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.

Ethnographic film has represented a converted and valuable effort by those concerned with the principles and objectives of anthropology to represent other cultures to members of our own. Ten years or more age, to explore other cultures on film means exploring the fictional works of celebrated filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, Yasujirô Ozu or Glauber Rocha; openly political documentaries of national liberation struggles (79 Spragues [Alvarez 1969], Last Grave at Dumbaza [Mahamos 1973]) or ethnographic films (Kenya Bunun [MacDougall and Blue 1974], Dead Birds [Gardner 1963], Juggler [Rouch 1967], and so on). Each of these three choices had value. Each expanded our horizons and our collective sense of the possible. As we move toward the present, however, the choices are far less clear cut. (This "we" is not universal; ten years ago or more the collectivity to refer to was predominantly white, male, and strongly university-based with minimal inclusion of those who now represent themselves. Given the contestation over and erosion of this traditional "we," though hardly its supplantation, I have used quotations marks around this particular "we" to indicate its lack of normative authority.)

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, non-specialist audience outside of anthropology per se, these other voices often seem more immediate, informative and engaging. The opportunity exists to learn from and engage with the ways in which others choose to represent themselves in "auto ethnographies" from Speak Body (Armatage 1979) and Unfinished Diary (Mallet 1983) to Handsworth Songs (Akomfrah 1986), Who Killed Vincent Chin? (Choy and Tajima 1988), and I'm Britich Bux (Chadha 1989), and from Surname Viet Given Name Nam (Trinh 1989) to Films Are Dreams (Sensperger 1989). 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.

All the better to vex you with, my dear

Clifford Geertz has described as well as anyone the finely honed interpretive skills required of the anthropologist, or ethnographer (1973). His account of the subtleties, and subtle misunderstandings, arising from the conflicting worldviews of a Berber tribe, a Jewish trader and a French colonial officer in the Moroccan of 912 captures well the "thickness" to which description might aspire—though it may be "thick" in an unintended sense as well. Following Geertz, "anthropology" becomes an institutional discourse which has assigned itself the challenge of representing others. Like the truth of "indefinite approximation" championed by Sartre (1965: 19), Geertz prefers refinement to perfection: "What gets better is the precision with which we vex each other" (29).

Both anthropology and documentary have caused themselves considerable vexation debating the issue of representation as a process of rendering likenesses effectively, according to criteria of realism, objectivity, accuracy or ethnographicness. Neither discipline has vexed itself quite as much with the realization that Geertz's model creates, but does not acknowledge, representation as trouble for the Other. Who has the responsibility and legitimacy (or power and authority) to represent, not only in the sense of rendering likenesses but also in the sense of "stand for" and "prepare an argument about," others? Evaluating the degree of difficulty attempted and level of sophistication attained is how "we" (objective, professional, "disciplined") vex each other more precisely at the expense of others. The unmasked question is, in what way does this representation matter to those it represents?

Anthropology: Behind the Scenes

If only he (the anthropologist) could provide us with correct, consistent accounts of himself, his gossiping organization, and the specific instances of discourse that constitute his very accounts, then there would be no need for us to carry out an ongoing critique of ethnographic ideology and its claims to represent other cultures. (Trinh, 1989: 74)
Anthropological representation addresses the problems of being "on the scene" and of getting "behind the scenes" of other cultures. It has proven less adept at looking behind its own scenes, at the staging of its own representations and in debating what this activity represents as a symptom of our own cultural situation (the mythologies of travel, the valorization of experimental knowledge over experiential or tacit knowledge, and the prevalence of scientism: the regulation of institutionally legitimized discourse and authority).

From this perspective, the location of anthropology's Other may reside less in another culture than in the anthropological unconscious, as it were. Among other things, this anthropological unconscious might contain: whiteness and maleness, and, consequently, the body of the observer; the experiential; the narrative conventions and forms of other cultures; the canonical conventions of western narrative; the full indexical particularity of the image and its emotional impact; the erotics of the gaze: textual theory and interpretation; the actual workings of the institutional procedures that determine what counts as anthropological knowledge, and the viewer or audience for ethnographic film (a group that has been largely unseen, unknown and unexamined).

Looking at others in order to represent them may not be so easily rationalized by strictly scientific motives as some anthropologists believe. Long takes and minimal editing do not eliminate, though they may disguise, the psychodynamics that Malinowski reserved for his diary. Many different ways of seeing surround the use of a camera. As long as human agency comes into play it will do so in relation to desire and the unconscious as well as reason and science. In film study, a considerable body of work has argued that the ways and means of cinematic representation often gain motivation from narcissistic, voyeuristic, sadistic and fetishistic mechanisms. Power, knowledge, hierarchy and scopophilic pleasure entwined one another in ways that cannot be easily avoided. As Laura Mulvey argues, scopophilic identification and desire are "formative structures, mechanisms not meaning. In themselves they have no signification, they have to be attached to an ideology [like the cinema's ability to re-present reality]. Both pursues aims in indifference to perceptual reality, creating the imagined, erotized concept of the world that forms the perception of the subject and makes a mockery of empirical objectivity" (1985: 308). I wish to look behind the scenes of anthropology's representational mechanisms to examine its unconscious assumptions, or habits, and their implications. The purpose of this examination is to see in greater detail how the ethnographic film stages its representations, whether these representations can withstand the fundamental rebuke of usefulness to Others, and of then looking beyond as well as behind ethnography to other scenes of increasing interest.

The Ethnographer's Tale: Making Representations

I have felt that my own projects vis-à-vis the Other, as representations of my own processes of self-discovery, carry with them, as the other is there as an actual person, and the other place, the question of potential dangers that arise from the tendency to do anything but misrepresent that other person. (Fengel 1988: 21)

As used here, ethnographic film will refer to films that are extra-institutional, that address an audience larger than anthropologists perse, that may be made by individuals more trained in filmmaking than in anthropology, and that accept as a primary task the representation, or self-representation, of one culture for another. What characterizes ethnographic film as we have known it from Nanook of the North (Talbert 1922) to First Contact (Connelly and Anderson 1984), from Butter Melon (Marshall 1971) to Forest of Bliss (Gardner 1985), and from Mo, anam (Rouch 1957) to I'm British but?

Binarism: If west, why, can vici be far behind?

The separation of Us from Them is inscribed into the very institution of anthropology and into the structure of most ethnographic film. They occupy a time and space which we must recreate, stage or represent. Once upon a time, it was easy to say, "There is no one else to do it." Under the aegis of scientific responsibility (and power), this is a sober enterprise. Ethnographic film, in fact, belongs squarely among what I have called in my study of documentary generally the discourses of sobriety (Nichols 1991). As systems of discourse, science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, and welfare exercise instrumental power. They operate on the assumption that they can and should alter the world itself or our place within it, that they can effect action and entail consequences. Their discourse has the air of sobriety since it is seldom receptive to "make-believe" characters, events or worlds (unless these serve as pragmatically useful simulations of the "real" one).

Discourses of sobriety treat their relation to the real as non-problematic. Like Plato's Guardians their speakers return to the cave with a knowing sigh of disinterest in the shadow-play and story-telling distractions they now understand entirely and can explain to others. Through the discourses of sobriety knowledge/power exerts itself. Through them,

Dead Birds, Robert Gardner.
things are made to happen. These are vehicles of domination and conscience, power and knowledge, pleasure and reason, desire and will (although the aura of science and sobriety—acute in U.S. anthropology—pushes the psychodynamics of domination, power, pleasure and desire squarely into the anthropological unconscious).

Between the "here" of anthropology and the "there" of another culture stands the border checkpoint where the passage of our bodies there and representations of them here is governed by the standards and principles of fieldwork, and location filming. The separation of "here" and "there" is thus sharply demarcated. The predilection for "non-Western societies, particularly exotic cultures" (Balikci 1988: 33) heightens the sense of separation, of a passage to and fro, in which visible differences attest to both spatial and temporal separation. The act of travel and, consequently, arrival scenes play a central role here (Pratt 1986). In film such scenes may have a literal representation, as in The Ax Fight (Chagnon and Asch 1971) and Before We Knew Nothing (Kitchen 1987), or they may be diffused throughout the film in the observational stance that puts distance between another culture and the person behind the camera lens.

Also central to the impression of being there, while remaining separate from the reality that is represented are the indexed film image and synchronous sound track. These qualities of the realist image certify the authenticity of what is seen and heard as life-like even though they may represent lives conducted quite differently from our own. Voice-over commentary is another familiar form of binary support; fabricated here, it provides an counterpoint for the sights and sounds from there, embellishing them. Sometimes a voice-over from there bumps against one from here, derivative, as in Nai: Story of a Karen Woman (Marshall 1980). Nai's voice-over, spoken by Letta Mbula, is a vehicle for nostalgic reminiscence: "When [my father] would get up to go hunting, ... we'd eat meat just like that." It is left to the anonymous male voice of anthropological authority, from here, to remind us of what Marshall's Hunters (1989) chronicled and Nai forgets. "It took four men five days to track the wounded giraffe."

Travel also underwrites the authority of ethnographic film with the powerful guarantee, "What you see is what there was. (I know: I was there.)" It may also guarantee that "What you see is what there would have been if I had not been there to film it. (I know: I was there and I can attest to the representativeness of what you see.)" Being "on the scene" also allows anthropologists to identify the distorted representations of others, particularly when it is a case of footage they have shot being transformed into the drab of television documentary: "What you see is what there was, but it did not occur in this sequence, have this musical accompaniment, or bear these meanings. (I know: I was there and can identify the distortions.)"

Travel thereby underwrites authority by means of bodily presence although the body of the anthropologist/filmmaker usually disappears behind the optical vantage point where camera and filmmaker preside—a behind-the-scenes perspectival equivalent of the film frame's vanishing point. This disappearance, once valorized as part and parcel of obervational respect for one's subjects, but subsequently criticized as a masquerade of self-effacement that also effaces the limitations of one's own physicality in favor of omniscience and omnipotence (McDougall 1981: 278), transforms first-hand, personal experience into third-person, disembodied knowledge.

As accounts of the personal, physical dimension of travel recede, invocations of the transpersonal, mythical dimension, distinctive to western culture, take on added prominence. Travel conjures associations with spiritual quests, voyages of self-discovery and tests of prowess, with the pilgrimage and the odyssey, as well as with the expansionist dreams of empire, discovery and conquest. Movement and travel participate in the construction of an imaginary geography that maps the world required to support the sense of self for whom this world is staged (Biddock 1991; Bishop 1989; Sud 1978). Travel, which began as something spiritual or economic, takes on the aura of something scientific and representational (Mukerji 1983). An expanded moral framework, the discovery of cultural relativity, the hercios of salvage anthropology, the ritual of self-improvement, training in the civic responsibilities of neo-colonial power—travel supports them all.

Going there to get the story is one important part of the overall process; returning here is equally important. The act of representation always requires distance between the staging of a representation and its maker or métier en scène, as well as between the world represented and its viewer. Questions of authority and authenticity arise from the effect of distance. This effect can be contested, subverted or displaced, as Brecht's theory of distanciation proposed. When left uncontested, this sense of distance—registered in the space between camera and event, in the observational stance from which it originates, in voice-over commentary, in the certifiable "ethnographicness" of sound and image (Heider, 1976), and in the construction of a factual story in accord with the canonic narrative form familiar in the west assures the viewer of the traveller's desire for a welcome return to the fold.

Talking Heads or Travel from the Waist Up

Our primary goal is the production of knowledge ... (Ruby 1990: 16)

Only anthropology provides the cross-cultural framework that is sophisticated enough to deal with the range of variation that exists among human cultural systems. (Rollwagen 1988: 294)

The more crucial science and writing loom for anthropology, the more suspect ethnographic film becomes, especially when produced by "amateurs" (Ruby 1990: 15). Science is the institutional discourse of sobriety par excellence. Ethnographic films, like studies based on fieldwork, attempt to resolve an acute contradiction between impersonal, scientific knowledge and the personal experience on which it is based: "States of serious confusion, violent feelings or acts, censorships, important failures, changes of course, and excessive pleasures are excluded from the published account" (Clifford 1986: 13). Scientific knowledge travels from one mind to another, transported by bodies as cargo by ships. Hence the disembodied quality of the voice of authority operating behind most ethnographic film. (The female voice-over commentary spoken by Mbula in Nai is clearly assigned to the physical person of Nai as her restricted perception and opinion, the unidentified male voice-over that speaks on behalf of unrestricted ethnographic knowledge has no body; it projects itself from here to there as the voice of reason, personified only by the "grain" of the individual voice used to represent it.)

Disembodied knowledge causes problems of its own. It contrasts sharply with the storytelling traditions of other cultures where experiential, embodied knowledge is more highly prized. As Trinh puts it, "The words passed down from mouth to ear (one sexual part to another sexual part), womb to womb, body to body are the remembered ones. [The] whose belly cannot contain (also read 'retain') words, says a Malinke song, will succeed at nothing. The further they move away from the belly, the more liable they are to be corrupted. (Words that come from the MIND and are passed on directly from mind to mind are, consequently, highly suspect ... )" (1989: 36). The knowledge Trinh describes requires different stagings, different forms and styles of representation from those that have characterized ethnographic film.

The ethnographic message can serve as ethnographic mask, shrouding the body, and body knowledge (discussed below) from view. The mask of the depersonalized, disembodied investigator or filmmaker also allows the race and gender of the body to be relegated to the anthropological unconscious. Like a default value in cybernetics, reference to the body and the experience of the ethnographic fieldworker/filmmaker may mask the white male bodies of most anthropologists along with their distinctive ways of seeing and knowing. (Are the etic systems applied by the ethnographer as tools of the trade color and gender blind? If so, what consequences follow from such blindness?)
Feminism: The Body That Is Not One

In my research I propose that ethnographic film and photographic images are a reflection of the gender stereotypes found in the filmmaker’s (photographer’s) dominant group, and thus reproduce the ethnographer’s ideas and ideals about gender onto the visual representation of the cultural group being studied. (Kechmash 1990: 24)

Feminism, as the articulation of issues that are inseparably linked to the physical body and its representation, to the personal and its political ramifications, has had noticeable trouble with ethnographic practice. Clifford laments the lack of a feminist contingent in the ranks of those who applied aspects of “textual theory” to ethnographic writing (1986: 20), without wondering if this “lack” might itself carry an implicit critique, and George Marcus identifies feminism (along with poststructuralism) as one of the major forces that has prompted a reevaluation of the nineteenth century realism supporting most ethnography only to drop it from the rest of his discussion of ethnographic writing and cinematic montage (Marcus 1990: 4).

Deborah Gordon specifies the dilemma posed by such gestures: “[feminism] presents a face of similarity outward toward men who are its ‘other.’ Unlike experimental ethnography where the point is to establish a mutuality between self and other, feminism’s relationship to its other is antagonistic” (1988: 17). On the other hand, films such as Small Happiness, Women in a Chinese Village (Hinton 1984), The Women’s Oolamal (Llewellyn-Davies 1985), India Cabaret (Nair 1986), and Before We Knew Nothing demonstrate that the apparently subordinate position occupied by women in a culture (something perhaps more “apparent” to men than women) need not be matched by a parallel subordination in representations of that culture. The possibility of a feminist ethnographic film aesthetic, however, has received no debate at all, to my knowledge.

Feminists recognize an acute predicament of either speaking “mind to mind,” even in the dialogic play of modernist distance, or of speaking words from the belly that are meant to be of use-value to both those who utter them and those who hear them. Feminists may therefore have trouble with both realist and modernist camps, and with “textual theory” as a politically efficacious, rather than formally sophisticated, move. They may also make trouble for all these camps by posing the simple, yet “unscientific” question of what place does realism, modernism or textual theory lead one to occupy among the permeable, shifting, diverse subjectivities and ideological affinities operating at a specific historical moment?

The Master’s Narrative

We spent a hectic first day in Mina shooting as much footage of the Charrada as we could. (Olosion 1988: 260)

Actions filmed were, for the most part, spontaneous, candid, and one-time phenomena and not the result of any deliberately planned “staging.” (Klima 1998: 228)

These epigraphs from Anthropological Filmmaking, Anthropological Perspectives on the Production of Film and Video for General Public Audiences (Riesswagen 1988) convey one of the central themes of the book: the disavowal of aesthetic intent. If aesthetic considerations should happen to slip in, despite the rough and tumble effort to catch-as-catch-can, safeguards must be taken. Participation in television productions based on anthropological footage generates tension largely because the anthropologist confronts a well-formulated television documentary aesthetic with only inchoate and semi-conscious aesthetic alternatives. Precepts based on content no longer carry their full weight. Precepts based on form circle back to a (discounted) content: they seldom address issues of audience and effect in any detail.

What is somewhat remarkable in this context is how ethnographic films repeat similar cinematic qualities and narrative structures, without apparently, knowing or acknowledging it. The cinematic story form of an introduction to characters and setting, presentation of a disturbance or puzzle, a goal-oriented line of causally linked situations and events, followed by a resolution to the disturbance or solution to the puzzle that leaves the mind at rest recurs regularly in ethnography as well as fiction. Boiled down to a schematic template by Bordwell, this story form amounts to “setting plus character—goal—attempt—outcome—resolution” (1985: 35). It has informed films from Nanook of the North to The Hunters and from Travail au Bini (Rouch 1971) to Ting Tana (Roed, et al. 1980). The pervasiveness of this format in classic ethnography suggests it is not considered aesthetic at all but “natural,” despite evidence to the contrary.

Inherent in this preference for cinematic story form is the idea of a “virtual performance,” a performance, which, like a staged one, serves to represent significant themes but which is unscripted and unrehearsed. It is, instead, the performance of a lifetime: the condensation of a lifetime into representative moments. Filmmakers seek out those who “naturally” reveal or expose themselves, allowing their performance to engage a viewer’s curiosity and empathy (while masking the filmmaker’s own fascination or attraction—including the eroticism of the gaze)—behind the naturalness of discovering familiar (western, dramaturgical) codes of human expressivity among others. (MacDougall discusses this tendency in relation to his work among African pastoralists and Australian Aboriginals in “Complicities of Style,” 1990). Cinematic conventions of the close up and the long take, of the scene and the event, of continuity editing and synchronous sound reinforce virtual performances that fit the mold of what Brecht labelled “dramatic theater” (1964) in ethnographies from Nanook to The Women’s Oolamal.

What is most convenient about these conventions is that they not only serve to support the cinematic form of narrative structure in Western society, they also literally constitute an “imaginary geography.” Like the imaginary geography constituted by the traveller, explorer and fieldworker, this map to an imaginary world reciprocally and recursively constitutes the self that produces it. This reassuring coherence may be one of the reasons why ethnographic film has not more readily adopted the conventions of modernism and cinematic montage championed by Marcus (1990). Modernist conventions upset the clean separation of here and there and the coherence afforded to the traveller who negotiates such spatial discontinuities by projecting onto other people and places systems of realistic representation.

When rendered subservient to scientific knowledge, to the sobriety of discourses that distinguish themselves from fiction or “just stories,” these realist conventions and narrative structures rupture the phenomenal, experiential bond of passing stories from one mouth to another, of a knowledge that is fully embodied (Ong 1982; Alter 1983, Trinh 1989). Trinh describes well the feminist and political dimension of what is at stake when stories become an explanatory template rather than an inseparable part of a life:

Not only has the “civilized” mind classified many of the realities it does not understand in the categories of the untrue and the superstitious, it has also turned the story— as total event of a community, a people— into a useful illusion for children of a certain age. (1989: 124, italics hers)

This is why we keep on doing violence to words: to tame and cook the wild, raw, to adopt the veriginously infinite. Truth does not mean simple; it exceeds meaning and exceeds measure. It exceeds all regimes of truth. (123)

A fascination with that which exceeds the grasp prepares the way for fetishism. Science can serve as talismanic fetish for the production of knowledge. Other cultures, caught in the thickness of ethnographic representation, as fetishized images of a pastoral Eden, offer a lost past, a reflection of the selves we might have been. To the extent that this process depends on
an other scene, separated off, distant, available for representation, others will exist within the framework of an oscillatory ambivalence. The desire to know or possess, "to tame and cook," is constantly juxtaposed to the desire for the experience of strangeness itself, which will hold the Other at the distance of fetishistic contemplation. Ethnographic realism serves this ambivalence well. The arrival scene and the distance required by the act of representation confirm the sense of otherness, strangeness. The canon of narrative format, in either fictive or expository forms, produces a sense of similarity and the familiar.

Elsewhere I have discussed this ambivalence as part of a much larger set of parallels between the licit knowledge produced by classic ethnographic film and the illicit knowledge produced by classic heterosexual pornography (Needham, Hanson, Nichols, 1989). The parallels are quite extensive even though the institutional frames, discursive practices, and ostensible purposes seem sharply distinct. (Parallels include: 1) efforts to establish the authenticity of what we see via arrival tropes and scenes or via images of male ejaculation, aka "cum shots"; 2) emphasis on "whole acts" defined in ritualistic, empirical terms, 3) on the hierarchical effect of a voyeuristic gaze or a panoptic gaze [Foucault, 1980a]; and 4) on a sexualization of phallic power or cephalic knowledge ["talking heads"). In many ways the parallels recapitulate the mind/body split epitomized by a scientific production of knowledge. What Foucault called a scena sexualis detaches itself from the body in order to understand, label, codify and cure the body and its sexuality (1980b). This detachment from that which becomes the object of study allows science, or ethnographic film, to disavow its attachment to the body. And yet, like the repressed, disavowal returns as fetish and ambivalence.

Ambivalence derives from the dependence of the Other for a sense of identity that is, in its imaginary coherence or autonomy, would deny the centrality of the other upon which it is dependent. In pornography this ambivalence involves a paradoxical desire for a pleasure that is not one, is not fully available. Pornography sets out to please but not please entirely. It affords pleasure but not the pleasure that is (only) represented. The pleasure that is represented remains deferred, perhaps indefinitely, in favor of its (fetishistic) representation. The result is a gendered viewing subject caught up in a desire for this oscillatory pleasure per se. The completion of desire is deferred in favor of perpetuating a set of staged representations of desire for more pornography.

In ethnographic film this ambivalence involves the paradoxical desire for a knowledge that is not one, that is not fully "ours" nor theirs. Rather than seeking to make strangeness known, we seek to know strangeness (the myths of travel enters here). By being beholden at a distance strangeness eludes full comprehension but supports an imaginary coherence, what Said would call Orientalism, what we might more generally call the self that constitutes itself through an imaginary geography. Ethnography affords knowledge passed from mind to mind, but not the knowledge that is (only) represented, which is their knowledge, embodied knowledge located there, in other bodies. The result is a viewing subject caught up in a desire for this oscillation between the strange and the familiar. The satisfaction of the desire to know is deferred in favor of perpetuating this set of staged representations of knowledge (by means of more ethnographies).

Break on Through to the Other Side

These parallelsisms might seem to deal a fatal blow to conventions of ethnographic film that bind its representational strategies so tightly to the culture of origin that misrecognition and misrepresentation are all but inevitable. I wish to suggest that what requires concerted effort is not the redemption of ethnographic film from its apparently fallen state, but heightened exploration and utilization of its material, experiential dimensions. Eliminating the perpetuation of ambivalence from the representation of experience, the body and the Other would be one important step forward. In her provocative book on hard-core film pornography, Linda Williams refuses to choose between the binary either-or of pro- and anti-pornography positions. She concludes by arguing that a feminist pernotopia—skin to an ethnotopia constructed by the Others who have been represented as source of the knowledge produced by anthropology—is preferable:

An ideal of bioculture drives the quest for the knowledge of the pleasure of the other: that one set can journey to the unknown Other and return, saturated with knowledge and pleasure, to the security of the "self." Of course, there is no such thing as a discrete sexual identity who can journey from fixed self to fixed other... these identities themselves are constructed in fluid relations to fictional Others who exist only in our relation to them... If the sexual other is ultimately unknowable, then all the more reason to desire this knowledge, especially now that what was once the "other" has begun to make the journey itself. (1989: 279)

Breaking through to the other side would mean making a similar journey, and helping others do so as well. The body—with its truth that exceeds all regimes of truth, its excess of physical specificity and historical situatedness—rather than being contained within (Western) story formats and ethnographic "attribute dimension grids" (Hedner 1976) might provide the focus for speculation about experience and knowledge beyond the valley where our ethnographic shepherds have built their house of science. Just as a pornotopia requires not diavolos but a more intensive exploration of the sexual imagination to represent a dispersal of pleasures no longer focused on phallocentric tales, an ethnotopia would disperse experience and knowledge far beyond the binary, realist, canonical narratives of the classic ethnographer's tale. Rather than dismissing ethnographic film for failing to fulfill (generally unspecified) criteria of anthropological validation based on a conception of anthropology as science and professional discipline (Kwilwag 1988; Ruby 1990) we might push forward, as Williams does, toward an ethnotopia that will not abolish experience, the body, and knowledge from the belly but affirm it.

Hussein, Anomaly, Excess

Viewers do not share the cultural context, and the background is not thus anchored in familiar assumptions, but begins to float in a sea of questions... (Jacobson 1988: 175-6)

The message goes straight to the stomach... (Tambles-Lyece and Waage 1989: 32)

Just because the world goes round is no reason for getting seasick. (Svevo 1023)

Sometimes bodily experience exceeds intellectual understanding. Cognitive processing and bodily experience produce contradictory responses that disorient the mind. Visceral reactions occur that are uncontained by the descriptive or explanatory grid utilized by a given film. To a large extent, such reactions appear as anomaly (they normally fall within the anthropological unconscious). My contention, however, is that such responses indicate a possible direction forward, toward an ethnotopia that does not arise from a discourse conveyed from mind to mind. Such an ethnotopia may provide a meeting ground for ethnographic film and these cross-cultural journeys that "Others" have already begun.

Two fascinating accounts indicate just how visceral the cinematic experience of another culture can be. Tambles-Lyece and Waage report that fourteen and fifteen year old Norwegian schoolchildren, shown a series of ethnographic films that included nudity, violence and "strange scenes," were nonetheless overwhelmed by The Nuer (Harris and Birkenhead 1970) in particular (1989: 31-33). Several students fled the classroom; "some were found vomiting, one crying" (31). In describing their responses the students identified with the Nuer as "so much like us" but also found their actions "disgusting."
Though seemingly anomalous and theorized as an hysteria-like display of emotion at behavior that could not be assimilated within a cognitive frame (partly because the film did not provide a conventional one), this report has its echo in a study done by Martinez (1990). In this case, a group of U.S. university students' responses to a series of ethnographic films were carefully monitored. Responses varied considerably and different qualities came to the fore with different films, but The Nuer again scored highest of all the films shown in terms of emotional response. Typical comments were: "I didn't like the film at all... I found it long and boring... I was in awe when I saw it... The droving of the cattle almost drove me crazy... The people were dirty" (1990: 41). These emotional responses which accompanied every ethnographic film to some degree, blocked out more elaborated readings of the film, leaving the student feeling boredom and disgust, or awe. This pattern recalls Mulvey's comment that patterns of identification, or scopophilia, have their own aims which create the eroticized, imaged world needed to support the subject's image of him or herself, aims which make "a mockery of empirical objectivity."

These visceral reactions float in a sea of questions, for viewers and ethnographers alike. Strong emotional reactions that block movement toward more generalized perspectives are not unique to The Nuer and its distinctively poetic, associative editing pattern. Such emotional disturbance is not limited to students: Balikci recounts how Representative Conlan of Arizona attacked The Nuer Eskimo Series (Balikci 1967–68) as unfit for American schoolchildren because it undermined morality, patriotism, and American values by means of its lack of contextualizing commentary in the face of numerous scenes of "violence and death" (Balikci 1988: 42–43). Such disturbances are not limited to events in other cultures. Sochack makes a compelling case for the extent to which the representation of death in any documentary is vividly different from its representation in a fiction film, a difference that prompts a qualitatively different form of response (1984). The disturbances are not limited simply to students and non-professionals: the extraordinarily diverse set of opinions occasioned by Robert Gardner's Forest of Bliss (1985) that appeared in the last issue of 3VA Newsletter and the first issue of 3VA News (1990) also give evidence of emotional reactions of such unfathomed strength that more elaborate analysis is blocked.

These responses float in a sea of questions because they lack an interpretive frame within which they can be addressed. They represent a short-circuit. An aesthetic, visceral response translates into expressive excess, spillage from reactions unconnected to a self-reflective, consciousness-raising means of contextualizing and understanding them. Instead of comprehension, assimilation and interpretation these reactions surge past the mind in a gush that allows expression to what remains ultimately repressed within the unconscious. They are ego-defense and boundary-protective rather than catalysts to relationality and exchange. This is not emotion as liberatory escape from Platonic hyper-rationality or sobriety, but emotion as the return of the repressed in forms that fail to lead to increased self-awareness or a heightened sense of permeable boundaries and partial subjectivities. Instead, "any scene is immediately either 'domesticated' by being naïvely explained as analogous to something in our culture, or it is dramatized and appears as a projection of unconscious or suppressed elements of our own culture" (Jablonko, 1988: 175).

**Shifting Paradigms and Changing Times**

How can we account for our bodily response to the sight of a film? This question exceeds the bounds of debate involving a new paradigm for ethnography based on a shift from a social science model to a cultural studies and textual theory model. This latter shift opposes the transparency of discourses of sobriety to an emphasis on the content of the form—on rhetoric and style as producers more than bearers of meaning; the imaginary geography of the Orientalist to the heterogeneity of interpenetrating categories and worlds; the fullness of empirical knowledge to the partiality of experiential knowledge; disembodied, impersonal logic to a situated historical voice; a zero-degree style of institutionally regulated objectivity to the purposeful style of intersubjective communication and exchange; conventional story formats to experimental ones; self-sufficient, full narratives to self-reflective incomplete ones; realism to montage or collage, univocality to dialogism, and hierarchy to difference.

Such a paradigm shift recapitulates the last thirty years of debate in documentary and ethnographic filmmaking that began with the introduction of lightweight, synchronous recording equipment. It leaves many of the same problems unanswered: how can dialogism, polyvocality, heteroglossia and reflexivity avoid the fundamental reverb of sustaining hierarchical relations and minimizing value to others when the questions, technologies and strategies are so heavily of "our" own devising!

Hardly insignificant, this paradigm shift does not yet, in and of itself, suffice to account for the nausea and excess ethnographic film may produce. Whatever remains to be proposed, not as an alternative but as an adjunct, is a reconceptualization of what visual anthropology itself might mean.

**Reinterpreting the Visual**

From the first moment of Forest of Bliss' then we are confronted with a central principle of Hindu thought—the juxtaposition and interpenetration of opposites (Creation: Destructive Life: Death). (Chopra 1989: 2)

I rarely can figure out what the people are doing in Forest of Bliss and when I can, the significance of the action is lost to me. (Ruby 1989: 12)

... literary practice remains the missing link in the socio-communicative or subjective-transcendental fabric of the so-called human sciences. (Kristeva 1980: 98)

If the status of ethnographic film within anthropology signals a tension within the field as a whole in terms of epistemological theory and modes of representation, the status of Gardner's Forest of Bliss, and the films of Trinh T. Minh-ha, signify a tension within visual anthropology between social science canons of evaluation and cultural theory modes of interpretation (or "literary practice" in the Kristeva epigraph). So far there has been minimal dialogue between these two camps since anthropology and cultural theory, like communication studies and film studies, occupy very distinct sites within the U.S. academia: the former located more squarely within a social science tradition geared to the interpretation of data and the latter within a humanities tradition of hermeneutic...
interpretation. The adoption of reflexive, text-centered strategies in many cross-cultural forms of representation has yet to be matched by a comparable adoption of cultural theory in ethnographic film criticism.

A visual anthropology devoted to the interpretation of texts might raise from the anthropological unconscious questions regarding the viewer and viewer response. Repressed questions of the body, experience and sensorial knowledge that figure forcefully into the rituals of fieldwork—even if they are largely suppressed from finished reports—might return, addressed to the viewer’s bodily, affective experience of an ethnographic film. Interpreting the experience of the text and the forms of knowledge it makes possible is precisely what Chatto attempts in her close textual reading of *Forest of Bliss* (1989).

Going further, it is not interpretation but theories of interpretation, not one reading of a text, but another but questioning historically conditioned and ideologically inflected mechanisms of textual representation that is at stake. Sarah Williams, in a response to a trio of commentaries on the work of Trinh T. Minh-ha, poses this more radical challenge by asking: “Is it possible to ‘know’ difference differently?” (1991: 12). And doesn’t such “knowing” require putting current practices, prevailing conventions governing the ethnographer’s tale, what takes places behind the scenes of anthropological discourse into suspension? “...suspension is deterrent, dispersion, cessation...To put into suspension is to support, to hang, to postpone, to interrupt” (1991: 9).

Reviewing the scope and application of cultural theory, literary theory, hermeneutics and interpretation is well beyond the scope of this essay. Clifford and Marcus have offered a useful prefiguration for anthropology in their *Writing Culture* (1986) and Trinh T. Minh-ha has offered a symptomatic, distanced reading of anthropological practice designed to put its underlying assumptions into critical suspension (1989). There also exists a tradition already represented, though often neglected, within sociology and anthropology that offers something of a bridge from paradigms lost to paradigms regained.

**A Method in the Mist**

It is crucial to realize that events take place not as representatives or examples of abstract categories (“marriage payments,” “dispute settlement”) but as contingent phenomena (which can be) far more important than the label which is attached [by analyst or actor] to the interaction. (Banks 1990: 32)

Seeking to perforate meaning by forcing my entry or breaking it open to dissipate what is thought to be its secrets seems to me as crippled an act as acting as being an unbound child by ripping open its mother’s womb. It is typical of a mentality that proves incapable of touching the living thing without crushing its delicateness. (Trinh 1989: 48-49)

The method glimpsed in the mist shrouding current discussions of the scientific dimension of anthropology is phenomenology. The phenomenological tradition shares with ethnographic film a commitment to the appearance of things in their specificity. It takes considerable interest in the question of the body and how embodied action—performance—constitutes a sense of self in relation to others. Phenomenology addresses the issue of experience directly. It brings into focus the (largely absent) body of the filmmaker him-/herself as the organizing locus of knowledge. Phenomenology, and kindred approaches such as ethnomethodology or symbolic interactionism, offer a framework within which to displace the problematic of observation and the professional gaze with questions of interaction and participatory dynamics.

Like a feminist ethnographic film aesthetic, a phenomenological aesthetic remains underdeveloped, and often overlooked as a possible point of departure. (It does figure, sometimes implicitly, in the largely informal discourse of ethnographic filmmakers attempting to articulate the problems and conflicts they experience in which bodily presence, emotional response, erotic engagement and ethical dilemmas intrinsically confront one another.) It may be no coincidence that both David MacDougall and Alison Jablonko envision an experiential or perhaps gnosiological, repetitive, poetic form of filmic organization that would foster “haptic learning, learning by bodily identification” (Jablonko 1988: 182) or would replace subject centered and linear models with ones “employing repetition, associative editing and non-narrative structures” (MacDougall 1990: 9).

Efforts such as these would move away from attempts to speak from mind to mind, in the discourse of scientific sobriety, and toward a politics and epistemology of experience—spoken from body to body. Hierarchical structures designed for the extraction of knowledge (the interview, the informant, the case study) might yield to more fully personal, participatory encounter that makes an expansion or diffusion of the personal into the social/political inevitable. Rather than “perforate” the surface of things to extract concepts and categories, falsifiable rules and generalizations, ethnographic film might respond to the call for evocation rather than representation in order “to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. It is, in a word, poetry.” (Tyler 1986: 125). Its production and interpretation requires both a poetics, and a phenomenology, to accompany, if not displace, the “production of knowledge” and interpretation of data that prizes referential and explicit meanings—pertaining to another culture—over implicit and symptomatic meanings—pertaining to “our” own.

**Beyond the Binary**

Its sequences (Appeal to Santiago) contain superb visual ethnography, but when finally produced, these scenes are montaged primarily for artistic effect with no respect for spatial or temporal context ... When the artistry becomes...
flexivity and experimentation with form can all be recuperated into new and improved ways for institutionalized ethnographers to vex each other more precisely by involving Others more thoroughly in the process. Giving Others a chance to speak (on terms not finally of their own choosing), is not a radical break with past convention. (And the thirty-odd years of debate on this topic, inaugurated by cinema-verite, has clearly not set the record straight, resolving issues and blazing trails written ethnographies need only follow.) Questions of how ethnography matters to Others, in what way it does more than refine a professional pursuit and project the imaginary geography peculiar to a modernist or postmodernist sensibility onto the world around it, remain unspecified, perhaps because, like women, Others have not participated in such debates as one among many, or, more precisely, as many among one—fracturing, reconfiguring, even dissolving that "one" into the many it too readily subsumes.

New strategies for film structure and film interpretation, incorporating a poetics and phenomenology, will make a difference but perhaps not enough to know difference differently. To go beyond is to go outside. It is to discover other voices in other places that, as members of a diasporic or exiled community, frequently are neither here nor there in terms of fixed location, that bring the Third World inside the First, that have undertaken their own experiments with form to give voice to subjectivities, perspectives and commitments that stem from other places and other experiences rather than to improve the existing ethnographic filmmaking tradition. These are voices from which we can learn.

Marita Mallet's Unfinished Diary (1983) is a case in point. Refusing to tell the story of a people, a culture or a general situation, this personal, diaristic account of a Chilean exile's experiences in Montreal, in the midst of a crumbling marriage (to Australian-born Canadian film director Michael Rubbo), and with the burden of memories of a Chile that no longer is, Unfinished Diary demonstrates the death of those master narratives that have organized so many other stories in other times. Partial satisfactions, diverse affinities, overlapping but incongruent affiliations and imperfect utopias replace the ordered lives constructed according to the premises of Aristotelian logic, Christian salvation, Keynesian economics, or Marxist revolution. How can the gulf between a past there, in Chile, and a present here, in Montreal, be spanned without the logic of problem-solving, the theology of damnation and redemption, the dynamics of the marketplace or the dialectical materialism of revolution? How do we represent—that is, depict, speak for, and argue about what is no longer present under conditions such as these?

Mallet's answer is to speak from and about the self, with the sense of an ever-widening web of implication that spins outward from this singular but incomplete nodal point, one among many that we see as the film unfolds. Like so many inhabitants of the great global village of political refugees, exiles, immigrants, and diasporic communities, Mallet is not "one of us" in terms of the classic, conventional image of the settled native informant as key to region and culture. She lives inside but perceives from "outside." Her split perspective leaves her acutely aware of the emotional resonance of minor moments such as when Rubbo matter-of-factly staples sheets of translucent plastic to all the windows as a heat-saving procedure. To her, the rationale is understandable but it does not eliminate the felt experience of encroachment that Rubbo's calm rationality only intensifies.

Unfinished Diary is the opposite of the travelogue or the conventional ethnography. Movement and travel no longer serve as a symbol for the expansion of one's moral framework, the realization of cultural relativity, the heroics of salvage ethnography, the rituals of self-improvement, or as training in the moral responsibilities that belong to the custodians of a post-colonial order. Movement and travel no longer legitimate the subject's right to speak through with disembodied discourses, master narratives and mythologies in which the corporeal "I" who speaks dissolves itself into the disembodied, depersonalized, institutionalized discourse of power and knowledge. This is the Cartesian, Griersonian, scientific legacy in documentary film that Mallet rejects.
For Mallet—as for others among the disposessed and displaced for whom "de-
territorialization" is not a concept but an experience—movement and travel become
dramatic of dislocation, of social and cultural estrangement, of survival and self-preservation
(what it is that one preserves in the midst of dispersal and fragmentation). Mallet explores
and proposes strategies of resistance, of struggle and resolution (displayed visually in the weave
of Spanish, French and English speaking voices that situates characters within their own
distinct, decentered locus of communication). Location stems from an embodied, corporeal
discourse and resistance from the material practice of communication and exchange.

Representing a politics of location—of living both here and there, of linguistic circles of
affiliation, of work, family and friends—points toward the importance of testimonial
literature and first-person filmmaking as an alternative tradition to master narratives and
canon stories. Testimonials are first person, oral more than literary, personal more than
conceptual. Such works explore the personal as political at the level of textual self-
representation as well as at the level of lived experience. Testimonial contrasts with the
traditional essay or documentary where the authorial "I" speaks to and on behalf of a
universalized collectivity. The "I" of testimonials embodies social affinities and collectivities. It
is acutely aware of hegemonic discourse and social difference, historical conjuncture, material
practice, and marginality. (Rigobert Menchu's *I, Rigoberta* [1984] and Cherie Moraga's *Leaving in
the War Years* [1983] are excellent examples of written testimonials that parallel many of the
preoccupations of Mallet's *Unfinished Diary. Mallet's* placement of herself within the film as
a person whose authority derives from experience more than from theories, methods or
institutional legitimacy, her displacement of the "history lesson" or "ethnographic message"
from its privileged position of justification for her diaristic account, her refusal to make
erself into the figure of the one who knows that most voice-over commentary in
documentary evokes, all propose a radically distinct model of social representation.

Her scenes cannot be described as examples, models, or representative evidence in the
service of an argument without betraying the very strategy she adopts. They are scenes not
from a marriage but her marriage, not from a life but her life. Their significance within a wider
web of implication resides in their particularity not their typicality, their phenomenological
aura not their conceptual essence. To treat them as examples is to slide toward a German
problematic where representation becomes the province of Us discussing Them in ways that
no longer matter very much to Them.

These qualities of testimonial are taken up in different and suggestive ways in other
works as well. *Fins Are Dreams*, for example, traces a journey to Tibet by a political refugee,
Lobsang Dakpa, and the ethnographic filmmaker herself, Sylvia Sensus. News of the
journey first comes to us through a staged television news report. The device aptly
introduces the theme of mediating images, memories and discourses that the remainder of
the video explores. Both Lobsang and Sensus speak for themselves about what the
journey means. In each case they envision a pre-existing Tibet: the Tibet of 1937 for
Lobsang, the year his exile began, and the Tibet of *Lost Horizon* (Capra 1937) for Sensus, the
film that pre-figured the world she thought she might discover. By intercutting footage
shot by Dakpa and Sensus separately, clips from Capra's *Lost Horizon*, newsreel footage of
China's annexation of Tibet and the Dali Lama's (and Dakpa Lobsang's) exile, and more
formal interviews with Dakpa, the film explores the construction of the imaginary
gerographies that usually remains unacknowledged in ethnographic work. Characters,
institutions and nations bring their pre-existing maps with them. Dissonance and conflicts
arise. Contradictions reveal the premises and limitations, the dream-world quality to
imaginary geographies which, at first, seem boundless. The tension between past and
present is also rendered far more palpable than a salvage anthropology of disappearing
customs can accommodate. There is no direct access to that imagined realm at the other
end of memory; there are only memories and dreams that make more vivid the
lineaments of the present from which past and future extend.

Another film that works against the grain of the ethnographer's tale is Dane Kitchen's
*Before We Knew Nothing*. This film is close to a conventional ethnography in its description of
living among the Ashanka Indians of the Amazon river basin, but Kitchen's emphasis on the
physical experience of being there: her admission of being drawn to the tribe by
early photographs of them as fierce warriors fending off the first waves of intruders earlier
in the century (conveyed by cutting these photographs into the flow of present events,
something like the intercut scenes from *Lost Horizon* in *Fins Are Dreams*), her very limited
use of synchronous sound, and her total reliance on a whispered voice-over for her
own commentary construct a very vivid sense of distance and separation. Rather than being
the space necessary for representation and feinshation of the other, this distance provides
the space for critical reflection.

The whispered commentary in particular conveys a sense of intimacy and respect rather
than confiding a secret or suggesting gossip. The whisper erases any sense of author-
ativeness from the commentary. The grungy whisper localizes and personalizes the
commentary and yet holds it apart from the visible scenes where its point of enunciation, Kitchen's
body, is plainly in evidence. Now and then, like here and there, interpenetrate in the shadowy
echoes of a voice that does not restore the past but identifies it as available to consciousness
and the present but irreducible to these or any other essentializing formulations.

Other voices propose yet other directions. These works refigure strategies and
assumptions that underlie the ethnographic film tradition from the outside, in relation
to other concerns and priorities. Brenda Longwell's *Our Marilyn* (1988), for example, is a
poetic first-person meditation on the formation of female subjectivity in relation to the female
body. The film positions the first-person, voice-
off narrator between the body image of physical prowess represented by Canadian long distance
swimmer Marilyn Bell and the image of physical allure represented by American film star
Marilyn Monroe. The narrator, drawn to both images, confounds any sense of fixed position
or transcendent coherence to individual identity. Her dilemma magnifies that of Nai or
behind after they left. Trinh's film, like her earlier Reassemblage (1982) and Naked Spaces: Living Is Round (1985), acts as a metacommentary on documentary form and ethnographic intent. Trinh stages the other culture (postwar Vietnam) as "there," only to reveal it to be "here" in ways that demonstrate continuing difficulty for women within the sex/gender system of both cultures; Trinh subverts standard assumptions about travel, fieldwork, and ethnographic authority and she presents translation and transcription as processes that distort or betray that which they represent. Rather than allowing subtitles to give the impression of representational adequacy, Trinh sets up vivid discrepancies and counter-pointing between what is said and what is written. Suriname Viet Giong Name Nam not only brings Vietnam inside the United States, it embeds the experience of cultural difference within the film experience.

Dream, Memory, History, Representation

We need a dream-world in order to discover the features of the real world we think we inhabit. (Sylvia Sension, quoting Paul Feyerabend, in Films Are Dreams)

Dreams rework everyday experience according to the distinct processes of the unconscious mind. They are a way of re-membering the past and addressing its lingering conflicts, traumas and contradictions. Memory often plays a similar role. Adjunct or alternative to third-person historical narratives, it is another way of discovering features of the real world we think we inhabit. And in many of these films, time, memory and the past are a recurring motif. As in Marshall’s film Nai: The Story of a K’ung Woman. Before We Knew Nothing, Lorang’s Way (MacDougall 1980) and Kenya Boran, Handsworth Songs, Unfinished Diary, I’m British But and Passion of Remembrance (Julien 1986) all address the question of how the past persists in the present or of how the present includes a partiality, a lack of fullness, resulting from the undertow of the past. (No longer a repository of “our” lost horizon of idyllic bliss or savage ancestry, the past takes on a living presence perceived and felt from the inside by those for whom it matters.) What has come before—often in another place, another country—confirms the self as multiple, split and layered, built up of sedimented acts and revised memories. The hearty individuality of a Nanook shatters against such forces but is none the worse for it. What is re-membered serves to constitute a body of knowledge and experience that informs the politics of location and subjectivity. The Pakistani-British in I’m British But, who begin by calling themselves Welsh or Scottish, conclude by remembering the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh, the kind of memory that identifies a place apart.

Handsworth Songs: vividly the memory of immigrant parents and the dreams they bore with them on the boats that plied the Atlantic through the use of a poetic voice of remembrance describing their aspirations in a diaristic mode. Sometimes this commentary is juxtaposed with footage showing new arrivals disembarking at dockside, sometimes it accompanies the camera as it slowly tracks past poster-sized photographs of the wedding pictures of Afro-Caribbean immigrants in an otherwise dark, open studio space. These passages about others built from journalistic footage covering the riots in Handsworth. There is no attempt to reconcile the two forms of representation. The memories of past hopes provide a contextualizing aura of historical consciousness for the next generation of blacks, those who made the film. It is little wonder that their imagination sees, and is compelled to help others see, ignorance, racial blindness and misrepresentation—in sum, incommensurate realities—where their parents saw new beginnings.

These films, a few of the many available for discussion, interpretation, and use, step beyond realist conventions, canonic story formats, modernist montage and disciplinary purity. These films already use cinematic montage in ways Marcus calls for in the future (1990) but are also perceived as outside the ethnographic tradition Marcus addresses. They are films with use-value for those of whom they speak; they come from women/natives/others; they
reconfigure the imaginary geography of cross-cultural representation itself and place ethnographic film as one, marginalized voice among many. These films move beyond the challenge of developing a better way for ethnographers to vex one another with their precision, proposing instead bold and innovative directions for cross-cultural representation in which others are no longer objects of study—but are sensitive to needless perforations that study might be—no longer even equal in the production of work that will enlist their efforts in the redemption of western anthropology. They are now themselves the founding voices—the pioneers, provocateurs and poets—of a discourse of their own making, made with full, sometimes painful awareness of what has come before and of the representational residue they may choose to adapt, ignore or redress.

Some works such as Trinh's Reassemblage and Naked Spaces: Living In Round, or Sensere's Films An Dreams clearly address assumptions and conventions behind the scenes of visual anthropology, but most do not. If this larger body of work contributes to the formation of an ethnography, it displays a very different geography from the one imagined by most ethnography and a viable answer to the question of whether it is possible to know difference differently. These works draw much of their inspiration from elsewhere, from other traditions, other forms, other perspectives and emphasis. In other words, speaking from other places, do not turn to ethnographic film as a primary source of inspiration, this should be occasion for pause. It invites "us" to reflect on the current state of, and discourse about, an ethnographic film tradition that has sought to represent others when, "we" have been told, they could not represent themselves.

Notes
1. This body of work is primarily feminist in emphasis. Representative works include: Mulvey (1981); Studlar (1981); De Lauretis (1984); Doane, Mellencamp, Williams, eds. (1990); Gien and Herzog, eds. (1990); and Kuhn (1982).
2. Manuela Torgovnick (1991) offers an extended account of the central, allegorical role played by the tale of Odysseus in western travel narratives ever since, including ethnographic ones.
3. The Twelfth Annual Nordic Film Festival revolved around the question of whether ethnographers could construct their work in accord with the narrative traditions and conventions of the cultures they study. MacDougall had explored the extent to which western conventions such as the canonical story format inform not only the film but also the selection of cultures to be studied (1990). Trinh’s book, Woman, Native, Other also discusses alternative story formats at length, especially in her final chapter, “Grandma’s Story” (1989).
4. Interestingly, those engaged in the creation of virtual realities (computer-based worlds that simulate our experience of this world) find that it is difficult for subjects to locate or orient themselves without some representative of themselves in virtual space. Programmers often design “default heads,” visual representations of a human head, that perceive and move through virtual reality in the same manner as the subject would if he or she were physically, as well as perceptually, “there.” These guides or “tricks” take cognizance of our inability to act if we cannot located our own body in relation to the world around us. When limited to a head, such figures would seem to offer one more example of an imaginary geography where the mind/body split of western civilization prevails. The mind enters into a strange and exotic realm, attaching itself to the guidance of a default head, while the physical body, left at the threshold, divides the mind’s consciousness between two different streams of contradictory sensory input, leading, quite possibly, to nausea. As a participant at a recent conference remarked, there is considerable need for “default bodies” that locate the entire self within a virtual reality. Our experience and accountability within a distinctly different perceptual world depends on taking full account of our bodies and our selves, not just our mind and its theories.
5. I discuss the professional or clinical gaze as well as the interactive mode of documentary filmmaking more extensively in Representing Reality (1991).
6. Discussions of the use-value of phenomenology to feminist theory of gender suggest something of its relevance to ethnographic film interpretation. Butler (1990), for example, argues, after Merleau-Ponty, for a conception of gender in which the body is “a historical idea” that renders gender specific through individual acts that are also socially indicative. These acts accumulate into a “legacy of sedimented acts” that constitute the self in a continuously opened-up yet stable fashion (1990: 274). Such acts, and their sedimentation over time, of course, are the very stuff of ethnographic film.
7. Stephen Lansing reminds us that the model of ethnographic film discussed here, of work aimed at a larger public, is not the only pertinent model (1990). His discussion of the National Film Board of Canada Fogo Island films and other works structured for use-value for their subjects rather than for their informational or affective value to others is a salutary reminder that ethnographic film can have more than one definition or purpose.

The direct usefulness of films to some of whose representation may be made available by extension, a variation on the question that has reverberated through the museum world for some time now: should film footage be repatriated to the cultures for whom it was shot? Important questions remain: How similar are sounds and images rather than artifacts? What is the use-value of these materials? Perhaps the answer to these questions lies in the use-value of the film itself, that it may well be considerable. The time when their repatriation becomes a serious question may well be approaching.

8. Recurring through I’m British But is a pop tune sung in a Punjabi by a Pakistani-Canadian rock group standing on the roof top of a small neighborhood store. The lyrics, printed in italics to make the point more clear, are a vivid reminder of roots and the price of dislocation. One verse, referring to the massacre, goes:

Recall that it was these same foreigners
That took their rifles to us
Innocent, fair flourishing lives
How they stood and destroyed us
And every corner bears witness
At Jalianwala Bagh
(refrain)
And you, my friend, come to England
Leaving your Punjab.

References