

# BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

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## **New Worlds from Fragments: Film, Ethnography, and the Representation of Northwest Coast Cultures**

Rosalind C. Morris

Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994. xi + 202 pp. \$49.50 (cloth)

*Reviewer:* Michael M. Ames

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This is an intelligent work of cultural criticism that deserves to be widely read. Morris locates her film analysis within the larger postmodernist frames that have become so familiar, but without becoming subservient to them.

Nine films (from some 200 available ones), including some of the classics, are selected for examination: *Bella Bella* (1975), *Blunden Harbour* (1951), *Box of Treasures* (1983), *In the Land of the War Canoes* (1914), *Potlatch . . . a strict law bids us dance* (1975), *Saving the Sagas* (1927), *The Silent Ones* (1961), *The Tsimshian Indians of the Skeena River* (1925-27) and *Totem* (1959). The discussion of each begins with a detailed synopsis to provide “a thickly described interpretation” (p. 46). The author then shows how a film’s thematic content is derived from more general paradigmatic traditions and institutional interests found in anthropology, museums and, to a lesser degree, popular culture (including *Dances with Wolves* and *Incident at Oglala*). The major contrast described is between films produced before 1970 about Northwest Coast First Nations by non-Natives and those produced more recently under the sponsorship or direction of, or in collaboration with, First Nations communities. Curtis’s *In the Land of the Head Hunters* and the CBC’s *Totem* serve as examples of the former, while the U’Mista Cultural Centre’s *Box of Treasures* is probably the best-known example of the latter.

Many of the tropes and rhetorical strategies of the earlier films are carried forward to the self-representational ones, but they are recontextualized: from a paradigm of salvage ethnography to counterhegemonic narratives of “resistance and cultural regeneration” (p. 137). Morris describes how this inversion in the more recent films of “epitomizing events” (p. 138) or tropes (such as the loss of land or banning of the potlatch) occurs within the earlier established non-Native film tradition. Inevitably, “resistance must always be carried out under or even behind, the banner of the reigning vision” (p. 135). She then proceeds, in each chapter, to effectively link these observations to broader theoretical issues, “to comprehend the ways in which film and other representational forms emerge out of concrete historical circumstances and then re-enter history as constituent parts” (p. 176).

As stimulating as is Morris’s examination of tropes, it is nevertheless inevitable that such a perspective will manufacture tropes of its own. The rhetorical strategies of films are related to others in written ethnographies, for example, but the film work of anthropologists is not related to *their* other works. Thus, she offers *Totem*—which describes the Royal British Columbia Museum and UBC Museum of Anthropology totem-pole expedition to Ninstints on the Queen Charlotte Islands—as an example of the salvage interests of anthropologists Wilson Duff, Michael Kew, Harry Hawthorn and Wayne Suttles. She excludes from her “gaze” the fact that this salvage operation was only a

minor part of their anthropological contributions, most of which were not concerned with salvage. Hawthorn, the founding director of the Museum of Anthropology, gave most of his attention to contemporary social and political issues, including promoting contemporary Northwest Coast craft production and directing (prior to the Ninstints trip) the pioneering socio-economic survey of contemporary BC Indians. Duff was the only member of that trip who was fully engaged in museum work, and even he was as much (if not more) concerned with renewal than salvage.

Morris correctly notes that the separation between anthropology and the museum at UBC "was never finally achieved," and that the Department of Anthropology and Sociology "derived much of its public credibility" from association with the museum (p. 88). Throughout the history of this relationship, however, only a small minority of department members were ever involved in museum work. For the first 20 years, from 1947, the Museum of Anthropology was almost entirely the responsibility of Audrey Hawthorn and her students. Even today there are only three cross-appointments. Finally, Douglas Cole is listed as Dennis Cole on p. 135 and in the index, and there is no "e" in Hawthorn. But these are all minor quibbles about what is otherwise a fine book.

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### **The Caribbean Diaspora in Canada: Learning to Live with Racism**

Frances Henry

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995. xv + 297 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), \$22.95 (paper)

*Reviewer:* Stanley R. Barrett  
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In this study, one of Canada's foremost experts on racism examines the everyday life of the approximately 300 000 people of Caribbean origin in southern Ontario. A general ethnographic picture is built up in chapters ranging from the family to employment, education, religion, leisure activities and relationships with the police and the legal system. Data were gathered through participant observation and unstructured interviews, the latter carried out by five Black assistants with roots in the Caribbean. Henry supervised the field work, trained the interviewers, selected the interview sample (134 individuals), analyzed the data and wrote the text. Among the book's strengths are pertinent background data on Caribbean history and culture, comparisons with racism in Britain and the United States and rich case material from the interviews, often presented verbatim.

The central conclusion of this study is that Black immigrants from the Caribbean (Indo-Caribbeans are not dealt with) have been excluded from full participation in Canadian life, owing to the racism that they have confronted and, also, to a lesser degree, to cultural practices brought from the Caribbean. Such racism is found in the educational system, with its Eurocentric curriculum and the familiar stereotype that Blacks excel in sports rather than scholarship. Henry indicates that people from the Caribbean have tended to concentrate in a few residential areas in Toronto, a product of both their own desires and racist obstacles. Contrary to popular opinion, their participation rate in the labour force is slightly higher than the Canadian average, although few have made it to the top of the class structure. Noteworthy is the number of