

The Camera as Microscope

Cinema and Ethnographic Discourse

I once read that in a certain South American tribe, the medicine man would take his apprentices to a local cinema on their final leg of training. Movies, he tells them, are not unlike the visions the sick see just before they die. For me, movies are not unlike the visions the homesick see when their hearts are bearing the weight of the realization that they're homeless, exiled, or caught in a limbo between native and tourist. —Justin Chin, "The Endless Possibility of a Kiss in a Fevered Faraway Home"

Not only, in Said's "Orientalist" sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as "Other." —Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora"

The Louisiana Purchase Exposition, held in St. Louis in 1904, celebrated U.S. economic power at the dawn of the twentieth century. As at most World's Fairs, the latest in technological innovations were displayed, and the history of U.S. westward expansion was commemorated. The fair was also a museum and laboratory for the study of anthropology, with many "primitive" peoples on display, including the Ainu of Japan and American Indians. By far the largest exhibit was the Philippine Reservation, forty-seven acres set off from the rest of the fairgrounds by a small stream; visitors crossed the Bridge of Spain to enter the compound. More than eleven hundred Filipinos representing a variety of ethnicities lived in dwellings they

had built using materials imported from home. They performed their rituals for the fair's visitors, sometimes charging fairgoers for the privilege of using their cameras. It is reported that some visitors sold dogs to the Igorrotes, tribal Filipinos from the northern Cordillera mountains, who then killed, cooked, and feasted on the dogmeat.¹ Tribes who had never seen each other lived in close proximity;² their juxtaposition was intended in part to prove that more evolved Filipinos were worthy of the White Man's Burden—a contention supported by the loyal Philippine Scouts (veterans of the U.S. war in the Philippines) who guarded the reservation.³

Movies were some ten years old at the time of the World's Fair. Film exhibition had been boosted greatly by the Spanish-American War; the demand for images of the war was met with genuine news footage (or "actualities") as well as scenes staged for the camera ("reenactments").⁴ One extremely popular film consisted of a Spanish flag flying in front of a painting of a castle; the flag was lowered and the Stars and Stripes hoisted in its place (the whole film lasting approximately forty-one seconds).⁵ Cinema participated in creating popular support for U.S. imperialism, which was justified scientifically by the inferiority of America's "little brown brothers," itself documented on film by ethnographers. From its conception, cinema has been thoroughly implicated in discourses of science and U.S. imperialism; these various discourses intersected in the Philippines, and later in St. Louis.

One hundred years after the birth of cinema, how far have we come? *Bontoc Eulogy* (Marlon Fuentes, 1995) and *On Cannibalism* (Fatimah Tobing Rony, 1994) each interrogate cinema's role in shaping the "science" of racial difference. Fuentes's film tells the story of a contemporary Filipino American's search to find out what happened to his grandfather, a Bontoc Igorrote who disappeared after the World's Fair. Rony's video interrogates ethnographic research films—and Hollywood's *King Kong*—from the perspective of a second-generation Sumatran American. Both movies deal with people of color who were brought to the West—not as laborers in support of Western economies, but as "others" who helped define Western superiority through scientific discourses which themselves legitimated Western imperialism. By deconstructing cinema's role in Western ethnographic practices, both films turn the camera's gaze back on the West. More than that, both movies are about our cinematic forebears, that is the way the cinema's racial discourses have shaped the way we are seen and the way we see ourselves—indeed, the way cinema has *created* us, representationally speaking. It is appropriate, then, that an elusive ancestor occupies the center of both

movies: the narrator's imagined grandfather Markod in *Bontoc Eulogy*, the Ompung of my Ompung (grandparent of my grandparent) invoked in *On Cannibalism*.

Both movies signify on ethnographic film conventions. All of the ethnographic footage quoted in *Bontoc Eulogy* is shot with a stationary camera, whose stability supposedly guaranteed the scientific objectivity of the Western camera operators documenting the primitive movements of the Filipinos. Fuentes's staged 16mm footage is likewise shot from a stationary camera, and its evident artifice is an implicit critique of the supposedly unstaged ethnographic film. For if *Bontoc Eulogy* is itself a re-creation inspired by the filmmaker's imagination, isn't ethnographic footage ultimately indicative of similar falsehoods? The ethnographer does not chance upon customs and rituals, but indeed compels them to be performed for his or her (typically his) camera. *On Cannibalism* features extreme close-ups of Rony's mouth as she narrates; this emphasis on the physicality of the production of speech recalls the precise documentation of movement by ethnographers like Félix-Louis Regnault.⁶ The early commercial cinema was likewise fascinated with the motion picture's ability to focus attention on mundane physical actions such as sneezes. If early cinema audiences were fascinated by the way cinema made their everyday actions seem strange, Asian American filmmakers a century later are equally fascinated by the ways cinema transformed our everyday actions into ethnographic spectacle.

Bontoc Eulogy

Marlon Fuentes was born in Manila in 1954. A self-taught photographer, he studied behavioral science and anthropology at De La Salle University in Manila, graduating summa cum laude in 1974. His employer sent him to the Wharton School, where he received his MBA in 1977. In 1981 he enrolled in Mark Power's photography course at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C.; soon thereafter, he began the *Circle of Fear* series.⁷ Fuentes may be best known for his *Face Fusion* series (1986–1989), which are assembled from photographs of himself and his then-wife (who is white).⁸ According to curator Margo Machida, Fuentes uses photography as "a ritual to relive . . . memories," transforming himself into a shaman (1994, 105); Fuentes comments that his "photography was being generated

by an increasingly narrative subtext," leading him naturally to filmmaking (Blumentritt, 1998, 76). In 1991 he was awarded a Presidential Fellowship by Temple University so that he could pursue an MFA in the Film and Video Program. Fuentes's other films include *Sleep with Open Eyes*, *Tantalus*, *Arm*, and *Crikee*.

Starting in 1992, Fuentes conducted research on the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 (also known as the St. Louis World's Fair) and on ethnographic footage of Bontocs and other Filipino groups; the vast majority of still photos used in *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995) came from the Library of Congress, but additional photos and film footage were held by the National Archives, the Human Studies Film Archives at the Smithsonian, and the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. (Fuentes received a grant from the Independent Television Service (ITVS) in 1993 or 1994; the project was also funded by NAATA. These grants permitted him to hire a research assistant.) He drew music from the Grafias recordings held at the University of Washington's ethnomusicological collection and from musical re-creations performed by the Ramon Obuson Folkloric Group (Obuson's brother Enrico portrays Markod in the film); additional musical material, including adaptations of ethnographic transcriptions, was created by Douglas Quin. Fuentes shot 16mm footage in San Diego's Balboa Park, the site of the 1915–1916 Panama–California Exposition, and in the Mütter Museum of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Philadelphia.⁹ He completed *Bontoc Eulogy* in 1995; the following year, it screened at Asian American film festivals in New York, Seattle, and Washington, D.C., and also at the American Museum of Natural History's Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival and the Film Society of Lincoln Center's New America/New Americans series.

Bontoc Eulogy is premised as a search for ancestors; the central conceit of the film is that the narrator is able to trace his ancestry back to a grandfather who was a Bontoc Igorrote who disappeared soon after being exhibited at the St. Louis World's Fair. The film's narrator is ultimately unreliable, however: there are times when he tells us what Markod thought without telling us if his speculations have any basis. It seems that every event the narrator describes is documented on film, suggesting that the narrator's musings are inspired by screening this footage.

Bontoc Eulogy's opening scenes, seemingly straightforward yet highly contrived, set the tone for the rest of the film. A crank phonograph (commonly known as a Victrola, after one of the most popular brand names)



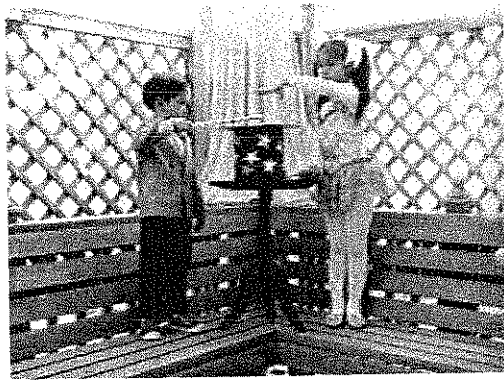
Bontoc Eulogy.
"Marlon" and the crank
phonograph; the first shot
of the film.

sits on a mat on an uneven brick floor. A figure who we assume is also the narrator—although we only hear him in voice-over and never see him speak—enters the frame and sits before the Victrola. Although we hear some ambient sound, we do not hear any footfalls or the sound of the Victrola being cranked; the cinematography is an arty, high-contrast black-and-white. This footage is clearly stylized; the room does not evoke any associations with work or domestic space. When the figure (for simplicity's sake, I will refer to him as Marlon)¹⁰ puts the needle on the disk, we hear a few seconds of surface noise—hisses and pops—and then what sounds like an ethnographic field recording of a dance and percussion performance. We do not hear these sounds from the cone of the Victrola, with the reverberation and narrow frequency range that we would expect to hear in that space; rather, the sound has a presence that suggests it was added in the editing room. After a few moments, the image fades to black while the sound fades out. Twice more we see Marlon put the needle down: the second time we hear more music, the third time we hear a man's voice speaking Bontoc.

What are we to make of this opening? Marlon does not present himself as an ethnographic researcher—we might expect to see him wearing headphones, seated at a desk, taking notes—nor as a man sorting through a collection of family artifacts (compare this scene with the beginning of *The Way to My Father's Village*, where Richard Fung sorts through a box of his father's papers in what appears to be the dining room of his parents' house). The film does not establish a premise for the investigation (as does Felicia Lowe at the beginning of *China: Land of My Father*). In this opening, if Fuentes does not explain the artificiality of what is to follow, neither does he deliberately mislead us. Instead, he relies on our habit of

Bontoc Eulogy.

The narrator's children perform a Méliès-inspired magic trick.



associating sound and image to create meaning, as he does when he shows us images of Marlon looking at medical displays in a museum while the soundtrack describes research conducted at the Smithsonian: we may jump to the conclusion that we are looking at Marlon in the Smithsonian, but the voice-over nowhere implies this is the case. Indeed, certain disjunctions between the voice-over and the image-track, combined with a brooding quality to Marlon's on-screen behavior that bespeaks a performance for the camera (rather than a candidly captured image), lead us to the conclusion that the narrator is unreliable. Early in the film, a girl and a boy, whom the narrator has identified as "my children," conjure a rabbit out of a hat: an obvious jumpcut precedes a puff of smoke. With this brief sequence, Fuentes reminds us of the ways cinema exploits our cognitive processes; by refusing to disguise the manipulation that produces the trick, he puts us on guard. (He also alludes to the trick photography tradition of George Méliès, whose earliest films date from the same era as many of the pseudo-documentary films excerpted in *Bontoc Eulogy*; Méliès himself called some of his films *actualités reconstituées*, or "reconstructed news films.")

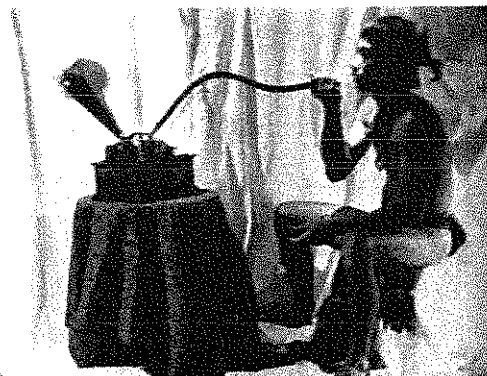
The narrator goes on to tell us that he has not been back to the Philippines since arriving in the United States, and that his children were born here: "In the beginning I lived in two worlds: the sights and sounds of my new life, and then the flickering afterimages of the place I once called home." The narration is deliberately ambiguous: Is it describing memories or movies? The narrator eventually tells us of his two grandfathers: Emiliano, who fought the Spaniards in 1896, and Markod, a Bontoc warrior who traveled to St. Louis, leaving his pregnant wife behind. The story of Emiliano is illustrated with representations of U.S. soldiers putting down

the Philippine insurrection (an 1899 reenactment entitled *Filipinos Retreat from Trenches*) and a sequence depicting the Battle of Manila Bay (constructed by intercutting footage of a toy boat re-creation at the St. Louis Fair with "actuality" footage of ships firing their cannons). As for Markod, we are told that he was a Bontoc chieftain, and we hear what sounds like a period recording of a man speaking Bontoc, which the narrator translates for us; this is the same recording we heard in the film's opening sequence. In truth, this soundtrack is a fabrication: the source of the text is an account of Chief Fomoaley, the leader of Bontoc Igorrotes who performed at Coney Island a few years after the St. Louis World's Fair.¹¹ Fomoaley spoke via an interpreter to *The Independent* in 1905; originally an abolitionist magazine (edited for many years by Henry Ward Beecher), *The Independent* began publishing first-person accounts of "undistinguished American men and women" (Holt, 1990, xxix) in 1902, collecting sixteen of them in a book entitled *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans As Told by Themselves*. Fomoaley's account was published in *The Independent* in October 1905, then reprinted in the 1906 collection (*Life Stories* was reprinted by Routledge in 1990). Fuentes commissioned Fermina Bagwan, a retired teacher from the Cordilleras, to translate the English-language text into idiomatic Bontoc; she also recited the account for Fuentes's microphone. Fuentes then took the recordings, altered the pitch "to make it more androgenous sounding," and added a "synthetic patina" of digital noise (Fuentes, telephone interview, 15 July 1999).

Who, then, is Markod? Fuentes derived the name from a narrator invoked by Bontoc storytellers. *The First Grammar of the Language Spoken by the Bontoc Igorot*, developed by C. W. Seidenadel (1909) with the assistance of several Bontoc men and women who resided in Chicago in 1906–1907, includes an appendix with a dozen tales related to Seidenadel in 1907. Some of the tales conclude with the narrator identifying himself or herself, but several of them end with words to the effect: "Thus ends the tale told by Malkod." Seidenadel explains: "The narrator must be named; if he is unknown, 'Malkod' must be named as the imaginary inventor of the tale; for . . . 'if 'Malkod' is the narrator, you do not dream (of the story)'" (361). Fuentes has interpreted this to mean that the tellers of fictions will be haunted in their dreams unless they attribute the story to Malkod.¹² The name Markod, then, is an obscure clue that reveals that the film's narrator has invented the stories attributed to Markod.¹³

In the second half of *Bontoc Eulogy*, we see Markod (played by Enrico

Bontoc Eulogy.
Markod records on a wax cylinder.



Obuson) in the act of recording his voice on a wax cylinder. Before and after this sequence, we see him slowly rotating on a turntable, standing proudly with his head thrown back. These images are intercut with ethnographic “mugshots” (front and profile), suggesting that Markod’s posture is attributable perhaps not to pride but to an ethnographer’s instruction to stand so that his features are clearly visible.¹⁴ The rotation also evokes the Victrola: Markod is metaphorically spinning on a platter (later, we see him playing the flute while rotating on the turntable). This circular movement is also a metaphor for the narrator’s investigation: turning in circles, never advancing. Whereas Fatimah Rony has argued that all ethnographic film tells an implicit narrative of evolution (1996, 25), of forward progress, Fuentes’s film makes no headway in understanding Markod, the Bontoc, or the narrator’s own estrangement from the Philippines.

Bontoc Eulogy, then, does not relate a story that the narrator has successfully reconstructed; rather, the film’s narrative is of the investigator’s journey from supposedly objective primary documents into increasingly subjective understandings of what those documents signify. This progression is neatly encapsulated by the film’s use of music. In the opening sequence, when we see the figure of Marlon operating a crank phonograph, we hear two recordings of Bontoc percussion taken from the University of Washington ethnomusicological collection (the Grafias Recordings), recorded in the 1960s. The film’s opening credits follow, accompanied by mouth harp music performed by the Ramon Obuson group (professional dancers who perform choreography that attempts to replicate Cordilleran folk dances). After this brief sequence, we hear the narrator’s voice for the first time: the music that undergirds his words was composed by Douglas Quin, who

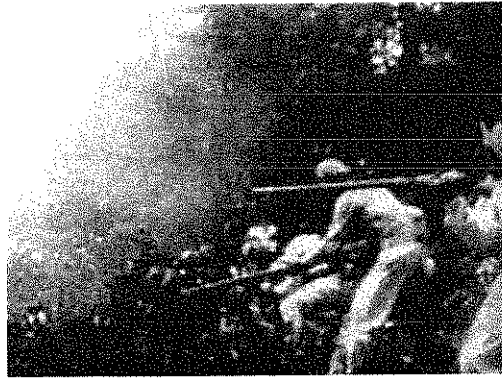


Bontoc Eulogy.
In a freeze frame from U.S. Army footage, a Cordilleran boy returns the camera’s gaze.

sampled the sounds of Cordilleran instruments and used those samples as raw materials for his score. *Bontoc Eulogy*’s music progresses from authentic to increasingly mediated musical forms, or, more precisely, the soundtrack increasingly foregrounds the mediation of its materials, for even the Grafias Recordings are mediated by technology and ethnographic convention. The film as a whole depicts a similar progression: it could be described as a journey from primary documents to increasingly fanciful stories inspired by them, but it is more meaningfully understood as a movement from narratives that avow their accuracy to narratives that increasingly reveal their unreliability. These gradual revelations critique the faith that we place in the initial accounts.

The final image of *Bontoc Eulogy* depicts Marlon in long shot as he walks up the aisle of an outdoor amphitheater in Balboa Park. Walking from frame left, he pauses in the center of the frame and turns his head to return the gaze of the camera; he then resumes walking and exits frame right. This final image reminds me of two of the period films that Fuentes quotes in the first quarter of the movie. As the narrator finishes telling us of his childhood interest in Philippine tribal life and begins to tell Markod’s story, there is a fleeting glimpse of a boy (possibly Bontoc) breaking the fourth wall to gaze into the camera. Shot by the U.S. Army in the Cordilleras in the 1920s, the footage shows a white man operating a handcranked camera; presumably he is filming an activity on the stream or on the opposite bank that we cannot see. The man with the camera pays no attention to the boy, who walks between him and our vantage point; just before leaving the frame, the boy looks over his shoulder, returning our gaze. Fuentes freezes this image, and then inserts a still frame emphasizing this detail. The

Bontoc Eulogy.
Actors portraying
Filipino rebels retreat
frame right . . .



. . . and the U.S. Army
enters frame left in the
short film *Filipinos Retreat
from Trenches* (quoted in
Bontoc Eulogy).



ethnographic “other” violates the diegetic illusion by returning the camera’s gaze. He does not interfere with the camera operator on the riverbank, suggesting that he respects—or is at least indifferent to—the activity. But he glances back at the second camera operator; perhaps he is wondering (as I am) why the white men are filming themselves. The self-reflexive act of filming a camera operator is trumped by this boy, and Fuentes pauses for a moment to make sure we don’t miss it. At the end of the film, when Marlon looks into the camera, he reminds us of the artificiality not just of *Bontoc Eulogy*, but of ethnographic and cinematic conventions themselves.

The other film that *Bontoc Eulogy* recalls for me in its closing moments is *Filipinos Retreat from Trenches*. In that film, the story of U.S. military superiority is conveyed in the simplest of narratives: brown men retreat frame right, white men (with the Stars and Stripes waving) enter frame left. The Americans force the Filipinos out of the frame; the shot ends with the American soldiers centered in the image. Merely moving from the margin

to the center tells the story of American Manifest Destiny, as the soldiers take command not only of the land, but of the cinematic apparatus. (This simple movement from left to right is of course only possible in a reenactment; guerrilla warfare is hardly so linear and photogenic.)¹⁵ In the final image of his film, Marlon momentarily pauses at the center, but then departs frame right. Although he may have some control of the cinematic apparatus—which is to say, his film puts a marginalized story on center stage—at the end he casts his lot with his cinematic Filipino forebears by leaving frame right. It is important to note that these imagined forebears were African American actors;¹⁶ by echoing them, Marlon is identifying not with real Filipinos, but with cinematic Filipinos. That identification is at least as real as his identification with the figure of Markod.

In paying such careful attention to nuances of movement—in overreading movement—I am in a sense responding to the spirit of ethnographic cinema. At one point in *Bontoc Eulogy*, footage of a dancing child is slowed down and sped up, evoking the researcher’s meticulous examination of ethnographic footage. After all, these movies were research tools to provide the most minute information about the appearance and movement of the “others” captured on film.¹⁷ Speaking of the time-motion studies of Regnault, Rony notes, “Detail must be ordered and rationalized, and the sense that one gets is of meticulous management of detail: performers enter the frame at right and exit at left” (1996, 49).

I now want to turn from pre-Hollywood films¹⁸ like *Filipinos Retreat from Trenches* (moving from left to right) to Regnault’s ethnographic studies (moving from right to left) and Hollywood movies like *King Kong*, movies that purport to tell a more sophisticated story but that ultimately return to the basic narrative of evolution and racial difference. This is the source material that Rony examines in *On Cannibalism*.

On Cannibalism

Fatimah Tobing Rony was born and raised in Washington, D.C., and Bethesda, Maryland. Her parents were from Indonesia, her mother a Batak from North Sumatra and her father from Palembang in South Sumatra. She earned her Ph.D. in art history at Yale in 1993 (a revised version of her dissertation was published as *The Third Eye* in 1996). Rony produced *On Cannibalism* (1994) at UCLA, while completing an MFA in film and video.

She has also completed three 16mm narrative shorts, *Concrete River* (1997), *Demon Lover* (1998), and *Everything in Between* (2000). At present, she sits on the Film Studies faculty at the University of California, Irvine.

The cannibalism referred to in the title of Rony's video is, first of all, a label applied to the Batak and thereby signals the narrator's attempt to understand if she is herself a cannibal.¹⁹ However, the title does not refer to cannibals but to the act of cannibalism; the video is thus a meditation on the topic of consumption of humans. In *The Third Eye*, Rony employs the phrase "fascinating cannibalism" to describe the consumers of ethnographic cinema: "By 'fascinating cannibalism' I mean to draw attention to the mixture of fascination and horror that the 'ethnographic' occasions: the 'cannibalism' is not that of the people who are labeled Savages, but that of the consumers of the images of the bodies—as well as actual bodies on display—of native peoples offered up by popular media and science" (1996, 10). Rony's video is thus an examination of the discourses of ethnography that offer up savages for public consumption; whereas Fuentes takes his camera to the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia, Rony visits the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

The video opens with footage Rony shot in Paris in 1994 when giving a paper on ethnographic cinema at a colloquium on colonial cinema hosted by the Institut du Monde Arabe (Rony, letter to author, 10 July 1999). A handheld camera explores the perimeter of a fence that seems to encircle the Eiffel Tower; on the soundtrack, we hear the character of Carl Denham from *King Kong*. The mastermind behind the expedition to photograph Kong describes a wall on Skull Island off the coast of Sumatra; behind that wall are things no white man has ever seen. The wall thus separates the civilized and prehistoric worlds. The Eiffel Tower was built to demonstrate that France stood at the pinnacle of Western achievements in science and engineering; it towered over the 1895 Exposition Ethnographique de l'Afrique Occidentale where Regnault recorded his time-motion studies using Marey's *chronophotographe*. Rony's camera does not execute a technically proficient panning shot, nor does it occupy the fixed position necessary to ensure the proper collection of scientific data. Instead, the camera peers through the fence at the Eiffel Tower; if, as on Skull Island, civilization is on the other side of the fence, then the camera is located on the savage side, so we can conclude that the camera is held in the hands of someone who is usually the object of the camera's gaze. At the end of this prologue, the image fades to black.

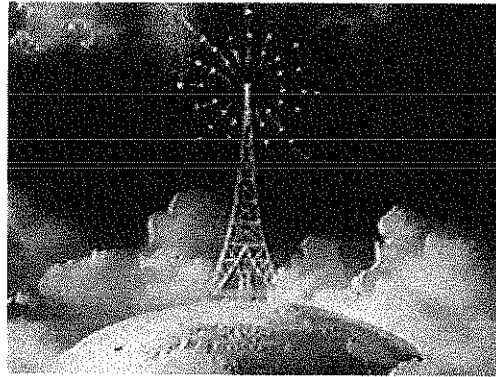
Next we see a series of video stills of words cut into the stone outside

the American Museum of Natural History ("explorer, conservationist, scientist") as a recording of Batak music begins.²⁰ The stills are followed by a close-up of a pair of lips that narrate the remainder of the video. The narrator tells us that while watching television late one night, she realized that she understood the language spoken by the savages in *King Kong*; according to *The Third Eye*, they speak the dialect of the Nias Islanders with heavy American accents (1996, 177). Just as the opening images tell us that the videomaker aligns herself with the savages, looking back over the fence at the Westerners, here the narrator reveals that a Hollywood film told her that she was a Primitive. The narrator states, "We were star attractions . . . you devoured us," thereby accepting being interpellated as the "other." On the image-track, we see processed images from *King Kong*, footage of the exhibits at the American Museum of Natural History, and ethnographic photographs. The narrator details a history of ethnographic consumption, including an anecdote about an entrepreneur who sold frankfurters as "hot dogs" near the Philippine Reservation at the St. Louis Fair, where dog eating was performed for the fair's visitors.²¹ The consumption of the racial "other" is tied to the all-American act of eating a hot dog: "fascinating cannibalism" is undeniably American.

Throughout the video, footage from *King Kong* has been intercut with the ethnographic images. In *The Third Eye*, Rony offers a fascinating reading of *King Kong*, organizing the film's representations of race and gender as an evolutionary taxonomy. At the conclusion of her typology, she reads Kong's climb up the Empire State Building as a conflict between the prehistory that Kong represents and the engineering feat symbolized by the New York skyscraper. *On Cannibalism* amplifies this argument by juxtaposing RKO's logo—an Eiffel-esque radio tower astride the globe—with Kong on the Empire State Building. While the Eiffel Tower and the Empire State Building symbolized scientific progress, technological know-how, and commercial savvy generally, the RKO logo yokes those discourses to the celebration of Hollywood as modern art form par excellence.

Rony also reads the contest between prehistoric and modern in a brief scene in *King Kong* portraying Ann Darrow and Jack Driscoll fleeing Kong through the jungle: "Their running is a literal embodiment of the race of history, a race which is the locus of ethnographic cinema" (1996, 170). The metaphor of history's race is introduced via a quotation from anthropologist Charles Letourneau: "The white race, semitic and indo-european holds, certainly for the present the head in the 'steeplechase' (sic) of human groups."²² In *The Third Eye*, Rony notes that this scene appears "about two-

On Cannibalism.
The RKO logo, excerpted
from *King Kong*.



thirds of the way through *King Kong* (1935), and it likewise appears at two-thirds of the way through *On Cannibalism*.

Shortly after this scene, the narrator departs from the stable position of “other” vis-à-vis the West (“we were star attractions . . . you devoured us”). Showing us an image from Regnault’s chronophotographic series, “Negress walking with a light weight on her head,” the narrator states, “I am a Wolof woman: I come from Dakar, Senegal. I am the Doctor Regnault: I am filming you using the *chronophotographe*, for time motion studies. I am a little girl: I haven’t yet learned to see.” The narrator has signaled that the cinematic apparatus allows for shifting identification: the spectator no longer occupies simply one position, but takes on a variety of different perspectives made possible by the narrative offered by Regnault’s protocinematic photography.²³ She becomes at one moment the object and at the next the subject of ethnographic study; then she becomes a little girl, perhaps recalling the narrator’s story of encountering *King Kong* and being told that her mother came from a race of cannibals.

On Cannibalism ends with a variation on the little girl’s statement: “I haven’t yet learned how to see. I haven’t yet begun to believe.” Does this statement refer to the narrator’s resistance to being told she is a descendent of cannibals? For assistance in interpreting this statement, let’s turn again to *The Third Eye*, specifically to Rony’s reading of “Negress walking with a light weight on her head”:

The exchange of looks in the chronophotography produced by Regnault . . . belies any simple polarity of subject and object. . . . A Frenchman, dressed in a city suit and hat . . . accompanies the woman as she walks,

never taking his eyes off her. His walk, meant to represent the urban walk, is there as comparative point of reference to what Regnault terms the woman’s “savage locomotion.” In addition, he acts as an in-frame surrogate for the Western male gaze of the scientist. There are also two other performers visible at frame left, watching the Frenchman watch the woman. Finally, a little girl, also West African, stares alternately at the group being filmed and the scientist and his camera. She appears to break a cinematic code already established in fin-de-siècle time motion studies: she looks at the camera. In this scenario of comparative racial physiology, the little girl has not learned how properly to see or be seen. (1996, 23)

Like the boy in the U.S. Army footage excerpted in *Bontoc Eulogy*, this West African girl returns the camera’s gaze. I would argue that these transgressions mark the resistance of people of color to the cinema’s process of “othering.” It is important to note, as *On Cannibalism* suggests, that this argument results from my ability to shift identification to different positions within the frame: I do not simply align my subjectivity with the gaze of the camera.²⁴ Similarly, one of Rony’s objectives in *The Third Eye* is to address the dilemma of the spectator of color, whose identification shifts between the white hero and the savage. Rony’s concept of “the third eye” derives from W. E. B. Du Bois’s double consciousness, which she glosses as “the experience of viewing one’s self as an object” (4).

Bontoc Eulogy, *On Cannibalism*, and other Asian American movies that excerpt films that have regarded us as “other” are all structured around this experience of seeing one self at a remove. I continue this discussion in Chapter 3, focusing on the construction of Japanese Americans as enemies of the United States; if we are grandchildren of the St. Louis World’s Fair and the Exposition Ethnographique de l’Afrique Occidentale, we are also “Children of the Camps.”²⁵ But before we turn to the topic of biological ancestors (the movies about the camps all deal with parents and grandparents), I want to turn to feature films that, like *Bontoc Eulogy*, create fictional narratives based on historical accounts of the first generation of Asians to arrive in North America. Unlike the Asians discussed in this chapter, the women who migrated to North America in the nineteenth century served not as objects of scientific study, but as laborers exploited by a rapidly developing economy.