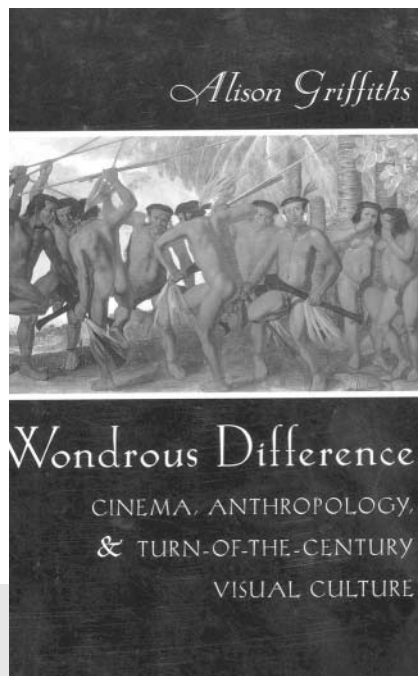


fects. For example, as evidenced by the sheer number of other writers referencing his work, Lev Manovich would have been a huge absence if not represented in this collection, but his contribution, for the most part, avoids the material of his seminal *The Language of New Media* book. While Manovich's essay in this volume is a provocative reading of the codes of "realism" and the potential of digital visual fictions to break free of old media conventions, a more spirited engagement with his own book would have been valuable here, especially to someone unfamiliar with his ideas. Also, throughout the book, one encounters a strange repetition of topics such as Napster or the *Blair Witch Project*, which crop up again and again throughout essays, but these continual references tend to date these essays more than to create a coherent argument about the importance of either media phenomenon.

Harries's book provokes much thought about the digital age in ways that will be useful to archivists. As of this writing, there still is no single comprehensive book in the field of new media studies, so in this regard, Harries's collection of essays is a useful sampler, especially if you do not plan to read widely throughout this field. You should be forewarned that Harries takes a breadth-over-depth approach, but as an introduction to these key thinkers, this book will likely make most readers want to go read some of the contributors' other works. These essays fairly represent the substance and style of these thinkers.

Finally, I do not want to fault the book for something that was not its purpose, but the book's overall ideology seems ready-made for a new media-style presentation, yet there is a dearth of visual examples in the book. There are ten high-quality color plates in the front of the book, but their presence stimulates a sense of lack rather than a feeling of plenitude. Moreover, the visuals' placement at the front of the book, without integration into the textual field, seems at odds with many of the authors' contentions about dynamic digital authorship and intertextual exchanges of knowledge. As we make more and more demands on moving image culture to recognize the unique properties of digital audiovisual environments, academic scholarship still seems to prefer the textual and the analog.



## Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture

ALISON GRIFFITHS

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2002

Sophia Siddique Harvey

In her preface to *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture*, Alison Griffiths asks if any ethnographic films existed prior to Robert Flaherty's seminal film, *Nanook of the North* (1929). Rather than providing an exhaustive history of the early ethnographic film, Griffiths's project offers an astute cultural reading of the emergence of ethnographic film during cinema's early history (1890s to 1920s). She defines the ethnographic film as "actuality films featuring native peoples that were produced by anthropologists, commercial, and amateur filmmakers alike" (xxix). With this working definition, Griffiths situates the development of the ethnographic film within the culture and politics of precinematic visuality, as well as its entangled

position between nineteenth-century anthropology and popular culture.

This exhilarating journey is framed within an *ambivalent gaze* of what she calls “wondrous difference,” which, according to Griffiths, “marked the historically disparate efforts of western painters, photographers, and filmmakers to visually evoke the encounter with the ethnographic Other” (xix). Griffiths is concerned with how filmmakers, anthropologists, museum curators, and the audience (both Western and indigenous) negotiate, translate, and process their fascination and astonishment with this difference. Griffiths, for example, explores the institutional and representational practices of the museum with its life groups, the world’s fairs with its native villages, and anthropometric anthropology to tease out how these spaces visually evoke the ethnographic Other. In these contexts, the ethnographic Other is often shrouded in a form of salvage ethnography, where indigenous peoples, clad in primitive garb, display or enact cultural practices that are no longer culturally relevant. In the case of anthropometric photography, the ethnographic body is made “legible as an ethnographic sign” (96). These practices of visibility, argues Griffiths, informed the manner in which ethnographic cinema fashioned its representation of the Other.

Griffiths, concerned not merely with the politics and practices of visibility in precinematic spaces, turns to reception practices employed by audiences who frequented these spaces to examine how cinema spectators of the time were conditioned to read the early ethnographic film text. How, for example, did audiences observe the life group displays within a museum setting or the native villages at the world’s fairs? The act of looking and navigating, Griffiths speculates, has less to do with the casual, detached, strolling figure of the flâneur and more to do with Walter Benjamin’s other character of the *badaud* or gawker. The *badaud* journeys through the physical spaces of the world’s fair or encounters the life group displays in the museum or sits in a darkened theater with a “desire to disappear into a crowd and simply stare at native peoples” (74). According to Griffiths, the spectator/museum goer as *badaud* underscores the tension between spectacle (gaping at, entranced with

native peoples) and pedagogy (the intent to impart anthropological knowledge about the life group display/native village/ethnographic film) that museum curators and anthropologist-filmmakers hoped to quell in order to secure the legitimacy of ethnographic film as a rigorous scientific document.

Such tensions reveal the uneasy dialogues circulating within the interstices of nineteenth-century anthropology, the space of popular culture, and the emergence of ethnographic film. Ethnographic filmmaking, with its often slippery relationship to popular culture, as evidenced by popular travel pictures like Edison’s *In and around Havana, Cuba* (1911) and *From Durban to Zululand* (1913) and the wide appeal of world’s fairs, threatened to destabilize nineteenth-century anthropology’s claim that it was indeed a scientific discipline (205). Griffiths speculates that this entangled position between spectacle and pedagogy, rationalism and pleasure, science and art, was a mitigating factor in anthropology’s tentative embrace of ethnographic filmmaking. It was also during the early twentieth century, Griffiths writes, that field-based anthropology was moving beyond visibility (anthropometric anthropology) to fieldwork that was more reliant on textuality (field notes). Hence, anthropologists attempting to incorporate the motion picture camera within the discipline faced an uphill battle.

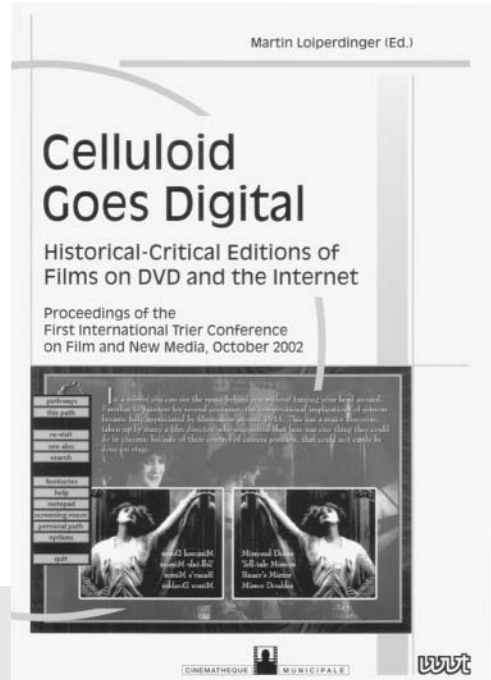
Griffiths acknowledges that this institutional battle was made even more challenging by the relative expense and logistical difficulties of working with the motion picture camera in the often humid, hot, and physically daunting fieldwork locations. Ethnographic film’s place within anthropology was therefore questioned vigorously. What would be the use value of such a film text? Would the film serve as a compelling cultural document? Would it function as a form of salvage ethnography to record the practices of vanishing peoples? Would it be used as a scientific tool to aid the anthropologist with data collection? In order to answer these questions, Griffiths examines the contributions of five incredibly intrepid anthropologist-filmmakers, including Frederick Starr, Pliny Earl Goddard, M. W. Hilton-Simpson, J. A. Haeseler, and Franz Boas, to the nascent field of visual anthropology.

The strength of Griffiths's book lies in its exhaustive construction of the complex politics and culture of visibility against which early ethnographic filmmaking emerged. The orientalist iconographies of early ethnographic films, for example, were strategically deployed as a civic tool to showcase Western (read white) superiority when faced with the ever-increasing influx of immigrants to America's shores in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Colonial masters (like Great Britain and France) also used these alluring "images of alterity" for their own colonial agendas, to encourage economic expansion and investment in their far-flung colonies (170).

The difficulty Griffiths faces is one she readily acknowledges, that ethnographic films "cannot be reduced to a singular site or textual meaning" (257). The exhibition contexts, whether looking through the kinoscope or attending screenings at the nickelodeon, greatly shaped the manner in which spectators negotiated their readings of the films. Furthermore, extrafilmic devices like magic lantern slides, music, and lectures conditioned the reception of these texts in a myriad of ways. Griffiths meets this methodological challenge by performing a case study of the American Museum of Natural History and its institutional relationship to early ethnographic films. In doing so, Griffiths relies on tangible historical evidence, including screening programs, memos, and letters, to discuss the place of ethnographic films within a museum space between 1908 and 1919.

*Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* provides a powerful context within which to view the emergence of the ethnographic film. In particular, Griffiths's engagement with the political and sociocultural implications raised by the entangled nature of the ethnographic film and popular culture, science, and the commercial enterprise carries with it a certain currency as these issues continue to haunt contemporary museum curators, anthropologists, and filmmakers.

## Conferences



## Celluloid Goes Digital

UNIVERSITY OF TRIER, GERMANY,  
OCTOBER 20–23, 2002

**Kay Hoffmann**

Unquestionably, the DVD (Digital Versatile Disc) is the most successful carrier medium in moving image history. Introduced only in 1997, the DVD has managed to become the most influential and innovative platform for the moving image. In 2002 every fifth household in Germany and 40 percent of American households already had a DVD player. The Motion Picture Association's published revenues for 2002 indicate that American studios organized by MPA earned \$37.3 billion, of which commercial theaters earned \$6.7 billion and the home market had a share of 43.7 percent (\$16.3 billion). The VHS format lost 12 percent market share, while DVDs increased theirs by 82 percent.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental consequences of digitalization for movie production, postproduction, and