Part II
Looking at Individual Films

Chapter 12
First Encounters: An Essay on *Dead Birds* and Robert Gardner

Charles Musser

One makes a film for its own sake—less as a message than as a testament to what one has seen and what one cares about. Sometimes it is enough to know that the connections are there in the body of the work, available to those who may someday discover them.

—David MacDougall

Nothing is more important than learning to think crudely.

—Bertolt Brecht

The vast majority of films we see only once—or not at all; however, we also find ourselves having repeated and often deepening encounters with a much smaller number over time. Such has been the case for me with Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds* (1963)—even as the documentary itself has accumulated an odd combination of criticism and kudos that have produced its somewhat peculiar canonical status. Its June 2014 Wikipedia page is exemplary. The Internet encyclopedia notes that the Library of Congress selected the picture for the National Film Registry in 1998, follows this information with a brief synopsis, and concludes with a more lengthy detailing of the film's apparent shortcomings.[1] In general, analyses of *Dead Birds* fail to provide adequate historical context. Nor do they explore the film's positive achievements by integrating a sympathetic approach with one that is also critically engaged. With this need for critical sympathy in mind, I offer an investigation of *Dead Birds* and its maker through a series of first encounters, which serve as useful markers for what needs to be said.

Jay Leyda's Film Course

My first film course was a Yale seminar taught by Jay Leyda in the fall of 1970. It was a graduate offering in American studies, entitled "Problems and Methods in American Film History." I was an interloping undergraduate—an impressionable sophomore whose initial interest in cinema came from designing posters and then projecting films for the Yale Film Society.[2] In a small basement screening room, Jay showed us an eclectic array of motion pictures that were designed to challenge our assumptions about cinema and its history. I don't remember if he consistently paired films in counterpoint, but one memorable duo was Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau's *The Sky Above—The Mud Below* (English-Language version of *Le Ciel et la boue*, 1961) and Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds*. Both films were shot in Dutch New Guinea (now West Papua, Indonesia) within a short time of each other. Although my classmates and I were all novice film students, we were immersed in political turmoil both on and off campus, and at least in this instance fully capable of some basic crude thinking. Superficial similarities underscored profound differences. Gardner's documentary left us deeply impressed by its originality, respectful immersion in Dani culture, and relevance to our immediate political climate.

If those classroom screenings involved my first encounter with one of Gardner's documentaries, they were my last encounter with anything by Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau until I decided that it was finally time to revisit this pairing for this essay.[3] Where might that moment of crude thinking take us if reexamined today? *The Sky Above—The Mud Below* was a presentation by Joseph E. Levine, Hollywood's master of movie exploitation, and he doubtless played a crucial role in engineering the picture's 1962 Academy Award for the best documentary. A theatrical release soon followed, and the picture was enthusiastically received by reviewers in the daily press. *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther hailed the feature as "an exciting account of an expedition into previously unexplored wilds of Netherlands New Guinea," remarking that "Watching its real-life illustration of rugged white men in long dugout canoes, propelled by naked black natives, pushing up a muddy river into the heart of an unmapped tropical region populated by stone-age savages, brings upon one a bold awareness of the incongruities of this world in which we live."[4] John L. Scott of the *Los Angeles Times* found it "without question one of the best film documents of its kind ever made."[5]

Leyda showed us *The Sky Above—The Mud Below* at the very moment that D.A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* (1967) and Albert and David Maysles' *Salesman* (1968) were the kind of documentaries that were then being shown by Yale's many undergraduate film societies. *The Sky Above* was shot in 35mm color but without synch-sound. Nevertheless, it was not the film's retrograde technology that disturbed us so much as its retrograde genre. It seemed a direct continuation of safari-adventure films such as Osa and Martin Johnson's *Congorilla* (1932) and *Baboona* (1935). In fact, the Johnsons began their motion picture career with the documentary *Among the Cannibal Isles of the South Pacific* (1918). Levine's movie presentation also possessed the sensibility of the Italian "shock documentary" *Mondo*

Cane (*A Dog's World*, 1962), which appeared on the heels of *The Sky Above* and recycled some footage from Gaisseau's success.[6]

Immersed in a Vietnam-era assessment of First-World/Third World power relations, our seminar found *The Sky Above—The Mud Below* to be infuriating and easily critiqued. As Europe's colonial empires are collapsing around them, seven French and Dutch men fly over the Arctic and ultimately land in primitive New Guinea in search of adventure. The filmmakers hire sixty-three Muyu porters to carry their food and heavy equipment through the unknown jungles and across the rivers of their journey. Before journey's end, their thirst for adventure causes the deaths of three porters. Our European protagonists are constantly surrounded by savages, many of whom—it is emphasized—are headhunters, cannibals, and/or pygmies. Gaisseau's narration constantly emphasizes the bizarre and horrifying customs of these people who "live in the stone age," as his crew witnesses terrifying rituals never before seen by the white man. Through camera work, editing, and narration, the filmmakers emphasize their own vulnerability and the natives' collective barbarity—concocting a delicious nightmare that momentarily intrudes into our cinematic dreams.

Not surprisingly, *The Sky Above—The Mud Below* essentially dropped out of motion picture history. It goes unmentioned in Erik Barnouw's *Documentary: A History of Nonfiction Film* (1974) and similar historical overviews.[7] Books and articles on ethnographic film mention it only in passing if at all. Karl Heider remarks that many of the scenes were obviously staged, reducing their value as documents.[8] His limited critique further underscores the film's disturbing politics and hypocrisies. Purportedly dangerous savages were in fact more or less cooperative actors. And yet, when the film had its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1961, *Variety*'s Gene Moskowitz, who ran the trade journal's Paris office, concluded his rave review, "this subject can take its place among the many outstanding documentaries in filmic history."[9]

Although a comparative viewing of *The Sky Above—The Mud Below* and *Dead Birds* was an experience Leyda's students shared with other moviegoers, we gave little thought to the relationship between the two documentaries in terms of their production.[10] Nor was this an obvious oversight, because Gardner was in New Guinea well before the Cannes premiere of *The Sky Above*. The Gardner expedition may have been aware of Gaisseau's effort (the number of filming expeditions in Netherlands New Guinea was obviously small), but one could safely assume that Gardner did not see the film until his return. Except that this assumption proves to be wrong. In a recent publication, Gardner reveals that,

> *The Sky Above, the Mud Below* (*Le ciel et la boue*) burst upon my consciousness late in 1960, when I saw it prior to its release in 1961, just as I was planning the trip I would make to New Guinea (now West Papua) to study and film an indigenous group of people. For me, and for its time, *Le ciel et La boue* was an amazing visual account of a journey on foot from the southern to the northern coast of New Guinea, with special attention paid to coming-of-age ceremonies practiced by people living on the Asmat Coast in the south. I was tempted to abandon everything, journey forth, and start making a film.

> I had never seen anything quite like this work by Domenic [sic] Gaisseau. What it showed me remains vividly present and real—despite the fact that roofs of houses were removed to provide light for interior shooting. . . .It was simply and impressively riveting in the way movies can be, and it is how all filmmakers hope their films will turn out.[11]

The strong connection was easier to accept than Gardner's enthusiasm, given the profound differences in approach evidenced by the two films. This may not be quite such a mystery if we remember that *The Sky Above* has two sections: in the first, Gaisseau visits the Asmat. Here we see the disconcerting spectacle of men wearing human skulls as ornaments, but Gaisseau also shows more conventional art work, which fascinated Gardner, as one might expect given his two previous films, *Blunden Harbour* (1951), about the Kwakiutl of British Columbia (more accurately known as the Kwakwaka'wakw) who were once famous for their elaborate woodworking and weaving, and *Mark Tobey* (1952), a portrait of the painter.[12] From today's perspective the basis for such interest can be readily grasped by flipping through the museum catalog *Asmat: Perception of Life in Art* (2002).[13] This portion of *The Sky Above* had a powerful enough effect on Gardner that he made a visit to the Asmat and seriously considered filming there before traveling to the Baliem Valley and meeting with the Dani. When I questioned Gardner about *The Sky Above*'s second section, involving the trek through the Central Highlands, he acknowledged something he had left unmentioned in the introduction to his "Asmat Journal" entries: that "I was very distressed by his film. A very high price was paid when he under-dressed or didn't dress his porters for highland travel. It was a thoughtless set of arrangements."[14]

Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau

Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau

My assessment of *The Sky Above—The Mud Below* (with my classmates in 1970 and again more recently) is so at odds with its reception at the time that it demands further explication. Who is this Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau? And how did Gardner come to see an early preview of the film? Answering the second question helps to answer the first one. Gardner had fostered a relationship with Alan Lomax, who would later appear as a guest on his television program *Screening Room* in August 1975.[15] Gaisseau was also a longtime friend of Lomax and "left in Lomax's research collection many unpublished films and sound recordings he had made on his expeditions to unknown and little known parts of the world."[16] *The Sky Above* was edited in the U.S., and when there was a New York screening Lomax alerted Gardner, who came down. In the process the two met.[17]

In the mid-1950s, Gaisseau was described as "a professional adventurer and explorer."[18] Born in 1923 to a well-to-do French family living near the Belgian border, Gaisseau fled to southwest France as the Germans invaded. According to the Gaisseau biography on the Lomax foundation website,

> His arrival more or less coincided with the spectacular discovery of the prehistoric cave paintings at nearby Lascaux by four teen-age boys and their dog on September 12, 1940. One of the boys, Marcel Ravidat, lived next door to Pierre and gave him an unauthorized tour of the caves. The following year, Gaisseau assisted Collège de France professor l'Abbé Breuil in his researches at the site. It was the formative experience of Gaisseau's life: the revelation of a prehistoric world sparked a lifelong interest in ethnography and man's origins that he would later explore more fully in Africa, South America, and New Guinea. Also, it was while working at Lascaux that he met the people who started him on his career as filmmaker.[19]

After the war, Gaisseau worked as a cameraman on an expedition to the Congo sponsored by the Musée de l'Homme and then as a key member of Alain Gheerbrant's team, which explored the origins of the Amazon River, and produced a descriptive study, a photo-book, and a 93-minute documentary, *Des Hommes qu'on appelle sauvages*, directed by Jean Richter, Gaisseau's brother-in-law, which debuted in Paris theaters on July 25, 1952.[20] The phenomenon of multiple products generated by this expedition was hardly new: explorers and adventurers such as Robert Flaherty, Osa and Martin Johnson, and Ernest Shackleton had done this before the war. Norwegian Thor Heyerdahl, of *Kon Tiki* fame, had continued the tradition in the postwar era. It would continue to be characteristic of future documentation efforts by Gaisseau—and the Harvard Peabody expedition to New Guinea.

The prestige of the Gheerbrant expedition gave Gaisseau the opportunity to generate his own. As Susan Tobin recounts, "In 1951, Pierre Gaisseau was the first recipient of the Prize of the Société des Explorateurs et des Voyageurs Français. That year he traveled to Guinea, Africa."[21] Jean Rouch saw Gaisseau as a notable member of a French "school of film making Africanists":

> Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau made a series of ethnographic films on the Toma, Bassari and Nalou peoples; entitled respectively *The Sacred Forest* (first version 1953), *Pays Bassari* and *Naloutai.* Thereafter, Gaisseau again went out with two European companions and all three were initiated into the secret society of the Tomas. The full-length version of *The Sacred Forest* tells the story of their exploits, their gradual acceptance by the members of the Tomas' society, their tattooing, their retreat into the forest and the purification rites, and their final failure to enter the sacred forest, after which, ill and discouraged they gave up. This film, to which a number of ethnologists objected (on the grounds that initiation was the surest way of losing the objectivity required for scientific observation) nevertheless presented something entirely new: for the first time on the screen, we witnessed an attempt, hopeless perhaps but testifying to unbounded respect, to penetrate to the very heart of an African culture.[22]

The initial documentary short, *Forêt sacrée* (1953), won first prize at the 1953 Basel Film Festival. For the film's expanded version Gaisseau returned with painter and poet André Virel, Jean Richter—serving as cinematographer and soundman—and French photographer Tony Saulnier. Released in July 1955, it was endorsed by André Bazin among other French critics.[23] In fact, *Forêt sacrée* (1955) and Jean Rouch's *Mâitres Fous* (1955) offer an interesting pairing even though their filmmaking methods are quite different.

A sixty-four-minute English-language version of *Forêt sacrée*, released in the United States as *Gri-Gri* (1956), was poorly received.[24] Nevertheless, it played intermittently in theaters, as the second half of a double bill, into 1959. It even appeared briefly at Boston's Trans-Lux Theater in 1957.[25] Gardner, then working on *The Hunters*, might have gone to see it "on a lark."[26] Gaisseau also wrote *Forêt sacrée: Magie et rites secrets des Toma* (Albin Michel, 1953): Saulnier provided most of the photographs for the book, which was quickly translated and published in English.

On his next adventure, Gaisseau traveled as a duo with Saulnier to Australian New Guinea, arriving there in January 1955. They were commissioned by *Paris Match* and other magazines for potential photo essays, but their main achievements were once again a book and a short film. Gaisseau's book *Visa pour la préhistoric* (1957), accompanied by Saulnier's illustrations, was quickly translated into English as *Visa to the Prehistoric World* (1957). Like *Sacred Forest*, it is a personal, almost diaristic account of their encounters with the local peoples and their ways of living. Eager to strike out beyond areas of European influence and government control, Gaisseau became interested in the fighting between neighboring tribes and its resonances with modern-day conflict:

> We did not attempt to take part in an actual battle, and had no expectations of ever witnessing scenes such as those described by the interpreters: two rows of warriors standing face to face some distance apart, and hurling insults until their anger has reached a homicidal intensity.
>
> Apart from these essential verbal preliminaries, the underlying causes of their battle are the same as the reasons for war everywhere else, struggles for property and for riches, which in these parts are as basic as their weapons of destruction: a patch of land, a pig or a woman. Only a few millennia separate their wars from ours, and as soon as we have taught them how to reduce the infant mortality rate and extend their lifespan, we shall doubtless find them only too keen to learn about the blessings of nuclear fission and fusion.[27]

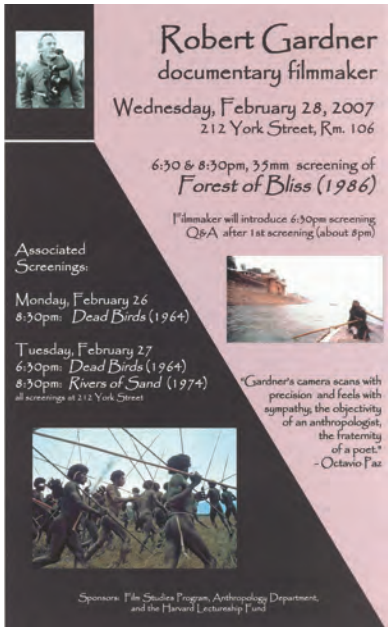
The accompanying documentary, Gaisseau's *Survivants de la préhistoire* (*Survivors of Prehistory*), is a nineteen-minute color short that won a first prize at the 1956 Venice Film Festival.[28] Again, much of the film seems carefully orchestrated. In the opening scene the men are dressed in their most elaborate and barbaric finery. They are shown preparing for ritual warfare and running to meet the enemy, but warfare itself is not shown. In many respects Olivia Cooper Hadjian, a reviewer for Kritikat.com, prefers it to Gaisseau's Oscar-winning counterpart, noting: "His more moderate flamboyance and sensationalism make it a less uncomfortable vision. It is however still not anthropology itself."[29]

The success of *Visa to the Prehistoric World* and *Survivants de la préhistoire* precipitated an entirely new full-length feature as producer René Lafuite of Adrennes Films funded a return to New Guinea. Gaisseau, Saulnier, and four other Europeans embarked on a new adventure, and the result was Gaisseau's documentary *Le Ciel et la boue*. Better funding, a longer length, and a larger crew created pressures to produce something more sensational—something that would justify the costs. In fact, costs soon exceeded their resources, and the production company went bankrupt. Arthur Cohn, who worked with Joseph Levine, acquired the international rights. Meanwhile, Saulnier also authored the photo book *Les Papous Coupeurs De Têtes; 167 Jours Dans La Préhistoire* (1961). Its English-language edition, *Headhunters of Papua* (1963), is an elaborately illustrated book that integrates photos (many in color) with text in roughly equal proportions. Saulnier offers a first-person account of their horrific ordeal, in which natural elements rather than the local headhunters proved to be the real antagonists. (In this respect, his storytelling was similar to the accounts of expeditions by Ernest Shackelton, Robert Scott, and Gaisseau among the Toma, in which explorers' sufferings more than actual discoveries serve as the basis for their heroism.) While Saulnier notes that "we never met any Papuans who were not pleasant to us," the reverse cannot be said. Saulnier and Gaisseau had been in the highlands of New Guinea before and had experienced frigid weather firsthand. Did financial difficulties lead to unjustified cost cutting? One way or the other, as Robert Gardner has noted, they did not properly clothe their sixty-three porters. Three of them died as a result—and it is on this note that Saulnier concludes his elegant photo book.

The specter of death did not entirely escape the Gardner expedition, either. In focusing on ritual warfare and the killings that resulted, death pervades *Dead Birds.* Some Christian missionaries thought it was the responsibility of the Harvard Peabody Expedition to stop the warfare, not film it.[30] Yet it was not these Dani deaths that garnered international attention. One member of the Harvard Peabody expedition was recent Harvard undergraduate Michael Rockefeller. Like Gardner (and Gaisseau), Rockefeller became fascinated with the Asmat and their art: after the expedition concluded and he returned to Cambridge, Rockefeller embarked on his own journey to New Guinea, where he died when his boat overturned and he tried to swim for shore.[31] Many associated this tragic accident with the Gardner expedition, including Joseph E. Levine. He became interested in *Dead Birds* as a theatrical documentary that could be sensationalized and made suitable for commercial exploitation by incorporating Rockefeller's participation and subsequent death as part of the film. This was something Gardner unequivocally rejected even though it meant that screenings of the film would be primarily limited to nontheatrical venues. Nevertheless, *Dead Birds* and the death of Rockefeller were often conflated: *Variety*'s review of the film begins "Excellent documentary, in the making of which Michael Rockefeller lost his life."[32]

When Robert Gardner Finally Came to Yale

Even before I completed my undergraduate degree, I moved to New York City and began working in the film industry, eventually making two of my own documentaries. I also pursued a PhD in film studies and began teaching. After returning to Yale as an assistant professor in 1992, I waited patiently for Yale's Department of Anthropology to bring Robert Gardner to campus. When this failed to materialize, I finally extended an invitation



for Gardner to screen three of his documentaries in February 2007: *Dead Birds*, *Rivers of Sand* (1974), and *Forest of Bliss* (1986). I wanted to acknowledge a certain debt as well as give students an experience parallel to my own from earlier days. This proved to be another first encounter: the first time Gardner had been invited to show his films at Yale.

The Yale-Harvard rivalry is well known, but normally relegated to the football field. Although academic interactions are typically more friendly, I gave little further thought to this mild case of bad manners until very recently when I had a chance encounter with Leopold J. Pospisil, professor emeritus In Yale's Department of Anthropology.

Now in his nineties, Pospisil wandered into the film studies program office just as I was beginning work on this chapter. He had shot some film in Netherlands New Guinea and was interested in preserving it. I soon learned that my emeritus colleague had lived with the Kapauku Papuans for a year in 1954–1955, during which he shot a substantial amount of footage. His research was for a dissertation, completed in 1956 and then published in 1958 as *Kapauku Papuans and Their Law*. Pospisil has been known for "his insistence upon an extensive knowledge of the language of the culture, his incomparable fieldwork, his holistic approach and his attention to definition and detail."[33] His initial study takes a rigorously descriptive, scientifically oriented approach, analyzing a wide range of Kapauku behavior including marriage practices, precipitants of frequent warfare, the treatment of elderly and the dead, as well as the nature of good and evil.

Leopold J. Pospisil

Despite Pospisil's interest in visual materials, his book contains only eight pages of photographs relegated to an appendix. These images seem a useful but modest supplement to his efforts at detailed, objective analysis, which is evident in his initial description of the Kapaukuans:

> The males average 151.2 cm., while the average female stands 142.1 cm high. Their heads are brachycephalic, the average index being 80 for males and 81 for females. Their faces are broad (facial index for males 78; facial index for females 76) and their bodies are well proportioned. Heavy brow ridges as well as deeply depressed roots of broad noses with straight bridges and depressed tips lend to the males a fierce look.
>
> This is even more accentuated by the wreath of black beard left growing on the peripheries of the massive jaw and on the angulated zygomatic arches (PL 7, bottom).[34]

Pospisil brought a 35mm still camera and a 16mm silent Bell & Howell motion picture camera with him on his 1954–1955 expedition and shot Kodachrome II color film in both.[35] The anthropologist used this material for his classroom lectures and for public presentations in the illustrated lecture tradition, including screenings in Washington, DC, New York City, and at Harvard, where Gardner saw them. Gardner's document-based account of the making of *Dead Birds* begins with an exchange of letters about Pospisil with Harold Coolidge of the Pacific Science Board, National Research Council. Coolidge expressed his admiration for Pospisil's monograph and then added,

> I understand that he is returning to New Guinea, and I find myself wishing that you, or someone with the kind of knowledge of film technology which you have developed, might accompany him and make a parallel record of primitive Papuans to the one that has been made of Kalahari Bushmen [John Marshall's *The Hunters*, 1957, which Gardner helped edit]. Pospisil, with very limited funds, has made a film of a war between two stone-age villages, which is a unique anthropological record.[36]

Gardner quickly responded to Coolidge:

> I met [Pospisil] about two years ago just after he had returned from New Guinea and saw his war film. It was a valiant effort and is no doubt a valuable document, but there were so many things wrong with it technically that it can never become a film. I don't mean he didn't approach his subject with feeling and knowledge, I mean he used a camera as if it were a flashlight, pointing it in every direction at once, going at the wrong speed, filming subjects at the wrong distance, most everything scrambled and out of focus. It is one of countless instances of a totally unprepared person taking it upon himself to do a complex piece of work.[37]

Gardner may have seen Pospisil's Kapauku films before they were tidied up—and the battle footage condensed. I recently viewed two reels of his now-standard lecture material, which includes scenes shot in 1959 as well as 1954–1955. Much of it focuses on agriculture, but there is footage of food preparation, dances, and a marriage ceremony. The bow and arrow is widely used to kill chickens, pigs—and in warfare. Indeed, the scenes of warfare are highly dynamic as opposing groups stalk their enemy, shoot, and dodge deadly shafts. This fighting does not appear to be staged for the camera and is caught with remarkable intimacy. The film material focuses on the Kapauku; unlike *The Sky Above—The Mud Below*, it is not about Pospisil and his own ordeals or his relationship to the Kapauku. He is invisible in the films, while he or his camera appears in only a few slides. This might seem unsurprising, but like Flaherty, Pospisil taught his subjects how to use the camera and they did at least some of the filming. His presentation of this material lacks a storyline: narrative progression is limited to several opening establishing shots and concluding scenes of his departure by a pontoon plane.

Coolidge's suggestion that Gardner join Pospisil was apparently pursued. Although the experienced anthropologist was initially agreeable, this potential alliance did not materialize for a variety of reasons.[38] One may have been timing. Pospisil returned to New Guinea in the summer of 1959—perhaps sooner than Gardner was ready to depart. But the idea was fundamentally a bad one. The Kapaukus were part of Pospisil's world. Any filmmaking that happened there would necessarily be on his terms. Gardner had already found a similar arrangement to be awkward when, after completion of *The Hunters*, he went with the Marshalls to the Kalahari Desert in 1958 to do more filming of the Ju/'hoansi. It seems unlikely that Gardner would have repeated this mistake. Likewise Pospisil must have been concerned about introducing a number of outsiders into Kapaukuan culture and its impact on his long-term research. He also saw himself as a veteran anthropologist who knew how to survive in primitive and often dangerous conditions, in part due to his wartime experience as a leader in the Czech resistance.[39] From his perspective, he would have been responsible for a group of young, wealthy, inexperienced amateurs who would not respect his authority. Surely they would get into trouble, and he would be blamed. From Gardner's perspective, Pospisil was also a hopeless amateur—an inexperienced, even inept filmmaker.[40]

After ten years working in different capacities as a filmmaker, the thirty-five-year-old Gardner had accumulated substantial experience and was eagerly putting together his own organization, modeled to some extent on the Marshalls' expedition.[41] In Karl Heider he found a Harvard graduate student in anthropology eager to study the Dani, much as Pospisil had studied the Kapauku. This would be a formative experience for both; they would collaborate and work in tandem for years. Undertakings such as theirs are never without risk and are often considered premature or ill-conceived by those who have already gone through similar efforts. Pospisil advised Gardner on what to bring on this expedition, but that was all.[42]

Pospisil's reservations were not confined to the members of the Harvard Peabody expedition. He also had an encounter with Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau, who was interested in using some of his Kapauku footage for *The Sky Above*.[43] This included a scene showing protracted struggle over the marriage of a young girl. The unhappy girl resists the arrangement, but her eager mother insists. Pospisil's reel follows this sequence with his impressive footage of ritual warfare. Gaisseau was accompanied by a colleague with whom he conversed in French, wrongly assuming Pospisil would not understand. Gaisseau envisioned the marriage kerfuffle as the catalyst for subsequent warfare, though the two sequences were unrelated. Pospisil found their private plans to misuse his footage to be profoundly dishonest: thereafter he would have nothing to do with the man.[44]

Pospisil had learned the Kapauku language and become "best friends" with many of the men. Yet his study of the Kapauku involved a high degree of depersonalization and scientific objectification. In this respect he saw Gardner as an amateur anthropologist who refused to submit to the dictates of the discipline.[45] Pospisil's attitude would seem to echo that of Jay Ruby, who has longed for an ethnographic cinema made by anthropologists who had gone through the ordeal of fieldwork and writing a dissertation monograph.[46] Or as Gardner saw these differences in the 1950s:

> Humanistic tendencies. . .were considered soft and were embraced only by an embattled minority. The pursuit of prediction and similar ways of arriving at certainties was just much more appealing. Such, at least, was the prevailing mood those days and, from the start, I struggled to fall in line.[47]

Gardner believed in a practice of anthropology that "revealed the meaning of one's own life as well as or even better than, the meaning of the lives of 'others.'"[48] For Ruby this meant that Gardner's "humanist desire to provide a meditation about mortality clearly took precedence over the need to articulate the details of Dani culture or to adhere to what was actually knowable about the people."[49] Although Ruby seems to have been unacquainted with Pospisil's work with motion pictures, he was doing very much what Ruby had in mind. And yet the Yale anthropologist's publications in the 1960s indicate that he was less and less concerned with visual documentation.[50]

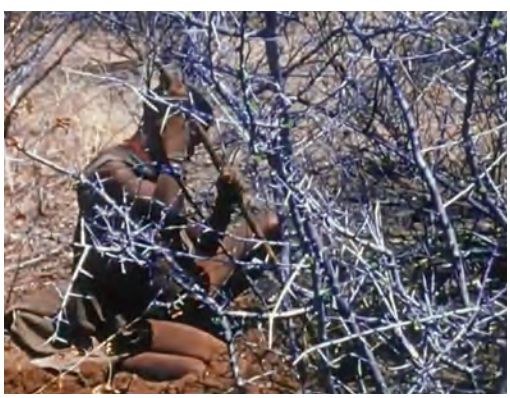
In the end, Gardner chose to live and film not with the Asmat (Gaisseau) and not with the Kapauku (Pospisil), but with the Dani of the Baliem Valley. All three men shot film in the highlands of Western New Guinea within a few years of each other. In making *Dead Birds*, Gardner was reacting against the others' approaches, despite some attraction to them. In this sense they helped to shape his distinctive voice. Documentary history benefits by seeing these three filmmakers together rather than focusing solely on *Dead Birds*. Yet even this context requires still further expansion: as Thomas Elsaesser has remarked, "Papua New Guinea has long been a favorite among anthropologists. . . .From Margaret Mead (*Growing Up in New Guinea*) to Jared Diamond (*The World Until Yesterday*), they have used New Guinea as a foil against which to measure their own cultural pessimism about our civilization's decline."[51] And not only anthropologists but journalists, explorers, adventurers, and political theorists. A fascination with ritual warfare and a characterization of these Papuans as prehistoric or stone-age people were established tropes—not assumptions that were newly created by the Harvard Peabody expedition.

A framework for understanding *Dead Birds* needs to look inward as well—to the multifaceted outpouring of work by the Harvard Peabody Expedition to the Baliem Valley. Peter Matthiessen's book *Under the Mountain Wall: A Chronicle of Two Seasons in the Stone Age* (1962) was the first major product of that expedition and provided a preexisting context for a viewing of *Dead Birds*.[52] The two works share many of the same characters: Weyak is called Weaklekek in the book. A sustained critical comparison has yet to be pursued, although the book provides a much more chaotic picture of diffused violence and constantly changing alliances among clans and even within households. For *Dead Birds*, Gardner focused on the binary opposition between the two warring factions in ways that spoke to Cold War circumstances. The principle behind the Harvard Peabody Expedition was to generate diverse, overlapping points of view—as opposed to a single perspective as was typical with anthropological work done by Pospisil and others. Gardner's and Heider's heavily illustrated *Gardens of War: Life and Death in the New Guinea Stone Age* (1968) was followed by Heider's *The Dugum Dani. A Papuan Culture in the Highlands of West New Guinea* (1970), Heider's study guide: *The Dani of*

West Irian. An Ethnographic Companion to the Film Dead Birds (1972), as well as Heider's two short films *Dani Sweet Potatoes* (1974) and *Dani Houses* (1974).

My First Encounter with Robert Gardner

I first met Robert Gardner when I was invited to give a job talk (my first) at Harvard's Department of Visual and Environmental Studies. It was 1987 to 1988, soon after I had finished my PhD, and I was frankly petrified. In the process, I had a brief exchange with Gardner, who was on the search committee. Did I gauchely confess to him that it was my first visit to the Harvard Film Study Center and Harvard Film Archive? Knowing my own ability to say the awkward thing at the wrong time, I probably did. Although I had done research in other collections at Harvard, this was my first glimpse of the institutional structure where Gardner had worked on a variety of projects over the years, beginning with John Marshall on *The Hunters* and then *Dead Birds*.



Gardner's work on *The Hunters* is generally seen as the immediate precursor and prime influence on *Dead Birds*.[53] Although there are notable similarities between the two films, there are also significant differences. His collaboration on the postproduction of *The Hunters* was an important learning experience for Gardner, but it was also a project that he subsequently worked against in ways not entirely dissimilar from the ways he worked against *Sky Above* and Pospisil's footage of ritual warfare, though his familiarity with *The Hunters* was far more extended and intimate. Both Gardner's and Marshall's films use voice-overs written and delivered by the principal filmmaker. However, there is no narration during the opening three-minute sequence of *The Hunters*—a series of brief shots depicting the northern Kalahari Desert in Southwest Africa, showing its flora and fauna—including five shots of birds and four shots of !Kung hunters. Relatively banal, perhaps intentionally so, they set the scene but do not construct a spatial-temporal unity. The soundtrack alternates between silence and !Kung music taken on location. Marshall's narration only begins after two transitional shots: first, a dissolve to a simple head title; second, an animated map of Southwest Africa, a long-established convention in documentary that is used to establish the location of a distant, primitive people. When the narration finally begins, it provides straightforward information about the !Kung and how they live. The language is expressive and reflects judgments based on observation: for instance, "It is a bitter land where all the trees have thorns." The correspondence between image and narration is quite

literal. The comment about thorns on trees is recited over the third and fourth close-ups of small branches with thorns on them.

These are followed by an establishing shot of a woman who is digging amidst some thorny bushes over which the second piece of narration is delivered: “From the ceaseless labors of women packing and tugging at the land comes most of the people’s food.”

In many respects, *The Hunters* is an illustrated lecture consolidated and standardized as a sound film—close in some respects to what Leopold Pospisil did with his illustrated lecture. (And yet the absence of opening commentary also distinguishes the film from an illustrated lecture.)

The opening of *Dead Birds* is the antithesis of *The Hunters*. The pretitle sequence is one long 37-second panning shot that follows a bird of prey, taken from above, as it flies over the rain forest canopy and some thatched huts (in contrast to the many shots—including those of a hawk-like bird taken from below—in *The Hunters*). This initial shot is accompanied by location sound of the forest and a bird’s cawing. Over the course of this opening the filmmaker tells us, “There is a fable told by a mountain people living in the ancient Highlands of New Guinea about a race between a snake and a bird. It tells of a contest which decided if men should be like birds and die, or be like snakes, which shed their skins and have eternal life. The bird won, and from that time all men, like birds, must die.” Gardner starts with narration, while Marshall began his film in comparative silence. And unlike *The Hunters*’ narration when it begins, Gardner’s opening narration is only indirectly and associatively about what is shown (the bird). From this ethereal shot, Gardner cuts to a Dani funeral and the sounds of mourning. The shift in sound from the cry of a bird to the cries of people is emotionally powerful, and we are immediately immersed into the world of a people very different from us.

In retelling this Dani fable about a bird and a snake, Gardner makes it his own fable as well. Fables are, according to one source, “a form of imaginative literature or spoken utterance constructed in such a way that readers or listeners are encouraged to look for meanings hidden beneath the literal surface of the fiction.”[54] We might ask: What new layer of allegory is added in Gardner’s retelling of the fable—that is, in his film overall? His point, made quite clearly through the film, is that we viewers are like the Dani. Most obviously: not only like the Dani will we die, but we Americans (and Westerners more generally) engage in our own kind of seemingly perpetual warfare that is little different from that of the Dani.[55]

Both *The Hunters* and *Dead Birds* tell stories (the stories of the giraffe hunt and of the major Dani battle we see are both famously composites), but *Dead Birds* is more artistically ambitious. *Dead Birds*’ opening shot sequence of the bird and the parable can resonate with the opening sequence of *The Hunters* with its three shots of a bird of prey: (1) the bird sitting on a barren tree, (2) the bird takes flight, and (3) a panning shot follows the bird in flight. This bird of prey is arguably like the !Kung men whom we see on the prowl looking for food. Both use their wits to survive in this harsh land. (In fact, the hunters will lose one of their kills to vultures later in the film.) The viewer can find an analogy between the men and the birds of prey, but it is more mundane and specific than Gardner’s analogy between human beings and birds.

Like *The Hunters*, *Dead Birds* has a title sequence of two shots. The complete title appears over the first shot of the funeral as the men move a dead man's body to its leafy shroud.[56] The next shot shows a stricken-looking man standing behind and perhaps bracing the dead man, who now is in a sitting position. Over this second shot is the title "A film by Robert Gardner." So in place of the map of the Kalahari, Gardner's name appears. Being by Gardner, it is also about him. Importantly, this credit does not appear against a black background—we see through or beyond Gardner's name to the Dani. In short, he establishes that this film shows the Dani through his point of view. With admirable modesty, John Marshall does not give himself credit until the end of the film. As the opening map suggests, *The Hunters* is about a specific people located in a particular place. (In this regard, it is fitting that Marshall after completion of *The Hunters* went to study anthropology at Yale, where Pospisil had begun to teach.) *Dead Birds* is about the human condition, about what the film's creator has in common with the Dani.

Gardner's First Film: Blunden Harbour

Gardner's first serious encounter with the making of motion pictures resulted in *Blunden Harbour* (1951), a portrait of a small village on the coast of British Columbia inhabited by Kwakiutl Indians and the home of a school of artists, in particular mask-maker Willie Seaweed.[57] *Blunden Harbour* establishes the daily lives of the village residents, who feed themselves from the sea. Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse, one of the few people to write about the film, has suggested that it offers an ahistorical treatment and "an eternal ethnographic present"; but this hardly seems the case.[58] As she notes, the people wear contemporary clothing and use modern-day utensils. Likewise, two men are seine fishing from a small motor-powered boat. As the narration remarks, "Old methods with new tools, old tools with new methods." It gradually becomes apparent that *Blunden Harbour* is about a community of art makers and their art. A scene of women scooping steamed clams from their shells leads to that of a man scraping out the insides of a piece of wood: he is carving a toy boat for a young boy, who then plays with it in the sea. Art emerges out of everyday life. Later we see Willie Seaweed painting a mask. The transition from mask painting to ceremonial dancing with masks is made with a final voice-over: "A way of life, a way of death, a way of dreams, and a way to remember." Thus Gardner indicates a crucial role for art in human culture, one in which the creative efforts revealed by the film speak to Gardner's own efforts at a way of life, a way of dreams, and a way to remember. Twenty-five years later I made my own first film, entitled *An American Potter* (1976)—like Gardner I was also twenty-six years old. In both cases, we used our position as filmmakers to watch more closely and better understand someone who had already found his way in a parallel art. Seaweed and studio potter Gerry Williams had found ways to integrate their artwork into the everyday such that the art itself was neither overly intellectualized nor a direct response to modernity and a sense of alienation in the spirit of modern art. Rather, these artists affirmed a continuity with the past.[59] They were both quiet innovators working out of a long tradition where craft meets art. Making a film about such people was a conscious form of apprenticeship even though we were working in a different artistic modality.

In *Blunden Harbour*, Gardner was concerned with "a way of death," and this was something he returned to again in *Dead Birds*. Indeed the poetically inflected voice-over and cinematic strategies utilized in *Blunden Harbour* would be reworked and refined in

Dead Birds. The opening narration, which recounts a myth or fable about the founding of Blunden Harbour, is a case in point. Gardner uses 140 words in *Blunden Harbour* to tell this story, which is somewhat hard to follow. Gardner tightened the corresponding myth of origins in *Dead Birds* to its essentials, using only sixty-three words. In making *Dead Birds*, Gardner undertook a complex work that far exceeded *Blunden Harbour* in ambition and rigor and yet in important ways also remained faithful to many of its essential elements, in some cases with the well-known edict that "less is more."

Other first encounters and crossings in the year 1951 might be mentioned. This was the year that Gardner's first child, Stewart Gardner, was born (as was I, meaning Gardner has been making films as long as I have been alive). For Gardner, filmmaking and fatherhood coincided—a fact that would inflect many aspects of *Dead Birds*. Interestingly, Robert Flaherty died in 1951, which means that Gardner launched his filmmaking career at the very moment that Flaherty's had forever ended. Gardner never met Flaherty, but has often acknowledged him as an inspiration and influence. However, Flaherty's influence on *Dead Birds* must strike us as complex, particularly when one considers not just *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Moana* (1926), and *Man of Aran* (1934)—documentary studies of various ways of life, with a personal and philosophical inflection—but also his fictional/documentary hybrid *Louisiana Story* (1948), made just three years before *Blunden Harbour*.

Some critics have complained that Gardner is engaged in a problematic pursuit of salvage anthropology, putting *Dead Birds* in a category with *Nanook of the North* and *Man of Aran*, for which Flaherty has been often criticized. Yet the differences between *Dead Birds* and these Flaherty films are essential. Gardner did not revive ritual warfare among the Dani as Flaherty revived the hunting of basking sharks among the Aran islanders. Nor did he convince the Dani to put aside guns and use traditional weapons to kill each other, as Nanook put aside his gun for the harpoon during a walrus hunt. Nor were the Dani asked to revert to anachronistic clothing. Gardner was seeking to document a culture before its sustained encounter with the West. By trading cowrie shells rather than T-shirts for Dani assistance and excluding his crew from the camera frame, he easily maintained this kind of separation. (It is worth recalling that Gardner did not pursue "salvage anthropology" in *Blunden Harbour*, either.) These overstated criticisms overlook the deeper reasons for the separation strategy. By keeping the Dani world in front of the camera separate from the modern world behind it, *Dead Birds* enables allegory and constructs analogies between these two worlds. *Dead Birds* offers a mirror to Western viewers who, witnessing the ritual warfare in New Guinea as presented by Gardner, cannot help but see it in relation to the Cold War and its various local manifestations of violence and mayhem. As Scott MacDonald has commented, "Gardner's focus in *Dead Birds* involves a kind of double consciousness: he is committed to representing the Dani as distinct and separate from his own world—paradoxically so that he can suggest general parallels between their lives and ours."[60] Such unsettling parallels force us to ask what civilization has achieved in terms of our ability to co-exist and live peaceably with our neighbors. If *Nanook of the North* focuses on man's struggle with nature, it is only to implicitly congratulate contemporary civilization on its apparent ability to tame the natural world. The impulse behind *Dead Birds* is quite the opposite.

Dead Birds has a more dynamic relationship with *Louisiana Story*. Both feature a young boy vulnerable to the dangers of his environment, along with an adult male figure. Birds, animals, and nature figure in both films and take on symbolic force. Nevertheless, the two films differ in their depiction of encroaching modernity. The oil company intrudes into the Louisiana Bayou, disrupts nature but also somehow co-exists with it while improving the lives of the local family. Missionaries or the Dutch colonial representatives may be the nearest equivalent in the Baliem Valley. Although Gardner mentions them in extra-textual commentary, seeing them as destructive of the Dani way of life, they had yet to make significant inroads in the area where he worked, and found no role in Gardner's film.[61] In *Louisiana Story* Flaherty explores the encounter between modernity and a more traditional way of life, though his honesty or insight into its long-term impact must be questioned. *Dead Birds* is interested in a traditional way of life before modernity, and while Gardner was personally skeptical of its potential benefits, its arrival would only occur after the filmmaking.

The Critical Landscape

David MacDougall begins his remarkable engagement with Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1986) with the observation, "What we lack are more commentaries on the intellectual underpinnings and creative processes by which films are made."[62] Gardner has suggested that his film work owes an intellectual debt to important contributions of Western thought, ranging from Sigmund Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) to Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) and Clyde Kluckhohn's *Mirror for Man* (1944). Scott MacDonald has helpfully touched on the influence of William James and John Dewey on the methods of Gardner and his associates.[63] Charles Warren, in his chapter for this volume, discusses a more proximate philosophical influence: Stanley Cavell, Gardner's friend and long-time Harvard colleague. My task here has not been to devalue or avoid these factors but rather to focus on a network of influential films and filmmakers against which, or in dialogue with, Gardner made *Dead Birds*.

Unlike my own first encounter with *Dead Birds* in 1970, today's film scholar confronts a plethora of commentaries on the film. Certainly there have been laudatory reviews; but for a documentary that won many awards and is generally recognized as a "classic," the critical landscape is surprisingly, even shockingly negative. The principle defender of the film has probably been Gardner himself, through various comments and his book *Making* Dead Birds*: Chronicle of a Film* (2007). (Interestingly, detractors often find ways to use his statements against the film.) More recently Scott MacDonald has offered a more positive assessment but one that still seeks to balance pros and cons. The problem is that this balance occurs within an unbalanced framework. Visual anthropologist Jay Ruby, Gardner's most persistent and influential critic, has set out the terms of the debate and identified the cast of characters in a Manichean universe where some are found to be ethically progressive (John Marshall, Jean Rouch) while others (Gardner) are mired in darkness. Ruby's nonfiction melodrama has been picked up by others such as Sharon Sherman and Craig Mishler. The sky above and the mud below, indeed!

Ruby remarks:

> At the time Gardner was planning *Dead Birds*, a number of documentary and ethnographic filmmakers were voicing their discontent with the limitations imposed upon them by their equipment and the dominant tradition of dramatic documentaries that imitated Hollywood features. . . .In other words, direct cinema and cinema vérité were being invented at the same time Robert Gardner chose to employ a traditional and, for some filmmakers, an outmoded approach to filming and documentary dramatic structure.[64]

Ruby believes that Gardner should have been more attuned to the state of documentary filmmaking and embraced the latest technological innovations being adopted by Drew Associates at Time-Life and elsewhere. Here Ruby seems to conflate two somewhat distinct issues: first, the use of synchronous location sound; second, the relationship between filmmaker and subject.

It is true that portable synch-sound equipment was beginning to be used before Gardner left for New Guinea, but it was at an extremely early stage of development. The equipment that was needed to support and so implement this emergent method was experimental and imperfect.[65] *Primary*, which follows the contest between Hubert Humphrey and John F. Kennedy, was shot in May 1960, and first televised on Friday evening, July 8 as a run-up to the broadcast of the Democratic Convention.[66] By then Gardner had purchased a Nagra tape recorder for the expedition, about which he was quite protective.[67] By the time that *Primary* received the Robert Flaherty Award in late March 1961, Gardner had been ensconced in New Guinea for over a month.[68]

Ruby's anachronistic criticism of *Dead Birds* may gain the appearance of credibility due to the documentary's postproduction, distribution, and exhibition histories. Although the footage was shot in the course of 1961, the film was only finished in December 1963 and began playing in nontheatrical venues in early 1964. It was not reviewed by *Variety* until March 1965, and even then Gardner lacked a 35mm blow up that would produce the print required for screenings in most commercial theaters.[69] Although synchronous filming had become much more common by then, the technical strategies of *Dead Birds* were not a problem for critics or festival judges (it received the Robert Flaherty Award, the Grand Prize at the Florence Film Festival, and other recognition).

Ruby also criticizes Gardner for post-syncing his sound, which seems ungenerous given the state of film/sound technology in 1961. A close examination of *Primary*, for instance, will quickly reveal the severe limits of synchronous sound at that time. Much of it was "post-synced" as well. In any case, documentary sound is almost never unprocessed and generally mixes synch-sound, which is typically filtered, with various kinds of ambient sound. That is, documentary sound is always constructed and the question is: to what purposes and effect. One of Michael Rockefeller's roles was to take location sound, which was added to the sound track and synchronized to the extent that this was possible to generate a sense of embodied space quite

different than the sound in either *Blunden Harbour* or *The Hunters*. From the first shot of the bird cawing, to the funeral with sounds of mourning, and Weyak humming as he weaves, Gardner enables the viewer to more fully enter into the world of the Dani as we hear sounds that accompany their lives. That is, Gardner uses sound to provide an audio counterpart to the visuals.

If the issue of appropriating a "traditional style" is to be taken seriously, one might productively contrast *Dead Birds* to Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1948), which could be seen as an American neo-realist film and not what we would now consider a documentary. *Louisiana Story* was shot in 35mm black and white and most shots were preplanned (i.e., "directed"). The film's family members were, in fact, not related. Such techniques continued to be used in later documentaries such as Lionel Rogosin's *On The Bowery* (1957) and *Come Back Africa* (1959). In an early "director's statement," Gardner emphasized that "the action was followed, not directed."[70] This would suggest that he shot *Dead Birds* in a cinema verité, observational style even though he lacked synch-sound capabilities. It is true that he shot color while the early Drew films were in black and white. Moreover, he avoided the wobbly camera that is often associated with early American cinema verité. Nevertheless, from a genealogical perspective, as a director/cinematographer, Gardner was working alongside the cinema verité movement rather than in disregard of or opposition to it.

Dead Birds does rely on extensive narration, which cinema verité was reacting against and largely avoiding. However, unlike Gaisseau, Gardner not only wrote the narration, he used his own voice rather than hire a professional narrator. And unlike Pospisil, his narration was carefully constructed and recorded. Given the personal nature of this film, it seems odd to argue, as Jay Ruby has done, that Gardner was following the conventions of Hollywood cinema and had a "need to erase the author and make the narrative structure seamless," showing a "lack of reflexivity."[71] Note that *The Sky Above* is a highly reflexive film: Gaisseau and his film crew are in front of the camera a very large percentage of the time. Gardner's radical act was to remain behind the camera and so make the film about the Dani while not pretending to some elusive objectivity.

Critics of *Dead Birds* too often posit some hypothetical alternative and then demonstrate how Gardner's film falls short of it. Craig Mishler, for instance, feels *Dead Birds* contains "so many subtle fictional pretensions and artistic ornamentations that it has surrendered most of its usefulness as a socially significant document."[72] He focuses considerable attention on the fable of the bird and the snake that Gardner provides in his opening narration. Citing Karl Heider on the subject, he notes that among the Dugum Dani whom Gardner filmed, the conflict between the bird and the snake actually takes the form of an argument rather than a race—though the race version is told by other Dani in the valley. Fair enough. The idea of a race certainly works well with the image of a graceful, fast-moving bird in flight. Gardner makes his choice, for a purpose. Mishler also complains that this opening fable was stripped of its complexity, while, as already suggested, one might with equal justice laud its concision. These are disputes over nuance, and the implied conclusion is that Heider, who spent much more time among the Dani after the filming, learned more about the Dani. One would hope. Need one add that a documentary film and a written text generally do different things—or do different things well?

What Mishler sees as a damning flaw, one could simply find interesting. Filmmakers, ethnographers, and cultural historians are all imperfect constructors of meaning. Their narratives—and our critical insights—can never fully transcend the historical limitations of time, place, and circumstance. Mishler, like Heider, offers worthwhile footnotes to the film, even if Mishler's are made in an ungenerous spirit.

Given that *Dead Birds* appeared at a time when voice-over narration was out of fashion, it is hardly surprising that this element of the film has been frequently criticized. Mishler complains, "There is virtually nothing in the voice-over of *Dead Birds* that is not contained in Heider's ethnography except Gardner's own philosophizing."[73] Filmmakers are not untouched by critical pressures, as Gardner revealed in a 1999 interview in which he confessed to certain reservations about both the text and his reading of it:

> I don't think for a moment that my reading is what I most hoped for the text of *Dead Birds* or for the film for that matter. In fact, in recent years I have been greatly tempted to both rewrite the text and "re-voice" the narration. I have gotten nowhere in accomplishing this task but the desire has not abated.[74]

Few documentary filmmakers like the sound of their own voice, and a reasonable man must be willing to accept some criticisms. Scott MacDonald, an obvious admirer of Gardner's work, picks up on this self-doubt to question the narration in *Dead Birds*, and finds the narration "both awkward and a bit too rote."[75] Going against apparent consensus, I find the documentary's narration to be elegantly written, while Gardner's voicing of this material is perfectly pitched to his images and location sound.[76]

Probing the presumed inadequacies of Gardner's voice-over in *Dead Birds* can nevertheless foster more critically productive efforts, starting with the basic question: "How can we make sense of this film, particularly given Gardner's narration?" Simply put, *Dead Birds* can be seen as a landmark "essay film"—a term that Gardner has increasingly applied to his documentaries and one that Charles Warren also discusses in relation to *Dead Birds* in this collection. Admittedly, the essay film is in many respects a fraught category or genre: what is or is not an essay film depends on the criteria employed and how one approaches the film in question.[77] Certainly the essay film and the documentary overlap substantially. Scott MacDonald shares some of my own hesitations about the term, only using it in passing at the end of *American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary* and not applying it to the work of Gardner or the other filmmakers who are his principal concern. As he explains in a footnote:

> The "essay film" has emerged as the newest category of documentary—or at least a newly popular term for certain types of films roughly analogous to the personal essay in literature. . . .Whereas the information in traditional documentaries is often presented by "voice-of-god narrators" who draw clear and definitive conclusions, essay films tend to rely on the filmmaker's personal observations and ruminations on the topic at hand and are less involved with drawing conclusions or creating a sense of resolution than traditional documentaries.[78]

Ruby and Sharon Sherman criticize *Dead Birds* for employing a "voice of god" narration, even though the film's head titles state that this is "a film by Robert Gardner" and the narration is written and spoken by the man who not only shot and edited the film but organized the expedition. Clearly it is a film that seeks to communicate the understandings and insights Gardner gained from his immersion in the life of the Dani over a sustained period of time. The filmmaker's narration differs from the "voice of god" narration in such documentary classics as Frank Capra's *Prelude to War* (1942), Henry Solomon's *Victory at Sea* (1952–1953), or Roman Kroitor and Colin Low's *Universe* (1960).

The essay film can be contrasted to documentaries that seek to maintain an objective, scientific, or impersonal approach to their subject—whether or not this is actually possible. In "The Essay as Form," T.W. Adorno reflects on the way the essay is a hybrid that is often attacked by those who "react to the situation by fencing up art as a preserve for the irrational, identifying knowledge with organized science and excluding as impure anything that does not fit this antithesis."[79] This observation anticipates complaints that have been leveled against *Dead Birds:* that it involves too much art and not enough ethnography, is too personal and so insufficiently objective and scientific. As Sherman writes, despite her sense of the narration as being of the objective, voice of god type, "Believing his responsibility was to reveal his own interpretation, Gardner viewed the Dani as vehicles for his own philosophical interests and thus violated one of the major ethical concerns of fieldworkers—that of treating others as unique and valuable human beings."[80] Sherman seems to suggest that Gardner's insights into Dani life did the Dani a disservice. As she adds, "In determining what he believed was significant for an audience to see, Gardner structured and edited his footage to make a statement that was not necessarily the same statement that the Dani might have made about their own culture."[81] Sherman is insisting on an imaginary objectivity, an absence of personal expressivity that is ultimately an illusion. In any case it is impossible for an outsider—whether Gardner, Pospisil, or someone else—to make a statement about the Dani that the Dani would themselves make.

The essayistic can also be contrasted with the impulse of many documentary filmmakers to tell a story.[82] Storytelling tends to move us away from the essayistic; and here again, there are complaints that Gardner is just telling a story and "makes the narrative seamless" in the style of Hollywood.[83] *Dead Birds* certainly differs from Pospisil's film presentations, which lack a clear storyline or chronology. (Pospisil's illustrated lecture offers an inventory or cataloging of significant features in Kapauka life.) On the other hand, *Dead Birds* certainly lacks the kind of storyline that structures *The Sky Above*—a group of European men involved in a dangerous quest. Although *Dead Birds* unfolds over time, following a certain logic that often involves cause and effect, little actually changes. The body of the film follows a cycle of violence: as the film begins, the Dugum Dani are one-up when it comes to their murderous rivalry, then with the death of a young boy they are in deficit, until they catch a rival Dani stealing a pig and kill him, returning to a net positive that the enemy will in turn seek to reverse. Gardner uses cross-cutting to propel this narrative forward, interweaving scenes of Weyak with scenes of Pua, scenes of Dani men with Dani women, and the Dani with birds. If the narrative structure is seamless, it is also cyclical and so in some sense static.[84]

The film, moreover, exceeds this circular story in various ways. It is essential to consider the opening and the closing scenes, which frame the unfolding of events. The briefly shown Dani funeral in the two shots of the title sequence is not a proleptic scene of the boy's funeral but that of an adult man—totally unrelated to subsequent events. The final narration, which echoes the opening fable, reflects on Gardner's experiences with the Dani but also what he has been thinking about since, at least, his encounter with the Kwakiutl in *Blunden Harbour*:

> Soon both men and birds will surrender to the night. They'll rest for the life and death of days to come. For each, both awaits, but with the difference that men, having foreknowledge of their doom, bring a special passion to their life. They will not simply wait for death, nor will they bear it lightly when it comes. Instead, they will try with measured violence to fashion fate themselves. They kill to save their souls and, perhaps, to ease the burden of knowing what birds will never know and what they as men, who have forever killed each other, cannot forget.

In fact, the body of the film has explored struggles of life and death among the Dani in ways that exceed the simple narrative unfolding of events. This essayist impulse is not only evident in moments of Gardner's commentary, but also at times in the unorthodox images he offers. For instance, immediately after the title sequence, his commentary introduces Weyak over a twenty-nine-second close-up of Weyak's thigh and a pile of bark string he is using to weave his funeral band. Other short sequences of shots avoid conventional audiovisual matchings, as when Gardner first discusses the towers that guard the frontier while showing images of birds, towers, and trees. There is cross-cutting, but not always in the conventional manner.

In his book-length study of the essay film, Timothy Corrigan characterizes essayist thinking as "a conceptual, figural, phenomenological and representational remaking of a self as it encounters, tests, and experiences some version of the real as a public 'elsewhere.'"[85] This seems consistent with Gardner's purpose: "I seized the opportunity of speaking to certain fundamental issues in human life," he writes. "The Dani were less important to me than those issues. . . .My responsibility was as much to my own situation as a thinking person as to the Dani as also thinking people. I never thought this reflective or value-oriented approach was inconsistent either with my training as a social scientist or [with] my goals as the author of a film. I thought this was especially true as long as I was diligent in the gathering of evidence."[86] As he concludes this short essay, "The film attempts to say something about how we all, as humans, meet our animal fate."[87]

The nature of Gardner's experience and how it is communicated is often criticized from two seemingly contradictory positions. Sherman invokes ethnographic filmmaker Jorge Preloran's assertion that "Gardner didn't like those people [the Dani]; you can tell in his narration."[88] David MacDougall remarks, "It is fair to say that Gardner is not particularly interested in the subjective experience of the Dani for its own sake," even as he goes on to add "although there are moments of intense personal sympathy."[89]

On the other hand, considerable criticism has suggested that Gardner is too interested in the subjective experience of his subjects, particularly in those moments when he tells us what Weyak and Pua are thinking. For instance, in the wake of Weyaké's death, for which Weyak feels some responsibility, "Weyak wonders not only about what he didn't do, but also what he did and why the magic that he made when Puakoloba was strengthened didn't work." Or as men are breaking the soil for a new garden, Pua "watches, thinking of the day when he himself would be a farmer." Ruby protests, saying, "most anthropologists then would have objected to attributing thoughts to the subjects of their studies, as would most anthropologists today."[90] How could Gardner know what Weyak and Pua are thinking at these moments? The answer seems obvious: Gardner spent considerable time with both Weyak and Pua. Through direct questioning, through intermediaries, and by observation, he would have learned what Weyak felt and how Pua imagined his future.

In the end, Gardner's use of interior monologue became an act of creative imagining. When Gardner and the Harvard Peabody expedition arrived in the Baliem Valley, the Dani were Other: alien, potentially dangerous, and inscrutable. Gardner's chosen task was to overcome these estrangements, first for himself and his film, then for his audience. His readiness to speak their thoughts and explain their motivations is only one aspect of his efforts to facilitate a sense of intimacy and even identification for his audience. As already noted, his use of sound to create an embodied space brings the viewer into the world of the Dani. Their world becomes our world. Gardner also uses close-ups. He treats the Dani as fellow human beings. They are not inferior or "primitive" in the negative sense of the term. As Gardner remarked:

> I wanted to make a film about certain particular individuals through whose lives and situations the film's themes and narrative threads could be developed. This was a decision of the most basic kind. Among other things, it meant that the camera would not be used for passive observation but as an active agent in disclosing the identities and recounting the experiences of some individuals but not others. I wanted to see all I possibly could of the context within which these individuals existed. . . .I was interested in entering the lives of some very real and particular people. I was not at all interested in making a film about abstractions like society, culture and personality, or about items on somebody's ethnographic laundry list.[91]

Weyak is Gardner's counterpart in the film. There is a deep connection between the two men—a kind of mutual identity and respect. Both are in charge of small groups of men, while Weyak's funeral band and Gardner's film both commemorate individual deaths and affirm a way of life.[92] Likewise, Gardner became Pua's surrogate father. Pua recalls Gardner's own son—and since Pua's father had died (he only has a stepfather), this connection came about naturally.[93] There is a lovely moment in the film, easily misconstrued, when Gardner is filming Weyak measuring the fiber band he has been weaving. The voice-over notes, "Pua, who has come to visit with a friend, helps him lay it out." Some have tried to see this as an effort to create a contrived father-son

relationship between Weyak and Pua.[94] This is not the case: Gardner is that friend.[95] There is a real father-son relationship between Pua and Gardner, rather than an artificially constructed one between Pua and Weyak. When I asked about his relationship to Pua, Gardner responded, "his father had died, from causes unknown to me, and I did become a surrogate parent, which was a pleasure I enjoyed all his and my life."[96] Their reunion in *Dead Birds Re-Encountered* (2013) movingly confirms this, as William Rothman's essay in this volume demonstrates.

David MacDougall further complicates the picture when he argues that Weyaké, the boy who is killed and whose funeral we see, becomes Pua's surrogate self in *Dead Birds*. I would argue, however, that Weyaké was a surrogate for someone else: Michael Rockefeller. Weyak feels immensely guilty for the death of Weyaké, even though everyone knows it was not his fault. Weyaké should never have gone to the unguarded frontier to get a drink at the river. Gardner must have felt very much the same way vis-à-vis Michael Rockefeller, who went off on his own after the Peabody expedition. Rockefeller also made a bad decision, and it cost him his life. Although Rockefeller's tragic death did not happen on Gardner's watch, that did not prevent him from feeling crushed, guilty, devastated. It is not surprising then that Gardner's narration, written after Rockefeller's death, emphasizes Weyak's sense of failure and responsibility. One can only imagine that Gardner knew all too well what Weyak was feeling.

The relationship between the ritual warfare of the Dani and the Cold War, particularly at a time of rising brutality in the Vietnam War, has been frequently noted. For some, given the controlled nature of Dani violence, there were ways in which their system appeared more civilized than our own.[97] Further, in presenting a people who had not yet felt the weight of the modern world—the political, economic, and cultural subservience to a more powerful center that would soon arrive—*Dead Birds* also invited speculation about a world that was undergoing a process of decolonization. Additionally, *Dead Birds* spoke to the changing world of U.S. race relations in the Civil Rights era, at least metaphorically. In its quiet insistence on equality and intimacy across profoundly different races and cultures, the film suggested possibilities for racial understanding and cross-racial intimacy at home. In this sense, *Dead Birds* strikes me as a film that resonates with Robert Young and Michael Roemer's *Nothing But a Man* (1965). To appreciate this, it helps to see the film repeatedly and over time. The Dani become less strange and ever more familiar. Once again, I reencounter that old friend Weyak guarding the frontier. As I get older, I have come to appreciate his manly bearing and well-toned torso—as well as his patient weaving of the belt.

Aldous Huxley has noted, "Essays belong to a literary species whose extreme variability can be studied most effectively within a three-poled frame of reference. There is the pole of the personal and the autobiographical; there is the pole of the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular; and there is the pole of the abstract-universal. . . .The most richly satisfying essays are those which make the best not of one, not of two but of all the three worlds in which it is possible for the essay to exist."[98] Somewhere in this constellation, I would put *Dead Birds.*

Notes

1. Following the submission of this chapter, I plan to update the Wikipedia page for *Dead Birds.*
2. I now teach a similar graduate course—"Historical Methods in Film Study."
3. Many thanks to Charles Warren in particular, who encouraged me to grapple with this pairing. Also to Melanie Honma for research contributions. In recent years, I have found myself haunted by memories of Jay Leyda, in particular various passing remarks that he made to me (and others), which were underappreciated at the time—and his programing choices, such as this one.
4. Bosley Crowther, "Screen: 'The Sky Above'," *New York Times,* June 20, 1962, 40.
5. John L. Scott, "'Sky, Mud' Fine Film Document," *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1962, 26. Brendan Gill of the *New Yorker* offered a somewhat ironic perspective on the film, noting, "it is certainly a chance to study curiosities of custom and dress that outdo one's fondest recollections of these treasures of unself-conscious nakedness which, in a primmer time, gave the *National Geographic* so vital a place in the coming of age of American boys" ("Suburban Savages," *New Yorker*, June 30, 1962, 68).
6. Susan Tobin, "Pierre Gaisseau," www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/ce_alanlomax_profile_gaisseau.php
7. Jack C. Ellis, *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989); Betsy A. McLane*, A New History of Documentary Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2012); Ian Aitken, ed., *Encyclopedia of Documentary Film*, 3 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2006). There is a parallel history of documentary in the United States, which could be chronicled through Academy Award winners. Unlike Barnouw's influential and impressive study, Ellis and McLane fail to include Robert Gardner's work as well.
8. Karl Heider, *The Ethnographic Film*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas, 2006), 94.
9. Gene Moskowitz (Mosk), "Le Ciel et La Boue," *Variety*, May 10, 1961.
10. The review of *Dead Birds* in *Variety*, for instance, briefly compares the two films ("Dead Birds," *Variety*, March 10, 1965).
11. Robert Gardner, *Just Representations* (Cambridge, MA: Studio7Arts & Peabody Museum Press, 2010), 32.
12. See Robert Gardner, *Making* Dead Birds*: Chronicle of a Film* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum Press, 2007), 45.
13. Ursula Konrad, Alphonse Sowada, and Gunter Konrad, eds. *Asmat: Perception of Life in Art* (Mönchengladbach: B. Kühlen, 2002).
14. Gardner to author, October 25, 2013.
15. "Screening Room with Alan Lomax," Documentary Educational Resources. www.der.org/films/screening-room-alan-lomax.html
16. Susan Tobin, "Pierre Gaisseau." www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/ce_alanlomax_profile_gaisseau.php
17. Robert Gardner, phone conversation, September 25, 2013. It is not entirely surprising therefore that the only substantive biography of Gaisseau is provided by the Association for Cultural Equity (ACE), a nonprofit founded by Alan Lomax. ACE is "dedicated to explore and preserve the world's expressive traditions with humanistic commitment and scientific engagement" (Association for Cultural Equity, www.culturalequity.org/ace/ce_ace_index.php).
18. Dust jacket, Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau, *The Sacred Forest: Magic and Secret Rites in French Guinea* (New York: Knopf, 1954).
19. Susan Tobin, "Pierre Gaisseau."
20. Alain Gheerbrant, *L'expédition Orénoque-Amazone, 1948–1950* (Paris: Gallimard 1952), translated into English as *The Impossible Adventure: Journey to the Far Amazon* (London,

Gollancz 1953). Gheerbrant's photo book, *Des Hommes qu'on appelle sauvages* (Paris: R. Marin 1952), was a complement to the film. A forty-minute television version, produced by David Attenborough, was shown on the BBC in December 1953.

21. Susan Tobin, "Pierre Gaisseau."

22. Jean Rouch, *The Cinema in Africa—Present Position and Current Trends* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, July 2, 1962), 12.

23. André Bazin, *Forêt Sacrée*," *L'Observateur*, July 4, 1954, 29.

24. The *Los Angeles Times* reviewer remarked that the documentary "makes no attempt at delicacy. . . .Neither does it make an attempt at understanding although its narrator insists that it does" ("Novel Film Presented," *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 1956, 19). See also "Unilluminating Documentary on Africa," *New York Times*, September 29, 1956, 12. For length see: http://movies.msn.com/movies/movie-synopsis/gri-gri/

25. "Entertainment Timetable for Boston and Vicinity," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 5, 1957, 10.

26. Gardner to Musser, phone conversation, January 2014.

27. Pierre-Dominique Gaisseau, *Visa to the Prehistoric World* (London: Muller, 1957), 129.

28. The film has become available as an extra on a French DVD with *Le Ciel et la boue.*

29. Olivia Cooper Hadjian, "Tintin in New Guinea: *Heaven and Mud*—DVD Edition," www.critikat.com/Le-Ciel-et-la-Boue-edition-DVD.html

30. Leopold Pospisil to Charles Musser, February 4, 2014. Gardner, *Making* Dead Birds, 26, 71.

31. A book by Carl Hoffman, *Savage Harvest: A Tale of Cannibals, Colonialism, and Michael Rockefeller's Tragic Quest for Primitive Art* (New York: Morrow, 2014) rather sensationally reopens this story, asserting that Rockefeller was killed and eaten by cannibals.

32. "Dead Birds," *Variety*, March 10, 1965.

33. Rebecca R. French, "Leopold J. Pospisil and the Anthropology of Law," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 16:2 (June 1993), 1.

34. Leopold Pospisil, *Kapauku Papuans and Their Law* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Publications in Anthropology, 1958), 13.

35. Leopold Pospisil to Charles Musser, January 17, 2014. His film training was indebted to Yale's audiovisual department.

36. Harold Coolidge to Robert Gardner, January 27, 1959, in Robert Gardner, *Making* Dead Birds*: Chronicle of a Film* (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press, 2007), 12.

37. Gardner to Coolidge, January 29, 1959, in Gardner, *Making* Dead Birds*,* 12.

38. Pospisil to Musser, January 17, 2014.

39. Not a member of the Communist underground, Pospisil was imprisoned by the postwar Czech government, which sought to discredit him as a Nazi collaborator. Detained for more than a year, he eventually proved his innocence in court. Freed, he soon came to the U.S. See Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution Against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 125–126.

40. In our discussions, Pospisil repeatedly cited the death of Michael Rockefeller as confirmation of his assessment—repeating the conflation that appears in the *Variety* review of *Dead Birds* and no doubt elsewhere.

41. Gardner was also aware of the Archbold zoological expeditions to West New Guinea's Baliem Valley, which had begun in the early 1930s and continued after World War II.

42. Robert Gardner, "Memorandum of Conversations with Leopold Pospisil, Eliot Elisofon, Margaret Mead, Michael Rockefeller," May 19, 1960, in *Making* Dead Birds, 21.

43. Brian Meacham and I recorded Pospisil as he screened two reels of footage and provided accompanying commentary on March 12, 2014. The material he showed Gaisseau is in the more dynamic second reel, which Pospisil sometimes screens by itself (i.e., dispensing with the more mundane first reel).

44. Pospisil to Musser, January 17, 2014.

45. Pospisil criticized Gardner for not learning the Dani language. On his part, Pospisil mastered Kapauku to the point where, he claims, it became his most fluent language and he wrote his field notes in it (Pospisil to Musser, March 12, 2014).

46. Ruby puts forth a fantasy of an anthropological cinema "designed by anthropologists to communicate anthropological insights about the human condition." Ruby, "An Anthropological Critique of the Films of Robert Gardner," *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 43, no. 4 (Winter 1991), 3.

47. Gardner, *Making* Dead Birds, 4.

48. Gardner, *Making* Dead Birds, 5.

49. Ruby, "An Anthropological Critique of the Films of Robert Gardner," 7.

50. Pospisil's ongoing work in anthropology pursued issues of much broader scope. See Pospisil, *Anthropology of Law: A Comparative Theory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

51. Elsaesser, "Kobarweng," October 2013, http://thomas-elsaesser.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=91%3Aneuer-berliner-kunstverein&catid=39%3Ablog-category-01&Itemid=70&limitstart=3 é. Other groups and anthropologists were in Dutch New Guinea in this period. The Star Mountains Expedition (1959) included cultural anthropologist Dr. J. Pouwer (www.papua-insects.nl/history/Starmountains%20exp/Starmountains1959.htm). Gottfried Oosterwal was an anthropologist and Seventh Day Adventist who published *People of the Tor: A Cultural-anthropological Study on the Tribes of the Tor Territory* (Northern Netherlands New-Guinea) (Assen: Van Gorcum 1961), while John-Erik Elmberg published "Field Notes on the Mejbrat People in the Ajamaru District of the Bird's Head (Vogelkop), Western New Guinea," *Ethnos* 20 (1955), 2–102, and "Further notes on the northern Mejbrats (Vogelkop, Western New Guinea)," *Ethnos*: *Journal of Anthropology*, 24:1–2 (1959), 70–80. Roy Rappaport, who received his PhD from Columbia University in 1966, did fieldwork among the Tsembaga Maring in New Guinea in the early 1960s. His dissertation became *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

52. Loren Eiseley, "Miniatures of Ourselves," *New York Times*, November 18, 1962.

53. Scott MacDonald, *American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary: The Cambridge Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 68–72.

54. "Fable, Parable, and Allegory, *Encyclopædia Britannica, Academic Edition*, www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1457283/fable-parable-and-allegory.

55. As Jonathan Kahana observes, "The power of social documentary comes from its allegorical displacement of particular details onto the plane of general significance." *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 26.

56. The second word of the title—"Birds"—appears first at the end of the shot of the flying bird. The word "Dead," and so the full title, appears with the cut to the funeral. This emphasizes the metaphorical equivalence of dead birds with dead humans.

57. "Blunden Harbour," Wikipedia. Blunden Harbour is on the Canadian mainland, not Vancouver Island as many descriptions of Gardner's film suggest.

58. Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse, "Kwakwaka'wakw on Film," in *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations*, eds. Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 318–319.

59. Gerry Williams explicitly associated himself with the early-American potter Daniel Clark as Seaweed does with his ancestors. Nevertheless, both must be seen as innovators rather than simply stuck in a past that is rapidly receding.

60. MacDonald, *American Ethnographic Film*, 71.

61. Gardner, *Making* Dead Birds, 26, 71. One might imagine a hypothetical documentary in which Gardner followed missionaries or Dutch representatives as they settled a new area and began to "civilize" or otherwise "improve" the local inhabitants' way of life.

62. David MacDougall, "Gardner's Bliss," in *The Cinema of Robert Gardner*, eds. Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor, (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 153.

63. MacDonald, *American Ethnographic Film*, 7–9.

64. Ruby, "An Anthropological Critique," 8.

65. The scope and cost of equipment needed for cinema verité filmmaking is too often minimized. That these new practices were introduced through Time-Life is not incidental. Time-Life had the resources and the New York location had the infrastructure that could effectively support this innovation.

66. "Television Programs: Wednesday Through Saturday," *New York Times*, July 3, 1960, X13. It was shown on Channel 11, WPIX, an independent television station.

67. Gardner, *Making* Dead Birds, 25. Gardner has also addressed this issue quite directly, remarking:

> Nineteen-sixty was the precise moment in the history of cinema when workable and lightweight synchronous sound and film equipment was being developed and tested. I had made some trials of my own as early as 1957 when I accompanied John Marshall to the Kalahari and brought a small, soundproofed camera that would run at a constant speed, but it seemed an impossibly awkward and ponderous way to make films. So I chose a camera designed for straightforward image making. . . .In New Guinea I was adequately but modestly equipped. (Robert Gardner, "The Impulse to Preserve," in Charles Warren, ed., *Beyond Document: Essays on Nonfiction Film* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 175.)

68. "Film On Politics Cited for Prize," *New York Times*, March 29, 1961, 28.

69. Ernest Callenbach's review in *Film Quarterly* came out in 19:3 (Spring 1966), 56–58. The film may have had its New York City debut at Donnell Library in May, 1964.

70. Film note: "Dead Birds," University of Minnesota Film Society, April 27, 1964, CineFiles, University of California-Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

71. Ruby, *Picturing Culture*, 101.

72. Craig Mishler, "Narrativity and Metaphor in Ethnographic Film: A Critique of Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds*," *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 87: 3 (September 1985), 669.

73. Mishler, "Narrativity and Metaphor in Ethnographic Film," 670.

74. Ilisa Barbash, "Out of Words: A Conversation with Robert Gardner," in *The Cinema of Robert Gardner*, 102.

75. MacDonald, *American Ethnographic Film*, 71.

76. Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1985) officially debuted in the same month as Mishler's article criticizing Gardner's narration for *Dead Birds*. *Forest of Bliss* not only has no narration, it lacks inter-titles or subtitles, so that even verbal utterances go untranslated. This involves a certain irony because that film made many of the same critics and anthropologists equally unhappy. See David MacDougall, "Gardner's Bliss," in Barbash and Taylor, *The Cinema of Robert Gardner,* 155.

77. Timothy Corrigan, for instance, considers Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) to be an essay film. See Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51–52.

78. MacDonald, *American Ethnographic Film*, 392.

79. T.W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form" (1958), trans. Bob Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, *New German Critique* 32 (Spring–Summer 1984), 151.

80. Sherman, *Documenting Ourselves*, 42.

81. Ibid., 43. Sherman also cites Karl Heider to suggest that Gardner was wrong to focus on ritual warfare as an "'essential quality' of Dani life" because they seemed to have adapted to peace under Dutch pacification with little difficulty. In fact, given the pervasiveness of ritual warfare and other forms of violence among the Dani, its cessation might readily have been felt as a relief. Other anthropologists who studied Papuans in the Central Highlands indicate the ways in which warfare was a pervasive aspect of these groups.

82. Sheila Curran Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen*, 3rd ed. (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2007).

83. Ruby, *Picturing Culture*, 101. Catherine Russell characterizes *Dead Birds* as "psychological narrativity" in *Experimental Ethnography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 14, 190.

84. This structural element makes it that much easier to accuse Gardner of showing the Dani as operating outside of history.

85. Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, 35.

86. Robert Gardner, "On the Making of *Dead Birds,*" in *The Dani of West Irian: An Ethnographic Companion to the Film* Dead Birds, ed. Karl G. Heider (Andover, MA: Warner Modular; Module 2, 1972), 34.

87. Ibid., 35.

88. Sherman, *Documenting Ourselves*, 171.

89. MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, 109.

90. Ruby, *Picturing Culture*, 101.

91. Gardner, "The Impulse to Preserve," 175–176.

92. Scott MacDonald suggests a parallel between Weyak weaving a long bark fiber band and Gardner making his strip of film. The connection is there, but I would argue it is deeper.

93. Gardner does not provide any equivalent connection to females. Only with Weyak's wife are we briefly allowed a similar kind of intimacy. While this is certainly one of the film's limitations, *Making* Dead Birds shows it to have been a necessary one. The women were reclusive and difficult to film.

94. See MacDougall, 108.

95. Although the depictions of Weyak and Pua can be compared to those of ≠Oma Tsamkxao and his son Tsamkxao in *The Hunters*, the two individuals are much more developed in *Dead Birds*: Weyak and Pua are introduced immediately after the head titles and have an ongoing prominence thereafter.

96. Gardner email correspondence, April 14, 2014.

97. Ernest Callenbach, "*Dead Birds* by Robert Gardner," *Film Quarterly*, 19:3 (Spring 1966), 56–58. Although *Dead Birds* suggests that this violence might be characterized as "controlled," Matthiessen's *Under the Mountain Wall* gives a different sense—that the violence was pervasive and often unpredictable.

98. Aldous Huxley, "Preface to *Collected Essays*," quoted in Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, 14.