

'What You Thinkin' About, Little Horse?'

Coniston Muster: Scenes from a Stockman's Life (1972)

A score of donkeys...gathered about our caravan in the night! The absolutely handsomest cowboy, a man named Jack. Lovely scenes at evening when the horses come to the soakage to drink. More mountains than I ever expected to find; one of them Leichhardt, truly grand. Winsome kiddies in the school. All in all many reasons to think that a very good film indeed is in the offing.

Roger Sandall

Coniston Muster was no disappointment. Indeed, it is one of the most popular films with Aboriginal audiences that the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies produced,¹ appeared at the Festival dei Popoli in Florence, the San Francisco International Film Festival, and was one of the films shown at the *Premières Rencontres Internationales d'Audiovisuel Scientifiques*, in Paris, in 1976. Forty years after its making, it still impresses.

It is a disobedient film, refusing to limit itself to any one particular means of presentation or orthodoxy about how to construct an ethnographic film. Observation, voice-over narration, inter-titles, subtitles, and explanation and commentary by a gifted storyteller/participant all contribute to this rich little work where there is no 'dead' time, where we dwell economically with place, people and animals. Most radically, the person with whom we spend most time and the owner of the film, is Aboriginal. And it is scenes from the life of the Aboriginal stockman, Coniston Johnny, that give the film its vitality, in 1972 and now.

From the start, we know the film is about country. Along with the camera panning across the proverbial dry brown land from above, Roger Sandall's voice comes in to tell us about the very particular country that it is:

In a good year, this country may get ten inches of rain. In a bad year, nothing at all. Even when it rains, the grazing's poor. The land will carry only about four head of cattle per square mile.

Once we're told we're looking at Coniston Station, an eight-hundred and forty square mile property in the Northern Territory, Sandall cuts to focus on Bryan Bowman, labelled 'Leaseholder' of the place. Ready to light his pipe, with his old felt hat and ragged face, he could be a prototype for an Aussie postage stamp. We learn a little of his history, the fact that he's got two other stations in the territory and a number of business interests. And that he lives in Alice Springs with his Aboriginal wife. Bryan has been living in Central Australia since the 1920s, and while we're learning about him, the camera situates him amidst craggy hills to match his face with no hint of condition.

When we cut to Coniston Johnny, named and labelled 'Head Stockman', we see a man with an old aviator cap of black leather and brown fur perched on his head, a couple of days' growth of white beard and a white and salmon-pink striped shirt. He looks to be directing himself to someone near the camera. And he has a bit of a squint in his right eye, which we'll learn about in the course of the film. Like Bryan, Johnny doesn't speak at this stage, but as the camera returns to the landscape, we learn he is one of the Anmatjara people, who have been here for a very long time. Mount Leichhardt, on the northern boundary of the station, is one of their sacred places. Johnny learned his stock work as a youngster from the man who had Coniston in the 1920s, and since then, he has worked on many other stations too. At the time of the film's making, he's there getting ready for the annual muster. He himself will take us through the process, as men, children, horses, dogs and equipment are gotten together.

Looking at captured footage, Johnny describes what different men are doing; putting swags together, having a bit of breakfast, and so on. He identifies 'old Johnny' walking around, and 'Old Toby', standing with 'a black coat on him'.² (Coniston Johnny is well over fifty himself—but the naming is not so much about age as about a way of talking with familiarity and affection.) Little boys working with the men and taking part in this readying are 'Toby's kid' and Jackie's kid, John'. 'That's Jackie', he points out a younger, tall and slender man, graceful in his movement, 'gettin' tea or sugar for that kid'.

There's old Paddy—poor old bugger (he laughs).
Here's Jackie havin' the breakfast. I had the breakfast this morning early.
There's Morris, standing on the top of the truck.
Top of the Land Rover. Loadin' them up.
Frankie galloping round. Pickin' em up swags.

With our cast of players for the event, we watch a car drive around behind another one with a spare wheel on the front, and see the old tin shed as the horn bips. The editing here leaves us time to contemplate the readying scene and an environment.

While Johnny's narration gave him the first words, Bryan will now give an opinion.

IF PEOPLE
WANTED
PROPER HOUSES

says a title card,

WHAT WOULD
YOU SAY?

asks the next one.

'Oh, I wouldn't disapprove of it', says Bryan, who goes on to tell us that the people themselves are not 'the slightest bit interested' in things you are supposed to do by law. As he speaks, and the word, 'discourses', wouldn't be out of place here, since he appears to be used to giving his opinions, he has a particular way of tilting his head from side to side. As he addresses the camera, though in typically (outback) Australian fashion, he doesn't open his mouth widely, we're aware of his crooked and missing teeth. This is not a man who has given himself the degree of attention well-heeled city-dwellers are accustomed to. Bryan links housing to tribal customs. Any houses would need to be portable, because if anyone died in a place, people would have to move from there. He gestures to a spot on the creek where two babies had died and the people had shifted. Moreover he sees the common sense of it, if there are infectious diseases. There's a reasonableness about what he's saying.

At the same time, he speaks about Aboriginal people as if he himself doesn't have an Aboriginal wife in the town.

But from opinions, Sandall returns to doing, to processes dear to him. And to Coniston Johnny's narration, as stockmen work with horses. Johnny puts himself and us into the scene as a piebald is encouraged to quiet down and have a saddle put on him. We're instructed, and the way Johnny talks, it's like he's there right now, involved, talking with the horse, who may have a sore back. When I say we're being 'instructed', conventional interpretation would limit itself to our learning about ideas and beliefs, getting information about the stockmen's tasks and lives at the close and more general level. But film, and certainly this particular one, can do more than this. We are privilege to people's being, and have what David MacDougall has called a whole *social aesthetic*,³ something of the life-world of the station-workers.

In this world with which we are presented, or perhaps better, which we are able to accede to, we can practically taste the dust in the environment as we hear the wind on the soundtrack, and as back inside the picture, we have shots of Johnny and a younger man on horses, mustering through the mulga scrub, and scenes of him and younger riders following after steers. Their riding is impressive, as they balance on their horses through rough country. It's visceral. The work looks hard. But the scenes are precisely beautiful because this is a part of the harsh but attractive environment the men live and work in, that they move through with frequency and grace, and through which they forge their identity.

MacDougall began 'Social Aesthetics and the Doon School' with a well-articulated truism that applies more generally than to the relatively closed enclave of the Eton-inspired school in India, on which he focuses in that essay. It certainly applies to this particular station environment in the dry centre of Australia. He wrote:

There are moments when the social world seems more evident in an object or a gesture than in the whole concatenation of our beliefs and institutions. Through our senses we measure the qualities of our surroundings—the tempo of life, the dominant patterns of color, texture, movement and behavior—and these coalesce to make the world familiar or strange.⁴

MacDougall used the term 'aesthetics' in a way that was 'closer to what the Greeks originally meant by *aisthesis*, or "sense experience"', than to our present way of using the word in relation to beauty, and the valuation of art.⁵ Social aesthetics relates to culturally patterned sense experience. It also includes, says MacDougall, 'much that derives from nature rather than culture, such as the geographical setting of a community, and even much in the life of its members that is onerous but to which they become habituated'.⁶ Crucial for us, is his argument that although

aesthetics may not be independent of other social forces, neither is it merely the residue of them. My working premise has been that the aesthetic dimension of human experience is an important social fact, to be taken seriously alongside such other facts as economic survival, political power, and religious belief. It is important because it often matters to people and influences their actions as much as anything else in their lives...

The social aesthetic field, composed of objects and actions, is in some respects the physical manifestation of the largely internalized and invisible 'embodied history' that Bourdieu calls *habitus*.⁷

Back in our film-world, title cards come up:

WHAT HURT YOUR EYE?

And:

YOU WERE
CHASING
BULLOCKS?

Johnny tells the story of cutting through mulga to block some cattle and getting hit, right across his eye. He shows the eye that was wounded, from a small stick going into it. He couldn't see:

I couldn't sleep.

I couldn't sleep.

Been hurtin' all night.
I couldn't sleep.
Make me nearly cry.
Then I went back to the eye lotion.
Put it on.
Then...made me a little bit right.

Sandall asks from off camera:

Did you get anything at the hospital for it?

And Johnny responds:

No.
I couldn't went in.
I had a lot of work to do.

Logically, we again cut to him working, chasing cattle with Jackie, yelling, swearing after a beast. We attend to the motion of the men and animals, see the dust rise from the earth and grass. Cattle are huddling together and making their own noise, before we see Johnny trying to tie up an animal that kicks him to the ground. 'You bastard, you bastard...!', says the stockman, sounding like many a worker with cattle, as he hits at the beast's hind leg repeatedly. Many white stockmen couldn't have gone immediately to see a doctor either when injured this way. But they most likely could and would have soon after.

In a letter to his wife, Philippa, while shooting, Sandall wrote of Bryan's 'pre-19th century conception of pastoral management'. The physical damage 'done to man and beast is fearful', he said, and we learn that the 'splendid "Coniston Johnny"' is in fact, 'largely blind in one eye'. Sandall writes of an incident while they were there filming involving another crash in the mulga that badly bruised Johnny's leg and his head and grazed 'a tree at top speed'. Likewise, the head 'tailer', Frank, who had a long splinter of mulga deep in his right leg had come to them for medicine they might have that could help. They had Medicrome, plaster and Codeine. Sandall reminded his wife that he was talking of men in their late

forties, fifties and older. While these days we have much more access to accounts of Aboriginal people working on cattle stations, this film has captured something of the damage, something of Johnny's travails, in a most economical and understated way—by his own account.

Peter Loizos was enthusiastic about *Coniston Muster*:

It is quite compelling in its hold on the attention, and its images and persons are vivid, memorable. It is a film which allows us to hear unaccustomed voices, and think about what were then, for many whites, new issues, under the guise of being 'scenes from a stockman's life'. It has strong 'entertainment value' of the kind which could get it a prime time television slot, but carries implicit messages which are not signalled in the title, subtitle, or the surface action (horses, cattle, excitement, manly skills etc.).⁸

The film 'touches' he says, on 'class, power, and race, working by allusion, juxtaposition, and elicited answers'.⁹

Let me suggest, however, that it isn't really a question of Sandall getting across issues *under the guise of* the scenes we see—as if it were a question of subtext. The scenes, even glimpses of aspects of life, do some careful and wonderful work. If the 'issues' are not signalled in the title, they are openly there in the texture of the film, in the very way that the film 'touches' on things. *Coniston Muster's* mixed means of presentation enabled them to be part and parcel of what we engage with when we engage with those in it, together with their work and surroundings. The 'surface action' is no overlay to what is most important about the film. Rather, it's a large part of the people's lives, which we have privileged access to enter.

Indeed, there is a way that in my own writing about the film I've sold short some of might be wrongly labelled 'surface action'. When Johnny and the others ride on their horses through the scrub, I mentioned the beauty. And I alluded to the men moving through the pictured environment where they do their job, something involving skill and through which they identify themselves. But I sold the scene short because it's hard to talk about, whether in a scholarly article or for a more general audience. It risks turning into what we call 'purple prose'. If we want a faithful account of what is pictured, however, we need to evoke with

some adequacy the speed and excitement involved, the pleasure for us of the motion of the men and animals moving through the vegetation. Just to label it 'lyrical' might be one way of avoiding the problem of what to do with such sequences on film—which has some relationship to the problem of what we do with such intervals in life. I want to at least point to the *vitality*, and *exaltation* involved—and not 'overly socialize' what we engage with here.

Writer John Fraser on the work of Eugene Atget is a help here, even though a French photographer of the city of Paris might seem from another world from a New Zealand-born filmmaker working in remote Central Australia. But Fraser writes of Atget's photographs presenting agents who embody 'vital city processes', and of the photographs being concerned with 'the pulsation of life'.¹⁰ They are of course sociological, but can't be reduced to that. So too Atget's pictures of the countryside are characterized by 'their unmatched evocation of natural *energies*', and a 'pervasive air of aliveness', says Fraser.¹¹ On film, Yugoslav director, Dušan Makavejev, who was applauded around the world for his decidedly non-mainstream films in the 1960s and 1970s, is one of the few writer/directors I've found who approach what seems to me to be some of the multilayered force of what is going on in such a sequence as I've mentioned. He observed in relation to ordinary American fiction films, for example:

Take westerns, for instance. Take horses, landscape, trains, guns. These are documentary items, and there is real action being done with them, in them, though the framework may be purely fictional. You get this strong impression of a life force at work, and bad guys against good guys become just a very simple excuse for *a kind of biological display*. Like the fantastic chases—real people, real horses, real rocks—this is behavior *on an ecological level*.¹²

Ironically, in what we know as 'art' cinema, where directors and actors consciously attempt to go directly to the existential depths of characters and environments while dealing with serious ideas, this engaging vitality, this 'life force' can be lacking. *Coniston Muster*, however, while communicating on issues like class, power and race, I think 'touches' us both on this *personal* and *ecological* level—which as in life, are one.

Sandall helped illuminate some of the *Coniston Muster's* magic when he wrote of the effect of certain action scenes looked at, remembered, addressed, and freshly participated

in by Johnny, where 'his voice is self-evidently unrehearsed, undirected, and uncontrolled'.¹³

He suggested:

During scenes in which a wild bull is released from a stockade in the early morning he begins to re-enact the desperate ride of the man who brings the animal back, and as he cries out in warning to the rider, past and present, objective graphic and subjective authentication, the viewer and the viewed, become for the moment phenomenologically fused.¹⁴

Letting Things Live

Sandall opened his article, 'Observation and Identity', with quotations from D.H. Lawrence on Paul Cézanne, and from André Bazin, on Vittorio de Sica's neo-realist film, *The Bicycle Thieves* (1948).¹⁵ Whether we are speaking of apples, people, landscapes, animals, or anything else that exists, he suggested these writers were arguing the virtues of letting things live—in painting, photography and film—in and of themselves.

In this essay of key importance for what came to be called 'observational cinema',¹⁶ Sandall noted that Bazin's English-language translator, Hugh Gray, suggested that Bazin's enthusiasm for individuality echoed that of theologian, Duns Scotus. This was possible, wrote Sandall, since it was of a piece with 'Bazin's generally Franciscan outlook'.¹⁷ And it was of a piece with his ethical-intellectual formation in phenomenology and existentialism. Sandall's quotation from Bazin related to where the 'true merit' of *The Bicycle Thieves* lay. It was for Bazin, 'in not betraying the essence of things, in allowing them first of all to exist for their own sakes, freely; it is in loving them in their singular individuality'.¹⁸ It was in reference to these last lines that Gray noted we had the echo of 'the epistemology of Duns Scotus, Franciscan'.¹⁹ Gray also quoted Robert Bridges's suggestion that for Scotus, by 'a first act of knowledge, the mind has a correct but vague intuition of the individual concrete object as a most special thing', and concluded that we could imagine how 'so much emphasis on the *value of the concrete thing*, the object of sense', must have appealed to the poet in Gerard Manley Hopkins, a volume of whose poems he was introducing.²⁰

I think it's both useful and enlightening for us to think about the film criticism of Bazin and a certain kind of film-making in relation to Scotus and his importance for

Hopkins's notion of 'inscape'—his word for the complex of characteristics that give all phenomena their uniqueness, 'the dearest freshness deep down things', as he put it in one of his poems.²¹ Bazin's serious attention to film was of pivotal importance to the emergence of film studies generally, and certainly for Sandall's thinking and practice. His approach was underpinned by a commitment to reality, a belief in the 'ontological priority and primacy of the real'.²²

Faithfulness on film has been enabled by technical developments that have enlarged 'the possibilities of observation, to bring the capabilities of cameras and sound-recorders ever closer to the human eye and ear', Sandall notes.²³ It was in the late 1950s and early 1960s that the wide-angled lens and zoom were combined with light-weight 16 mm. cameras, and then synchronous sound. But these things can only shed light on our efforts to understand if both the camera person and film editor (who tend to be the same in ethnographic films) are committed to *truth-telling*, to honouring the integrity of events. For Sandall, it is John Marshall, with his 'skill and prescience' with his viewfinder while filming, 'who leads all others in his mastery of the structural integrity of events'.²⁴ And where new machinery and techniques were particularly needed, 'where the gap was widest between observer and subject', that is, in ethnographic film, it was Jean Rouch who seized his opportunities, very nearly closing that gap. It is in the tradition established by Rouch, Sandall argued, 'that the finest ethnographic work is still being done'.²⁵

Sandall applauded David MacDougall's then recent film, *To Live With Herds* (1971), which, he said,

offers an admirable harmony of photographic and editorial styles. It is built up of substantial intact events and coherent units of conversation. The conversations often take us into an inner world of memory and feeling: in few other films do tribal people speak so naturally and informally about themselves.²⁶

He also writes with admiration of David Hancock and Herb Di Gioia's film, *Chester Grimes* (1972), featuring an old woodsman in Vermont, who 'knows personally every fold in the hills and every abandoned habitation', a character who talks continuously in the manner of 'a man thinking out loud'.²⁷ Here we have the *duration* so favoured by Bazin, as 'the film is built on a series of complete and rounded episodes in which single camera takes often

encapsulate whole events'.²⁸ Indeed, Bazin's preference for a 'cinema of duration', Sandall suggests, boils down to 'little more than strict adherence to the old unities of time and space',²⁹ unities that are so important to him as well, both in the earlier ritual films and in *Coniston Muster*.

Animals may observe, wrote Sandall, in a major strand of his argument, 'but only men interpret—if by interpretation we mean the organisation of meaning into language'.³⁰ Yet if we were to side 'with the rest of the animal kingdom' we might dare to question our compulsion to transform 'matter into symbolic meaning'.³¹ He notes that Susan Sontag had in mind the amount of evidence for the ambiguity of the interpreter's role when she declared that: 'Interpretation is the revenge of intellect upon the world'. And long before this, 'we had been quietly warned, *traduire est trahir*'.³²

Sandall noted the 'ill-concealed strain between the exigencies of reality and the needs of the story-teller' that made for a relatively common fault in documentaries.³³ Despite their strengths, beauties and pleasures, scenes in 'highly interpretative' classics like Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1948) and Sergei Eisenstein's *The General Line* (1929) have dated, he notes:

What sort of sense do they now make? What sort of sense did they ever make? It is not merely the hindsight of ecological knowledge and political revelation which makes both these works seem to glamorise ways of life or political policies (the exploitation of resources, the 'modernisation' of a conservative peasantry) which had little relation to the felt interests of the people they portrayed.³⁴

On the other hand, 'the cultural meaning of the scenes' in a film like Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) 'can never date', he argues, because their strength 'is that of the irreducible identity of Nanook the man himself'.³⁵ Of key importance is a responsibility to whatever is before the lens,

because the mutual claims of the identities on either side of the camera must be brought more nearly into balance if either is in the long run to survive.

By this criterion many of the richest images to have come down to us intact are precisely those displaying an equilibrium of trust and respect.³⁶

Fundamental to science, Sandall argues, is the practice of allowing others 'to share observations one has made oneself'.³⁷ In important respects,

the aims and procedures of both science and observational film-making are similar. Each admires the habit of truth. Each tries to keep an open mind. This does not imply the priority of observation to theories or goals. On the contrary: observation refines theories and helps to define goals. It is empirical. It helps to identify mistakes and put them right. It has a passion for the specific.³⁸

Sounding very like Siegfried Kracauer, in his *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960),³⁹ Sandall was concerned about what happened to people before the camera in ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic films where there is a wide cultural gap between those before the cameras and those behind (that gap which he praised Rouch in his effort to close). He noted that in *Desert People* (1966), which did constitute 'a testament to human dignity and endurance', director Ian Dunlop rightly wanted to 'humanise a subject not noted for humanity in the past'.⁴⁰ But if the Aboriginal people in *Desert People* get to 'live of themselves', they 'do not speak for themselves'. Instead,

Amidst landscapes of lunar desolation a remote and unknown people move voicelessly about, and though there's strong evidence to the contrary—scenes of children happily at play—the general impression the film leaves is that not only the desert but its inhabitants are bleak, emotionless, and austere'.⁴¹

Likewise, in the picturing of Japanese peasants in *Shindo* (1960) and Algerian villagers in the overtly politically engaged *Ramparts of Clay* (1971), once again, nobody speaks, says Sandall. Reviews of the latter film 'gravely noted the "sombre existence of the desert dwellers" and the "long burning silence of their lives"'.⁴² Sandall argues:

Speech maketh man, so why are these men mute? What evidence is there that Japanese peasants and Arabs and Aboriginals are so silent? Very little. What they have in common is a social order held together by oral tradition, one in which not

only daily life but the whole memory of a people is carried along on an unending current of talk. The reason for the pervasive silence appears to be a combination of directorial method and 35 mm. techniques.⁴³

While Baldwin Spencer yearned for a panning mechanism in 1901 so that he could follow the Aboriginal dancers when they danced outside of his frame, and Flaherty used that device so well on his Akely camera not that many years later, by contrast, people in the 1920s and 1930s, Sandall argues, were less interested in developing radically innovative equipment, since observation was deemed less important and worthy than 'imaginative interpretation': 'Not the identity of the subject but its hidden meaning as discerned and expressed by the film-maker: this was what mattered'.⁴⁴

Rouch addressed this same point in his usual frank and flamboyant way, in 1974:

It would be interesting to study the style of the commentaries of ethnographic films since the 1930s—how they passed from the colonial baroque to adventurous exoticism, and then on to the dryness of a scientific report. Most recently they are characterized either by the shameful distance of anthropologists not wanting to acknowledge their passion for the people they study, or by an ideological discourse through which the filmmaker exports to the other the revolt that he has not been able to act upon in his own country.⁴⁵

MacDougall too has recently discussed the lack of demand on the part of filmmakers for the kind of revolutionary new equipment that Rouch and Brault and Sandall and Fitzgerald went on to develop. He noted that despite *Nanook* demonstrating a new use for film by providing a doorway we could step through imaginatively 'into the life of another people', in 1922, it 'inspired no imitators among anthropologists' unlike Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, published that same year'.⁴⁶ One reason that Flaherty lacked disciples among filmmakers and anthropologists, MacDougall suggests, was perhaps because 'the demonstrable humanity of Nanook and the details of his daily life were not for anthropologists the most pressing scientific issues of the day'.⁴⁷

Certainly for some of those preoccupied with questions of colonial domination and justice who believed that political exploration and exposure in relation to these was the

proper vocation of documentary film, *Nanook* was regarded as ignoring the social problems and realities facing the people he filmed with.⁴⁸ As for anthropology, it was as MacDougall puts it, at that time losing its vision. It was entering a 'dark age' as far as the visual was concerned.⁴⁹ Paradoxically, though participant-observation was becoming 'the cornerstone of anthropological practice' in the field, as far as the 'digested' product of anthropologists' efforts, published monographs, were concerned, 'anthropological interests had made a decisive shift away from the visible world of material objects to the invisible world of beliefs and abstract relations'.⁵⁰ In the production of knowledge, cultural translation was deemed more important than 'brute facts', or raw material.⁵¹

MacDougall nicely complemented what Sandall argued in relation to translating matter into symbolic meaning. In history and anthropology, he argued, methods that directly address the senses, such as photography and film,

tend to be treated similarly—that is, chiefly as adjuncts to formulating knowledge at a higher level of abstraction. In accepting this, historians and anthropologists preserve the value of knowledge as meaning, but they miss an opportunity to *embrace the knowledge of being*.⁵²

Where Sandall wrote of some interpretative filmmakers' betrayals, and their films' 'impatience to forgo reality',⁵³ MacDougall has more recently written of similar compulsions on the part of photographers and filmmakers, who 'live in a world so dominated by concepts that they find it difficult to look at anything attentively'.⁵⁴ Their thinking, judging, and assessment of what is not in any particular film but should be (according to whom, exactly, is a key question here), means they cannot engage with it with an open consciousness. He suggests that 'many filmmakers are afraid of looking',⁵⁵ fearing giving themselves unconditionally to what they see. It is a fear that none of us is totally free from, MacDougall believes, going on to suggest that it seems to him

that this fear is allied to our fear of abandoning the protection of conceptual thought, which screens us from a world that might otherwise consume our consciousness. For to be fully attentive is to risk giving up something of ourselves... If we are afraid to look honestly, and are afraid of our own responses, or of what

others may think of us, our looking will always be evasive. It is this kind of dishonest looking that does immeasurable harm to others and to society.⁵⁶

These things don't only apply to filmmakers, of course, but can be equally as important with audiences, scholarly and otherwise.

By contrast, what is there to engage with, if we can look and listen? MacDougall's way of putting it fits well with Sandall's praise of artists and writers letting things live in and of themselves. And what they say is highly relevant to scholarly methodology in the human sciences today, where respect for the empirical can still too often be confused with positivism. Says MacDougall:

In fiction films as well as non-fiction films, we use 'found' materials from this world. We fashion them into webs of signification, but within these webs are caught glimpses of being more unexpected and powerful than anything we could create. These may be qualities we discover in human beings or in the plenitude of the inanimate world. A good film reflects the interplay of meaning and being, and its meanings take into account the autonomy of being... In making films, wise filmmakers create structures in which being is allowed to live, not only in isolated glimpses but in moments of revelation throughout the whole work. These form their own connections above and beyond our intentions as filmmakers. This is why knowing when to desist in our interpretations is so important, to allow these moments to connect and resonate.⁵⁷

Coniston Muster is such a wise film.

Looking and Learning

Ten minutes into *Coniston Muster*, title cards ask:

BLACK STOCKMEN VERSUS WHITE
HOW DO THEY COMPARE?

We meet up with Bryan again, sitting with the flexibility of a young man or a child, one leg on the ground, the other bent, with his arm stretched out over his knee, and pipe in hand. Sitting in front of a fire, there are old bags behind him in the dirt, and a cat walks into the shot.

Addressing the question, Bryan believes that 'provided they've had the same amount of training, there's no difference'. But he goes on to contradict that, suggesting that the Aboriginal stockman has hereditary skills that probably make him superior as a musterer. When all was said and done, 'musterer is only another form of hunting and they are naturally hunters. Whereas white men are not necessarily men of the hunter type'. Churchill, when he formed the commandoes, says Bryan, wanted men 'of the hunter type'. The inter-title, 'A Second Opinion', makes way for more of Johnny's story-telling, all related to place—with plenty of amused opinion to boot.

Well I dunno, these whitefellers
You know they don't know any place, you know,
any place where the cattle run
Where the cattle livin'
In the rocks and...in the little waterholes.
Might be back up there somewhere (he gestures).
They don't know.
Them whitefellers gotta
walk along, walk along, just look along
like that they can see the cattle standing
over there on the flat, then, then
pick up that...
Take him home to dinner camp.
Never got any more...

He tilts his head and looks direct to the camera with a cheeky but subtle smile, and continues:

Then go back to the dinner camp

Then havin' a yarn, a yarn
When they eatin' dinner
Where you get that cattle?
I get that cattle over there on the flat.
And then, er...boy got the mob of bullocks.
Then, yes, where you get these bullocks?
I get 'em over there.

He makes a sound of astonishment, acting the amazed, somewhat naïve whitefella.

Oh..., I didn't find any.
Oh, we been find 'em alright...
Yes, we lucky to find them, yeh, hmm...
Oh, I couldn't go over there, I find them on the flat
Yes, the cattle went up in the scrub...

This won't be the last time we hear him tell a story about the whitefella's lack of hard work ethic, which makes for a nice inversion of certain whites, other than anthropologists, talking of lazy blacks.

We soon move on to looking and learning about 'Branding and "Cutting" the Calves', Johnny once again talking us through the process, step-by-step, putting us into the picture again. As we hear the noises involved and watch Jackie roping a beast, Johnny points out a young whitefella, Paul, in the picture, and Johnny himself is now in the action as the bullock's wrestled to the ground by the men and held down to be branded. The process continues with another beast being earmarked and cut and Johnny throwing away the testicles before a younger man has to ride the bullock away. We get to watch as the bullock bucks, as Johnny's narration encourages the younger rider's effort, and smiling, manages to stay on. We see a child sitting on a pole of the fence. Johnny points out that it's 'Toby's kid...learning and looking at 'em'. And we can't help but like the idea of the boy being part of the event, of seeing little children with a place and purpose when work is going on.

We have scenes of the children playing at working. Johnny narrates, exhorting the kids as we watch him sitting on the ground with them as they pretend to 'cut' a dog to make

him a 'bullock'. Jackie's curly-haired boy runs up to the camera, and his father plays with a dog as the boys practise roping. There's plenty of fun and laughter as one of the dogs, Spot, goes for Toby's boy, John, who's been tormenting him.

It's with the handsome cowboy Jack, as he tells his story about his droving days and a bad stampede, that another delightful scene unfolds. There is already humour in his story where drovers save themselves by climbing a tree, each by hoisting himself up over the back of a man called Paddy, who doesn't have a chance to get up himself. But as Jack sits in the grass, his little son's behind him, and once he starts telling his tale, evidently with the filmmaker/cameraman's full attention, the child starts climbing over him, fully aware of the camera. Jack doesn't interrupt his story as he gesticulates, moving his long, slender arms as he talks. There's a bit of harmless competition going on as the child places himself in front of Jack's face, blocking him, and smiling at us. It's the kind of scene we don't see much of on film, ordinary time between an adult and a child and it's full of affection. It's a long way from the edited 'talking head' interview we're more used to.

When we come back to Johnny talking onscreen, we will see that Sandall is aware of and capably incorporates the performative aspects of this individual character, whose voice and individual personality are given room to speak directly to us. Most of the time, Johnny's shoulders, chest and upper body are in view—and expressive. While Johnny's humour is dry but fulsome, Bryan's dry manner and body language are more recessive, more in the Australian laconic vein.

'Styles of self-presentation, and the ritualized and rhetorical aspects of small actions', MacDougall noted, 'were already important in ethnographic films when Erving Goffman and Edward T. Hall were drawing attention to such topics'.⁵⁸ When Colin Young was starting up his interdisciplinary Ethnographic Film Programme in the mid-1960s at the University of California, Los Angeles, it was not so much the anthropologists, but the sociologist, Harold Garfinkel, who was of key importance to the new enterprise, both methodologically and philosophically.⁵⁹ While anthropologists seemed so ambivalent about the use of film, Paul Henley (one of Young's and Di Gioia's later students) stressed this sympathy between Garfinkel's kind of ethnomethodological sociology, the study of the minute processes of everyday life, and Young's approach to cinema. Garfinkel, Young found, was strongly focused on the fact that the observational filmmakers would show things that

traditional anthropologists were often maddened by, because their methodologies weren't capable of capturing them. Said Young:

[H]e confirmed in our mind that if we were careful in how we approached subject matter and people, and if we trusted them in regard to what other people would find interesting, the amount of manipulation that we would have to do with the material was very little. So that was an aesthetic or a methodological issue which had to do with procedure and process.⁶⁰

And,

we said, let's be sure we understand the predicaments that the protagonists find themselves in. Everyone has predicaments, so it's a question of discovering what they are. That's to do with building up trust and intimacy with people. We were giving ourselves assignments on the assumption that everyone was interesting. But you had to find out what that interesting thing was. That was an exercise in human relations, not in filmmaking as such.⁶¹

It was less a question of everyone deserving their Warholian 'fifteen minutes of fame' than the fact that there was a 'grandeur' in people's lives that we could be witness to: 'I don't mean by making another life exotic but by knowing how to be close to what is actually happening in that other person's life. Not by romancing it'.⁶²

While Young did his M.A. in Theatre Arts at UCLA, and worked in the film industry before becoming a young Dean of the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre, his first degree in Scotland had been in philosophy. Henley suggests that Young's encounter with ethnographic film allowed him to explore his interest in people in a way that hadn't really been possible in work as a philosopher or filmmaker. However, while the general idea of the Ethnographic Film Programme he set up was intended to teach anthropologists about film and teach filmmakers about anthropology, he was struck by what he saw as a 'curious paradox about anthropologists' general attitudes to film.⁶³ On the one hand, says Henley, he found that they were

'over-optimistic about what film could do for them', i.e. that it could be used as sort of a scientifically objective recording medium. On the other hand, they didn't

actually seem to be all that interested in using this medium despite its supposed virtues.⁶⁴

It was agreed that the new technology was an asset, minimizing the intrusion filmmaking entailed. However, Henley stresses,

For Colin and his associates, the advantage of this lack of disturbance was that it permitted a greater degree of subjective engagement on the part of the filmmaker with his or her subject. For the anthropologists, on the other hand, the advantage was rather that it enabled a more objective, supposedly scientific form of filmmaking. As Walter Goldschmidt [then head of the Anthropology Department] himself was wont to put it, this new technology would allow films to be made of people acting exactly as they would have been had the camera not been there. This view is routinely quoted by Colin's protégées as exemplifying an approach that they regarded as the antithesis of what they were trying to do.⁶⁵

In his landmark article, 'Observational Cinema', Young had suggested that the faith many social scientists had in film as an 'objective recording instrument' was 'touching and almost sentimental':

Much of the energy that anthropologists have poured into film in the last decade has been based on the hope that they could be rescued from the subjectivity of their field notes, but they have not stopped to consider the problems that exist within film aesthetics about selectivity and subjectivity.⁶⁶

Young had worked with maverick anthropologist, Edmund Carpenter on a UNESCO project, had met Rouch, and despite the attitudes toward film of other UCLA anthropologists, still found them good company and 'good to explore ideas with'.⁶⁷ He met Sandall at the UNESCO Conference in Sydney in 1966, when he and Carpenter presented a paper. Rouch, Robert Gardner and Ian Dunlop too were present, and Young found debate there particularly lively. This was a time when Aboriginal and Women's Rights movement politics firmly entered university arenas. Women, for example, were required to leave the

room for the screening of films about certain Aboriginal male rites that were to be witnessed by men only. The eventual exit wasn't without prior discussion.

Young and Sandall would amicably argue a few years later about who invented the label, 'observational cinema', Young going on to put the term on the academic map in Paul Hockings' edited volume, *Principles of Visual Anthropology* in 1975. As Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz put it, Young echoed Sandall's 'characterization of approaches built around *seeing* as opposed to those built around *assertion*'.⁶⁸ Both essays, they say,

were critical in establishing the parameters of the new kind of ethnographic film. Both writers identified its distinctive aesthetic. Central was a commitment to the spatial unity of events and to duration. In particular, they underlined [the] importance of continuity (within the shot, between image and sound, between shooting and editing) and context (emplacement, the holding together of figure and ground) to observational cinema.⁶⁹

Neither Sandall's nor Young's essays implied a 'fly on the wall' perspective, nor a simple promise of 'objectivity'. Nor did they suggest the enforcing of any set of rules regarding construction. Varieties of ways to be true to the relationship between any one film's subject and its audience could be forged. Young included the point that 'the temperament of individual filmmakers' influenced the way they used the new opportunities that better technology made possible. He suggested

A possible weakness in the observational approach is that in order to work, it must be based on an intimate, sympathetic relationship between the filmmaker and the subject—not the eye of the aloof, detached observer but of someone watching as much as possible from the inside. It would thus be immoral and a betrayal of trust to make a film of this sort about people you disliked. If the diary (true confessions) is a form of suicide in literature, observational cinema can be a form of homicide on the screen.⁷⁰

MacDougall's essay, 'Beyond Observational Cinema', first written in 1973, was published in the Hockings volume along with Young's essay, and Sandall's 'Ethnographic

Film Documents'. It was a rich article for many of us wanting to 'participate', be involved, and 'decolonize ourselves' as Rouch would put it. Yet ironically, the article probably made it easier for those who weren't careful enough to go back to sources to get the wrong impression of what 'observational' film was about. MacDougall's 1992 'Epilogue' to his own essay appears in *Transcultural Cinema*, and is well worth restating in part. The 'borderline between observational and participatory cinema [of the sort he was then advocating] now appears more blurred', he wrote.⁷¹ None of the best of the observational filmmakers

believed they were producing complete, unmediated documents, nor did many of them ever hold that observational film could be ideologically transparent, as some critics have assumed. Indeed, the prevailing spirit of observational cinema was contrary to such a view, and its claims were correspondingly modest. Interviews of the period show that the filmmakers cautioned time and again against taking their work as omniscient or politically neutral. In retrospect, their work now appears manifestly personal in its choice of subject matter and its emphasis on the perspective of the individual filmmaker. The observational method always implied the contingency and provisional status of its findings, and it was perhaps more the fault of audiences and critics that they failed to read observational films for what they were.⁷²

The 'profound interest' Sandall and Young shared with Bazin, say Grimshaw and Ravetz, 'is distinguished by the intensity, steadfastness, and, crucially, *expansiveness* of the filmmaker's attention'.⁷³ Their own book, *Observational Cinema*, was written, they tell us, precisely to 'make a new case for observational cinema' in relation to 'Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life', as their subtitle puts it.⁷⁴ And they made their case precisely by returning to Sandall's and Young's foundational articles, their Bazinian roots, the context in which they were written, and what they were reacting against. (Both men made clear, for example, their rejection of spectacle, didactic, and conflict-driven documentary. Both resisted grand claims for what was captured/presented on film.) Crucially, in Sandall's and Young's writing and practice, 'observation' wasn't to be confused with idle spectatorship, yet alone the 'voyeurism' later attributed to it by scholars ignorant of sources. Sandall and Young used 'observation' in a particular way—not only as a visual

strategy. Instead, they ‘referred to a particular ethical stance—in which “to observe” meant “to respect” or “to comply with”’.⁷⁵ Grimshaw and Ravetz liken the men’s use of the word ‘observe’ to Jonathan Crary’s (in *Techniques of the Observer*), where he stresses that unlike the Latin verb, ‘spectare’, ‘observare’ involves ‘observing rules, codes, regulations and practices’.⁷⁶ And they are unequivocal in their summation of Sandall’s method:

To observe, as Sandall made clear, involved attending to the world—actively, passionately, concretely—while, at the same time, relinquishing the desire to control, circumscribe or appropriate it.⁷⁷

Given this acknowledgement, it seems such a pity that none of Sandall’s films are either named or receive attention in their book.⁷⁸

Grimshaw and Ravetz’s new case rests on renewing observational cinema’s identity ‘as a sensuous, interpretive, and phenomenologically inflected mode of inquiry’.⁷⁹ They want to explore ‘its distinctiveness as a way of knowing, highlighting the challenge represented by observational cinema to the discursive conventions of textual anthropology’.⁸⁰ And they note that both Cinema Studies and Anthropology, at the time of their writing, has been marked by paradigm changes, with the resurgence of phenomenologically oriented work. But there had been no straight trajectory in either discipline from earlier work done. As I see it myself, there was also a (somewhat shorter) ‘Dark Age’ in the study of film, as well as the one MacDougall posits for anthropology. Grimshaw and Ravetz rightly note that despite Bazin’s importance ‘in establishing film studies as a respectable and legitimate form of intellectual endeavour’,⁸¹ his work went out of favour within a relatively short space of time. Indeed, it was as if Bazin, ‘the father’, had to be killed and buried in the service of the structuralist revolution, whose young French participants (followed by scholars in the Anglo-American world—all reviving manifestoes from the Russian Avant-Garde and Formalists from the 1920s) tended to equate the term ‘realism’ with both an endorsement of the status quo and with Stalin’s version of Soviet Socialist Realism (which in reality, had more in common with the fairy-tale).

It is worth stressing the extent to which in rejecting Bazin’s approach (to film and the world), more than what we often refer to as ‘Oedipal battles’ were taking place. In initially zealously Marxist journals like *Positif*, it was regarded as a duty to ‘demystify a pope’. If for

Francois Truffaut and others Bazin was likened to a ‘companion of St. Francis of Assisi’ and a key to understanding his person and work was ‘love’, such a term was regarded as a ‘mystification’ by the young structuralist-Marxists, and notions like ‘respect for reality’ deemed objectionably ‘idealist’. Like Albert Camus on the wider political stage, despite his rejection of capitalism, his emphasis on openness, pluralism, and individual freedom and dignity meant a judgement of complicity was passed against him over and over—certainly for many years in university film studies. (Like Camus, Bazin was a non-communist leftist. Institutionalized screen studies, however, owed more to Lenin and vanguardist politics than any grass-roots, moral-ethical version of leftism.) Hugh Gray nicely encapsulated what Bazin stood for in a quotation from his essays: ‘They (the neorealist directors) never forget that the world *is* before it is something to be condemned’.⁸²

What was called for in screen studies, however, was ‘science’ (in the form of Louis Althusser’s version of Marxism), psychoanalysis (Lacan’s, disembodied form), and semiotics (deriving from Ferdinand de Saussure, often via Roland Barthes or Claude Lévi-Strauss). Lecturing and assertion were firmly back on the table, ‘looking’, certainly its attentive version, was frequently equated with the pathology of ‘scopophilia’—and ‘downcast eyes’ before the equivalent of biblical ‘graven images’ were regarded as the correct demeanour before film images. This often made for scholars playing fast and loose in their theory, both with regard to what appeared on the screen and those in the audience who engaged with it. Earlier phenomenological/experiential approaches to film were either neglected or unknown and the new one regarded as the ‘only game in town’.⁸³

As Grimshaw, Ravetz and MacDougall all note, the ethnographic filmmakers, with their resistance to grand, totalizing claims and a more humble approach to the lived experience of particular people or groups of people, were also out of step with the direction text-based anthropology was moving. Here, as the two women put it, ‘concerns with ethnographic particularities were pushed aside in favor of the more muscular or herculean endeavors of theory, Marxism, and interpretation’.⁸⁴ Yet at the very same time that this was happening in anthropology and cinema studies, filmmakers like Rouch and Marshall (and Sandall in our film) were making films that as MacDougall put it, were less a part of a restoration of vision that anthropology had lost, than ‘a new kind of ethnographic seeing’.⁸⁵ Their films, he wrote,

brought a liberating spirit to anthropology, and a set of new interests. While anthropological writers were pursuing increasingly schematized forms of analysis and exposition (the experimentation would come later), Rouch and Marshall were engaged in a mimetic analytical process. Their approach could also be described as one of *amplification from within rather than reduction from without*. If one were looking for a trait that distinguished Rouch and Marshall from most anthropologists of the period, it would have been their indifference to drawing boundaries. They were more interested in the creativity than the limitations of their subjects' lives. While many anthropologists were struggling to find cultural coherence, Rouch and Marshall were often, perhaps unconsciously, challenging the 'culture concept'. Marshall's interest lay in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and agency, Rouch's in zones where 'cultures' meet, matters that were to be taken up more enthusiastically in the anthropology of the 1980s.⁸⁶

Complex Pictures

During MacDougall's 'dark age' for the visual, things were being explored on film that might be described as 'aberrant' trends that would only come back into what received the label of anthropology a good few years later. This included the whole issue of reflexivity. Forty years after the UCLA programme began, MacDougall wrote:

The activities of a few unorthodox anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers kept these interests alive. Much of what interested them—the embodied experience of individuals, the relation of people to places and material objects, the performative aspects of social life—have now become part of the anthropological mainstream.⁸⁷

He also noted the way in which the material culture that interested earlier streams of anthropology came back in a different way in the films of Marshall and Rouch. In their films, you had the 'presence and textures of the items being handled', and the sensory qualities of the material world were 'presented as defining aspects of the subjects' consciousness' and given 'anthropological weight'.⁸⁸ The wave of ethnographic films beginning to emerge in the

1950s and 60s 'transformed these earlier interests in material culture into an interest in the subjective experience of material things'.⁸⁹

When MacDougall suggests, or, hopes, that 'one day these concerns will be seen as having been central to visual anthropology's potential from the very beginning',⁹⁰ like him, I have my doubts. In the same way, when Grimshaw and Ravetz suggest that with the changes in theoretical paradigms in anthropology and cinema studies, the resurgence of phenomenological work 'promises to greatly enhance any understanding of the nature and scope of observational cinema',⁹¹ I doubt this too. But the way disciplinary border-surveillance and academic argument tend to work, questions of who will be listened to, and who is and isn't open to persuasion, are not what we're concerned with here. It's rather to emphasize and testify to the fact that a film like *Coniston Muster* was indeed dealing with these things—well, and with popular recognition on the part of indigenous and non-indigenous audiences.

Rouch, as we've noted, had seen Flaherty as 'doing ethnography...without knowing it'.⁹² He was both an inventor of 'participant observation', and pioneer of the kind of 'feedback' we now value so highly.⁹³ MacDougall suggested Flaherty 'appealed to the viewer through his narrative strategies, his obvious affection for his subjects, and his detailed and often expansive view of settings and events'.⁹⁴ Rouch and Marshall, for their part, 'wanted to draw the viewer even more fully into the physical and psychological fabric of the events themselves'.⁹⁵ Their cameras 'saw events from within the physical spaces of their subjects',⁹⁶ drawing the audience into what Marshall called, 'the little worlds inside events'.⁹⁷ These worlds, I want to stress, *are animal, vegetable, and mineral—as well as imaginative*. (From the very beginnings of filming, the motion of animals, horses in particular, came before man.)

As we have seen, Stanley Cavell helped usher in a renewed interest in phenomenological theory in the study of film, noting, like others before him, that things seem to 'speak themselves' on film, that film and photography seem to promote a kind of ontological democracy.⁹⁸ Deciding on the muster for our film was an inspired move on Sandall's part, given the range of places, objects, bodies (human and animal), issues, personalities (human and animal) and stories involved. Indeed, as Loizos noted, *Coniston Muster* raised questions 'from an Aboriginal viewpoint which was unprecedented enough to be remarkable'.⁹⁹ And MacDougall suggested that the film was 'first of all important for its

foregrounding of individuals at a time when Australian Aboriginal people were still widely portrayed as anonymous social objects'.¹⁰⁰ It accomplished this, he said,

partly by eliciting stories. The effect upon the viewer is of encountering an individual personality in all its forcefulness. But it is in the story-telling that the viewer also begins to read a distinctive cultural style and perceive another possible conceptual world.¹⁰¹

A good few years ago, Marcus Banks noted the amusement of some ethnographic filmmakers and visual anthropologists at the proposed 'solutions' some of the proponents of the 'so-called crisis of representation in ethnographic writing' were putting forward. Strategies were advocated in print 'with little recognition of the fact that ethnographic film had been achieving these ends for decades'.¹⁰² Yet even he is probably overly optimistic when he suggests that in the last decade,

as academic anthropology has rediscovered the ethnographic museum, the world of goods and sensory experience and the bodies in which the knowledge of society is engrained, has ethnographic and folkloristic film come to be seen as an ideal medium not merely to document but to explore and to engage with the process of living.¹⁰³

As we've seen earlier, one of those placing a premium on experience and bringing everyday existence to the fore in anthropology was Michael Jackson, who stressed the way theory and conventions can be used to protect or defend us against 'the unmanageable flux of lived experience'.¹⁰⁴ He made use of the notion of 'radical empiricism', taken up from pragmatist philosopher, William James, suggesting in his Introduction to *Things as They Are* (1996), that its central tenet was that

the field of empirical study include the plurality of all experienced facts, regardless of how they are conceived and classified—conjunctive and disjunctive, fixed and fluid, social and personal, theoretical and practical, subjective and objective, mental and physical, real and illusory.¹⁰⁵

It was not, Jackson said, that

reflection, explanation, and analysis are to be extirpated from phenomenological accounts of human life; rather that these modes of experience are to be denied epistemological privileges and prevented from occluding or downplaying those non-reflective, atheoretical, and practical domains of experience which are not necessarily encompassed by fixed or definitive ideas.¹⁰⁶

Writers like Jackson, Lila Abu-Lughod, and others, were attempting to depart from what might be described as a fetishization of intellectual reflection and theory-building to 'regain' the world in a way that did not betray 'things as they are'.¹⁰⁷ They were writing after that politicization of our discipline that brought into focus the violence of colonization, domination, and exploitation whose effects continue into the present day. While anthropology has always been 'political', being born of and enabled by imperialism, whatever its progressive, utopian dimensions, the politicization in the wake of the reverberations of the late 1960s often took on a redemptive character, as if seeking to expiate original First World and Colonial Sins—in writing. Paradoxically, however, too singularly focussing on Anthropology's 'others' as objects of domination and bearers of oppressive structures could mean sacrificing truths of these very people and denying them the *actual life* in their lives. It was as if, by acknowledging this life, which included some happiness, some joy and satisfaction, they would risk losing focus on the structural-political determinants and relations responsible for their position (*vis-à-vis* the privileged, including the fieldworking anthropologists themselves). As I conceive it, something like a *double colonization-effacement* could occur, the first stage practical-political, the second, conceptual political. It could be thought of as a perpetuation of a different form of 'bondage'. Paul Stoller made his case for Rouch as a 'radically empirical' anthropologist in *The Cinematic Griot*,¹⁰⁸ and although he never used such a term, this kind of 'double effacement' of people was what Sandall, Young and others were reacting to years earlier in works where filmmakers spoke over human subjects and rendered them mute.

Jackson acknowledged that theorists like Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault were better than their most reductive positions, but something he says applies to them and a

generation of theorists influenced by structuralism who concentrated on the tenacity of the structures after the imaginative revolt of May '68:

Behind Bourdieu's and Foucault's refusal to admit the knowing subject to discourse is a *refusal to give issues of existential power the same value as issues of political power*. Questions of coping with life or finding meaning in the face of suffering are rated less imperative than questions of social domination and distinction.¹⁰⁹

If we take this on board, rather than fearing the loss of the acknowledgement and analysis of power and domination from our pictures, we might think instead, of making more *complex pictures*—thinking through and trying to communicate the ways actual, empirical individuals live their life in all its aspects.

Attempting to acknowledge domination, political power and the apparatuses that enable most ethnographers to engage in the studies they do, in 'Writing Against Culture', Abu Lughod called for 'ethnographies of the particular'.¹¹⁰ The effects of extra-local and long-term processes, she noted, are 'manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives', and 'inscribed in their bodies and their words'.¹¹¹ And these particulars, as we know from our own experience, are 'always crucial to the constitution of experience'.¹¹² While the wealth of examples to be found on film doesn't come into her discussion (though she will later work extensively on Egyptian women and television soap operas), she is keen to acknowledge that she stands on the shoulders of feminist sociologists like Dorothy Smith and a number of women who produced the unconventional forms of ethnographic writing called for by James Clifford and others, yet were erased from the 'revolutionary' record. Often their work wasn't deemed 'professional' by the men.¹¹³ Often not regarded as properly 'trained', they also tended to be open about their positionality, and less assertive about the authority with which they wrote than their professional male counterparts. While these attributes were later called for in anthropology, it seemed that the women did this too early. They also tended to be more focused on particular individuals and families, and were read by wider than academic audiences.¹¹⁴

In the Introduction to *Things as They Are*, Jackson quoted Abu-Lughod in a formulation that can bring us back nicely to *Coniston Muster*, where we will see that attentive looking and listening, along with the refusal to reduce people and events to part of

an argument, doesn't preclude opinion—both on the part of the filmmaker, and those participating in a film:

By insistently focusing on individuals and the particularities of their lives, we may be better able to perceive similarities in all our lives... Dailiness, by breaking coherence and introducing time, trains our gaze on flux and contradiction; and the particulars suggest that others live as we perceive ourselves living—not as automatons programmed according to 'cultural' rules or acting out social roles, but as people going through life wondering what they should do, making mistakes, being opinionated, vacillating, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragic personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of laughter.¹¹⁵

Reaching Some Understanding

Before hearing another of Johnny's stories, we've had a panel, titled 'An Early Morning Start', with beautiful light, windmills turning behind spindly trees, horses, and a truck in view—and Johnny explaining what's going on before we see him in the picture, directing the team:

'Right, all you gentlemen,

Come on.

Come on all you boys and girls', and he chuckles as they ride out on horses, under the trees and into the sunlight that floods into the picture.

Still chuckling in voice-over, Johnny indicates the yard that the bullocks enter. As one escapes, two men go after it. On the soundtrack, he's now encouraging the men to 'wheel him in', cautioning them, speaking after the event, but with an immediacy that involves us in the activity. All this motion is a pleasure to watch, along with hearing the familiar noise of cattle mooing, the sounds of men whistling and shouting. Focusing at last on the herded cattle in soft-faded dry grass, it's like we're inside some familiar Australian paintings—that have come to life. While there's an idyllic quality to these early morning scenes, once again, we would be mistaken to regard the cameraman or the viewer to be romanticizing what's

going on. More radically and evidently, what is captured and what we can experience if we're open to it, are the agents' activity and environment, testimony to what was before the camera on this station at this time. It suggests too how the people involved feel about country. What surprises me on each viewing is how vivid the land and the characters are, given that prints of the film I can manage to see have now faded to a pinkish hue.¹¹⁶

Panels appear to announce Johnny's next story:

ON A NEARBY
STATION

THE STOCKMAN
RIDES HIS HORSE

THE BOSS RIDES
IN HIS CAR

Johnny faces us centre-screen, a brown cowboy hat back off his face to reveal a strong head of white, curly hair, his mouth wide in his pleasant, lived-in face:

'All right then, what job I gonna take?'

'Oh, er...give me a hand to muster up.' Johnny acts the boss, re-enacting the conversation.

'All right then, I'll go.'

'And mustering along...this whitefeller driving motor car along'.

'This whitefeller driving motor car along...', he shakes his head and looks down.

'Goes along the dinner camp and...', he sits up to his full height and looks to the right, acting the boss.

'All right...lookin' up this way, that way, he's sittin' down there lookin' at a book and then he starts to look up'.

'Hullo—mob of cattle come.'

'Ah, where you get?'

He gestures, 'We get 'em up there'.

'...some more people away?'

'Yeh, some more away'

'Oh, we mighta got just about enough'

'Oh...alright'

'He starts lookin' at that book again'

'He look up that book like that...', Johnny picks up an imaginary book and holds it up before him.

'Lookin', lookin' it, lookin' it, thinkin' about that book'. He has a concentrated expression on his face.

'Alright, see mob comin''

'Oh—we've got plenty...'

'That's a loafer'. He gives a big, direct smile to the camera.

'He's not mustering them in'.

'A loafer properly'.

'What's a loafer?' asks the director offscreen.

'Sittin' down...sittin' down the arse. Lookin' that book'.

Sandall signals the move back to work, with the title, 'Breaking in Brumbies', to be precise. Horses move round and whinnie in a yard, and one's corralled alone with Jackie and his lasso, while Johnny shuts the gate on them, for the training to begin.

Here we're treated to a workaday sequence named in a workaday way, whose beauty and tenderness are striking. Jackie is in the pen, lassoing a horse, and Johnny is commenting in voice-over, laid over the diegetic sound. He enters the pen and they have the horse on the ground, talking to him and putting a bridle on. In the sand amidst ropes, we see the big body of the floored horse, veins on its belly standing out, the nervous, accelerated breathing, and the discomfort in its mouth as the steel of the bit is inserted between his teeth. The men's effort, for their part, is palpable.

Then it's Jackie in the shot, lightly hitting the animal over the back with the whoosh of a cloth. As metal clinks, the camera pans to the action in the adjacent pen, where Johnny is at an earlier stage with another horse he's swearing at, a mare. Then it's back to Jackie, cattle mooing on the soundtrack as he pats the horse and talks quietly to it:

Now now, now now don't do that.

You're not like the others, eh?

You're going to be good.

With his arm on the horse's neck and smiling, as if in conversation, it looks like the man and the animal have come to an understanding.

We then cut to Johnny with his horse, patting it with the cloth, and giving it a pep talk:

Pick up yer arse.

Never mind kick...

The animal's back legs flinch and lift from the ground as the cloth hits the flank and legs themselves. Then we're with Johnny at the horse's head, him touching it, pulling the rope so the horse must face him directly.

Come on, show yourself. Come on.

You gotta... No. You never run away. You've got to show yourself.

Come on, stand up. Here.

Stand up. Stand up. And look at me.

C'mon. How you goin' eh?

You want to be quiet... (He and the horse are now looking directly at each other, the man's hand on the horse's forehead.)

I want you to sit down be properly quiet... (He's patting the horse.)

Oh...Nothing wrong with the little boy, eh?

What you thinkin' about little horse...?

Eh, c'mon. Don't be bit silly now

I want you to make it quiet properly eh?

Here here here here.

Stand up and look't a me...

The scene goes on as Johnny tries to lead the horse away, sympathising that his neck might be a problem, being gentle with him—firm but loving. As well as a process, what is captured is a whole relationship. It's quite a feat. And Johnny's and the horse's movements, including the man's redundancies of speech (also evident, and very true to life in his earlier stories, as they are in most of our stories), give a feel of the duration of the 'breaking in', the gradual forming of the relationship, in the way that long experience has taught the man to proceed with these animals. We soon cut to Toby's boy riding a horse through the scrub, issuing instructions as he looks like he's rounding up cattle. He's in control of and at ease with the large animal, despite his own size. It's a pleasing scene, and one that's out of step with the idea of coddled children shielded and sequestered in their own age-group, away from any risk, and away from the everyday life of the rest of us. And it's followed by another scene where the other smaller child, 'working' with his father, Jackie, pokes a stick at the cattle in the pen to goad them up the ramp to be loaded onto a truck. It's driven away through the dust by someone we haven't met.

Recognizing Connection—and Home

Johnny's conceptual, empirical and imaginative world is that of an Anmatjara man and a stockman—a good one with a great deal of know-how, who works under tough conditions, conditions that would defeat many younger men. When I watch the film, I encounter a man who also, in his mode of delivery, gestures and mildly boastful put-down of his bosses, uncannily reminds me and my sons of our father-in-law and grandfather—along with a range of my other old country relatives from the far West of New South Wales. Their phrasing and intonation resembled this man's (and they saw themselves as living in different conceptual world from me—the word, 'concept', rarely, if ever coming into their speech, for example). The grandsons can be struck by this resemblance between Johnny and their grandfather at an initial home viewing. In a discussion in a university classroom, it's still very likely that all roads would lead back to Johnny's difference.¹¹⁷

But photographs and film can violate scholarly messages, being less open to the control of meaning and significance that scholarly writers usually seek. Furthermore, much of our own 'uncensored' experience tells us that in photographs and films, 'cultural particularities may be only the modulations and oddities that we see worked on the mantle

of human existence'.¹¹⁸ In addition to such facts of film and photography, Sandall's art here, including stretches of observation that in turn gain in richness by a layer of explication/commentary/subjective invitation to this particular stockman's community and life-world, enable something enlightening to happen. One way we might think about it is that Coniston Johnny, the workers, and their families are not made *other*, they are not *anthropologized*.¹¹⁹ With the restoration of *empirical individuals* on film, the presence and textures of items, along with the consciousness and voice of those who had been objects of colonialism or anthropology could be freed from the bondage of having to represent categories imposed by others.

In the climactic scenes of the film, Bryan and Johnny have the opportunity to say what they think and how they feel about ownership and the land. Two title cards come up:

THE CATTLE
ARE BRYAN'S

WHAT ABOUT
THE LAND?

We return to Bryan, crouched, smoking his pipe, shaking his head as he speaks:

No, I say...er..., I can't see it m'self. Legally, they have as much land rights as I have...er..., legally...

He has a slow and authoritative way of talking, his pipe a kind of indicator of pensiveness, of white bush wisdom.

I say...under Australian law... I say, there are actually... I think it was in '64, Aboriginals ceased to exist. There's only Australian citizens...

He gives a good impression of being satisfied with himself, that he has done his thinking and with evidence before him, has reached his conclusions.

I say they have as much er, legal right to er, to land as I have, which is none at all.

Bryan goes on to say that while he controls stations, he doesn't actually own a square inch of land. He has no title to the land whatever, but is given use of it for a certain period and under certain conditions.

Can you think of any instance in...er...history where...er...that has been the...right to occupy a place has been...ah, um...I say, has been ah... Aw, well I mean has it carried the day?

His self-satisfaction appears to reach a climax.

I can't think... I say, there is one, Israel...

He pauses and smiles, directly to the camera,

Which could lead to a Third World War.

Playfully, the film cuts to a road train coming towards us, and once it drives right up to the camera, we can clearly see its name is 'Hitler's Revenge'.

In the next scene, Jackie is again working, cows mewing and the little boy runs along beside the pen, making his noises, poking in at the cattle with his stick as Bryan stands by supervising with a pad, pencil, and watch in hand. The last title comes up:

MY FATHER
AND MY FATHER'S
FATHER

Johnny sits in his big cowboy hat addressing the camera front on:

My father, my father country then.
When my grandfather been finished

Me, then after that, we been come in, I been come...
This's my country.
It's my country.
Then old Bryan bought this country.
Then old Bryan bought this country.
He's not belonging to him.
But he's not belonging to him.
He's not own the place.
But he's got windmill, tanks and windmill, trough, he got 'em.
They're Bryan's.
He's got no... (Johnny is pointing out now, to illustrate.)
It's all this shade for the kangaroo,
Kangaroo and...our fellers all the blackfellers' shade.
This our country. Our place.

He remains direct, looking into the camera. And there's a cut, securing the argument, to a fine still light green tree with a white trunk in front of a brown cliff with darker shades of vegetation upon it—land in itself and kangaroos and blackfellers' shade, as our lead character and owner has claimed. Light moves through the branches highlighting the movement of the leaves as the wind whooshes through the landscape. The camera pans down across hills and plains as the credits roll.

¹ The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS) became The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in 1989.

² I am attempting to quote people's speech as spoken in the film here rather than as it appears in the subtitles, which can be slightly different and include paraphrasing.

³ See David MacDougall, Chapter 4, 'Social Aesthetics and the Doon School', in *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Peter Loizos, *Innovation in Ethnographic Film: From Innocence to Self-Consciousness, 1955-1985* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 173.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ John Fraser, 'Atget and the City', *Cambridge Quarterly* III, no. 3 (1968): 208.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 213 and 218.

¹² 'Dusan Makavejev Interview', in Edgardo Cozarinsky and Carlos Clarins, *Film Comment* 11, no. 3 (1975): 51.

¹³ Roger Sandall, 'Matters of Fact', in Paul Hockings, *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, Second Edition (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995), 467.

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- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ See Roger Sandall, 'Observation and Identity', *Sight and Sound* 31, no. 4 (1972): 192.
- ¹⁶ As Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz note, terms like 'observation' and 'observational' were used by documentary filmmakers and commentators during the 1960s, but it was from the mid 1970s onwards that 'observational cinema' was used to label a 'distinctive *genre* of anthropological work'. See *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 163.
- ¹⁷ 'Observation and Identity', 192.
- ¹⁸ Bazin in Sandall, *ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Sandall, *ibid.*, 184.
- ²⁰ Robert Bridges in Hugh Gray, Endnote to p. 69, in André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. II, essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 184.
- ²¹ See Hopkins's poem, 'God's Grandeur'. The young Anglo-Irish priest had originally aspired to be a painter. It was via Scotus that he at least to some degree reconciled the conflict between his inability to suppress his desire to engage with and evoke the natural world and an ascetic form of religion.
- ²² See David Forgacs, in Grimshaw and Ravetz, 23.
- ²³ Sandall, 'Observation and Identity', 193.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 195.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 193.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 192.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 195.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 196.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 193.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ See Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 194.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Rouch, 'La camera et les hommes', in *Pour une anthropologie visuelle*. Recueil d'articles publiés sous la direction de Claudine de France. Cahiers de l'homme (Paris: Mouton Editeur, 1974), 65-66, my translation. I have made my own translation from Rouch's 'The Camera and Man', because of small but significant differences in this passage as it appears in Hockings's collection of essays, *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (1975, where no translator is listed), and Steven Feld's and Marielle Delorme's translation of the essay, which originally appeared in *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* in 1974, and was reprinted in Jean Rouch, *Ciné-Ethnography*, edited and translated by Steven Feld (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Delorme's contribution was acknowledged on p. 390 of this volume. Feld and Delorme leave out the 'unacknowledged passion for the people they study', of which Rouch wrote, and they translate Rouch's 'le cinéaste exporte chez l'autre la révolte qu'il n'a pas pu assumer chez lui' (p. 66) as 'the filmmaker shares with others the revolt that he can no longer contain within himself' (p. 41). In the Hockings version, closer to the spirit of what Rouch wrote, I believe, 'révolte' is translated by 'revolution' (p. 92). The differences count because Rouch consistently attempted to be faithful to the subjects of ethnography (as an anarchist with the aim of 'shared anthropology' before any ideology, and because the 'observational' filmmakers also had that commitment to those they filmed).
- ⁴⁶ MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, 232.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 233,

⁴⁸ See Paul Rotha with the assistance of Basil Wright, 'Nanook and the North', *Studies in Visual Communication* 6, no. 2, (1980): 33-60. Here Forsyth Hardy articulated well such objections regarding the film: 'When Flaherty tells you it is a devilish noble thing to fight for food in a wilderness, you may, with some justice, observe that you are more concerned with the problem of people fighting for food in the midst of plenty. When he draws your attention to the fact that Nanook's spear is grave in its upheld angle, and finely rigid in its downpointing bravery, you may, with some justice, observe that no spear, held however bravely by the individual, will master the crazy walrus of international finance. Indeed, you may feel that in individualism is a yahoo tradition largely responsible for our present anarchy, and deny at once both the hero of decent heroics (Flaherty) and the hero of indecent ones (the studio)' . p 51. This was said in Forsyth Hardy's edited collection, *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), and Rotha and Wright note that the social-realist documentary movement which Grierson founded represented a different conception of the use of cinema from that held by Flaherty. Interestingly, Grierson, who described himself as Flaherty's 'self-appointed attorney' (in Rotha and Wright, p. 41), wrote: 'Flaherty's theory that the camera has an affection for the spontaneous and the traditional, and all that time has worn smooth, stands the test of twenty years, and *Nanook*, of all the films that I have ever seen—I wish I could say the same for my own—is least dated today. The bubble is in it and it is, plain to see, a true bubble. This film, which had to find its finance from a fur company and was turned down by every renter on Broadway, has outlived them all' (48).

⁴⁹ MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, 228ff.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6, my emphasis.

⁵³ Sandall, 'Observation and Identity', 195.

⁵⁴ MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁵⁹ See MacDougall on the mid to late 1960s at UCLA, when he was a student in Young's programme, in 'Colin Young, Ethnographic Film and the Film Culture of the 1960s', *Visual Anthropology Review* 17, no. 2 (2001-2002): 81-88.

⁶⁰ In Paul Henley, 'The Origins of Observational Cinema: Conversations with Colin Young', in Beate Englebrecth (ed), *Memories of the Origins of Ethnographic Film* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 150-151.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶⁴ Henley quoting Young in *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Henley, *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Colin Young, 'Observational Cinema', in Paul Hockings, *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. Second Edition (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995, first published in 1975), 100.

⁶⁷ Young in Henley, 142.

⁶⁸ Grimshaw and Ravetz, 8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁰ Young, 'Observational Cinema', 110-111.

⁷¹ David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*. Edited and Introduced by Lucien Taylor (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 137.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Grimshaw and Ravetz, 21.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁶ Crary in *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Grimshaw and Ravetz, *ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁸ In a Grimshaw interview with Herb di Gioia, he mentions Sandall's appreciation of and enquiries about the making of *Chester Grimes*, and the fact that Sandall went on to make *Coniston Muster*. See 'Conversations with Anthropological Filmmakers. Herb di Gioia, introduced and edited by Anna Grimshaw, *Visual Anthropology Review* 22, no. 1 (2006): 53. Grimshaw and Ravetz discuss Robert Drew, Albert and David Maysles and Frederick Wiseman as 'Social Observers', and Part 2 of their book focuses on the work of Di Gioia and David

Hancock and David MacDougall. Part of the rationale for their focus is that there was ‘a distinctive anthropological lineage associated with Colin Young—one in which we are ourselves located’ (2009: 163). While choices must be made in any such piece of writing, and they state that they are ‘acutely aware of neglecting many other examples of observational practice, naming other filmmakers, they give the impression of being unfamiliar with Sandall’s films, which is a pity, given the acknowledgement of ‘Observation and Identity’’s importance for their whole project.

⁷⁹ Grimshaw and Ravetz, ix.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 11.

⁸² See Gray’s ‘Translator’s Introduction’ to Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema?* vol. 2, edited, translated and introduced by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 5. For just one example of the denunciation of Bazin, see James Roy MacBean’s *Cinema and Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975). For an alternative approach, see Dudley Andrew’s *Andre Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), his edited collection with Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2011), and his ‘The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenological Film Theory’ in *Wide Angle* 2, no. 2 (1978): 44-49. On debates about the politics of film in the wake of May 1968 in France, Sylvia Harvey’s *May ’68 and Film Culture* (1980) is well worth a read, as is Terry Lovell’s *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure* (1980). For a historical and comprehensive treatment of the tradition of anti-visual ideologies in religion and theory, see Martin Jay’s *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993). Stanley Cavell addressed this notion of one or another theory being regarded as ‘the only game in town’ and of the ‘sad acquiescence in the reign of cults’ in academic scholarship in his ‘Appendix: Film in the University’, in *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (1981).

⁸³ See Stanley Cavell, ‘Appendix: Film in the University’, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 273-274.

⁸⁴ Grimshaw and Ravetz, 8.

⁸⁵ MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, 254.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 255, my emphasis.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 237.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 257.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 237.

⁹¹ Grimshaw and Ravetz, 21.

⁹² Rouch, ‘The Camera and Man’, in Hockings, 82.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, 251.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 254.

⁹⁷ Marshall in MacDougall, 253.

⁹⁸ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Enlarged Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1979), xvi and 37.

⁹⁹ Loizos, 171.

¹⁰⁰ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, 118.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Marcus Banks, ‘Rites of Footage’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 December (1980), 30.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Jackson, *Paths Toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1989.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Jackson ed., ‘Introduction: Phenomenology, Radical Empiricism, and Anthropological Critique’, in *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁷ See Lila Abu Lughod, ‘Writing Against Culture’, 1991. <http://xcelab.net/rm/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/abu-lughod-writing-against-culture.pdf>. Accessed 21 May 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot: The Ethnography of Jean Rouch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁹ *Things as They Are*, 22, my emphasis.

¹¹⁰ Abu Lughod, 473.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 474.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 476.

¹¹³ See, for example, Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987) and James Clifford and George Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

¹¹⁴ In earlier days, E.E. Evans-Pritchard found Margaret Mead's writing to exemplify the 'rustling-of-the-wind-in-the-palm-trees' school of anthropological writing. See Nancy C. Lutkehaus, 'Margaret Mead and the "Rustling-of-the-Wind-in-the-Palm-Trees School" of Ethnographic Writing', in *Women Writing Culture*, eds. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 188. Important too, since her work and person are far too little known, is the chapter, 'Multiple Subjectivities and Strategic Positionalities: Zora Neale Hurston's Experimental Ethnographies', by Graciela Hernández, in the same volume.

¹¹⁵ Abu-Lughod in Jackson, 1996, 84.

¹¹⁶ Colour fading is caused by chemical changes that occur in the image dyes of colour films. The colour dyes used in films between the 1950s and 1980s were the least stable.

¹¹⁷ MacDougall notes that 'a number of people, and notably nonacademics for whom a Turkana camel-owner might be expected to be a quintessential "cultural other" have responded to seeing Lorang in [his] film *Lorang's Way* by saying, "He's exactly like my father!", in *Transcultural Cinema*, 276. For anthropologists, it is in talking about their fieldwork experience that this is more likely to be articulated.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹¹⁹ I use the term the way MacDougall uses the notion in *Transcultural Cinema*: 'Dipesh Chakrabarty observes that Western intellectuals are uncomfortable dealing with many aspects of non-Western life *except* by "anthropologizing" them, because the master-code of Western thought (Marxist thought included) is a secular, historicist discourse' (266). Perhaps the descriptive words 'academically certified' need to be placed before 'Western thought'—a notion that can and has been problematized in itself, but can still have a certain purchase.