

alpacas to restore the herd so that repayment to the bank can be made. This video is well worth viewing and is appropriate for all sorts of college and even high-school courses about traditional, enduring Fourth World life in a modern, Third World nation-state.

**Charcoal Makers.** 1990. A film directed and produced by *Colette Piault*. 30 minutes, color. Greek, with English subtitles. For further information contact *Les Films du Quotidien*, 5 rue des Saints Pères, 75006 Paris, France.

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At first sight this film may appear to be one that deals with the technical processes of charcoal making, but it is more than this. It is, among other things, an exposition of the discourses of men and women in Greek society on the nature and conceptualization of work. Dealing with a peripheral and low-status occupation (charcoal making) among a small, specialized group in Greek society, the film weaves together how changes in one Epirot village (a desire by the community to enlarge its cemetery), with economic activities many miles away in the restaurants of Athens and other tourist resorts, have a specific set of social implications.

This is the overall social and economic framework within which the film is located: A village far from the tourist track (Ano Ravennia, in Epiros) rents out part of its forest territory for the production of charcoal, which is then purchased by merchants who sell the product to restaurants in the tourist sector. In between are the charcoal makers, slaves to the fire that unremittingly rules their lives for months. They constitute a peripheral group employed in one of the lowest-status jobs imaginable in Greece: peripatetic, living in shoddy *barangas* (hastily erected, flimsy, corrugated iron huts) in the countryside, at the mercy of merchants, and performing a low-paying job without the benefits of labor or health regulations.

Colette Piault, the anthropologist and filmmaker, has produced a film very much in line with her previous works. This one takes a segment or a slice of ordinary life and explores it. The narrativity of the film closely replicates the actual experience of fieldwork; thus, the film is as fresh and possibly as significant (or insignificant) as any slice of that experience is likely to be. It is far removed from the TV documentary mode: there is no introduction, no

voice-over, no reliance on the spoken word or prepared text as the main means for the transmission of information and consequent padding-out with images. As a result, the film is distinctive and refreshing.

But it is also hard work for the viewer, who is plunged straight into the world of the charcoal makers. Slowly, the social context emerges in and through the conversations the filmmaker has with the people. Ostensibly about the techniques of charcoal making (which could easily be seen as a boring topic), the film actually reveals much more. It must be said, however, that this percolates through the reflexivity of the viewer after the film has ended (rather than during it, as is the case with a more documentary-type film).

At first, the questions Piault poses to her charcoal makers could appear banal, dealing as they do with the technical aspects of charcoal making. Indeed, on one level they may well be; after all, who wants to know? Some people, perhaps, but not many. Slowly, the rather awful nature of the job these people perform breaks through. It does so through the desolate landscape these people work in, their isolation, their sense of pessimism, in their tight comments about the disappointingly low income they earn, in the general lack of the humor that is so important a feature of Greek village life, and also in the lack of music.

And it also comes through in the responses of the people. The men, in response to questioning, give "official" and technical explanations on the techniques of charcoal production; the women, by contrast, give more "emotive" and freer responses, complaining that they have to work extremely hard, and lamenting their isolation from urban and "civilized" life, and from their homes. There is one incident in the film, captured fleetingly, which brings out the tension between the charcoal makers and their merchants. The latter purchase charcoal by weight through individual contracts, and tensions emerge between them and the charcoal makers. The workers are often disadvantaged, having little means of redress, and the structural relationship resembles that between merchants and Sarakatsani highlighted by John Campbell (*Honor, Family, and Patronage*, Oxford, 1964).

Some may object that this film oscillates between an ethnotechnical exposition of charcoal production and an exploration of the social networks that this small group was enmeshed in. On the obvious level this film appears to be about the former, and in this respect it may be less appealing to anthropologists and Mediterraneanists. However, this determination ignores the film's elusive but impor-

tant style, construction, and evolving hints, for it raises questions about the style that anthropological films could explore and develop, and about how they should present their material. This is a film that uses actual narrative to construct a reflexive narrativity that emerges in the viewer. I enjoyed it.

**The Chinampas.** 1989. A film by *Anne Prutzman*. 31 minutes, color. Purchase \$250 (video); rental \$40 (video) from University of California Extension Media Center, 2176 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94704 (415/642-0460).

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*Sustainability* is the current buzzword utilized in a variety of contexts to indicate the need to create productive systems that do not degrade the underlying resource base. As this perspective has gained currency in conservation organizations, international development agencies, and domestic programs, attention is being drawn to ancient systems. Prominent among these are the *chinampas*.

Like many people who have done research in Mexico, I had read about these so-called floating gardens of the Aztecs and had visited the tourist center of Xochimilco for the boat trip on the canals between the *chinampas*. Prutzman's film takes us into the system—showing us how the *chinampas* were built, emphasizing how important they were for the power of the Aztec empire, following farmers who use labor-intensive techniques to get maximum productivity from small plots of land, discussing the issues that now threaten this system, and showing us some of the people whose lives revolve around the *chinampas*.

The construction of the *chinampas* and some idea of their extent within the Basin of Mexico are demonstrated with an excellent selection of drawings and paintings from documentary sources. These are interwoven with footage of farmers who still use some of these practices. Few will be unimpressed with the ingenuity, productivity, and sustainability of this system.

The film goes on to discuss the many sources that threaten the *chinampas*. One major factor is the growth of Mexico City, which, in effect, is resulting in the filling in and paving over of former *chinampas*. There are shots of streets and buildings where there were formerly *chinampas*; however, a series of maps or aerial photographs showing the extent of this loss would have been of greater value. Their absence is one deficiency of the film.

A threat to the remaining *chinampas* is the need of Mexico City for water; the city has tapped many of the springs that fed the *chinampas* system with clean water. The water has been replaced with untreated sewage and toxic wastes from the urban megalopolis. This process is graphically portrayed in the film, and we see and hear the laments of the people who had been farming the *chinampas*.

The film's production quality is not outstanding. There is often a grainy quality to the images, and the voice of the narrator is too low-key to grab the viewer's attention. The audience at which the film is aimed, however, seems to be the classroom. With some background and discussion, the film could be used in high schools. It will be most useful for classes that deal with the historical importance of this system to the Aztec empire and for those that consider contemporary issues related to sustainable agriculture. In these classes, it would be an excellent complement to archeological and ethnographic sources.

**Films Are Dreams that Wander in the Light of Day.** 1989. A video by *Sylvia Sensiper*. 20 minutes, color. For rental and sale information (video) contact Sylvia Sensiper, Department of Urban Planning, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90024 (213/734-8209).

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At the turn of the century there were high hopes that understanding others (read "non-Europeans") would follow quickly in the wake of people watching other people on film. About thirty years later, the great Russian director and theoretician, Sergei Eisenstein, was sure that film was the best way to bridge national cultures. Another thirty years went by, and Margaret Mead took up the cause with enthusiasm. Now, as we approach the end of the century, the innocence is gone.

In ethnographic film, the end of innocence is marked by confrontation with a set of questions: Who are these people who think they can represent others? What are their motives and assumptions? What good, if any, comes to those represented? Those who have been most often represented, peoples from the permafrost of the Arctic to the deserts of Australia and the tropical forests of South America, are making their own films—they are presenting themselves as they see themselves—so who needs ethnographic filmmakers to represent