

SCREEN DRAMATURGY IN AN AFRICAN TRADITION (PART II)*

by

Martin A. Rennalls

SOME OTHER ORIGINS OF SCREEN DRAMATURGY

The dramatic narrative form seems to have universality in its use and application in communication. It is also an original characteristic of film presentation although it is not peculiar to the film medium, for story telling has been a form of communication in many other types of media. Contrary to popular belief, the film medium originally did not copy narrative dramaturgy from literature and the stage. Our previous investigation has shown that it was a characteristic of filmic presentations long before the film as projected celluloid was introduced in the late nineteenth century. The story telling format has also been used for communication of information and for entertainment in many cultures and dates back to early civilization. The use of pictorial imagery for what can be termed dramaturgical filmic representations or communications developed only in terms of sophistication and complexity through the ages.

It already has been mentioned that in the art of Mesopotamia there appeared the beginnings of the pictorial narrative as depicted in the Standard of Ur, along with some of the conventions of Egyptian Art. But Mesopotamian art was different from Egyptian art in that it maintained the manifestations of movement, life-quality and realism that were evident in prehistoric art. In far off China which was then completely cut off from the western world there appeared a unique continuation and development of the pictorial narrative around the years 960-1126 A.D. during the Sung Dynasty. As Peter Swann puts it:

Under the Sung, both of the Northern and Southern periods, painting reached new heights. The level of inspiration in landscape painting in particular was never again to be reached.¹

Emperor Huitsung was himself a painter and "he gathered around him a galaxy of brilliant artists and set a pattern for refined sensibilities."² He formed an academy which served both to support eminent artists and to train younger men. It was from this school of devoted artists that many eminent

*Part I appeared in *UFAHAMU* Vol VII, Number 2, 1977

paintings were produced on scrolls. Famous among them was the Ching Ming Festival of the River. It was not to be viewed as a whole but continuously as the scroll is unrolled from left to right and new scenes are gradually brought into view. In this way the painting reveals a story of a Festival of 'remembrance of ancestors.' It was like a grand country fair with the people travelling along a river towards the palace of the king. It has a rare historical value, for in it are all the characteristics and the origin of the presentation of cinema narrative. The unrolling of the scroll was to a degree comparable to the passage of the film through the projector. Movement and life qualities were manifested in the lifelike and realistic representation of scenery, people and objects in each segment of the story. There was an implicit illusion of movement between one segment and another which were bound together by the motif of a river. This motif provides continuity of time and space. Thus were introduced into dramatic narrative film style the elements of fragmentation and resynthesis of the scene which are some essential characteristics of modern cinema.

There was no rigidity of viewpoint and linear perspective, which predominated the advances in Western art. There was, however, the element of the convention of the frame and other filmic features of titles and credits. All in all this masterpiece was a realistic presentation of a series of events clearly and well executed with color and tone to denote perspective. The many sequences were bound together by the 'connecting tissue' - a river, and bearing close relationship and correlation to documentary film presentation.

Contemporary with the Ching Ming Festival of the River there developed in Europe another masterpiece of pictorial narration, the Bayeux Tapestry. This artistic representation carried the narrative one step further. It introduced all the important ingredients and characteristics of modern film dramaturgy. There were indications of production by groups of artists or crews and the delegation of responsibilities in that of the director, sponsor, producer, as well as the concept of production for the purpose of communication, and propaganda. The story and dramatic format were predominant throughout as with life-like and realistic imagery the story of the conquest of England by William the Conqueror was told. There were the protagonist and antagonist, climax, suspense, conflict, paragon, action, half truth and half fiction and finally the resolution or denouement. In this representation also were many organized and conventionalized techniques of the modern film - the framing of the scene, the sequence, the cut-away shots, close-ups, and the like.

In the areas of Africa from which the ancestors of the Jamaicans came, there seems to have been a similar development

in dramatic narrative presentation. There are indications of this from the types of oral dramatic narrative, originating from those areas although there are no records of these stories manifested in their art representations. The writings of A.W. Trowbridge seem to support this:

Negroes are known to possess the elements of an extensive literature and a mass of folktales and songs, not inferior in interest to those of European races. They are passionately fond of music; and although as an art it has not been developed to any extent among them, yet it forms a great feature in their lives. They are very fond of introducing songs into their stories and these verses, sung by the story teller always form the crowning part of the tale for both listener and narrator. One of the best localities for studying the negro better, perhaps in many respects, than the African continent is the island of Jamaica. 3

The following stories from Nigeria, Ghana and Jamaica seem to have sufficient similarities to indicate their origins in the same geographic region and also that they have correspondences to the cinematic qualities and characteristics of the Bayeux Tapestry and the Ching Ming Scroll of the River.

The Tortoise and the Wild Yam - (from Nigeria)

"At one time there was a great shortage of food in every home, but in the bush there was a kind of yam that could still be obtained. These yams were very big and moved about the bush on both feet like human beings. No animal had any idea how to trap this yam, and as none of them possessed any unusual qualities they could do nothing but starve while food walked away from their very eyes.

It was the snail that first got an idea. He had a good supply of sticky fluid and after watching where the yams walked, he drew a thick gummy line across their main paths. When the yams went to the spot, they lost their balance and fell and the snail took them home and ate them. The tortoise, the envious animal, who was also a friend of the snail heard the news of the snail's success and he too decided to make a trap. He walked across the road making an ordinary line as he went along and went into the bush to wait for his catch.

The yams came striding along, and one by one they passed the line the tortoise had drawn, but none of them fell. The tortoise was surprised and angry at this incident and he sprang

at the last of them. He was no match for the yam, and very soon he found himself taking a very uncomfortable ride. The tortoise cried out in great pain, 'Snail, my friend, please save me! The wild yam is going away with your friend, save me!'"

First the snail was determined not to help the tortoise, but thought it would be unfitting for the tortoise to be carried away across the river. He then crawled across the path making a thick gummy line along the way and as the yams staggered on the line, they fell and their fragments scattered into the bush along the river including the one bearing the tortoise. When the tortoise had regained his senses, he and the snail collected the fragments of the yams and made a large heap. Other animals gathered together at the scene and the tortoise decided that it was he who should divide the spoil among the animals. But the snail disagreed. He said, 'If I had not saved you, where would you have been?' The tortoise was ashamed of himself and he allowed the snail to share out the yams in whatever manner he liked."4

Ananse's Punishment - (From Ghana)

"There was a terrible famine in the little town where Ananse lived, and he, like the other inhabitants, found it very difficult to obtain food for his family.

One day, gazing despairingly at a pool of water near their farm, he saw a very wonderful thing happening: A little island on which a palm tree was growing was slowly emerging from the midst of the pool. On the palm tree were many palm nuts. On seeing the fruits of the palm tree, Ananse determined to reach this wonderful island and try to pluck some of the fruits. But to get there was his immediate difficulty.

He searched round the bush forest near the pool and soon found a little old boat which did not seem fit to bear his weight on the water. He managed to row away to the island. He had enough rest under the palm tree before he started to climb it. He aimed at dropping the palm fruits which he plucked into the boat he had left under the tree; but each time he did this he missed his target and the fruit rolled into the pool. To his annoyance, the last fruit also missed the boat and rolled into the water. As soon as Ananse climbed down the tree he plunged into the pool to recover some of the fruits. To his horror he found himself in front of a small, beautiful cottage. From this cottage came a grand old man who asked Ananse what he wanted. Nervously, Ananse told him how he had arrived there. The old man expressed his sympathy and promised to be of help to him.

The old man went into his cottage and brought out a queer-shaped cooking pot. He gave it to Ananse and added that he and his family would never be hungry again because from then onwards all food for them would be provided by the magic pot. Ananse was given instructions on how the pot could be invoked to serve food whenever it was needed. Before Ananse left the old man he tried to see how the pot worked; he invoked it to provide his first meal. He thanked the old man and told him how grateful he was for getting such a help from him for his family.

When Ananse reached home, the wicked, greedy and selfish part of him prompted him to hide the pot and say nothing about it to his wife and children who had grown weak and thin. He pretended that he was very hungry and tired because he had been out for a very long time in search of food.

After several weeks Ananse's family and many of his friends in the town noticed that unlike them, Ananse was growing robust and plump, while they were getting thinner and weaker. His activities and movements became very suspicious. He was, therefore, tailed and shadowed wherever he went. His eldest son, Kweku Tain, a split personality, one day turned into a house-fly, and followed his father into his bedroom where he had hidden the magic pot. It was Ananse's mealtime and so he brought the pot out from where it had been hidden. He started invoking it to do what it always did for its master. Immediately, food was served and Ananse had his usual, secret, hearty meal. After this he went out in search of food for his family.

When Ananse left the house his son who had witnessed how the magic pot worked, went to bring it out from the hiding place. He invited his brothers and sisters and his mother to have an enjoyable meal.

Ananse's wife in her indignation wanted to make her husband ashamed and so decided to invite many of her friends to come and enjoy the excellent meal provided by the magic pot. Those who were invited were greatly disappointed because the magic pot in trying to provide enough food for the great number of visitors present overworked itself and melted.

Ananse returned very late in the evening, from the farm, with very little food. When he was ready to have his meal he went into his bedroom as usual, but the magic pot was not there to serve him any food. He knew how wicked and selfish he had been so he dared not ask for the whereabouts of the pot. He went to bed without any food.

The next day Ananse went to the little island in the pool. He climbed the palm tree again and started to pluck the

few fruits that were left on it. This time the fruits did not roll into the water. He descended the tree very quickly, picked up all the fruits, threw them into the water and plunged into the pool after them. Again he found himself in front of the small, beautiful cottage; the old man was sitting there ready to listen to what news Ananse had to tell him.

This time the old man gave Ananse a stick which he told him would help him to solve all his difficulties. The old man instructed him on how to invoke the magic stick to act. Ananse thanked him and left.

Ananse was too eager to know what the stick would do to help him. He, therefore, began his invocation, saying, 'Stick, I would like you to do to me what you always did to my master when he was in difficulties.' The stick immediately gave him a thorough thrashing; Ananse had to jump into the water to save himself from punishment."⁵

*Anancy Story from Jamaica**

The following story is from Jamaica. It belongs to the island's most popular folklore, called Anancy Stories. It is said to have originated from Africa (notice the slight difference in spelling of its African counterpart).

"It was a time of great famine in the land where Anancy lived. All the animals were starving except Brer Bird who used to fly across a river where there were some cherry trees all laden with juicy berries. Anancy went to Brer Bird and begged in the most heart rending manner to take him along across the river so that he could save the life of his wife and many children. Brer Bird knowing Anancy to be very clever gave the matter a lot of thought but eventually broke down under Anancy's pitiful pleas. He therefore stuck some of his feathers into Anancy to help him fly. In the early morning they set out. Anancy took his big bag to bring back as many cherries as he could. When they reached the cherry trees, Anancy began as usual to use his brains on Brer Bird. Every cherry that Brer Bird saw, Anancy shouted that he had seen it first and grabbed it away from Bird. When Anancy had collected all he wanted and ate his stomach full, he fell asleep. Brer Bird who had become very upset with him took out the feathers and left Anancy to his fate. When he woke he tried to fly but could not, so he decided to try to find his way home on foot. When he came to the river it was flooded and Anancy became afraid. He threw his bag in

*The language used to narrate Anancy stories is the local Jamaican dialect. This type of language might well be the same as the ones used in the other countries of Ghana and Nigeria. English has been used here for purposes of general understanding.

the river saying to himself, 'If the bag floats then I will float too.' The bag did float, but alas!, when Anancy jumped in he sank straight to the bottom of the river. (There is a song here titled, 'The riben ben cum dung, A how yu cum ober.' - in dialect, and is very popular).

Anancy found himself at the home of Brer Alligator. He, fearing that he might be eaten, told Alligator that he was Alligator's cousin and that he had come to pay a visit. Thereupon Alligator proceeded to test him. He gave him a boiling pot of porridge to eat, saying that all his relatives could eat food boiling hot. Brer Anancy told him that it as not hot enough so he would place it in the sun to get hotter. When the porridge got cool, Anancy drank it all and fooled Alligator who accepted him in his home. When night fell, Alligator who was short on accomodation, put Anancy to sleep in his nest of eggs. Before he did so, however, he made Anancy count them and warned him not to interfere with them. During the night Anancy ate all the eggs but one. Next morning, Alligator told him to bring all the eggs for a check. Anancy brought the same egg to Alligator over and over until the correct number had been reached. When Alligator asked why he was bringing them one by one, Anancy explained that he feared they would break. Anancy then prepared to leave. Alligator got his boat chariot which was drawn by two partially deaf alligators. When Anancy was a little way off, Alligator discovered that his eggs were missing, so he called to his alligators to bring back Anancy. When they inquired of Anancy what their boss was saying he said, 'He says you are to move faster for a storm is coming up.' And so Anancy escaped and reached home safely."

These stories seem to have all the similarities of plot configuration and geographical considerations. From this a deduction might be drawn that they originated from people of a similar way of life, with similar problems and from a similar geographic region. The character of Anancy is identical in name in the tales from Ghana and Jamaica. The Jamaicans' love of stories of this type must have originated from their forbears since these stories form a significant part of their culture. Once again I quote from Trowbridge in support of my deductions:

It has always been of interest to me to know that the greater part of the Anansi Stories told to me by my Negro nurse were told her by her grandmother, an African princess, who was stolen, when a child, from Guinea by Spanish slave traders and sold as a slave in the island of Jamaica. 6

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WESTERN AND JAMAICAN NARRATIVE STYLES

It has been suggested in the previous chapter that the three stories are typical of the countries from which they come and that they have similarities in content, format, basic plot-configuration, time and place setting and in the values and goals of the characters portrayed as expressed through their personal and interpersonal relationships; that the people of the countries involved are from similar cultural and social backgrounds. They also have some correspondences with the basic elements and characteristics of the narrative dramaturgy of the Bayeux Tapestry and the Ching Ming Scroll of the River.

The similarities, however, between the Tapestry, the Scroll and the Folk Tales are far less total than those between the Folk Tales themselves. There is a fundamental and significant difference in the content and plot configurations of the styles in which they are couched. And this is not surprising for according to research into the artistic representations of various cultures through content analysis, it has been hypothesized that the characteristics and "life representations" of a culture are reflected in the dramatic and fictional materials produced within the culture. Barcus has emphasized that the content of these dramatic and fictional materials contains "basic social data which both shape and reflect the social situation and that the 'values and mores which are held by our own and other societies are reflected either directly or indirectly in the products of communications industries.'"⁷ He made particular reference to "plot configuration" as a factor for consideration when analyzing dramatic and fictional materials. He quotes Wolfenstein and Leites to support his view:

The dramatic productions of a particular culture at a particular time or even over a considerable period, tend to exhibit a distinctive plot configuration. This configuration gives the various individual dramas the distinctive atmosphere which we can recognize as pervading them all. Obviously a group of plots or even a single plot is extremely complex. Nevertheless, a simple basic plan may be discerned; we can see that one pattern from among the range of dramatic alternatives has been chosen for major emphasis.⁸

Barcus goes on to illustrate this concept by distinguishing the essential plot configuration between British, French and American films. He writes:

The plot in British films is 'that of the conflict of forbidden impulses with conscience.' In French

*films, human wishes are opposed by the nature of life itself. 'It is a contest in which we all lose in the end and the problem is to learn to accept it....' In American films, 'winning is terribly important and always possible though it may be a tough fight. The conflict is not an internal one; it is not our own impulses which endanger us or our own scruples which stand in the way. The hazards are all external, but they are not rooted in the nature of life itself. They are hazards of a particular situation with which we find ourselves confronted.'*⁹

The plot configuration of the African Folk Tales seem to suggest a concern with strategy, tactics and skill based primarily on the brain and intellect. There is not an emphasis on the conflict of the spirit and the flesh and conquest through sheer physical force, as in English drama, as exemplified in the Bayeux Tapestry. There was not the pessimism of the French or the optimistic brain and brawn approach of the Americans. Anancy and Wild Yam were not able to assault and conquer their adversaries by sheer physical strength. They were always too powerful for him. His only hope was his ability to out-manuever his adversaries and to conquer them by sheer sagacity, intellect, foresight and skill. And how well do the content configurations of these stories reflect the past and current socio-economic situation and life of the people of Third World countries, and the black man in particular! For, often, it is only by their mental powers that they have been able to survive.

This aspect of the investigation seems to lead to the conclusion that whereas Jamaican audiences should understand the general form or structure of narrative dramaturgy in cinematic representation, plot and content configuration could play a major role in their ability and desire to empathize and identify with the story and characters portrayed. Outwardly, they may respond to cinematic dramaturgy whatever the source or whatever the plot configurations but inwardly, subconsciously, deep-down, they seem to remain unchanged, unaffected by styles other than their own. There seems to be justification, therefore, for further research and investigation into the plot and content configurations of screen dramaturgy for people of an African tradition so that the current emphasis on the Western style so prevalent in their present dramatic presentations might be modified in favor of the "Anancy style."

AREAS FOR EXPERIMENT

The main thrust of this investigation so far has been centered around four basic propositions. A brief restatement

or summary of them is apropos to suggestions for changes in filmic style and techniques of structuring that is intended to make them more understandable and impactful for a particular audience or people.

Firstly, the filmic mode of expression in its pure and original form is a natural medium of human expression and, therefore, its application for communication purposes should not be limited to any geographical region, race, color, creed or stage of civilization. In this respect the medium could be regarded as possessing organic or biobasic qualities.

Secondly, while narrative or dramaturgical forms of presentations are universal in use and application their plot configurations seem to vary with cultures.

Thirdly, the process of conventionalization of the filmic mode, down through time, has produced innovations which are not organic derivations but rather hybrids. Like symbols of spoken language their derivations are arbitrary and therefore, can be learnt. But to peoples who have not been steeped in them from the times of their origination, the conventions remain foreign and like a foreign language they never seem to reach and affect the inner chords of meaning and feeling. It is probable that the effectiveness of filmic communication to achieve changes in deep-rooted values could be reduced by too much use of or reliance on conventions.

Pictorial Factors

It is assumed that the majority of the rural audiences of Jamaica are not oriented to the constraints imposed by the conventions of western art, and the film medium in particular, hence efforts could be made to reduce these conventions as much as possible. An innovation of this sort would not be a novelty nor would it be original in film production techniques. These conventional impositions have been realized to be unnatural to film art by many modern film makers and are being discarded or reduced. There are indications of a gradual return to the "pure or original" form of the cinema. It is being freed from the patchwork of conventions, thus allowing an untainted virgin art of the cinema to emerge and evolve that should ultimately be a universal language understandable to all people -- the literate, semi-literate and illiterate. It is this stream of development and change in which Jamaican film makers should become involved both for regular production and experimentation purposes.

The following are some suggestions for experimentation and for changes and improvements to present techniques:

1. The use of conventions, e.g., mixes, fades, wipes, and the "cut" should be reduced and optical devices in time eliminated. Their use cannot be based on or supported by any logical rationalizations or considerations. They were arbitrary symbols or devices that have to be learnt like those of a spoken language and are not natural forms of artistic or life representations. Time lapses and transitions could be smoothly and meaningfully effected by other means that are more consistent with, intimately related to, and characteristic of the medium of the cinema. Symbols denoting time lapses could be selected that would have meaning to audiences in any part of the world, while others would have specific relevance to people in specific cultures and geographic areas. The passing of night, for instance, could be shown as a very underexposed or "night shot" of the localities involved in a film, instead of the use of the optical of "fade-out, fade-in or a dissolve." It could also be suggested by shots of the setting sun followed by the locality underexposed, and the rising sun heralding a new day. These should have universal applications. The time lapse to denote the passing of long periods like a year could be shown by shots indicative of typical or symbolic scenes from each of the four seasons. This would be especially applicable to temperate countries. In the tropics and Jamaica, in particular, where the seasons are not clearly differentiated, other seasonal cues would have to be found. Resurrection lilies could be associated with the period around springtime or Easter, the dried earth or parched grass for summer, mango season for autumn and the profusion of "Christmas flowers" like poinsettia for winter. Events specific to the culture could also be used, for example -- a Christmas scene for wintertime, the planting of catch crops for spring, watering and irrigation for summer and the festivities which take place annually in August as heralding fall.

Transitions involving shorter time and space lapses between sequences or locations can be achieved or bridged by devices like the lingering of the camera on the scene from which a character exits before introducing a new scene in which the character involved in the former scene arrives or, vice versa, cut the scene as a character leaves but allow the camera to linger on the new scene before the character enters. It is as if the film were giving time for the journey between the two locations to take place. Therefore, instead of using quick mixes as time and space compression devices between scenes, some "business" could be evolved and included which has some relevance to real life experiences to suggest or symbolize the passing of time. In appropriate situations and conditions where dramatic impact is required by the use of the collision of sensations, smooth and direct cuts could be used to effect the necessary transitions. Here motion graphics, subject and camera movements could be effectively used to fuse the shots at the transitional points. Acceptance and understanding of these devices are based

on the organizational principles of Gestalt psychology, which regarded as applicable to the perception of all peoples.

The Japanese film *The Island*, directed by Kaneto Shinozaki, which won the Grand Prix at the Moscow Film Festival in 1961, is a good example of the attempt to eliminate the use of optical devices like mixes and fades and to introduce devices of the types suggested above. The time lapse of a year was depicted by flowering trees for spring, yellowing leaves for autumn and the falling snow for winter. The lingering camera on the scene ahead or behind the subject and the direct cut for shorter time lapses were also evident.

Another film of outstanding merit in this respect is the Swedish production *Elvira Madigan* directed by Bo Widerberg. The elimination of optical devices for time compression was explicit and obvious and seems to suggest an open rebellion of Widerberg against conventional film techniques. In "Cries and Whispers," Bergman used color for the same purpose. Instead of fading to black, he changed to red which was a dominant and symbolic color of the film. The methods and techniques of achieving smooth transitions without recourse to optical devices should only be limited by the imagination, improvisational ability and originality of the film maker. The Jamaican climate and culture should generate many ways and means that are understandable and appealing to its people; it is for her film makers to accept the challenge and to discover and evolve them.

2. The limitations, strictures and rigidity of the cinema frame should be reduced to a minimum, for it has been pointed out previously, that the frame has been a convention imposed upon the cinema during its early stages of evolution. It limits and demarcates the spacial bounds within which the object to be represented is to function. In view of this, the audience's perception of any object differs considerably from the direct perception of the same object under ordinary conditions. In order to achieve a more realistic representation of reality, film makers have been employing various strategies and techniques. They have tried to alter the proportion of the frame limits. "The frame proportions," writes Nilsen, "have been the subject of unending, fierce discussions throughout the first 100 odd years of the cinema's existence."¹⁰ In spite of the many suggestions and innovations there has been no commonality of agreement as to the proportions of the frame limits. It is the writer's view that the artistic solution of the "cine space" problem does not lie in further pursuits and experiments in attempts at proportioning and correlating the sides of the frame but in the use of techniques that will provide an illusion of the non-existence or unimportance of the frame as was the case in prehistoric art. Film shots, for example, should not always be framed and composed like the traditional "picture" with the

usual reverence and respect for perpendiculars, horizontals, diagonals, lines - whether explicitly or implicitly expressed in, or around the image - linear perspective and other classical conventions. Why not allow the frame to conspire with the content of the shot and move in directions that are more in harmony with the mood of the scene, as Eisenstein did in October. He intentionally tilted the frame line away from the perpendicular to capture the struggle and suffering of the peasants hauling excessive burdens. To further minimize the impact of the frame line the "expanded frame" technique could also be applied. An establishing shot of a scene could be preceded by a gradually built up series of close shots showing important and significant aspects that characterize the scene. The incompleting images would always cause perceptions to seek completions beyond the frame lines. This would immediately begin to provide information that is more meaningful, impactful and suspenseful than a general long shot of a scene which because of its generality and lack of definition would in essence signify less meaning or impact at the start. The frame lines for these close shots would not show the physical limitations of the objects depicted but only the parts that are really important to the characterization and understanding of the total scene. A close shot of a face, for instance, need not show the whole face but should "pick out" and emphasize the portion of the face that is important at that particular moment. In this way, the audience is made less aware of the boundaries of the frame and more concerned with the content, for the images are always extending and seducing the audience's attention and interest in and beyond the limits of the frame.

Another technique that is important to this phase of exploration is the constant animation of the screen by camera movement. The camera by tilting, panning, crabbing and tracking gives the illusion of an explosion at the boundaries of the frame and the destruction of a consciousness of its presence. The camera in motion keeps the frame always filled and overflowing with content as it discovers and explores new areas without the necessity of cutting.

Citizen Kane - directed by Orson Welles and considered one of the most artistic and innovative films ever produced contains some fine examples of the "expanding and exploding" frame techniques. The opening shots, for instance, which led up to and culminated finally on the mansion home of Kane called Xanadu, reduced awareness of the frame by the gradual establishing of a scene by the use of close shots as well as the moving camera. Commencing with the fences surrounding the castle, following with the gates, then the various "business" around those environments, then the castle itself, and finally with its inmate, Kane, Welles revealed the character of its owner slowly and deliberately. The knowledge, understanding and dramatic

impact gained by this method far exceeded what could be achieved by one long shot. Then, to climax this suspenseful scene, only lips of the dying Kane were selected and emphasized in a close up and not his entire head or body as only that section was considered necessary and important as he uttered the key words of the story - "Rosebud." Here again the consciousness becomes so totally tuned to the lips of the dying man that the frame becomes non-existent and in the mind's eye Kane's total body beyond the frame becomes dominant.

3. The "moving eye" technique could be used to get away from the static viewing positions of the eye that has been conditioned by Renaissance art and so recapture the mobility of viewpoint characteristics of prehistoric art. "It has been found," writes McLuhan, "that non-literates do not know how to fix their eyes, a few feet in front of the movie screen, or some distance in front of a photo."¹¹ This technique would reduce the necessity for constant and "spirit-like" shifting and fixation of viewpoints which is achieved by cutting between shots, referred to by McLuhan. In this approach, the camera would move continuously either by panning, tilting, crabbing or tracking shots to reveal a scene or sequence in its entirety and from varying viewpoints. The moving camera could objectively portray a subject as well as sensuously caress it. This technique was used, for instance, in the establishing shot of the French locale in the opening scene of the film "We Are All Murderers." Hitchcock employed it in his "long takes" in his film "The Rope" and Murnau in "The Last Laugh." Referring to the camera movement in the latter film, Arthur Knight writes:

The camera moved with the old doorman through the courtyard of the apartment building in which he lived, receiving with him the salutations of his neighbors and friends, feeling with him their derisive laughter after he had lost his lofty position. It groped with him down a dark hotel corridor to steal from a cupboard the splendid uniform that had been his cloak of authority. It even at one point got riotously drunk for the old man, whirling dizzily around the room until the audience comes to share his vertigo. 12

The excessive and unwarranted fragmentation of sequence into an unnecessary large series of cuts between shots also produce an unnatural and unrealistic representation of life when they are resynthesized at the editing stage. This technique often causes a lack of believability as it often provides loopholes for director to manipulate the structuring and to introduce shots that might be totally unrelated from a realistic and geographic point of view. The technique of cutting or editing within the frame, and the use of the master scene should be exploited

Both of these techniques are really similar in practice. Orson Welles used them with great success in *Citizen Kane*. They really are a carry-over from the stage. The entire sequence is performed through from beginning to end, and the movements of the camera and actors are so planned that they conspire to produce the necessary fragmentation of the scene into close-shots and mid-shots, etc. required without cutting. Wyler and Stevens have also exploited this technique with encouraging results. Arthur Knight, in making reference to it, writes:

Wyler has also developed to perfection a technique that might best be described as cutting within the frame. Realizing that dialogue imposes a slower editing pace than obtained in silent days, he has sought to create the effect of shifting visual patterns by strong regroupings of his characters within the shot, or by sudden changes of background. In the scene of Frederic March's homecoming in The Best Years of Our Lives (1946), for example, March enters close to the camera. His wife, Myrna Loy, runs toward him down a long corridor. As she approaches, their daughter, Teresa Wright, moves in from the side and the trio shut out the view of the corridor. Thus, a long-shot has been transformed into a close-up without the need of cutting. ---- A very similar technique is to be found in the films of George Stevens, one of the most creative talents in the sound medium. Formerly a cameraman he shares with Wyler a strong feeling for the dynamics possible within the frame, an ability to shift the dramatic emphasis within a shot without recourse to unnecessary editing. In Shane (1953), a "big Western" built around the hackneyed theme of farmers versus cattle ranchers, Stevens managed to infuse a new vitality, a new sense of realism into the time-worn story through the strength and freshness of his visuals. In one incredibly protracted long-shot Alan Ladd and Brandon de Wilde are speaking in the foreground while, from the distant hills, a horse and wagon approach the camera, drawing nearer and nearer until the riders dash into screen center with their important news. By this device Stevens has been able to prepare the audience for their arrival while still concentrating attention on the dialogue between his principals.

The "moving eye" technique could also be effectively used to minimize orientation problems experienced by rural Jamaican audiences when the "cut" is applied in transitions from long-shots to extreme close-ups of an object. This problem

was mentioned earlier when a "cut" is made from a long shot of a fly to an extreme close-up of the head of one of them. By moving the camera gradually into the scene and towards the object the gradual uncut revelation would have achieved the transition required but with believability and understanding preserved. Too often to achieve emotional shock by the application of the collision of shots of varied sizes the variations are so severe that orientation is destroyed together with the effect.

4. The application of the convention of linear perspective within scenes should be curtailed. This method of perception is a result of our psychological conditioning. The use of what might be called aerial perspective, which was a characteristic of prehistoric art, should be emphasized. Aerial perspective is achieved by the "direct dependence on the laws of the structure of the light, reflection, and nature of light sources." It is observed as the tonal differentiation of planes and dimension and produced by the use of various intensities of light. The nearer the subject is to the eyes or the foreground, the weaker we will perceive the light, and its strength will gradually increase as distance increases.

A similar effect of depth could be achieved by the breaking up of the visual planes in scenes to create foreground, middleground and background and eliminating the convention of the long gaze along lines that diminish in distance apart as they move towards a point of rendezvous on the horizon.

Dramaturgical Factors

1. The dramatic narratives created for films that are intended primarily for the rural audiences of Jamaica should reflect the theme or plot configuration as depicted in the folk tales of the country, with special reference to the Anancy type of stories. The folklore plot embraces and reflects their basic values, beliefs and attitudes that seem to operate below the conscious level and contribute to the triggering and cueing of their responses. The main theme characteristics of the stories could therefore be exploited in every possible way. The following are some suggestions:

(a) The main thrust of the content and characterizations of the stories in the films should emphasize basic intelligence and sound common sense as they are some of the most important resources of the people of developing countries in their struggle to modernize. In stories, for instance, that are designed to assist in effecting and motivating change, the success of the protagonists should be based on and reflect their cunning, sagacity, skill, patience and perseverance. They should be the type that will carefully plan their strategies and tactics in

order to overcome their problems and be willing to take advice and obtain information from informed and trusted sources. In other words, the protagonists would be like the "opinion leaders," in the "Anancy" stories.

(b) The rewards for motivations and efforts to accept and adopt new attitudes towards change should be explicitly delineated. They should include tangible and worthwhile contributions towards the satisfaction of the needs that are considered most important by the people at any particular time. The "pie in the sky" philosophy, and "milk and honey hereafter" should be replaced by "a slice of the pie now" and a substantial serving of the milk and honey during one's lifetime.

(c) The theme characteristic of optimism in the stories which is so important in Anancy's character should be also exploited. Failures and conflicts should be included in the plot configuration of the dramatic narrative as natural ingredients of life experiences for the promotion of progressive changes and should, therefore, accompany the life and activities of the protagonists, but the denouement should be tinged with success.

(d) The qualities of humor, gaiety, fun and other basic human qualities are also features of the Anancy stories. These should be maintained, cultivated and encouraged. Too often we find a tendency for a people to lose these qualities in the serious, competitive, jungle-like and mannequin-like lifestyle that seems to infect societies in their struggle for modernization. The simple joys and pleasures of life seem to go underground. In the new approach to film narrative, there should be an endeavor to "turn back the spread of creeping solemnity" and keep alive the philosophy that "acculturation and learning can be fun."

(e) The continuous striving for the revelation of realistic, original and true life related experiences, as against contrived material primarily for escapism, should be a keynote of the productions. Taking the simple, everyday experiences and activities of the farmers that might seem to them and others to be total drudgery and commonplace, and exalting them to positions of beauty and importance by means of artistic treatment is a contribution that will be valuable to their's and the entire society's appreciation of and pride in their way of life. Bunuel refers to this approach when he said:

The most worthwhile contribution...is the raising of a humdrum act to the level of dramatic action. In Umberto D, one of the most interesting neo-realistic films, an entire ten-minute reel is devoted to showing a maid go through a series of actions that only a short while ago no one would have

considered worthy of being filmed. We see the maid go into the kitchen, light the fire, put on a casserole, throw water several times on ants that are advancing Indian-style across the wall.. Despite the trivial side of the situation, we follow her movements with interest and even with a certain suspense.¹⁴

(f) The film which mostly reflects these African, traditional, Anancy style configurations referred to above is *Roots*. Its underlying theme of seeking, discovering, preserving and taking pride in one's traditional heritage as being basic to the discovery, identification and understanding of one's self is so applicable to people with an African tradition whose literal and visible links have been so severely strained, stained, shattered. The determination, stick-to-itiveness, perseverance, endurance and skill exhibited by the main protagonists in the preservation of their identity and dignity are symbols of heroic comparable to the highest and greatest accomplishments of man. The problem is for these qualities to be perceived in that dimension by at least its black viewers. The portrayal of these qualities is where the film excelled and where many others of that type might have failed. The successful application of what seems a built-in native intelligence and mental adroitness born of long years of self preservation was amply demonstrated by the life-style and accomplishments of Chicken George the grandson of Kunta Kinte. The denouement of the story which finally brings some measure of tangible success to those who labored and sacrificed epitomizes the philosophy of the Anancy theme, with Chicken George as the Anancy of the story.

Another film that partially demonstrates the above film styling is *The Harder They Come*, a Jamaican production by a Jamaican director, Perry Henzel. The thematic configuration corresponds to that of the Anancy story configuration with the exception of the latter portion. Its chief protagonist gives up the technique of the pursuit of his goals through "brain", and adopted "brawn power." He ultimately failed at the hands of those with overwhelming forces of "brawn power."

2. The Anancy stories *per se* should also be recorded on film. It would be a contribution to the encouragement of the people to take pride in their roots and traditions. Although many of the stories have been written and published and attempts have been made to produce staged productions, filming them would promote greater mass distribution within and without the country. A fine example of another country's efforts in this direction is the production of *The Lune's Necklace* by Crawley Films of Canada.

3. The rendering of the Anancy stories in poetry is an innovation which has been introduced in Ghana and should be tried.

in Jamaica. This seems feasible in view of the fact that Jamaica has produced a native poetess who writes in dialect, and others are following in her footsteps. This principle could be applied to films in which the format, structure and commentary of the films could be poetic after the style of the classic English film "Night Mail."

4. Whenever possible a "connecting tissue" or "clothes line technique" could be used around which to structure and present experiences, somewhat corresponding to the "river" in the *Ching Ming Scroll of the River*. For example, in presenting development programs, or the need for development of any sort, the story of a person, a road, a river, a railway, an airline, a piped water supply could find correspondences with the technique used in the *Scroll*. They are all based on the "journey," which is a basic tissue of life itself and the Anancy theme.

5. In dialogue sequences the tendency to use long discourses between actors to put over information could be modified by the more visual approach. The beginning of a conversation and the people involved could be used, with a cut-away to visuals illustrating the conversation. Due largely to the need for economy in costs and production time, the tendency for emphasis on static and formalized discourse to expound content, reminiscent of the early sound movies, is developing in some of our modern films especially those produced for television. The "Anancy style" is extremely visual and is indicative of its strong cinematic quality and this should be retained and emphasized in the cinematic representations.

Dialect, Language and Use of Sound

1. The use of dialect in films for the rural audiences would seem to be the right approach. Domestic and conversational styles of speech have now become the rule rather than the exception in films of today. Language previously regarded as acid, odorous and socially inappropriate, fit only for beer-halls is gradually being introduced as modern modes of discourse in person-to-person as well as mass media communication. It is, therefore, high time that the dialects of developing peoples which have been so long degraded and regarded as demeaning by peoples of developing countries be afforded their rightful dignity and be allowed to play their proper role in intra-cultural communication media.

2. In many of the Anancy stories, songs are introduced to supplement the narrative and to emphasize some important facet of the story. It is also used as part of the dialogue as when in some of the stories, Anancy sings to his wife who also replies in song. This area could be explored in film representa-

tions and deserves to be given attention as folklore music is very appealing to the masses. For instance, the commentary could in some instances be put into song and the instrumental portions used to perform the role of theme music. Dialogue and narration put to folklore music and used in appropriate sections at appropriate times could be also a useful innovation. The sound track of the film *Rise and Fall of the Great Lakes* produced by the National Film Board of Canada is a fine example of the application of this technique.

3. A greater predominance of drums in the music for film could be introduced. Drums have been prominent in the communication process of African peoples and still play a major role in the music of the masses in Jamaica. In some sectors drums are the only instruments used for religious ceremonies. The effect of drums used in the opening sequence of *We Are All Murderers* admirably set the scene for the story giving the atmosphere of military occupation as well as the somber atmosphere of the story to follow. In similar respects they could be used to provide atmosphere as well as to play a predominant role in background music of Jamaican films. An example of its use for this purpose is in the fugitive scene of *An Occurrence at Owl-Creek Bridge*.

4. In spite of the special emphasis that is being placed on innovations in the sound track in the foregoing suggestions the writer would like to accent the importance of silence in films. It should be remembered that films are primarily a pictorial language and it is the visuals that usually carry the burden of the message. Too often, the great value and importance of sound as complementary to the visuals, is lost in its overuse and contrived applications. Too often, it is used to suppress and cover-up weaknesses. Speaking specifically of the extravagant use of music, Bunuel said:

Personally, I don't like music in films; I think it's a lazy device, a kind of trickery - with some exceptions, naturally.

Referring to films he had seen at a meeting of the Association of Producers of Documentary Films in New York, he continued:

At this festival, I was very much surprised to see some great films without music. I could name you three or four in which there were passages lasting twenty minutes or more without any music at all. 'The Great Adventure' for example....15

(*Great Adventure* was a Swedish documentary directed by Arne Sucksdorff). In the film *Elvira Madigan* the Swedish director Bo Widerberg has demonstrated his ability to use silence to

produce effects that are beyond verbal description.

This technique seems to have great promise in the production of films for unsophisticated audiences, for by its application the film can be reduced to utmost simplicity. It is an attempt to reach back to the cinema that is pure and original, uncluttered by formalities and conventions.

The choices of ways of producing films specifically for developing countries with their heritages, views of the world, life styles and values should become more intentional and deliberate, rather than left to chance. In the words of T. George Harris:

*Choices once left to chance or tradition
must be made by deliberate decision.*¹⁶

Footnotes

1. Swann, Peter. *Art of China, Korea and Japan*. F.A. Praeger Publishers, New York 3, N.Y., 1963. p. 144.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
3. Trowbridge, A.W. *op. cit.*, p. 279.
4. Ekwensi, C.O.D. *Ikolo the Wrestler and Other Ibo Tales* London, Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1960, pp. 76-77.
5. Lindsay, J.K.O. "Ananse's Punishment" in *Voices of Ghana*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, The Government Printer, Accra, 1955-1957. p. 41.
6. Trowbridge, A.W. *op. cit.*, p. 287.
7. Barcus, F.E. *Communications Content: Analysis of the Research 1900-1958*. Urbana, Ill., 1959. Thesis-University of Illinois. p. 10.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Nilsen, Vladimir. *The Cinema as a Graphic Art*. New York, Hill & Wang. p. 27.
11. McLuhan, M. *op. cit.*, p. 287.
12. Knight, Arthur. *The Liveliest Art*. The New American Library of World Literature, N.Y., 1957. p. 63.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.
14. Kyrou, Ado. *Luis Bunuel*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1963, p. 111.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
16. Harris, T. George. *Psychology Today*. July 1974.

* * * * *

Martin A. Rennalls is an Associate Professor at the School of Photographic Arts & Sciences, Rochester Institute of Technology, New York.



Igbo Folk Tale: "USU"