



FATIMAH TOBING RONY

**THE THIRD EYE**

RACE,

CINEMA,

AND

ETHNOGRAPHIC

SPECTACLE

**THE THIRD EYE** \_\_\_\_\_

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# THE THIRD EYE

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Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle

Fatimah Tobing Rony

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*This book is dedicated to my parents,  
Mr. Abdul Kohar Rony and Mrs. Minar Tobing Rony,  
and to the memory of my Ompung, Mrs. H. L. Tobing,  
and my late uncle, Mr. R. A. P. L. Tobing*



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*Travel books tell us that the thing to do is attract the attention of the main party by firing a shot.—Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques (1955)*

*For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. . . . But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go—so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself.*

—Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (1988)

*But you cannot possibly know what I have done or why I have done it if you think of me as a savage.—James Baldwin, A Rap on Race (1971)*





**THE THIRD EYE** \_\_\_\_\_



1. Still from *King Kong* (1933).  
(Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art)

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE THIRD EYE

#### *How I Became a Savage: Seeing Anthropology*

Sometimes, there are moments in watching a film when the illusion of entering another space, another time, another experience is shattered. A tropical island. A prehistoric land. Fay Wray. Island Savages. King Kong.

The Savages are speaking my language. Tidak. Bisa. Kau. Like King Kong and the Islanders, I was born in two places, Sumatra and the United States: the daughter of a Batak mother from North Sumatra, and a father from Palembang, in South Sumatra. I am watching myself being pictured as a Savage. I am the Bride of Kong.

Several years after seeing *King Kong* for the first time, I had another occasion to be reminded of my Savagery. One gray rainy afternoon in Paris, I sat with cold feet conducting research in a deep cavern of a library with tall stone ceilings and coughing tweed-clad scholars at long tables. I was reading the writings of a certain doctor in Paris who was interested in pathological anatomy and movement; that is, the anatomy of criminals, circus freaks, and people of color. Savages squat whereas Civilized people sit, explained the doctor: a Batak, because of this, is akin to a monkey.<sup>1</sup> I come across this passage:

All savage peoples make recourse to gesture to express themselves; their language is so poor it does not suffice to make them understood: plunged in darkness, two savages, as travelers who often witness this fact affirm, can communicate their thoughts, coarse and limited though they are.

With primitive man, gesture precedes speech. . . .

The gestures that savages make are in general the same everywhere, because these movements are natural reflexes rather than conventions like language.<sup>2</sup>

According to the doctor, a Batak from North Sumatra would be able to speak to a Wolof, an Inuit, an Igorot, through the language of gesture.

The doctor, Félix-Louis Regnault, went on to make what have been considered the first ethnographic "films."<sup>3</sup> Regnault believed not only that film could furnish documents for the study of race, but also that by capturing the physical form in motion, film could serve as an unimpeachable scientific index of race. Under the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, that supreme symbol of progress, Regnault filmed West African performers at an 1895 Ethnographic Exposition in Paris. As in other "native village" displays at world's fairs, these West African performers who danced, and conducted animal sacrifices and other rituals for coin-throwing French spectators, were inscribed in film in order to study the language of gesture, the language of race.

Thinking back on it now, I believe that the doctor may have been correct. Perhaps we Savages, plunged in darkness, do understand each other. What we share is the ability to see with the "third eye." In conventional terms, the third eye refers to the experience one has when, during an argument with one's lover, for example, one has the feeling that a third eye has floated out of one's body and is observing the altercation with the dispassionate air of a zoologist examining a specimen. "I am watching myself and my lover act out a conventional lover's quarrel." Or, "I've heard those words before, they're my mother's." Most everybody has had this experience of the third eye. But for a person of color growing up in the United States, the experience of viewing oneself as an object is profoundly formative. Reflecting on an indelible childhood memory, W. E. B. Dubois describes the double consciousness that a young person of color is forced to develop. Dubois explains that one day, a young white girl gave him a glance, and in that glance he recognized that he was marked as an Other. As Dubois describes it, the internalization of this recognition gives one the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others,"<sup>4</sup> or of seeing "darkly as through a veil."<sup>5</sup> The experience of the third eye suggests that Dubois's insight can be taken one step further—the racially charged glance can also induce one to see the very process which creates the internal splitting, to witness the conditions which give rise to the double consciousness described by Dubois. The veil allows for clarity of vision even as it marks the site of socially mediated self-alienation.

The movie screen is another veil. We turn to the movies to find images of ourselves and find ourselves reflected in the eyes of others. The intended audience for dominant Hollywood cinema was, of course, the "American," white and middle-class. Not Hopi, Sumatran, or Dahomeyan, or even African American, but "American." Thus Frantz Fanon is describing a third eye

experience when he writes, "I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theater are watching me, examining me, waiting for me. A Negro groom is going to appear. My heart makes my head swim."<sup>6</sup> Born in Martinique of African descent, Fanon writes eloquently of the humiliation of being forced to identify with images of blacks on the screen as servile and inferior: in *Black Skin, White Masks* he explodes at his objectification, fixed as if by a dye under the gaze of commercial cinema and the white audience.

But there is yet another form of identification which Fanon describes. A black schoolboy, he writes, deluged by Tarzan stories and other such adventure narratives, "identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages—an all-white truth."<sup>7</sup> How can it be otherwise? How can any viewer identify with the "savage," a being represented as having scarcely a shred of subjectivity? Indeed, in the Tarzan literature, jungle animals at times receive more sympathetic treatment than the African "native." If the "Negro groom" is a straitjacketing image issuing from white racism, the "native" is even more Other—represented as trapped in some deep frozen past, inarticulate, not yet evolved, seen as Primitive, and yes, Savage.

This book has two primary objectives. First, I offer a sustained critique of the pervasive form of objectification of indigenous peoples which I somewhat tendentiously, though with clear purpose, will label Ethnographic. I seek to subject representations of the "Native" to the kind of critical analysis that Edward Said has applied to representations of the "Oriental."

At present, a silence surrounds the stereotype of non-white indigenous peoples. Landscaped as part of the jungle mise-en-scène, or viewed as the faithful Man Friday to a white Robinson Crusoe, or perhaps romanticized as the Noble Savage struggling to survive in the wild, the individual "native" is often not even "seen" by the viewer but is taken for real: as when the barker outside the fair tent calls potential spectators to come in and "see real Indians," or the excitement over Kevin Costner's recent *Dances with Wolves* (1991) as a film employing "real Lakota Indians." It is as if the distance between the signifier and the referent in the construction of native peoples collapses. In *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), Claude Lévi-Strauss muses that explorers, anthropologists, and tourists voyage to foreign places in search of the novel, the undiscovered. What they find, he tells us, apart from their own trash thrown back in their faces, is what they already knew they would find, images predigested by certain "platitudes and commonplaces."<sup>8</sup> It is thus impossible to view the "native" with fresh eyes. Lévi-Strauss

himself explains that part of the motivation for his voyage to meet the Tupi of the Brazilian Amazon was to reenact the 1560 meeting between the Tupi and Montaigne.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, when the average museum goer views a life group of Hopi dancers handling snakes, or a display of Wolof pottery, or an ethnographic film about trance and dance in Bali, he or she does not see the images for the first time. The exotic is always already known.

My first objective is thus to begin to uncover the conditions of possibility of this conventional framing of ethnographic visualization and to analyze the forms it took in cinema prior to World War II.

The second objective of the book, which intersects with but ultimately moves away from the ideological critique of representations of the Ethnographic, is to use the experience of the third eye to address the dilemma so eloquently outlined by Fanon: although the non-white child nourished on stories of *Tarzan* cannot grow up forever identifying with the white explorer, what does one become when one sees that one is not fully recognized as Self by the wider society but cannot fully identify as Other? I believe that understanding how the “native” is represented in film—how ethnographic cinema forces us to “see” anthropology—is crucial to people of color currently engaged in developing new modes of self-representation. I am speaking not only of artists and filmmakers in major metropolitan cities of the West, but also of those who are creating national cinemas in formerly colonized countries, as well as of minority groups who are producing independent film and maintaining indigenous broadcasting corporations. The modes of representation of ethnographic cinema, of course, need not be and often are not always rejected in their entirety: ideas from anthropology and modes of representation taken from ethnographic cinema can be appropriated by people of color in many different ways, both conservative and oppositional. It is only by understanding what ethnographic cinema is, and how it works, that the powerful potential of the third eye can be more fully realized.

### *“Ethnographic Cinema” Defined*

“Ethnography” is, in the first place, an invention of anthropology, its defining practice. In cultural anthropology, ethnography refers both to the actual process of fieldwork and to the final product, the written ethnography. Anthropologist Susan Slyomovics explains:

The classic ethnography by a social anthropologist trained via Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss, would be a work in which the life of a tribe would be encapsulated into a volume, divided very clearly into certain topics:

life cycle, economics, land tenure, social organization of the village notables as opposed to the various classes. In the appendix you would put a section on folk tales. For the most part, there would be no investigation of individual lives. . . . The traditional model would be to encode the account so that it is implicit that you have been there, without actually stating it.<sup>10</sup>

The encyclopedic coverage of the written ethnography occurs also in cinema. In the popular imagination an “ethnographic film” is akin to a National Geographic special which purports to portray whole cultures within the space of an hour or two. The viewer is presented with an array of subsistence activities, kinship, religion, myth, ceremonial ritual, music and dance, and—in what may be taken as the genre’s defining trope—some form of animal sacrifice. Like a classic ethnography which encapsulates a culture in one volume, an “ethnographic film” becomes a metonym for an entire culture.

As historian of anthropology George W. Stocking Jr. explains, anthropology’s historical unity lies in its subject matter: dark-skinned people known as “savages” or “primitives.”<sup>11</sup> Visual anthropologist Jay Ruby also points out that ethnographic film is most often defined by subject matter. He writes, “The vast majority of films described as ethnographic are concerned with exotic, non-Western people.”<sup>12</sup> The boundaries of anthropology have broken down recently, perhaps in response to the fact that descendants of so-called Primitives are doing ethnography, and the fact that the European myth of first contact can no longer be sustained in a postcolonial world. Founded in the late nineteenth century, the discipline of anthropology has undergone a series of transformations and is now more self-reflexive about the ethics and politics of its own “customs and manners.”

Nevertheless, the category of “ethnographic film,” at least in the popular imagination, is still by and large *racially* defined. The people depicted in an “ethnographic film” are meant to be seen as exotic, as people who until only too recently were categorized by science as Savage and Primitive, of an earlier evolutionary stage in the overall history of humankind: people without history, without writing, without civilization, without technology, without archives. In other words, people considered “*ethnographiable*,” in the bipolar schema articulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, as opposed to people classified as “*historifiable*,” the posited audience of the ethnographic film, those considered to have written archives and thus a history proper. The historian Michèle Duchet has explained that Enlightenment thinkers Joseph François Lafitau, Comte Buffon, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau located



the study of non-Western indigenous peoples as a subfield of natural history, a discipline which, Duchet explains, was essentially descriptive. Physical and cultural anthropology were born out of this eighteenth-century refusal to regard indigenous peoples as "*historifiable*."<sup>13</sup>

The term "ethnographic" literally comes from "ethnos," a people, and "graphos," the describing or writing. The term, however, although at times used by anthropologists as a synonym for the objective description of a people, instead is a category which describes a relationship between a spectator posited as Western, white, and urbanized, and a subject people portrayed as being somewhere nearer to the beginning on the spectrum of human evolution. Although there is no English word which fully captures the notion of the *ethnographiable*, even the seemingly innocent word "ethnographic" has resonances of the *ethnographiable*/*historifiable* dichotomy. I assume those resonances in my use of the word "ethnographic."

Let me be clear that when I refer in this way to the "ethnographic" in cinema, I do not mean to implicate all of what others call ethnographic film. Some may challenge my definition of the "ethnographic" as anachronistic.<sup>14</sup> U.S. visual anthropologist Faye Ginsburg defines ethnographic film as a medium "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."<sup>15</sup> Ethnographic filmmakers like Jean Rouch and David and Judith Macdougall have made increasingly reflexive and collaborative cinema in an effort to get beyond scientific voyeurism. Their use of handheld cameras, direct address, and elicitation of the participation of the peoples filmed expresses a modernist sensibility toward the precarious statuses of truth and realism. I am not concerned here with how best to envision an ideal of ethnographic cinema of the kind that Ginsburg, Rouch, and others are pursuing. Instead, I seek to explain what I see as the pervasive "racialization" of indigenous peoples in both popular and traditional scientific cinema.<sup>16</sup> I thus use the term "ethnographic cinema" to describe the broad and variegated field of cinema which situates indigenous peoples in a displaced temporal realm. I include within the category works now elevated to the status of "art," scientific research films, educational films used in schools, colonial propaganda films, and commercial entertainment films. Ethnographic cinema so defined, I would contend, has proved staunchly resilient.

Finally let me emphasize that I couple "ethnographic" with the word "cinema" rather than with "footage" or "films" because I wish to stress the institutional matrix in which the images are embedded. Cinema is not only a technology, it is a social practice with conventions that profoundly shape

its forms. My particular interest, of course, is that cinema has been a primary means through which race and gender are visualized as natural categories; cinema has been the site of intersection between anthropology, popular culture, and the constructions of nation and empire.

*Fascinating Cannibalism: History, Cinema, and Race*

Phil Rosen brilliantly delineates how, in the nineteenth century in Europe and North America, history was enshrined as the “sovereign science of mankind” and an explicitly historical consciousness came to pervade everyday life.<sup>17</sup> This was the century of Leopold von Ranke and Jules Michelet, of the growth of museums, of architectural and artistic revivals, and of the invention of archeology and anthropology. Our present century reverberates with the resultant discourses. If the nineteenth century is the century of history, however, the twentieth century is the century of the image, of cinema. The twentieth century is characterized by the accessibility, circulation, and popularization of mechanically reproduced images. If the nineteenth century was obsessed with the past, the twentieth century is, in the words of Walter Benjamin, characterized by “the desire . . . to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly . . . overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction.”<sup>18</sup>

Cinema appears to bring the past and that which is culturally distant closer; likewise, anthropology, which posits that indigenous peoples are remnants of earlier ages, has been largely concerned with the description and preservation or reconstruction of the spatially and historically distant.

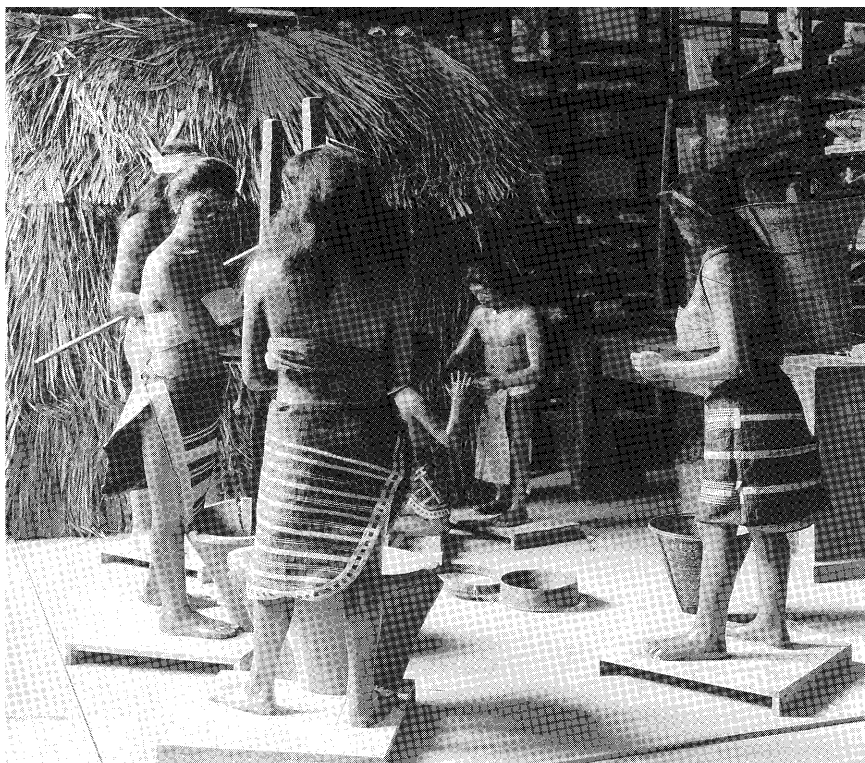
Rosen contends that classical Hollywood cinema is superior to photography as a means of controlling and managing time and the past. Using Roland Barthes’s notion of the *punctum*—the potentially threatening and hallucinatory detail in the photograph—Rosen explains that photography’s status as document, its particular subjective nature, disrupts realism; but the detail in cinema, subjugated to diegesis, more easily results in socially mediated meanings.<sup>19</sup> The shared experience of viewing a film allows for a high degree of ideological control—cinema is after all an industry—whereas photography elicits a more solipsistic engagement between viewer and photograph, an engagement which leaves open the possibility of unconventional readings. Early-twentieth-century cinema is thus a privileged locus for the investigation of the coming together of the nineteenth-century obsession with the past, and the twentieth-century desire to make visibly comprehensible the difference of cultural “others.”

As V. Y. Mudimbe explains, in anthropology’s construction of the Savage,

"an explicit political power presumes the authority of a scientific knowledge and vice versa."<sup>20</sup> In such diverse genres as colonial propaganda film, *Tarzan* movies, and scientific films seen as positivist recordings, ethnographic cinema is often harnessed to ideologies of nationalism and imperialism; it has been an instrument of surveillance as well as entertainment, linked like the written ethnographies of cultural anthropology to a discourse of power, knowledge, and pleasure.

It is impossible to speak of the ethnographic without speaking of race. "Race" as we now know it—the general color-coded configuration of "white," "red," "black," and "yellow"—was an invention of the nineteenth century and became the defining problem for early anthropology.<sup>21</sup> In evolutionary terms, "race" consciously or unconsciously implies a competition involving time, and both cinema and anthropology enabled the viewer to travel through dimensions of space, time, and status.<sup>22</sup> Johannes Fabian explains that anthropology is premised on notions of time which deny the contemporaneity—what he calls coevalness—of the anthropologist and the people that he or she studies. Anthropology, asserts Fabian, is a time machine.<sup>23</sup> At the height of the age of imperialism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States and Europe, there was a tremendous proliferation of new popular science entertainments visualizing the "ethnographic," such as the dioramas and bone collections of the natural history museum, the exhibited "native villages" of the world's fair and the zoo, printed representations such as the postcard and stereograph or *carte de visite*, popular science journals such as *National Geographic*, and, of course, photography and cinema. These entertainments too were time machines: to see the subjects portrayed was to see a nexus between race and a past of origins. Even Walter Benjamin's insight that the appeal of media like photography stemmed from the masses' desire to bring distant things closer does not adequately capture the masses' voracious appetite for the images of peoples of color which these entertainments made possible. In order to understand the early history of how indigenous peoples of color were represented in film, it is necessary to examine the obsession with and anxiety about race manifested in both science and popular culture.

The obsessive consumption of images of a racialized Other known as the Primitive is usefully labeled *fascinating cannibalism*.<sup>24</sup> By "fascinating cannibalism" I mean to draw attention to the mixture of fascination and horror that the "ethnographic" occasions: the "cannibalism" is not that of the people who are labeled Savages, but that of the consumers of the images of the bodies—as well as actual bodies on display—of native peoples offered up by popular media and science.



2. Dayak family group, Smithsonian Institution. (Smithsonian Institution photo no. 28321, used by permission of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives)

Although ethnographic film is often seen as a subgenre of scientific film—and hence is assumed to be inherently dry, boring, and uninteresting—there are at least three reasons why such film, and the broader field in which I situate it, deserve close scrutiny. First, such a study reveals how inextricably early cinema is linked to discourses of race. In the historiography of cinema, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) is hailed as an early monument of dominant Hollywood film; its equivalent in status for documentary and ethnographic film is Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922).<sup>25</sup> Film historians call the formal aesthetic qualities of both films revolutionary, yet both films focus upon the racialized body, an Other whose race is an immediate marker of a problematic difference—whether it be Griffith's racist portrayal of the African American in the post-Civil War South, or Flaherty's portrayal of the Inuit hero Nanook as a kind of arche-

typal “natural” and Primitive Everyman.<sup>26</sup> Griffith’s film celebrates the birth of History, whereas Flaherty’s film extols the birth of Ethnography. The two films, hardly ever compared, were made only seven years apart; they both impose a stereotyped vision of the meaning of the past, and both smooth over anxieties about difference through ideologies of race. The dominant subject position of the spectator, the ideal viewer of the films—white, masculine, the bearer of History—is alternately frightened and soothed by the narratives of the Ku Klux Klan as saviors of the nation, and of the Inuit hunter as raw-flesh-eating but smiling Savage.

Second, the will to perceive ethnographic cinema as scientific and objectively voyeuristic—a common trope of early ethnographic cinema is that the peoples who were filmed were ignorant of film technology—is in need of interrogation. It is not only that film is seen as a positivist tool for recording reality; it is also that indigenous peoples are seen as natural, more *authentic* humanity. Just as mainstream Hollywood cinema depicts Western peoples in obviously scripted narrative films, the Primitive is constructed in a genre of film akin to the nature film. Film studies has begun to examine the construction of race in classical Hollywood cinema, but has largely ignored any film associated with science, including the body of work conventionally labeled “ethnographic.” The current scholarship on and criticism of such films is scarce, and is comprised of mostly self-reflexive accounts by visual anthropologists eager either to find *totemic ancestors*<sup>27</sup> or to slay and denounce the colonial complicity of Oedipal fathers (and, when Margaret Mead is the target, mothers). Many anthropologists, although acknowledging particular ethnocentric biases of the filmmakers, still do not dispute the status of ethnographic film as empirical record. It is astonishing how often the constructed nature of the ethnographic film is ignored; yet, just as *The Birth of a Nation* reveals mainstream fears of miscegenation and thus weaves a web of myths around race, ethnographic film reveals an obsession with race and racial categorization in the construction of peoples always already Primitive. Of equal significance, scholars have largely overlooked the ways in which standard ethnographic film is linked to popular media entertainments and Hollywood spectacle.

Finally, a study of ethnographic cinema is crucial to understanding issues of identity. The anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod describes how even today the Self/Other opposition is integral to anthropology:

Anthropological discourse, with its roots in the exploration and colonization of the rest of the world by the West, is the discourse of the self. It defines itself primarily as the study of the other, which means that its

selfhood was not problematic. Some would even argue that the Western civilized self was constituted in part through this confrontation with and picturing of the savage or primitive other. Even when anthropology is in crisis, as many would argue it is today, and even when the focus of that crisis is precisely the self/other problem, as it is in reflexive anthropology and the new ethnography, the divide tends to remain unquestioned.<sup>28</sup>

One result of this ever present division between Historical Same—Western subjectivity—and Primitive Other is a speaking for and thus a silencing of the peoples depicted in ethnographic cinema, an assumption of voice made especially dangerous because of the perception that film is a window onto reality. In this setting, the critic may become the unwitting propagator of a new postcolonial form of fascinating cannibalism, a reification that further entrenches the categories of Same and Other, Western and Indigenous. I acknowledge the precariousness of my position. Against this danger, however, and in an attempt to negotiate new ways of thinking about the relationship between the camera and the peoples filmed in ethnographic cinema, I turn at various points in the text to reflections on how the people of color who performed and acted in these films experienced the process. The evidence suggests that many of them also saw with a “third eye.” Although my efforts are tentative, I believe that approaching the images with this understanding produces a new way of looking at the images, one that can begin to bring the people who inhabit them out of their bondage of silence and into the present, one that acknowledges performance rather than empirically represented Primitives in timeless picturesques.

*Regnault, Nanook of the North, King Kong:  
Science, Taxidermy, and the Monster*

This book does not purport to offer a comprehensive survey of early film conventionally labeled ethnographic or, indeed, of the broader field I have labeled “ethnographic cinema.” It is structured as a triptych, each part dedicated to a distinct modality in early ethnographic cinema: (1) the positivist mode of the scientific research film, represented here by the 1895 *chronophotographie* or time motion studies of Félix-Louis Regnault; (2) the taxidermic mode of the lyrical ethnographic film, represented here by Robert Flaherty’s 1922 *Nanook of the North*; and (3) the postmodern mode of the commercial entertainment film, represented here by Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack’s 1933 *King Kong*.

I have chosen Regnault's work and Flaherty's *Nanook* because they have been described by historians of visual anthropology as two moments of origin of ethnographic film. Regnault's time motion studies or *chronophotographie* of West African performers in the Paris Ethnographic Exposition of 1895 represents the supposed moment of origin of a particular type of ethnographic film: the scientific research film. Regnault believed that by filming the movements—walking, running, climbing, jumping—of West Africans, and comparing them with films of the movements of Europeans, one could establish an evolutionary typology of the races. Human history could be read in locomotion. The peoples filmed were perceived as raw data, and the films were meant to be studied both in themselves and to aid comparative studies of the physiologies of different races, much the way the microscope was used by other scientists. As people pictured as “ethnographic,” the West African performers who Regnault filmed were literally *written* into film as racialized bodies, transformed into a kind of racially signifying hieroglyph. Regnault also wrote about the need to establish an archive or museum of films and phonographic recordings of so-called vanishing peoples. Regnault's positivist legacy—his belief in film as a scientific instrument, an improved eye much like that of a microscope, and his promotion of the ethnographic film archive for anthropological research—was inherited by anthropologists such as Marcel Griaule, Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and even Alan Lomax, in his choreometric dance project of the 1970s.

I use Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* as the paradigm of romantic, lyrical ethnography, the film of art, which hinges upon a nostalgic reconstruction of a more authentic humanity. In the second part of the triptych, I begin by describing travel films made before 1922, including Edward Sheriff Curtis's *In the Land of the Headhunters* (1914). I then offer an in-depth study of *Nanook of the North*. In 1922, the anthropologist Sir James G. Fraser observed that the ethnography of the younger Bronislaw Malinowski sees the native “in the round and not in the flat,” praising his *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* as “one of the completest and most scientific accounts ever given of a savage people.”<sup>29</sup> Fraser's comment applies equally to Flaherty: if Regnault had portrayed natives in the flat, almost as ciphers, Flaherty portrayed natives in the round, in the mode of *taxidermy*. As Stephen Bann points out in his study of French and British historiography, the taxidermist uses artifice and reconstruction in order to make the dead look alive. Similarly, Flaherty himself emphasized that *Nanook* was made more authentic by the use of simulation: the Inuit actors were dressed in cos-

tume, the igloo was a set, etc. The “ethnographic” is reconstructed to appear real to the anticipated audience, and the fiction sustained is that film does not alter anything. This ideology undergirds the use of cinema in the salvage ethnography of “vanishing races.” Later film theorists like André Bazin, Edgar Morin, and Luc de Heusch have exalted Flaherty as a poet who presented in *Nanook* not the reality of science, but the reality of “a higher truth,” that of art. The strategies for encoding authenticity and the Primitive in *Nanook* inspired other kinds of documentary cinema, but *Nanook*’s most immediate legacy is the scripted films of the period including Flaherty’s *Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age* (1926), and F. W. Murnau and Flaherty’s *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas* (1931), as well as later ethnographic film like Robert Gardner’s *Dead Birds* (1962).

As Bann points out, the taxidermic specimen, created when the boundaries of the real are transgressed by repainting the dead as lifelike, is closely related to the monster, “the composite, incongruous beast which . . . simulated the seamless integrity of organic life.”<sup>30</sup> The final part of my triptych includes a study of the “racial films” made before 1933, and culminates with a close analysis of *King Kong*. I have chosen to analyze *King Kong* for several reasons. *King Kong* is the ironic moment in ethnographic cinema. On first sight, the film appears to be a pure fantasy. As I hope to establish, however, this film is one more manifestation of fascinating cannibalism: it explicitly recalls the historical practice of exhibiting humans at ethnographic expositions, and partakes of many of the defining traits of the “racial film” genre which flourished in the wake of *Nanook of the North*. Unlike Regnault’s chronophotography and *Nanook*, which are represented in the histories of ethnographic film as points of origin, *King Kong* is part of a long line of films representing the person of African, Asian, or Pacific Islander descent as an ape-monster. In its construction of the *ethnographiable* monster, *King Kong* draws on discourses which equate the native with the pathological, as well as on discourses—mainly nativist—on the fear of the hybrid as monster. *King Kong* summons a notion of time that feeds into ideologies of survival of the fittest, and of the indigenous body as the site of a collision between past and present, Ethnographic and Historical, Primitive and Modern. Cooper and Schoedsack had previously made films now considered “ethnographic” like *Grass* (1925), *Chang* (1927), and *Rango* (1931), but *King Kong* is a pastiche film about the making of an ethnographic film and hence offers a meta-commentary on “seeing anthropology,” one which, I will argue, foreshadows the fear of the postcolonial Other as monster.

Regnault’s *chronophotographie* of 1895, *Nanook of the North* (1922), and