Defiant images
The Kayapo appropriation of video

TERENCE TURNER

The author, professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, has undertaken field research in various Kayapo villages in Amazonia, central Brazil, since 1982, and has extensive experience of film-making with British television teams. This is the text of the Forman Lecture which he delivered in Manchester on 14 September as part of the RAI’s Third International Festival of Ethnographic Film. Both the Lecture and the Festival were sponsored by Granada Television. The visits of Mokuka and Tamok were subsidized by Unesco and by the RAI’s Harry Watt Bursary.

A reply to this Lecture by James Faris will appear in a forthcoming issue of A.T.

On behalf of my Kayapo colleagues, Mokuka and Tamok, and myself, may I say that we are honoured that the RAI has invited us to show and discuss our work at this Festival. It is an honour to be invited to deliver the Forman Lecture.

Introduction: Kayapo video in the context of ‘indigenous media’

The global expansion of telecommunications, coupled with the availability of new and cheap forms of audiovisual media, above all video recording, have given rise within the past decade to an unprecedented phenomenon: the appropriation and use of the new technologies by indigenous peoples for their own ends. The peoples most involved in this development have been among those most culturally and technologically distant from the West: Australian Aborigines, Canadian Inuit and Amazonian Indians. Among the latter, the Kayapo provide perhaps the most striking and varied examples of the indigenous use of video.

The use of video and other visual media such as television broadcasting by indigenous peoples differs in a number of ways from the making of ethnographic films or videos by anthropologists or other non-indigenous persons. It has only recently begun to receive attention in its own right from anthropologists and media theorists, and there are as yet only a few ethnographic studies or descriptive accounts of specific cases of indigenous media use: of these, the work of Eric Michaels on Central Desert Aboriginal Television has been the most theoretically important (Michaels 1984, 1986, 1991a, 1991b, Ruby 1991). Michaels’ and the other existing studies deal almost entirely with the Australian and Canadian cases, in which state-subsidized indigenous TV broadcasting via communications satellite is the principal medium in question. These cases present special problems of their own (e.g. the insidious effects of dependence on government subsidies, or the satellite-TV connection’s also serving as a conduit for Western TV programming which is then directly received by Aboriginal, Inuit and Indian viewers; Kaptana 1988; Murin 1988; Ginsburg 1991, n.d.) These factors are absent in the Amazonian cases, where video-recorders and generator-powered VCR decks and monitors comprise the limits of communications technology and there is no question of government financial subsidy. The relatively small world of indigenous media thus nevertheless contains important differences: hence the need for more empirical studies of different cases. The present account of the Kayapo case represents an effort in this direction.

Faye Ginsburg, in the only general theoretical discussions of indigenous media thus far to appear, has noted that the appropriation of visual media by indigenous peoples typically occurs in the context of movements for self-determination and resistance, and that their use of video cameras tends to be ‘both assertive and conservative of identity’, focusing both on the documentation of conflicts with or claims against the national society and the recording of traditional culture (1991, n.d.: 11). She makes the important point that in contrast to an earlier generation of anthropological film makers but in

2. do., £45 hardback, £17 paper.
4. Brassey’s, £24.50.

Sierra Leone, unable to surrender because of the atrocities they had been forced to commit, but prevented from retreating into the territories controlled by their erstwhile captors for fear that their wild assial violence might be infectious. Similar accounts are given of the emergence of Renamo as an endemic rebel movement-without-cause in Mozambique.

What defences are there against the spread of this kind of violence? What, if anything, does anthropology have to say about the capacity to generate a sense of civil society in such an unpropitious setting – in circumstances where there is no longer any normality to which to return, where “habit” (to use Bourdieu’s term) has been torn up and defiled? This, it seems to me, is the real theoretical challenge for famine and disaster studies in Africa today. When I reflect on the problems of those who will have to take charge of the rehabilitation (if not re-habilitation) of youngsters from the Liberian border lands, now lost to their natal communities, perhaps for ever, I begin to suspect anthropology will have to abandon its preoccupation with social continuities and inherited symbolic templates and foster a greater concern for the cognitive and performative abilities through which human groups improvise fresh beginnings. Perhaps Megan Vaughan’s focus on famine as expressed through song was even more apposite than her readers realized at the time, for it may be that overcoming the effects of famine (and war) requires the ability to dance to a new tune. □
convergence with the work of contemporary film makers like Asch, the MacDougalls, Kildea, Preloran, Rouch and others, indigenous cultural self-documentation tends to focus not on the retrieval of an idealized vision of pre-contact culture but on 'processes of identity construction' in the cultural present (n.d. 11). Here, indigenous video makers converge significantly with tendencies in Western cultural theory such as the work of Stuart Hall and the Cultural Studies group, which rejects the notion of 'authenticity' as applied to an idealized conception of 'traditional' culture and emphasizes the ongoing production of ethnic, cultural and subcultural identity through the construction of 'hybrid' representations, combining aspects of mass culture and technology with more traditional elements (Hall 1990; 1992).

Emphasizing the similarities as well as the differences between contemporary ethnographic film and indigenous media, Ginsburg has suggested that both should be seen as 'cultural media', which use contemporary Western film and video media technology for the purpose of 'mediating culture' between social groups, whether societies of different culture, or older and younger generations within the same indigenous society. The point is that 'cultural media' form part of a social project of communication of cultural knowledge for political and social ends, such as overcoming prejudice through inter-cultural understanding, or reproducing ethnic identity and political cohesion. Ginsburg's concept is an attempt to shift the focus of the term 'media' from the denotation of technologies of representation or the representations in themselves to the social process of mediation in which they are used:

In order to open a new 'discursive space' for indigenous media that respects and understands it on its own terms, it is important to attend to the processes of production and reception. Analysis needs to focus less on the formal qualities of film/video as text, and more on the cultural mediations that occur through film and video works (n.d. 4).

The emphasis on processes of production and reception, and on media as 'mediation' provides a useful point of departure for my account of Kayapo video, but 'mediation' is a Protean notion that can subsume many specific meanings. As I proceed it will be necessary to emphasize a number of differences between the sorts of mediation going on in indigenous, or at any rate Kayapo, media and those involved in ethnographic film and video.

Social effects of indigenous media in indigenous communities

One major difference concerns the act of video-making itself. As video takes on political and social importance in an indigenous community, which member of the community assumes the role of video cameraperson, and who makes the prestigious journey to the alien city where the editing facilities are located, becomes issues fraught with social and political significance, and consequently, social and political conflicts.

I have been surprised by how little this fundamental point crops up in the literature or in presentations at film festival or discussions at conferences. It is common to hear those involved in indigenous film and video, indigenous persons and sympathetic non-indigenes alike, proclaim that the guiding principle of their work is the integral vision of the interconnectedness of all things inherent in Amerindian, or as the case may be, Aboriginal or Inuit cultures. Yet few of these same eloquent evocations of the spiritual interconnectedness of the whole are accompanied by any reference to the effects of the activities of the film- or video-makers upon the communities in which they worked (in some instances, their own). Few reflect upon the possible effects of an objectifying medium like film or video on the social or cultural consciousness of the people filmed (Michaels again being perhaps the most notable exception: e.g., Michaels 1984). Few discuss who ends up owning or controlling access to the films or videos at the community level.

These may seem petty issues with no connection to the grander issues of theory and politics normally addressed in the anthropological and media literature; but they are often the channels through which an indigenous community translates the wider political, cultural, and aesthetic meanings of media such as video into its own local personal and social terms. They can have cumulatively important effects on the internal politics of a community and the careers of individuals.

It is especially important for non-indigenous people working in the field of indigenous media to pay attention to this level of phenomena and to try to make allowance for the specific effects their projects or support
may have in the communities where they work.

Among the Kayapo, for example, becoming a video cameraperson, and even more importantly, a video editor, has meant combining a prestigious role within the community with a culturally and politically important form of mediation of relations with Western society. As a combination of the two main prerequisites for political leadership in contemporary Kayapo communities, it has been one way that people have promoted their political careers. Several of the current group of younger chiefs acted as video camerapersons during their rise to chieftainship, and a number of the more ambitious younger men have taken up video at least in part in the hope of following in their footsteps.

My general point is simply this: an outsider attempting to facilitate the use of video by a community, either for political or research purposes, by donating a camera or arranging access to editing facilities, quickly finds that she or he does not escape the invidious implications and responsibilities of ‘intervention’ simply through handing over the camera to ‘them’. Precisely whom she/he hands it to can become a very tough question, and may involve consequences for which the researcher bears inescapable responsibility. The act of video making itself, when done by an indigenous person or member of a local community, begins to ‘mediate’ a variety of social and political relationships within the indigenous community in a way that has no exact parallel when the video maker is an outsider, as is the usual case in documentary and anthropological film and video-making.

There is a complementary side eto this point, which is that for a people like the Kayapo, the act of shooting with a video camera can become an even more important mediator of their relations with the dominant Western culture than the video document itself. One of the most successful aspects of the series of dramatic Kayapo political demonstrations and encounters with the Brazilians (and other representatives of the Western World system such as the World Bank and Granada Television) has been the Kayapo’s ostentatious use of their own video cameras to record the same events being filmed by representatives of the national and international media, thus ensuring that their camerapersons would be one of the main attractions filmed by the other crews. The success of this ploy is attested by the number of pictures of Kayapo pointing video cameras that have appeared in the international press. The Kayapo, in short, quickly made the transition from seeing video as a means of recording events to seeing it as an event to be recorded.

[Video clip 1: Kayapo cameramen at Tucurui dam; at meeting with Brazilian bureaucrats at Tucurui; at Altamira rally; at constitutional convention; photographing ceremonies; A’ukre villagers watching video in men’s house]

Let me illustrate rapidly with a few cuts of Kayapo camerapersons at work, taken by non-Kayapo photojournalists or documentarists. Early in 1989, at the beginning of the mobilization of the great rally at Altamira against a government hydroelectric dam scheme on the Xingu River that would have flooded Kayapo land, Kayapo leaders made a tour of the huge dam at Tucurui. They brought along their own video camera to record for the people back in the villages what a big dam does to a river and the land around it. They also pointedly aimed their camera in the faces of Brazilian bureaucrats merely attempting to explain what had happened to other indigenous peoples whose villages had been flooded by the dam.

Then, at the Altamira rally itself, their cameras – here held by Mokuka – not only recorded the event but were themselves one of the events most recorded by photojournalists of the world press and documentary crews like that of Disappearing World.

A year earlier, at the Brazilian constitutional convention, the Kayapo not only sent a delegation to lobby delegates debating the sections on indigenous rights but video-recorded themselves doing it, and were duly photographed doing so by every news photographer covering the event.

These cuts from the two Disappearing World films on the Kayapo illustrate the important point that the primary use the Kayapo have made of their video cameras has been to record their own ceremonies.

This scene, shot by Mike Blakely, the cameraman on both Disappearing World Kayapo films, shows the people of A’ukre crowding into the village men’s house to watch a video of themselves being shown on a VCR and monitor powered by a petrol generator.

**Editing**

Between 1985, when they obtained their first video camera, and 1990, Kayapo video capability remained at the ‘home movie’ level. Their original video tapes rapidly deteriorated under village conditions, as they had no way of copying or storing them in a safe place. They also had no training in editing and no access to editing facilities. In 1990, with a grant from the Spencer Foundation, I started the Kayapo Video Project to supply these needs, with the co-operation of the Centro de Trabalho Indigenista of Sao Paulo, which made available their editing studio and technicians to train Kayapo in editing, and their video storage space for a Kayapo Video Archive for original videos and edited masters.

Our standard editing procedure is for me to go through the rushes with the Kayapo cameraperson who shot them, making an annotated shot record, following which the Kayapo takes over the editing controls while I help with references to the shot record as required. Depending on the Kayapo editor’s familiarity with the editing equipment being used, a technician may or may not be present. We have tried to limit editing assistance and advice to elementary technical procedures of insertion and assembly, compatibility of adjacent cuts, use of cutaways and inserts, and avoiding abrupt camera movements or zooms. We have made no attempt to teach Western notions or styles of framing, montage, fast cutting, flashback or other narrative or anti-narrative modes of sequencing, nor have we sought to impose length constraints or other features that might render a video more accessible, or acceptable to a Western audience. One of us may occasionally suggest a good point for a cut or a cutaway, but the Kayapo editor remains free to reject such suggestions and retains control of both form and content.

On occasions what I feel to be fascinating material is cut by a Kayapo editor in which case it stays cut. There has also been a case when a Kayapo editor, working alone (I was not in Brazil at the time, and he needed no assistance at the editing table) simply strung together scenes of various ceremonies and village activities in the order in which they occurred on the original tape, with minimal editing consisting mostly of cutting repetitive material, producing a two-hour long video which he entitled ‘mixed-up dances’. I don’t consider this a masterpiece of Kayapo post-structuralist anti-narrative; rather, as a minimal step from raw home movie status, it serves to emphasize that for the
Kayapo, even for accomplished Kayapo video editors, the difference between a fully edited and an unedited video is not yet culturally significant for many purposes. The Kayapo are happy to watch unedited ‘home movies’ as well as the beautifully edited work now being turned out by some of their video-makers.

Most of the Kayapo videos thus far have been of cultural performances such as rituals or political meetings which form natural narrative units, with self-defined boundaries and sequential order. Both in camera-work and editing, Kayapo have spontaneously tended to use technically simple long shots, slow cuts, and alternating panoramas and middle-range close-ups, while avoiding extreme close-ups of the face. [Video cut 2: Mokuka editing at CTI studio and making speech about editing in Kayapo; Tamok editing on high-8 deck]

This is Mokuka working at the editing table at the Center in Sao Paulo. He had already mastered the basic editing techniques and was able to work without the assistance of a technician. As in all cases, I first went over his originals with him to do an ethnographically annotated shot record, then served as editing assistant keeping the shot record. Mokuka directed the video from which these excerpts are taken about his own work, in order to bring back to his and other villages a record and explanation of his editing work and why it is important to the Kayapo people as a whole. This is his explanation, in Kayapo, which I will translate in voice-over:

Right. All over the world people are looking at these videos we are making of ourselves. So I am glad to have come today to this place where videos are made.

This had not yet appeared when I was a youth. Now that we are becoming more like the Whites, however, we are going to need to watch these videos we are making of ourselves.

It is not Whites who are doing this work, but I, a Kayapo, who am doing it, as all of you can see. These videos will be seen in all countries. Tell your children and grandchildren, don’t be deaf to my words, this [work] is to support our future generations, all our people.

This is what I want to say to you today.

I am a Kayapo doing this work.

All of you in all countries who see the pictures I make can thereby come to know our culture, my culture of which I tell you today.

Look at these videos, stored here in this place where I work - it’s not just my workplace, any one of you can come for the asking, it’s all of ours, for any one of us with enough understanding to come here to look at these videos of ourselves. Look, everybody, at all these videotapes of us here. See! They’re all about us. This row of tapes are all pictures of us Kayapo. These in the next section are of other indigenous people, our relatives.

These tapes aren’t just left here idly. From here our videos of ourselves are sent far away to the lands of the whites, so our [white] relatives can see how we truly are. This is what I want to explain to you today, what this editing studio and these video tapes are all about, so you will understand.

Do Whites alone have the understanding to be able to operate this equipment? Not at all! We Kayapo, all of us, have the intelligence. We all have the hands, the eyes, the heads that it takes to do this work.

I am not doing this work for my own selfish advantage. I have learned this skill to work for our common good. That’s what I am doing here.

This is what I am doing and telling you about.

This is a picture from another group of our people, from Catete. This picture here. Is there someone somewhere who has learned something about them too from having looked at this?

Our young people can learn about our kindred peoples from different places by looking at pictures like this. We should do the same for ourselves by making pictures of ourselves with which to teach and learn about ourselves.

With this, my speech to you is ended. At first Kayapo camerapersons were brought to Sao Paulo to the Centro de Trabalho Indigenista studio to edit the videos they had shot. For our most recent editing sessions last July, however, Cleiton Capelossi, an editing technician from the Centro, and I brought the Center’s new portable hi-8 editing deck up to the town of Redecnco in Southern Para, within air taxi range of the Kayapo villages. Here we are working with Tamok on the hi-8 deck in Redecnco. We are hoping in future to use the portable hi-8 to bring the editing as close to the Kayapo as possible.

Cultural schemas and the production of the image

The sort of cultural ‘mediation’ effected by indigenous video is also different from that effected by ethnographic film or video for another important reason: an indigenous video maker operates with the same set of cultural categories, notions of representation, principles of mimesis, and aesthetic values and notions of what is socially and politically important as those whose actions he or she is recording. Wirth and Adair, in their early project on Navajo film making, were the first to realize the potential significance of indigenous film making in this respect. The indigenous film maker’s employment of his/her own cultural categories in the production of the video may reveal their essential character more clearly than the completed video text itself. This is true above all in one respect of great theoretical importance: as schemas guiding the making of the video, cultural categories appear in their essential social character as forms of activity rather than as static textual structures or tropes.

Making the making of the video by the indigenous editor, rather than the finished video text, the focus of attention thus brings out another major difference between indigenous media and ethnographic film and video from an anthropological point of view, which is the way the production of the medium itself ‘mediates’ the indigenous categories and cultural forms that constitute its subject matter as well. I have found that keeping the shot record for the editors, which has been my main practical role in the Video Project, affords an...
This is what Tamok’s video of the ceremony also does. He faithfully shows every repetition of every performance, each with its successive increments of regalia and participants. His video replicates, in its own structure, the replicative structure of the ceremony itself, and thus itself creates ‘beauty’ in the Kayapo sense. The master categories of social production and cultural value, replication and beauty, thus become the master schemas guiding Tamok’s editing, his construction of his representation of the ceremony.

Not only his editing, but his camera technique as well. Look at this series of shots from his video of the women’s version of the same naming ceremony.

[Video cut 4: women’s naming ceremony: framing of dancers moving through stationary camera]

Holding the camera still in semi-close-up, so that only the feather capes of the dancers moving by appear as a succession of identical objects, Tamok in effect creates a frame that focuses the quintessence of replication as beauty.

Kayapo culture possesses a well developed set of notions of mimesis and representation that antedate Western cultural influences, but which have also exerted their influence on Kayapo work in video and Kayapo representations of themselves in social and political interaction with the West. A locus classicus where these notions are expressed in traditional cultural forms is in ceremonies involving ritual masking, like the Koko naming ceremony with its anteater and monkey masks. Consider the following series of cuts from Tamok’s video of this ceremony as performed in his village of Kubenkakre.

[Video cut 5: anteater masks dancing]

The dancing of the two principal anteater masks supposedly imitates the real movements of anteaters. Imitation here must clearly be understood in the Aristotelian sense of mimesis as imitation of the essence rather than an attempt at exact naturalistic copying. The movements of the masks represent the Kayapo idea of the essence of anteater movement. But now consider this:

[Video cut 6: monkey masks bringing anteater masks to life]

We are now at the very beginning of the ceremony. The anteater masks have just been finished in a secluded clearing in the forest. They are still inert, however: just masks. They have yet to be animated, brought to life, or, as it were, empowered as representations. And here come the monkey masks to do the job. Under the vivifying influence of the monkeys, the anteaters slowly stir into life and take their first steps.

This is clearly a long jump beyond the simple imitation of the anteater dance. It is a dramatic composition, unreflective of any natural actions of either anteaters or monkeys. Both types of animal masks now become actors in a social drama of representation. This little skit plays reflectively (as it were) with the relation of cultural representations (the masks) to the realities (the living animals) they are supposed to represent but are not. The gap between the two is closed by drama: the masks are brought to life, like anteater Pygmalions, by a meta-representation, a dramatic imitation of bringing them to life, a representation of the act of creating a representation: mimesis now reversing direction, transforming itself from a reflectively to a creative principle; mimesis as poetics.

[Video cut 7: monkey masks as clowns acting as ‘doctors’]

The monkeys in this skit are the meta-operators who embody the creative power of representation itself, and throughout the ceremony they act as comic mediators of excellent vantage point for studying this process while making myself useful and not being over-intrusive. Let me illustrate some of the points that have emerged.

[Video cut 3: men’s naming ceremony, same dance, 3 repetitions]

This is a men’s naming ceremony, the Mebiok, as performed in the village of Kubenkakre; Tamok was the cameraman and editor (this was the video he was editing in last cut you saw). The ceremony has the form of successive performances of the same suite of dance steps, each with its own song. This one is called ‘Raise your wings’. In the cut you see the three successive performances that constitute the framework of the sequential order of the ceremony.

The initial performance, which marks the beginning of the ceremony as a whole, is held at a spot in the forest far from the village. You will have noticed the emphasis on uniformity of movement and singing in unison. Everyone is doing the same step, singing the same song.

The second performance marks the temporal halfway point of the ceremony. The performers have also come halfway in their spatial trajectory from forest to central village plaza, where the final performance will be held. While the song, gestures and step are the same, the dancers now wear decorations, and women — the paternal aunts or grandmothers of the little boys who will be named — have joined the dancing line, some carrying the boys.

The spectacular final performance takes place in the central village plaza, with everyone performing the same songs and steps, but now with a complete outfit of ritual regalia, including the gorgeous feather capes that are the most valued items of Kayapo ceremonial finery. Through successive replications the performance has become simultaneously complete (all its parts being present in the proper order) and fully socialized (moved into the centre of the village), or in other words fully reproduced as a social form.

In Kayapo thought, replication of originally ‘natural’ forms (like the ceremonial song, ‘Raise your wings’, originally taught to a shaman by a bird) through concerted social action is the essence of the production of human society. It is what ‘culture’ consists of. The perfection of such socialized forms through repeated performance embodies the supreme Kayapo value, at once social, moral and aesthetic, of ‘beauty’. Note that ‘beauty’, in this sense, comprises a principle of sequential organization: successive repetitions of the same pattern, with each performance increasing in social value as it integrates additional elements and achieves more stylistic finesse, thus approaching more closely the ideal of completeness-and-perfection that defines ‘beauty’.

ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY Vol. 8 No. 6, December 1992
Kayapo dramatic representation, however, is not confined to masked actors. In the ceremony for war, celebrated before the departure of the raiding party, a skit is performed in which Kayapo actors take the parts of the intended victims, at the end fleeing from the successful attack of other Kayapo warriors playing themselves. Here is Mokuka’s video of such a performance in his village, A’ukre. The actors are representing Brazilians, mimetically evoking the Kayapo notion of the essence of Brazilianness through the imitation of typical Brazilian ways of eating, dancing, music, etc. Here the comic exaggeration of simulated qualities is adapted to a quasi-performative role: the satirically diminished intended victims are easily defeated; life is supposed to imitate art. The example helps to bring out the close relationships between Kayapo notions of mimesis or representation as imitation, on the one hand, and replication as the essential form of social and cultural production on the other. The two notions are in fact continuous, drawing on the same notions of imitative or replicated action as an effective mode of constructing reality, and culturally elaborated through the same complex ritual forms. These same fundamental categories of Kayapo culture emerge as the master tropes of Kayapo video camera work and editing. Representation, far from being an exclusively Western project foisted on the Kayapo through the influence of Western media, is as Kayapo as manioc meat pie.

While the Kayapo are accomplished in their own cultural modes of representation, their supreme dramatic role, their greatest feat of creative mimesis, has undoubtedly been their enactment of themselves in their self-presentations to Brazilians and other Westerners, from environmentalists to World Bank executives. These self-representations have played a central role in their successful political actions over the past decade. There has been a complex feedback relationship between Kayapo self-dramatization in these political encounters, many of which have taken on an aspect as guerrilla theatre, and the Kayapo use of video media. On the one hand, Kayapo leaders have planned political actions like the Altamira rally partly with a view to how they would look on TV (or video). On the other hand, Kayapo video camerapersons have been included in these actions, as I have described earlier, not merely as recorders of the event but as part of the event to be recorded.

This synergy between video media, Kayapo self-representation, and Kayapo ethnic self-consciousness is well brought out in the two clips I want to discuss next. Neither were photographed by Kayapo; the first was shot by the Brazilian crew who went in my stead to record the new village of Juary at the community’s invitation. The second is a moment of the Altamira rally, shot by a Brazilian from one of the indigenist support groups. Both were edited by me. The point of interest in both clips, then, is neither the camera work nor the editing per se, but rather the way Kayapo dramatic self-representation in contemporary contexts of inter-ethnic confrontation continues traditional cultural forms of mimetic representation. It is important to recognize this continuity in order to understand how the increased objectification of Kayapo consciousness of their own culture and ethnic identity in the contemporary inter-ethnic context has not been merely the effect of Western media or cultural influences, but has drawn upon powerful native cultural traditions of representation and mimetic objectification. These traditional mimetic modes continue to influence Kayapo video makers in their use of the video medium, as they have influenced the specifically Kayapo forms that the objectification of cultural self-representation has assumed in Kayapo political and social action.

Kayapo dramatic representation, however, is not confined to masked actors. In the ceremony for war, celebrated before the departure of the raiding party, a skit is performed in which Kayapo actors take the parts of the intended victims, at the end fleeing from the successful attack of other Kayapo warriors playing themselves. Here is Mokuka’s video of such a performance in his village, A’ukre. The actors are representing Brazilians, mimetically evoking the Kayapo notion of the essence of Brazilianness through the imitation of typical Brazilian ways of eating, dancing, music, etc. Here the comic exaggeration of simulated qualities is adapted to a quasi-performative role: the satirically diminished intended victims are easily defeated; life is supposed to imitate art. The example helps to bring out the close relationships between Kayapo notions of mimesis or representation as imitation, on the one hand, and replication as the essential form of social and cultural production on the other. The two notions are in fact continuous, drawing on the same notions of imitative or replicated action as an effective mode of constructing reality, and culturally elaborated through the same complex ritual forms. These same fundamental categories of Kayapo culture emerge as the master tropes of Kayapo video camera work and editing. Representation, far from being an exclusively Western project foisted on the Kayapo through the influence of Western media, is as Kayapo as manioc meat pie.
Kayapo uses of video as social and political document

From the moment they acquired video cameras of their own, the Kayapo have made a point of making video records of their major political confrontations with the national society, as well as more exotic encounters such as their two recent tours to Quebec to support the Cree Indians in their resistance to a giant hydroelectric dam scheme that would have flooded their land. They have also employed video to document internal political events such as meetings of leaders from different communities to settle disputes or the foundation of new communities.

An example of the latter may serve to illustrate the general point. In December of last year a young leader from the large village of Gorotire, who was about to lead some 60 followers to found a new village at one of the frontier posts the Kayapo have established along the boundaries of their reserves, telephoned me from a nearby Brazilian town to ask me to come down and video the group’s departure for the new village. ‘Hurry, we’re leaving Saturday’, he said (it was then Tuesday). There were no Kayapo video cameras or camerapersons available, and the leader of the group was intent on having a video documentary made of the foundation of the new village under his leadership. He wanted a public record of what was to be, for him, his first major chiefly act of authority, to help him in establishing his claim to chiefly status. He also hoped that the video document would help to lend social facticity to the new community itself, which needed all the reality reinforcement it could get (it actually fell apart as the result of internal squabbles only six months later, before we could get the edited video back to show the community). Although I was unable to go myself on such short notice, I was able to arrange for a Brazilian video maker who had previously worked with the Kayapo and two colleagues to accompany the group and do the job.

[Video cut 11: enactment of founding new village of Jury]

Here are some scenes from the video they made. They arrived after the group had arrived at the new site, but the Kayapo, unfazed by this, and calling upon their rich mimetic traditions, re-enacted their departure for the new site, so that it could be put at the beginning of the video they were having made of themselves. They continued to enact for the camera the aspects of village life they thought proper to a good community, which they wanted to represent themselves as being. Here, then, is an instance of spontaneous reflexive mimesis: the Kayapo acting themselves, for themselves.

This case illustrates several points about the purposes served by Kayapo video records. The Kayapo do not regard video documentation merely as a passive recording or reflection of already existing facts, but rather as helping to establish the facts it records. It has, in other words, a performative function. Political acts and events which in the normal run of Kayapo political life would remain relatively contingent and reversible, the subjective assertions or claims of one individual or group remaining open to challenge by other groups with different objectives or interpretations (for example, a young leader’s claims to chiefly authority), can be rendered by video in the form of objective public realities. The representation of transient events in a medium like video, with its capacity to fix the image of an event and to store it permanently in a form that can circulate in the public domain, objectively accessible to all in exactly the same way, make it a potent means of conferring upon private and contingent acts the character of established public facts. The properties of the medium itself may in this way be seen to confer a different kind of social reality on events than they would otherwise possess.

Here, then, is another way in which the mediation of social reality by indigenous media may involve different cultural and conceptual mediations than in the case of ethnographic film. The medium mediates its own properties as a permanent, objective, publicly circulating representation to the indigenous culture’s consciousness of social reality. The Kayapo penchant for using video not only to document historic encounters with Brazilian state power but internal political events as well, such as meetings of leaders or the founding of a new village, may be understood in part as an attempt to infuse these events with the more potent facticity and historical permanence conferred on Western political events by Western telemedia. The notion of an objectively determined social reality permanently fixed by public documents, which many non-literate societies first acquired through the medium of writing, has come to the Kayapo and some other contemporary non-literate peoples through the medium of video. To this extent, it seems fair to say that video has contributed to a transformation of Kayapo social consciousness, both in the sense of promoting a more objectified notion of social reality and of heightening their sense of their own agency by providing them with a means of active control over the process of objectification itself: the video camera.

Video as political rhetoric

I now want to discuss a quite different kind of video, which brings out a number of different ways in which indigenous cultural categories, in this case forms of political conflict-resolution and the rhetorical tropes of political oratory, may serve as schemas for the construction of a visual representation of a political event. This is an excerpt from a video shot and edited by Mokuka of a meeting of Kayapo leaders in his home village of A’ukre. Called ‘Peace between chiefs’, it is the only product of the Kayapo Video Project thus far to have a version subtitled in another language – in this case English.

[Video cut 12: meeting of Kayapo leaders and Funai officials]

The meeting in question was called to bring an end to a dispute between two senior Kayapo chiefs. The dispute had been fomented by the Brazilian Indian Agency, FUNAI, in an attempt to undermine Ropni (known in the international press as Ronly), who had recently scored a smashing international financial and political success on a tour with the Rock star, Sting, to raise money and political support for the demarcation of a new Kayapo reserve. FUNAI, jealous of Ropni’s financial and political clout (at that point considerably greater than its own) instigated Pombo, a rival of Ropni and chief of a different Kayapo community, to challenge Ropni’s leadership and to proclaim himself as the
new paramount chief and spokesman of the Kayapo na-
tion (fictitious positions to which Ropni himself had
never pretended). The Brazilian press gleefully fell in
with this campaign, but Pombo failed to win support
from the Kayapo themselves, and eventually FUNAI,
through which Kayapo representatives Payakan, was
forced to arrange the meeting of which this video was
made, formally bringing the dispute to an end with a
public acknowledgement of Ropni's victory and Pombo's
ignominious defeat.

Mokuka's video was made as a record of this event
for Kayapo who were not able to attend the meeting
itself. He begins by showing the arrival of the main
Kayapo chiefs in a sequence indexing their relative im-
portance. Next he shows the arrival of the FUNAI of-
cials, including an episode of horseplay with Ropni in
which they act like old friends: the scene is cut on the
sentence, 'The most important thing in life is friends'.
The irony is not lost on Kayapo audiences, fully aware
that the whole attack on Ropni had been instigated by
FUNAI to begin with. The deft framing of the event by
these two opening sequences is immediately followed
by an interlude of ceremonial dancing. This might seem
oddly irrelevant to a Western viewer, but to a Kayapo
audience it appears as an integral part of the proceed-
ings, since the joining of the representatives of the
communities of the disputed leaders with members of
the host community in the common ritual performance
prefigures the reaffirmation of collective peace and
solidarity the meeting was called to confirm.

Finally, the meeting itself is edited to show those fea-
tures of greatest significance to Kayapo viewers. Only
the speeches of the more senior chiefs are included, with
Mokuka explaining in his Kayapo narration that the
younger men respectfully repeated what was said by
their elders. Most of the content of the speeches was
cut, but the introductory passages in which the speakers
itemize and affirm their kinship relations with one
other are carefully preserved. Important Kayapo
metaphors of solidarity and community are also in-
cluded when employed by a speaker. The extended in-
terplay of metaphors of sexual potency, self-restraint
and fertility through which the two main protagonists,
Ropni and Pombo, code their respective victory and
concession, never once making explicit reference to the
actual dispute at issue, is employed as the framework of
the final segment of the video. Throughout, the content
and sequential ordering of the video follow the rhetori-
cal tropes and structuring forms of Kayapo oratory and
political procedure.

'Voices', 'other' and otherwise
Letting the Others' voices be heard, or at least read
alongside that of the ethnographer in heteroglossic or
polyphonic texts, is one of the distinctive themes of
what has been called the 'new ethnography'. The use of
media like video by indigenous peoples shares with this
new ethnographic turn a concern with the expression of
indigenous voices, but the similarity between the two
genera stops here. Indigenous film- or video makers
are not interested in producing 'dialogical' texts, with their
overtones of subtle cooptation of the so-called Others' voices,
which implicitly serve by their presence to legitimize the voice of the ethnographer within the
same text. Nor are they concerned with the political and
epistemological questions currently bedevilling Western
ethnography. They are, on the other hand, clearly inter-
ested in not leaving to Western commentators the 'last
word' about themselves (Tyler's rationale for the
polyphonic text as an ethnographic form: Tyler 1986),
and in using their own video and Western telemedia to
make their voices heard - and in having the last word
themselves if they can manage it.

A case in point: when I was with the Kayapo in July,
a scandal exploded in the Brazilian news media about
the alleged rape of a Brazilian girl by the Kayapo
leader, Payakan. In the Brazilian media, the case was
being built into a general attack on the Kayapo and
other indigenous peoples, with emphasis on the cor-
rupting effects of allowing them to control their own
lands and resources. Kayapo leaders, with considerable
restraint and collective discipline, had refrained from
replying, waiting for the storm to pass before making a
concerted statement on the case and the Brazilian
response to it on behalf of their people as a whole.
When I arrived with a video camera, however, they
seized the opportunity to have leaders, both male and
female, make statements which I could then subtitle
and get broadcast on Brazilian television, so that the
Brazilians could for a change hear the Kayapo side of
the story through their own media. Here then is another
facet of the Kayapo use of video media, in this case to
insert their own voices directly into the media of the
Western 'Other', an exercise that might better be char-
acterized as defiant discord than cooptative polyphony.
[Video cut for representatives of the Kayapo community by Payakan case]

Text of statement by Tu'tire, a woman from A'ukre now
living at Gorotire

He did not penetrate her! Her vagina remained empty! His
wife did not put in her hand, she only scratched her vulva! But
the whites are lying about it, they are liars and go about spreading these lies everywhere. This is what they are
doing!

Text of statement by Kaben's, a man from Gorotire

The whites are saying all these things out of hatred for us
Indians. All right, my kinsman did something minor with
this white woman. What exactly he did, only the two of
them know. But the whites have blown this up out of all
proportion, as a pretext for attacking us Kayapo.

Cultural mediation and 'hybridization' in the interethic situation
One of the most disconcerting things about free-ranging
‘Others’ to some current Western champions of cultural
‘difference’ is how little concerned they tend to be with
the ‘authenticity’ or cultural purity of their life-styles,
as defined from the base-line of nostalgic Frankfurter
notions of ‘traditional culture’. The realities of cultural
politics, in inter-ethnic situations like those in which
virtually all the World’s indigenous peoples now live,
put a premium on the ability of these minorities to in-
tegrate into their own cultures the institutional forms,
symbols and techniques by which the dominant society
defines its relations to them, and thus in some measure
to control them on their own terms. A condition of suc-
cess in this, and thus a prerequisite of cultural and
political survival, is the ability of a group to objectify
its own culture as an ‘ethnic identity’, in a form in
which it can serve to mobilize collective action in op-
position to the dominant national society and Western
world system. For contemporary indigenous peoples,
in other words, the objectification of their own cultures
typically forms one side of the struggle for cultural and
social survival, whose complementary aspect is the
hybridization of their cultures in Hall’s sense through
the incorporation of elements, techniques and perspec-
tives of the dominant culture. Indigenous media play a
key role in both aspects of this struggle.

All this means that indigenous peoples like the
Kayapo tend to be far more concerned with the pursuit
of inter-cultural adulteration, as far as possible on their
own social and cultural terms, than the maintenance of cultural virginity.

The Kayapo, at least, with characteristic panache, have thrown themselves into inter-cultural adultery on a grand scale. Since communal ceremonies are for them the supreme expressions of shared sociality, it seemed, to the Kayapo village of Kugenkrenken, a logical step to appropriate the most important national ceremony of Brazilian society, the celebration of national independence on the 7th of September. The appropriation of ceremonies from other indigenous societies such as the Juruna and Karaja is itself a traditional feature of 'authentic' Kayapo culture. These 'borrowed' ceremonies retain many of the original songs, elements of costume and choreographic patterns, but are recast into the forms of Kayapo social organization, with the dancers grouped by gender and age set. In the case of the Kugenkrenken celebration of the Sete de Setembro, they were advised and in part led by the new Brazilian teachers sent into the community by FUNAI, one of whose sons can be seen leading the drum corps. Despite their heavy-handed coaching, the Kugenkrenken turned out as usual organized for the big parade organized in men's and women's age sets. The community acquired appropriate musical instruments and uniform costume and dances, with suit and ties for the chiefs. They also acquired a video camera to record the occasion, with revenues from their new timber concessions. A son of one of the chiefs obtained the necessary instruction from another Kayapo video cameraman and shot the video from which I have extracted these excerpts.

[Video cut 14: Kayapo performance of Brazilian national independence ceremony]

This video was shot in 1989, when the ritual was performed for the first time. It had been kept in the village during the ensuing three years. I saw it for the first time only two months ago, and as far as I know am the first non-Kayapo to do so. I never saw anything like this in any other Kayapo community: to my knowledge none of the others have taken up the 7 Setembro on their own. I confess to having felt rather horrified when I saw it (it is not the aspect of my own culture of which I am most fond, and I did not like the reinforcement it seemed to provide of the Kayapo reputation in some quarters as a ritual organization of the Amazon). I was delighted when some Kugenkrenkens told me that they had abandoned the rite after only one more performance the following year, because 'they didn't like it'.

The ceremony of the 7 Setembro, as adopted, performed and photographed by the Kugenkrenken, is paradigmatic of the complexities and ambiguities attaching to the concepts of cultural 'authenticity', 'difference', and 'Otherness' in real situations of inter-ethnic coexistence. 'Difference' and identity in such situations may not appear contradictory or mutually exclusive to the indigenous people involved, but complementary and interdependent. One of the ironies of this fashionable discourse of 'Otherness' is that it tends to exaggerate the potency of Western representations to impose themselves upon the 'Others', dissolving their subjectivities and objectifying them as so many projections of the desire or gaze of the dominant West. It is therefore salutary to note that after trying out their own (creatively reworked) version of a key Western collective representation of nationhood, the Kayapo became bored with it and stopped. The inexcusably compelling gaze of the dominant West was in this case stymied by a simple cultural yawn from the unimpressed 'Other'.

It is also important to be clear that in appropriating the political ritual of the dominant nation state, the Kayapo were not simply passively succumbing to 'objectification' and absorption by an irresistible Western form of representation, but pursuing what they perceived as their own interests as they both conflicted and converged with those of the enveloping national society. They were, in other words, acting very much as 'subjects' of their own history as Kayapo.

After the flag-raising, the requisite 'patriotic' oratory consisted mostly of a passionate recitation of grievances against the Brazilian state, thus making it very clear that the Kugenkrenken perceived their performance of the national ritual as legitimating their expression of grievances against, and demands upon, the Brazilian nation, rather than simply acquiescing in its domination. The Kayapo, in other words, used the ceremony as an occasion for defiantly asserting their differences with the Brazilian state and society even as they asserted their place within the multi-ethnic Brazilian nation.

Let us suppose for a minute, however, that by some criterion the Kayapo of Kugenkrenken might be said to have definitively forfeited their 'Otherness', their distinctive character as Kayapo, through their adoption of the Independence Day ritual and perhaps other forms of the Brazilian cultural form. Their world then be Westerners, albeit of a rather aberrant sort, and as such presumably once again endowed with freely assertible, authentic subjectivity. This is the part I like about the radical discourse of Otherness. Either you are an authentic Other, and therefore still a subject, or you are an inauthentic Other, an objectified projection of the West, but therefore then part of the West, the culture of triumphant subjectivity, and therefore a born-again subject. The lucky indigenous can't lose!

Indigenous media and misplaced politics

For some post-modernist, avowedly 'political' critics of anthropological film and indigenous media, on the other hand, it seems that neither the indigenes nor anthropological film-makers can win, either as subjects or object(ific)ers. James Faris, for example, in his contribution to the last RAI Festival, is at pains to pour cold water on what he calls the 'curious optimism' of anthropologists about ethnographic film (video) and especially the growing troopers of the media of the media in the Amazon. He finds 'almost amoral' in the light of his own politically principled gloom about the representational crises of anthropology in general and anthropological film/video in particular. Faris specifically singles out the Kayapo and the work of the Kayapo Video Project as epitomizing all that is politically misguided, epistemologically mystified and existentially inauthentic in the project of indigenous media in general. In the context of the present review of Kayapo use of video, Faris's tract thus provides a useful illustration of the practical, theoretical and political implications of some of the main tenets of the post-modernist critique of ethnography, as well as some of the contradictions that result from trying to combine such a critique with 'politics', particularly a politics of the Left.

Every post-modernist, of course, is different from every other post-modernist, and Faris is no exception to this uniform post-modernist principle of difference. He is critical of the 'shallow optimism' of relatively moderate post-modernist reformists like Marcus and Fischer and their suggestions that 'reflective' or 'polyphonic' ethnographic texts might be a solution to what they (and he) call the Western 'crisis of representation', while drawing his main inspiration from the
more implacably corrosive Foucauldian critiques of representation and subjectivity, with sceptical epistemological twists and turns. But this is couched in a confused pastiche of claims drawn from various post-modernist canons, mostly simply asserted rather than argued, with no consistent attempt to confront the realities of any empirical (perish the word) case.

Faris’s basic claim is that representation, as a ‘Western project’, is absolutely destructive of the subjectivity of these non-Western Others’ unlucky enough to have their images caught by some representational medium like film or video, and that the camera (or camcorder) so fundamentally incorporates Western categories of visual and spatial ordering as to preclude the possibility that it could be used to convey or construct a non-Western cultural optic. The true name of the Western demon that so inexorably reduces all Others to mere ‘projections’ of its ‘gaze’ is, however, not technology or even political domination per se but ‘consumption’, or, more specifically, the ‘desire’ to consume Others as fetishized, commodified image-objects (Faris 1992: 171-2). Western consumerist desire and its objectifying gaze, embodied in Western audiences for films or videos produced by indigenous people, pre-emptively determine the form and content of such productions, making the indigenous use of cameras in itself a mere ‘pathetic gesture’ (175) devoid of cultural meaning or political significance.

Consistently with this view, Faris at some points divides the world into Western representers and non-Western presenters:

There has never been, to my knowledge, a film of them by them (or by us) for them ... Local people present themselves to each other — that is what we call culture — and this [i.e. their ‘presentation’, TT] ... has not up to now headed film or anthropology ... (174-5)

At other points, directly contradicting himself, he argues that precisely because the Others habitually represent themselves to themselves anyway, they don’t need Western techniques of representation like video:

It is not, of course, a matter of people having cameras for the first time. Nor is it a matter of defining culture or of new and changing self-definings of culture. People have been doing that for ages; they have always represented themselves to themselves. (176)

Which is it to be, to be Other as ‘presenter’ or as ‘representee’? The answer, of course, should be, ‘both’, since virtually all ‘presentation’ necessarily involves myriad embedded representations, linguistic, imagistic, social and conceptual (that, I would have thought, ‘is what we call “culture”’).

These confused and confusing assertions collapse when confronted with a real case like that of the Kayapo. Of course the Kayapo ‘present’ themselves to one another, but their culture also includes extremely elaborate representational forms like those illustrated in the examples of ritual and oratory presented (and represented) in this lecture. The Kayapo are so interested in video and its representational possibilities because they are keenly aware that the social circumstances affecting their presentation of themselves to one another are changing in ways that strain the capacity of their traditional modes of representation either to represent or reproduce. They are therefore interested in new media of representation, and are in turn using these new media in ways that affect and transform their culture and their conception of themselves. So, yes, it is very much ‘a matter of people having cameras for the first time’, and using them as tools for ‘defining culture’, in the process developing ‘new self-definings’ of what their culture is. Faris’s cavalier assertions to the contrary serenely proceed from his own theoretical first principles, never once, in his entire paper, pausing to consider how different-minded a reader of any of the non-Western Others with whom he purports to be concerned. His entire argument is in fact profoundly and unrelievably ethnocentric (a besetting vice of postmodern discourse on the Other), and in its own condescending construction of the West as the only viable subjectivity (‘we of power are the subjects’; 177) embodies precisely the disempowering impact of the West on non-Western cultures which it purports to decry. The same unselfconscious and unselfcritical ethnocentrism is evident in the series of counterfactual assertions he makes about the Kayapo, redefining their reality as a projection of his own ideological gaze without feeling the slightest obligation to offer any evidence in support of his claims. The Kayapo, he declares, are not the primary audience of their own videos, and hence their representations of themselves in them, down to and including such specific devices and techniques as framing and sequence, must obviously be determined by the alien Western standards of their primary audience, Western viewers (175). I have devoted a good part of this paper to demonstrating the contrary of each of these obiter dicta, specifically including Kayapo modes of framing and sequence. Faris further asserts that ...

... the means to realize both the power of the technology and its influence, and the motivations of cultural presentation for non-Kayapo consumption have not been the privilege of the Kayapo. (176)

He accordingly finds ...

... their use of video, as described by Turner, is rather forlorn. It is almost as if, now, they are equal partners with newsgatherers and photojournalists, [but they are not because they] enter [the global village] already situated by a West, which gives them little room to be anything more than what the West will allow. (176)

Against this, I have sought to describe how the Kayapo have managed to realize a significant measure of both the power of video technology and its influence; how in a variety of ways their representation of their own culture through video and their own use of video ‘for non-Kayapo consumption’ has proceeded from their own conscious motivations; and how they have succeeded, in no small part through their use of media technology, in gaining some significant and descriptively different from what the ‘West’ as embodied by the Brazilian state, the World Bank, and various capitalist ranchers, miners, loggers and land speculators had sought to ‘allow’ them. In the most concrete terms this ‘room’ now amounts to a series of reserves totalling roughly the area of Scotland for a total population of around 4,000 Kayapo, all won in a series of successful political struggles within the past ten years. Not bad for a bunch of de-subjectified projections of the Western gaze.

It is clearly very important to Faris to deny what the Kayapo have in fact achieved, in order to carry his more general point about the futility and deceptive practices of indigenous media projects. His hostility to indigenous media arises in turn directly from his commitment to a post-modernist theoretical agenda focused around the conception of representation as a sort of Western cultural equivalent of radioactive waste, with the power to corrupt or destroy any Third- or Fourth-World culture with which it is brought into contact. Representation is our thing, ‘a Western project’, and thus filmic versions of this, irrespective of who’s filmic, are going to be inevitably Western projects so long as we consume them. The subject of ethnographic film will always be object, no matter who does the filming, so long as we are the viewers. The West is now everywhere ... in...
structures, minds, technologies. The epistemic privilege ... permeates and dramatically influences most possible projects of others' presentations of themselves to us. [Such projects are not co-constructions, they are one-way filters. The message is that Western representation, in some way which Faris never feels the need to explain, is ir- resistible and absolutely dominating wherever it comes in contact with non-Western Others. Resistance is hope- less, for the very subjectivity of the Others is suborned and transformed into a mere projection of the dominant West. There is a powerful feeling of magical thinking about all this: the vampirich power to suck the subjectivity of the Other, reducing her/him to a mere objec- tified 'projection' of the desire of the Western con- sumer, which Faris attributes to the camera, is essential- ly akin to the belief so widely associated in the popular mind with the magical thinking of primitives and savages that the camera steals the souls of those whose pictures it takes.

Faris dismisses the employment of media tech- nologies like video by indigenous peoples as 'arraga- tion ... by an expansionist capital', but his argument derives from Foucault rather than Marx. For Faris, it is consumption by a Western audience, not production by whoever may actually make the video, that determines its character as representation, which in this case means its character as a commodity. Consumption in turn, Faris tells us, is the product of desire, and desires are felt by individual subjects. Production, with all its specific relations and conditions, is of no consequence. We have, then, a market-driven model, in which the products on offer are determined in form and content by their utility in satisfying individual consumers' sub- jective desires. Marginal utility, not social relations of production or political economic forces, or indeed so- cial forces of any kind, drives Faris's recession of 'ex- pansionist capitalism'. In his post-modern guise as the Evil Empire of representation, this 'capitalism' is en- visioned as imposing itself in an inexorable process un- troubled by internal contradictions, or the awkward propensity of historical capitalism to arouse resistant forms of subjectivity, critical representations and polit- ical activity in its exploited victims. Faris's 'capitalism' thus betrays its lineage, not from Marx, but from Foucault's notion of power, as a quasi-mystical, inex- erable effective force, unlocatable in specific social relations, which ultimately reduces itself to a sort of negative mana, an immaterial miasma of generalized nastiness.

Given these assumptions, the possibility that non- Western Others might actually empower themselves through the appropriation of the very Western tech- nologies of 'gaze', i.e. representation, which are sup- posed to transform them into passive zombies of capital becomes epistemological anathema, and any empirical evidence that it might have happened somewhere must clearly be denied to save the theory. Hence the other- wise perplexing intensity of Faris's assault on the Kayapo, and hence his categorical dismissal, on programmatic theoretical grounds, of the whole project of indigenous media. The specific political consequence of this post-modern trajectory across the political and epistemological spectrum from red to ultra-violet is thus the categorical assertion of the disempowerment of non-Western peoples and their absolute subordination to the 'representations' of 'expansionist capitalism'.

I am in total agreement with Faris and the others who argue in similar vein that this is a political position. What I find puzzling is their representation of it as a critique from the radical Left, when its ideological af- finities and practical political implications are so clearly on the Right, converging with conservative neo-liberal free-market economics, arguing the inevitability of Western/capitalist world hegemony and programmatic- ally denying the possibility of resistance or self-em- powerment by non-Western peoples. Faris's theoretical argument itself uncritically embodies the very effects he lays at the door of 'representation' and 'expansionist capitalism'.

Faris's attack on indigenous media thus has the vir- tue of bringing out with stark clarity the political and ideological implications of the broader post-modern at- tack on ethnographic representation while focusing them on a series of specific issues within the field of visual anthropology. The fundamental problem inheres in the self-limitation of this critique to issues of repre- sentation; in other words, its invertebrate textualism. That 'representation' should have become not merely the focus but often the limiting horizon of what purports to be a political critique is itself indicative that the real 'crisis of representation' is not 'of representation' but of the contradictory attempt to do political critique with concepts whose social, and therefore also political, roots have been cut. When social and political phenomena are seen only through the filter of the texts in which they are represented, and thus seen as repre- sentations, social and political relations become textual relations among representations, and it is a short jump to the proposition that textual relations among repre- sentations are social and political relations. The epitone of this confusion is the proposition that representation is itself a political force or agent, a means of material control over its objects or referents.

We might paraphrase Whitehead and call this the Fallacy of Misplaced Politics. As in the case of Hegel, the misplacement of politics in the de-materialized realm of logical and cultural categories results in a pro- gram of practical political disempowerment of material social actors; what began as a liberating critique be- comes, albeit unwittingly, a conservative brief for the hegemonic status quo. It also results in passive quietism. There remains nothing to be done, save to critize the political and theoretical aporia of what has already been done. As far as visual anthropology and indigenous media alike are concerned, Faris gives it to us straight: 'Perhaps we may help best by leaving them alone' (176). Whether we or they hold the camera, it's better to just keep the lens cap on.

The positive moment of (some) post-modern critique is its shift from a focus on textual structures to a focus
on the constructive activity of subjects. It unfortunately tends to neutralize the constructive ethnographic and analytical possibilities of a focus on constructive activity by employing it only as a principle of deconstruction of anti-constructivist approaches like Malinowskian empiricism. It is possible, however, to move in a different direction from the same point of departure, and approach the ethnography, and theoretical analysis, of cultural representation through the study of the activities of producing them. This is the turn being taken by a number of contemporary theorists in communication and visual anthropology, for instance Caldarola in his call for making the "imaginary process" the focus of ethnographic inquiry or Ginsburg's notion of mediation to which I referred at the beginning of this talk (Caldarola 1988: Ginsburg n.d.).

Working with the production of indigenous visual media, observing the techniques of camera work and editing, and also the social activities and relations through which videos are made, used and controlled, provides an opportunity to study the social production of representations rarely approached in non-visual ethnography, and different again from the insights afforded by ethnographic film. I would suggest that approaching the study of cultural categories in this way can be a salutary corrective to the historic bias of the discipline, inherited from both Durkheimian and Anglo-American positivism, towards conceiving of categories only in the static form of classification or collective representations, and not in the active form of schemas for producing classes or representations.

A theoretical approach of this kind, as I have further suggested, is not inherently opposed to or exclusive of a political approach to supporting indigenous media as a means of indigenous empowerment and self conscientization. My own involvement with Kayapo media started as a politically motivated effort along these lines, rather than from theoretical premises. I have found, however, that working to promote political empowerment through media has converged both conceptually and practically with the theoretical interests of many visual anthropologists in image production and the role of media (particularly indigenous) as mediators of social and political activity.

should anthropologists pay their respondents?

vinay kumar srivastava

Vinay Kumar Srivastava is a doctoral candidate in social anthropology at King's College Cambridge.

i

I began thinking of the issue of payment to respondents in the initial phases of a fieldwork with the Raikas - the caste of traditional camel-breederers - of western Rajasthan in north-west India.

My stay in their hamlet, which I had first studied in Bikaner, was facilitated by a local Raika school teacher. He mostly lived in Bikaner town, and on week-ends he visited the hamlet where he owned one of the three cemented (paccia) houses. He not only introduced me to his extended family, but also provided me with an out-house to live.

After a few days of fieldwork I discovered that the others in this hamlet apart from his family were particularly friendly. Whenever I went to their male gatherings, they would all turn quiet, and if I stayed, one by one they would leave. Frustrated and dismayed, I would return to my out-house. A couple of weeks elapsed. I was unable to break the barrier.

I might have been able to think of a strategy to befriend them had I known why I was being treated in such a manner. Having conducted fieldwork in other parts of India, I intuitively knew that it was not the usual lukewarm response anthropologists receive at the beginning of their research. My salutations (Ramashama, namaskara) to them did not go unanswered; however, they lacked the warmth I expected after having been there for weeks. My interaction was painfully confined to the teacher's family, and I was sensitive to being labelled as 'the teacher's friend from Delhi' (master-ji ra Dilliwala bhalia). I knew that this reputation would destroy my chances of becoming familiar with the rest of the hamlet.

I quickly learned that there were two factions in this hamlet – the teacher's and the rest – although it was an extended kin group. Whenever I asked the teacher and his family members why they did not have cordial relations with the rest of the hamlet, their reply consisted of stories of nasty and evil deeds their neighbours had relentlessly executed against them. These stories ranged from stealing to witchcraft, from argument to fight. I was also assured that whatever information I needed would be available from them, so I should stop worrying about the others.

To understand this situation and, more particularly, to conduct peaceful and unrestricted fieldwork, I knew that I had to move into a neutral space. On the pretext of being accustomed to working at night when there was no electricity, I shifted from the teacher's out-house. With difficulty, I eventually learned to manage both factions, and could move freely from one part of the hamlet to another without receiving frowns from either group. I gave the impression of a person who was keen to speak to all, and not one interested in interpersonal squabbles.

As time went by, the reasons for factional enmity became clear. Many events, one related to another, were responsible, but an important one was the payment made to some and not to others by an outside agency. It could be argued that this selective payment served to underline and aggravate pre-existing conflicts. Even today both parties talk about this issue, although the facts are tailored according to each one's stand-point.

ii

Some years before my arrival (1989), a team of film makers came to this hamlet. They got in touch with the teacher, as I did, because he happened to be at that