THE PARALLAX EFFECT: THE IMPACT OF ABORIGINAL MEDIA ON ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

FAYE GINSBURG

parallax: (mf *parallaxe* fr. Gk. *parallaxis*, change, alternation...)
1. the apparent displacement or the difference in apparent direction of an object as seen from two different points. (*Webster's Third New International Unabridged Dictionary*, 1976)

Ethnographic film no longer occupies a singular niche. Other voices call to us in forms and modes that blur the boundaries and genres that represent distinctions between fiction and documentary, politics and culture, here and there. For those situated in the larger, nonspecialist audience outside of anthropology per se, these other voices often seem more incisive, informative, and engaging...The voice of the traditional ethnographic filmmaker has become one voice among many. Dialogue, debate, and a fundamental reconceptualization of visual anthropology in light of these transformations is, quite simply, essential (Nichols 1994: 64).

Central to multiculturalism is the notion of *mutual and reciprocal relativization*, the idea that the diverse cultures placed in play should come to perceive the limitations of their own social and cultural perspective. The point is not to embrace the other perspective completely but at least to recognize it, acknowledge it, take it into account, be ready to be transformed by it...

At the same time, historical configurations of power and knowledge generate a clear asymmetry within this relativization. The powerful are not accustomed to being relativized...It is therefore not merely a question of communicating across borders but of discerning the forces which generate the borders in the first place (Shohat and Stam 1995: 359).

This essay is an effort to rethink the way we position ethnographic film at the end of the twentieth century, with special attention to the relationship of the genre to the burgeoning of work by filmmakers from communities that have, historically, been anthropology's objects, in particular the work of indigenous media makers. Because the assaults on indigenous people have been so severe, these current efforts to reassert a cultural and historical presence through a widely acccessible media form are particularly important, because their self-consciousness about cultural production suggests a close parallel to the project of anthropology, yet one whose urgency is far greater than any academic agenda. Moreover, ethnographic film at the *fin de siècle* cannot pretend (anymore than can anthropology in general) that it occupies the same postion in the world it did even twenty-five years ago, as the only show in town, so to speak. The genre now exists amidst a bewildering array of imagery from around the planet and an equally complex range of technologies for its production and circulation. Certainly, the moral and empirical imperatives of these new media forms would make it necessary to rethink the genre's project at the present moment. Additionally, the rich possibilities that this rethinking can offer in terms of epistemology, aesthetics, pedagogy, production, and research seem more than sufficient to justify the expanded framework I advocate here, and that others have elsewhere from

slightly different perspectives (Michaels 1986, 1987; Nichols 1994; Prins 1994; Roth 1994; Shohat and Stam 1994; Turner 1990, 1992).[1]

I am not in any way advocating that indigenous media should displace ethnographic film, as has been suggested by some critics. Rather, I argue more positively for developing a framework that will allow us to think of the different but related projects of ethnographic film and indigenous media in relation to each other, to help expand and refine the broader project of representing, mediating, and understanding culture through a variety of media forms. To do so requires attending to both ethnographic and indigenous films as representations of culture *and* as objects that are themselves implicated in cultural processes. While my research (and therefore my case) is based on my work with Australian Aboriginal and other indigenous media makers, my suggestions could easily be extended to work being done by media makers from diasporic communities and Third World communities, as others have done (Nichols 1994), although with important attention to the historical and political differences inherent in these terms and the people and objects they point to (Shohat and Stam 1994).[2]

Specifically, I am interested in how indigenous film and video offer productive challenges to the assumptions of the genre of ethnographic film by (1) reframing questions about the representation of cultural differences; by (2) highlighting mediamaking as a dimension of contemporary (and historical) social, cultural, and political processes; and by (3) expanding the discursive field that can bring a variety of subjects into conversation around questions raised by these media as they travel across boundaries of difference. Most importantly, in my view, this work demonstrates the necessity of acknowledging multiple points of view in both the creation and reception of screen representations of culture. In this way, ethnographic film can offer an exemplary model for social theory that increasingly argues for the contested nature of cultural production.

To capture the sense I have of the epistemologically positive impact that indigenous media might have on ethnographic film, I use the metaphor of the parallax effect.[3] In astronomy, this term was invented for the phenomenon that occurs when a change in the position of the observer creates the illusion that an object has been displaced or moved; this effect is harnessed to gain a greater understanding of the position and nature of the cosmic object. In optics, the small parallax created by the slightly different angles of vision of each eye enables us to judge distances accurately and see in three dimensions. Drawing on a similar principle, one might understand indigenous media as arising from a historically new positioning of the observer behind the camera so that the object—the cinematic representation of culture—appears to look different than it does from the observational perspective of ethnographic film. Yet, by juxtaposing these different but related kinds of cinematic perspectives on culture, one can create a kind of parallax effect; if harnessed analytically, these "slightly different angles of vision" can offer a fuller comprehension of the complexity of the social phenomenon we call culture and those media representations that self-consciously engage with it. It is my argument that the parallax created by the different perspectives in these media practices is crucial in responding to contemporary critiques of ethnographic film that regard indigenous media and related practices as the genre's death knell. Rather, bringing these different practices into relationship can help us expand our sense of the field's possibilities and revive its contemporary purpose.

This notion of the parallax grows out of my interest in Jean Rouch's longstanding commitment to and development of film as a vehicle for the creation of a "shared anthropology," in research, in production, in exhibition, in pedagogy, and in social action. First and foremost is his concern that one's knowledge about another culture be produced in a way that can be shared with members of that culture. As he wrote almost twenty years ago

...what reason could we as anthropologists give for the glances we cast over the wall at others?

Without a doubt, this word of interrogation must be addressed to all anthropologists, but none of their books or articles has ever been questioned as much as have anthropological films...film is the only method I have to show another just how I see him. In other words, for me, my prime audience is...the other person, the one I am filming (Rouch 1975: 99).

Faye Ginsburg is the Director of the Program in Culture, Media and History at New York University and a member of the Department of Anthropology.

Other key ideas and practices associated with Rouch are really extensions of this idea, such as *cinema vérité*—in which the activity of filming becomes a reflexive and catalytic encounter among all involved—or the collaborative production of a series of "ethno-fiction" films with his African friends (Rouch 1975). These were early important efforts to create cultural dialogue and critique through the juxtaposition of commentaries of Europeans and Africans, accommodating not only diverse views but also multiple formal strategies, including collaboration as in semi-fictional works such as *Jaguar* (1967), parodic narrative as in *Petit à Petit* (1969), and surreal techniques as in *Cocorico, Monsieur Poulet* (1974). The rich alternative possibilities Rouch's films provided for cultural dialogue and commentary from the point of view of the subjects foreshadowed later developments in indigenous media, both in terms of production methods and stylistic experimentation.

Rouch's concept of *regards comparés* (compared views) most closely resembles the idea of the parallax effect. Beginning in 1978, Rouch organized a series of conferences at the Musée de l'Homme devoted to a comparative study of the media coverage of different groups, beginning with the Yanomamö. The events brought together people from all over the world, including anthropologists, filmmakers, television executives, video artists, amateur movie makers, as well as people from the societies being viewed, to begin to see how different media agendas, as well as the culture/nationality and gender of producers, shape the images produced. The juxtaposing of these different kinds of films and their producers and subjects together to jointly contemplate the images that they had created of a culture is precisely what the parallax effect is meant to describe; of course, this kind of understanding can occur in many different processes. As another example, Rouch's work has always been in dialogue with and supportive of the development of an African cinema as an essential component of his utopian view of cinema as a "a new language which might allow us to cross the boundaries between all nations" (1975: 90).

While in this paper I focus on *producers* of work from other communities, the changing composition of *audiences* for these works has also motivated this essay, as others have also noted. For instance, in their recent book *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Ella Shohat and Bob Stam point out, "Spectatorship is not sociologically compartmentalized; diverse communities can resonate together" (1995: 351). Indeed, during the last decade of teaching ethnographic film to graduate students in New York City, my classes have become increasingly "multicultural." Seminars regularly include Native Americans, African Americans, recent immigrants from the Caribbean, Latin Americans, Asian Americans, Indonesians, Indians, Pakistanis and Iranians, to name just a few. Many of these people are themselves media producers; in any case, their readings of films are not only quite sophisticated but also bring an unexpected perspective to "classic" works. Discussions have ranged from a lively debate about why (unpredictably) the Native American students liked *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty 1922) or what difference it made to watch *N!ai: The Story of !Kung Woman* (Marshall 1980) from the point of view of a black female spectator. The complex responses of these students to films over the years made it very clear that the assumed spectators for most ethnographic films, until recently, have been white middle class male straight audiences, and that some interrogation of the relationship of these films to other kinds of audiences is long overdue, and would be a welcome extension of the recent excellent research on ethnographic film spectatorship by Wilton Martinez (1992).

GENRE POSITIONS: INDIGENOUS MEDIA AND ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

Ethnographic film is in trouble. Not entirely due to what ethnographic filmmakers have done, or failed to do, but also because of the nature of the institutional discourse that continues to surround this mode of documentary representation. And not entirely due to either of these factors, but also because of the ground-breaking, convention-altering forms of self-representation by those who have traditionally been objects (and blind spots) of anthropological study: women/natives/others. For over ten years a significant body of work has been accumulating that comes from elsewhere, telling stories and representing experiences in different voices and different styles (Nichols 1994: 63).

The origins of what we have come to identify as ethnographic film were in the efforts of Western scholars, travellers, explorers and filmmakers to record on film what they regarded as the supposedly "vanishing worlds" of people from non-western, small-scale, kinship-based societies—i.e., those who had been the

initial objects of anthropology as it developed in the early twentieth century. However, it was only after World War II that ethnographic film took on definition and shape as a genre, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s when efforts to "reinvent anthropology" (Hymes 1969) kept pace with a variety of historical, intellectual, and political developments. Briefly stated, these include movements for independence by colonized peoples; the radicalization of young scholars in the 1960s who began to question the purpose of their knowledge and its relevance to those they were studying; the replacing of positivist models of knowledge with more interpretive and politically self-conscious approaches; and a reconceptualization of "the native voice" as one that should be in more direct dialogue with anthropological interpretation. By the 1980s, this constellation of events precipitated what some have called "a crisis in representation" for the field that required new, experimental and more dialogical strategies for transmitting anthropological understandings (Marcus and Fischer 1986).

It is, perhaps, a reflection of ethnographic film's position in the academy that little attention was paid to the fact that a number of central figures in ethnographic film already had responded to this "crisis" with moral, intellectual, and aesthetic creativity. For example, questions of epistemology, ethics and the position of the native interlocutor were being addressed as early as the 1950s by ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch, in works such as *Les Maîtres Fous* (1954) and *Chronicle of a Summer* (1960). Visual anthropologists such as Jay Ruby also articulated arguments in print advocating a critical reflexivity in ethnographic film (Ruby 1980); and, in an important shift toward the current paradigm in 1975, David MacDougall called for more participatory methods of production and styles of representation (MacDougall 1975). Beginning in the mid-1970s, David and Judith MacDougall, John Marshall, Gary Kildea, Barbara Myerhoff, and Jorge Preloran and later, filmmakers such as Sarah Elder were developing collaborative and/or highly reflexive film projects that subverted the purely observational style that had initially characterized the field. In the hands of Rouch, such methods also challenged the prevailing scientific realism of the time through "ethno-fiction" projects developed jointly with his African friends.

In films like *Jaguar* (1967) and *Petit à Petit* (1969), the imaginative re-creation of contested cultural and political realities provided rich alternative possibilities for native self-representation, foreshadowing indigenous media both in terms of production and style. A more "sober" (Nichols 1994) attempt to put the means of production and represenation into the hands of indigenous people was carried out by Sol Worth and John Adair in the 1960s. Their project (discussed in the book *Through Navajo Eyes* [1972]) taught filmmaking to young Navajo students without the conventions of western production and editing, to see if their films would reflect a distinctively Navajo film worldview. While it was a shortlived project and was very limited in its view of the social processes around making media (e.g., no thought was given to circulation or even the social aspects of production), the experiment was nonetheless groundbreaking, and helped break the classic paradigm of ethnographic film of "us" always filming "them."

This situation began to change radically by the 1980s, as indigenous people began producing their own images; some chose to work with accomplished and sympathetic filmmakers and activists such as Vincent Carelli at the Centro de Trabalho Indigenista in Sao Paolo, Brasil (Aufderheide, this issue); Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling at the Alaska Native Heritage Project, described in this volume (Elder, this issue); or with anthropologists such as Terry Turner, who initated the Kayapo Video Project (Turner 1990). Others have entered directly into film and video production themselves, for example Hopi video artist and activist Victor Masayesva, Jr. (1984, 1988) or Inuit producer/director Zacharias Kunuk (1989).

Their media work has been provoked by an increasing awareness of the politics of representation on the part of indigenous people, spurred on by the not always welcome introduction of communications satellites that bring television reception to indigenous people living in remote areas. The desire to be in control of imagery made about them has been facilitated by the increasing availability of relatively inexpensive media technologies such as portable video cameras and VCRs, as well as more complex communication forms that have been used to facilitate regional linkages, as in the development of compressed video through The Tanami Network in Central Australia (Ginsburg 1993). The enthusiasm with which these have been embraced (Molnar 1995) suggests the importance of indigenous media as an expression of contemporary indigenous sensibili-

ties, part of a desire on the part of Aboriginal people to "talk back" on their own terms to those who might have presumed to speak for them. It is worth noting that these developments have received relatively little attention in contemporary anthropology despite the repeated call for more dialogical approaches. As Aboriginal activist and anthropologist Marcia Langton astutely observed in discussing the development of Aboriginal media (1993:84),

> Aboriginal people have invented a theatre of politics in which self-representation has become a sophisticated device, creating their own theories or models of intercultural discourse such as land rights, self-determination, 'White Australia has a black history' and so on...

> The complaint, "This is all so tiresome and infantile; why do we have to listen to this chorus of 'I want.' 'I demand'?" is part of an intellectual malaise. Some intellectuals even demand that the Native answer back in a refereed journal, say something about the French intellectuals, Jacques Derrida or Jean Baudrillard, and speak from the hyperluxury of the first world with the reflective thoughts of a well-paid, well-fed, detached scholar.

It seems that the interest in hearing "the native voice" is too often confined to those texts that are already inside the academic circle, providing "new and improved ways for institutionalized ethnographers to vex each other more precisely by involving 'others' more thoroughly in the process" (Nichols 1994: 84). Yet, indigenous media, because it can circumvent the more rigid hierarchicies of print genres, provides a unique opportunity to bring these kinds of representations into a more equitable relationship.

With these developments in mind, I would like to consider the challenge indigenous media poses to the assumptions on which ethnographic film has been based. One response to the presence of indigenous media production (in its broadest sense) is that it has demonstrated the irrelevance of ethnographic filmmaking. In part, this follows from fraught discussions of the last decade about the "burdens of representation"; in some formulations, only members of particular communities are considered entitled to represent these groups, thus reinscribing essentialism in the face of a

growing recognition of the complexity and instability of identity. Underlying these responses, of course, is a profoundly static and reified understanding of culture. The very notion of "we" and "they" as separate is built on the trope of the noble savage living in a traditional, bounded world, for whom all knowledge, objects, and values originating elsewhere are polluting of some reified notion of culture and innocence, as Johannes Fabian clarified so eloquently in *Time and the Other* (1985). While such ideas seem patently out of date in relation to contemporary work in anthropology, they undergird recent critiques of indigenous media practice as inherently corrupting and commodifying (Faris 1992; Moore 1992). Similarly (and equally discouraging), anthropologists have been known to question the so-called authenticity of an indigenous person's identity because he or she was using a camera. As a succinct response to that position, let me quote Kayapo video maker Mokuka's response to such a comment when he visited Manchester, England in 1992 with Terry Turner: "Just because I hold a white man's camera, that doesn't mean I am not a Kayapo...if you were to hold one of our head-dresses, would that make you an Indian?" (in Eaton 1993). In other cases, anthropologists have responded to videos I have shown of traditional ceremonies made by Pitjantjatjara people of Central Australia as "salvage anthropology," unable to comprehend that the camera was not a "cause" for its performance but had been incorporated into an ongoing ritual practice.

The making of images by anyone, whether by "outsiders" or "insiders," is problematic when ethical and social rules have been violated in the process and the grounds for the filmmaker's presence unacknowledged. Conversely, the fact that one is an "insider" does not guarantee an untroubled relationship with one's subject, as is dramatically clear in Navajo filmmaker Arlene Bowman's problematic encounter with her traditional grandmother in *Navajo Talking Pictures* (Bowman 1991). The legitimacy of one's presence with a camera in any setting (especially when power relations are unequal) should *always* be raised, not simply as a textual question referred to through reflexive cinematic strategies, but in social relations that are secured before a film or video project even begins. The fact that the people with whom one is dealing may also have cameras and choose to represent themselves with them should not diminish that concern. Each approach raises

its own sets of issues regarding ethics, social relations, power, and rights to represent, whether one is filming others or one's own group.

Indigenous media production has also provoked more conservative responses, which consider such work as an equal but altogether separate category from ethnographic film, with different intentions and audiences, such that they can be held apart both practically and analytically. Indigenous work might be viewed, for example, as intended only for internal cultural consumption and therefore not satisfying some minimal definition of ethnographic film, as if one could assume the stability and singular identity of the audience either culturally or historically. Clearly, there are institutional structures that channel the circulation of work to certain kinds of spectators. However, in practice, neither "ethnographic film" nor "indigenous media" have ever been bounded by their potential audience. To name one prominent example, for nearly half a century, Jean Rouch has argued that he considers the primary audience for his films to be the people who are in them, although mostly they are viewed and appreciated by Western viewers, many of whom are not anthropologists. As another example, the works of many indigenous makers that were originally intended for community viewing are circulating nationally and even internationally. And recently, people all over the world have been appropriating colonial photography and films for purposes of cultural revival and political reclamation, completely resituating these earlier works for entirely unanticipated viewers. For example, the film *Box of Treasures* (Umista Cultural Center 1983) shows how contemporary Kwakiutl Indians are utilizing a number of resources—including colonial photography—to facilitate cultural revival.

Given the inadequacies of arguments concerning singular positions of the producer or audience as bases for holding ethnographic and indigenous film apart, I suggest we explore the possibilities for considering these practices within the same analytical frame. This is part of a more general and healthy revision of the field that comes out of a broad rethinking of cultural theory. For example, Terence Turner, in an essay on this topic, makes a compelling argument for rethinking our understanding of culture in a way that clarifies how practices like indigenous media are linked to broader struggles for political rights:

...from the critical vantage point of a conception of culture as empowerment to collective action, self-production, and struggle, the presently constituted forms of *multiculturalism* may be seen as embryonic expressions of the revolutionary principle that the protection and fostering of the human capacity for culture is a general human right and, as such, a legitimate goal of politically organized society (1993: 428).

David MacDougall suggests the term "intertextual cinema" to draw attention to these changes as they apply to ethnographic film. He writes:

Since 1896, ethnographic film-making has undergone a series of revolutions, introducing narrative, observational and participatory approaches. With each, a set of assumptions about the positioning of the film-maker and the audience has crumbled. Now it is the single identity of each of these that is under review....

...we are already seeing the changes in a new emphasis on authorship and specific cultural perspectives....I think we will increasingly regard ethnographic films as meeting places of primary and secondary levels of representation, one cultural text seen through another...films which are produced by and belong equally to two cultures...

If we are in the midst of a new revolution, as I believe we are, it is one which is interested in multiple voices and which might be called an *intertextual cinema.*

In recent years ethnographic films have become less insular in opening themselves to the voices of their subjects, but one can now foresee films which are produced by and belong equally to two cultures. This should not in my view result in cultural relativity run wild... It may instead help us recast the problem of Self and Other more productively as a set of reciprocal relations in which film, when all is said and done, plays only a very small part (1992: 97).

MacDougall's idea of intertextual cinema addresses similar concerns to those I am raising and allows for a
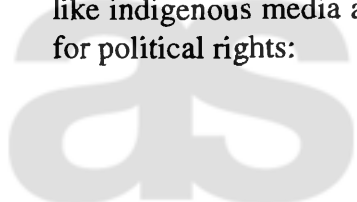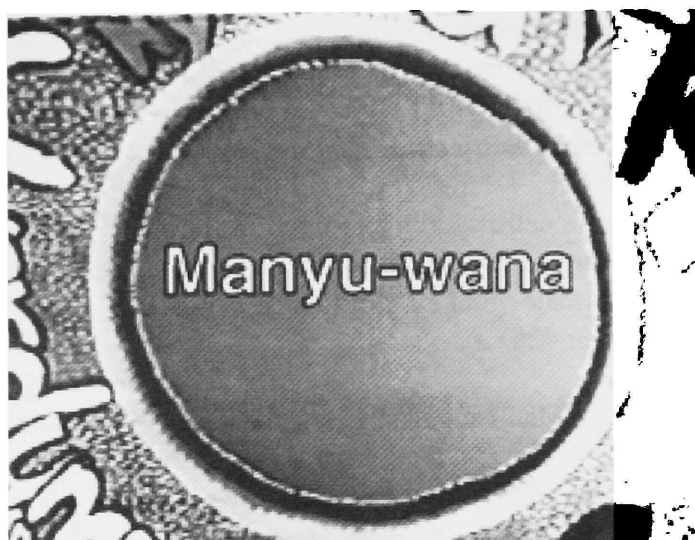
Figure 1. Title card from *Manyu-Wana (Just for Fun)*, a community-based Aboriginal children's program.
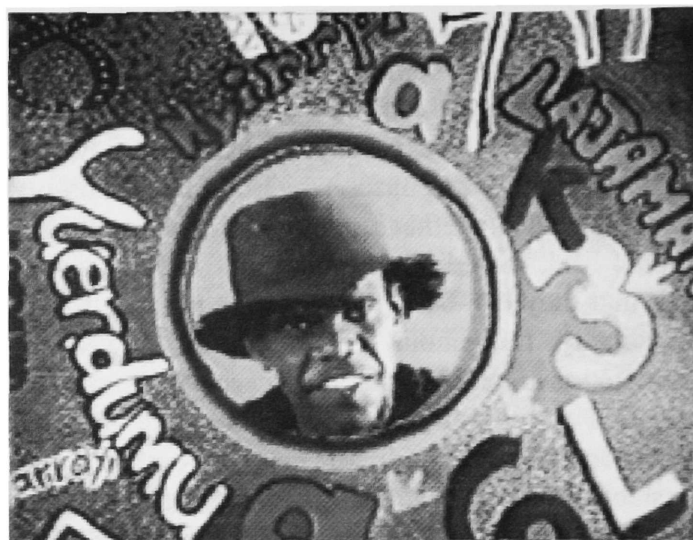

Figure 2. Host of *Manyu-Wana* children's program.

Video Clips (Figures 1-4) in courtesy of Warlpiri Media Association, Yuendumu, Northern Territory.

broader framing that can accommodate ethnographic and indigenous work. Additionally, I would argue not only for intertextuality but also for an emphasis on the social relations constituted and reimagined in media explicitly engaged in representing culture. This focus on social action extends the Griersonian assumption regarding documentary practice that the viewing of a work will lead to enlightened social action. In an ironic critique of that premise, film theorist Bill Nichols argues that documentary consumption is built on the viewers' pleasure in the kind of "knowing" that draws on our social imagination and cultural identity, what he calls "epistephilia" (as a parallel to the erotically-based scopophilia in theories of narrative film speactatorship); epistephilia, he argues, creates a paradoxical aesthetic that produces "less a disposition to engage directly with the world than to engage with more documentary" (1994: 180).

In the case of ethnographic film and even indigenous media, epistephilia is no doubt a part of the pleasure that brings audiences to watch them, including most anthropologists. However, in terms of an *analytic* frame that we can use in thinking about this work, we need to attend more closely — even ethnographically — to the very activity of film/video production, as part of a social process engaged in the mediation of culture. This understanding builds on the insights of indigenous producers who clearly recognize their media work as a form of social action when they become the authors of representations about themselves.

The motivations behind Aboriginal community video production and television transmission can be seen as basic issues of self-determination, cultural maintenance, and the prevention of cultural disruption.

…The strategies which indigenous Australians have employed to overcome the problems posed by the impact of television and video include: cultural and aesthetic interventions; control of incoming television signals; control of self-representaion through local video production in local languages; refusal to permit outsiders to film; and negotiation of co-productions which guarantee certain conditions aimed at cultural maintenance.

An expansion of experimental film- and videomaking is vital to allow Aboriginal people to make their own self-representations and to create culturally useful meaning (Langton 1993: 85).

In other words, the pleasure that Aboriginal producers and viewers get from creating and viewing media about their own lives derives from the very production and circulation of this work as forms which enable them to articulate and enhance their own cultural practices. This is true for work that is viewed primarily in Aboriginal communities, as well as for work that is explicitly intended for "white audiences" (although such categories are questionable given that these media

Figure 3. from *Manyu-Wana.* Teaching children the Warlpiri word for the number three.

Figure 4. from *Manyu-Wana.* Illustrating the number three and a Warlpiri word using the letter "k"

quickly and inevitably escape their original circuits). For those looking at work produced by people from another culture there may be more than epistephelia involved; instead it may summon up new sources of identification and engagement, as Shohat and Stam have suggested. Arguing that identity is less something one has than something one does, they write:

> The concept of crisscrossing identifications evokes the theoretical possibility and even the political necessity of sharing the critique of domination and the burden of representation. It even involves making representation less of a burden and more of a collective pleasure and responsibility (1995: 346).

In the case of indigenous work created explicitly for outsiders, the intervention of Aboriginal views of Australian history, for example, are part of an ongoing effort to reverse efforts to erase the presence of Aboriginal people that began with the colonial doctrine of *terra nullius.* This allowed settlers to declare Australia "unoccupied," justifying the colonial appropriation of lands from Aboriginal people from the seventeenth century until the present, a hegemonic legacy that was only challenged successfully in the 1993 Mabo decision (Pearson 1994). Under such circumstances, not unlike those faced by indigenous people in many other regions, the very creation and viewing of work representing Aboriginal perspectives is a significant form of social action. An example of the mobilization of media

to assert Aboriginal presence in Australian history, on a national scale, occurred with the approach of Australia's Bicentenary celebrations in 1988. Protests over the lack of appropriate media representation for Aboriginal people became widespread, as activists drew attention to their view of the founding of a British colony on their shores as "Invasion Day." The state television channel, the ABC, in response to such pressures, formed the Aboriginal Programs Unit. The first work produced by the unit, *Babakiueria*, was made by a mixed ensemble of European and Aboriginal Australian actors. This biting satire of the 200 year legacy of racism in Australia entailed a recasting of Australia's past as if the native population had been white Europeans and the colonists Aboriginal. We follow an Aboriginal investigative reporter as she lives with "a typical white family in a typical white ghetto" in a parodic indictment of ethnographic inquiry and the journalistic gaze. The show was broadcast on national television in 1988 during the Bicentenary.

This explicit sense of indigenous media as cultural production has specific manifestations in the work itself. As a novel form for indigenous societies, film and video provide an especially important arena in which an Aboriginal past and present as well as social relations with the encompassing society can be playfully reimagined, a possibility more traditional indigenous forms cannot so easily accommodate. Indigenous productions are often directed to what I call the mediation of ruptures of cultural knowledge, historical

memory, and social relations between generations. For example, *Manyu-Wana* (Just For Fun) (1991) is a community-based Aboriginal children's program made at Yuendumu, a remote desert settlement of Warlpiri people living in the Northern Territory. The project was initiated by Warlpiri elders who, along with school teachers, were concerned about the loss of traditional language and numerical skills that seemed to accompany the acquisition of English literacy. Aware of the lure of television for kids, they decided to make a series of video programs that would teach them literacy in Warlpiri, with the participation of the children themselves and the help of a local filmmaker, David Batty. Looking like a combination of *Sesame Street* and home movies, using considerable humor and modest special effects (e.g., a cardboard box "magically" turns into a truck), the programs are comprised of short segments improvised with children at Yuendumu; written Warlpiri words are superimposed along the bottom of the screen. The tapes, originally designed for local consumption in Warlpiri communities, schools and out-stations, quickly escaped their original circuit. *Manyu-Wana* has been shown on national television in Australia (on the SBS channel) and charmed audiences at festivals and exhibitions in London, New York, and Montreal, despite the fact that is entirely in Warlpiri. (The series was funded by the National Aboriginal Languages Programme in Australia, along with Central Television, London, indexing the increasing combination of local and global interests in creating this kind of cultural imagery). Such mediations are not simply repair or salvage work; they enable Aboriginal people to envision what the late Eric Michaels called a "cultural future" (1987), some "third path" along which possibilities can be imagined other than those offered by the non-choices of assimilation or traditionalism, possibilities which might allow for something as basic as literacy in an Aboriginal language or an Australian nation in which an Aboriginal perspective prevailed.

One can see in such media productions how longstanding Aboriginal skills at collective self-production through narrative and ceremonial performance are engaged in innovative ways that are simultaneously indigenous and intercultural. *Coniston Story* (1984), one of the first tapes made at Yuendumu by Frances Jupurrurla Kelly and the Warlpiri Media Association with American researcher Eric Michaels, records an elder telling about "the Killing Time" in 1929, when one hundred Warlpiri men, women, and children gath-

ered for a ritual were massacred by whites at Coniston Station, near their settlement, in retaliation for the killing of a white trapper. According to Michaels, this story "has come to function like an origin myth, explaining the presence and nature of Europeans and articulating the relations that arose between the two cultures. Which version of the story becomes 'official' would seem to matter greatly....These are crucial historiographic issues..."(Michaels 1987: 40-41). When they began shooting the story, twenty-seven people turned up to make a film that featured only three people and required only two operators. Upon inquiring, Michaels was told: "They're *kudungurlu* [ceremonial managers of the land]. They want to stay on the side for this story." In other words, video production was organized socially according to the same structures for the performance of religious ritual, the cult structures still had to be observed: the *kurdungurlu* maintained their traditional role, to witness and instruct the *kirda* (owners of the land) on their performance (Langton 1993: 64, 65).

The mediating qualities of indigenous media point to the common (and perhaps most significant) characteristic that they share with more conventional understandings of ethnographic film. They are all intended to communicate something about that social or collective identity we call "culture," in order to mediate across gaps of space, time, knowledge, and prejudice. However, the differences in the goals of such work can bring important questions to the fore regarding cultural difference and social inequalities. This point is central to the arguments of Shohat and Stam (1994). They advocate what they call a "polycentric multiculturalism," but not as a favor,

> something intended to make other people feel good about themselves; it also makes a cognitive, epistemological contribution. More than a response to a demographic challenge, it is a long overdue gesture toward historical lucidity, a matter not of charity, but of justice. An answer to the stale, flat, and unprofitable complacencies of monoculturalism, it is part of an indispensable reenvisioning of the global politics of culture (1995: 359).

The films most closely associated with this desire (ideally) work toward creating understanding between two groups separated by space and social practice.

Increasingly, they also are calling attention to the difficulties of such comprehension, for example, as in Dennis O'Rourke's *Cannibal Tours* (1988) or Trinh T Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* (1982). Additionally, indigenous media and the best of contemporary ethnographic film share an interest in the *processes* of identity construction, creating and asserting a position for the present that takes into account the inconsistencies, contradictions, and complex subject positions of contemporary life.

In conclusion, let me return to the idea of a parallax. The common object of interest—the representation of culture in film and video—has not been displaced because of the changed position of the observer—in this case, the perspective of indigenous (and other) media makers. The media produced by these people helps to realign a long outdated paradigm of ethnographic film built on the assumption of culture as a stable and bounded object, and documentary representation as restricted to realist illusion. By recognizing indigenous media (and other works) as forms of social action, we are obliged to move away from comfortable and taken for granted narrative conventions that reify "culture" and "cultural difference." Instead, we—as producers, audiences, and ethnographers—are allowed to encounter the mulitiplicity of points of view through which culture is produced, contested, mediated, and reimagined. This is very much part of what Terry Turner has recently articulated as historically emergent "praxis-oriented notions of culture as the realization of a collective human potential for self-production and transformation" (1994: 4271).

Indigenous media opens up not only socio-cultural questions regarding the production and circulation of media, but also shifts our attention to new possibilities for the expression and interrogation of questions of culture and its representations. Hopi videomaker Victor Masayesva, Jr. states the case with straightforward eloquence (1994):

> If film is about imagined time and space, it is borne from the imagination of people each of whom have constructed those times and spaces differently...Certainly I feel the power of sacred spaces of ancient kivas at the ruins of Chaco Canyon, Mesa Verde, Betattakin, and certainly our ancestral ruin Kawestima. Then why are we continually left out of the recreation of these spaces and times on film?

Figure 5. *Cannibal Tours,* a film by Dennis O'Rourke. (Photograph Courtesy of Direct Cinema, Santa Monica, CA).

Looking at how film and video are produced cross-culturally, we encounter a complex range of formal/narrative strategies for reflecting on subjective and objective conditions of identity formation as a means of "representing reality." As a few examples, I think of the effective use of parodic juxtaposition and performance in a number of Native American films such as *Harold of Orange* (Brennan/Vizenor 1983), *Ritual Clowns* (Masayesva 1988), or *Sun, Moon, and Feather* (Rosen and Miguel Sisters 1989); the use of multilayered screen texts to explore the complex relations between generations and former homelands explored by Asian diasporic videomakers such as Richard Fung (*The Way to My Father's House* 1992) or Rea Tajiri (*History and Memory* 1992); or the use of dramatic reflexivity to consider the intersections of class, culture subjectivity, historical iconography, and sexuality in works such as *Looking for Langston* (1993) or *The Attendant* (1994) by Black British filmmaker Isaac Julien.

To restate the case, our cinematic practice of ethnographic film can be seen as part of a continuum of practices engaged in representing culture that are all enmeshed in wider social, cultural, and political processes in which cross-cultural "looking" must be understood as taking place within relations of inequality

With the development of indigenous media (as well as work from other communities), the possible positions of authorship in ethnographic film and video expand, and we are more able to "see" the multiple ways cultural realities are understood and experienced, (Rouch's *regards comparés*), producing an illuminat-

ing (if slightly disorienting) parallax effect. Thus, indigenous media not only provides important new arenas of cultural production; it also resituates ethnographic film as a cinematic mediation of culture by calling attention to the presence of other perspectives as well. It is my argument that this revision of the genre of ethnographic film is necessary if the field is to keep in step with changing understandings of culture and cultural representation, both in the academy and, more importantly, in the world. In my view, this is not a revolution for the genre, but the logical next step for a field that has been shifting slowly over the last twenty years toward more dialogical, reflexive, and imaginative modes and away from the monologic, observational, and privileged Western gaze stereotypically associated with the field.

NOTES

1. Nichols, in his essay "The Ethnographer's Tale" (1994) is attempting a similar project, but in the end, seems not to have found a frame that can place ethnographic film and multicultural media in a productive analytical relationship to each other. His characterizations of ethnographic film practices as well as the debates in the field are highly selective and somewhat out-of-date; for example, he chooses not to include absolutely key figures such as Rouch who would disrupt his argument regarding the sobriety and scientific insularity of ethnographic film, yet several times quotes people such as Jack Rollwagen, whose presence and ideas are marginal at best to the field. Similarly, while he mentions some indigenous media productions, he chooses not to mention any of the analytical work on indigenous media that has been in press since the late 1980s (Faris 1992; Ginsburg 1991, 1993; Michaels 1987; Turner 1990), which have raised questions and debates regarding the field of visual anthropology along similar lines to those of Nichols. Turner and Ginsburg in particular advocate the importance of looking at media practices by indigenous people as forms of social action, which pushes Nichols' notion of looking at film as cultural representation even further into the arena of lived experience that he finds lamentably absent in his somewhat selective history of the field.

2. Shohat and Stam write:
> The concept of the "Third World" also elides the presence of a "Fourth World" existing within all of the other worlds; to wit, those peoples variously called "indigenous," "tribe," or "first nations"; in sum, the still-residing descendants of the original inhabitants of territories subsequently taken over or circumscribed by alien conquest or settlement. As many as 3,000 native nations, representing some 250 million people, according to some estimates, function within the 200 states that assert sovereignty over them. (1994: 32).

3. I want to thank Jacqueline Urla for recently referring me to "Double Visions", a review written by Homi Babha, in an article that appeared in the January 1992 issue of *Artforum,* in which he also uses the idea of the parallax as a way of thinking about the postcolonial perspective in the presentation of cultures. As he points out,
> ...a theory of cultural difference must be able to explain those transformations in esthetic value and cultural practice that are produced through histories and broad patterns of cultural conflict, appropriation, and resistance to domination (1992: 88).

> ...There is no simple parallelism or equidistance between different historical pasts. A distinction must be maintained—in the very conventions of

representation—between works of art whose pasts have known the colonial violence of distruction and domination, and works that have evolved into an antiquity of a more continuous, consensual kind, moving from courts to collectors, from mansions to museums. Without making such a distinction we can only be connoisseurs of the survival of Art, at the cost of becoming conspirators in the Death of History (1992: 89).

REFERENCES

Aufderheide, Pat
1995   Videomaking With Brazilian Indians. *Visual Anthropology Review.* Vol. 11.2.
Bhabha, Homi
1992 Double Visions. *Artforum* January: 85-89.
Carelli, Vincent
1988   Video in the Villages. *Commission on Visual Anthropology Newsletter*, May, 1988.
Clifford, James
1988   On Ethnographic Authority. In *The Predicament of Culture.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press: pp. 21-54.
Eaton, Mick
1993   Amazonian Videos. In *Sight and Sound*, November: 17.
Elder, Sarah
1995   Collaborative Filmmaking: An Open Space for Making Meaning. *Visual Anthropology Review,* Vol. 11(2).
Fabian, Johannes
1985   *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object.* New York: Columbia University Press
Faris, James
1992   Anthropological Transparency, Film, Representation and Politics. In *Film as Ethnography.* P. Crawford and D. Turton (eds.). Manchester: University of Manchester Press. pp.171-182.
Ginsburg, Faye
1991   Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village. *Cultural Anthropology* 6 (1): 92-112.
1993   Aboriginal Media and the Australian Imaginary. *Public Culture* 5 (3):557-578. Special Issue, Screening Politics in A World of Nations, Lila Abu-Lughod, ed.
1994   Culture and Media: A (Mild) Polemic. *Anthropology Today*: 5 - 15.

Hymes, Dell
1969   The Use of Anthropology: Critical, Political, Personal. In *Reinventing Anthropology*, New York: Vintage: pp. 3-81.
Langton, Marcia
1993   *Well, I Heard it on the Radio and Saw it On the Television.* Sydney: Australian Film Commission.
MacDougall, David
1975   Beyond Observational Cinema. In *Principles of Visual Anthropology.* P Hockings, ed. Chicago: Aldine. pp. 109-124.
1992   Complicities of Style. In *Film as Ethnography.* P Crawford and D. Turton, eds. Manchester: University of Manchester Press. pp. 90-98.
Marcus, George E. and Michael Fischer
1986   *Anthropology as Cultural Critique.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Martinez, Wilton
1993   Who Constructs Anthropological Knowledge? Toward a Theory of Ethnographic Film Spectatorship. In *Film as Ethnography.* P. Crawford and D. Turton (eds.). Manchester: University of Manchester Press: pp. 131 - 163.
Masayesva, Jr., Victor
1994   The Emerging Native American Aesthetic. *The Independent*: 21 -23.
Michaels, Eric
1986   *The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia: 1982-1986.* Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
1987   *For A Cultural Future.* Melbourne: Art & Criticism Monograph Series.
Molnar, Helen
1995   Indigenous Media Development in Australia: A Product of Struggle and Opposition. *Cultural Studies* 9 (1): 169-90.
Moore, Rachel
1992   Marketing Alterity. Visual Anthropology Review, 8(2): 16-26.
Nichols, Bill
1994   *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Pearson, Noel
1994   Mabo: From Remnant Title to Social Justice. Text of a lecture delivered at the University of Sydney: Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies: 1-6.

Prins, Harald
1994   Indigenous Advocacy in the Electronic Domain: Documentary Film and Human Rights. Paper presented at the 93rd American Anthropological Assocaition Meetings, Washington D.C.
Rouch, Jean
1975   The Camera and Man. In *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. P. Hockings (ed.). Chicago: Aldine: pp. 83-102.
Roth, Lorna
1994   Northern Voices and Mediating Structures: The Emergence and Development of First People's Television Broadcasting in the Canadian North. Unpublished Dissertation. Montreal, Quebec: Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University.
Ruby, Jay
1980   Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology, and Film. *Semiotica* 30 (1/2): 153-179.
1991   Speaking For, Speaking About, Speaking With, or Speaking Alongside: An Anthropological Dilemma. *Visual Anthropology Review* 7 (2): 50-67.
Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam
1994   *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* New York: Routledge.
Sloan, Jen
1979   Compared Views of the Yanomamö. In *Film Library Quarterly* 12 (1):20-22.
Turner, Terence
1990   Visual Media, Cultural Politics, and Anthropological Practice: Some Implications of Recent Uses of Film and Video Among the Kayapo of Brazil. *Commission on Visual Anthropology Newsletter*. Spring: 8 - 13.
1992   Defiant Images: The Kayapo Appropriation of Video. *Anthropology Today* 8 (6): 5-16.
1993   Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What is Anthropology That Multiculturalists Should Be Mindful of It? *Cultural Anthropology* 8(4): 411-429.
Worth, Sol and John Adair
1972   *Through Navajo Eyes*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bowman, Arlene
    1991   *Navajo Talking Pictures*
Brennan, Dianne and Gerald Vizenor
    1983   *Harold of Orange*
Carelli, Vincent
    1988   *Video in the Villages*
Elder, Sarah and Leonard Kamerling
    1988   *The Drums of Winter*
Featherstone, Don (for the ABC)
    1988   *Babakieuria*
Flaherty, Robert
    1922   *Nanook of the North*
Fung, Richard
    1992   *The Way to My Father's House*
Julien, Isaac
    1993   *Looking for Langston*
    1994   *The Attendant*
Kunuk, Zacharias with Norman Cohen
    1989   *Quaggiq*
MacDougall, David and Judith MacDougall
    1992   *Photo Wallahs*
            A Wife Among Wives
Marshall, John
    1980   *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*
Masayesva, Jr., Victor
    1984   *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*
    1988   *Ritual Clowns*
Myerhoff, Barbara with Lynn Littman
    1977   *Number Our Days*
O'Rourke, Dennis
    1988   *Cannibal Tours*
Rosen, Bob and the Miguel Sisters
    1989   *Sun, Moon, and Feather*
Rouch, Jean
    1954   *Les Maîtres Fous*
    1960   *Chronicle of a Summer*
    1967   *Jaguar*
    1969   *Petit à Petit*
    1974   *Cocorico, Monsieur Poulet*
Tajiri, Rea
    1991   *History and Memory*
Trinh T. Minh-ha
    1982   *Reassemblage*
Umista Cultural Center
    1983   *Box of Treasures*
Warlpiri Media Association
    1984   *Coniston Story*
    1992   *Manyu Wana*