the conceptual space in which cultural meaning is generated.

In this review article MacDougall provided a discussion of the definition of ethnographic film and provided a breakdown of its varieties. There is either ethnographic film or ethnographic footage. Films are “structured works made for presentation” while footage “is the raw material that comes out of a camera” (MacDougall 1978:406). Footage
is then further broken down to be either research footage or record footage. Research footage is that filmed for the purpose of studying aspects of “behavior that cannot be approached adequately through direct observation” (ibid.:407). MacDougall included the choreometrics studies of Lomax in this group as well as that of Sorenson discussed earlier. Record footage is used for “more broadly descriptive purposes” and is employed as a means of preserving aspects of culture (ibid.:408). MacDougall (ibid.:409) qualified this further by stating that “[a] film record is not the thing it records, but as a direct photochemical imprint it shares in its reality in a way that written descriptions cannot”. He includes the early work of Haddon and also the Harvard Peabody expeditions in this group as well as Sandall and Dunlop’s work in Australia. For him however there are limitations with ethnographic footage but there exists a danger that exists in this method “in the seductive belief that they can record all that really matters about human societies. As in anthropology itself, ethnographic filming must balance attempts at comprehensive documentation with intimate explorations of particular phenomena” (ibid.:412).

Ethnographic film according to MacDougall (MacDougall 1978:413) is either illustrative or revelatory.216 In illustrative films the images support a verbal argument and in the revelatory, it is the images primarily that provide the development of meaning in the film. Images are data in illustrative films which are “elucidated by means of a spoken commentary or as visual support for verbal statements” (ibid.). MacDougall offers Gary Kildea’s Trobriand Cricket (1974) as an example of this. Revelatory films generally cover circumscribed events following a diachronic structure which requires “the viewer to make a continuous interpretation of both the visual and verbal material articulated by the filmmaker” (ibid.). Some of MacDougall’s suggestions for films using this approach are Preloran’s Imaginero (1970) and Rouch’s Jaguar (1967). He also gives Sandall’s Lawari and Walkara as an example. MacDougall (ibid.:414) went on to point out that sometimes the social processes being filmed do not allow the filmmaker to structure the material in such ways, requiring that “more conceptual film structures” be used.

216 This is very similar to Sandall’s concept of the use of commentary either being illustrative or validative. I am not sure how well used this distinction is in general film theory.
Observational filming made it clear that “the illusion of authorial invisibility could lead to a false interpretation of the behavior on the screen”, a realisation that led some filmmakers to believe that “their films should not only be revelatory, but self-revelatory, containing evidence of the encounter which had produced them” (MacDougall 1978:415). Filmmakers started to realise that their films were not independent of the circumstances that led to their production. Context soon became an important element for inclusion in their films as they turned their films into explorations of dealing with reality and not just records of it.

The aim of breaking down the constitutional elements of ethnographic filmmaking was to draw parallels between it and written anthropology and also to show how they differ. This comes back to the failure of ethnographic filmmaking to break into mainstream anthropology where the written ethnography had held court for so long. Anthropologists had not accepted film because film discourse and anthropological discourse were incompatible at the time. At a descriptive level, the written ethnography creates a static representation of an event whereas the filmmaker merely marks out the boundaries for the description of material and does not necessarily remove it from its context. While writing is a serial activity, film can transmit information in several dimensions simultaneously so filmic discourse is “best described as a reflection of shifting attention rather than the direct representation of thought that in everyday life we associate with language” (MacDougall 1978:420). Therefore, in MacDougall’s mind, this filmic discourse which is an “articulation of witnessed human behavior”, uses a different lexicon that is not available to the writer of anthropology (ibid.). The important task for ethnographic filmmakers then is to invent “new forms that balance the intellectual and informational potentialities of film” (ibid.).

What MacDougall (1978:421) is getting at is “the question of whether a visual medium can express scientific statements about culture at all comparable to those that can be stated in words”. He realised that, it can produce comparable statements but that the visual medium can also go further by providing an opportunity “for interrogating the concept of scientific communication, which assumes that language is an instrument for
transmitting messages that progressively delineate the external world” (ibid.:422). This assumption has been challenged, he stated, by a few films which has led to what he called “the ethnographic film-as-text” (ibid.). Here lies the promise of ethnographic film in the recognition that it can exist as a parallel text to the written text and that it can provide information in a way that is unapproachable through the written word. MacDougall stated that the “underlying insight of the film-as-text is that a film lies in conceptual space somewhere within a triangle formed by the subject, film-maker, and audience and represents an encounter of all three” (ibid.). The film-as-text is therefore an area of inquiry where all elements collide, manifesting meaning through the film.

David MacDougall did not publish any major academic papers during the early 1980s as he had embarked on a heavy program of filmmaking (but see 1979, 1981a, 1981b; see also his justifications for the Unit 1981c, 1982). The published paper that hinted at a growing detachment from the Institute came in 1987 in the first edition of Visual Anthropology, “Media friend or media foe?”. In this paper, MacDougall gave a brief summary of the Institute’s filmmaking activities over the past twenty-five years in the context of Aboriginal people across Australia becoming more critically aware media consumers. In this paper he recognised that Aboriginal people:

want the funds, training and equipment to make their own films, which may have nothing to do with ethnography or other research. They may wish to exploit the very devices of propaganda and persuasion in Western filmmaking that ethnographic filmmakers are most at pains to avoid (MacDougall 1987:57).

This led the Institute to direct its initiatives in the mid to late 1980s towards investigating the potential impact of television broadcasting on remote Aboriginal people (Michaels 1986, 1989) and also training others in film and video production in Canberra. MacDougall realised that the landscape on which ethnographic filmmaking had taken place for the past twenty-five years had irrevocably changed. Aboriginal people were wanting to make their own filmic representations and ethnographic filmmaking was seen as a remnant of an old world that was unacceptable in the highly charged political world of pre-Bicentennial Aboriginal Australia.
Conclusions

Both Sandall and MacDougall left the Institute for the same general reason: what they were doing became incompatible within broader political agendas. Sandall claimed that he stopped making films in Australia because the:

> circumstances were getting less and less favourable and as I say I felt that I had done really what I wanted to do at that point. The cattle station film [Coniston Muster] pointed in a different direction and it left me freer to play around editorially, impose a form on the material.\(^{217}\)

He had become disillusioned with the conditions under which he could make ethnographic films, both institutionally and socially. He felt that his freedom to make the films he wanted to had been curtailed by the Institute and that his new position at the University of Sydney would afford him more opportunities. He was also depressed by the increase in the consumption of alcohol and the devastating effect it was having in remote communities. Finally, he felt that he was getting stale and that he wanted to get out and do something else.\(^{218}\) Of course I cannot emphasise enough the concept of moving on; as both Sandall and the MacDougalls felt that with around ten years experience each in the field, it was time to explore other subjects in their films.

The use of different methodologies is context dependent. Sandall’s positivist scientific methodology was appropriate in the 1960s and the MacDougall’s use of participatory methods was in tune with the political climate of the 1970s and early 1980s. What I have also discovered is that methodologies and styles, as David MacDougall prefers to call them, can transcend time and be applied as they are required. When Ned Lander and Rachel Perkins made the film Jardiwarnpa with Warlpiri people at Yuendumu in 1992, they employed a collaborative model but they also filmed secret business at Ngama at the request of Warlpiri men.\(^{219}\) This footage was not included in any final film but is held in restricted access conditions at the Warlpiri Media Association. In this situation both methodologies used by Sandall and the MacDougalls were used because of their appropriateness in context. Context is also created by the participants so the filmmaker

\(^{217}\) Interview with Roger Sandall 31/7/95.
\(^{218}\) Interview with Roger Sandall 31/7/95.
\(^{219}\) From the documentation I was unable to tell if women were present during this filming at Ngama but I suspect that they were not.
can pre-determine what methodology to employ: Sandall created a context where the usage of observational methods were appropriate because he went into the bush to make scientific records of ceremonial events for what was then a collection institution; the MacDougalls on the other hand did scoping studies of communities beforehand in order to determine a context which would be appropriate for their long-term participatory methodology.

From this investigation of methodology it is clear that there were two separate paradigms of thought creating the two phases of filmmaking. MacDougall (1981c) has stated elsewhere that there were three phases of production although he bases this distinction on film style as opposed to my more general historical and political examination. I am now in the 1990s wondering how these years of activity have affected the current state of ethnographic film in this country — for are we not all influenced by our past? This legacy of filmmaking has provided some outstanding films that have provided methodologies worthy of emulation today and some that should never be repeated. The next chapter is an examination of the potential of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia as we near the close of the twentieth century and one hundred years of filmmaking in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.
Reconceptualising ethnographic cinema in Australia: conclusions

This has been an attempt to provide a short history of one group of ethnographic filmmakers in Australia. I have tried to anchor the filmmakers in time in order to contextualise their activities and to show how the social and political structures they operated within affected and informed their filmmaking. I have done this to learn from the past, to create a space in which I can think about doing ethnographic filmmaking in Australia with Aboriginal people in the 1990s.

The first chapter outlined how film and cinematography were adopted at an early stage as tools for scientific record making and how much later in the 1960s film was seen rather unproblematically as the appropriate medium for documenting complex social action. I then went on to show how this usage of film as a tool for scientific record making was incorporated into the raison d'être for the establishment of the Film Unit at the Institute and how much of the early filmmaking was motivated by a desire to capture and collect on film what were thought to be disappearing aspects of culture. Through the lobbying of William Wentworth, the Institute was funded handsomely by the government to salvage the remnants of Aboriginal culture and society for future researchers.
In examining the history of the Institute's Film Unit I tried to show how the two directors made quite different sorts of films even though they were both working within a common institutional structure with the same institutional goals. The move away from the creation of scientific records to a more humanistic approach in the second phase was not just a matter of individual style but was also a response to the radical changes occurring in Aboriginal affairs and anthropology during the 1970s and 1980s. I tried to make evident the tension that existed between the Film Unit and the institutional goals in the first phase. I wanted to show how the contradictions of theory and practice during this phase contributed to the creation of a body of film work that is probably far from being scientific and probably more a thing of aesthetic and filmic beauty. In discussing the second phase, I wanted to show how the MacDougalls and McKenzie dealt with the new politics of an increasingly post-colonial Australia. The MacDougalls were not strangers to colonial worlds but Australia allowed them to work with people who could effectively communicate in English and who actively sought change in their local worlds. In order to explore the differences between these two phases of filmmaking and to clarify the nature of the changes I went on to review the writings on ethnographic film by Roger Sandall and David MacDougall.

**What were the difficulties?**

During the 1970s a theatre of politics emerged in which Aboriginal people across Australia sought the recognition of a number of basic rights. One of these rights was the right to self-representation. Most Aboriginal people had been cut-off from the technological means of cultural production available to mainstream Australia such as access to the media. Aboriginal people had been the subject of many fiction films, documentaries and general television programs but rarely, if at all, were they the producers of these representations. With the rise of a politics of indiginism came the need to access media. Aboriginal activists hoped that access to the media would allow them to have a controlling say in the way they were publicly represented. With respect to the Film Unit, the call for self-representation was most evident at the 1978 film conference which was held at the Institute. It was reported that during the conference “there were several
occasions when one of the Aboriginal women or men expressed their frustrations with the proceedings or with their inability to be heard but their comments were rarely taken up" (Fitzpatrick 1979:7). It was also reported that:

...an Aboriginal woman from Sydney, Maureen Watson, stood up and spoke on behalf of the other urban black women who were present. With great depth of anger and passion she said how insulted they had been and how upset they were with the conference. They had felt like leaving after the second day but stayed on because otherwise there wouldn't have been anyone to represent their viewpoint (ibid.:8).

More broadly, the call for self-representation was heard in 1974-75 when the Institute conducted a review of its philosophy and functions. This review was precipitated by a resolution from the NACC in late May 1974 which requested that a clear majority of the Institute's governing Council be Aboriginal and that it was their hope that the Institute would in due course become an Aboriginal university "governed by a council of Aboriginal leaders".220

During the 1970s, the Institute became the focus for many Aboriginal activists and to an extent, this focus was fostered by the Principal Peter Ucko. Ucko drew the Institute into the politics of self-representation as he wanted it to represent the views of Aboriginal people. The MacDougalls and Kim McKenzie were the filmmakers that had to deal with the competing pressures of making films that had authorial integrity and the pressure of calls for self-representation. The way that the pressure manifested itself on them was through calls by some Aboriginal people for representation of southeast Australian issues in their films. There was also a widening of focus in Australian anthropology at this time to include settled Australia (see Beckett, Cowlishaw etc), to look at the local as well as the remote. The Institute answered the calls for self-representation through its trainee program and through the collaborative and participatory methodologies employed by the MacDougalls and McKenzie. Sandall tried to address the issue of representation in Coniston Muster and the MacDougalls and McKenzie actively worked with the new politics of representation in order to go beyond them, to create content that gave voice to their Aboriginal collaborators. But there was still an overbearing feeling that they should move over and create room for Aboriginal filmmakers (Bryson 1997).

220 Cited in Appendix 7 of a document entitled "The Institute's philosophy and function" authored by a sub-committee of the Institute's Council that was chaired by Colin Tatz.
Cecil Holmes first realised this need to move over and provide room for Aboriginal filmmakers in 1972 when he attempted to teach a young Aboriginal couple at Roper River, Fred and Mavis Ashley, how to make films. Holmes (1973; see also Identity 1972) considered this a “social exercise” and was convinced that by providing Aboriginal people with the equipment and expertise to make their own films, “some windows would be opened on all our minds”. Holmes’ aim was to teach the Ashley’s how to film and edit and then to leave them the cameras so that they could continue to produce films after his departure. Holmes believed that film was an important tool that would allow Aboriginal people to communicate with whoever they wanted and could eventually lead to Aboriginal “liberation”. He finished his conference paper in 1973 thus:

And let us make no mistake, placing cameras and recorders in the hands of people will have a machine gun like effect. There may be pain and explosions here within the whole Australian psyche. Let it be so (Holmes 1973).

The Ashleys went on to do some work with the ABC in Darwin and later trained at the University of Western Australia. Unfortunately however, I have not been able to trace their work after this project with Holmes. The Institute went on of course to create its own training program but this ceased in the late 1980s. The important question is now: are training programs for indigenous people in ethnographic filmmaking methods relevant in the 1990s?

The other pressure on the kind of films the Institute made came from the emerging problems associated with the ceremonial films. As the communication links with remote Australia began to improve in the late 1960s, the Institute was faced with the fact that it could no longer assume that people from remote Australia would not be affected by the screening of the ceremonial films. With increased visitation by Aboriginal people to settled Australia, the potential for uninitiated men and women to see what they should not see became an issue. Scientific recording was thus brought face to face with the realities of the practice of Aboriginal religion. The promotion of this as an issue seems to have emanated more so from the south-east than from people in remote communities.

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221 It should be added that this problem is now becoming obvious with other films that were previously thought not to contain ceremonial material. The relationship between open and restricted films is dynamic, fluctuating and context dependent.
Fred (above) and Mavis (below) Ashley, the young couple from Roper River that Cecil Holmes taught basic filmmaking techniques to. These photographs appeared in a 1972 article in *Identity* about Holmes' project (Courtesy: AIATSIS Pictorial Archive).
Aboriginal people in urban areas sought to protect the rights of those living in remote areas and therefore create a pan-Aboriginal political space in which to operate. Regardless of who was doing the politicking, the issue of concern in the 1980s was how could religious systems heavily reliant on the controlled transmission of knowledge go on allowing the recording of stories, paintings, dances, and songs on a communication medium that had mass distribution of information as a central tenet? Again, it came down to the central issue of control.

The issue of intellectual property rights in the broader sense is of critical importance today in indigenous politics. Besides the need to keep sacred the sacred there has in the past been appropriation and commercialisation of indigenous imagery and symbolism by non-Aboriginal people without due acknowledgement and remuneration to its original producers. The right to self-representation has been incorporated into arguments by Aboriginal people about the right to exclusively earn an income from selling the products of Aboriginality. Film production by non-Aboriginal people is considered by some as yet another appropriation of Aboriginal intellectual property and a situation has evolved where money has become central to the telling of Aboriginal stories on film. In two recent documentaries *Jardiwampd* and *Aeroplane Dance*, large sums of money were paid to the Aboriginal participants for the stories that are told (see Bryson 1995 regarding *Jardiwampd*). From the records it appears that Sandall paid Aboriginal people for their participation in films but I am unsure what this really means thirty years later. Just as documentary filmmakers today pay for the participation of Aboriginal people they are not buying the rights to stories, they seem only to be buying the rights to the performance or enactment of a myth, ceremony or story. So if an exchange has taken place who has rights over the cultural information in the films? Who is responsible for the information held in the films made by the Institute, what responsibilities does the Institute have to Aboriginal people in the dissemination or withholding of this information and to which people in particular? These questions are not answerable here, but what is important is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were a part of Wentworth’s imagined posterity, verbal contracts engaging rights and responsibilities were enacted at the time of
This photograph was taken by Lew Parlette who accompanied Sandall on a trip in 1972. Sandall is shown here paying men for their participation in a ceremony (Courtesy: AIATSIS Pictorial Archive).
filming all of the Institute's productions and therefore all of these films are more than just records of meetings, they have a pro-filmic life that has transcended the time and place of their creation. Any filmmaker who wants to work with indigenous people in Australia today, especially within the specialised field of ethnographic filmmaking, must be aware of this life and the rights and responsibilities they have beyond the production of a film.222

Another difficulty encountered by the filmmakers at the Institute was the lack of interest in their work by Australian anthropology in general. The history of the Unit, makes it clear that there was little involvement by Australian anthropologists in the development of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia. The MacDougalls tried to get anthropologists involved and in fact chose Aurukun as a location because there were a number of anthropologists working in the area at the time (Peter Sutton, John von Sturmer and Athol Chase to name a few). There was however little engagement with the films outside the occasional anthropologist being a part of a production. The Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney was the only department in Australia to teach in the area until well into the early 1980s. It was Sandall's presence there that made this possible and he in turn was there because of William Geddes' desire to have professional assistance in making his own films, not in teaching as such. Critical engagement with ethnographic filmmaking has generally been the province of the filmmakers themselves and only occasionally by anthropologists who have worked with filmmakers (Morphy 1984, 1994; Sutton 1978). Despite the increased use of film in anthropology teaching there has been limited intellectual involvement with ethnographic film issues by anthropologists in Australia until the last five years.223 Two excellent pieces by anthropologists who have worked in Australia, Howard Morphy (1994) and Fred Myers (1988), are the most significant analyses of films made in Australia. The recent work by Marcia Langton (1993) is also worthy of note here. In his comprehensive review of

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222 The late Eric Michaels began to codify the moral obligations of participants in the pro-filmic life of visual representations in 1986 in his primer on restrictions on taking photographs in Aboriginal communities. See Michaels 1994.

223 This situation is changing at the time of writing with the establishment of the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the Australian National University in 1997. It should be added that it is David MacDougall who heads the section of the Centre that deals with ethnographic film and visual anthropology. See their web site at <http://www.anu.edu.au/culture>. There are also courses taught from time to time in anthropology departments at the University of Sydney, the Australian National University, the University of Western Australia and James Cook University.
ethnographic filmmaking between 1955 and 1985, Peter Loizos (1993), though having never worked in Australia, is the only other anthropologist to have written recent criticism about these films. I should make the point that ethnographic films are heavily used in anthropology departments in Australia but they are generally not engaged with critically in filmic terms. A recent exception is the work of Chris Gregory (1994) at the Australian National University who’s *Learning from ethnographic film* project sought to use technology to make ethnographic film more accessible as a part of teaching anthropology to undergraduates (see also Slotte 1994 and Davis 1994).

Another difficulty not really experienced by Sandall but one encountered by McKenzie and the MacDougalls was that of access, both physically and communicatively. The vacuum created by the withdrawal of the colonialist administrative apparatus from Aboriginal affairs in the early 1970s was filled by other forms of control, some imposed by the government such as re-incarnations of Aboriginal Affairs Departments but still many others created and imposed by Aboriginal people themselves. With the movement to self-representation came the denial and refusal of access by Aboriginal people to Aboriginal land, society and culture. McKenzie and the MacDougalls built up long-term relationships with people who actually wanted films made by these filmmakers in their communities. Although Sandall made multiple films with the same people over periods of years, he never really spent enough time in the one place to build up rapport that would be apparent in his productions. Although if he ever did film personal interactions, he probably would have not included them in the final edit. McKenzie and the MacDougalls on the other hand were able to create intimate portraits of people who they had become very close to. So access may have been a difficulty, but it contributed to a reconceptualisation of what was needed in ethnographic film and allowed for the creation of different methodologies. Access is still an issue in Australia today but like the recent television documentaries with indigenous people by Ned Lander and Rachel Perkins (*Jarduwarnpa*), Trevor Graham (*Mabo: Life of an Island Man*), Martha Ansara (*My Life as I Live it*) and Francis Calvert (*Cracks in the Mask*) have shown, if you as a filmmaker build up a rapport with your subjects over time, the product of your work will be far richer socio-
culturally. The closing down of access in many locations precipitated a change in praxis that cut out the cowboy filmmakers and allowed Aboriginal people to negotiate relationships and therefore degrees of control with the serious filmmakers who were prepared to make more collaborative and, in the end, more rigorous and insightful films.

The 1980s saw a decline in interest among Australian funding bodies in supporting documentary film production. Creativity and diversity in Australian feature films also suffered under the strangling effects of what was supposed to be a positive government tax incentive for investment in Australian film (see Jacka 1988). The unfortunate effect on documentary production was a decline in the interest and funding for them (see Bell 1991). Although the Institute's Film Unit was not directly affected by the funding problems in the commercial industry, it suffered massive funding cuts during the 1980s. Because of the expense of filmmaking, the Film Unit was often singled out for budget reduction during the expenditure reviews of the Institute in the 1980s. In this climate it is easy to say that if the Film Unit had not already been in existence there would have been little, if any, chance for such films to have been made. This is not to say that commercial documentary film production of Aboriginal issues films ceased in the 1980s as many were produced. Funding cuts simply made it difficult for the continued development of other representational modalities — ethnographic filmmaking — such as that being developed by the MacDougalls and McKenzie. Now, with the availability of cheap, lightweight and high quality video cameras, I feel that many of the problems caused by the escalating expense of 16mm production can be addressed. Production values have still remained high and the technology has improved to meet them. There is much hope to be had that the methodologies developed by the ethnographic filmmakers of the past can be re-employed in the varying contexts of the present with the help of the new breeds of videography technologies. There is also much hope that the difficulties experienced by the filmmakers at the Institute can be avoided through sensitively organised collaborative projects that allow for creative, theoretical and technical interplay between filmmakers and subjects.
Dialogue

The increasing production of documentary film and other media by indigenous people throughout the world has created a discursive space in which there has been a to-ing and fro-ing of representations. A veritable 'writing-back' has taken place in which Aboriginal people such as Tracey Moffatt and Richard Frankland have created alterior representations of Aboriginality completely opposite to anything produced by the Film Unit. But as film, each circulates in a world where viewers consume representations, interpret them, and construct imagined realities. So a combination of films from each part of the spectrum can create a dialogue which provides the viewer with the opportunity to come to other understandings about Aboriginality. This has been the most important result of self-representation and one which I take up here to encourage its continuance but also to show that despite the difficulties associated with making ethnographic films, Aboriginal people have been participating in a discourse with the filmmakers at the Institute since its inception.

One of the most important aspects of the filmmaking by the Film Unit was that in many circumstances its activities acted as an avenue of communication for the Aboriginal people involved — they were in effect avenues of dialogue from the point of view of the speaker. In later circumstances — the films of Levy, McKenzie and the MacDougalls — both the speaker and the filmmaker became subjects in the films. In his recent book on knowledge and secrecy in Arnhem Land, Ian Keen (1994:296-303) explained that during the 1970s profound changes occurred in the exercise of Yolngu men’s social and religious power. These changes occurred because of a move to a welfare economy and the resultant diversification of men’s roles in the communities. In order that men may maintain control over religious knowledge and thus power, they sought new ways of acknowledging, displaying and transferring it. This was done through new administrative structures such as community councils and committees but also through such things as art and public ceremonial activity. Extending Keen’s observations in Arnhem Land into a general statement, I would say that during the 1970s, some Aboriginal people in remote areas started to realise the potential of film and began to use it for their
own purposes, in particular by using it to express and strengthen their rights to land and to display their religious knowledge. To this end, they used the filmmakers, especially those of the Film Unit, as a mouthpiece.

At times the filmmakers were unaware of these motivations but in McKenzie's Waiting for Harry for example, Frank Gurmanamana was quite explicit about them. He claimed that it was his film and through it he was showing his designs to the rest of the world. In Familiar Places, Angus Namponam expressed his ownership over land by taking the camera to places to show us country. Again in Mourning for Mangatopi and Goodbye Old Man, a Tiwi family from Melville Island used the making of films to their own political ends. It seems clear that in most of the films there was such an indigenous agenda, even in the Kunapipi film which includes a major speech about the rightful ownership of the ceremony by the people promoting it (Peterson pers comm). Whether or not the filmmaker knew what was going on, many of the films are reciprocal in nature. Unfortunately some of the Aboriginal people involved in the filming of secret ceremonies were somewhat naïve about the extent to which they could control the films after the filmmaker left their country.

Peter Sutton (1978:4) is one of the few anthropologists to have reflected on this matter. In the paper he presented at the 1978 ethnographic film conference he claimed that the people at Cape Keerweer in Familiar Places used the filming to validate their identity and to register their claims in the eyes of outsiders. He said with regard to taking photographs on Cape York that "photos are taken 'for prove'. Proving is showing. Showing things is a ritual" (ibid.:5):

When filming is 'permitted', therefore, it is a mistake to see this permission as a passive acquiescence out of mere politeness, cooperativeness or desire for money. In a great many cases, film is being actively used. There is a naïve view that doing ethnographic films is one-way exploitation by the film-maker of Aboriginal film objects. An extension of this view is that the only way to 'democratise' film making is to have the Aborigines make all the films themselves. In the Cape Keerweer case, this would remove one of the most important functions of film making as the use of the outsider for insider ends (1978:6).

Here Sutton perceived a situation in which the people at Cape Keerweer incorporated the making of the film into 'traditional' models of knowledge transfer — it became ritual. Fred Myers (1988) has recognised this phenomena in the later films of the MacDougal [in Reconceptualising ethnographic cinema in Australian contexts]
which he saw the political processes that are employed by Aboriginal people when communicating with non-Aboriginal people. David MacDougall (1994:28-29) recognised this happening in the filming of *Three Horsemen*, Stephen Wild (pers. comm.) observed this first hand in Sandall’s *Lawari and Walkara* and I believe that it is also evident in most of the open ceremonial films, especially *Waiting for Harry*. This would certainly be a rewarding area of analysis worthy of further study.

These occurrences however, were not simply dialogues on their own but were incidences of the attempted use of film by Aboriginal people to enter a complex discursive space in which notions of Aboriginality could be created and contested. To this end, the Film Unit has had an exceptional record in providing indigenous people in this country with access to audiences, allowing the audiences to construct ideas about Aboriginality. Marcia Langton (1993:31) has observed that this process of “intercultural dialogue” is central to image making about Aboriginal people today because it is through it that Aboriginality as a social thing arises; “whether in actual lived experience or through a mediated experience such as a white person watching a program about Aboriginal people on television or reading a book”. So if what the Institute Film Unit did was good in its promotion of voice and contribution to the construction of Aboriginalities, why are there no more films made by them and why is there not a continuing tradition of ethnographic filmmaking here? I am asking a question that I have already partly answered — as a government statutory authority the Institute followed federal government policy in its increasing Aboriginalisation; self-determination included self-representation. The critical discursive space that the Film Unit had contributed to for so long was and is not a vacuum and before long new types of documentary film filled the gap left by government supported films. These were created by indigenous people themselves and the non-Aboriginal people who empathised in the stories that were asked for and needed to be told.
In Australia today there is no significant institutionally supported ethnographic filmmaking. There are documentary films being made by indigenous and non-indigenous people on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues but none of these have been made by anthropologists. The indigenous productions that have reached mainstream audiences have emanated either from the two government broadcasters or from programs set up by the Indigenous Branch at the Australian Film Commission. The Institute has only supported two films in the last five years through its grants program — *Jardiwampa* (1992) by Ned Lander and Rachel Perkins and *My Life as I Live It* (1993) by Martha Ansara and Essie Coffey — although both have been for very small amounts aimed at supporting research and script development. The first film *Jardiwampa* received assistance for its script development. Marcia Langton worked on it as a script consultant and later assisted with the editing. The final film was made for television broadcast (55 minutes) although longer archival versions of the ceremony performed in the broadcast version and other ceremonies performed elsewhere as part of the ceremonial complex were made. Other recent documentaries of note have been Trevor Graham's *Ka-Wayawayama: Aeroplane Dance* (1994) filmed at Borroloola in the Northern Territory and Francis Calvert’s *Cracks in the Mask* (1997) about the journey of a Torres Strait Islander man, Ephraim Bani, through a number of European museums that contain artefacts from the Strait. All of these documentaries were made for television broadcast. So in fact, documentary films are still being made about indigenous people in this country but only rarely are they motivated by anthropological interest.

Many indigenous filmmakers today do not want to be recognised just as indigenous media workers or representers of Aboriginal culture but as filmmakers in their own right. Many do not want to make social issue films to right injustices, as was the case in the 1970s, but to produce creative and cutting edge fiction and non-fiction films that...
can compete in national and international markets. Both of the national government broadcasters have indigenous program units that create programs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and these generally take the format of magazine shows like Blackout and ICAM (Indigenous Cultural Affairs Magazine). These units could be considered the training grounds for the indigenous filmmakers who go on to take advantage of the assistance offered by the Australian Film Commission’s (AFC) Indigenous Branch. The AFC is the Australian government’s central film funding body and any project funding application containing significant indigenous content produced by an Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal person is first considered by the Indigenous Branch. This Branch effectively polices representation as it states in its objectives and functions:

When a project is submitted which has considerable Indigenous content, preference for Film Development funding will be given to projects which can demonstrate a considerable amount of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic and creative control in the development and production of a project.226

This is an ambivalent policy in practice as many documentary filmmakers who have worked with Aboriginal people will attest to. As I have just shown with regard the Institute’s films, there were instances when the issue of whose film it was became very blurred (see MacDougall 1994). Of course the dangerously ambiguous aspect of this is the notion of “considerable amount of...control” — what constitutes control and who exercises it? Marcia Langton (1993:27), in her essay for the Australian Film Commission on this very issue, pointed out that:

[[there is a naive belief that Aboriginal people will make ‘better’ representations of us, simply because being Aboriginal gives ‘greater’ understanding. This belief is based on an ancient and universal feature of racism: the assumption of the undifferentiated Other. More specifically, the assumption is that all Aborigines are alike and equally understand each other, without regard to cultural variation, history, gender, sexual preference and so on. It is a demand for censorship: there is a ‘right’ way to be Aboriginal, and any Aboriginal film or video producer will necessarily make a ‘true’ representation of ‘Aboriginality’.

Langton’s point here is that by locking out non-Aboriginal people from the representation of Aboriginal people and only allowing Aboriginal people to represent other Aboriginal people, because only they can do it ‘right’, the result will be empty representations. Aboriginal people still need to make films about Aboriginal people but they also need to

make films about white people and vice versa for Aboriginality exists as a dialogue between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people. Or as Langton (1993:32) so aptly puts it: "Aboriginality’ only has meaning when understood in terms of intersubjectivity, when both the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal are subjects, not objects”.

Future

I believe that there is still a place for a filmmaking in Australia that engages visually with Aboriginal culture, however financed. From the perspective of Marcia Langton on one hand, a need exists in the intersubjective creation of Aboriginality. On the other hand, a need can be seen in the study of anthropology as a discipline for the recognition of alterior points of view through different representational modalities can only broaden our understanding of other cultures. In the context of anthropology, Faye Ginsburg (1995:65) has dealt with the intersection of indigenous media and ethnographic film by the use of the metaphor, the “parallax effect”:

In optics, the small parallax created by the slightly different angles of vision of each eye enables us to judge distances accurately and see in three dimensions. Drawing on a similar principle, one might understand indigenous media as arising from a historically new positioning of the observer behind the camera so that the object - the cinematic representation of culture - appears to look different than it does from the observational perspective of ethnographic film. Yet, by juxtaposing these different but related kinds of cinematic perspectives on culture, one can create a kind of parallax effect; if harnessed analytically, these “slightly different angles of vision” can offer a fuller comprehension of the complexity of the social phenomenon we call culture and those media representations that self-consciously engage with it.

Ginsburg (1995:65) argues that it is the “different perspectives” provided by this effect that can lead to the expansion and revitalisation of the field of ethnographic film. Ginsburg is interested in how indigenous media challenges the assumptions of ethnographic film and how together they create a discursive space in which light can be shed on the social and political processes involved in making these films and videos (the profilmic events). In Ginsburg’s eyes, indigenous media is not signalling the death of ethnographic film but is providing an opportunity for us to investigate differently the “contested nature of cultural production” (ibid.).

Films and videos are cultural artefacts, whether created by a European anthropologist or by a Yolngu boy playing with a camcorder. What Ginsburg notes is that
the parallex effect helps us realise how culture is manifested in video and film production therefore taking us back to the moment of production, the moment when identity (read Aboriginality) is contested and created. The parallex effect metaphor helps us to see the space for dialogue that Langton states is required for the existence of Aboriginality. So on one level I see a need for the continuing practice of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia on indigenous subjects because of its benefit to anthropology and because Aboriginal people still make requests for documentation films to be made. On another level I see its continuance important because of the reasons that Langton and Ginsburg offer: that together with the films and other visual media of Aboriginal people, a discursive space is created in which identity can be manufactured, contested and studied. This seems to me to be a focus for the future of an ethnographic, trans- or cross-cultural filmmaking in Australia.

Maybe the concept of ethnographic filmmaking as used to describe the films in this thesis is no longer applicable to the films that are being made. Maybe anthropology in Australia just never had the critical mass of practitioners to make visual anthropology viable enough in universities to seek research funding to continue the work of the early ethnographic filmmakers. Maybe audiences just became bored with the styles of ethnographic film as they became more visually literate and the language of film became more complex and sophisticated. Maybe we just don’t understand what it is about film and its representation of people that is so telling and emotive. One thing is true though, I have found no reason to say that there should not be filmmaking by anthropologists in Australia that seeks an explication of culture through the visual. In fact, it is because of the critical tension that exists in Australia about representing Aboriginality visually that there is a need to conduct further research. One important lesson I have learnt is that the term ‘ethnographic film’ is anachronistic. It is loaded with meaning from another time and from places that are no longer relevant. I still believe in the veracity of the visual to tell us something about culture but anthropology is only just coming to terms with what to do with the visual as a discipline. In Australia especially, we need to continue to adjust the
anthropological lens to more clearly see in what ways we can use the visual to investigate culture.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Agreements made with the Aborigines by Nicolas Peterson

THE AGREEMENT MADE WITH THE ABORIGINES FOR THE FILMING OF THEIR SECRET CEREMONIES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Whilst Research Officer for the Institute, I negotiated on its behalf, nine verbal agreements with various groups of Aborigines for the filming of their secret ceremonies. On each occasion the conditions were similar:

1. The film would not be shown publically, in cinemas or on television.

2. The film would not be shown to women or children black or white in the community, or to members of other Aboriginal tribes.

3. The film would be shown to ‘business’ people.

'Business' is a pidgin English term used to refer to secret ceremonies that are exclusive to either sex. 'Business people' are therefore non Aborigines with a legitimate interest in ritual, in our terms, anthropologists. The term does not explicitly define the sex of the person involved though the implication is men where men's ceremonies are involved and women where women's ceremonies are involved.

In the absence of an Institute policy decision on arrangements to be made with the Aborigines, the above agreement was formulated specifically to achieve what I had been asked by the Institute to arrange, the filming of the Djungman. The three points were presented by me to the Aborigines at the outset of negotiations in the knowledge that they met traditional requirements. Since it was assumed that only specialists were likely to look at the films no detailed consideration was given to defining exactly what other people might see the film when completed.

There is no doubt that at face value the agreement means that the films may only be shown to adult male anthropologists. However implicitly in both the Aborigines' minds and my own, we were talking about the world as known to them. This at its maximum extent is Australia. Only a very few N.T. Aborigines have any understanding of Australia as a geographical unit or any conception of the vast distances which separate it from other countries of the world. Their concern, as is usual, was parochial as I interpreted it. They wanted to ensure that in the area known of to them, and that could possibly affect them directly, the films would not be shown to women or children. Beyond that region the question is academic for the Aborigines.
That this is not an unjustified interpretation of the position is partly demonstrated by the reaction to the showing of David Attenbourough's films on the Northern Territory Settlements and Missions. These films contain short sequences on ritual and on several occasions were shown during the Settlement/Mission Saturday film night. The immediate reaction was to stop the film regardless of whether the ceremony was a local one or one belonging to Aborigines 900 miles away. The only point they seem to have insisted on is that the films should not be shown anywhere where there were Aborigines. (It must be mentioned that none of the most secret elements were shown in the films I know of i.e. bloodletting, string crosses.)

That is the Aborigines were primarily concerned to remove the films from ever impinging on their environment. I therefore think I may be right in saying (though I am of course open to correction) that as long as the films are only shown in distant places unknown to the Aborigines, and as long as the members of the audience are never going to come in contact with them, the Aborigines would accept the films being shown though they probably would not be interested in knowing about it.

In Australia this means strict policing of the showing of the films for anybody these days may go to the NT for a holiday and in an attempt to show a friendly and real interest in the Aborigines, start to talk about blood letting, sacred objects etc. in front of the women, and children. Only specialist audiences of anthropologists and other closely interested people should be allowed to see them.

Such a practice even so requires that female anthropologists in the field who have seen the films must pretend ignorance. An interesting case would be somebody like Dr Catherine Berndt whom the people of Yirrkala specified as one woman that could see the Djungguan film. Would the Yirrkala men allow her to admit to the women that she had seen the film (without of course divulging the contents) or would they require her to pretend she had not?

Two points emerge from the foregoing. The issue is a moral one involving the Institute in a matter of principle. The agreements need to be clarified with the Aborigines, both for films already made and those to be made.

Without doubt the problem of whom the films should be shown to is going to become more difficult in the immediate future within Australia, unless their showing is very restricted. Aborigines generally are becoming politically aware and active; increasing numbers of both men and women are coming down to the cities; and now three have been appointed to Canberra based jobs to advise the Government on Aboriginal interests. The issue needs to be clarified therefore.

I cannot agree with Mr Sandall that what he calls 'the narrow ethic of tribal law' should give way to the 'larger values of science to which, by definition, a research institute is committed.' This is not the issue. The issue is 'WHAT DO THE ABORIGINES BELIEVE THE INSTITUTE HAS COMMITTED ITSELF TO WITH RESPECT TO THE USE OF THE FILMS?' This needs investigation, perhaps, by a linguist fluent in the language of the groups concerned. If the Institute does not like the Aborigines understanding of the agreement then a new and more formal agreement should be drawn up.

Such an approach with formal agreements raises the fundamental problem of exactly what sort of films the Institute is interested in making and/or whether it should not have two clearly defined and distinct categories. One type would be pure research
films and the other, films of anthropological interest for wider audiences that the specialist. At the moment there is often an uneasy balance between the two.

If formal agreements are entered into which allow wide distribution of the films, then the Institute will almost certainly be involved in award rate payments to Aborigines etc.

Much more importantly from the viewpoint of a research institute, it could end up reducing the research value of the ritual films. If before making a film on a men's secret ritual an agreement was drawn up in which it was stated that the finished film would be shown to the general public, the men might start to halter aspects of the ceremonies which they do not wish women to know about or which they know Europeans at large will think disgusting.

So far the Institute has made only two films of pubically held camp ritual in the Northern Territory. There are many that could be filmed and given wide circulation without any of the problems attendant on secret rituals. There are also numerous other topics that could be filmed which have a wide interest and would be enriching educationally.

Nicolas Peterson

Appendix 2 - The Unesco Round Table

As mentioned above, Sandall and Peterson interrupted their first filming trip to attend the Round Table on Ethnographic Film in the Pacific Area which was held in Sydney between the 25th and 29th of July 1966. Among those gathered at this event were Enrico Fulchignoni (Head of the Cultural Films and Television Section, Unesco), Burton Benedict, Robert Gardner, Jean Rouch, Colin Young, Denys Brown (CFU), T. Draper Campbell, Ian Dunlop, A. P. Elkin, Ruth Fink, William Geddes, Stanley Hawes (Producer-in-Chief, CFU), Cecil Holmes, Sylvia Lawson, Maslyn Williams, David Moore, Charles P. Mountford, Nicolas Peterson, Dawn Ryan, Roger Sandall and J. A. Tuckson (Art Gallery of NSW). This was an important event in the history of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia because it brought together some of the leading figures at the time and it also served to focus attention on the activities of filmmakers in Australia. I should not over-emphasise its importance however, because of the twenty-eight Australian participants, ten were in some way involved with the Institute. Of course these ten had the opportunity

227 These people were Bill Geddes, Fred McCarthy, T. D. Campbell, Ian Dunlop, A. P. Elkin, Cecil Holmes, David Moore, C. P. Mountford, Nicolas Peterson and Roger Sandall.
to associate with the international guests, Enrico Fulchignoni, Robert Gardner, Jean Rouch and Colin Young.

The event had initially been proposed as a conference on "cultural films" by Unesco. It was to be the fifth in a series of similar meetings initiated by Unesco that had previously been held in Lyon (1962), Beirut (1963), Mannheim (1964) and Moscow (1965) (Fulchignoni 1966:23). This proposal was further developed by Denys Brown of the CFU, McCarthy and others in Australia throughout the latter half of 1965 with some input from members of Unesco in Paris. The original aim of the event was to examine the relationship between cultures and the mass media. In particular it was suggested that the conference might also: "...examine ways in which the film can best preserve and present cultures... increase knowledge of little known works of value... [and] arouse the interest of private producers in making documentaries on cultural themes". They also hoped to create a major catalogue of films made to date and publish a report of the event's proceedings.

The Round Table as it eventuated accomplished all of these goals and appears to have been very successful (see Moore 1966, Lawson 1966, and Higham 1966). Its final purpose was to take stock of what films had been made to date and to stimulate production of and interest in ethnographic filmmaking in the Pacific. The final report of the meeting (in English, Unesco 1966) contains lengthy discussions about the use of film as a medium for the preservation of "passing" cultures and the need for integrity if the films are to be objective scientific records. Ethnographic film was seen here as the perfect

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228 "Conference on Cultural Films: report of sub-committee meeting held on Friday, 17th September 1965" in AIATSIS file 65/130/1.
229 Ibid.
230 This was finally published in French as Unesco 1970.
tool for the chronicling of culture, its use was “an historical duty to all mankind”.

Overall, the conference was an important moment in the history of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia because it confirmed in the mind’s of the Institute’s members that they did indeed have a mandate to preserve aspects of Aboriginal culture on film.

231 Resolutions of the 1966 Round Table on Ethnographic Filmmaking in the Pacific Area: “A General Resolutions. The conference calls for - (1) Recognition of the indispensable role of the cinema in providing an adequate record of passing cultures and in leading us to an understanding of life and society. (2) Acceptance of the use of film for such purposes as an historical duty, being an essential extension of more conventional methods of chronicling the history of man, both in primitive and advanced societies, and in the various stages of aculturation to be found in all continents. (3) Wide use of ethnographic film as (a) archive and research material, thoroughly documented and made available to museums and universities, (b) educational film, for schools and television, (c) cultural film, for general distribution to theatres, television and film societies. (4) An acceptance of special responsibility by those working with primitive cultures, and of a general duty by all concerned with ethnographic film to recognise it as a branch of scientific investigation and research, and to discourage its exploitation for commercial and sensational purposes. (5) Recognition of the immediate necessity for urgent programmes with primitive cultures which are threatened with extinction within the next decade. The conference urges all countries to seek local and international solutions to the problems of documenting these cultures through suitable collaboration between the cinema and anthropology.”