



---

Culture/Media: A (Mild) Polemic

Author(s): Faye Ginsburg

Source: *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Apr., 1994), pp. 5-15

Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2783305>

Accessed: 08-12-2017 20:04 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Anthropology Today*

Europe. It was represented at a discussion on the use of chimpanzees for medical experiments, held in the European Parliament in October 1993. If readers of this article would like more information about PACE, or a summary of the conference, please write to Ms N. Partington, Secretary of PACE, 1 Brookside, Houghton le Spring, Tyne and Wear, DH5 9NW, UK, or to me. Asquith, P. J. 1983. The monkey memorial service of Japanese primatologists. *RAIN* 54, February, 3-4. Porphyry (transl. T. Taylor 1965, 1992). *On abstinence from animal food*. London: Centaur. Quiatt, D. and V. Reynolds, 1993. *Primate behaviour: Information, social knowledge, and the evolution of culture*. Cambridge: U. P. Singer, R. and P. Cavallieri, 1993. *The great ape debate*. London, Fourth Estate. Sorabji, R. 1993. *Animal minds and human morals*. London: Duckworth.

Singer and Cavallieri's *The Great Ape Debate*, in relation to mentally subnormal humans, who fall within the circle of humanity, just as apes fall outside it.

As for the field workers, of whom I am one, what have we done or are we doing about the situation in laboratories? Less, I think, than we should. Our tradition stems not from experimental science but from Darwinism, from observation. We try to unravel nature. Our ethic is closely allied to the need for truth, the need to observe meticulously and report accurately all that we see. We work alone and must be honest about what we see. Later, others will repeat our work and see if we were right. In the meantime, we owe it to our peers to be honest and truthful. All this goes for laboratory workers too. But in the field tradition, there is no suffering by the animal observed as a result of the observation. We field workers keep our hands clean.

Why should we concern ourselves with the sufferings of primitive primates? Because morality isn't divisible. We stick to the highest moral standards we are capable of in the field, in reporting our observations as faithfully and truthfully as we can. We expect that of others too. We know our animals for what they are: selfish and at times brutal maybe, but also capable of caring and co-operation, always active, feeding grooming, mating and playing. We know that before a primate can be used for a medical experiment it has to be isolated, quarantined, vaccinated and prepared for the experiment. Many of us have not been inside medical laboratories (some have), but we all know what goes on there, more or less. It is the knowledge we have that makes us morally involved.<sup>1</sup>

That is the practical issue, and it affects only a few of us. The wider issue is whether or not we are now prepared to accept that apes and humans are on a continuum, that their species is special in some ways and our species is special in others, but there is no absolute difference between the two. If that position is accepted,

then many questions arise to which we have no answers at present. For instance, can we cage chimps, experiment on them and exhibit them with moral impunity? We do so on the grounds that they are not of our kind. But what if they are, or nearly? What if it's only a matter of degree, not of kind? All sorts of things that we accept today will become less acceptable if we accept continuity. The moral dimension we apply among ourselves cannot be allowed to stop operating for chimps if they and we are so akin. Just as we apply moral principles to imbeciles, we should need to apply them, with perhaps slight modifications (but not radical ones), to apes. Probably we are unwilling to do this yet, but things do change. There was a time when bear-baiting was common enough in English towns.

Where does anthropology come in? It could certainly play its part in changing public perceptions. They are already starting to change. The films of Jane Goodall, the apes that can understand language (those experiments are non-invasive and also help raise public awareness of ape intelligence, so full marks to them), and the growing public consciousness of our responsibility towards the animal kingdom, all are playing their parts. Anthropology plays its part wherever and whenever lecturers teach primate behaviour in comparative perspective, or cover the field of human and ape genetics, or human and ape evolution. The findings by Louis and Richard Leakey or Don Johanson of our pongid and hominid ancestors, the discoveries of anthropological field workers on the behaviour and social organization of apes, the writings of theoretical anthropologists bringing together facets of ape and human kinship, aggression, sexuality, maternal care and infant development – all are contributing in the same direction to a change in public perception, away from the divide, towards the continuum. Only morality, it seems, has yet to come to terms with the new situation. □

---

# Culture/media

## A (mild) polemic

---

### FAYE GINSBURG

*The author is an associate professor of anthropology at New York University, where she directs the Graduate Program in Culture and Media, and the Rockefeller Center for Media, Culture, and History. She has written one and edited two books on gender and the politics of reproduction. She is currently writing a book on indigenous identity in the age of electronic reproduction.*

*This article is based on the Forman Lecture given by the author at the University of Manchester on 8*

#### Forms of media that interpret cultures

I call this article a polemic, because the issues I want to raise cannot easily be separated from political and moral passions that enliven any contemporary discussion of culture and its representation today. However, this work is equally part of my enduring intellectual interest in understanding processes of self-conscious social transformation as carried out by those who I call cultural activists, an analytic frame that encompasses my research on both abortion activists and indigenous media makers (Ginsburg 1989, 1991). Accordingly, I would like to start with a quote from one such person who has helped shape my thinking, Frances Peters, an Australian Aboriginal film-maker who produces work for the Aboriginal Programs Unit of the ABC.

...[A]s a commercial filmmaker I'm like the African artist<sup>1</sup> who makes *colons*, those wooden statues sold to tourists. They aren't valued because they aren't seen as authentic and because they represent colonization, not some sort of pure 'primitive' past.... But I've got a message and I belong to the whole world. It's going to be difficult because I make *colons*, because people are going to see themselves

in [my] film[s]. (Peters 1993)

This statement is a grounded, ethnographic instance of a broader situation. We live in a world in which, increasingly, people learn of their own and other cultures and histories through a range of visual media – film, television, and video – that have emerged as powerful cultural forces in the late twentieth century. The development of low-format inexpensive video equipment, as well as cable and satellite technologies, has placed the capacities for image-making, once monopolized by media industries, in the hands of people almost everywhere on the planet. Those such as Frances Peters from indigenous, ethnic, or diaspora groups who are using such media, are more and more conscious of their activities as vehicles for mediating cultural revival, identity formation and political assertion.

The transnational and intercultural spread of these new communication forms has stirred many twentieth century intellectuals to consider their transformative impact on social life. Their arguments about the effects of mass media have ranged from the dystopic – suggesting

November 1993, under the auspices of the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology, University of Manchester. The lecture was illustrated by film and video clips.

the hegemonic reach of state and corporate powers into everyday lives (Schiller 1976, Tunstall 1977) – to the utopian – heralding the potential of new technologies to create electronic democracies and global villages (Fiske 1986, McLuhan 1964). Until recently, frameworks like these have been the bases for most discussions of media. Only recently were their assumptions measured against the lived realities of the production, circulation and reception of visual media representations in different societies. New discussions are emerging, in and outside of academia, concerning the multiple ways that culture is encoded in film, TV and video – whether dominant or alternative – and how these representations are interpreted as they mediate across disjunctures of time, culture and prejudice (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1993a, Aufderheide 1993).

This essay is a response to the challenges these developments offer to visual anthropology, and how they might transform our objects of analysis, our theoretical interests and our methodologies. Such a transformation requires a self-conscious examination of our own practices. Part of my argument, then, is to include media (including ethnographic film) as appropriate objects of ethnographic enquiry and social and cultural analyses. For example, to understand the significance of ethnographic film today, we need to consider it in relation to a broader range of media engaged in representing culture, especially work being produced by those who traditionally have been the object of ethnographic film, such as indigenous people. To resituate ethnographic film as part of a continuum of representational practices aligns our project with a more general revision of anthropology that is concerned with the contested and complex nature of cultural production.

Working along similar lines, David MacDougall suggests the term 'intertextual cinema' to draw attention to the increasingly complex visual ecology in which ethnographic film operates. In his essay, 'Complicities of Style' 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* ... (MacDougall 1992)

The idea of intertextual cinema, as MacDougall conceives it, addresses concerns similar to those I want to raise here regarding the need to acknowledge the multiple positions of those engaged in the creation and consumption of screen representations of culture. To take account of these, I borrow the term 'parallax effect', used to describe the illusory perception of displacement of an object observed due to a change in the position of the observer. My argument is that looking at media made by people occupying a range of cultural positions, from insider to outsider, can provide a kind of parallax effect, offering us a fuller sense of the complexity of perspectives on what we have come to call culture, but only if we have the analytic tools to put these perspectives together into a larger meaningful framework. In the interest of such a model, I would expand on MacDougall's ideas; it is crucial that we understand media not only intertextually but also in the context of broader social relations that are constituted

and reimagined in film and video works explicitly engaged in representing culture. This in no way dismisses the value of the text itself. If we recognize the cinematic or video text as a mediating object – as we might look at a ritual or a commodity – then its formal qualities cannot be considered apart from the complex contexts of production and interpretation that shape its construction. Films embody in their own internal structure and meaning the forms and values of the social relations they mediate, making text and context interdependent.<sup>1</sup>

To restate the case regarding ethnographic film, anthropologists need to situate our own film/video practices in relation to these other media forms concerned with interpreting cultures, and to understand all of this as worthy of ethnographic inquiry. My suggestion, then, is that we expand not only the kinds of media work we consider, but also the way we look at media to include its relation to other cultural forms, as well its circulation via production, distribution, and reception both locally and across social boundaries. Such research can provide critical insights into how culture and social relations are being mediated through cinema, television and video in local, national and intercultural settings.

Let me offer a few examples that suggest different ways people have been thinking more analytically about ethnographic film over the last decade. In 1986, in an effort to situate their own ethnographic film productions in specific social and cultural locations, Linda Connor, Patsy Asch and Tim Asch wrote *Jero Tapan: Balinese Healer*, an 'ethnographic film monograph'. This book, meant to accompany and elucidate the four films they made about Jero as a healer and medium, offers ethnographic background, film and sound texts, shot lists and commentary, and more general notes on the context of filming. As another example, in research that took television production on ethnographic topics as its object, Barry Dornfeld carried out an ethnographic study at an American public television station, following the social relations and cultural assumptions that shaped a cross-cultural mega-series on childhood, from conception to production to reception (1992). Finally, in a collection of essays on British ethnographic film on television (Ginsburg 1992), Terence Turner (1992a), David Turton (1992), and Annette Weiner (1992) offer cogent analyses of the production and reception of various ethnographic films and series they worked on for British television. Their analyses of these works and the social processes that shaped them mobilized multiple points of view including those of anthropologists, producers, general publics, and, most importantly, the people they worked with – respectively, in Amazonia, the Trobriands, and Ethiopia. Without the expanded intellectual and empirical bases that such work provides, visual anthropology and the practice of ethnographic film are in danger of becoming atavistic and myopic, especially as images of other cultures are interpolated increasingly into the seamless flow of television, as is especially true in Britain. We cannot pretend that our work stands apart from the domain of mass media, or from a broad-based global ecology of media imagery that has been created via satellites, VCRs, cable, low-format video and a myriad of other sources. This shift to expand our range, then, is one that can effectively address contemporary critiques of ethnographic film and revive its contemporary purpose.

The expanded framework I propose might provisionally be termed the anthropology of culture and media, a denomination I see as invoking two often neglected le-

Frances Peters. Photo courtesy of Aboriginal Programs Unit, ABC.





From *Petit à Petit* (1969) by Jean Rouch. (Photo courtesy of The Center for Visual Communication.)

gacies in visual anthropology. The first legacy can be traced to Jean Rouch and his ideas of shared anthropology, ethno-fiction, and *regards comparés* (Rouch 1975, Sloan 1979). These were early important efforts to create a parallax effect through the juxtapositioning of cultural commentaries of Europeans and Africans, accommodating not only diverse views but also multiple formal strategies including fictional (*Jaguar*), parodic (*Petit à Petit*), and avant-garde techniques (*Cocorico Monsieur Poulet*). Following Rouch's legacy, it is easy to see how his early efforts connect with current work by Third World and indigenous media-makers, people who are particularly engaged in the repositioning of cultural authority and experience by using satire, humour and performance, to provide multi-layered commentaries on their own identities and on the dominant society. The film, *Sun, Moon and Feather* (1989), for example (see front cover), is a hilarious yet poignant examination of identity and memory by Lisa, Gloria and Muriel Miguel, Native American sisters of Cuna and Rapahnonok descent. They grew up in Brooklyn, where their family were involved in carnival acts performing 'Indian dances and songs' for mostly white audiences in the 1940s. As adults in the 1970s, they formed the Spiderwoman Theatre Company. In *Sun, Moon, and Feather*, they blend performance, memoir, and home movies to reflect on the sisters' complex histories and identities as Native American women. Their childhood memories coincide with those of many other Americans (the arrival of a sibling, discovering sex, alcoholism), yet whose experiences differed in important ways as they negotiated their subjectivities through distorted images of Native American culture. This is brought home to the audience not through solemn indictments of Hollywood for its inherent racism, but through an antic re-enactment by the sisters of 'Indian Love Song' intercut with the original cinematic version featuring Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald.

The second legacy I shall invoke is the work of an-

thropologists (and others) who took media as a serious aspect of scholarly inquiry, beginning in the 1930s with Mead and Bateson's films and photography projects in Bali and New Guinea. After a hiatus of interest in the 1950s, new possibilities opened up in the 1960s with the work of Sol Worth, Jay Ruby and Richard Chalfen. Ruby and Chalfen argued in the 1970s that if anthropology is going to pay serious attention to film-making (as was occurring in the 1960s with the ethnographic film work of Tim Asch, Robert Gardner, and John Marshall), then anthropologists needed to attend to the cultural and social dynamics of the media systems they were engaging. Sol Worth summarized this argument nicely in a title of a 1976 essay as a 'shift from visual anthropology to the anthropology of visual communication'. He wrote:

There are, it seems to me, at least three basic premises ... for us to examine. First, is our deeply held and largely unexamined notion that ... motion pictures, are a mirror of the people, objects, and events that these media record photochemically. Second is the questionable logic of the jump we make when we say that the resultant photographic image could be, should be, and most often is something called 'real', 'reality', or 'truth'. A third concern, which is central ... increasingly to all people studied or observed by cameras for television, whether for science, politics, or art, is the effect of being ... 'the object of that tool'. (186)

One should distinguish between ... film as a record *about* culture and ... as a record *of* culture. One should also distinguish between using a medium and studying how a medium is used ... (190) here I am talking about looking at how someone takes a photograph or puts together an advertisement, as well as how he makes a movie ... (191)

While these words were written almost twenty years ago, it is only now that they are becoming accepted in the field.

Since the late 1980s there has been a small but vital efflorescence of ethnographic research on television, cinema, and video practices around the globe. While some of this work is by people trained by Worth or Ruby, much of it has been spurred by changed circumstances in the world, in particular the ubiquitous pene-

tration of new media. Notable among these studies are projects to develop and understand the use of media by indigenous peoples, such as the work of the late Eric Michaels (1986, 1987, 1991) (a student of Jay Ruby), and Terry Turner's Kayapo Video Project (1990, 1992b). Other groundbreaking work looks ethnographically at the reception of popular media in Third World settings, for example Victor Caldarola's study of television reception in outer Indonesia, or Lila Abu-Lughod's research on the production and interpretation of Egyptian soap operas among people of various classes and backgrounds (1993). These studies offer models for ethnographers (and others) to come to terms with the inescapable presence of media as a contemporary cultural force. They also suggest a future in which visual anthropology (or culture and media) draws closer to current anthropological concerns with the mediation of hegemonic forms and resistance to them; the growth and transnational circulation of public culture; the creation of national and other social imaginaries; and the development of new arenas for political expression and the production of identity.

### Self-positioning

I would like to digress briefly to position myself as someone shaped by particular mentors and a specific zeitgeist. When I was asked to develop a programme in ethnographic film at New York University in 1986, I was determined to develop a curriculum that would accommodate some of the developments in media that were challenging and exciting to me. As a graduate student, independent documentary maker, and television producer who came of age in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the world of independent film and video seemed to be exploding with possibilities. For me, as for many others, the annual Margaret Mead Film Festivals, which began in 1977 at the American Museum of Natural History, were galvanizing. The Mead events introduced many Americans not only to ethnographic film as a genre that was hitting its stride, but also to key figures in the field such as David and Judith MacDougall, Asen Balikci, Tim Asch, and Jean Rouch. As a case in point, the first festival, which featured the work of Jean Rouch, spurred me to pursue studies with him and to begin graduate study in anthropology.

The late 1970s were also a time when media arts centres such as Third World Newsreel and Global Village were establishing themselves in New York City as collectives for independent media-makers from a variety of backgrounds. Cinema made by film-makers from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia were beginning to circulate among repertory houses; and the first Native American film and video festival was held in New York City in 1979. These all seemed to be developing along a parallel track to ethnographic film but the relationship of these practices to each other was unclear or even hostile, despite some common goals.

Clearly, the work being produced by people from communities which anthropologists often studied was changing the entire landscape of media representations. This was particularly true of the dynamic work being done by media-makers of colour in the United States about their own cultural and historical identities. For example, pieces such as *I Am Joaquin* (1969; Luis Valdez with El Teatro Campesino) or *Yo Soy Chicano* (1976, Jesus Trevino, Barry Nye) were among early efforts to relocate Chicano identity in a reimagined past, from mythical origins in Aztlan through Mexican and southwest U.S. history. Film and videomakers with

more experimental approaches began producing visions of American culture and history that simultaneously addressed particular cultural communities and their relations with the dominant society, as well as audiences interested in formal experimentation. Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* (1991), for instance, explores the complex impact of her family's experience of US internment camps for Japanese Americans during World War II. *Ritual Clowns* (1988, 18 min.) by Hopi video artist Victor Masayesva, Jr. uses a collage of narrative and visual elements – archival footage, computer animation, music, performance, humorous readings of anthropological texts by Hopi children in animal masks – organized around sacred clowns as key ritual figures in Hopi culture. Masayesva considers these clowns on their own terms, as they have been misapprehended by racist missionaries, appropriated by anthropologists, and as commentators on global dilemmas. Thus, the video both explores and is an example of the acerbic, ritually cleansing role of humour, parody, reversals and prophecy in Southwest Native American cultures.

The change in the American media zeitgeist I have been describing was not confined to independent production. In the arena of public television, the enormously successful twelve-part American series, *Roots*, first broadcast in 1976, was a clear watershed, followed a decade later by the *Eyes on the Prize* public television series documenting the history of the American civil rights movement. Through such vehicles, African American media-makers and scholars took the lead in translating new scholarship into accessible visual media that could reach audiences far beyond the university.

The U.S. case is exemplary of broader developments in which marginalized people worldwide are employing a variety of media to assert their cultural and political presence. They are using their work to mediate boundaries of time, space and language across historically-produced social ruptures, and to construct identities and narratives that link past, present and future. While such media have had some influence on teaching and scholarship in the academy, their more profound impact has been in the building and expansion of a whole range of supportive cultural institutions through which alternative media forms have become more visible and even fashionable since the 1980s. To cite a British example, Channel 4 and the British Film Institute, through the Workshop Declaration of 1981, made minority media-production groups eligible for nonprofit production money to create innovative programmes in their communities. With funds from the Greater London Council's race relations unit, two ground-breaking black film groups, Sankofa and Black Audio Film, financed their first works (Fusco 1988).

To return to my own narrative for a moment, it was evident to me that we could no longer ignore the impact of such visual media on the production of culture and the creation of collective memory, both inside and outside of official channels. The challenge to ethnographic film-makers and anthropologists was to come to terms with this new social field in which we no longer held a monopoly on images of other cultures for the West. (Barbara Myerhoff, a personal mentor, was among the few American anthropologists who addressed these issues in her work (1977)). For me, the first step was to find a way to include a broader range of work in teaching visual anthropology; the dearth of available material on indigenous media production inspired me to begin research on indigenous media production in 1988, especially among Aboriginal Australians. Rather than regarding such work as 'degenerate'

cultural forms, I was interested in how we could understand them as arenas of positive cultural production. The insights of social and visual anthropology, enlarged to encompass this expanding nexus of culture and media, could provide both the substance and the framework for the research and pedagogy necessary to comprehend these developments as significant mediations of contemporary culture.

### Trajectories

Having laid out my polemic and its roots, I want to trace a trajectory for these ideas that recuperates their foundations in the history of visual anthropology. Despite the ideas of people such as Jean Rouch who made early and deliberate efforts to break the reified dualisms of *gemeinschaft/ gesellschaft*, these categories have had a striking and depressing resilience in the field of ethnographic film, visual anthropology and communications research. While there are certainly exceptions, and I will elaborate on them, these categories still hold true for many anthropologists when it comes to mass media, which are viewed as disruptive if not corrupting of the integrity of small-scale non-western societies once (and probably still) identified as our bailiwick.

Such views are particularly evident in the responses of some to the work of the indigenous media makers who are the focus of my current research. In my experience, even sophisticated anthropologists are quick to question the so-called authenticity of an indigenous person's identity simply because he or she was using a camera. Kayapo video maker Mokuka apparently anticipated this when he visited Manchester in September 1992, as is clear from his reported comments to the assembled group:

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?' (quoted in Eaton 1992a,b)

I believe some of this misapprehension comes from anthropology's lack of analytical engagement with media more generally as an area for ethnographic study. Even in the U.S. and other societies where cinema and television are arguably among the most powerful cultural forces at play, they have been virtually ignored as possible research sites for ethnographers. With the exception of the aforementioned experiments in American anthropology, until recently, there has been little systematic ethnographic engagement with what is rapidly becoming the most widespread means of cultural production and mediation on the globe. As Debra Spitulnik notes, in her 1993 *Annual Review* essay on 'Anthropology and the Mass Media,

An inquiry into just why and how anthropologists have managed to neglect the centrality of mass media in twentieth century life would not only be of historical interest, but also of potential use in illuminating certain conceptual gaps in contemporary anthropological theory. (1993)

In response to such comments, part of my goal is to offer a revised intellectual history of visual anthropology. Of course, any such effort at revisionism is an argument about where we should be in the present. I want to suggest a certain trajectory into the present that broadens ethnographic film and visual anthropology to encompass what I have been calling culture and media.

In fact, there is a history in our field of considering<sup>1</sup> visual media as distinctive artefacts through which the societies and cultures that produce them are reproduced, contested or changed. As I described earlier, some initial efforts were made during and after World War II in America by a group of anthropologists – Ruth Bene-

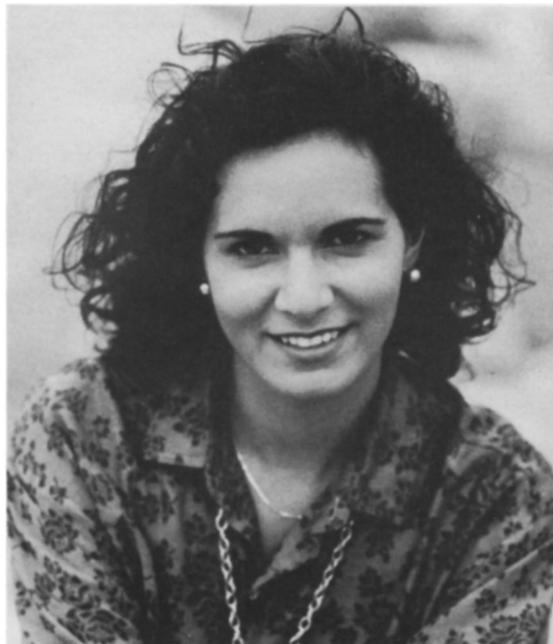
dict, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson – who were summoned by the U.S. government to study the cultural characteristics of enemy nations, especially Germany and Japan, in order to better prepare the U.S. for war and peace. In order to carry out their assignment to report on 'national character traits' and lacking the possibility of doing foreign fieldwork during the war, these anthropologists used whatever data were available to them, in particular propaganda films and popular cinema, as well as interviews with expatriate populations from these countries who were living in the U.S. The most well-known results of this period were Ruth Benedict's best-selling book on Japanese culture, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946); the collection of studies edited by Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux, aptly named *The Study of Culture At a Distance* (1952, see also Howard 1984); and Gregory Bateson's provocative psychoanalytically-inclined analyses of a popular German propaganda film, *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1980, see also Bateson 1943). Hortense Powdermaker's ethnographic study of the U.S. cinema industry, *Hollywood: the Dream Factory* (1950) was a logical extension of their work, applied to an American context, which unfortunately set no lasting trends.

A more concerted effort to consider visual media ethnographically was initiated by Sol Worth, who developed a graduate programme in visual communication at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1960s. Influenced by Worth's approach, Jay Ruby initiated a visual anthropology seminar at Temple University in 1968. In 1974, Ruby (along with Richard Chalfen, a student of Worth's hired by Temple in 1970) announced the first Masters in Visual Anthropology in the U.S. with a focus on culture and communication, and production training in Santa Fe under Carroll and Joan Williams. This programme, along with the annual Conference on Visual Anthropology that was a regular event organized by Ruby from 1968 to 1980, and the journal *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* which began in 1974, made the Philadelphia area a vibrant centre in the development of a broader understanding of visual anthropology. This approach included the social uses and cultural meanings of film, television, video, and photography, for example, Chalfen's study of snapshot photography (1987) or Michael Intintoli's ethnographic study of the production of American soap operas, *Taking Soaps Seriously* (1984). Unfortunately, after Worth's death in 1977, that approach didn't continue to have a strong impact on the field, suggesting that it may have developed a bit ahead of its time.

Renewed interest in visual anthropology in the U.S. and U.K. tended to focus more exclusively on ethnographic film production. The contemporary understanding of ethnographic film acquired definition and shape during a critical period, the 1960s and 1970s, when efforts to 'reinvent anthropology' (Hymes 1969) were produced by a variety of historical, intellectual and political developments. Briefly stated, these include: the end of the colonial era with assertions of self-determination by colonized peoples; the radicalization of young scholars in the 1960s and 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.

A number of central figures in ethnographic film responded to these circumstances with moral, intellectual, and aesthetic creativity. For example, questions of epi-

Tracey Moffatt, director  
of *Bedevil and Night  
Cries: A Rural Tragedy*.



stemology, ethics and the position of the native interlocutor were being addressed as early as the 1950s by ethnographic film-maker Jean Rouch, in works such as *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955) and *Chronicle of a Summer* (1960). By the late 1970s, long before James Clifford's challenge to monologic ethnographic writing (1988), David and Judith MacDougall, John Marshall, Gary Kildea, Melissa Llewelyn-Davies, Barbara Myerhoff and Dennis O'Rourke were developing reflexive and dialogical film projects, subverting the observational style that had initially characterized the field. Visual anthropologists such as Jay Ruby also articulated arguments in print advocating a critical reflexivity in ethnographic film (1981).

In an important shift in 1975, David MacDougall called for more participatory methods of production and styles of representation, a critical recognition of the power relations embedded and embodied in ethnographic film practice and aesthetics. 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. Films like *Jaguar*, *Petit à Petit*, and *Moi Un Noir*, offered an imaginative re-creation on film of contested intercultural and political realities. The rich alternative possibilities they provided for self-representation and political commentary from the point of view of the subjects, foreshadowed later developments in independent media both in terms of production methods and stylistic experimentation. For example, in the improvised parody of ethnographic film, *Petit à Petit*, Jean Rouch's African friends Damouré and Lam become ethnographers of Paris. In an especially funny and famous scene, Damouré carries out his 'research' on the streets of Paris and finally ends up in front of the Musée de



From Tracey Moffatt's  
*Night Cries* (1989)  
(Photo courtesy of  
Women Make Movies  
Inc., New York.)

l'Homme measuring the heads and teeth of bewildered Parisians.

A less antic effort at 'shared anthropology' was carried out in the U.S. by Sol Worth with John Adair, an anthropologist who had worked many years with Navajo. Their plan was to teach film technology to Navajo students without transmitting the conventions of western production and editing, to see if their films would reflect a distinctively Navajo film 'grammar'. Indeed, the works demonstrated aesthetic principles consistent with Navajo cultural concerns. However, Worth and Adair failed to consider seriously differences in the social relations around image-making and viewing, even though these concerns were raised in the initial negotiations. In a now legendary exchange, Sam Yazzie, a leading medicine man and elder, after discovering that films would not benefit the sheep on which the Navajo economy depended, queried 'Then why make movies?' The lack of consideration for how movies might 'do the sheep good' – i.e. be of social value for this community – meant that the Navajo Eyes project, while prescient of things to come, was rather short-lived and, retrospectively, appears as a somewhat sterile experiment for focusing almost exclusively on the film text as the site for the production of cultural meaning (Worth and Adair 1972).<sup>2</sup>

By the 1980s, such patronizing naiveté could no longer be sustained. Indigenous, Third World and diaspora peoples who have been the exotic objects of many films have been concerned increasingly with controlling their own images, either by working collaboratively with more accomplished and sympathetic film-makers and activists, such as Amazonian Indians who work with Vincent Carelli and the Centro de Trabalho Indigenista (Carelli 1988), or Terry Turner and the Kayapo Video Project (1992b); or the Yupik Eskimo communities who have been collaborating on films with Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling and the Alaska Native Heritage Project (Elder 1993). Others have been entering into film and video production themselves, for example Inuit producer/director Zacharias Kunuk has been making video dramas about Inuit life based on improvisations by members of his home community, Igloodik, for example *Qaggiq* (1989). Aboriginal film-maker Tracey Moffatt is known for her stylish, experimental aesthetics and biting critiques of sexism and racism in Australia, as in *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, in which a sick and aging white mother is nursed by her now middle-aged adopted Aboriginal daughter. Her first feature film, *Bedevil*, premiered at Cannes in 1992. This media work has been provoked by their increasing awareness of the politics of representation, along with the widespread penetration of new inexpensive media technologies. It is aided as well by communications satellites that have brought the ambiguous presence of television downlinks to non-western people living in remote areas. I want briefly to consider indigenous media as paradigmatic of the larger universe of challenges to conventional understandings of visual anthropology. The following short description and analysis of one case demonstrates how ethnographic understandings can expand our anthropological as well as cinematic sensibilities.

#### Television culture: The Aboriginal Programs Unit of the ABC

I have chosen the five year old Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU) of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Australia's national state-supported television channel, as an illustration in part because it is little



Staff of the Aboriginal Programs Unit, ABC (courtesy of ABC)

known and their work is of interest. Additionally, it counters the current western fascination with images of 'hi-tech primitives' as in the 1992 Wim Wenders film *Until the End of the World*. This movie featured a crew of Aboriginal technicians assisting mad scientist Max von Sydow in his efforts to use technology to make visible people's dreams, thus playing quite literally on the notion of Dreamtime, the English gloss for Aboriginal cosmological systems.

Contrary to such futuristic nostalgia, Aboriginal producers at the APU have advanced university degrees and are sophisticated about the ins and outs of national television vis-a-vis their interests as indigenous makers. Because of the broadcast range of the ABC and the resources it has as a state institution which allow it freedom from commercial sponsorship, the APU is playing an important part in increasing the televisual representation of Aboriginal people throughout Australia. However, perhaps because of television's distinctly national profile, ephemeral character, and middle-brow status among intellectuals and artists, the APU has had virtually no recognition outside of Australia, despite the quality of the work it produces.

The APU emerged out of nearly a decade of struggle by Aboriginal people to gain some control over their representation in Australian media. These concerns were clarified in the early 1980s in anticipation of the government's 1985 launching of a communications satellite, AUSSAT; this meant that traditional Aboriginal people living in remote parts of Australia's Central Desert would suddenly be subject to television signals (Batty 1993). It was out of a concern that they have some say in what the satellite might bring into their lives that Aboriginal activists in Australia's centre mobilized around access to and control over media.

With the approach of Australia's Bicentenary cel-

ebrations in 1988, protests over the lack of appropriate media representation for Aboriginal people became more widespread, as activists drew attention to their view of the founding of a British colony on their shores as a cultural disaster. The ABC, in response to this pressure, formed the Aboriginal Programs Unit. One of the first works produced by the unit, *Babakueria*, was made by a mixed ensemble of Euro-Australians (producer/director/writer) with Aboriginal actors and production crew. This dramatic parody 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 the ethnographic/journalistic gaze. The piece was broadcast during 1988 as a counter to the celebrations of the bicentenary year of Captain Cook's Australian landing.

Since then, all APU directors and producers are Aboriginal. As of 1993, the APU had six Aboriginal staff who produce *Blackout*, a weekly late night programme on Aboriginal affairs, as well as occasional documentaries and dramatic works. As such, it is a precedent-setting model for including indigenous people and their concerns in the televisual imaginary of the nation state and beyond. In the U.S., by contrast, the possibility of a regular state-supported presence of indigenous people in broadcasting is almost inconceivable to a nation that has become accustomed to the virtual invisibility of Native American productions in our media.

Aboriginal awareness of the connections between political enfranchisement and the need to control their own images in the public sphere is growing; while efforts like the APU are greatly appreciated, there is some concern on the part of Aboriginal film-makers that they

are expected to confine their work to what Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls 'the savage slot' (Trouillot 1991). As a counter to such ghettoizing, in a recent position paper for the Australian Film Commission, Aboriginal anthropologist and cultural activist Marcia Langton argued for the '... need to develop a body of knowledge and critical perspective to do with aesthetics and politics ... on representation of Aboriginal people and concerns in art, film, television, or other media' (1992: 6). Her concerns represent the kind of broad view that would allow visual anthropology to develop a 'discursive space' for such media that can respect and understand a range of works cinematically, sociologically, and culturally.

Clearly, there are important differences distinguishing works made by indigenous makers and those with an explicit interest in producing ethnographic film. I am advocating the expansion of visual anthropology to include both kinds of work in our canon and discourse, a shift which stresses the critical importance of a *comparative* awareness of the place of our own work in a broader 'mediascape', much along the lines of MacDougall's recognition of the need for an increasing intertextual sensibility in our work (MacDougall 1992). My concern is that in the contemporary world, we are in danger of becoming ever more narrow and irrelevant as a field if we fail to understand the relationship of anthropology's project (filmic or otherwise) to these other efforts to represent culture.

Unfortunately, some consider indigenous and other multicultural media as altogether outside the discursive space of visual anthropology because it is made, originally, for internal cultural consumption and therefore fails to satisfy some minimal definition of ethnographic film. This position, in addition to being profoundly insular, wrongly assumes the stability and singular identity of the spectator either culturally or historically. In practice, 'ethnographic film' has never been bounded by a presumed homogeneous 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 audiences (1975). As another example, the works of many indigenous media makers originally intended for community viewing are circulating nationally and even internationally. At Yuendumu, a remote Warlpiri speaking Aboriginal community with an active Media Association, the elders and schoolteachers decided to make children's videos to help teach youngsters literacy in their native language. The community hired a local Anglo-Australian film-maker, David Batty, with whom they had worked before to create the series *Manyu Wana* (translation: Just For Fun), a charming collaborative community-based production with support from the Australian government and from London's Central Television. Despite its very local origin and use of monolingual local language, this work has been seen and appreciated all over the world.

Another argument for the segregation of indigenous media production from anthropology is that it renders ethnographic filmmaking obsolete. Underlying such a response, of course, is a profoundly static and reified understanding of culture, as if 'we' and 'they' are not co-present and interdependent. To restate the case, my argument is that we need to consider these media practices – ethnographic film and indigenous media (in the broadest sense of indigenous) – relationally, even as we appreciate their obvious differences. To do so requires an analytic frame that views all such media as part of

the social and cultural processes we study as anthropologists. It is to this point I want to turn in the final section.

### Mediating culture

As the circulation of images across and within societies is growing ever more complex, scholars and artists from a number of fields are paying closer attention to how 'local knowledge' becomes implicated and transformed in the production and interpretation of such visual media around the globe.

While this has intersected cultural anthropology's turn away from positivist models of knowledge toward more interpretive and dialogical approaches, much of the new work in visual anthropology addresses the specific social relations and political processes surrounding and embodied in new media. At the same time, new discursive possibilities are emerging in anthropology and cultural studies which view media as part of larger social formations (Appadurai 1990, Hall 1992) as in Arjun Appadurai's concept of 'mediascape'. He created this term to help resituate our understandings of the different kinds of global cultural flows that characterize the late 20th century, including shifts in both the availability of media technologies and the images created with them. Appadurai argues for situated analyses that take account of the interdependence of media practices with the local, national, and transnational circumstances that surround them (1990).

Over the last decade, the increasing presence of media has made people more aware of the need to understand them using ethnographic tools and sensibilities, as in the precedent-setting work of Abu-Lughod, Caldarola, Dornfeld, Michaels and Turner. Additionally, a critical mass of innovative research and analysis is emerging based on empirically-grounded enquiries into the development of television and related film/video practices worldwide. Expanding on the important insights of Benedict Anderson into the ways that nation states have constituted 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983) through print media, this new work demonstrates how critical cinema and television are to the building (and contesting) of contemporary identities. This can be tracked by studying national film or television industries, as in the work of Felicia Hughes-Freeland on Indonesian State Television's documentation of Balinese culture (1992). Others are looking at community-based media production, as in the *Talleres de Fotografía Social* discussed by Penny Harvey (1993), Alexandra Juhasz's important work on AIDS media (1993), or in Chris Pinney's analyses of Indian popular photography (1990). This new research clarifies the importance of looking at the complexity of social processes that shape the global spread of television and film and the range of interpretive practices which influence its production and reception, including our own.

The interests of these scholars and media practitioners – coming from communications, cultural studies and anthropology – are generating a fertile understanding of the relationship between media and culture. This is evident in the work I have cited, as well as at professional conferences – as in sessions on Anthropology and the Media, and Television and the Transformation of Culture at recent meetings of the American Anthropological Association; and in publications – as in a number of articles in the edited volume *Film and Ethnography* (1992), several issues of the *Visual Anthropology Review* and *Visual Anthropology* over the past few years, and a special 1993 issue of *Public Cul-*

ture entitled 'Screening Politics in A World of Nations'. This work makes a powerful case for the value of an anthropological approach to the study of culture and media. The ideas offered are an impressive demonstration of the possibility and necessity of grounded ethnographic inquiries into the creation and consumption of film and television in diverse cultural and national contexts. In anthropology's best tradition, they throw into question the taken-for-granted nature of the way media is constituted and understood in our own society.

What distinguishes a contemporary anthropological approach to mass media as opposed to studies in communication, semiotics, or cultural studies? I would argue (as do others) that our work is marked by the centrality of people and their social relations – as opposed to media texts or technology – to the empirical and theoretical questions being posed in the analysis of media as a social form, whether we focus on its production, modes of representation, or reception. In certain ways, this parallels what cinema scholar Bill Nichols has characterized as the central problematic of ethnographic documentary: 'What to do with people?' (1991). In other words, if there is some original contribution to be made by an ethnographic approach, it is to break up the 'massness' of the media, and to intervene in its supposed reality effect by recognizing the complex ways in which people are engaged in processes of making and interpreting media works in relation to their cultural, social, and historical circumstances.

Focusing on people's activities with film, television and video, however, is only the first step. The next intellectual move is still only begrudgingly acknowledged in anthropology or communications: that social bodies – from nation-states to provincial communities to individuals – increasingly mediate and comprehend their identities and placement in the world in relation to televisual and cinematic structures and experiences. Working from that premise, research requires increasingly sophisticated approaches to understanding the ways that mass media – and especially television – are contributing to the mediation and construction of cultural difference within and across societies. By looking at the broad range of social processes that shape media production, distribution and reception in particular settings, such enquiries offer cogent challenges to the ethnocentric assumptions of the inevitability of western media hegemony, exploring the intersection of local cultures, regional histories of cinema and television, and the political economies and ideological agendas of states and corporate empires. For example, Brian Larkin (1994) is studying the complex field of television, cinema and video as they intersect in sometimes contradictory ways with nation building and ethnic tensions in Nigeria. Nancy Sullivan's research addresses how film, TV and video are being used to both create a Papua New Guinean national identity, and to enhance centrifugal regional power relations (1993).

Media texts, of course, must be viewed in context, as they are informed by a larger discursive network ranging from 'high culture' – poetry, novels, paintings – to 'popular culture' – commercial television, music video, theme parks – to political and social processes – social movements, changes in economic formations, transnational migrations. Indeed, anthropologists are well<sup>1</sup> suited to study the production and the reception of film, video and television in this way. We are accustomed to looking at social practices inhabiting diverse sites of communication, from the pedagogic space of the class-

room (as in Wilson Martinez's study of the reception of ethnographic film by American undergraduates (1992); the familial space of the snapshots, and home movies as in Dick Chalfen's work on Kodak kinship (1987); the privatized space of national television consumption in the U.S (Lull 1990) or Brazil (Kottak 1990); the street space of urban life and tourism as in the MacDougalls' film *Photo Wallahs* (1992), or the fictional-entertainment space of mass-mediated culture which is becoming prevalent throughout the world as is clear in various studies of soap operas throughout the world (Abu-Lughod 1993, Ang 1985).

Such work is an important contribution to understanding public culture as it emerges from multiple locations; it also offers a useful corrective to current Foucauldian fashions in media studies which point to discourses of power as causative, but fail to locate them concretely in the lives of motivated social actors and the processes of everyday life. By contrast, ethnographic approaches provide grounded analyses and critiques of how 'technologies of power' are created and contested, by tracking the dynamics of 'public spheres' in which an independent criticism and practice can develop. Methods range from analyses of institutions and events, to studies of the cultural impact of national communication policies, to explorations of interpretive practices, and the space-time effects of new technologies on social hierarchies. Such work offers provocative insights into the disjunctive relations between intention, text, and effect, by studying how producers make decisions and how audiences interpret works in unpredictable and destabilizing ways.

For ethnographers, reception is not limited to the moment of contact between media event and audience, as is sometimes the case with research in cultural studies. Questions about the consumption of cinema are considered in relation to histories of cinema viewing, prior interpretive practices, and problematic social relations. For instance, Mayfair Yang's work on the state sponsored film criticism groups in China (*qunzhong yingping*) that emerged along with economic reforms in the People's Republic of China in the 1980s, offers an illuminating critique of Habermas' notion of the public sphere as an arena of social criticism autonomous from state or market domination (1989). While these Chinese forms of film criticism were initiated and/or structured by the state, her interviews with and readings of the reviews written by members of these groups of non-professional film enthusiasts suggest that they provide one of the few arenas in China in which governmental control is ruptured by popular discourse in an otherwise very tightly regulated cinema industry. Yang asks whether a public sphere developing under the aegis of the state is any less constrained than those traditions of criticism that are overshadowed by market interests, as in the U.S. (1994). The work of Yang and others shows how, in different contexts, television and cinema can help to constitute alternative modernities, even as they may reinforce class, regional, and ethnic hierarchies.

Again, in an article on Japanese television production, Andrew Painter offers a riveting account of the Japanese broadcast media's representation of the national educational system – a central problematic reaching into the daily lives of most citizens – and considers how Japanese televised representations of youthful enthusiasm, innocence, and spirit embodied in the Japanese concept of *sieshin* are meaningfully related to a rigid and demanding educational system and meritocracy. Through televised spectacles such as the National High School Quiz championship, the Japanese preoccupation

FILMOGRAPHY

Asch, Asch and Connor. 1980. *A Balinese Trance Seance*.  
 —1980. *Jero on Jero Tapakan*.  
 —1980. *Stories in the Life of A Balinese Healer*.  
 —1980. *The Medium is the Masseuse*.  
 Carelli, Vincent. 1988. *Video in the Villages*.  
 Elder, Sarah and Leonard Kamerling. 1988. *The Drums of Winter*.  
 Featherstone, Don (for the ABC). 1988. *Babakieuria*.  
 Kanuck, Zacharias with Norman Cohen. 1989. *Quaggiq*.  
 MacDougall, David and Judith MacDougall. 1992. *Photo Wallahs*.  
 Masayeva, Victor, Jr. 1984. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*.  
 —1988. *Ritual Clowns*.  
 Moffatt, Tracey. 1992. *Bedevil*.  
 —1987. *Nice Colored Girls*.  
 —1990. *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*.  
 Myerhoff, Barbara with Lynn Littman. 1977. *Number Our Days*.  
 Peters, Frances and David Sandy (for the ABC). 1992. *Tent Embassy*.  
 Rosen, Bob and the Miguel Sisters. 1989. *Sun, Moon, and Feather*.  
 Rouch, Jean. 1960. *Chronicle of a Summer*.  
 —1960. *Cocorico, Monsieur Poulet*.  
 —1955. *Jaguar*.  
 —1954. *Les Maitres Fous*.  
 —1969. *Petit à Petit*.  
 Tajiri, Rea. 1991. *History and Memory*.  
 Trevino, Jesus and Barry Nye. 1976. *Yo Soy Chicano*.  
 Valdez, Luis with El Teatro Campesino. 1969. *I Am Joaquin*.  
 Warlpiri Media Association. 1992. *Manyu Wana*.  
 Ziv, Ilan. 1986. *Consuming Hunger*.

with *seishun* – a central principle in the spectacle – is subverted by the intense competition of the quiz, a kind of apotheosis of the unrelenting ranking that characterizes the broader educational system (1994).

Even when analyses focus on how television is constituted as a state apparatus via production practices, policy, and shifts in knowledge/power engendered by new developments such as communications satellites, ethnographic approaches to media have shied away from analyses that simply rest on global notions of technologies of power. Rather, they are engaged with the specific ways these processes are enacted, and cultural and ideological agendas are destabilized by social actors and social movements (Hamilton 1993). For example, in an elegant study of how 'TV time' disrupts neocolonial hierarchies in Belize, Richard Wilk solves a puzzle: why do the upper-class oppose television, claiming that it is destroying Belizean culture, while working-class people embrace TV and finds it culturally affirming? The immediacy of the medium via satellite, he argues, challenges the temporal basis of the legitimacy of Belizean elites as the less privileged are no longer dependent on them for information, the latest styles, and news from the metropolises. Simultaneously, he argues, the appearance of Belizean products in advertisements in between live transmissions from the U.S. has freed their material world from the status of 'backward', making it (and Belizean identity) coeval with the centres of modernity seen and heard on television. More generally, he demonstrates that the impact of television is not so much in the content of its message (as many have argued). Rather, for Wilk, the power of mass media is in its intervention into concepts of time and distance as they are altered in often unexpected ways that can enhance rather than erode local cultural autonomy.

Such examples suggest how we might, as ethnographers and cultural analysts, analyse televisual and cinematic processes and artefacts. They demonstrate, as well, how our methods and insights can contribute new understandings of these powerful and far-reaching forms of cultural mediation. While in the past I have invoked pessimistically the modernist meta-narrative of the bargain with Mephistopheles as an allegory for the impact of the global penetration of media (1991), I would now like to encourage optimism, both for future research and for the actual televisual practices themselves in which we are all enmeshed. Whatever the power and reach of media institutions and messages, the people who receive it continue to have unpredictable and creative responses to such processes; ethnographic research is especially well-suited to understanding these dynamics, as the cases I have described make clear. The variety and particularity revealed by such research is a necessary corrective to grand theorizing that loses touch with the specific, embedded and diverse ways that people use media to make sense of their worlds and, most importantly, to construct new ones. It is only through such case studies, especially in diverse cultural settings, that we can refine and rethink prevailing theories regarding the power and impact of film and television, and reimagine the place of media in all of our lives.

**The parallax effect**

In conclusion, let me return to the idea of a parallax. The common object of interest – the screen representation of cultural meanings and differences – has not been displaced because of the multiple positions of those who produce such work. Rather, the media being

produced by indigenous, diaspora, and other media makers challenge a long outdated paradigm of ethnographic film built on notions of culture as a stable and bounded object, documentary representation as restricted to realist illusion, and media technologies as inescapable agents of western imperialism. With the development of indigenous media (as well as work from others engaged with issues of cultural and collective identity), the possible positions of authorship in film and video expand. By attending to such work as well as to ethnographic media, we are more able to 'see' the different ways cultural realities are understood and experienced, producing a salutary (if slightly disorienting) parallax effect. It is my argument that such an expansion of the range of work we take seriously in visual anthropology is necessary if we are to keep abreast of changing understandings of culture and representation both generally and in specific communities. To do so requires greater analytic attention to the ways that film/video work mediates cultural meanings, social relations and power. This may or may not be a revolutionary position, depending on how one interprets the history of visual anthropology. In any case, it is the logical next step for a field that has been shifting slowly over the last away from the monologic, observational and privileged Western gaze stereotypically associated with it. Recent efforts to produce more dialogical, reflexive and imaginative productions in ethnographic film have been important, but in some cases recreate a focus on the film text in isolation from broader mediations. By enlarging and changing the terms of the field so that we recognize media work as a form of social action, we are obliged to revise our comfortable and taken for granted narrative conventions that fetishize the text and reify 'culture' and 'cultural difference'. Instead, we – as producers, audiences, and ethnographers – are challenged to comprehend the multiple ways that media operate as a site where culture is produced, contested, mediated, and continually re-imagined. □

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1993. Editorial Comment: On Screening Politics in A World of Nations. Special Issue of *Public Culture* 5: 3, Spring 1993: 465–468.  
 —1993. Finding A Place for Islam: Egyptian Television Serials and the National Interest. *Public Culture* 5: 3, Spring 1993: 493–514.  
 Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.  
 Ang, Ien. 1985. *Watching Dallas* NY, London: Routledge.  
 Appadurai, Arjun. 1990. Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Public Culture* Vol. 2 (2): 1–24.  
 Aufderheide, Pat. 1993. Latin American Grassroots Video: Beyond Television. *Public Culture* 5: 3, Spring 1993: 579–592.  
 Bateson, Gregory. 1943. Cultural and Thematic Analysis of Fictional Films. In *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*: 72–78.  
 —1980. An Analysis of the Nazi Film 'Hitlerjunge Quex'. In *Studies in Visual Communication* 6 (3): 20–55.  
 Batty, Philip. 1993. Singing the Electric: Aboriginal Television in Australia. In *Channels of Resistance*. Tony Dowmunt, ed. London: British Film Institute. 106–125.  
 Bellman, Beryl and Bennetta Jules Rosette. 1977. *A Paradigm for Looking: Cross-Cultural Research with Visual Media*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.  
 Benedict, Ruth. 1946. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.  
 Caldarola, Victor. 1994. *Reception As Cultural Experience: Mass Media and Muslim Orthodoxy in Outer Indonesia*. Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers U. P.  
 Carelli, Vincent. 1988. Video in the Villages. *Commission on Visual Anthropology Newsletter*. May.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank a number of people who helped make this article possible including: Paul Henley and the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology; Fred Myers, Jay Ruby, and Terry Turner for extremely helpful comments on early drafts; Jonathan Benthall for all his editorial support; and Frances Peters and David Sandy of the Aboriginal Programs Unit for their insights. Research for this work has been funded by a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation, and a Presidential Fellowship from New York University.

## FOOTNOTES

1. I thank Terry Turner whose comments on this paper were important in clarifying this section.
  2. A few other efforts to introduce media production to communities without prior media exposure were carried out in the 1970s including Bellman and Jules-Rosette's research introducing videotape in two African communities (1977), and Edmund Carpenter's introduction of photography to a community in Papua New Guinea (1975).
- Carpenter, Edmund. 1975. The Tribal Terror of Self-Awareness. In *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. Paul Hockings, ed. 450–461.
- Chalfen, Richard. 1987. *Snapshot Versions of Life*. Popular Press: Bowling Green.
- Clifford, James. 1988. On Ethnographic Authority. In *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard U. P.: 21–54
- Connor, Linda, Patsy Asch, Tim Asch. 1986. *Jero Tapakan: Balinese Healer*. Cambridge U. P.
- Dornfeld, Barry. 1994. 'Envisioning Reception: How Public Television Producers Prefigure, Approximate, and Invoke the Transnational Audience' in *The Construction of the Viewer: Media Ethnography and the Anthropology of Audiences*, P.I. Crawford and S. B. Hafsteinsson, eds., Høeibjerg: Intervention P.
- 1992. 'Producing Public Television: Interpretation, Authorship, and Cross-Cultural Representation in "Childhood", A Public Television Documentary Series'. Ph.D. Dissertation. Annenberg Sch. of Communications.
- Eaton, Mick. 1992a. Amazonian Videos. *Sight and Sound* November: 17.
- 1992b. Third International Festival of Ethnographic Film. ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY, 8.6, December.
- Elder, Sarah. 1993. Collaborative Filmmaking: An Open Space for Making Meaning. Paper presented at the Visible Evidence Conference, Duke University, September.
- Fiske, John. 1988. *Television Culture*. Routledge.
- Fusco, Coco. 1988. A Black Avant-Garde? In *Young, British, and Black*. Coco Fusco, ed. 7–22. Buffalo: Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center.
- Ginsburg, Faye. 1989. *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* Berkeley: U. of California P.
- 1991. Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village. *Cultural Anthropology* 6 (1): 92–112.
- 1992. Television and the Mediation of Culture. *Visual Anthropology Review* 8 (1): 97–102.
- 1993a. Aboriginal Media and the Australian Imaginary. *Public Culture* 5 (3), Special Issue, 'Screening Politics in A World of Nations', Lila Abu-Lughod, ed.: 557–578.
- 1993b. Station Identification: The Aboriginal Programs Unit of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. *Visual Anthropology Review* 9 (2): 92–97.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into A Category of Bourgeois Society*. Thomas Burger tr., Cambridge: Cambridge U. P.
- Hall, Stuart. 1992. Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies. *Cultural Studies*, L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, P. Treichler, eds. Pp. 277–294. New York: Routledge.
- Hamilton, Annette. 1993. Video Crackdown, or The Sacrificial Pirate: Censorship and Cultural Consequences in Thailand. *Public Culture* 5: 3, Spring 1993: 515–532
- Harvey, Penny. 1993. Ethnographic Films and the Politics of Difference. *Visual Anthropology Review*. 9 (1): 164–175
- Howard, Jane. 1984. *Margaret Mead: A Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Hughes-Freeland, Felicia. 1992. Representation by the Other: Indonesian Cultural Documentation. In *Film as Ethnography*. P. Crawford and D. Turton, eds. 171–182. Manchester: U. of Manchester P.
- Hymes, Dell. 1969. 'The Use of Anthropology: Critical, Political, Personal' in *Reinventing Anthropology* New York: Vintage. 3–81.
- Juhasz, Alexandra. 1944. *AIDS TV: The Politics of Independent Video*. Duke U. P.
- Kottak, Conrad. 1990. *Prime-Time Society: An Anthropological Analysis of Television and Culture*. Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth
- Intintoli, Michael. 1984. *Taking Soaps Seriously*. New York: Praeger.
- Langton, Marcia. 1993. *Well, I Heard it on the Radio and Saw it On the Television*. Sydney: Australian Film Commission
- Larkin, Brian. 1994. The Social Practice of Media in Northern Nigeria. Unpub. dissertation proposal, New York U.
- Lull, James. 1990. *Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on Television's Audiences*. London: Routledge
- MacDougall, David. 1975. Beyond Observational Cinema. In *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. P. Hockings, ed. Chicago: Aldine: 109–124.
- 1992. Complicities of Style. In *Film as Ethnography*. P. Crawford and D. Turton, eds. Manchester: U. of Manchester P.: 90–98.
- Martinez, Wilton. 1993. 'Who Constructs Anthropological Knowledge? Toward a Theory of Ethnographic Film Spectatorship' 131–163. In *Film as Ethnography*, see above.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Mead, Margaret and Gregory Bateson. 1962. *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* New York: New York Academy of Sciences.
- Mead, Margaret and Rhoda Metraux, eds. 1952. *The Study of Culture at a Distance*. Chicago: U. of Chicago P.
- Michaels, Eric. 1986. *The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia: 1982–1986*. Canberra: Australian Inst. of Aboriginal Studies.
- 1987. *For A Cultural Future*. Melbourne: Art & Criticism Monograph Series.
- 1991. Aboriginal Content: Who's Got It – Who Needs It? *Visual Anthropology* 4. (3–4): 277–300.
- Nichols, Bill. 1981. *Ideology and the Image*. Bloomington: Indiana U. P.
- Painter, Andrew. 1994. On the Anthropology of Television: A Perspective From Japan. *Vis. Anth. Review*. Forthcoming.
- Peters, Frances (with Jacqueline Urla). 1993. Breaking All the Rules: An Interview With Frances Peters. *Visual Anthropology Review* 9 (2): 98–106.
- Pinney, Chris. 1990. The Quick and the Dead: Images, Time and Truth. *Visual Anthropology Review* 9 (2): 98–106.
- Powdermaker, Hortense. 1950. *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*. Boston: Little Brown & Co.
- Rouch, Jean. 1975 'The Camera and Man' in *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, P. Hockings ed., Chicago: Aldine: 83–102.
- 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.
- Schiller, Herbert. 1976. *Communication and Cultural Domination* New York: Int. Arts & Sciences.
- Sloan, Jen. 1979. Compared Views of the Yanomamo. *Film Library Quarterly* 12 (1):20-22
- Spitulnik, Debra. 1993. Anthropology and the Mass Media. *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 22: Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews Inc.
- Sullivan, Nancy. 1983. Film and Television Production in Papua New Guinea: How Media Become the Message. *Public Culture* 5: 3, Spring 1993: 533–556.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1991. 'Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness' Pp. 17–44 In *Recapturing Anthropology*, Richard Fox, ed. Santa Fe: School of American Research P.
- Tunstall, Jeremy. 1977. *The Media Are American: Anglo-American Media in the World*. NY: Columbia U. P.
- 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 Vis. Anth. Newsletter*. Spring: 8–13.
- 1992a. Defiant Images: The Kayapo Appropriation of Video. ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY 8 (6): 5–16.
- 1992b. The Kayapo on Television. *Visual Anthropology Review* 8(1): 107–112.
- Turton, David. 1992. Anthropological Knowledge and the Culture of Broadcasting. *Vis. Anth. Review* 8 (1): 113–117.
- Weiner, Annette. 1992. Trobrianders On Camera and Off. *Visual Anthropology Review* 8 (1): 103–106.
- Wilk, Richard. 1994. Colonial Time and TV Time: Television and Temporality in Belize. *Visual Anthropology Review* Forthcoming.
- Worth, Sol. 1972(69). 'Towards an Anthropological Politics of Symbolic Forms', In *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. D. Hymes: 335-64. New York: Vintage.
- Worth, Sol and John Adair. 1972. *Through Navajo Eyes*. Bloomington: Indiana U. P.
- Yang, Mayfair. 1994. Film Discussion Groups in China: State Hegemony or a Plebian Public Sphere? *Visual Anthropology Review* (forthcoming).