SPEAKING FOR, SPEAKING ABOUT, SPEAKING WITH, OR SPEAKING ALONGSIDE: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND DOCUMENTARY DILEMMA[1]

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The Passenger, Michelangelo Antonioni's 1975 film, is about a documentarian making a film about a national liberation front in an unspecified north African country. Mr. Locke, played by Jack Nicholson, tries to interview a rebel leader and has the following conversation:

> *Locke*: Yesterday when we filmed you at the village, I understand that you were brought up to be a witch doctor. Isn't that unusual for someone like you to have spent several years in France and Yugoslavia? Has that changed your attitude towards certain tribal customs? Don't they strike you as false now and wrong perhaps for the tribe?
>
> *Native*: Mr. Locke. There are perfectly satisfactory answers to all your questions. But I don't think you understand how little you can learn from them. Your questions are much more revealing about yourself than my answer would be about me.
>
> *Locke*: I meant them quite sincerely.
>
> *Native*: Mr. Locke. *We can have a conversation, but only if it is not just what you think is sincere but also what I believe to be honest* (emphasis added).
>
> *Locke*: Yes, of course, but . . .

The rebel leader now turns the camera around so that Locke is centered in the frame.

> *Native*: Now, we can have an interview. You can ask me the same questions as before.

Introduction

Questions of voice, authority, and authorship have become a serious concern among documentary filmmakers and anthropologists. Who can represent someone else, with what intention, in what "language," and in what environment is a conundrum that characterizes the postmodern era. In this essay, I explore some of the responses to these problems by focusing on the relationship between documentary/ethnographic filmmakers and the people they film—in particular, the development of cooperative, collaborative, and subject-generated films. The social, political, and epistemological implications of filmmakers sharing or relinquishing their power is discussed.

The construction of the argument presented here is a consequence of my identity as an anthropologist interested in pictorial media as a means of producing culture. I find thinking about visual images

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as socially constructed communicative forms to be productive, and the work of Sol Worth ("Toward"), Larry Gross, Howard Becker, John Berger, Faye Ginsburg, and Alan Sekula especially useful.

Cooperatively produced and subject-generated films are significant because they represent an approach to documentary and ethnographic films dissimilar to the dominant practice. They offer the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world. Subject-generated films and video are a tool used by some disenfranchised people in their efforts to negotiate a new cultural identity. For other indigenous and minority producers, making movies and television is a way into the profits and power of the established order. These films challenge our assumptions about the nature of documentary and ethnographic films and potentially offer us insight into the role of culture in the "language" of film. For the sake of brevity, I will use the term "documentary film" to stand for both documentary and ethnographic cinema for the remainder of the essay.

Speaking For and Speaking About

Documentary film is motivated by two fundamentally different conceptions of the relationship between the filmmaker and those who are filmed. These approaches can be located in the works of Dziga Vertov and Robert Flaherty. While they did not invent the formulations, they were crucial to their development.

In his Kinok manifestos, Dziga Vertov wrote:

> I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, am showing you a world, the likes of which only I can see. I free myself from today and forever from human immobility, I am in constant movement, I approach and draw away from objects, I crawl under them, I move alongside the mouth of a running horse, I cut into a crowd at full speed, I run in front of running soldiers, I turn on my back, I rise with an airplane, I fall and soar together with falling and rising bodies.
>
> This is I, apparatus, maneuvering in the chaos of movements, recording one movement after another in the most complex combinations.
>
> Freed from the rule of sixteen-seventeen frames per second, freed from the frame of time and space, I coordinate any and all points in the universe, wherever I've recorded them.
>
> My road is toward the creation of a fresh perception of the world. I decipher in a new way a world unknown to you. (Vertov 359)

For Vertov and most filmmakers, film is a vehicle for the expression of their sensibility. It is not important for our purposes whether one assumes this sensibility is derived from the idiosyncratic mind of the filmmakers or is a manifestation of their gender, class, or culture. The filmmakers' view is regarded as paramount, even when the goal of the film is to present the actuality of other people's lives.[2]

In contrast, Robert Flaherty, particularly during the filming of *Nanook of the North*, sought to replicate the view of the world held by the people he filmed by seeking the response of the subjects to his vision. Nanook was shown footage in the field and asked to comment on its accuracy as well as assist Flaherty in planning for the next day's filming. "But another reason for developing the film in the north was to project it to the Eskimos so that they would accept and understand what I was doing and work together with me as partners" (Flaherty 13–14). Some Inuit were trained as technicians to maintain Flaher-

ty's equipment (Ruby, "Aggie"). One can trace a thin line of tradition from Flaherty's nascent efforts to share creative power in the 1920s to current practices.

While most documentaries are Vertovian, that is, the filmmakers present us with their vision,[3] some documentarians have aspired to replicate the subject's view of the world. Their intention duplicates the traditional goal of ethnography—"to grasp a native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (Malinowski 25). The documentary is assumed to give a "voice to the voiceless," that is, portray the political, social, and economic realities of oppressed minorities and others previously denied access to the means of producing their own image. From this perspective, the documentary is not only an art form, it is a social service and a political act.

It is generally assumed that this task is best accomplished by having professional filmmakers employ their technical skills, artistic sensitivity, and insight to reveal the "reality" of others. The subjects of documentaries seldom have direct input. Imagemakers who follow the dictates of broadcast journalism argue that *any* personal relationship between the filmmakers and the filmed compromises the objectivity of the film. They believe their task is to report without making value judgments—an effort some contend is not only impossible but misleading and even dangerous. The technical and aesthetic skills and knowledge necessary to make a "good film" are regarded as being beyond the means of most people. It is, therefore, in everyone's best interest to have films made by professionals.

This commonsense, taken-for-granted assumption has been under attack for some time from within the independent documentary community and more recently from the people traditionally filmed. The protest literally stares back at us from our own work. At the end of John Marshall's 1979 film, *N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman*, the story of a fourth world woman and the destructive transformation of her culture by white South Africans, N!ai confronts the camera and sings, "Now people mock me and I cry. My people abuse me. The white people scorn me. Death mocks me. Death dances with me. Don't look at my face. Don't look at my face." Our gaze is again indicted in Edin Velez's videotape, *Meta-Mayan II*, as the eyes of an Indian woman reproach our intrusion with the camera into her life. The examples grow daily. The right to represent is assumed to be the right to control one's cultural identity in the world arena. Some people, traditionally film subjects, are demanding that filmmakers share the authority and, in some cases, relinquish it entirely. These demands call for profound changes in the way in which images are produced as well as the means by which knowledge is presented to the public.

At the same time as subjects are asserting their right to control their own image, there is the growing recognition on the part of the independent documentary community that it is difficult to justify making films about the private acts of the pathological, socially disadvantaged, politically disenfranchised, and the economically oppressed. As Brian Winston has suggested, documentarians are becoming self-conscious about their "tradition of the victim." Until recently, most victims have passively allowed themselves to be transformed into aesthetic creations, news items, and objects of our pity and concern. Society condones this action because it is assumed that the act of filming will do some good—cause something to be done about the problems.[4]

In 1960 Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly produced a landmark television documentary, *Harvest of Shame*, an investigative report on the deplorable conditions of immigrant agricultural workers. Since that time dozens of "hard-hitting" television reports have continued to doc-

ument the plight of these people. There is little evidence that their economic and social conditions have markedly improved over the years. It would appear that the funds spent on these productions were wasted, except perhaps to advance the careers of their makers. Furthermore, there seems to be little interest among the politically committed film community in the development of empirical verification of the impact of social and political documentaries. Socially concerned and politically committed documentarians erroneously assume that a compelling documentary automatically produces a desired political action. Perhaps it is time to realize that the image may be more impotent than powerful when it comes to changing the world, and therefore one needs a different justification for making films. Regardless of Lenin's oft-quoted statement, film may not be a cost-effective tool for social and political change.[5]

While recent political and economic conditions have brought about a need to reexamine basic assumptions about the documentary film, neither the idea nor some of the solutions are actually new. In an interview with Elizabeth Sussex in 1973, John Grierson characterized the history of the documentary as follows:

> I always think of documentary as having certain fundamental chapters. The first chapter is of course the travelogue. . . . The second chapter is the discovery by Flaherty that you can make a film of people on the spot, that is, you can get an insight of a dramatic sort, a dramatic pattern, on the spot with living people. But of course he did that in respect to faraway peoples, and he was romantic in that sense. The third chapter is our chapter, which is the discovery of the working people, that is, the drama of the doorstep, the drama of the ordinary. But there is a fourth chapter that's very interesting, and that would be the chapter in which people began to talk not about making films about people but film with people. . . . However, the next chapter, this making films with people—you've still got the problem that you're making films with people and then going away again. Well, I see the next chapter being making films really locally, and there I'm following Zavattini. Zavattini once made a funny speech in which he thought it would be wonderful if all the villages in Italy were armed with cameras so that they could make films by themselves and write film letters to each other, and it was all supposed to be a great joke. *I was the person who didn't laugh, because I think it is the next stage—not the villagers making film letters and sending them to each other, but the local film people making films to state their case politically or otherwise, to express themselves whether it's in journalistic or other terms.* (Sussex 29–30; emphasis added)

As mentioned earlier, Robert Flaherty actively sought the cooperation of his subjects in *Nanook of the North*. During 1931–1932 in the Soviet Union, the Cinetrain project of Alexander Medvedkin produced films about local problems of bureaucracy, inefficiency, nepotism, and so forth, with the assistance of local political workers. In the remarkable 1935 British film, *Housing Problems*, by Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton, people speak for themselves on the screen, perhaps for the first time, directly confronting audiences with their plight. I am certain one could compile an impressive list of similar efforts—some motivated by intellectual and artistic curiosity, others by politics, and still others by a moral commitment to the subjects of the films.[6] However numerous the attempts and interesting the results might have been, the idea of doing collaborative and subject-generated work was, by and large, ignored until the 1960s.

The Death of Objectivity

During the last 30 or so years, a paradigmatic shift has occurred in the relationship between the filmer and the filmed. While some continue to produce images in a traditional manner, I would argue that these mainstream practitioners do so with less and less conviction and impact. Professional inertia, and the marginal position of the documentary within the image industry, insures that many documentarians maintain a conservative position.

Regardless of how powerful the forces of tradition may be, the intellectual and moral support for mainstream practice has been seriously eroded. These changes are part of a complex of intellectual, artistic, political, and ethical factors, unfortunately labeled the postmodern.[7] The self-examination undertaken by some documentary filmmakers can be understood as part of a larger phenomenon George Marcus and James Clifford characterize as a *crisis in representation*.

> A conceptual shift, "tectonic" in its implications, has taken place. We ground things, now, on a moving earth. There is no longer any place of overview . . . from which to map human ways of life, no Archimedian point from which to represent the world. (Clifford 22)[8]

When a popularized version of positivism and naive empiricism dominated the way in which Westerners understood the world, it was assumed that filmmakers were able to discover and report the truth about other people. Documentaries were understood as uncontested statements of facts, the official version of someone else's reality. The people portrayed were regarded as not capable of speaking for themselves. Today,

> widespread perceptions of a radically changing world order have fueled this challenge and undermined confidence in the adequacy of our means to describe social reality. . . . Thus, in every contemporary field whose subject is society, there are either attempts at reorienting the field in distinctly new directions or efforts at synthesizing new challenges to theory. . . . At the broadest level, the contemporary debate is about how an emergent postmodern world is to be represented as an object for social thought . . . (Marcus and Fischer vii)

An adequate explication of the origins of this crisis would take us too far afield; however, some contributing factors do seem most relevant.[9] First, the end of the colonial era among people subjugated by capitalist empires and socialist satellites caused the authority of a Western male, middle-class, heterosexual construction of reality to be contested. People formerly the object of our gaze and dissident filmmakers from within the system challenged the right to represent anyone but oneself. Among the many results of this upheaval was the realization that cultural identity is not eternally fixed but something that has to be regularly renegotiated.

Second, the recognition that scientific inquiry consists of hypothesis testing rather than the search for eternal truths caused some philosophers of science to argue that the progress of scientific knowledge can be understood as a dialectical process. The impact of Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty and Kuhn's analysis of the role of the paradigm in science come to mind as exemplary of this trend. This revolution in the philosophy of science is felt most directly in the documentary world through the social sciences. Among those factors directly contributing to an undermining of traditional assumptions about the documentary are the concept of cultural relativism, the acceptance of the idea that reality is a social construction, and the impact of academic Marxism, especially in terms of the recognition of the ideological base of knowledge. At the

same time as the theoretical foundations of science were being probed, some young scholars questioned the moral and political validity of so-called value free science. Social scientists' involvement in covert activities in Viet Nam and Chile brought this predicament to a head. Positivist models of knowledge were challenged by more interpretive and politically self-conscious approaches—a reflexive stance where producers of knowledge, be it a treatise on sub-atomic particles or a documentary film about the peace movement, are responsible for the knowledge they construct (Ruby, *A Crack*).

Finally, the development of literary or "new" journalism, non-fiction novels, docudramas, and other genres blurred distinctions between fiction and non-fiction.[10] Models of criticism developed that regarded all communicative forms as "serious fiction," that is, constructed according to culturally bounded conventions. The documentary's claim to an inside track to the truth and reality of other people was therefore undermined if not destroyed completely. Documentaries were recognized as an articulation of a point of view—not a window to reality.

The Documentarians' Responses

The response by the independent documentary community to the crisis of representation has been far reaching—from the methodological and technical to the formal. Some documentarians have questioned their ability to "speak for" anyone and began looking for ways to "speak about" or "speak with" (Nichols). As notions of objectivity were challenged by more tentative attitudes towards the social construction of reality, some filmmakers openly acknowledged that their authority was circumscribed, even uncertain at times.

Stated in a more formal way, there has been a reassessment of the moral and intellectual implications of documentary authorship. The documentary, particularly its journalistic manifestations, stopped hiding behind the idea that images are merely recordings. Some imagemakers and theorists now acknowledge films, fiction and non-fiction, as articulations made by someone wishing other people to infer meaning in a specialized way (Worth and Gross). Since the public still believes that documentary films can be objective, the documentarian has the additional obligation never to appear neutral, that is, to disabuse people of the fantasy that films are somehow privileged messages imbued with truth and reality. As the acknowledged author of a film, the documentarian assumes responsibility for whatever meaning exists in the image, and therefore is obligated to discover ways to make people aware of point of view, ideology, author biography, and anything else deemed relevant to an understanding of the film, that is, to become reflexive (Ruby, "The Image Mirrored"). The idea that being moral means being objective is abandoned, and in its place is the open acknowledgment of the ideological base of all human knowledge, including films. Ironically, the traditional form of the journalistic documentary not only denied a voice to subjects but to filmmakers as well.

"Objective" documentaries have no authors, only reporters who present the "who, what, where, when, and why" of the "truth." So the move toward a multivocal documentary form has also involved a renewed and increased role for the filmmaker—an overt acceptance of authorial responsibility.

A number of consequences result from acknowledging the documentary filmmaker as the author of a socially constructed message. The image, demystified as truth-bearer, becomes a vehicle for the transmission of a message constrained by the range of social expression possible within a society. Social knowledge is ac-

cepted as always tentative, the result of a negotiation between the seeker and the object of study. This repositioning of the work and the documentary author carries with it the necessity for reconstituting the relationship of author to the subject and to the viewer, and ultimately, redefining documentary subject matter.

Cinéma Vérité—Power to the People?

The advent of portable synchronous sound film technology, associated with direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* offered the possibility of empowerment to subjects through the use of on-camera interviews. The invention of this technology was the consequence of filmmakers like Michel Brault, Jean Rouch, and Drew Associates seeking the means to express a new documentary consciousness. Direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* held the promise that people could have the authority to present themselves and have their opinions respected. Unfortunately, the promise was not often realized. While "voice of God" narration was declared *déclassé*, it was replaced by talking head "expert witnesses." The off-screen voice of authority simply moved into the frame. Subtitled with their pedigree, authorities continued to tell us the "truth." "Talking heads" became a documentary cliche—the boring mainstay of television news and documentaries, thus dulling the impact of the method. In a few years, the excitement of seeing slum dwellers in *Housing Problems* articulate their plight became transformed into the jaded, predictable performance of a victim of the "disaster of the day" who appears to cry on cue for the six o'clock news.

Observational cinema developed partially as a response to the limited effectiveness of "talking heads" cinema. Colin Young argues that the works of David Hancock and Herb Digioia in their New England films and David and Judith MacDougall's Turkana trilogy offer subjects a chance to be themselves without the restrictions of voice-over, on-camera experts interpreting their lives or the artificiality of formal interviews. Thus it provided audiences the chance to interpret the lives represented on the screen (Young).

Being able to hear people tell their stories and observe their lives instead of being told what they think and the meaning of their behavior clearly offers subjects a greater say in the construction of their image. It represents a major shift in attitude about where one looks for authority and authenticity. It recognizes that the opinions of the experts and the vision of the filmmakers need to be tempered by the lived experience of the subjects and their view of themselves. It is "speaking with" instead of "speaking for." However, editorial control still remains in the hands of the filmmaker. The empowerment of the subject is therefore more illusionary than actual. While new voices are heard, traditional forms of authorship have not been significantly altered.

Perhaps the pendulum has now swung a bit too far in the opposite direction. The success of the PBS series "Eyes On The Prize" and other documentaries, like *Berkeley in the Sixties*, where no experts or analysts or historians are interviewed, may cause some imagemakers to abandon the notion that analysis has any merit. In "Eyes On The Prize," the sole on-camera authorities are participants in the civil rights movements recalling their experiences a quarter of a century later. The theory of history implicit in these documentaries is most troublesome. The body of "Eyes on the Prize" consists of selected and highly edited news footage. The criteria for selection and editing are never made available to the viewer. The veracity and point of view of the archival footage are never questioned or even treated as problematic. Nor are we privy to how the interviews were structured, who did the interviewing, and what questions were asked. For example, were the interviews

conducted after a rough cut of the news footage was assembled so they were designed to complement the footage, or did the substance of the interviews cause the producers to search for footage to illustrate them? Amy Taubin refers to this as an "If-You-Were-There-You-Must-Have-Something-To-Say" approach.

The move to give greater voice and authority to the subject has now reached a logical but extreme point. There is an unspoken assumption about the validity of interviews, particularly with those outside the mainstream. These films seem to suggest that what subjects say about themselves and their situation is to be taken at face value. While it is clear that the balance needs redressing and the victims of Western oppression should represent themselves, it should not be assumed that any one group has privileged insight into its own history. People seldom understand their own motivation. No particular group of people has the corner on being self-serving or adjusting the past to fit the needs of the present. To assume otherwise denies the role of the unconscious. What people say about themselves is data to be interpreted, not the truth.

Cooperative Cinema—Is "Informed Consent" Possible?

In Jeff Vaughn and John Schott's 1978 film, *Deal*, a documentary about Monte Hall and *Let's Make A Deal*, the subjects were given the right to view all footage and to veto any scenes they felt inappropriate. It was both a condition imposed by Hatos-Hall productions (I assume the producers were sensitive to the bad press the program had received from intellectuals and other high-brows, and they wanted to protect their public image) and a matter of ethical concern for Vaughn and Schott. They felt a moral obligation to obtain "informed consent" before they finished their film. In an interview by Lenny Rubenstein, John Schott explains their approach:

> Because we have access to such intimate aspects of their lives, we allow our subjects the review of all the uncut raw footage in which their faces and voices appear. Since they know they will be allowed to screen and review this footage, it builds a bond of trust between us. This does two things: it serves a moral purpose, makes *cinéma vérité* fair since in documentary filming there is a certain invasion of privacy—you can nail someone's skin to the wall for public display—and the other thing is that it allows the person to be relatively unguarded, since he knows he can review the material with us and negotiate cuts.
>
> At that time we sit down with the person and ask whether they feel their ideas have been fairly represented; in both our films we've never lost any footage we thought essential. What did get out were personal references to other performers, curse words, extraneous scenes and libelous statements—that kind of thing. Bear in mind that we had 40 hours of footage and most people are mainly interested in their individual material. We got to use 99.99 percent of our footage. And, of course, we have a final cut. In this film (that is, *Deal*) all the people interviewed extensively are public personalities; they're used to the public eye. They've also been beleaguered by criticism which they felt was unjust, so the challenge we were presented was to film them in a relatively neutral fashion. (Rubenstein 36)

Asking subjects to become cooperatively involved in the making of a film—seeking their advice and consent—seems quite sound at first glance, but lay people tend to respond uncritically when they see themselves on the silver screen. Most lack the sophistication to see the implications of camera angles, lighting, pacing, and so forth. I am uncertain whether even media

sophisticates are competent to evaluate documentaries about themselves. Vaughn and Schott told me that when Monte Hall was viewing footage from *Deal*, there was a particular scene that the filmmakers wanted but were anxious about because the shot was unflattering to Hall. After the viewing Hall commented that it made him look fat, but they could use it because after all it was a documentary!

Documentaries are often regarded as elaborate home movies by the people in them. Subjects become "documentary pop stars" and realize their 15 minutes of fame rather than critically examine how their images are constructed and the potential impact on audiences. The complex reaction of the Loud family to their public image in Craig Gilbert's PBS series, "An American Family," and Alan and Susan Raymond's *The Louds: An American Family Revisited*, is one example of the ambivalence documentary subjects feel about their moment of ciné fame (Loud). Often people are flattered when they see themselves and later become disillusioned when the critics make negative comments about the life they see portrayed on the screen. At events like the annual Flaherty Film Seminar, documentarians attempt to justify their films by saying the subjects saw the film and loved it. As appealing as this validation may be, it is hardly adequate.

Informed consent in documentary production is a thorny issue (Pryluck; Anderson and Benson). It is a concept developed to protect subjects in medical experiments. Researchers are required to explain in advance the "risk to benefit" ratio for people volunteering for an experiment. Documentary filmmakers seldom know the potential problems people in their films may face. While a medical researcher has a reasonably clear idea of what the potential risks to individuals are and the possible benefits to society, how can filmmakers ever have such clarity? People tend to be flattered when asked whether they mind being filmed and do not consider the potential problems of ending up in a distributor's catalog. Some filmmakers feel that asking consent prior to taking pictures is destructive of the moment that interested them in the first place. In cases where the film is about a subject's unethical, immoral, or illegal activities, one could hardly be expected to ask permission or offer the subject a chance to view the footage prior to completion. In some extreme cases, the filmmaker must overtly lie to make a film. If the subject is considered sufficiently evil, few would fault a filmmaker for using devious means to gain access.[11]

As paternalistic as it sounds, it may be only the makers themselves who are in a position to judge whether the people in their films might be adversely affected.[12] Unless one plans to spend the time and money training subjects to become filmmakers, or even reasonably competent critics, subjects will continue to lack the skill necessary to give informed consent. I am not suggesting that filmmakers should stop asking for permission or soliciting subjects' opinions. I am arguing that most people are not informed enough to exonerate the producer. Advice, consent, and cooperation are necessary but not sufficient when dealing with the potential for exploitation. I am suggesting that even with cooperatively produced films, the moral burden of authorship still resides with the filmmaker.[13] While a multivocal approach to the documentary does empower subjects, it will not absolve the filmmaker from the ethical and intellectual resposibility for the film.

Allowing subjects to represent themselves on screen and asking their approval after they have reviewed the footage represents a definite shift in documentary voice and authority. The distance maintained by those favoring journalistic "objectivity" is abandoned in favor of a shared authority. The subjects' views of themselves are recognized as having merit, something

that must be acknowledged and represented.

Sharing Authority: Cooperative, Community, and Collaborative Films

Asking people to actively cooperate in the making of a film about their lives naturally increases their power. It is a practice found among a number of filmmakers. Often individuals are asked to work with a filmmaker as a representative of some social collective—a community, an organization, or even a culture.[14] Cooperative ventures turn into collaborations when filmmakers and subjects mutually determine the content and shape of the film. While the idea of films where the authority is shared might have a certain appeal, there are few documented cases. Films labeled in this fashion seldom contain descriptions of the interaction between the filmer and the filmed, nor have people associated with the production written about the complex mechanics of collaboration.[15] Most of what I know about cooperative, community, and collaborative films is the result of personal contact with the makers or hearing them discuss their work at a festival or seminar. Without more concrete information the notion of sharing authority remains more a politically correct fantasy than a field-tested actuality.

For a production to be truly collaborative the parties involved must be equal in their competencies or have achieved an equitable division of labor. Involvement in the decision-making process must occur at all significant junctures. Before a film can be judged as a successful collaboration the mechanics of the production must be understood. Is the collaboration to be found at all stages of the production? Have the filmmakers trained the subjects in technical and artistic production skills, or are the subjects merely "subject area specialists" who gauge the accuracy of the information and pass upon the political and moral correctness of the finished work? Who had the idea for the film in the first place? Who raised and controlled the funds? Who owns the equipment? Who is professionally concerned with the completion of the film? Who organizes and controls the distribution? Because films of shared authority represent a fundamental repositioning of the filmer and the filmed, these films must be reflexive if they are to be understood as the radical departure implied by the term. I know of no films that meet these requirements of discourse.

During the late 1960s "Challenge For Change" was created by the Canadian government to discover ways in which film, and later video, could act as a catalyst for social change through new forms of interaction between the government and its citizenry. In one of the earliest projects filmmaker Colin Low

> relinquished the artistic prerogatives of the documentary-maker in offering film as a tool for the people of Fogo Island. He worked in tandem with Newfoundland's Memorial University, community organizers, and the inhabitants of Fogo. Members of the island community helped select topics and sites. Subjects were filmed only with their permission, and were the first afforded the opportunity to view and edit the rushes. Their consent was also required before a film could be shown outside a village or outside the island itself. The process by which the films were made and screened was central to their impact on the lives of the islanders. Group viewings organized all over the island fostered dialogue within an isolated, divided population. The films and discussions heightened the awareness of the people that they shared common problems and strengthened their collective identity as Fogo Islanders. As a result, the planned relocation of the community of Fogo Island was abandoned. . . . A number of media histo-

> rians and activists have traced a new concept of public access to mass communicatons media and the seeds of community television to the Fogo projects of "Challenge for Change." (Engelman 8–10)

Following the success on Fogo, "Challenge for Change" introduced the then new portapak technology to community activists. Bonnie Sher Klein's film *VTR: St. Jacques* (1969) documents this early effort at subject-generated video. There was also an attempt to train indigenous people to make their own films. An all-Native American crew produced *You Are On Indian Land*. "Challenge for Change" ended when the Canadian government stopped its funding. George Stoney, the executive director of "Challenge for Change," continued his interest in community media by founding New York University's Alternative Media Center and has had a major impact on the development of cable access and community television in the United States.

While the results of this program were temporary, it became a model for other "shared authority" media projects. In a review of *You Are On Indian Land*, Sol Worth disputed the claims of the program and in the process raised some fundamental questions about what happens when you teach the *other* to make films.

> Although the Film Board has made great efforts to involve the people in the films . . . and to teach community members how to make films themselves, they have not been able to divorce themselves from their own professional filmmaking and reportorial culture. They still look upon film with the professional eye of the middle-class TV producer—liberal, committed to change, and versed in the use of "art" and "persuasion." Teaching others to make and use film was essentially teaching white middle-class values of how information films brought about gradual and democratic change. *You Are On Indian Land* . . . is a perfect example of a professional white liberal film made in "consultation" with Indians . . . Even if this film were made by the Indians themselves, I would feel that it was a white man's film. I would have been sorry that once again we had used our culture as a power play to overcome another. But this wasn't made by them. It was made by us. Even with the best of intentions and greatest filmmaking skills, it is only another television documentary—by us about them. Again. (Worth, Review n.p.)

Appalshop, a media center in Whitesburg, Kentucky, is one of the most widely known community media centers. Started in 1969 by Bill Richardson, a Yale architecture student, Appalshop produces films, radio shows, television, and concerts for, about, and by Appalachian people. In Appalshop's 1990 interim report to funders they explain the purpose of "Headwaters," their television service, as an organization that

> continues to work with communities and grass-roots organizations in the experiment we are calling "community directed" media. We form a partnership with local organizations involved in change, and work together to produce relevant television which explores their issues and allows people to speak with their own voice and to tell their own story. Community groups have directed us during productions, set priorities in editing, and have been able to use clips of the raw footage and finished programs as organizing tools. (Interim Report)

The intention of Appalshop is to give people some control over the construction of their media image. Dee Davis, director, says " 'Headwaters' is an attempt to create 'televison that makes sense for here,'

that takes its pace and style from the way people in Appalachia express themselves" (Nold 32).

From its beginning, Appalshop's staff has been a mixture of outsiders and locals. Davis is from the region while Anne Johnson, chief producer for "Headwaters," came into the area in 1973 with Barbara Kopple during the production of *Harlan County*. She married a miner from the film and became an "adopted" native. Appalshop productions raise a fundamental question about film as an expression of cultural identity—what difference does it make whether the filmmaker is from the same culture or community as the subjects?[16] Can a person who is not from a culture learn enough about it to produce works that accurately represent their world? Are Tony Buba's documentaries, *Voices From a Steeltown* and *Lightning Over Braddock*, somehow more authentic because Buba is a native of Braddock? Until someone makes an ethnographic analysis of the production and utilization of community-based films like those produced at Appalshop, these important questions remain unanswered.

Most so-called "collaborative" film productions involve anthropologists, undoubtedly a result of the fact that anthropologists tend to spend long periods of time with their subjects, develop a rapport seldom possible with traditional documentary methods, and seek feedback as a means of verification. Since the 1950s French anthropologist Jean Rouch has been making films with his West African associates whom he taught to take sound and perform other technical duties in the field. Rouch is a pioneer in the training of African filmmakers such as Mustapha Alaassane, Safi Fayi, Oumarou Ganda, and Desire Ecare. During the making of *Petit à Petit* and *Cocorico, M. Poulet*, Damouré Zika, Lam Ibrahim Dia, and Rouch formed a production company, Film Dalarou.

As an early advocate of subject-generated media, in 1974 Rouch suggested

> And tomorrow? Tomorrow will be the time of color video portapacks, video editing, of instant replay ("instant feedback"). The dreams of Vertov and Flaherty will be combined into a mechanical "cin-eye-ear" and of a camera that can so totally participate that it will pass automatically into the hands of those who were always in front of the lens. At this point, anthropologists will no longer control the monopoly on observation; their culture and they themselves will be observed and recorded. And it is that way ethnographic film will help us "share" anthropology. (Rouch 43–44)[17]

According to Rouch, the role of the documentarian as a professional outsider making films about other people's lives will become unnecessary. Filmmakers will produce only autobiographical works, films about the world they inhabit.

Rouch pioneered a reflexive style in *Chronicle of a Summer*, where one sees subjects actively participating in the production. Unfortunately, he has never made explicit the extent of his collaborations. Instead we are left to ponder marvelously complex films like *Jaguar*, in which the participants speak about themselves in the third person.[18] In a new study of Rouch as ethnographer and filmmaker, Paul Stoller suggests that Rouch was a "premature" postmodern anthropologist.

> Rouch's films of the 1950s and 1960s embodied themes of ethnographic postmodernity articulated in the well-known works of recent years (that is, Marcus, Clifford, etc.). His ideas on participatory anthropology are, like poetic truths, embodied in his ethnographic practice, embodied within and between the frames of his films. For this reason Rouch's philosophic

> contributions have been heretofore underappreciated or have been ignored. (254)

It may be that films of shared authority are an impossibility. Collaboration requires the participants to have some sort of technical, intellectual, and cultural parity. If subjects become knowledgeable as filmmakers in order to be collaborators, why would they need the outsider? Wouldn't they want to make their own films? Until a film reputed to have been produced by sharing the authority has been documented, it is impossible to know whether the idea is feasible.

Films by the Other[19]

Documentary subjects have gained considerable power and to a limited extent have had the chance to speak for themselves. They have been asked their opinion and consent, asked to cooperative actively and possibly become full collaborators. For some that was not sufficient. They want more. They wish to represent themselves. This is not a recent desire. It is at the core of the development of an independent cinema movement.[20] At political, artistic, and economic odds with the mainstream media industries, independents are in a 70-year-old ideological struggle against Hollywood and commercial television's representation of the world and the industry's insistence that moving images should be mindless entertainment. It was therefore only logical that during the New Left radicalization of the United States, there was a renewed call for the decentralization of access to the means of producing images. Organizations like New York Newsreel collectively produced political films, such as *Making Out* or *A Woman's Film*, in an effort to democratize the authority of the director.

Their proposed changes were not so radical if one considers the empowerment of the subject. The New Left cinema practice was, in actuality, the substitution of a new official vision and version of reality for an older one. It was simply the creation of new elites—a change in masters. The conventional radical ideology does not include asking the subjects to cooperate, collaborate, or produce their own films. One of the egotistical qualities of Marxists is their belief that they possess the "truth" about social relations. In Julianne Burton's analysis of "liberating impulses" in Latin America documentaries, she cites Fernando Birri's 1966 statement that

> the revolutionary function of the social documentary in Latin America is to present an image of the people which rectifies the false image presented by traditional cinema. *This documentary image offers reality just as it is . . . it shows things as they are—not as we might like them to be or as others . . . would have us believe them to be.* (Burton 374; emphasis added)

Marxists' "scientific" analyses of other people's lives are assumed to be correct, even if the subjects disagree. Given this persepctive there is little need to give subjects a greater voice.

African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, the poor and the homeless, gay people, and women have been seeking the means to represent themselves for some time. The movement in the U.S. is part of an expansion of the power base of film production in African, Asian, Latin American, and third world cinemas (Armes). Some minority filmmakers are predominantly interested in joining the media establishment and creating a market for their product. They are "independents" only until they can join the mainstream industry. They are convinced that the assimilation of people of color and other outsiders into the industry is a certain sign of progress. The so-called blaxploitation films, like *Super Fly* or the television series *I Spy* (in which Bill Cosby

played a CIA agent disguised as a professional tennis coach), are two early examples of this variety of "minority" image-making. Other "new" filmmakers are more interested in the construction of an alternative practice that remains deliberately outside the establishment. The creation of a cinematic form that allows minorities to express uniquely their cultural identity may be important only if one is trying to restructure society fundamentally. Learning mainstream means of expression fits the liberal, social reformist notion that society can accomodate everyone's voice within existing structures.[21]

While some producers from misrepresented and underrepresented groups were working to create a new cinema, a tradition of critical scholarship developed in which mass mediated systems of representation were examined for the inaccurate and distorted images they offered of people outside the mainstream, thus further justifying the need for films produced by "the natives" (Gross).

The right and ability of outsiders to represent minorities accurately has been repeatedly questioned. Some suggest that the misrepresentation is so entrenched that only members of the group can properly represent themselves (Burton). As a consequence, a number of alternative cinemas have emerged. As members of the communities in which they filmed, these minority producers learned first hand what the subjects thought about the film, thus introducing a form of accountability often lacking when an outsider makes a film about a community. For some, autobiography, personal films, and films about one's family became the solution. In these films, the self and the other become intertwined (Katz and Katz).

Broadening the power base in image production does represent a significant democratizing change. The possibility of feedback did cause the makers to think about the community impact of their work. However, it did not necessarily indicate a significant alteration of the relationship between the filmmaker and the filmed. The directors may have come from the communities they filmed but most continued the dominant pattern of maintaining control over the production of the film as an artist.[22] The subject remained passively cooperative.

Moreover, some minority producers sought to emulate the form of dominant cinema in order to obtain funding, distribution, and an audience. As they became successful, their attachment to the community they first sought to represent became tenuous. In order to obtain production funds, gain access to the monopolistic systems of distribution, and attract the audience they wish, they package their work in a form that many contest is destructive to the very cultural identity they sought to preserve in the first place. Thus mainstream cinema and television industries are able to coopt and render these dissidents harmless. Minority and indigenous cinema became a new market, providing new products for new profits.

During the past decade, some indigenous people have attempted to wrest control of the production and distribution of their image away from the people who traditionally controlled it. In North America, Inuit have their own satellite television and a number of Native Americans produce films for PBS and other independent outlets (Weatherford and Seubert; Weatherford).[23]

The Kayapo of the Amazon rain forest in Brazil and the Walpiri of Central Australia are among the best documented examples of indigenous media producers. The Kayapo observed for a number of years the use of electronic equipment—short wave radios and tape recorders, as well as video and film cameras—by anthropologists, television crews, and other outsiders. By the mid-1970s, they decided to use these media in a fight to defend their land and

the environment as well as their own cultural identity. After being trained in video production in 1985 by Brazilian researchers, the Kayapo set out to document their traditional culture, particularly ceremonial performances; record transactions with government officials in their battle to stop the construction of a dam at Altamira; document transactions with miners and airstrip owners to be used in potential litigation; and as an organizing tool with other indigenous people. A team from Granada TV's "Disappearing World" series, with anthropologist Terrance Turner, documented some of this remarkable story in the 1989 film *The Kayapo: Out of the Forest* (Turner). Turner suggests that

> the power of representation through these media thus became identified with the power of conferring value and meaning on themselves in the eyes of the outside world, and reflexively, in new ways, in their own eyes as well. . . . The significance of the acquisition of media capacity for the cultural politics of empowerment is manifest in the prominence the Kayapo give to their video camera persons in their confrontations with the national society. The role of the Kayapo camera persons in situations such as the Altamira encounter is not only to make a Kayapo documentary record, but to be documented in the act of doing so by the non-Kayapo media. (10–11)

During the last year, members of the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information assisted the Kayapo in learning editing techniques and establishing a Kayapo film archive.[24]

In 1982 Eric Michaels was hired by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to "assess the impact of television on remote Aboriginal communities" (Ruby, "The Belly"). Instead of simply observing, Michaels became actively involved in facilitating change. With his assistance, the Warlpiri people at Yuendumu in the Northern Territory of Australia learned the technology of video production, how to create and manage a "pirate" low-power transmission facility, and the economic and political realities of fighting the world of television broadcasting. They produced hundreds of hours of videotape productions, inventing ways to make and show their works that would not violate their own values (Michaels, "For A Cultural Future").[25] They established the Warlpiri Media Association so that they could continue to function after the research project ended. Three years after Michaels's study was concluded, they were still producing new tapes and narrowcasting their programs (Ginsburg "In Whose Image?"). Michaels felt an authentic "Aboriginal" media could be developed but only if "training, production and distribution assistance by Europeans be reduced to an ancillary role. Schemes to achieve Aboriginal access to new media by importing European crews, or by training aborigines in Western production styles in urban institutions will inhibit the development of a truly Aboriginal media" (Michaels, "The Social Organization" 34).

For some observers, indigenous media is a positive step of self-documentation. Faye Ginsburg suggests that it

> offers a possible means, social as well as political . . . for reproducing and transforming cultural identity for 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. ("Indigenous Media" 96)

In the early 1970s Edmund Carpenter studied the impact of new media among

traditional people in New Guinea. His deeply pessimistic conclusions argue against Ginsburg's hopeful predictions.

> Western audiences delight in stories about natives who use modern media in curious ways, their errors being both humorous and profound, suddenly illuminating the very nature of the media themselves. . . . Even when these stories are true, I think their importance is exaggerated. Surely, the significant point is that media permit little experimentation and only a person of enormous power and sophistication is capable of escaping their binding power. A very naive person may stumble across some interesting technique, though I think such stories are told more frequently than documented. The trend is otherwise. (Carpenter 188)

The Conundrum of Success

> These are the days of lasers in the jungle
> Lasers in the jungle somewhere
> Staccato signals and constant information
> A loose affiliation of millionaires and billionaires.
>
> These are the days of miracle and wonder
> This is a long distance call
> The way the camera follows us in slo-mo
> The way we look to us all.
>
> The way we look to a distant constellation
> That's dying in the corner of the sky.
>
> (Paul Simon, "The Boy In The Bubble" *Graceland* album 1986).

The variety of experiments in decentering the authority of the documentary film is staggering. This essay has barely scratched the surface.[26] Mainstream documentaries still dominate the centers of production. White, straight, middle-class Western males still construct a world consonant with their reality; but alternative voices are being heard and with greater regularity. A mixture of theories, methods, techniques, and ideologies all compete with each other—none seeming to offer a definite answer to the question of how to open up the documentary.

What is not adequately discussed are the consequences of this shift in authority. The political rhetoric that often accompanies minority and indigenous participation in the construction of images can, at times, obscure the complexity of some of the issues. To suggest that there may be a downside to the empowerment of documentary subjects is not a message likely to be enthusiastically received.

In 1968, Sol Worth described a world many of us believed was just around the corner.

> Imagine a world where symbolic forms created by one inhabitant are instantaneously available to all other inhabitants; a place where "knowing others" means only that others know us, and we know them through the images we all create about ourselves and our world, as we see it, feel it, and choose to make it available to a massive communication network, slavering and hungry for images to fill the capacity of its coaxial cables.
>
> Imagine this place that is so different from the society within which we nourish our middle-class souls, in which symbolic forms are not the property of a "cultured," technological, or economic elite, but rather are ubiquitous and multiplying like a giant cancer (or, conversely, unfolding like a huge and magnificent orchid), and available for instant transmission to the entire world.
>
> Imagine a place where other cultures . . . are available to all; a place where

> almost anyone . . . can produce verbal and visual images, where individuals or groups can edit, arrange, and rearrange the visualization of their outer and inner worlds, and a place where these movies, TVs . . . can be instantaneously available to anyone who chooses to look. . . . Imagine this place, for it is where we are at now. (Worth, "Toward" 85–86)

As lovely as the vision is, the image revolution so many of us assumed would emerge has thus far eluded us. The evidence from the past 20 years suggests the dream may turn into a nightmare.

In order to gain some insight into the problems facing a multivocal documentary, the production and distribution of documentary films must be examined within the larger context of world television.[27] It is the marketplace of television that determines the future of the documentary. As unpopular as it may be, the possibility that "mass media eats its young" must be articulated and examined. Given America's history of successful cooptation of anything dangerous to the established order, minority and indigenous filmmakers may face what Ginsburg calls a Faustian dilemma.

> [W]hile 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, the spread of communication technology such as home video and satellite down links threatens to be a final assault on culture, language, imagery, relationship between generations, and respect for traditional knowledge. ("Indigenous Media" 17)[28]

This essay has not dealt with the complexities of audience. Issues of intention and reception are of course crucial. We are all receivers (audiences) long before we ever contemplate making our own images. If we are socialized into assuming the world created by television is real, are we doomed to simply replicate that assumption when we make our films and videos? Some aboriginal people recognize this danger.

> 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 these communities 24 hours a day in a foreign language—English. It takes only a few months and the kids start changing. (Freda Glynn, director of an Australian Aboriginal Media association, cited in Ginsburg, "Indigenous Media" 98)

Perhaps the very notion of making a documentary film is subversive to the identity of all outside the Western mainstream. Gaining access to the means of producing your own image may cost you the cultural identity you sought to cultivate in your film. Since the formal attributes and social practice of image producing were invented in a middle-class Western world, all those who acquire the technical skills may also acquire the world view in the process. Becoming a successful media producer could mean becoming assimilated into the mainstream.

George Gerbner and Larry Gross have suggested that the relationship between culture and television may make media diversity virtually impossible.[29] Television, whether private or state controlled, whether broadcast, cable, or satellite, is by its economic and technological construction a force for cultural centralization. A few conceive, construct, and are empowered to transmit to the many. The socio-cultural purpose of television is to reify, underwrite, support, and espouse

the ideology of the status quo. Television functions the way religion and other supernatural systems used to, that is, as the underpinning of official culture. I am not suggesting that the people in charge of a television system conspire to suppress deviation or that they deliberately mean to support the establishment. Often, in the U.S., television representatives espouse liberal sentiments about cultural diversity. I simply mean that those who are given the responsiblity tend to come from a privileged upper middle-class segment of society that has clearly benefited from the current structure of society.

> Whatever their sex, race, and class origins, almost all documentary makers belong to a specific class—the petty bourgeoisie in Marxist terms—and a stratum of that class—intellectuals, in the broad sense, those who by training and work are centrally concerned with the production and dissemination of ideas, images, information and analyses. . . . As members of the in-between class, petty bourgeoisie media people like to think of themselves as "free professionals"—an attitude which matches their class interests. Precisely their class interest is to waver and not commit themselves, or if they do, to be free to reverse at a later point. (Kleinhans 330)

Without necessarily realizing it, producers assume the world they know is the only world possible and project that assumption into their work. While one can find some exceptions within every television system, the overwhelming historical evidence suggests that television has been and generally continues to be a centralizing melting pot that opposes any sort of real programming diversity or willingness to share broadcast power with "new" producers if they are unwilling to make programs according to the conventions of the industry.

When faced with linguistic, religious, ethnic, or sexual minorities, the historical response of the television industry has been to symbolically annihilate the group, that is, not represent them at all. If it is true that most people obtain information about world events from TV news, then the fact that a group seldom appears on television becomes a serious issue. For example, if U.S. television is to be believed, there were few gay men and no lesbians in the U.S. or anywhere else.

> The big lie about lesbians and gay men is that we do not exist. The story of the ways in which gayness has been defined in American film is the story of the ways in which we have been defined in America. . . . As expressed on screen, America was a dream that had no room for the existence of homosexuals. Laws were made against depicting such things on screen. And when the fact of our existence became unavoidable, we were reflected, on screen and off, as dirty secrets. (Russo xii)

A variation of symbolic annihilation is the perpetuation of the dominant culture's stereotypic view of the world. Gays are seen as limp-wristed interior decorators, while African Americans appear as servants, criminals, or preachers.[30]

The perpetuation of these cliches made the television industry susceptible to liberal criticism. Therefore, a change in representation occurred that was designed to make that industry less vulnerable. Some "progress" was apparently made over the past two decades—announcers are permitted to retain their regional accents, more African Americans, Asian Americans, women, and Hispanics are to be found in front of and behind the camera. Cable and satellite systems provide access to a large number of channels. It is important to note that the way in which diversity has been introduced does not seriously threaten the power structure already in place.

Diversity is "mainstreamed," that is, it has the appearance of minority representation without seriously challenging anything. For example, programs are aired where minority characters are featured, but they don't speak their native language or dress in a way distinct to their group; in short, none of the characteristics which provide the group with an identity are allowed to appear. In the United States, African Americans often appear as characters who display nothing unique to the African American "experience." There is a story circulating around U.S. television circles that next season some producer will propose a "black" version of *The Cosby Show*! In *Out of the Silent Land*, author Eric Willmot suggested that Aboriginal representation be "embedded" in regular Australian Broadcasting Commission programming, thus the representation of disenfranchised urban aboriginal characters in regular programming could be regarded as a progressive sign.

In spite of the fantasies fondly nurtured by "media freaks" of the 1970s, our "wired nation" has not significantly altered the centralized control of broadcast empires. Cable systems often represent more selections of the same basic fare—network reruns and "wannabe" programs from Fox Broadcasting. The information flows from the top down. And alternative distribution systems like Deep Dish TV and Paper Tiger Television tend to ghettoize their work by appealing to the already converted.

A conclusion logically drawn from the work of Gerbner and Gross is that broadcast television, regardless of the system employed (that is, on the air, through the cable, or from the satellite), is fundamentally incompatible with notions of cultural autonomy and diversity.

> History offers too many precedents of new technologies which did not live up to their advance billing, which ended up being part of the problem rather than part of the solution. There surely are opportunities in the new communications order for more equitable and morally justifiable structures and practices, but I am not sure we can get there from here. As Kafka once wrote in his notebooks, "In the fight between you and the world, bet on the world." (Gross 201)

Where does this pessimism lead us? Should documentarians confine themselves to autobiography? Or will they return to the documentary that speaks for other people, to films that purported to show us the reality of another culture? Shall indigenous people and Western minorities be discouraged from making their own films lest they lose their cultural identity in the process? Shall critics "expose" indigenous and minority produced works as "inauthentic" when they emulate mainstream forms? I think not. Few would listen to such ramblings.

The move toward a multivocal documentary creates a large number of opportunities. This essay has concentrated on the possibility of documentarians sharing their authority with the people they film. It should not be forgotten that the reassertion of the documentarians' voice is an equally significant trend. In trying to give the subjects' voices room in their films, documentarians are also attempting to locate a new voice for themselves. In so doing, some recognize that audiences need to understand that documentarians always speak about and never speak for a subject and that films never allow us to see the world through the eyes of the native, unless the native is behind the camera.[31]

The documentarians' new voices can assume a number of different forms. For example, between the alternatives of the subjugation of the subject by filmmakers and the domination of image production by the subject lies a third path—one expressed by filmmaker-anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff shortly before her death in

1986. Myerhoff proposed that the researcher-filmmaker seek to locate a *third voice*—an amalgam of the maker's voice and the voice of the subject, blended in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern which voice dominates the work. In other words, films where outsider and insider visions coalesced into a new perspective. Rouch's *Jaguar* appears to be a rare documentary experiment in the third voice.

Some documentarians are attempting to discover ways to free themselves from the control of film and television industries and their standards and assumptions about what constitutes a "good" film. They wish to develop alternative ways of producing and distributing works that are sufficiently new, experimental, or deliberately non-Western as to make them unfundable and/or exclude them from a commercial market. Perhaps the documentary will thrive in the future only if it is the avocation of non-professionals!

The image empires may ultimately win the war but there are some battles where temporary victories are possible. The world of videotape and VCRs has the potential for some real diversity in the production and consumption of images. The technology is relatively inexpensive, decentralized, and almost impossible to control. The Warlpiri and the Kayapo had no trouble mastering the technology and developing *their own* strategies for *their* use of *their* tapes. Recent events in Eastern Europe seem to confirm this power. Video technology contributed to the subversion of the hidebound regime of Czechoslovakia where people taped the demonstrations and then created an underground system of distribution that quickly destroyed the attempt to control information by censoring the state-run television broadcasts. Within a week of underground narrowcasting, the government allowed state television to show the extent of the unrest and the government fell.

Ironically, the problem is success. As works produced by indigenous and minority people for their own purposes attract the attention of the outside world, there is the real danger they will by appropriated by the dominant culture. Watch for Sting's latest MTV video to include some Kayapo footage!

Notes

[1] This article is a revised version of an article originally published in *Visual Anthropology Review* (Fall 1991); it is reprinted here with the permission of the American Anthropological Association. The article is derived from a talk given at the 1990 Flaherty Soviet-American Film Seminar in Riga, Latvia, American University, and American Anthropological Association meetings. I wish to acknowledge the close reading of the paper by Peter Biella, a discussant on the panel. Faye Ginsburg, John Katz, Bruce Jackson, and especially Pat Aufderheide read drafts of the paper. Their critiques added significantly to my understanding. The title of the paper has been appropriated from Trinh T. Minh-ha's film *Reassemblage*. I do so with some irony. I regard her films as uninspired derivatives of 1960s U.S. experimental film and her "criticisms" of documentary film and anthropology uninformed by the tradition of self-criticism easily located within both fields. Alexander Moore is one of the few writers to suggest that the empress may have no clothes.

[2] I would be doing a disservice to Vertov if I did not admit that his views of cinema are more complex than I have presented here.

[3] The origin of a filmmaker's sensibility is sometimes difficult to determine. Some have theorized that it is idiosyncratic to the artist/auteur while others would have it emanate from the social worlds of gender, ethnicity, class, and culture. For our purposes it is not significant whether a film is regarded as the work of a lone genius or representative of the gender, class, or culture of the maker. None of these theories of film authorship regard the input of the subjects as anything other than "raw material" to be transformed in the process of making the film. I have discussed the politics and ethics of dominant documentary practice elsewhere (Ruby, "Ethics").

[4] An example of the documentarian as "professional sympathizer" can be found in Mary Ellen Mark's *Streetwise*—a film acclaimed as an impassioned plea for homeless children and critiqued as a cynical, scripted, manipulative career enhancement.

[5] More bluntly stated, the argument goes as follows—power is not created with the lens of a camera, it comes from the end of a rifle barrel. Therefore, if you really wish to change the world, put down the camera and pick up a gun. This essay is not the place to critically examine the romantic and often naive liberal and leftist politics of the independent documentary movement. It is sufficient to quote Lindsey Anderson's slogan in *Oh, Lucky Man*: "Revolution is the opiate of the intellectual."

[6] Seth Feldman has critiqued the Bantyu Kimena Educational Experiment, a mid-1930s colonial effort to make effective educational films by having native producers.

[7] How sad it is to find ourselves living in an era *after* something important happened, in an era with so little identity that we simply say it is after the modernist revolution. A cynical student of mine has suggested "pre-apocalyptic" might be a more accurate term.

[8] It should be noted that Marcus, Clifford, and others who have defined the postmodern crisis in the 1980s have ignored the work of people like Jean Rouch, who in the 1950s explored these issues of representation in his films (Stoller).

[9] I wish to acknowledge that this section was influenced by my reading of Faye Ginsburg's works-in-progress and discussions I have had with her.

[10] Documentarians, regardless of their political orientation, tend to be conservative about changes in the form, as witness the less than enthusiastic reception of mixed genre films like Jill Godmilow's *Far From Poland*, Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line*, or documentary parodies like Mitchell Block's *Speeding?* and *No Lies*. At a Flaherty Film Seminar, Willard Van Dyke's response to *No Lies* was to accuse Block of trying to destroy the documentary.

[11] I can find no criticisms of Marcel Ophuls's hidden cameras or the other deceptive practices he employed in *Hotel Terminus*.

[12] If you apply Janet Malcolm's wholesale condemnation of journalism to include the documentary, my assumption that the documentarian has a moral obligation to the subject may be naive.

[13] See Geertz for a discussion of the moral burden of authorship.

[14] Of course, finding one person, or even a small group of people, to represent accurately or fairly a community or a culture is difficult, perhaps impossible.

[15] The Australian film, *Two Laws*, is a rare example of a truly collaborative effort. According to James Roy MacBean, "the traditional (or tribal) peoples themselves collectively controlled the decision-making processes of what to film and how to film it—even down to what lens to use on the camera" (31).

[16] The controversy about the cultural fit between director and community represented in a film spills over into fiction film as well. Witness the continuing conflicts about who should direct *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Fences*. " 'I have a big problem with Norman Jewison directing *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*,' " Spike Lee fumed in an interview with the *New York Times* last year. " 'That disturbs me deeply, gravely. It's wrong with a capital W. Blacks have to control these films' " (*New York Times* Entertainment Section, Sunday, 27 Jan. 1991).

[17] Rouch has written prophetically about what he calls "shared anthropology" (*anthropologie partegée*). "It is this permanent 'ethnodialogue' which appears to me to be one of the most interesting angles in the current progress of ethnography. Knowledge is no longer a stolen secret, devoured in the Western temples of knowledge; it is the result of an endless quest where ethnographers and those whom they study meet on a path which some of us now call 'shared anthropology' " (Rouch 7).

[18] For additional information on Rouch see *Studies in Visual Communication* 11.1, an issue devoted to *Chronicle of a Summer*, and *Visual Anthropology* 2.3–4.

[19] This discussion of subject-generated films does not include an exploration of the film production workshops in which school children, teenagers, mental patients, and others who would not otherwise make a film are taught some production skills. The impetus for these projects comes from educators, researchers, and politically concerned outsiders but not from the people themselves. The results are temporary. When the funding goes away so does the equipment, the teachers, and the fledging filmmakers. See Chalfen for a review of these projects.

[20] The independent video movement in many ways parallels the independent film movement. They have established a number of alternative distribution outlets such as Paper Tiger Television and Deep Dish TV. People who would not have normally produced shows now have access to an audience that was virtually nonexistent prior to the invention of these technologies. The advent of cable systems, satellites with public and community access, and VCRs have all had a decentralizing impact. However, in order to keep this essay within reasonable bounds, I will not attempt to discuss the significance of these developments.

[21] In 1966 anthropologist John Adair and communications scholar Sol Worth taught the technology of film production to a group of Navajo Indians in New Mexico without suggesting what the films should be about nor how they should look. The purpose of the study was to discover whether the Navajo would create

films unique to their view of the world. Would a discernable Navajo film style emerge? The researchers concentrated on semiotic questions about the production of the films and the ways in which Navajo audiences responded to the films, or the possibility of any long term media use by the Navajos. The results seemed to indicate that Navajos organized their films in keeping with other narrative forms in their culture (cf., Worth and Adair for details). Unfortunately Worth/Adair and Eric Michaels's Australian work represent the only attempts to deal in a rigorous scholarly fashion with the question of cultural and film form among non-Western people.

[22] Trinh T. Minh-ha quotes Jacques Rabemananjara's definition of the role of the black poet. " 'He is more than their spokesman: he is their voice': his noble mission entitled him to be 'not only the messenger, but the very message of his people' " (13).

[23] The list of indigenous people producing their own media grows daily. Within the development community, a number of projects have been organized by Martha Stuart Communications with USAID funds, among them Video SEWA, a self-employed Indian women's group that is using video as an organizing tool (Stuart). The work tends to be unknown to the independent documentary community. *Media Development* frequently has relevant materials, especially see issue no. 36 (1989) "Video For The People," and *Group Media* issue "Coming to Terms with Video," no. 6 (1987).

[24] Turner is planning to do an analysis of the tapes as well as continue to chronicle this unusual use of the media.

[25] Michaels's work is not well known outside Australia. An Australian journal recently devoted an entire issue to essays about Michaels (*Continuum* 3.2 [1990]). *Visual Anthropology* will publish several of his essays, and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra is planning to reprint his work.

[26] Faye Ginsburg and Elizabeth Weatherford are planning a book dealing with indigenous media.

[27] Focusing on the relationship between television as a funding source and distribution outlet for documentaries avoids the global question of the relationship between communication technologies and culture. To oversimplify the range of opinions, there are those who see each new media technology as the ultimate weapon for liberation. "There is indeed no other medium like video which offers ordinary people so much choice and therefore freedom, so much creativity and therefore self-assertion and growth, and so much collective knowledge and experience and therefore learning" ("Editorial" 1). And those who see the media as the soldiers of the status quo. "Surely, communication, as it is currently structured and managed in almost all the nations of the world, will not provide the stimulus or be the source of changing the consciousness of vast audiences now absorbing the images and messages that the media conglomerates are manufacturing and transmitting. Far more modest information undertakings exist and many are dedicated to providing alternative prospects and different readings of reality. Generally, however worthy their activity, they remain marginal and their outputs lack significant impact" (Schiller 33).

[28] Ginsburg has pointed out to me that her view of the future of indigenous media is far less pessimistic than mine, as can be seen in the quotation I cited earlier in which she suggests that indigenous media have great potential as a tool for creating cultural identity.

[29] The following section is based on a set of assumptions about television's socio-cultural function. The ideas are grounded more in personal feelings and the observations of an ethnographer looking at his own behavior and culture than in any systematic research I have conducted. Support for the position comes from Michaels ("For A Cultural Future") as well as from the work of George Gerbner and Larry Gross and their long term Cultural Indicators project (Gerbner and Gross; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli). This argument was first articulated by me in Ruby ("The Belly").

[30] See Jack Shaheen, who describes the stereotyping of Arabs on television.

[31] Anthropology is trying to overcome the burden of Malinowski's dictum. As Ian Jarvie suggests, "seeing the world the way the actors do is emphatically not the aim of anthropology. It is at best a means, sometimes useful, sometimes not, for furthering the true aim, which is to solve some problems of the tradition of inquiry known as anthropology" (Jarvie 253).

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