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| **Rouch, Jean. (1917-2004)** |
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| Jean Rouch is a documentary filmmaker, ethnographer and anthropologist who was born in Paris in 1917. Rouch is the architect of ‘shared ethnography,’ and an early practitioner of *cinéma vérité*, best known for *Les Maîtres Fous* (*The Mad Masters*) (1955), *Jaguar* (1955), *Moi, un noir* (*I, a Negro*) (1958), and *Chronique d’une été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*) (1960). Creating over one hundred films in his lifetime, Rouch contributed significantly to the related fields of documentary and narrative technique, visual anthropology and cinematic technology. |
| Jean Rouch is a documentary filmmaker, ethnographer and anthropologist who was born in Paris in 1917. Rouch is the architect of ‘shared ethnography,’ and an early practitioner of *cinéma vérité*, best known for *Les Maîtres Fous* (*The Mad Masters*) (1955), *Jaguar* (1955), *Moi, un noir* (*I, a Negro*) (1958), and *Chronique d’une été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*) (1960). Creating over one hundred films in his lifetime, Rouch contributed significantly to the related fields of documentary and narrative technique, visual anthropology and cinematic technology.  File: JeanRouch.jpg  Image Source *Senses of Cinema*: <http://sensesofcinema.com/2010/great-directors/jean-rouch/>  Rouch grew up in a scientifically and photographically inclined home: Rouch’s uncle was a biologist who studied penguins on Antarctic expeditions with Rouch’s father, a Navy officer and meteorologist. Rouch’s father exposed the young filmmaker to Robert Flaherty’s 1922 documentary *Nanook of the North*. Rouch tells a story of attending a fictional film soon after seeing Flaherty’s work, but being unable to discern between on-screen fiction and non-fiction. Blurring documentary and fiction film would become Rouch’s most distinctive cinematic trademark. Having received an engineering degree from Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées, Rouch destroyed German bridges during World War Two. After travelling to West Africa to build causeways in 1941, he became fascinated with regional cultures and local ethnographic archives. He returned to France and began a doctorate in Anthropology under the supervision of Marcel Griaule, basing his dissertation on footage and notes he took while exploring the Niger River basin. He would complement this early footage with subsequent trips to Niger, eventually screening this work at the Biarritz Film Festival and winning the admiration of Réné Clément and Jean Cocteau. Rouch would compile his early ciné-ethnographical work on Niger in *Les Fils de L’eau* (*The Sons of Water*) in 1953.  In the 1950s, Rouch experimented with audio and visual recording techniques, developing a way to shoot 16mm film while simultaneously using audio field recorders to create post-synchronised cinema — an effect previously impossible, as lightweight 16mm cameras were silent devices.  He began researching the movements of Songhay tribes to West African cities, which led to his first seminal films: *The Mad Masters, Moi, un Noir,* and *Jaguar*. Made to match the increasingly volatile politics in 1950s Africa, these films broke from traditions of descriptive anthropological documentary and favoured increasingly theatrical aesthetics. Rouch folded techniques of fictional narrative with improvisational cinematography and acting to create dream-like and fantastic ethnographies. This ‘shared ethnography’ attempts to bridge the subjective world of the film’s participants with the technological frames of Western-oriented cinema, promoting a democratic interaction between audience, filmmaker, technology and the documented subjects. Rouch hoped that these increasingly dramatic forms would have a direct impact on Western audiences and African politics.  In 1960, Rouch teamed up with sociologist Edgar Morin to make *Chronicle of a Summer*. This documentary is a provocative critique of Parisian social life that employs the first sustained use of *cinéma vérité* methods: one-take shots, improvised and non-professional acting, lightweight and handheld recording equipment and little sound or light staging. This film became an ideological inspiration for both *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema movements. |
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