

Filming a Tarahumara Festival

Charles Nauman

I AM FILMING A MAGPIE and an eagle has just landed on my head. It always seems to happen that way. This time I am deep in the canyons of the Sierra Madre Occidental, and I am seeing so much that I will never get on film. I must shoot and shoot, while the time and the film run out. What is really happening is not within this narrow frame. Though the magpie of my intention waits now in the chemistry of my emulsion, the eagle of another vision is circling, soaring and gone.

For two weeks Jane and I have been film-documenting a festival of Mexico's nomadic Tarahumara Indians, probably the most remote and inaccessible native people on this continent. We cannot stay longer, the festival is ending, and within a day the Tarahumara people will be disappearing into the very walls of a canyon which is so large that it dips and rises from the tropical latitudes to the temperate zone, where we are now, at 9000 feet. Within this labyrinth of barrancas several thousand Tarahumara families follow the cycle of seasons roaming from cave to cave and rock hut to rock hut, herding goats along the way, and planting and harvesting corn within the pulse of two growing seasons a year. But ask a Tarahumaran about the depths of these canyons and you may be told that only the birds know.

In these last hours of filming I am empty with the awareness that "intention" is too much the director of every film I have made, that beyond the swing of my camera there is here, among the Tarahumara people, a mysterious verité which does not answer to intention. I look down at sky, in the water below.

The Urique, this river of the barranca where we are camped, slides with gentle eddies over the ochre stones, quickening and returning the mid-morning blue. Earlier, as I was bathing there, I heard the mahogany skinned laughter of a Tarahumara man burst as the blanch of my pallid bottom porpoised above the water. I had looked for his presence, but could not see him. On the shore I wiped the sand from my feet and gazed at a collage of tiny sticks and stones dented into the branny of earth. It reminded me of that nearly universal stone and pit game, which in some

places is called *Kalah*, though it may have been a miniature from some child's fantasy, or, for all I know, it could have been an accounting of the number of times someone has not seen the legendary serpent of this river. What do I know? I am only a "camera" wanting to be something more.

I do know that there are quiet happenings here, that on the broken cliffs across the river Tarahumara foot paths are worn deep into the pure stone, deep like the grooves of primordial memory. And if I wait here, what replay of that timeless shaping might I see?

I am now about two hundred yards above the river, seated on the ground at the feet of my tripod. This camera and I are in the shadow of a wide branched *ponderosa*. About another hundred yards down the slope to my right is our mountain tent where Jane is busy re-organizing the fourteen cases of gear we have brought here. Two miles on another foot-path behind is the mission village of Norogachic where we have gorged our film cans and tapes with dancing that has been nearly perpetual for the last seven days.

By the moon of the mission it is Easter time; and by that same moon it is Tarahumara corn planting time. Either way, this moon has heralded a strangely convoluted festival of pre-Christian and Catholic mission ritual where all blessings seem welcome. Four centuries earlier Jesuit history records that it was different.

The missionaries who came here then were either killed or chased away by the Tarahumaras. Nevertheless, in a few years the indomitable Jesuits returned, this time with Spanish soldiers who encouraged the Tarahumaras to build churches.

Here on the mission side of the canyon it is easy to imagine that over there, on that mysterious other side, is the realm of the untouched Tarahumara shaman.

The telephoto lens is mounted and I stand slowly to get the vision of something that is moving with feline assurance on the lower ridges across the river. It is a young woman. Here, where thirteen is perhaps twenty, I do not know how to place her in my world. I drink from her movement — she is like water coming to join water. Almost witchlike she probes the sand with a stick that is already there and water rises into a sinkhole where she fills her vessel. Again, like water, she rises on the wall as softly as she came. I am stealing her, and though I am secluded I think she knows, is giving this gift of shadow from her solitude.

The young woman is gone, but on the far left at the very edge of the rim, four Tarahumaras are coming in file. In the generous light at the top of the barranca, in the curve of the river below, and through the lens, they move like instruments of space. I follow in a panning motion to get their rhythm, not yet pressing the button. I press. It rolls. The man in front suddenly halts. His hand shoots above his head seeming to grasp at the sun. My camera stops! I look at its locked down switch. It should be going. On the other side the procession moves on again. I check the battery contacts. I turn the camera off and try again. It doesn't work. I watch the four turn into silhouette and disappear. The shadow of a large bird sweeps along the ground in front of me. I look behind and see its owner, a golden eagle, drifting enigmatically toward another horizon. As I watch through the long lens the eagle recedes into a tiny dot, and as suddenly as my camera has stopped its shutter begins to whirl again.

I fold and return to our tent. This film, whatever it is, has been shot. As I cap and put the lenses away there is a lucid awareness that I have been privileged to know only the limits of my own communion with this place—or these people, who are inseparable from this place. It is not a question of taking pictures. It is a question of giving pictures. In this I have been trapped and left alone to see with another kind of vision.

It may be this “giving vision” which confronts me now, not as picture, but as a dimension of a strangeness which intersects my consciousness of space, a dimension that I can only call MEANING. It is here that I think of the Don Juan, of Carlos Castaneda: “controlled folly,” I hear him say of my work. In his world it is all folly, the work that I am doing here, but how I use it, how I am born from it, has meaning—nothing matters but everything has meaning. My thinking mind pales at the concept of pure meaning, yet in this coincidence of perception meaning flies to inform me that MEANING IS ALL THERE IS.

When Jane comes out of the tent she notices a tactfully waiting Tarahumara man seated on a rock a little way behind our camp. He is not so elegantly dressed as the others we have been seeing. Though he has the wrap of folded cloth around his head, he does not wear the flamboyant bloused and pleated sleeve, and he even has western jeans instead of the loin cloth so usual here. At his feet is a bulging gunny sack. Since it is the Tarahumara way not to come knocking, not to solicit, but to wait at a distance, Jane goes to him. In the contents of his bag he shows her some

freshly dried leaves, presumably herbs. Jane is delighted. If she could, she would cook with every herb. It tastes like bay leaf, she decides, and barterers for a huge quantity. As the man stands he gestures to my jeans. He would like to barter for some jeans, but when he learns that the only jeans I have are the rags I am wearing, he turns in disgust. Indeed, we have brought trade goods, the cloth so beautifully worn in the traditional Tarahumara garment; we have been careful not to add to the missionary dross that comes from every culture but this one.

In our selection of trade goods we have been influenced by our companions on this sojourn, Leslie and George Carlson. Leslie is a painter and George is a sculptor who has returned four times to work within this uniquely unsophisticated world. For George the Tarahumara costume is like a raiment of sculpture, so perfectly does it grace the movement, the poise of these calm people. Carlson calls the transgression of missionary cloths an "abomination," not only to his art, but especially to the people. Tonight we are dining with George and Leslie in the opulence of their pyramid tent, in which there is a double bed, a wood stove and a floor. On the wall opposite the bed are shelves of canned goods, fresh oranges and peppers, a yule cake from George's mother, and a variety of staples. Above the bed are rows of books: Remington, Edward S. Curtis, Bodmer, Rodin, and two volumes of Carl Lumholtz, a Norwegian who was here in the 1980s. It is our last night with the Carlsons. A large ham has been reserved for the occasion, and with it two bottles of chokecherry wine, which Jane has made and brought from home. As the wine is opened, the daughter of a Tarahumara woman, who has shown Jane her ways of cooking, arrives with a basket of tortillas which are still warm. The basket has been woven by the same woman from palm fronds, and it is for us to keep. We understand this because it is with Mario, our interpreter, that she has come to the door.

At the end of the meal we are drinking mescal and looking at reproductions from the portfolios of Edward S. Curtis, photographs made near here in the nineteenth century. There has been little change, we think, and it is easy to imagine that we have dropped back in time at least one hundred years. But I am drawn away from the conversation by the effect of the raw Aladdin lantern light on the mahogany-like wax George has been sculpting. Even in this colorless light the figures seem warm and delicately moving. It is impressionism dawning onto the ultimate bronze. I am

amazed. I see whole groups of Tarahumara dancers transformed into the essence of their dance. They are moving in that space between drum beats. What I am seeing is somehow beyond sculpture. It is a synergy of silence and sound where nothing feels captured, where movement does not pause, but rather is given into the endless circle of all our touching. Nowhere in the body of stone or bronze have I seen this so well—not in Michelangelo, not in Rodin. I wonder now at the miracle of just being here, at these brevities of experience when I have nearly stepped off the clicking slope of time, and the texture of all things spatial suggests that they could become transparent, immersed one within the other. In other moments here I have sensed this irrational conjunction as an association with the earth. Once, several days ago, a massive throng of Tarahumara men, women and children came out of the mission church, walking over and around my body while I lay flat on the ground filming them. Though my sight was fiercely preoccupied with composition, when I got up off the ground I felt as though I had just stepped out of a comforting field of force.

I have experienced this same gathering of power at a Sioux Sun Dance. Within its circle there is a pulse that informs the psyche. Here it is the people with the earth with the drum—the mantra-like rhythm of the drum, which we have heard almost constantly since we dropped within these echoing walls. It is as though the people and the canyon have one voice, a voice that comes, as it does even now, like a distant breathing, or, as it has at sunrise each day, breaking the chill air with its insistent animal skins—weaving us into a common robe.

Before Jane and I depart the Carlson lodge, Mario shows us the sketches he has been doing and asks us to select anything we would like to have. He has at least a hundred pages of hastily rendered charcoal strokes, projections of the paintings he wants to do when he gets back to Juarez, where he teaches art. We select two and Jane does Polaroids for Mario's reference.

Though Mario's fluency with Tarahumara, Spanish and English is his ticket for being here, he has also found time to give drawing lessons to several Tarahumara men, who have been charmed by the nearly photographic speed of his sketching. These involvements bring good ears for gentle access to hidden ceremonies or they can be an antenna for keeping our distance; like the morning he suggested I should not wear my sheath knife (a habit I have always had when camping) because, "They feel threatened by this."

As Mario looks at the Polaroids, Jane and I smile at each other. We both want to ask, why is it that each time she has done a portrait Polaroid as a gift from what we are doing, the receiving Tarahumara smilingly turns it on its side or even upside down to view it? When Jane asks, Mario also smiles and, with his own enigmatic sophistication, simply says, "Yes, yes."

Robert Flaherty, the documentarian, in his early work among the Eskimos, is said to have projected his moving pictures of the people onto their igloo walls only to discover that they did not comprehend their non-dimensional selves. Instead they saw what was really there—shadows.

Suddenly I find myself seeing through some apprehension of Tarahumara eyes: ". . . these two fools are going to a lot of trouble to make a piece of sticky, foul-smelling paper come out of that black box. They seem so pleased to give it to me though—I better take it. I smile and turn it around and around, wondering what I should do with it. Because it seems so useless, I smile some more, thinking that we too have clowns."

It is out of some coincidence of other films which Jane and I have made with Native Americans that a benefactor of George Carlson's work has asked us to come here. He has asked us to do a film of the Tarahumaras with Carlson sculpting among them. The film will be used for a major opening at the Kennedy Galleries in New York City, and perhaps on television. With the Carlsons we have agreed that the emphasis of the project must be first and last with the Tarahumaras. But as we prepare to depart, we have second thoughts, realizing that we may not have done enough to show the Carlsons here. George and Leslie are delighted with the emphasis, but to keep everyone from worrying George reminds us that we must come to their studio in Colorado, where we can always get a second chance at him. The talk quickly shifts to tesguino, the rapid-fermentation corn beer of the Tarahumaras, which, on this last day, has entered prominently into the celebration. Having heard that it is a wild, even dangerous time, I reach for some assurance that George and Leslie, who will be alone in this camp after tomorrow, will not let themselves be ill-used. But the words that get said speak mostly of our mutual regret in not being together to share the Bacchanalian.

The last morning is a quiet granola morning. While I rinse the dried milk from our cups, Jane begins to rewind and classify the melange of sound tapes she has made here. With filmmaking our marriage is a *ménage-*

à-trois. In the more than seventy films we have realized together, our roles and passions have been mixed with love, jealousy, chaos and mystery. At the moment there is balance. We are awaiting word from the truck that will take us out to Creel. It was due in Norogachic last night. Meanwhile, Jane, in her constant paroxysm of energy is using the time. Wondering how far this sound will take our film, I lie down with my head in the shade of our little tent, listening to the playbacks and letting the warm sun ripen my blood for the day's journey.

The tapes I hear playing are fragmented interludes of drums, voices, dances—then a violin and a different drum begin. Its music has the sportive gambol of an Irish jig. It is the sound of what we have called the Pascala dance, the last dance of the festival.

I had said to an anthropologist, who was there beside us that day, “It sounds like an Irish jig.” “No, it has no Irish influence,” he says. He continues to look at me with erudite silence as I snap a white “barney” around my camera to keep the film from melting. We both look back at the two shamanistic figures who are being painted for the Pascala.

We are in the secluded patio of a tiny *ranchero*. Other dancers, whom I have been seeing all week, squat on the ground and along the walls watching also. The two men who are being painted with a tortuously intricate design appear to be the center of an honoring ceremony. They have been standing in this same spot for nearly eight hours. Finally, from a little wooden dais filled with several enormous *tesguino* pots, someone dips a gourd and takes it to one of the standing men. He drinks it in the customary fashion, in one continuous swill, but when he finishes a burst of chaff comes flying from his teeth. The gourd is refilled and passed to the other painted man, then to the musicians. The musicians get ready to start again: Roll sound. Roll camera. An Irish jig is dancing in my head if nowhere else.

All over the world I have seen Irish priests. That they could have brought a jig here seems possible to me, but I am no anthropologist. And what about the violin? The Tarahumaras have carved them from native pine, it is true, but it is still the universal violin. I can even imagine their so-called traditional costume coming here by way of Spain from Morocco. What anywhere is truly indigenous? If we keep moving back we can come to the rhythm of the earth itself, which we all share. Yet that “earth pulse” may, indeed, have an indigenous flux, if what Carl Jung has said is

true: that the physiological measurements of Europeans who have come to the New World have now evolved toward the physiological measurements of Native Americans.

The man that my camera sees now is the drummer. He wears a cowboy's straw hat, and I feel like asking him to get with it, dress Tarahumara! But his drum beat is impeccable. I pan to the violinist seated beside him on the ground. His long grey hair is conventionally wound with yards and yards of red cloth. The zoom moves to his face where I have been feeling some asymmetrical harmony, a kind of listening without seeing presence. Then, as I get very close to his eyes, I wonder if he is blind, or if, perhaps, that moving pulse of sound is all he wants to see.

As the last daub of paint dries onto their skin the two men begin to dance around the circle of the patio sunwise. The musicians stand to follow them and everyone exits through the gate that leads out of the rancho. The dancers are still going in circles and I rush ahead so I will meet them when they arrive at the mission.

The mission is twenty minutes away, and the tripod with its camera and heavy magazines of film weigh uncomfortably into the bruise they have made on my shoulder. My pace quickens as I hear the drum and the violin coming from behind. I am once again aware of the irony of trying to out-distance what are considered the world's most renowned long distance runners. At age sixteen these Tarahumara men are already expected to run a hundred miles between sun-up and sun-down. For sport they play a game called *Rarajipari*, which requires barefoot teams to compete while they kick a ball carved from the root of an oak over a course that may be one hundred and fifty miles long.

I drop down into an arroyo and the sound seems to recede. I am intent on being there at the mission when the dancers arrive. And somehow I make it. I even have time to dust my lenses and wonder how I could be so far ahead. I stretch out on the ground with my straw hat over my face. I must have fallen asleep instantly, and when I awake with surprise, the amorphous silhouette of an Indian nun is bending over me. I think I have heard her say, "Are you dead?" in Spanish. But I am not sure what she has said, or even that I know the right answer. When I finally say, "*Buenas tardes*," she seems relieved and returns to her path on the hill.

Mario arrives with the dancers and their entourage. He tells me that I have missed the offering. They have placed a cross and made offerings of

food and tesguino to the four cardinal directions. This explains why I have arrived here ahead. I tell Mario I am sorry I have missed it, but I am not. He shows me a sketch. I say that I have seen it before with the Lakota (Sioux). Only there it was with tobacco and without the cross. I had been a participant in the Lakota ceremony. And as I recall the purity of that unstolen moment without cameras, I know that I have somehow reached the end of ever wanting to film sacred ceremonies. This special Pascala Dance, though it is for the public, will be the last.

Someone has fixed the effigies of Judas and the son of Judas onto the stone wall of the church. I hurry to the scene and begin filming the dancers as they approach the wall. Jane is already recording the violinist and the drummer, who are seated on the ground again.

The two dancers are now wearing turkey feather headdresses and their dance is an exquisitely intricate interpretation of the mating dances I have seen among prairie birds. Suddenly the drummer and the violinist rise and follow the dancers toward the wall where the figures of Judas hang. The dancers pick up large stones and hurl them with devastating accuracy at the effigies. The crowd laughs and cheers—the dancers and the musicians smile and circle back. Again they sally toward the wall and fling more stones. My camera jams, its battery weary of the long “take.” I rip out a pile of accorded film from the sprockets and tape the remaining ends together. I look for someone to bring me another battery, but there is no time. I continue filming in shorter takes. It works, though I can see by the tachometer that the speed is varying. The dancers have now returned to the destruction of the Judases for the fourth time. The effigies fall from the wall and are ripped apart with bayonets and set afire. The (Irish) music continues as they circle the fire and dance away in a long procession toward the river, the evening star—and tesguino.

Mario tells me that every occasion requires tesguino. It is as good for anointing a new born babe as it is for holding a wake. It is even mixed with the mother’s milk to prevent illness. Indeed, tesguino flows in a magic circle: for without tesguino the planting of corn could not be properly blessed, and without corn there would be no tesguino. To plant and harvest corn every Tarahumara family depends on its nearest neighbor for help, and the only remuneration expected is tesguino. It is always drunk with a purpose to be obtained. It is part of the marriage ceremony, it is left for the dead, and it is sacrificed at the cross because the gods also like tes-

guino. There are so many occasions for drinking this slightly alcoholic brew that a Tarahumaran with many relatives is likely to be in its influence about a third of the year.

Shamans, Jesuits, tesguino, violins, Irish jigs. In the wowing bleat of Jane's shifting sound tracks a texture of something we have experienced is being confirmed. I am glad for this, but shocked when I recall that our benefactor expects me to write words of narration. What can I say? I only know there is this texture, vivid and obvious, these drums ubiquitous and hypnotic—the space, the faces, the dances. This much is rich. This milieu of impressions is a voice stronger than words. Words will only bring it down.

Our tent is no longer a shade, and dancing needles of sun pierce the weave of the straw hat which covers my face. In the tape, the trickle of water behind the voice of a Tarahumara child brings back images of the fish trapping scene we recorded up the Urique from here.

The sand had been blowing mercilessly as we followed the brow of the canyon on our return from photographing some cave dwellings. Hoping to keep the sand out of the camera, I reload it before leaving the interior of the last cave. As we head down to the river level, where there will be less blowing, Jane points to a clan-like configuration of Tarahumaras.

They are quite literally working like beavers to build a dam in the shallows where the current spreads. With sticks and stones, and mud and cloth, they are just now finishing a looping dike which runs out from the shore. But before the loop is closed completely, all of the eight men, women and children form a line with a long net and chase the several small schools of fish into its opening. A patronizing young clan chieftain watches the fish while the others quickly scramble to seal the entrance with logs and more mud.

With the fish corralled, they relax and a mother takes her naked and crying baby from the swaddling of cloth that carries it on her back. She goes to the beach and nurses it. Another woman, very old, but very agile, comes back from the shore with a heavy bag and through a loosely woven basket sifts white powder onto the surface of the water. A child follows her with a branch of a tree—sweeping and stirring the powder into the water. The chieftain stands on the shore, watching. He has given us permission to film, but each time the camera turns in his direction he con-

sciously turns away. In the pure white of his elegantly draped garments and his air of noblesse, he is like a figure from Greek drama. But I must wait.

The powder which the grandmother spreads is a talc, and the fish, without adequate oxygen, are swimming lethargically near the surface. Two boys set baskets on the dike and the entire clan enters the corral — scooping tiny fish from the water with bare hands, and throwing them resolutely into the baskets. Even with the talc the fish are quick, and with a tight lens I try to anticipate the predatory dart of a young woman's hands. But before I speed the motor to try a second time, I see the patriarch in white. With his arms folded he wades through the water offering suggestions, but never stooping to catch fish. He continues to hold his head high, and the shots I get are like staged portraits. Reflectively I try to understand his fragile pride (or it could be my own). In it I think I sense the irony and the necessity of having to take such a poor quarry in the death trap of starvation. Starvation haunts these people every day they are alive.

Ricardo has come to tell us that he has made it to Norogachic with his truck. He is ready to drive us back to the railroad at Creel.

As we pull away from the mission courtyard, the only reminder of the Easter festival that I can see is a freshly hewn little cross stuck loosely into the ground. One of the dances had radiated from this cross, and later it had been my vantage point as we filmed a procession of hundreds of Tarahumaras. All around the courtyard separate fires burned in an all-night vigil and as the drum from one fire would pause, the drum from another fire would begin. In the cold night air the resonating sinew that stretches along the face of the big tambours echoed with a mournfully hollow twang that I will not easily forget. Then, in the day that followed they took the symbolic body of Jesus, wrapped in a Tarahumara goat blanket, and hanging horizontally on a pole between two men, to a distant cave burial.

In the back of the same courtyard there had been feasts each day. The food, mostly provided by the Jesuits, was undoubtedly a strong enticement for the Indians to come here. When we came early one morning we found an exuberantly chatting circle of women seated on the ground, mashing potatoes between their hands, and stirring them into a classic "cannibal pot" of boiling water. One lone chicken lay feathered and limp

beside the pot. And behind the women a man was winnowing a box of beans into a basket. A handsome woman with the assurance and aura of a priestess was putting it all together. As she bent over the cooking pot we could see the hems of at least seven skirts. These we learned were the new skirts from the last seven (or however many) Easters, and as a sign of wealth or prestige she was wearing them all.

Jane contributed our venison jerky to the pot and stayed there blithely recording enough track for a feature-length film—all on boiled stew! Later she justified this by using it to fortify the tracks of waterfalls, rivers, distant motors, and the general ambience of noise that distracts film viewers from really seeing.

Jane was still recording “stew” when several score of spotted dancers wielding wooden swords came to the kettle to be fed. The “priestess” served them all, and then the women ate.

The road to Creel is not a road. It is ten hours of bouncing over what amounts to a slightly submerged boulder field. It winds steadily upward on the edge of copper-colored precipices, then alternately through mesas of pine, scrub oak, and medronas. On the ridges we see more deserted Tarahumara caves with stone or log walls about chest high across the main opening, and at one site we see petroglyphs. These are probably not of Tarahumara origin, but within the markings we note the Greek cross which anthropologists agree was a significant symbol among the Tarahumara before the Christian cross was brought here. And on the mesas, where we are seeing more and more stone and log huts, we see more of the little dance crosses too. These are always situated on tiny patios which are for the essential work of the people—dancing. Some of the patios have three crosses of different sizes which, in the principal “rutubar” dance, are said to represent the sun, the moon and the morning star. Or for those who have accepted the Christian interpretation, the three crosses have another meaning—the Holy Trinity.

In Creel there are cold showers and dark streets. We go in search of the cocina where we had eaten on the way in. It is closed. Robert Getty, an Arizona journalist, whom we have just met at the Motel Rancho, says there is another place, a cantina where we might at least get some beer. Though the whole village seems ominously black and vacant, we are accompanied by the pervading measures of a largo. Coming from the only

church tower in sight, the religiosity of its music pushes down on the modest village like a canopy of alien stars.

A boyish Mexican stands at the door of the cantina saying, “No señorita.” Jane is furious, but holds her arms under her black poncho long enough for Mario, Getty and myself to relay our finds from the interior, where the air is a swimming brew of tequila, beer, and urine steeped from the poetic counterpoise of a room that has a bar at one end, and a rotunda-like urinal in the floor at the other.

With good Mexican beer and tortilla chips our only viveres, we make it back to the Motel Rancho, where Getty describes the coup with which he has intrigued himself into the Guadalajara prison to interview some north of the border drug convicts who didn’t make it back—even to Creel. He paints a bizarre vision of a medieval caste system where prisoners earn their way out of the dungeon into the grimmest survival through prostitution and every kind of black traffic. My thoughts run to the somewhat libertine entrance Jane and I have made into this country.

We had had only two weeks to prepare our entry as professional filmmakers, and even the brother of the President of Mexico couldn’t clear our way in without months of red tape and a trip to Mexico City. Finally, on the advice of a ranking union official in Mexico City, we decided to enter as amateurs. But with fourteen cases of professional equipment, not only did the Customs inspectors have to be naïve—so did the aliens. (I will only say that we had a courteous exchange about the utility of 16mm equipment for amateur photography, and there were no bribes.) At this point, confiscating our equipment and arrest are said to be high on the agenda for us if we are found out. Tonight, on the day before our return across the border, stories of the Guadalajara prison are not what I want to hear.

In the morning when we arrive at the Creel railroad station, Mario tells us that the express train is not scheduled for today. The only way we can make our plane at Chihuahua and the already scheduled recording session in Denver is to take what Mario, in low gringo, calls the “chicken train.”

We take the chicken train. It means we stand, third class style, with our cameras, tripods and all of our gear dispersed on the overhead racks from one end of the car to the other. The train stops everywhere and in places a lot of people would call nowhere. But the milieu of third class travel is such a feast that I put on my sunglasses, not exactly to hide, but rather, not to offend, because I have been told before that my eyes are sometimes

too indulgent. I am sure that my eyes do go a little mad, flitting like a high-speed moviola through the textures and cuts, the experimental conjugations of this “movie” I am seeing. Maybe there are people who would put me away if they could see the work my eyes are doing.

When the train stops in Cuauhtemoc, Mario discovers that we have to transfer everything to another third class train which is already jammed to the rods and ready to move. Mario commandeers a juvenile street gang to run a bucket brigade with our equipment — someone smears me for being a rich American because I tip the whole gang, and we are miraculously jolting forward within another sheltering sea of humanity. But Jane has defected. She has opted to catch a bus, any bus. It is the only way, she says, to make Chihuahua in time to get our air tickets. It works. When I meet her about ten hours later, she has been in Chihuahua five hours and everything is “go.”

At noon the next day we leave the airport at Juarez and go eccentrically through Mexican Customs at the taxi gate. The driver has so much humor and conversation to share with the inspector that his passengers, who must sit in front of the overloaded cab, go unnoticed. U.S. Customs officials don’t care if we are professional filmmakers, but they cross check the serial numbers on our equipment declaration. We fly to the lab, open the silver case of film cans, and discover that our plastic sack of bay leaves has spilled its contents. Another filmmaker who has just arrived from Peru observes with great interest as I brush the leaves off every can of film. He says, “Nice cache of coca leaves, eh?” I say, “No, bay leaf.” We make tea. Coca leaves.

Once again at our little studio in the Black Hills, Jane is editing a music track for the film which we are now calling, “They Are Coming to Norogachic.” The only music will be the Tarahumara drums, Tarahumara violins, and often within the drums there is the shrill bird-like cry of the Tarahumara bamboo flute.

I say to Jane, “If I could only do what you are doing—bring Tarahumara voice to this instead of my voice.” But I let myself be deadened with the thought that our benefactor comes from that archaic school, which would bend the finest glow of sight into the arrogance of another Anglo colony.

I look at the index of Tarahumara phonetic words which runs backwards in a little spiral notebook Jane has made. I remember them as sparkl-

ing sounds that seem to have the musical voice of the thing represented: BIRD—choo roo kiki, WIND—ee kaw kaw, OWL—tu tu goo ree.

Among their own, there are Tarahumara words of greeting which say, “What do you dream?” And in their mysterious ghost-like handshake, which is like a brief touching with water, it is not hard to imagine a people who, in some separate reality, speak first to the hovering spirit, the pervading dream that structures each one of us.

“Intention,” when it ignores the soaring dream, is a thief. But at last I have begun to dream my answer to the Tarahumara greeting: that if I am once more given to such a film, I will ask, “What do you dream?”—with my dreams.