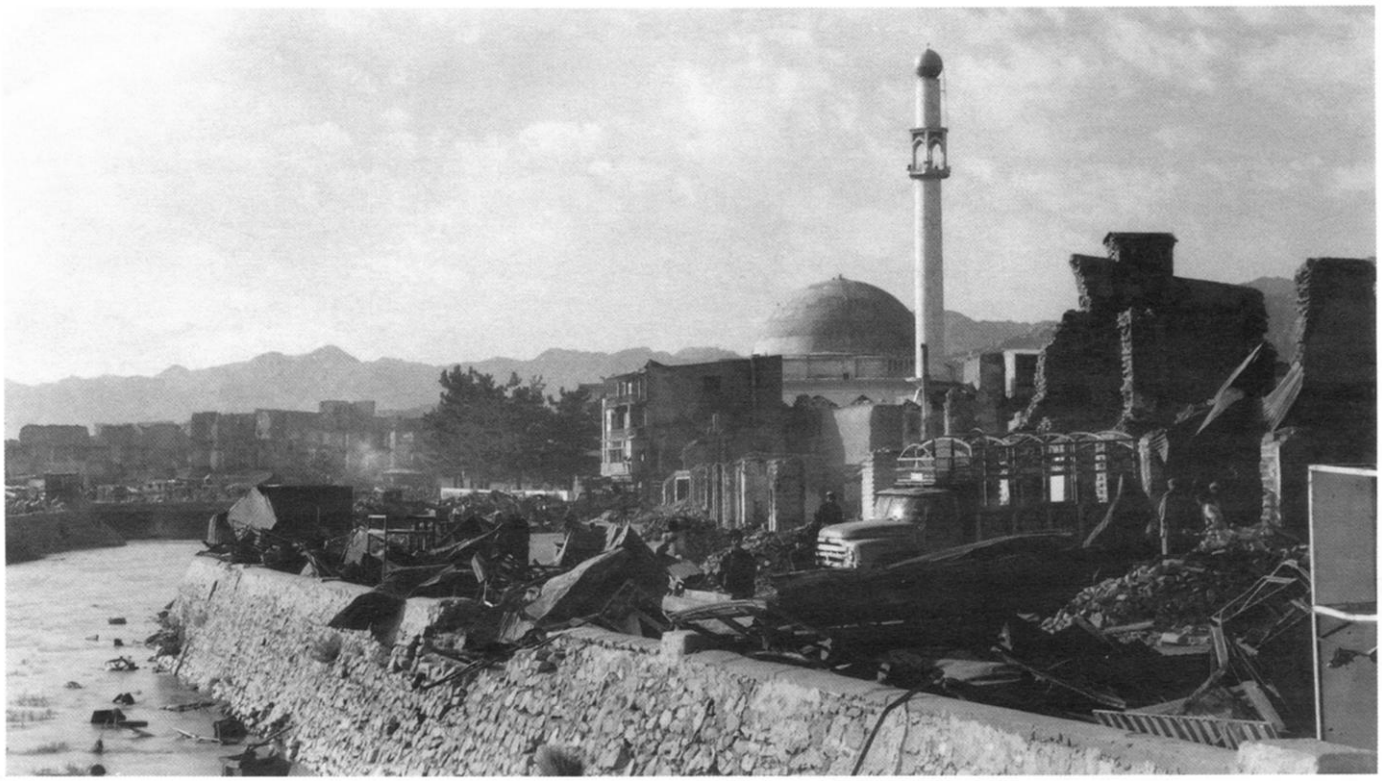

Figure 3. The prosperity of Kabul in the early 1970s is only memory, now that the old city has been ruined during years of fighting in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion and ongoing violence ravaging Afghanistan. Courtesy of Matzka-Kiener Filmproduktion.

Schaaf shows us a stoned blond girl with a toddler who disappears into a "Pathan harem," a conversation with a young German man dying in the infirmary, and a protracted scene of a 19-year-old woman injecting herself with heroin in the desert (subtitles tell she died a year later in India). These add a tragic element but one that is cinematically out of proportion with the death and suffering of Afghanistan's civil war taking place in the program's present.

Only two moments suggest sympathy between the foreigners and the Afghanis. The musical group Embryo plays a concert with Ustad Mohamed Omar, and there seems to be genuine musical exchange and camaraderie. And an Afghani man who married a runaway in Kabul tells about accompanying her to Switzerland to meet his mother-in-law.

Ultimately *Dream of Kabul* fails. It does not offer insight into the nihilism of the world travelers. There is scant connection to be made between the brief hippie occupation and the devastating effects of Soviet Russian, American, and Taliban military involvements that have reduced Afghanistan to its present state. And though the pathos of expatriate drug addiction rings true, it does not inform our thinking about any of the interlocking cultural, economic, and political dimensions of drugs in today's world. The greatest value of the film is in deromanticizing 1960s drug use; unfortunately the only social activist in the film is a bank robber and a terrorist. ⬌

The Shadow Circus. 1998. 50 minutes, color. A film by *Tenzing Sonam* and *Ritu Sarin,* produced by White Crane Films (www.whitecranefilms.com). For more information, contact University of California Extension Center for Media and Independent Learning, 2000 Center Street, Suite 400, Berkeley, CA 94704; http://www.cmil.unex.berkeley.edu/media/.

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For those who associate Tibet with the Dalai Lama and his celebrity Buddhist followers—such as Richard Gere, Harrison Ford, and Steven Seagal—this documentary might come as somewhat of a surprise for it tells a different story, one that predates Tibet's emergence as the fashionable political cause in North America and Europe, and until recently has remained shrouded in secrecy.

In place of images of nonviolent and religious Tibetans that have become common currency in the Western popular imagination, this film portrays the armed guerrilla movement that sprang up after Chinese communist forces entered Tibet in 1950. Led by Tibetans from the eastern region of Kham, the resistance received covert support from the United States through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) between 1956 and 1974. Employing standard documentary conventions of archival footage and talking head interviews to tell its story, the film presents a compelling and tragic narrative of this Tibetan-American collaboration told from the point of view of retired CIA officers and former guerrillas. The unguarded interviews are remarkable

documents in and of themselves, with many individuals speaking frankly on camera for the first time about their experiences. Their stories fill in important gaps in our knowledge of this critical period of modern Tibetan history and flesh out our understanding of Cold War politics in Asia at the time.

Efforts to internationalize the Tibet issue began in the 1940s. American involvement started in 1942 in the context of World War II when U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt sent secret agents from the Office of Strategic Services (precursor of the CIA) to Tibet to scout for possible overland supply routes to the Kuomindang (KMT). The only concrete result from the encounter was a commitment by Washington to send radio transmitters, radio receivers, and generators to Lhasa, Tibet's capital.

Meanwhile, consumed by regional tensions and crippling internal quarrels between and within the clergy and laity, the ruling Buddhist elite in Tibet remained largely oblivious to larger changes taking place in China and elsewhere. These deep differences left them dangerously isolated and ill prepared to face the communists who came to power in 1949 vowing to "liberate" the whole territory of China, which, they argued, included Tibet. It was only after Mao Tse-tung's victory that the Dalai Lama's central government scrambled to mobilize support from the United States and Great Britain in the face of such threats.

Both the British and Americans equivocated at first, urging the Dalai Lama to seek assistance instead from the government of India (GOI). But by 1951, official American attitudes shifted with the rise of anticommunist fervor, and the United States indicated that it would be willing to provide support "if Tibet intended to resist communist aggression" (Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snow: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947,* Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 23), and Tibetan resistance to the Chinese did in fact emerge in the eastern part of the country after implementation of land reforms and collectivization between 1954 and 1956. Fierce fighting took place as Tibetans attacked Chinese cadres in towns across the area. News of the "Kanding revolt" spread internationally as Khampa refugees began spilling into India, further spurring American interest. Having been unsuccessful in establishing a direct line of communication with the Dalai Lama, the United States shifted its tactics. Instead of trying to influence the Lhasa government, the Americans decided to focus their attention on the emerging resistance movement, seeing it as a valuable means through which to achieve their Cold War aim of destabilizing communist China through covert action.

The Shadow Circus documents the period of the CIA's involvement with the Tibetan resistance, which lasted from 1956 to 1974. It traces the outline of the covert operation—code-named St. Circus—which included training of Tibetan volunteers on the Northern Marianas island of Saipan in the Pacific Ocean and Camp Hale in the mountains of Colorado in "hit and run tactics" of guerrilla warfare. Upon completion of their training, the men were airdropped into Tibet (along with weapons and radio equipment), where they were expected to make contact with Tibetan resistance forces and with the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa. In this documentary, we hear from Athar Norbu, one of 12 who survived the operation inside Tibet, who fondly recalls his experience of working with an American named Roger "Mac" McCarthy ("he was like a Khampa," recalls Norbu) in Saipan. Norbu and Lotse were airdropped in 1957 with radio equipment that they used to communicate with the Americans about conditions on the ground in Tibet. Norbu recounts meeting up with the Dalai Lama's escape party once it had left Lhasa and radioing the United States about the Tibetan leader's progress and intentions. Norbu's memories are an important reminder that it was the Dalai Lama's own decision to flee his homeland, not one made for him by the CIA, as some have claimed.

Other firsthand accounts by veterans of the guerrilla force reveal gaps of understanding between Tibetans and their American supporters, gaps that raise serious questions about the human cost of these kinds of operations mounted by the United States during the Cold War. In one of the film's most poignant moments, Thinley Paljor, a former guerrilla turned carpet seller in Nepal, describes the Tibetans' interpretation of the fact that a signed photograph of U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower hung on the wall at Camp Hale, the Colorado mountains training base for about 300 Tibetan fighters: "We thought he was giving us his direct support." The Americans who worked closely with Tibetans grew fond of their trainees, as Don Cesare points out in the film: "We were working directly with people who believed in their own cause—we got hooked on these people and learned about their cause."

Unfortunately but not surprisingly, those further away in Washington felt no such attachment to the Tibetan cause. As Sam Halpern, another retired CIA officer interviewed by the filmmakers, puts it, "The idea was to keep the Chinese occupied—it was a nuisance operation and didn't cost us much . . . our objective was never to get an independent Tibet." His point is underlined in an anecdote about CIA Director Allen Dulles, who at an agency briefing on the operation is reported to have asked, "Now, where is Tibet?" The sense of betrayal created by this misunderstanding is one of the main themes to emerge in the film.

Throughout the 1960s, the resistance forces launched raids into Tibet from their remote base in Mustang, Nepal. The CIA provided money and arms to the 2,000 guerrillas in Mustang until the American rapprochement with the People's Republic of China. The CIA's decision to make a "clean break" with these Tibetans left some deeply disappointed and betrayed. As one guerrilla states in the film, "All of a sudden, the CIA stopped our program. We felt we'd been deceived, our usefulness to the CIA was finished. We were only good for the short term."

Despite the cutoff of funds, the Tibetans maintained their resistance until 1974, when China pressured the Nepalese into closing down the base at Mustang and the Dalai Lama had to get directly involved. Ugyen Tashi recalls this moment with sadness: "He sent a tape with a message saying you must lay down your arms . . . some men cried, we had no choice but to turn in our weapons." Another guerrilla, Ato Chodak, tells us that "for some men, it was better to die than to give up. Sonam and four or five others killed themselves." Veterans of the Mustang force still live together in two camps in Nepal where many eke out a living spinning wool.

The film concludes with some self-reflection by CIA officers on the operation and whether or not they had in fact betrayed their charges. Weighing both sides of the argument, one American notes, "You could argue that the CIA just stirred up the pot . . . in that human lives were lost. . . . I made mistakes and misunderstood . . . but we had good intentions." The final word goes

to a Tibetan who claims that we should not regard the guerrillas simply as Cold War proxies. "Our armed struggle was just one chapter in our continuing struggle for independence . . . it still has meaning." His attempt to recuperate this moment of Tibetan history, despite the movement's ultimate failure, is what distinguishes *The Shadow Circus* from the majority of documentaries made about the issue today. Instead of depicting Tibetans as passive victims of the Chinese, the film represents Tibetans as historical agents who make choices, in this case one to take up arms in defense of their religion and homeland. For that reason alone it is worth watching.

The Shadow Circus, directed by Tenzing Sonam and Ritu Sarin, is based on extensive primary research, a result of the fact that Sonam is the son of the late Lhamo Tsering, chief field officer for the CIA in Tibet and Mustang. The filmmakers' unprecedented access to information and living survivors of the resistance movement makes this film an important historical document, one that will be of special interest to students of Tibet and the diaspora as well as to those with an interest in international relations and American politics during the Cold War. In the classroom, the film could be supplemented by readings from two recent books on the subject. One is by Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snow: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947* (cited above), and the other is by the former head of the CIA operation in Tibet, John Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle* (Public Affairs, 1999). ⬌

The Architecture of Mud. 1999. 52 minutes, color. A film (and video) by *Caterina Borelli.* For more information, contact Anonymous Productions, Documentary Educational Resources, 101 Morse Street, Watertown, MA 02472; 617-926-0491; docued@der.org.

STEVEN C. CATON
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Yemen has long been admired for its stunning and very distinctive mud-brick architecture. In the "old city" of the capital, Sana'a, for example, there are hundreds of houses between five and eight stories tall whose foundations are made of stone and the upper stories of sun-dried mud bricks, the latter laid to form an intricate geometric pattern on the external facades, sometimes whitewashed for greater visual relief. Beautiful stained-glass and alabaster windows filter the light of the harsh Arabian sun into rooms that are cool in the summer, warm in the winter. More dramatic still and quite different from the "northern" style, though obviously part of the same grand Yemeni masonry tradition, is the architecture of the Wadi Hadhramawt and its adjoining valley, the even more dramatic Wadi Do^{c}an. Not only has this part of Yemen had a different cultural history from that of the north—due to emigration from southeast Asia and particularly Malaysia, as well as to British colonial rule—it has also nurtured a different urban tradition. One can see this in its three main cities: Shibam to the west, famous for its "skyscraper" architecture; Tarim to the east, more renowned perhaps for its tradition of religious learning but also as a city of great colonial palaces built by its Malaysian-Yemeni rulers; and, finally, Seyoun in the middle, whose architecture may not be as distinguished, but it is a lively commercial center of the region nonetheless. It is on the varied architecture of this cluster of cities, as well as some of the villages of the adjoining Wadi Do^{c}an, that this documentary film focuses.

We see the various stages of house construction. First, the mud bricks are formed with wooden frames of different sizes, depending on where they are used in the structure. Then the foundation is laid with stones and a rubble in-fill topped by walls made from dried mud bricks. Unlike the houses in Sana'a, the sides are smoothed and painted in white and invitingly cool pastel colors. The interiors are especially beautiful, with their graceful columns of wood imported from southeast Asia and walls looking rather like tile than the limestone with which they are actually finished. Perhaps the most arresting scenes are the ones in which we see how this malas lime-plaster is made and then applied, often with extraordinary ornamental embellishments. What this footage also reveals is that this masonry is arduous work and involves highly caustic materials that are dangerous to the body, so it is no wonder that the tradition seems to be on the wane, as sons no longer succeed fathers in their trade and cheaper, less time-consuming materials such as cement are substituted for mud and limestone. But, as the builders explain, these more modern structures are less likely to be climate-efficient and enduring.

The story of the architectural tradition is told in the words of the masons themselves whom we hear speak in their local dialect, a treat for Arabists. The lack of any analysis on the part of architectural historians is a bit irritating, however. Other than the translators, the presence of the filmmakers is invisible, in keeping with the nonreflexive mode of the classic "observational" or realist film in which the images on the screen and the speech of the subjects are supposed to be self-revelatory, if not exactly self-explanatory. There is no narrator, the only voice-over reading the descriptions from two of the great travelers to the Hadhramawt in this century—the English writer and photographer Freya Stark and the Dutch diplomat van der Meulen—of the valleys and the architecture that they came across and found so beautiful. Their commentary seems a bit redundant when the scenery and images are already dramatic enough, and one wonders what their commentary is supposed to serve except perhaps to lend a certain scholarly "authority" to the film.

The cinematography is lovely throughout, though it must be said that it is not hard to take beautiful pictures in such a photogenic land. The editing is also at times clever, as when the image of a hand using an implement to smooth a mud surface is repeatedly inserted to mark the transition between scenes. The major weakness of Caterina Borelli's film is that she does not provide enough ethnographic context to make its subject matter altogether clear and intelligible, especially to the nonspecialist. Classroom viewing will have to be supplemented by maps, as well as cultural, social, and historical information. This caveat not withstanding, *The Architecture of Mud* is recommended as a valuable contribution to our ethnographic record about a relatively unknown part of the world. ⬌