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Recommended Citation
Matthews, Julianna (2003) "The Identity of the Self and the Other in Ethnographic Film," Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 15.
Available at: http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/totem/vol11/iss1/15

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Keywords
self, other, identity, ethnographic film, Lords of the Garden, Cannibal Tours

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The Identity of the Self and the Other in Ethnographic Film

Julianna Matthews

"Anthropology, and hence ethnographic film, was created out of a nineteenth century need of Westerners to describe, explain and control the exotic other" (Ruby 1995: 78). The three actions listed in this statement: description, explanation and control, provide a framework for establishing the identity of the Other and the relationship between the observer and the observed. Who is describing, explaining and controlling? Moreover, what was/is this need? Why was/is it necessary to define, explain and control the Other? I would suggest that the need to define the Other must be related to the need to define the Self. Ranciere (1994) suggested, "the paradox of identity is that you must travel to disclose it" (Ranciere 1994: 33). Consideration of the films "Lords of the Garden" and "Cannibal Tours" illustrates this point, as ethnographic film provides the viewers with a figurative opportunity to travel and to re-affirm their own identity in contrast with that of the Other.

"LORDS OF THE GARDEN"

"Lords of the Garden" was filmed in 1993 as a collaborative effort between an anthropologist, Paul Taylor and a filmmaker, Judith Hallet. According to Taylor the purpose of anthropology is "[t]o make other people seem logical, reasonable, understandable", and within this framework the film claims to examine the practice of the construction of treehouses and the reported practice of cannibalism among the Korowai of Papua New Guinea.

In "Lords of the Garden" the identity of the Other is who the viewer expects it to be: the Korowai of Irian Jaya. They are described, their beliefs and practices explained, and their image is controlled by Taylor and Hallet. Geography, time, closeness to nature, religion and humanity are all used to construct a representation of the Other and to guide the viewer to draw conclusions about the identity of the Self by contrasting it with the Other (Morris 1996).

The film begins by establishing the geographic and temporal distance of the Korowai from the presumably Western audience (Morris 1996). The title of the series includes the word "expedition", giving the impression of a journey about to be undertaken. This journey is described as a trip into the unknown, "literally a world away". Addressing the viewer, Taylor suggests that if the goal of anthropology as stated above could be accomplished in Papua New Guinea, then it can be done anywhere.

A second tool used in representing the Korowai as the Other is the element of time. They are described as “little touched by the twentieth century”. In his journal Taylor comments on the frustration of the film crew regarding the intensive interviews he wants to conduct, citing one situation involving the village chief: "...not a photogenic character to begin with, and less so since he insists on wearing his one t-shirt (that says 'Cartier' on it)" (Kaupp 1994: 10, emphasis added). This image interfered with the filmmaker’s vision of a previously uncontacted group.

The Korowai are depicted as a society that is close to nature. This representation is established through both words and images. In one scene Taylor is shown being carefully guided across a slippery log. Following him are the porters carrying heavy loads, yet confidently and nimbly crossing the same log. The image that completes this representation is one of a colony of ants scurrying across a branch. Just like the hardworking ants and unlike the out of place Westerner, the Korowai porters are creatures of the forest and a part of nature.

Religion and the concept of humanity are used to cement the identity of the Korowai as the Other. First, according to the narration of the film, none of the Korowai have converted to Christianity, having resisted the efforts of missionaries. Second, in one instance the word “inhuman” is used in conjunction with scenes of grooming, with similarities in actions, posture, and communication to the images often used in the analysis of non-human primate behaviour, such as with chimpanzees. The third and most extensive effort at establishing the status of the Other through their inhumanity is the continual focus on the reported practice of cannibalism. Kirsch states, “It is difficult to conceptualize a more viscerally compelling way to deny the humanity of ‘the other’ than through the practice of cannibalism, or conversely, through its attribution to others” (1997: 174).

The effort to understand cannibalism appears at times to be more of an effort to expose what Taylor calls "the shadow side of their
[Korowai] recent past". The choice of the word "shadow" by Taylor (in translation from interviews with Korowai individuals) gives the impression of something to hide, a negative feature of their culture of which to be ashamed. This ominous theme is threaded throughout the film from beginning to end, even when it would seem as though the film is addressing an unrelated topic. The introduction to the film sets the tone by using words and phrases such as "mysterious", "dangerous" and a "tangled land" that has resulted in the loss of life of explorers (the most popular example being Michael Rockefeller). The film contains a sequence that describes and illustrates for the viewer the "shadow" by Taylor (in translation from "CANNIBAL TOURS": first, that of the tourists down the Sepik River into the "heart of darkness" and second, a metaphysical journey which is "an attempt to discover the place of 'the other' in the popular imagination" (Lutkehaus 1989: 427).

Despite the stated purpose of the film, distinguishing between the observer and the observed (and therefore establishing the identity of the Other) is a complex task, more so than in "Lords of the Garden". More than one group enacts description, explanation, and control. The initial expectation is that the villagers of Papua New Guinea are the Other, based on conventions such as geographic distance and the assumption that they are the cannibals to which the title refers. O'Rourke interviews the tourists and inquires about their ideas and opinions on the way of life of the villagers, the issue of authenticity, and the villagers' prospects for the future. A transition occurs almost without the viewer realizing, and their attention turns to analyzing the behaviour of the tourists. O'Rourke conducts interviews with the villagers and asks for their insights and opinions about the tourists. O'Rourke shows the tourists adopting the appearance and behaviour of what they perceive to be the Other (e.g. face paint and dancing). The tourists have become the Other, described, explained and controlled by the villagers, the filmmaker, and the viewer (Young 1992). Moreover, the identity of the cannibals in this film becomes less clear, as the tourists are, in a sense, cannibalizing the villagers and their culture (Lutkehaus 1989).

T.T. Minh-ha (1994) suggests that "the traveller maintains his difference mostly by despising others like himself" (Minh-ha 1994: 22). Applying this statement to the role of the viewer as the observer of the tourists, the Self is defined by distancing or criticizing the Other, even though in this case they could be the tourist...
Other themselves, based on geographic origin or general worldview. In relation to the villagers, the methods of defining the Self of the viewer are similar to those used in “Lords of the Garden” (e.g. geographic distance, the image of primitiveness and the practice of cannibalism).

O’Rourke constructs the identity of the villagers as the Other by the expectations of the tourists, and by the villagers themselves. This is a new kind of Other because the “primitive”, “authentic” Other of the past no longer truly exists (MacCannell 1992). O’Rourke makes clear his own role in the representation of the Other in a scene where he films an interview with a village man who is being photographed at the same time by the tourists (Lutkehaus 1989). The viewer feels sympathy for the man when O’Rourke makes the comment that “It’s hard to make a dollar”, and the man simply replies “Yes”. Yet the point is made that O’Rourke is doing the exact same thing as the tourist: “[t]his relationship between the filmmaker and the people filmed has the effect of making the viewer conscious of the constructed or ‘filmed’ nature of the images and of the control the filmmaker has over the process.” (Lutkehaus 1989: 426, emphasis added).

In another scene a villager takes a German tourist over to a tree and says: “[w]e’d dance around that tree before removing the head”. Although the German tourist later states that he believes that cannibalism no longer occurs in Papua New Guinea, he accepts the statement by the villager and uses it to confirm his image of the Other. The villager is complicit in the construction of this representation. O’Rourke wanted the viewer to understand this complicity, stating that “…the aim is to find a nongratuitous way in which to give viewers a sense of the role of the filmmaker and the complicity between him or her and the person or persons filmed.” (Lutkehaus 1989: 431).

A third example of the villagers’ active role in the construction of their identity as the Other is seen in an interview. A villager tells O’Rourke that they tell the tourists that they believe the Europeans to be their ancestors coming back to visit. The villager then says that they do not truly believe this - it is for the benefit of the tourists’ imagination only (Young 1992).

DISCUSSION
In his chapter “Introduction: Partial Truths” in Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, James Clifford refers to ethnographies as “fictions”, a word which captures “the partiality of cultural and historical truths” (1986: 6). He notes that fiction is an appropriate term, as it can be understood as referring to something that is constructed. Taking it one step further, Clifford suggests that the concept of ethnographies as fictions also denotes something that is made up. While this idea was formed with ethnographies as written texts in mind, I think that it is equally applicable to film. Films are representations, constructed and produced and, like written ethnographies, “are based on systematic, and contestable, exclusions” (Clifford 1986: 6). Representations of the Other in film are subjected to the editorial vision of the filmmaker. Choices made by the filmmaker regarding narrations, subtitles, images and sounds all influence the representation of the Other that a viewer interprets.

The Other also makes choices that influence the representations produced. Clifford (1986) describes a situation in which the sharing of knowledge between generations in the Saramaka is purposefully incomplete. A parallel is drawn with the role of the Other in the production of a version of their identity: “strategies of ellipsis, concealment, and partial disclosure determine ethnographic relations” (Clifford 1986: 7). The Other can therefore be added to the list of those who describe, explain and control in “Cannibal Tours”.

Representations of the Other in “Lords of the Garden” and “Cannibal Tours” differ in their nature. In “Lords of the Garden” this representation is implicit within the structure of the film, whereas in “Cannibal Tours” representation of the Other is the explicit focus of the film. These differences can be attributed in part to the identity of the observers and the observed, the need to define the Self in terms of the Other, and the incomplete nature of representation in ethnographic film. The role and vision of the filmmaker is central to the understanding of the final product and its representation of the Other.

In drawing comparisons between “Lords of the Garden” and “Cannibal Tours” there are two additional points that I would like to address. First is impact of the outlook of the filmmaker on the moral implications of the film and the responsibilities of the filmmaker, and second is the overall vision of the filmmaker.

In “Lords of the Garden” Taylor informs the audience that this expedition may be the last opportunity to observe a way of life that will
likely disappear. Logging activity will soon enter the area and destroy a core aspect of the Korowai culture, namely the trees and the treehouses. It is implied that the Korowai are "unknowing innocents, incapable of comprehending their future" (Kirsch 1997: 175). It precludes the possibility that the Korowai will adapt to their changing environment, and assumes that whatever happens the Korowai will no longer be "authentic". The only concern that the film expresses about this situation appears to be that future generations of Western researchers will not be able to continue their study of the Other. While I think it is highly unlikely that the Korowai were oblivious to the changing activities in the forest, the film suggests that Taylor has no obligation to inform them of these future events.

In contrast, O'Rourke believes that the filmmaker does have an obligation to the people in his films: "I believe in doing good. I care and I have a moral purpose in doing what I do" (Lutkehaus 1989: 433). The vision of the filmmaker impacts the final product, as David MacDougall (1991) suggests: "Whether a film is capable of generating more complex statements seems to depend upon the filmmaker’s ability to make the film more than merely a report on a cultural encounter and, instead, embody it" (1991: 9). I think that this is what O’Rourke has succeeded in doing with "Cannibal Tours" in explicitly addressing the issue of representation of the Other and using cultural encounters as a vehicle for presentation. In "Lords of the Garden" the cultural encounter was the end in itself, rather than a means to an end.

The constructed nature of "truth" and the creative element of fiction in "Lords of the Gardens" are seen in the filmmaker’s dramatization of cannibalism. Using fragments of images and artistic techniques such as blurring and atmospheric music, the viewer is led to believe in the existence of cannibalism among the Korowai (Morris 1996). This approach was deliberate on the part of Hallett, in response to what Taylor identified as the film crew’s frustration with "the lack of visual excitement in ... interviews" (Kaupp 1994: 10). Hallet stated in her journal that "[w]ith such detailed description of cannibalism, we decided to film a series of illustrative but abstract scenes by the river..." (Kaupp 1994: 10). This illustrates the uneven balance of control between both the Westerners and the Korowai, and the filmmaker (Hallett) and the anthropologist (Taylor), over the representation of the Korowai and the construction of their identity as presented to the viewer.

CONCLUSION
I began with the statement "Anthropology, and hence ethnographic film, was created out of a nineteenth century need of Westerners to describe, explain, and control the exotic other" (Ruby 1995: 78). A discussion of the films "Lords of the Garden" and "Cannibal Tours" and their representations of the Other has shown how the need to describe, explain, and control still exists today. "Lords of the Garden" is a demonstration, or a case study illustrating this assertion, whereas "Cannibal Tours" is a film about exposing this assertion and creating awareness in the viewer of the constructed and fictional nature of the identity of the Other.

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