



TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

SUNDAY

MARCH 27, 2016

7:00PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

KAPAUKU 1954/55 - 1959

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



Leopold Pospisil was born in Olomouc, Czechoslovakia, in 1923. He was active in the Czech resistance during World War II, and received a law degree from Charles University in Prague, in 1948. He and his wife Zdenka came to the United States in 1949, where he received a degree in sociology at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, in 1950. They moved New Haven in 1952, where Pospisil entered the anthropology Ph.D. program at Yale. Pospisil received his Ph.D. in 1956, and became a professor of anthropology at Yale in 1960, where he taught until 1993. During the last twenty-plus years, he has been an active Professor Emeritus, teaching courses in anthropology and law at Yale, as well as Charles University in the Czech Republic and other institutions around the United States and the world.



As field work for his dissertation at Yale, Pospisil spent 13 months in 1954-55 as well as the summer of 1959 studying the culture, law, and economy of the Kapauku Papuans in what was then known as Netherlands New Guinea. The 16mm film material he shot during those visits was edited together to become the film known as KAPAUKU 1954/55 - 1959. The work is an ethnographic document of enormous importance, most likely the first color film footage shot in the highlands of New Guinea, and a work which documents a people who were coming into contact with westerners for the first time. KAPAUKU 1954/55 - 1959 was Pospisil's first film, and arguably his most important.

DIRECTED BY **LEOPOLD POSPISIL**
(1959) 63 MINS.

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THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

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While Pospisil's field work and publications about the Kapauku are well known in anthropology circles, his films have been seen only during his lectures, by a relative few, and are positively unknown when compared with other films on similar subject matter. KAPAUKU 1954/55 - 1959 is contemporary with the better-known work of filmmakers Pierre Dominique Gaisseau and Robert Gardner, who also filmed in New Guinea, though each approached his subject matter differently and achieved different results. Gaisseau shot what would become *LE CIEL ET LA BOUE* (*SKY ABOVE AND MUD BENEATH*) in New Guinea in 1959; in 1962, it won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. The film has since fallen out of favor, with its obviously staged scenes and emphasis on the "barbarity" of the people it presents. Robert Gardner was a member of the Harvard-Peabody Expedition to New Guinea in 1961, and the footage he shot among the Dani people became *DEAD BIRDS* (1963), a film which is now in the National Film Registry. Gardner saw some of Pospisil's footage during a talk at Harvard in 1958, and the two even explored the possibility of working together in New Guinea. While Gaisseau's and Gardner's films sit somewhere along the documentary spectrum, Pospisil's film is more aligned with the long tradition of the illustrated lecture. As Prof. Charles Musser writes in his article "First Encounters: Some Thoughts on Robert Gardner & *Dead Birds*,"

All three men shot film materials in the highlands of Western New Guinea within a few years of each other. In making *Dead Birds*, Gardner was attracted to Gaisseau's and Pospisil's motion picture presentations even as he was reacting against them. They helped to shape his distinctive voice. And there is value for documentary history to see them together rather than focus solely on the one that has withstood the test of time.

Pospisil returned to New Guinea in 1962, 1975, and 1979, studying the changes that had occurred since his original visits in the 1950s. His landmark work, *The Kapauku Papuans of West New Guinea*, was published in 1963. With his focus on what he called the Kapauku's "complex and rather sophisticated type of true money economy," which used cowrie shells of different values, Pospisil destroyed many myths about the supposed lack of economic complexity of aboriginal people.

DID YOU KNOW: IN ADDITION TO THE MATERIAL SHOT IN NEW GUINEA, PROFESSOR POSPISIL HAS CAPTURED MOVING IMAGES AS PART OF HIS WORK AROUND THE WORLD, IN LOCATIONS AS DIVERSE AS POINT BARROW, ALASKA, AND THE OBERNBERG VALLEY IN AUSTRIA.

NEXT UP: BOLLYWOOD ON THE BIG SCREEN! HAILED AS "A VITAL, INSPIRING, AND LIFE-REVISING WORK OF CONTEMPORARY ART WITH HEART IMBUED INTO EVERY PART," DIRECTOR RAJKUMAR HIRANI'S MUSICAL DRAMEDY **3 IDIOTS** IS A BOX OFFICE SMASH ABOUT FORMER ENGINEERING STUDENTS ON A SEARCH FOR THEIR UNORTHODOX COLLEGE ROOMMATE. IT SCREENS IN 35MM ON **SUNDAY, APRIL 10 AT 2:00 P.M.**