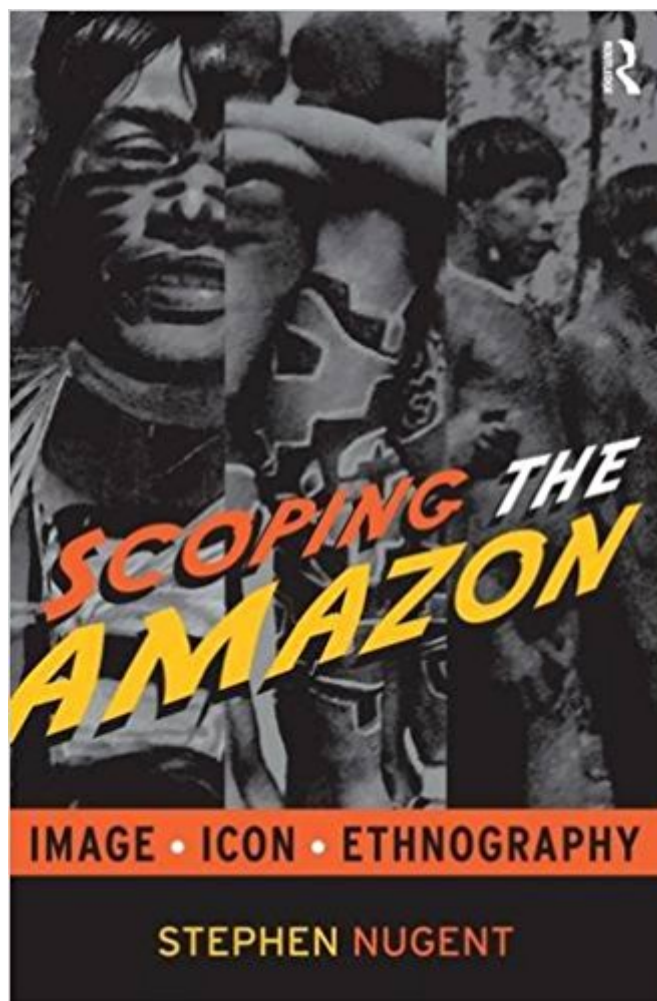


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# Scoping The : Image, Icon, And Ethnography



## Synopsis

The Indian is an icon that straddles the world between the professional anthropologist and the popular media. Presented alternately as the noble primitive, the savior of the environment, and as a savage, dissolute, cannibalistic half-human, it is an image well worth examining. Stephen Nugent does just that, critiquing the claims of authoritativeness inherent in visual images presented by anthropologists of life in the early 20th century and comparing them with the images found in popular books, movies, and posters. The book depicts the field of anthropology as its own form of culture industry and contrasts it to other similar industries, past and present. For visual anthropologists, ethnographers, specialists, and popular culture researchers, Nugent's book will be enlightening, entertaining reading.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Savage cannibal or utopian proto-environmentalist? Nugent examines both popular images of peoples in film and general books as well as changing anthropological views of the rainforest and its people.

Stephen Nugent is professor of anthropology and director of the Centre for Visual Anthropology at the Goldsmith's College, University of London. He has done fieldwork in Brazil since the 1970s. He is author of five books on the , elite culture, and cultural studies and a member of the Critique of Anthropology editorial collective.

Since the founding of anthropology as a social science in the late 19th century up through the end of the 20th century, the field has been one of the primary brokers of culture and the industry that surrounds it. Beginning with the founding "fathers" of the field and their desire to define culture and its subsequent particulars, up until recently with struggles over identity and who has the right to define that identity, anthropology has played a major role. This is particularly true in countries and among indigenous peoples that were at one point part of Western civilization's colonial and imperial past. As distant lands and people became known to science and were brought under the fold of Western colonial and imperial discourse, the construction, definition, and identities of "culture(s)" largely became the privy of anthropologists. This is no more so true than in the region of South America. As Stephen Nugent articulates in the recent book *Scoping the* "the geographical remoteness and marginality of most Brazilian indigenous peoples that survived through the 20th century has meant that anthropology as a field has been a key source and reference point for much public understanding of and knowledge about extant indigenous peoples" (p. 221). In this powerfully argued, and potentially deconstructive book, Nugent focuses on one product line within the anthropological culture industry - indigenous peoples of the Amazon - and its portrayal across three different, though linked, historical projections: the "green hell" of Victorian naturalism; the hunter-gatherer landscape of modern ethnography; and the Amazon of Hollywood and popular media. By reformulating one of anthropology's more recent core contradictions - that of replacing the universalism of science with the universalism of the visual - *Scoping the* offers a new medium, photography, as a way of retaining the possibility of anthropology's cross-cultural discourse while disavowing any scientific pretensions or associations. Whether this is actually possible is still undecided, but Nugent makes several strong arguments for and against such a universalism. Although the Amazon is widely perceived as a region dominated by nature - not by culture - the region and the indigenous peoples who inhabit it have, in fact, been part of the modern world system for well over four hundred years. To many in the Western world the Amazon still exemplifies a vast "wilderness," despite the historical evidence indicating that the region has been massively altered in many ways since humans first arrived some 10,000 years ago. As *Scoping the* reveals, however, the main images used to represent the Amazon in the Western world have tended to hide this complexity and contradiction. Instead, they have invoked a unified, dehistoricized domain of rainforest, indigenous hunter-gatherers, and mysterious unknown plants and animals. The ahistoricism and persistent naturalism still used in depicting the Amazon is surprising given the arguments in *Scoping the*, as Nugent clearly articulates how the region has been part of the modern world since the earliest phases of Western colonization. In the beginning of the book Nugent discusses why he took on this

deconstructive project. "I mention these matters of image and is not to establish any credentials in this area... but in order to trace the path leading back to the photographic record of the Indians and my interest in looking at how a set of stereotyped images came to be established and the kinds of relationships it has with a late-arriving scholarly literature - ethnography" (p. 13). In progressing along this course, and as Nugent convincingly argues in his book, the reason that these stereotypical images and associated ethnographic literature worked for each other's mutual benefit is that they could absorb, contest, coexist with, transcend, and otherwise cope with each other. An image of indigenous Indian peoples that is at once "the real thing" and also a historical product of a protracted encounter that has contained elements of genocide/ethnocide, accommodation, religious conversion, patronage, duplicity, admiration/reverence, celebration, and cooperation allow neither to be seriously questioned or contradicted for fear of offense. This intertwined relationship between anthropology, ethnography, and indigenous Indian stereotypes came rather late in the history of the region. Although anthropological attention to the indigenous peoples' identity now has an undoubted authority, it did not develop until almost 400 years after the first European exploration of the region. As Nugent articulates, because of this the authority and the record that it rests upon sits atop many layers of description and image making, commencing with the accounts of Francisco de Carvajal in 1555. Carvajal's and many other early accounts from European explorers and missionaries failed, however, to capture popular attention and to define a common and lasting stereotype within Western civilization's consciousness. It was not, as Nugent points out, until the first photographs of indigenous peoples appeared in the third quarter of the 19th century that this occurred. Hence, the detailed focus on images and their portrayal in the book. When this intertwined relationship developed, anthropology was in a state of transition. Moving from its founding explorer/naturalist mode, anthropology turned toward a more scientifically oriented kind of investigation. By the time an ethnographic literature had achieved dimensions that warranted encyclopedic rendition, such as in Steward's *Handbook of South American Indians* (1948) key elements of the image of indigenous peoples already had wide recognition: headhunter, cannibal, primitive, naked, long haired, savage, nomad, bow hunter, and so on. These are the same images that fed into - and were embraced by - early anthropological literature of the region. As Scoping the argues, however, this dominance of the cultural identity of the region - the environment, its people, and their lifeways - by anthropology and ethnographic literature is only the latest phase in a series of stereotyping images of the region. According to Nugent the first phase is associated with accounts provided by religious chroniclers who accompanied, respectively, the first descent and first ascent of the River: Carvajal who documented the voyage of Orellana (1542), and Acuna who documented Teixeira's expedition a

century later (1637). La Condamine (1737), von Humboldt (1799), von Spix and von Martius (1817) - and subsequently, Agassiz (1865) - represent the second phase, characterized by a explorer/naturalist agenda. Phase three is closely associated with Wallace (1889), Bates (1892), and Spruce (1908), independent scientists whose work was mainly funded through the sale of botanical and cultural collections. Phase four, according to Nugent, is the official ethnographic record, effectively commencing with Curt Nimuendaju (1939, 1942, 1946, 1949, 1952), while the fifth phase, which continues today, is characterized by the so-called "opening" of ia via projects associated with natural resource development. These phases are fairly well known among experts of the region, and although they provide a means of looking at ia chronologically, the tracing of stereotypical imagery and representations across the phases is not the major contribution of this book, although it is an important one. Rather, by looking at imagery and its association with stereotype making across time, *Scoping the* strongly challenges the almost sacred association held within the larger social science arena between rigid environmental constraint and the possibility for the emergence of social complexity that has been a keystone of much research. Likewise, the book gives pause to the notion that the predominant form of contemporary indigenous peoples in the is typical of pre-Conquest societies (i.e., small scale, mobile foragers, etc.). It are these two final points that make *Scoping the* such a powerful contribution to the literature, not only in ia and South America, but also for other regions where the construction, definition, and identity of indigenous peoples has been dominated by social science. As Nugent powerfully argues, the handed down images of indigenous peoples of ia are not necessarily the most accurate. In fact, they are most likely highly constructed stereotypes that offer us only one small glance at the lives, culture, identity, and history of the indigenous peoples of the region. *Scoping the* is a well written and carefully researched book that opens more lines of discussion and investigation than it closes. Perfect for advanced undergraduate classes, graduate seminars, and those working in the region, Nugent's book is a welcome addition to the literature. No longer can one purport to be ignorant of the stereotypes that have emerged out of the concerning indigenous peoples and their history. Rather, it is now up to us - social scientists and others - to make sure that such stereotypes are no longer perpetuated. *Scoping the* makes a welcome contribution to such an endeavor. Indigenous Peoples Issues & Resources[...]

A really great book! Nugent writes very well and his reviews about icons, cliches, wrong ideas about the and the Indians in the visual anthropology history are clear, complete and really useful for those who work in the field. I found it very useful for my job (I'm a documentary director who works since

a lot of years in the )Giorgio Piracci[...]

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