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Indigenous Media:
Faustian Contract or Global Village?

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> And tomorrow? . . . The dreams of Vertov and Flaherty will be combined into a me-
> chanical "cine-eye-ear" which is such a "participant" camera that it will pass au-
> tomatically into the hands of those who were, up to now, always in front of it. Then
> the anthropologist will no longer monopolize the observation of things.
>
> —Jean Rouch, "The Camera and Man,"
> in Principles of Visual Anthropology, 1975, p. 102

> Aboriginal communities are ensuring the continuity of their languages and cultures
> and representation of their views. By making their own films and videos, they speak
> for themselves, no longer aliens in an industry which for a century has used them for
> its own ends.
>
> —Michael Leigh (1988:88)

Over the last ten years, indigenous and minority people have been using a
variety of media, including film and video, as new vehicles for internal and ex-
ternal communication, for self-determination, and for resistance to outside cul-
tural domination.[1] The new media forms they are creating are innovations in both
filmic representation and social process, expressive of transformations in cultural
identities in terms shaped by local and global conditions of the late 20th century.
Such alternative "multicultural media" have become both fashionable and more
visible in the latter part of the 1980s: museum shows in the United States,[2] the
Black Film workshop sector in the United Kingdom,[3] and a Special Broadcasting
Service (SBS) in Australia are just a few examples of this increased interest.[4] Until
quite recently, support for and exhibition of such work focused on productions by
ethnic minorities, rather than indigenous groups.[5] While many of the issues they
contend with are shared concerns, I will focus in this essay on specific dilemmas
posed to indigenous people by the introduction of video and television, grounding
my discussion in recent developments in Australian Aboriginal media.

Efforts to produce indigenous media worldwide[6] are generally small-scale,
low budget and locally based; because of this, their existence is politically and
economically fragile, while their significance is largely invisible outside of oc-
casional festivals or circles of specialists.[7] There is very little written on these
developments, and what exists comes mostly in the form of newsletters and re-
ports, which are useful, but do not address directly broader theoretical questions
regarding how these developments alter understandings of media, politics, and

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representation. It is particularly surprising that there is so little discussion of such phenomena in contemporary anthropological work, despite the fact that video cassette recorders (VCRs), video cameras, and mass media are now present in even the most remote locales. This is due in part to the theoretical foci anthropologists carry into the field that have not expanded to keep up with such changes. The lack of analysis of such media as both cultural product and social process may also be due to our own culture's enduring positivist belief that the camera provides a "window" on reality, a simple expansion of our powers of observation, as opposed to a creative tool in the service of a new signifying practice.

I want to argue that it is of particular importance, now, that these most contemporary of indigenous forms of self-representation and their creators be considered seriously. They are of critical theoretical and empirical significance for current debates in several fields regarding the politics and poetics of representation, the development of media in Third and Fourth World settings, and the expansion of ethnographic film theory and the canon associated with it.

The first part of this essay addresses how indigenous media challenges the conventions and very categories of both "traditional culture" and "ethnographic film." The second part explores the specific cases of several media groups in Central Australia that I have been studying since 1988. These are Warlpiri Media Association in the Central Desert Aboriginal community of Yuendumu; CAAMA—the acronym for the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association located just outside the town of Alice Springs; and Imparja Television based in Alice Springs, but serving all of the Northern Territory and large parts of South Australia as well.

The developments I discuss are the most recent manifestation of the ever-increasing involvement of Australian Aboriginal people in media production over the last two decades. Different aspects of this involvement are summarized nicely in essays by film historian Michael Leigh (1988) and filmmaker David Mac-Dougall (1987). As Leigh points out, the upsurge of collaborative productions with Australian Aboriginal people began during the Labor government in 1972–75, in part enacting its liberal left policy toward Aboriginal "self-determination."[8] For example, since the early 1970s, at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders Studies Film Unit (the Institute), new projects were based increasingly on interest expressed by Aboriginal communities, resulting in outstanding films such as *Waiting for Harry* (McKenzie 1980) or *Goodbye Old Man* (MacDougall 1977). Paralleling a similar shift in ethnographic writing, these changes in ethnographic film practice to accommodate indigenous interests were, according to David MacDougall, a shift away from

> reconstruction of pre-contact situations towards an examination of the realities of contemporary Aboriginal experience. Initially this took the form of supporting and documenting Aboriginal moves for cultural reassertion . . . [1987:55]

In 1979, the Institute began taking on occasional Aboriginal trainees in film and video. That same year saw the debut of *My Survival As An Aboriginal,* the first

film directed by an Aboriginal woman, Essie Coffey of Brewarrina (made with Martha Ansara and Alec Morgan of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative).

Such "participatory cinema" (MacDougall 1975) is part of the increasingly collaborative approach to ethnographic filmmaking which foreshadowed and encouraged the development of indigenous media. Because all this work has been particularly innovative in the filmmaking *processes* as much as product, it seems appropriate that analysis should shift as well: I am concerned less with the usual focus on the formal qualities of film as text and more with the cultural *mediations* that occur through film and video works.

Given my concern with mediation, I want to call attention to the use of quotations and interviews as "data" in this article. They are intended to locate indigenous media at the intersection of a number of discourses, since part of what I am trying to understand is how this work gets positioned by those practicing it and by those in the dominant culture with some interest in it. So, for example, Australian art critics Tony Fry and Ann-Marie Willis greet Aboriginal media with a postmodern embrace, as they search for a disruptive and positive response on the part of Aborigines to the oppressive legacy of colonialism. Perhaps because of this intellectual commitment, they have a rather utopian view of television's potential for Aboriginal social relations and consciousness, particularly in comparison with the circulation of Aboriginal paintings in the world art market:

> [Aboriginal] Video trades on the assumption that its application and cultural production are a form of resistance. This is not because of its content, but rather because it is *occupied* as a cultural space from which the right to speak is asserted—a late-modern space to address the present and the future. Television's cultural and economic usefulness to Aboriginal people is great. For one thing, it is less easily accommodated into the international exchange of cultural commodities than are art works. More importantly, it can't be classified as easily and in the same ways as the 'spectacular primitive' (which isn't to say it is invulnerable). [Fry and Willis 1989:160; emphasis in original]

This perspective, shared by a number of contemporary art critics, is a bit naïve in its disregard for the destructive effects of television; since this is a concern voiced by many Aborigines themselves, it suggests the important contribution that grounded anthropological research can make to this critical discourse.[9] Nonetheless, I would like to take an optimistic view as well, tempered by my awareness of compromises and problems that are more visible from an "on-the-ground" (rather than distant) vantage point.

I am proposing that when other forms are no longer effective, indigenous media offers a possible means—social, cultural, and political—for reproducing and transforming cultural identity among people who have experienced massive political, geographic, and economic disruption. The capabilities of media to transcend boundaries of time, space, and even language are being used effectively to mediate, literally, historically produced social ruptures and to help construct identities that link past and present in ways appropriate to contemporary conditions. Before exploring these ideas further, I first want to address the general questions indigenous media raises for the genre of ethnographic film.

Indigenous Media and Ethnographic Film

Ethnographic film was originally conceived as a broad project of documenting on film the "disappearing" life-worlds of those "others"—non-Western, small-scale, kinship-based societies—who had initially been the objects of anthropology as it developed in the early 20th century. Ironically, the field of ethnographic film took on definition and shape as a genre during a critical period, the 1960s and '70s, when efforts to "reinvent anthropology" (Hymes 1972) were produced by a variety of historical, intellectual, and political developments. Briefly stated, these include:

- The end of the colonial era with the assertions of self-determination by native 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.

- A reconceptualization of "the native voice" as one that should be in more direct dialogue with anthropological interpretation.

Some have called this constellation of events "a crisis in representation" for the field that required new, experimental strategies for transmitting anthropological understandings (e.g., Marcus and Fischer 1986). It is not sufficiently appreciated that many people working in ethnographic film had, in fact, already responded to this "crisis." Often less constrained by the academy than those working in written ethnography, ethnographic filmmakers offered a variety of creative solutions, following the experimental turns in the arts and sciences in general. For example, questions of epistemology, ethics, and the position of the native interlocutor were being addressed in the 1950s by ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch, in works such as *Les Maîtres Fous* (1954), *Jaguar* (1955), or *Chronicle of a Summer* (1960). By the mid 1970s, the list included (to name a few) Tim Asch, David and Judith MacDougall, John Marshall, Gary Kildea, Barbara Myerhoff, and Jorge Preloran. A number of these people also articulated arguments in print for what David MacDougall has called more participatory methods and styles of representation (1975).

In addition to these more dialogical approaches in ethnographic film, an early attempt to put the camera directly into native hands was carried out by Sol Worth and John Adair in the 1960s. Their project, discussed in the book *Through Navajo Eyes* (1972), attempted to teach film technology to Navajos without the conventions of Western production and editing, to see if their films would be based on a different film "grammar" based on Navajo worldview. However, the experiment focused overmuch on the filmic rather than the social frame. Worth and Adair failed to consider seriously potential cultural differences in the social relations around image-making and viewing, even though these concerns were brought up clearly in the initial negotiations with Sam Yazzie, a leading medicine man and elder.

> Adair explained that he wanted to teach some Navajo to make movies. . . . When Adair finished, Sam thought for a while and then . . . asked a lengthy question which was interpreted as, "Will making movies do sheep any harm?"
>
> Worth was happy to explain that as far as he knew, there was no chance that making movies would harm the sheep.
>
> Sam thought this over and then asked, "Will making movies do the sheep good?" Worth was forced to reply that as far as he knew making movies wouldn't do the sheep any good.
>
> Sam thought this over, then, looking around at us he said, "Then why make movies?" [Worth and Adair 1972:5]

The lack of consideration for how movies might "do the sheep good" meant that the Navajo Eyes project was rather short lived and, retrospectively, is seen as a somewhat sterile and patronizing experiment. Still, the notion of distinct indigenous concerns for cinematic and narrative representation was prescient. By the 1970s, indigenous groups and some ethnographic filmmakers were questioning not only how conventions of representation are culture bound; they also concerned themselves with central issues of power regarding who controls the production and distribution of imagery. Indigenous peoples who had been the exotic objects of many films were concerned increasingly with producing their own images, either by working with accomplished and sympathetic filmmakers[10] or by entering into film and video production themselves, for example Hopi artist Victor Masayesva, or Inuit producer/director Zacharias Kunuk.[11]

These developments were part of a more general decentralization, democratization, and widespread penetration of media that emerged with the growth of new technologies that simultaneously worked the local and global fronts. On the one hand, inexpensive portable video cameras, and cable channels open to a spectrum of producers and viewers gave new meaning to notions of access and multicultural expression. On the other hand, the broad marketing of VCRs and the launching of communications satellites over Canada in the 1970s and Australia in the 1980s suddenly brought the possibility or menace, depending on one's point of view, of a mixture of minority/indigenous and mainstream Western programming entering into the daily lives of people living in remote settlements, especially those in the Canadian Arctic and central Australian desert.

Thus, indigenous and minority people have faced a kind of Faustian dilemma. On the one hand, they are finding new modes for expressing indigenous identity through media and gaining access to film and video to serve their own needs and ends. On the other hand, the spread of communications technology such as home video and satellite downlinks threatens to be a final assault on culture, language, imagery, relationship between generations, and respect for traditional knowledge. Freda Glynn, the Aboriginal director of CAAMA and chair of Imparja's board, articulates this sense of dilemma. As an Aboriginal woman who was taken from her family in childhood to be educated in Western schools, she is keenly aware of the impact of such interventions and sees television as part of a continuum of assaults on Aboriginal life that must be dealt with in as positive a manner as possible. Her words are instructive.

TV is like an invasion. We have had grog, guns and diseases, but we have been really fortunate that people outside the major communities have had no communication like radio or TV. Language and culture have been protected by neglect. Now, they are not going to be. They need protection because TV will be going into those communities 24 hours a day in a foreign language—English. It only takes a few months and the kids start changing. . . . We're trying to teach kids you can be Aboriginal and keep your language and still mix in the wider community and have English as well. At least they will be seeing black faces on the magic box that sits in the corner, instead of seeing white faces all day long. [Interview with author, 6 July 1988]

Some scholars of Third World broadcasting (following on the gloomy predictions of the Frankfurt school theorists) believe that people like Freda, at best, are simply bargaining with Mephistopheles. They conclude that the content and hegemonic control of mass media irreversibly erode traditional languages and cultures, replacing them with alien social values and an attraction to Western consumer goods. Such concerns, for example, have been the basis for debates in Papua New Guinea over the introduction of commercial television (Crossette 1986). Others argue that the very *form* of Western narratives may undermine traditional modes. As David MacDougall recently pointed out,

The dominant conflict structure of Western fictional narratives, and the didacticism of much of Western documentary, may be at odds with traditional modes of discourse. The division into fiction and documentary may itself be subversive. Or differences may arise in the conventions of narrative and imagery. At a film conference in 1978, Wiyendji, an Aboriginal man from Roper River, argued against the Western preoccupation with close-ups and fast cutting, saying that Aborigines preferred to see whole bodies and whole events. This may not be borne out by Aboriginal preferences when viewing non-Aboriginal material, but it is a common complaint about films by outsiders which portray Aboriginal subjects.
    Such objections obviously cry out for more Aboriginal filmmaking. [1987:54]

Taking a similar perspective, indigenous people, scholars, and policymakers have been advocating indigenous use of media technology as a new opportunity for influence and self-expression. In this view, television technology offers unique potential for the expansion of community-generated production, and the construction of viewing conditions and audiences shaped by indigenous interests, and ultimately, cultural regeneration. Art critics Fry and Willis express this position in the language of postmodernism, updating Lévi-Strauss's image of *bricolage* with more contemporary metaphors, combining popular understandings of recombinant DNA and telecommunications.

Making a new culture which knowingly embraces the future is a more viable form of cultural bricolage (by this we mean the making of a culture by a process of the selection and assembly of combined and recombined cultural forms). Resistance to ethnocide is not seen as trying simply to defend an existent cultural identity but the forging of a new one which rejects the models sought to be imposed. Radio, television and video have become significant media in this cultural strategy. And what is particularly significant is that these media break the circuit of producing products for circulation and consumption within the culture of dominance (as opposed to works of

> art). Aboriginal radio, video and TV producers are producing ideas and images that circulate in their own cultures. [Fry and Willis 1989:160]

Finally, as John Lent noted in his collection *Case Studies of Mass Media in the Third World,* "The hard work of empirically done case studies on individual media in particular countries remains to be done" (1979:v). A 1986 report for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies by researcher Eric Michaels on the introduction of local video production and low-power broadcast at a Warlpiri community, Yuendumu, in Central Australia presents one such case, demonstrating the possibilities and limits of these sorts of innovations. Making a case for the local control of media, the author argues that the substance and formal qualities of the tapes have a distinctly Warlpiri sensibility, marked, for example by an intense interest in the landscape as filled with specific meaning. But, he goes on to point out, of equal if not more importance is the social organization of media production; the ways in which tapes are made, shown, and used reflect Warlpiri understandings of kinship and group responsibilities for display and access to traditional knowledge (Michaels 1984).

The last point, regarding transmission of information, has been the subject of much recent ethnographic inquiry (Myers 1986), which demonstrates how ceremonial and other kinds of knowledge ("law") critical to cultural identity are transmitted. Elders impart their knowledge at appropriate times over the life cycle, most dramatically through initiation rituals. Thus, in traditional communities, knowing, seeing, hearing, speaking, and performing certain kinds of information are highly regulated; violation of norms can meet with severe sanctions. In addition, Aboriginal knowledge is made meaningful by associations with particular geographic locations, in contrast to the free-floating signifiers that characterize much of Western semiotics, particularly in television. As one communications scholar points out:

> European mass media with its homogenized messages transmitted from a central source is at odds with Aboriginal information patterns. Aborigines see their local areas as the centre from which information emanates. Their information/communications model is completely the reverse of the European model which sees the urban cities as the centre and the remote communities as the periphery. The mass media not only ignores local boundaries (Aboriginal countries), it also makes information accessible to all viewers. [Molnar 1989:8]

Indeed, the question of media reception is complex in such settings. And, as others have noted, such practice is significant not only to their own communities.

> Aboriginal people, both individually and collectively, are turning to film, video and television as the media almost likely to carry their messages to one another and into the consciousness of white Australia. [MacDougall 1987:58]

Transmitting Identity: Aboriginal Media

In the following discussion of particular instances of indigenous media production, I propose an analysis of how Aboriginal video practice is engaged in the

construction of their contemporary identity that integrates historical and contemporary lifeworlds.

The Warlpiri Media Association[12] grew out of a project initiated by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1982, emerging from a concern over the possible deleterious impact of the AUSSAT satellite. Its launching in 1985 was to bring the possibility of television to remote areas, including many Aboriginal settlements and communities, for the first time. While Yuendumu and many other Aboriginal communities had not received the steady flow of broadcast television, it is important to point out that they were acquainted with Western filmmaking practice through community viewings of rented films, attending cinemas in towns, and most recently, through the circulation and viewing of materials through their own or resident whites' video cassette recorders.

American researcher Eric Michaels was hired to work with Warlpiri-speaking Aboriginal people at the Yuendumu community in the Central Desert to develop video based on Aboriginal concerns that might be programmed instead of the imagery of standard commercial television. The fifty tapes produced by Warlpiri videomakers between 1982 and 1984 demonstrated how media could be fashioned and used in ways appropriate to native social organization, narrative conventions, and communicative strategies. Originally intended for use in their school, the works covered subjects ranging from traditional dances, to a piece memorializing a massacre of Warlpiri people by whites, to recording of local sports events.

When I was there in 1988, the activities of Warlpiri Media Association had expanded from production and irregular broadcast of a Warlpiri evening news program to include the operation of a local low-power television station via a homemade transmitter since April 1985. (This operation as well as a more recent government-funded Aboriginal media scheme, in a Kafkaesque twist of bureaucracy, are considered illegal because the state had not managed to authorize a new, appropriate licensing category [Molnar 1989:34]!) The development of media similar to Yuendumu is happening in other remote communities such as Aurukun and Ernabella (Molnar 1989:25ff.; N. Turner 1990), while other production units in cities such as Perth, Sydney, Darwin, reflect the distinctive interests of urban Aboriginals.

The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, or CAAMA, is one of the most successful of Aboriginally controlled media projects. It was started as an FM radio station in 1980 by two Aboriginal people and one ''whitefella'' whose private record collection was the basis of most of the original programming. CAAMA quickly became one of the most popular radio shows for both blacks and whites in the Northern Territory. Its format combines country western, Aboriginal rock, call-ins, and discussion of news of concern to Aborigines in six native languages and English for nearly fifteen hours a day. It later expanded to AM and shortwave broadcasts, a prizewinning educational show called ''Bushfire,'' and a recording studio for Aboriginal bands whose tapes are sold along with other Aboriginal art products in the CAAMA shop. In addition, a video unit was established in 1984; originally, it produced a series of one-hour video newsletters

in English and other major Aboriginal languages to circulate to communities without radio access.

In 1985, when the Australian government launched its communications satellite, AUSSAT, it was clear that eventually commercial television was going to be available to the remote Aboriginal settlements in CAAMA's radio broadcast area. Out of concern for the potential negative impact of this on traditional Aboriginal languages and culture, CAAMA made a bid for the satellite's downlink license to Central Australia, as a symbolic assertion of the presence and concerns of that region's Aboriginal people. Much to their surprise, their proposal for taking on this multimillion-dollar operation was taken seriously. In January 1987, after a prolonged battle against bigger commercial interests and opposition from the Northern Territory government, CAAMA won the Regional Commercial Television Services (RCTS) license for the television downlink to the Central Australian ''footprint,'' (so named because it describes the general shape of the signal patterns to earth given off by satellites). They were able to make the acquisition with financial assistance from a variety of government sources.[13]

The private commercial station they now run, Imparja (which means ''tracks'' or ''footprint'' in the Central Australian language Arrernte), began broadcasting in January 1988, serving approximately 100,000 viewers in Central Australia, over a quarter of them Aboriginal (though some put that figure as high as 40%) (Goddard 1987). Thus far, in addition to public service announcements, logos, wraparounds, and the like which are directed to Aboriginal concerns such as bush foods or the Central Land Council, Imparja has been broadcasting regular Aboriginal programs. In 1988, they carried 26 30-minute current affairs programs, broadcast twice a week in prime time: ''Urrpye'' [messenger] a ''magazine and current affairs style program helping to promote awareness about the concerns and issues of Aboriginal people'' (in English);[14] and ''Nganampa—Anwernekenhe'' or ''ours'') a news show in different Aboriginal languages—Arrernte, Luritja, Pitjantjajara, Warlpiri—with English subtitles, intended to help maintain Aboriginal language and culture through art, music, stories, and dances. In 1989, Imparja developed a 13-part language series, an Aboriginal music program, and a late-night show featuring Aborigines talking in their own languages, telling their history and ''dreaming'' stories (Molnar 1989:23). As part of their support for Aboriginal health concerns, they refuse to sell commercials for alcohol.

There have been complaints, especially from other Aboriginal people, that 2 to 3 hours out of 70 hours a week, even at prime time, is insufficient Aboriginal programming. Others are concerned about Imparja's stress on ''broadcast quality''—an elusive and problematic term for somewhat arbitrary technical standards for productions used by television stations, that effectively keeps low-budget and unconventional work off the air. In this case, the result has been to limit Imparja's use of material produced by Yuendumu, Ernabella, and other local Aboriginal media associations. It also restricts CAAMA's ability to produce programming for Imparja because of the costs involved in ''broadcast quality'' work. A 30-minute piece could cost between $10,000 and $20,000, while imported American shows can be purchased inexpensively (Molnar 1989:23).

The question of advertising also has an impact on programming content for any commercial television outlet. Imparja, like the other Australian satellite downlinks, struggles to meet the $4.5-million satellite rental fee (rising at 12% per year) via advertising revenues which will never rise significantly because the population numbers (and therefore potential consumers) are low. Aboriginal programming is particularly not lucrative because there is a dropoff in European viewers, and advertisers—who are mostly local business people—don't view Aborigines as consumers.

As one possible solution, in addition to their own Aboriginal productions, CAAMA is trying to correct for the homogenizing top-down flow of commercial television by providing "windows" which would allow the insertion of community-made video programs in language for local broadcast at places such as Ali Curung, Barunga, Borroloola, Ernabella, Galiwinku, Ntaria, Hermannsburg, Oenpelli, Wadeye, Port Keats, Santa Teresa, and Yuendumu.

Finally, while Imparja is the only large-scale commercial television station owned by Australian Aboriginal people, just 10% of the television staff is Aboriginal, because of a lack of skilled personnel. To help correct for this problem, in 1988, CAAMA and Imparja made a three-year training agreement with the Department of Education, Employment and Training to train 33 Aboriginal people as videotape operators, editors, recording assistants, television presenters, radio journalists and broadcasters, translator/interpreters, sales representatives, researchers, and bookkeepers. All trainees are supposed to be taken on as permanent employees by CAAMA and Imparja when they finish their training.

Some sympathetic white Australians, assessing Imparja at some distance from its internal difficulties, are hopeful. For example, Tony Fry and Ann-Marie Willis recently writing in *Art in America,* see Imparja as claiming

> a cultural space in which innovation is possible; it has a future. This is a new symbol of power in a culture dominated by the media. It doesn't override the effects of the damaged culture in which it functions, but creates a fissure in which a new set of perceptions can seep in. Such comments do not imply such an operation is free from either the reach of ethnocidal agency or of more direct effects of unequal exchange— it is not judged by authority as a mainstream commercial channel and is dependent on government funding. It is neither beyond nor lacking in criticism, especially over the nature and quantity of Aboriginal-made content. [1989:163]

While they and other critics at a distance focus on Imparja, it is important to look at the *range* of indigenous media projects and how they relate to each other. The Aboriginal cases I have been discussing are particularly interesting from this perspective because each video and television project is being introduced at a distinct level of social, political, and economic organization, yet they intersect each other. Together, Warlpiri Media Association, CAAMA, and Imparja (and there are more of course) might instruct us as to the costs and benefits of the introduction of media technologies.

While small groups such as Warlpiri Media Association have maintained community control artistically and politically (for example by setting up their own

"illegal" satellite downlink and then inserting their own programming into the signal as they desired), they have developed a production style (both aesthetically and in work relations) that is embedded in local concerns and traditions. But such groups are fragile both economically *and* because they rely heavily on the unique talents of a few individuals. For example, Warlpiri Media's central figures, Francis Jupurrurla Kelly and Andrew Japaljarri Spencer, are able to juggle and use both Australian and traditional Aboriginal language and knowledge; they have the motivation, skills, and legitimacy to graft this Western form onto traditional sensibilities and concerns. Eric Michaels captured a sense of this in his description of Francis:

> Jupurrurla, in his Bob Marley T-shirt and Adidas runners, armed with his video portapak, resists identification as a savage updating some archaic technology to produce curiosities of a primitive tradition for the jaded modern gaze. Jupurrurla is indisputably a sophisticated cultural broker who employs videotape and modern technology to express and resolve political, theological, and aesthetic contradictions that arise in uniquely contemporary circumstances. [1987:26]

Such individuals, however, occupy a historically unique intergenerational position that is unlikely to be replicated unless a conscious effort is made to do so. So, the departure of just one of them—as when Andrew Japaljarri Spencer moved on—is a serious blow to the operation of these small-scale media groups.

At the other end of the spectrum from Warlpiri Media, Imparja is a large multimillion-dollar commercial interest. While it is owned and managed by an Aboriginal organization, and has initiated a three-year training program for young Aboriginal people, it is still 90% white and European in its staffing and programming. In between these two falls CAAMA. Perhaps it presents the golden mean between flexibility and sensitivity to local-level needs, but with sufficient institutional infrastructure to withstand the vagaries of funding and personal changes that plague the smaller media associations.

Positioning Indigenous Media

Given all this, how does one place such work in relation to the enterprise of ethnographic film? While many of us—myself included—might prefer to toss the term out altogether, I leave that concern aside momentarily for the sake of moving discussion forward in ways that are important to larger goals. I would like to consider briefly how indigenous media challenge the conventions and very categories of both "traditional" identity construction and "ethnographic film."

One response some Westerners have to indigenous media in relation to ethnographic film is to simply abandon or declare "colonialist" any attempt to film "the other"; indigenous media production makes it clear that they are capable of representing themselves. This response is common to those interested in ethnographic film, for example, who confront for the first time the possibility that such activity is not necessarily the "white man's burden." Underlying these responses, of course, is the idea that "we" and "they" are separate, which in turn

is built on the trope and mystique of the noble savage living in a traditional, bounded world, for whom all knowledge, objects, values originating elsewhere are polluting of some reified notion of culture and innocence. The movie *Crocodile Dundee* presented a witty commentary on such misapprehension, in an encounter between New York journalist Sue Charlton (Linda Kozlowski) and Dundee's (Paul Hogan) Aboriginal friend Neville Bell (David Gulpilil).

> Creeping through the bush, looking authentic but sounding up-to-date, he is painted from the waist up but wears jeans and a watch. Sue then wants to take his photo. He solemnly tells her she can't. She wonders whether it is because it will steal his spirit. "No," he informs her, "the lens cap's on." [Malone 1987:114]

Questions about the legitimacy of one's presence in a foreign setting (especially in which power relations are unequal) as an outsider with a camera should *always* be raised, and generally have been in most successful projects. The fact that the people one is dealing with also have cameras and choose to represent themselves with them should not diminish that concern, nor does it make the act of taking those images by outsiders illegitimate. Filming others and filming one's own group are related but distinct parts of a larger project of reflecting upon the particulars of the human condition, and therefore each approach raises its own sets of issues regarding ethics, social and power relations. In fact, much of current postmodern theory, while raising important points about the politics of representation, is so critical of all "gazes" at the so-called "other" that to follow the program set forth by some, we would all be paralyzed into an alienated universe, with no engagement across the boundaries of difference that for better or worse exist.

Another response considers indigenous production as an altogether separate category from ethnographic film, with different intentions and audiences. The sense of differences is exacerbated by the academic or media positions of one set of producers, as opposed to the community-based locations of the other, a point raised cogently by Marcia Langton, an anthropologist of Aboriginal descent, regarding more academic anthropology (1982). One might, for example, view indigenous work as not intended to cross over so-called cultural boundaries, but rather as made for intracultural consumption and therefore not satisfying some minimal definition of ethnographic film as images of some "other" b, taken by people identified as "a" presented back to people "a." However, "ethnographic film" has never been bounded by its potential audience. To name only one prominent example, for nearly half a century, Jean Rouch has made a practice of taking his films back to those filmed, the people he considers to be his primary audience.[15] And recently, native groups all over the world have been reappropriating colonial photography and films for purposes of cultural revival and political reclamation (identifying relatives, land sites, designs, dances, etc.).

While I reject arguments for separating indigenous media from ethnographic film, I also recognize that they are quite distinct projects. *Because* of the differences, I believe it is crucial that those interested in ethnographic film be informed of and aware of developments in media being produced by those who might be

their subjects. But beyond this ethical/political concern, I would like to propose a different frame that incorporates both kinds of productions in some analytically meaningful way.

Mediating Culture

I would like to propose expanding the field of ethnographic film to include what I call ethnographic media. I use media not simply because that term also embraces video and television which play an ever-increasing role in these concerns. I would like to draw attention to other uses of the word media. The *American College Dictionary* defines it as

> an intervening substance, through which a force acts or an effect is produced, [2] an agency, means or instrument.

related to mediate:

> to act between parties to effect an understanding, compromise, reconciliation.

Using these meanings, ethnographic media as a term points to the common (and perhaps most significant) characteristic that the works I have been describing share with more traditional understandings of ethnographic film. They are all intended to communicate something about that social or collective identity we call "culture," in order to mediate (one hopes) across gaps of space, time, knowledge, and prejudice. The films most closely associated with the genre (ideally) work toward creating understanding between two groups separated by space and social practice (though increasingly, they are calling attention to what might be the impossibility of knowing, for example, Dennis O'Rourke's *Cannibal Tours*).

Work being produced by minorities about themselves, I suggest, is *also* concerned with mediating across boundaries, but rather than space and cultural difference they are directed more to the mediation of ruptures of time and history—to heal disruptions in cultural knowledge, historical memory, and identity between generations due to the tragic but familiar litany of assaults—taking of lands, political violence, introduced diseases, expansion of capitalist interests and tourism, and unemployment coupled with loss of traditional bases of subsistence. Unfortunately, these abuses apply equally to the three most active centers of indigenous media production—native (especially Arctic) North Americans, Indians of the Amazon Basin, and Aboriginal Australians. Whether it be Inuit, Yup'ik, Hopi, Nambiquara, Kayapo, Warlpiri, or Pitjanjajara (to name a few)—almost always, the initial activities engaged in with the camera are simultaneously assertive and conservative of identity: documenting injustices and claiming reparations, making records of the lives and knowledge of elders who witnessed the often violent destruction of life as they had known it—from dramatizing mythic stories, to recreating historically traumatic events for the camera, to the always popular recording of food gathering and hunting techniques.

What these works share with the current practices of ethnographic filmmakers such as David and Judith MacDougall, Gary Kildea, Dennis O'Rourke, and Jean Rouch is that they are not about recreating a preexistent and untroubled cultural identity "out there." Rather they are about the *processes* of identity construction. They are not based on some retrieval of an idealized past, but create and assert a position for the present that attempts to accommodate the inconsistencies and contradictions of contemporary life. For Aboriginal Australians, these encompass the powerful relationships to land, myth, and ritual, the fragmented history of contact with Europeans and continued threats to language, health, culture, and social life, and positive efforts in the present to deal with problems stemming from these assaults.

Yet, as in Worth's study with the Navajo, perhaps the real question remains, "will it do the sheep good?" Or, in the case of satellites and VCRs, the question might be, "Can the sheep be kept alive?" As Rosemarie Kuptana, president of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation succinctly phrased it:

> As you know, the history of the Inuit people is a history of adaptation; to climatic change, to cultural threat, to technological innovation. Television had clearly arrived to stay; a way had to be found to turn this threat to our culture into a tool for its preservation. [1988:39]

In central Australia, Imparja's Aboriginal programs "Urrpye" and "Nganampa" borrow the studio interview format of dominant television; yet, Aboriginal people, news, and languages are heard and seen twice weekly on commercial television in Central Australia. Do the formal conventions of Western television turn off more traditional Aboriginal viewers, or seduce them into watching other non-Aboriginal programs? Or conversely, are more European viewers inclined to attend to things Aboriginal when they appear in the "flow" of broadcast?

In Aboriginal media, the work is not simply an assertion of existing identity, but also a means of cultural invention that refracts and recombines elements from both the dominant and minority societies. This sort of cultural positioning via the creation of new expressive forms has been noted by others. In his essay on ethnic autobiography, Michael Fischer offers insights that seem appropriate to understanding indigenous media as well (recognizing that Aboriginal identity and ethnic identity are not to be equated into a depoliticized domain of multiculturalism):

> What the newer works bring home forcefully is, *first,* the paradoxical sense that ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation . . . the search or struggle for a sense of ethnic identity is a (re-)invention and discovery of a vision, both ethical and future-oriented. Whereas the search for coherence is grounded in a connection to the past, the meaning abstracted from that past, an important criteria of coherence, is an ethic workable for the future. [1986:195–196; emphasis in original]

With these insights on ethnic autobiographies in mind, what are we to make of MTV-inspired indigenous productions with well-known Aboriginal rock groups? These are perhaps the metalanguage, the poetry of indigenous media,

performing what is implicit in other kinds of productions that might follow more conventional lines. In one particularly popular segment featuring a band led by Aboriginal singer Ned Hargraves, the MTV style, clearly a Western form, might be interpreted as contradicting the message of the song the group sings:

> Look at us, Look at the price we have paid.
> Keep your culture, keep your land.
> Will you stop before your ways are dead?

As the group performs against a dramatic desert background, visions of men doing traditional dances, images of desert animals and sites, fade in and out. By the end of the piece, the lead singer, Ned Hargraves, falls down, apparently dead. It seems to be the fitting image to the end of the piece as the last line is repeated: "Will you stop before your ways are dead?" Then, suddenly, Ned revives with a wink and a "thumb's up" signal to the audience, suggesting a different perspective that inverts the usual jeremiad over cultural loss. Such unexpected bricolage borrows freely from a range of available expressive resources (rock music, video, Aboriginal language, and landscape) in the service of Aboriginal cultural assertion.

This piece represents the hopeful dimension of Aboriginal response to this new form introduced from the dominant culture, suggesting a more positive model of exchange than the Faustian contract. Still, in some remote Aboriginal communities, television retains its original nickname, "the third invader"; first were Europeans, then alcohol (McGregor 1988:35). In the range of media generated with and by Australian Aborigines in the 1980s one can see both sides of the bargain: the imposition of European commercial television (uninvited) into relatively isolated rural, intact, Aboriginal communities also catalyzed locally controlled, innovative, community-supported video production that has a revitalizing effect in some venues.

Indigenous media, like the ethnic autobiographies that Fischer discusses as well as other contemporary multicultural artistic production, is a cultural process and product. It is exemplary of the construction of contemporary identity of Fourth World people in the late 20th century, in which historical and cultural ruptures are addressed, and reflections of "us" and "them" to each other are increasingly juxtaposed. In that sense, indigenous media is a hybrid, and (to extend the metaphor), perhaps more vigorous and able to flower and reproduce in the altered environment that Aborigines live in today. Young Aboriginal people who are or will be entering into production are not growing up in a pristine world, untouched by the dominant culture; they are juggling the multiple sets of experiences that make them contemporary Aboriginal Australians. Many in this generation want to engage in image-making that offers a face and a narrative that reflects them in the present, connects them to a history, and directs them toward a future as well.

Notes

[1] In this essay, I am defining indigenous/minority media as that work produced by indigenous peoples, sometimes called the ''Fourth World,'' whose societies have been dominated by encompassing states, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. This is to distinguish such work from the national and independent cinemas of non-Western Third World nations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, which have developed under different conditions, and for which there is considerable scholarship. For a recent comprehensive work, see Roy Armes, *Third World Filmmaking and the West* (1987).

[2] For example, in the summer of 1990, ''The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s,'' was hosted by a consortium of three New York City museums: the New Museum of Contemporary Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art. The accompanying brochure to the show describes the issues uniting the diverse visual, video, and performing artists in the exhibition:

> Through their examination of familiar issues—homelessness, gender, racism, sexism, AIDS, homophobia, media politics, the environment, and war—these artists demonstrate that identity is a hybrid and fluid notion that reflects the diversity of American society . . .
>
> The work included in this exhibition may be seen as material evidence of alternate viewpoints. Many artists of color, for example, in their philosophical, aesthetic, and spiritual linkages to precolonial societies of Asia, Africa, and America, legitimize diversity, resist Eurocentric domination and create a foundation from which to analyze and explain contemporary social phenomena. Feminist, gay, and lesbian artists similarly affirm that there are other ways of seeing, ways equal to existing cultural dictates.

[3] As part of a commitment to multicultural awareness, Britain's Channel 4 and the British Film Institute, developed the Workshop Declaration of 1981, which gave nonprofit media-production units with four or more salaried members the right to be franchised and eligible for nonprofit production and operation money. These Workshops are expected to provide innovative media and educational programs in the communities where they are situated.

In the racially tense climate of Britain in the early 1980s, and especially after the 1981 Brixton riots, the Labour Party initiated progressive cultural policy through the establishment of a race relations unit and Ethnic Minorities Committee. Money was made available for film and video from the Greater London Council and local borough councils. Based on these funds, the future members of two influential and ground-breaking black film groups, Sankofa and Black Audio Film, financed their first works and organized workshops (Fusco 1988:10–11).

⁴The Special Broadcast Service (SBS) in Australia was set up initially as an ethnic broadcasting service. Until 1989, it viewed Aborigines as outside its mandate because they are indigenous rather than ethnic minorities.

⁵In April 1989, SBS initiated a 13-part TV series devoted to Aboriginal issues, called "First In Line," broadcast Tuesday nights at 7:30 P.M. The producers and crew were primarily Aboriginal, and consulted with communities throughout Australia for items stressing the positive achievements of Aborigines (Molnar 1989:38–39).

The ABC in Australia set up an Aboriginal Program Unit in 1987 to develop and purchase Aboriginal programs, but it was run by a white person and is regarded as underfunded. The Unit's first Aboriginally produced and presented program, "Blackout," began broadcasting in May of 1989, on a Friday 10:40 P.M. time slot. To its credit, the ABC has been training Aborigines since 1980. However, by 1987, there were only seven Aborigines employed by the ABC. That same year, the Prime Minister established the Aboriginal Employment and Development Policy (AEDP) which requires all industries to have 2% Aboriginal employment by 1991, which lead to a new more successful ABC training program (Molnar 1989:36–38).

In the Spring of 1990, the New Museum hosted "Satellite Cultures," a showcase of experimental and alternative video from Australia that included screenings of work by Tracey Moffat, an urban Aboriginal filmmaker and artist who is relatively well known in art circles, as well as a reel of work by CAAMA, and a documentary on Aboriginal land rights, "Extinct But Going Home." Unfortunately, the video was poorly contextualized and badly exhibited. Lacking any background, most American observers watching the CAAMA programs in that context seemed intrigued but bewildered.

⁶The main centers of indigenous media production (besides Australia) are among the Indians of the Amazon Basin, especially the Kayapo (T. Turner 1990), and among Native North American Indians (Weatherford 1981; Weatherford and Seubert 1988) and the Arctic Inuit (Murin 1988).

⁷Even with the increase in and significance of indigenous media, only occasionally is such work seen in independent film or Third World cinema circuits such as the Native American Film Festivals held regularly in San Francisco and New York City; the Pincher Creek World Festival of Aboriginal Motion Pictures held every summer in Alberta, Canada; and the Arctic Cultures and Media Conference, held in Montreal 1987.

Latin American "Fourth World" media has had a growth spurt in the last few years, due to the work of dedicated young activists such as Vincent Carelli in Brazil. The Instituto Nacional Indigenista in Mexico City, and the cross-national Instituto Indigenisto Interamericano, headed by Alejandro Camino, initiated a Latin American Film Festival of Indigenous Peoples in Mexico City. In 1988, the Festival was held in Rio, where, under the guidance of Claudia Menezes of the Museo de Indio, workshops were held to train indigenous groups in low-format media. In October 1989, the festival was held in Venezuela.

These developments are less well known here, although anthropologist Terry Turner has worked with Disappearing World to produce two excellent documentaries in 1988 and 1989 on the positive political and cultural uses of video made by the Kayapo. Documentary maker George Stoney has been making community video to make the political case for land claims for the Kraho Indians, north of the Amazon. These works were shown at the 1989 Native American Film and Video Festival, programmed by Elizabeth Weatherford and Mildred Seubert, for the Museum of the American Indian in New York City. They were also included with other journalistic and experimental works during a film festival

and panel, "Representing the Amazon on Film and Video" that were part of "Amazon Week," held at New York University, 26 March–1 April 1990.

⁸For anthropological analyses of Aboriginal "self-determination" and the production of Aboriginal identity in relation to the state, see "Aborigines and the State in Australia," a special issue of *Social Analysis* (1988), edited by Jeremy Beckett.

⁹In fact, almost all this writing, as well as my own work, is based on the work of Eric Michaels whose analyses of Aboriginal media were based on applied anthropological field-work in Central Australia.

¹⁰These projects include works such as *Familiar Places* (1980), *Goodbye Old Man* (1977), *The House Opening* (1980), *Takeover* (1980) by David and Judith MacDougall with various Aboriginal groups in Australia; *Two Laws* (1983) made by Alessandro Cavadini and Carolyn Strachan with Aboriginal people in Boroloola; *Ileksen* (1978) and *Yumi Yet* (1976) made by Dennis O'Rourke in New Guinea; and Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling's work with the Alaska Native Heritage Project, including *At the Time of Whaling* (1973), *From the First People* (1976), *On the Spring Ice* (1976), *Tununeremiut* (1973), and *The Drums of Winter* (1988).

¹¹Hopi video artist Victor Masayesva's works include *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* (1984) and *Ritual Clowns* (1988), Inuit producer Zach Kanuck's work includes *From Inuit Point of View* (1987) and *Quaggig* (1989).

¹²Most of this information is compiled from interviews with Philip Batty, and Freda Glynn, and Eric Michaels's report *The Aboriginal Invention of Television* (1986).

¹³Imparja's initial funding came from the Australian Bicentennial Authority ($2.5 million), the Aboriginal Development Commission ($1.8 million), the National Aboriginal Education Commission ($1.5 million), and the South Australian Government ($1 million) [Bellamy 1987:1].

¹⁴"Urrpye" was cancelled by the end of 1989 in favor of more programs in Aboriginal languages.

¹⁵Rouch (1975), p. 99:

> what reason could we as anthropologists give for the glances we cast over the wall at others?
> Without a doubt, this word of interrogation must be addressed to all anthropologists, but none of their books or articles has ever been questioned as much as have anthropological films . . . film is the only method I have to show another just how I see him. In other words, for me, my prime audience is . . . the other person, the one I am filming.

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