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The Decade of Destruction by Adrian Cowell

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emerge and are diffused among the Western public. Some of these myths have a complex history of their own; however, it is Flaherty's genius that amplified them, gave them poetic form, and presented them in a sense intelligible to vast audiences.

The bibliography is useful but certainly not complete, with several important studies on Flaherty in French not listed. In the appendix are placed some of the many tributes paid to Flaherty following his death. They give eloquent testimony to the deep influence he has exercised on the minds of the cinematographers of his generation.

An Ancient Gift. 1983. Produced for the Museum of Northern Arizona by *Tellens, Inc.* 18 minutes, color. Purchase \$315 (16mm), \$240 (video), rental \$32 from Extension Media Center, 2223 Fulton St., University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720 (215/642-0460).

CHARLOTTE J. FRISBIE
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

Although unclear from its title, this carefully produced film examines the importance of sheep to the Navajos. Funded by an NEH grant and filmed on the reservation in 1982, *An Ancient Gift* also portrays much about contemporary life in traditional areas. One's attention is focused on learning about the life cycle of sheep, the interdependence of Navajos and their flocks, and the Navajo view that equates sheep with life itself. Simultaneously, however, one gets accurate visual impressions of housing, transportation, dress, people, weaving, division of labor in daily life, and the environment at different seasons as well as aural impressions of language, daily sounds, and the importance of women and land.

Framed by portions of Changing Woman's story, the sound track identifies sheep as one of her gifts to the People and then follows them from birth through daily herding into shearing and the provision of other needs, be they hoof trimming or herbal medicine. The centrality of sheep to traditional Navajos of all ages is made clear at multiple levels as is the People's involvement in their care. As the narrator says, "Care for them and you will be able to live on."

The contemporary scene is interrupted by historical stills that provide flashbacks, first to the stock reduction of the 1930s and then to Fort Sumner. Likewise, the sequence that begins with catching a sheep for butchering is interrupted almost immediately by a longer one

focusing on the wool that sheep give, year after year, in return for care. Here the camera follows two women through segments of the carding, spinning, dyeing, and weaving processes while the narrator provides cultural and economic information about weaving. Portions of the butchering process then resume central visual importance. The female narrator is temporarily replaced by a Navajo man who explains that butchering, the natural end of a sheep's life, was planned by Changing Woman so that the People might eat and live. He also explains how Navajos use all parts of the animal except the bones.

The routine nature of this event is immediately denied by the continuing narration, which states that this butchering was done to provide food for a ceremonial occasion. For me, what ensues is the weakest part of the film; all one learns is that family and clan gather in a ceremonial hogan "to share food and pray" for the restoration of harmony. Surely the centrality and complexity of such events could have been conveyed more effectively, both aurally and visually, even while honoring the restrictions some Navajos place on such portrayals. Among other points that detract from the film's effectiveness, albeit in minor ways, are the use of non-Navajo background music for initial dawn and final dusk frames, omission of reference to the ongoing relocation trauma and the reduction and impounding of livestock associated with it, and the speed at which the final credits, to both Navajo and Anglo consultants, pass before viewers' eyes.

Among the film's best features are the camera work; the mixing of contemporary, historical, and mythological time; and the multi-leveled, multimedia statements about the endless, reciprocal cycle of life nurturing life, and the interdependence of Navajos, their flocks, and the environment. Also outstanding is its subtle preservation of the sounds of the daily round—those of sheep, goats, dogs, chickens, and humans—and its mixture of carefully phrased English narration with Navajo conversations and comments in Navajo English. The result is a powerful, successful statement, accurate and educationally appropriate for high school, college, and general public viewers and also, I believe, acceptable to the People themselves.

The Decade of Destruction. 1984. A series of four films. *The Search for the Kidnappers*, *The Blazing of the Trail*, *In the Ashes of the Forest*, and *The Mechanics of the Forest* and *The Storms of the Amazon*. Produced by *Adrian Cowell*. Color, 55 minutes each. Purchase \$450 each (video),

\$990 for the set (video); rental \$90 each, \$250 for the set from Nomad Films Ltd, 46 Anson Rd., London N7 OAB, England (01-609-1240 or 01-607-2920).

GREG URBAN
University of Texas, Austin

Adrian Cowell has provided us with an extraordinary vision of the emergent "world system." He has tracked that system to its limits—the Brazilian frontier in the vast wilderness of the Amazon Basin. Here the system encounters the unknown, much as it did 200 years ago in the North American west. Cowell's documentary explores the inner mechanism of this system, how and why it expands into previously uncharted territory, how it devours populations and whole ecosystems in its path, how it subjugates the world to its rule. Simultaneously, Cowell shows the effects of this devastation, what we will have lost, what consequences that loss might have.

As Part 1, "The Search for the Kidnappers," opens, the film crew is following a Brazilian Indian Agency "pacification" team. It is January 1980, the beginning of the "decade of destruction," and we are in the western Brazilian state of Rondônia. The pacification team is on the trail of "kidnappers"—the uncontacted Uru-eu-wau-wau Indians—who had recently abducted a seven-year-old boy named Fábio. Fábio is the son of Chico Prestes, a settler who with his family has pressed into the aboriginal territory of the Uru-eu-wau-wau tribe. However, the team is not simply searching for the boy. Its purposes transcend those of specific individuals, forming part of a more global scheme. The team is out to establish contact with the tribe and, ultimately, to bring an end to the frontier.

The cameras wander through the frontier. First they follow the FUNAI (Brazil's Indian Agency) pacification team, boating down the river and slashing through the dense rain forest. Then they follow Chico Prestes on his own mission to find his son, or, if not, perhaps to have vengeance on the "kidnappers." Along the way they encounter Alfredo, a rubber tapper who clashed with the Uru-eu-wau-wau in October 1979, killing six men. This encounter precipitated the Uru-eu-wau-wau attack on the Prestes homestead and the capture of Fábio. We begin to recognize the complexities of the frontier, the interconnectedness among events.

In the frontier town of Ariquemes, Cowell's cameras and microphones capture a different side of life. This is the outpost of "civilization," bursting with frontier expansion, trucks

and cars moving along dirt roads, manufactured products from the cities lining the shops, saloons attracting the marginalia of society. There is resentment in Ariquemes over "the curb on expansion posed by the Indians," and Cowell's evenhanded approach allows us to understand that fact.

Cowell provides us with film portraits of the colorful figures of Brazil's frontier: the settler, the rubber tapper, and the FUNAI agent. Cowell even encounters an illegal band of tin prospectors, and he somehow manages to film them. Through his skillful interviewing, we learn of a clash between the prospectors and a group of Uru-eu-wau-wau. We try to imagine what it must be like for the Indians, what their vision of these intruders is, yet the camera has no way of penetrating into their world, not yet.

Part 2, "The Blazing of the Trail," is framed by haunting images of destruction, flames devouring the once-towering rain forest, as settlers slash and burn the area for farms. The camera is in a plane observing the progress of Rondônia 429, a road cut halfway across the jungle, an area roughly the size of Holland. It is the rainy season of 1981, and the camera takes us to the very end of this road. Ahead stretches the vast Amazonian wilderness. Yet just three kilometers beyond the road's end, as the camera pans, we see Uru-eu-wau-wau plantations. This isolated tribe is on the fringe of the world system, and it is destined to be pulled in and transformed by it.

FUNAI has established a post at Alto Lídia in the center of Uru-eu-wau-wau territory, an elevated plateau accessible only by bush plane. Earlier, the Indians had cut up the presents that were left for them, and now they attack the FUNAI post. Yet one of them allows himself to be seen, and Cowell captures on film this first image of an Uru-eu-wau-wau. The Indians seem to be toying with the possibility of peaceful contact.

Sixty kilometers away, colonists are streaming into the forest at a rate of 70,000 per year, each having received a title to 50 ha of land (100 ha is equal to 1 km²; 1 ha is equal to 2.471 acres) from the government, which is encouraging settlement in the region. Cowell provides such background information through narration, as we take in images of the frontier. However, his primary method is essentially anthropological. He allows the actors in this drama to speak for themselves, and he endeavors always to look for the general in the particular, to see large-scale events in terms of the minutia of everyday life. So we follow the progress of one colonist, Renato and his family, with whom the film crew stayed for two years. We see them go about the business of

clearing and planting, as they talk of their enthusiasm, of how much better life is now that they have their own land.

Some of the forest that has been cut down is mahogany, and it is destined for export to Germany. Cowell here begins to unravel the mechanics of the world system. The governor of Rondônia plays a key role in the colonization program. The government has provided minimum price supports to the settlers, and the governor speaks of an "export highway," which must be paved. Cameras show the vast caravans of trucks stalled on the dirt roads during the rainy season.

One hundred kilometers away at the FUNAI post in Alto Lídia, the Uru-eu-wau-wau have made their first peaceful visit, which lasts some 20 minutes. Cowell captures this on film, the cameras peeking out from within the FUNAI huts. We see the Uru-eu-wau-wau made suspicious by the sound of a FUNAI radio that has been left running within. The Indians are wary of the contact, suspecting that something untoward might come from it. From our vantage point, deep within the world system, we sense that they are right.

Meanwhile, the global events unfold. The World Bank has made its funding of the Rondônia settlement project, known as Polonoeste, conditional on the safeguarding of aboriginal rights. The progress of Rondônia 429 through Uru-eu-wau-wau territory has been temporarily halted, the road closed by order of the Brazilian Minister of the Interior. Events thousands of miles away affect this seemingly remote frontier region.

The cameras go back to Renato and his family. His crops have not grown and despair has set in. The soil is infertile, virtually useless for agricultural purposes. By 1983, the film crew following Renato's family came to believe that the destruction of the frontier had been for nothing. The Uru-eu-wau-wau had contracted an epidemic of coughing. There are similarities here to the plight of the Suruí Indians, who had been contacted and decimated by disease ten years earlier. Now Renato is forced to abandon his land, and to begin working as a sharecropper for someone who has acquired a more fertile plot.

Part 3, "In the Ashes of the Forest" explores this colonization process. Who are the colonists? Where did they come from and why? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the colonization? Are there alternatives? Cowell's approach here is more analytical, less story-oriented. Yet the result is equally as compelling.

He chooses as his spokesman Brazilian environmentalist José Lutzenberger, a professor

at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. Lutzenberger believes that the colonization program is a mistake, and Cowell documents his reasons for subscribing to this belief. We must see the colonization in a broader historical light, and so the film takes us back to the 19th century, to the colonization of southern Brazil by European immigrants.

The connection is not merely analogical. Thanks to government incentives, large-scale capitalist agriculture began to take hold in Rio Grande do Sul. The small farmers were displaced, many of them migrating to Paraná, where the process was repeated. This last process has provided the driving force behind the recent push into the western Brazilian state of Rondônia. So it is the actual grandchildren of the original immigrants who have themselves migrated to Rondônia, searching for a better life. Cowell's camera captures this migration process, as the settlers board buses in Paraná, full of expectations, making the long journey to the Amazonian jungle.

These are good, decent people, as Cowell's sympathetic portrayal makes apparent. Upon their arrival in Rondônia, they are given title to plots of land, and Cowell's camera shows them standing in line, receiving vaccinations as part of the government program. There is much government rhetoric heralding the arrival of a new day. Optimism dominates as the colonists look forward to their future.

But does the government know what it is doing? Are things in control, as they seem to be, or is the Polonoeste project an ill-conceived effort by the government to gain popular support? The government has carved up a jungle the size of England into rectangular blocks of equal size. No provision has been made for the actual lay of the land. Some plots provide access to water, others do not. No account has been taken of the variation in soil.

Worse still, Lutzenberger contends, there has been no attempt to determine a rational strategy for the exploitation of the Amazonian rain forest. Anthropologists will recognize in this another problem: no account has been taken of the "culture" of the immigrants. These people have their traditional ways of doing things, their traditional system. Naturally, they endeavor to replicate that system in the new ecozone in which they find themselves. Unfortunately, according to Lutzenberger, that traditional system is maladaptive.

The colonists wish to cut down and clear the land. Yet, as Lutzenberger describes, most of the nutrients in this tropical rain forest are in the forest canopy, not in the soil. The *caboclos*, descendants of the Indians who once inhabited all of Amazonia, have tree plantations. An

entire family can live off of one hectare of land. The immigrant family, endeavoring to plant crops, cannot live off of five. Similarly, the attempt of settlers to raise cattle is futile. Only two or three cattle can be grazed on a hectare of land, for a yield of some few kilograms of meat per year. The fish of Amazonia's vast river system are capable of supplying protein at an incomparably higher rate.

There is also the question of rubber tapping, which, Lutzenberger claims, is a viable endeavor in Amazonia. It is conservative, preserving the rain forest, and yet it is productive. A rubber tapper can earn as much as the best-paid factory workers. Despite this, Brazil imports two-thirds of the rubber it uses. Cowell's cameras document in detail the rubber-tapping process, and we see on screen the contrasts that Lutzenberger describes.

There are clearly larger-scale social forces at work, forces that are determining the fate of Amazonia. It is not simply a question of the Brazilian government's need to provide a livelihood for its starving masses, to provide shelter for the homeless. There are the constraints of a global capitalist system, and the need to produce for export. The Brazilian government must shape its policies to conform with the facts of a larger world order. Or must it? This is the question Cowell leaves in our minds.

Part 4 consists of two parts, "The Mechanics of the Forest" and "The Storms of the Amazon." Both endeavor to assess the ecological impact of the devastation of Amazonia. Most researchers agree that the decade of the 1980s will be decisive, if the present rate of deforestation continues. The rate of transformation is almost as alarming as the fact of destruction itself. Amazonia contains one-fifth of the world's forest, one-sixth of its fresh water, one-tenth of all the species on earth. What will its devastation mean?

It is this question that Cowell addresses in Part 4. Here the focus is on scientific research. The camera crew travels to an Amazonian research station some 100 km north of the city of Manaus. There, a team of biological researchers has engaged in a two-year study of the effects of deforestation. We seem to be in the midst of an endless, dark rain forest. Yet, as aerial shots reveal, these are only tiny blocks left in the middle of three huge ranches, which have been largely deforested.

The metaphors of cogs and wheels, suggesting the interconnectedness of the Amazonian ecosystem, recur. How many cogs can be lost before the entire system collapses? The researchers document the habits of various wondrous species. We have sometimes incongruous images, such as that of a bird being

tracked by means of a complicated electronic device. The researchers describe the "system," one species feeding on the next. As the size of the rain forest decreases, various of the larger species die out. This in turn effects a disruption of the entire system.

In "The Storms of the Amazon," we begin to see some of the global climatic consequences of the destruction of Amazonia. Here, the research makes for particularly striking footage, as we see various computer simulations and other representations of the process intermixed with footage of the rain forest storms themselves.

Trees are critical to the formation of clouds in Amazonia. Studies show that 25% of all rain evaporates back into the atmosphere from the forest canopy itself, 50% is returned to the atmosphere through the roots, and only 25% washes into the river system, whence it is dumped into the Atlantic ocean. This represents a mutual interdependence. The trees make possible the evaporation of rain water, and hence the formation of clouds; the clouds produce rain that in turn allows the trees to grow. Studies show that 200 km inland from the mouth of the Amazon extensive deforestation has occurred. This deforestation has already produced an effect on the climatic patterns. Evidently, destruction of the Amazonian forest would mean a transformation in the rain cycle.

There are other linked effects of deforestation. For example, without the cloud cover and forest canopy, annual mean temperatures would rise, making the Amazon Basin a veritable earthly inferno. These changes form the central focus for Cowell's "The Storms of the Amazon." The devastation of Amazonia will lead almost certainly to changes in the climatic patterns throughout Brazil. Some of these changes can be observed already. In the long run, the devastation of Amazonia will affect the global weather system.

At the same time, because Amazonia contains one-fifth of the world's forest greenery, its deforestation will have consequences as well for the very composition of the atmosphere. Trees produce oxygen and use up carbon dioxide. As Amazonia is deforested, the ratio of carbon dioxide to oxygen in the atmosphere will change. Indeed, studies show that the amount of carbon dioxide has already been increasing at a rate of 1% every three years.

Despite these potential consequences, mass destruction of the Amazonian ecosystem continues at alarming rates. It is estimated that an area roughly equal in size to Portugal is deforested each year in Amazonia. Cowell has

correctly entitled his documentary series. If deforestation continues at present rates, the 1980s will witness the decimation of Amazonia as we know it. This is truly the "decade of destruction."

Cowell's documentary is filmically compelling, analytically brilliant. The photography is typically stunning, from the exotic Amazonian nature shots to the almost portraitlike studies of individual participants in this vast drama. The editing is skillful and the films move ineluctably to their conclusion. There are some portentous scenes, and some symbolic ones—for example, the shots of colonists actually walking into the forest. The music is employed artfully to effect mood changes accompanying the narrative. Most of it is popular Brazilian music, such as the Brazilian settlers themselves actually listen to on portable radios. The only exception is the integrating theme, which effects a sense of mystery and forboding. While the films were made for a television audience, there is nothing unsophisticated to be found in them.

The films will be of interest to the scholarly community generally, but especially to those engaged in research on the world system, on development, on cultural ecology, on Latin American peasantry, and on South American Indians. They will be particularly useful as a classroom tool, and, indeed, one can imagine constructing an entire course around them. "The Decade of Destruction" is so impressive—simultaneously moving and yet always analytical—that justice cannot be done to it in a single review. This is the kind of documentary that deals with one of the great problems of the modern world, one, moreover, to which the relevance of anthropology is obvious. It should not be missed.

Gui Dao—On the Way: A Station on the Yangzi. 1980. A film by *George Dufaux*. 59 minutes, color. Purchase \$775, rental \$60 from Documentary Educational Resources, 5 Bridge St., Watertown, MA 02172 (617/926-0491).

Women in China Today. 1983. Produced by *Nippon A-V Productions*. 46 minutes, color. For purchase or rental inquire with Nippon A-V Productions (NAV), 6-27-27 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160, Japan (03/204-0111).

Wuxing People's Commune. 1978. A film by *Boyce Richardson* and *Tony Ianzelo*. 56 minutes, color. Purchase \$775 (16mm), \$400 (video), rental \$60 from Documentary Educational Resources, 5 Bridge St., Watertown, MA 02172 (617/926-0491).

Small Happiness: Women of a Chinese Village. 1984. Produced by *Richard Gordon*, *Kathy Kline*, and *Dan Sipe*, and directed by *Carma Hinton* and *Richard Gordon*. Color, 58 minutes. Purchase \$800 (16mm), \$480 (video), rental \$90 (16mm), \$75 (video) from New Day Films, 22 Riverview Dr., Wayne, NJ 07470 (201/633-0212).

CHARLOTTE IKELS
Case Western Reserve University

Gui Dao—On the Way depicts life at a railway station in Wuchang, 240 km south of Beijing. This film is extremely slow paced and seems aimed at the junior high school student. The narrator speaks simply and deliberately, and much of the movie serves as an orientation for those of us about to take our very first train ride. We learn how to buy a ticket (by height rather than age when discriminating between a child and an adult), how to sit correctly on the benches in the waiting room (backs straight, feet on the floor), how to arrange our luggage (in straight rows right in front of us), and how to line up to board the train (by reserved seat and car number).

The pace quickens when we attend a party for a retiring railway worker. Since this film was shot when it was still fashionable for railway stations to sport enormous portraits of Chairmen Mao and Hua, the supervisor at this formal gathering delivers a routine speech praising the socialist system, the party leadership, and Chairman Mao for making possible the expansion of the national rail system. Then accompanied by a drum and cymbal playing group of musicians, the retiree is marched through the station and up onto an open truck, which drives to his home.

The second half of the film describes the orientation program for four new workers, one of whom is the 19-year-old daughter of the man who has just retired. They try on their new uniforms, scrupulously clean up their table in the workers' cafeteria, and successfully complete their final examination (drawing the national railway network from memory in 14 minutes). Train buffs will be disappointed with this film, as it focuses exclusively on the social happenings at the station. We never actually board a train or go to the train yard to investigate the technical state of the art.

Women in China Today was produced by a Japanese company working closely with the Wuxi Branch of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. Wuxi, 130 km west of Shanghai, is beautifully presented, but this production is otherwise seriously flawed by superficiality, sentimental-