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Writing Culture

The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography

EDITED BY JAMES CLIFFORD AND GEORGE E. MARCUS

Experiments in Contemporary Anthropology

A School of American Research Advanced Seminar

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Why have ethnographic accounts recently lost so much of their authority? Why were they ever believable? Who has the right to challenge an "objective" cultural description? Was Margaret Mead simply wrong about Samoa as has recently been claimed? Or was her image of an exotic land a partial truth reflecting the concerns of her time and a complex encounter with Samoans? Are not all ethnographies rhetorical performances determined by the need to tell an effective story? Can the claims of ideology and desire ever be fully reconciled with the needs of theory and observation?

These are some of the questions raised by *Writing Culture,* new essays by a group of experienced ethnographers, a literary critic, and a historian of anthropology. All the authors are known for advanced analytic work on ethnographic writing. Their preoccupation is both theoretical and practical: they see the writing of cultural accounts as a crucial form of knowledge—the troubled, experimental knowledge of a self in jeopardy among others.

These essays place ethnography at the center of a new intersection of social history, interpretive anthropology, travel writing, discourse theory, and textual criticism. They analyze classic examples of cultural description, from Goethe and Catlin to Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and Le Roy Ladurie, showing the persistence of allegorical patterns and rhetorical tropes. They assess recent experimental trends and explore the functions of orality, ethnicity, and power in ethnographic composition.

Writing Culture argues that ethnography is in the midst of a political and epistemological crisis: Western writers no longer portray non-Western peoples with unchallenged authority; the process of cultural representation is now inescapably contingent, historical, and contestable. The essays in this volume help us imagine a fully dialectical ethnography acting powerfully in the postmodern world system. They challenge all writers in the humanities and social sciences to rethink the poetics and politics of cultural invention.

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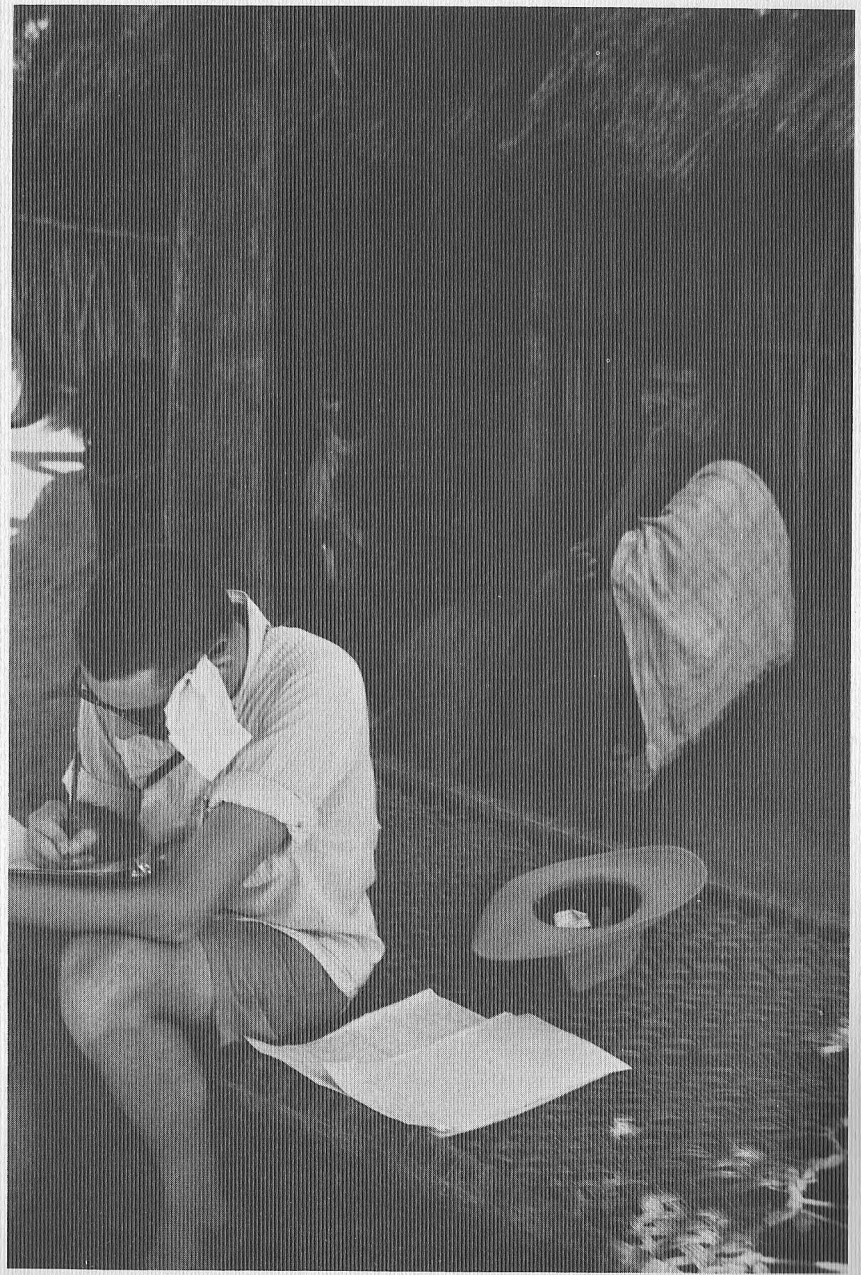
Writing Culture



Stephen Tyler in the Field. Photography by Martha G. Tyler.

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A School of American Research Advanced Seminar

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Preface

These essays are the product of intensive discussions held at the School of American Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, during April 1984. Following the school's format for "advanced seminars," conversations continued over a week, and the number of participants was strictly limited to ten. The group discussed papers circulated in advance and explored a wide range of topics relevant to the seminar's focus on "the making of ethnographic texts." Some of the participants had been recent innovators in the writing of ethnography (Paul Rabinow, Vincent Crapanzano, Renato Rosaldo, Michael Fischer); others had been systematically developing critiques of its history, rhetoric, and current prospects (Mary Louise Pratt, Robert Thornton, Stephen Tyler, Talal Asad, George Marcus, James Clifford). All were involved with advanced, ongoing work in textual criticism and cultural theory. Eight of the ten participants had backgrounds in anthropology, one in history, one in literary studies. The group's center of gravity in one field, cultural anthropology, ensured a common language and range of reference, thus allowing the exchanges to take place at an advanced level. But the seminar's scope was interdisciplinary. All the participants had questioned disciplines and genres in their recent work, drawing as needed from historical, literary, anthropological, political, and philosophical sources. More information is contained in the "Notes on Contributors" (pp. 295–96 below), and the volume's common Bibliography gives full citations of relevant works by each individual. Of the ten essays presented at the seminar, nine are included here. (For contingent reasons, Robert Thornton could not revise his in time to meet the deadline.)

By looking critically at one of the principal things ethnographers *do*—that is, write—the seminar sought both to reinterpret cultural anthropology's recent past and to open up its future possibilities. But while pursuing textual and literary analyses, the seminar also considered the limitations of such approaches. Several papers stressed, and the discussions repeatedly returned to, larger contexts of systematic

power inequality, world-systems constraints, and institutional formations that could only partly be accounted for by a focus on textual production. The seminar thus pursued a limited set of emphases self-critically in an attempt to come to terms with the politics and poetics of cultural representation. For a fuller account of the Santa Fe discussions (including topics that have not found their way into this volume), see the report published in *Current Anthropology* 26 (April 1985): 267–71. Some of the more blatant exclusions produced by the organization and focus of the seminar are discussed there, as well as in the Introduction that immediately follows this Preface.

The essays in this volume are all revised versions of the working papers presented at the seminar. Some are now quite different. As editors we have not prodded them toward thematic unity or tried to contrive artificial "conversations" between them. Readers will doubtless find friction as well as agreement. Nor have we tried to impose a uniformity of style on the essays; on the contrary, we have encouraged diversity. The sequential ordering of the volume's parts does not hold any great significance. There is a general progression from studies with a literary bent toward those that question this emphasis—for example, Rabinow's critical framing of the entire "textualist" approach. The essays tend, also, to move from retrospective critiques of ethnographic conventions to discussions of current possibilities for experimental work. By this logic, Tyler's evocation of a "post-modern ethnography" might have been placed at the end. But in fact his essay looks to pre-modern sources for the post-modern and is generally unclassifiable. We did not wish to leave the impression that the volume as a whole points in any utopian or prophetic direction.

As editors, we would particularly like to thank the seminar participants for their cooperation and good humor; the School of American Research (notably its president, Douglas Schwartz, and its director of publications, Jane Kepp) for hospitality and encouragement; the Humanities Division at the University of California, Santa Cruz; and especially Barbara Podratz, with the help of Margi Wald, at Rice University, for assistance in preparing the manuscript. At the University of California Press, Naomi Schneider and James Clark offered editorial help and encouragement. We are grateful, also, to more than a few press and nonpress readers of the manuscript, not only for their specific suggestions, but especially for their general enthusiasm. They confirmed our hope that the book would strike an important, controversial chord in all those fields where ethnography and cultural criticism are becoming important. Many of these readers are fully as qualified to contribute to a volume on this topic as are the ten individuals who gathered at Santa Fe. The questions raised in the pages that follow are being widely debated; we did not invent them. We trust that those who have already contributed to the debate will find themselves appropriately thanked, or at least engaged.

Finally, as an Invocation, we offer the following verses composed in mock despair by our first editorial reader, Jane Kepp, dictionary in hand.

The Hermeneut's Dilemma, or, A Jargon Poem

Twas prelapsarian, and the hermeneut
Sat huddled with his faithful trope,
Sunk in thaumasmus, idly strumming his lute,
Lost in subversion with nary a hope.

Then with heartfelt apoplanesis he cried,
O come, interlocutor, give me your ear!
In my pathopoeia I've slandered and lied;
Now of my grim project this discourse you'll hear.

I've dabbled in vile phenomenological rites,
And joined in a secret synecdoche,
Squandered my received knowledge in bibulous nights,
And embraced epistemological heresy.

O, but now my metonymy is too great to bear!
This ecphonesis has become too deictic to hide!
I've lost all the poesis I once held so dear . . .
And, with typical hypotyposis, he died.

James Clifford
University of California, Santa Cruz

George E. Marcus
Rice University

JAMES CLIFFORD

Introduction: Partial Truths

Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary it's not enough to choose a "subject" (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one.

ROLAND BARTHES, "Jeunes Chercheurs"

You'll need more tables than you think.

ELENORE SMITH BOWEN, advice for fieldworkers, in *Return to Laughter*

Our frontispiece shows Stephen Tyler, one of this volume's contributors, at work in India in 1963. The ethnographer is absorbed in writing—taking dictation? fleshing out an interpretation? recording an important observation? dashing off a poem? Hunched over in the heat, he has draped a wet cloth over his glasses. His expression is obscured. An interlocutor looks over his shoulder—with boredom? patience? amusement? In this image the ethnographer hovers at the edge of the frame—faceless, almost extraterrestrial, a hand that writes. It is not the usual portrait of anthropological fieldwork. We are more accustomed to pictures of Margaret Mead exuberantly playing with children in Manus or questioning villagers in Bali. Participant-observation, the classic formula for ethnographic work, leaves little room for texts. But still, somewhere lost in his account of fieldwork among the Mbuti pygmies—running along jungle paths, sitting up at night singing, sleeping in a crowded leaf hut—Colin Turnbull mentions that he lugged around a typewriter.

In Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, where a photograph of the ethnographer's tent among Kiriwinan dwellings is prominently displayed, there is no revelation of the tent's interior. But in another photo, carefully posed, Malinowski recorded himself writ-

ing at a table. (The tent flaps are pulled back; he sits in profile, and some Trobrianders stand outside, observing the curious rite.) This remarkable picture was only published two years ago—a sign of our times, not his.[1] We begin, not with participant-observation or with cultural texts (suitable for interpretation), but with writing, the making of texts. No longer a marginal, or occulted, dimension, writing has emerged as central to what anthropologists do both in the field and thereafter. The fact that it has not until recently been portrayed or seriously discussed reflects the persistence of an ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience. Writing reduced to method: keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, "writing up" results.

The essays collected here assert that this ideology has crumbled. They see culture as composed of seriously contested codes and representations; they assume that the poetic and the political are inseparable, that science is in, not above, historical and linguistic processes. They assume that academic and literary genres interpenetrate and that the writing of cultural descriptions is properly experimental and ethical. Their focus on text making and rhetoric serves to highlight the constructed, artificial nature of cultural accounts. It undermines overly transparent modes of authority, and it draws attention to the historical predicament of ethnography, the fact that it is always caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures (Wagner 1975). As will soon be apparent, the range of issues raised is not literary in any traditional sense. Most of the essays, while focusing on textual practices, reach beyond texts to contexts of power, resistance, institutional constraint, and innovation.

Ethnography's tradition is that of Herodotus and of Montesquieu's Persian. It looks obliquely at all collective arrangements, distant or nearby. It makes the familiar strange, the exotic quotidian. Ethnography cultivates an engaged clarity like that urged by Virginia Woolf: "Let us never cease from thinking—what is this 'civilization' in which we find ourselves? What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them? What are these professions and why should we make money out of them? Where in short is it leading us, the procession of the sons of educated men?" (1936: 62–63). Ethnography is actively situated *between* powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of

1. Malinowski 1961 : 17. The photograph inside the tent was published in 1983 by George Stocking in *History of Anthropology* 1 : 101. This volume contains other telling scenes of ethnographic writing.

innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes.

Ethnography is an emergent interdisciplinary phenomenon. Its authority and rhetoric have spread to many fields where "culture" is a newly problematic object of description and critique. The present book, though beginning with fieldwork and its texts, opens onto the wider practice of writing about, against, and among cultures. This blurred purview includes, to name only a few developing perspectives, historical ethnography (Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Davis, Carlo Ginzburg), cultural poetics (Stephen Greenblatt), cultural criticism (Hayden White, Edward Said, Fredric Jameson), the analysis of implicit knowledge and everyday practices (Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau), the critique of hegemonic structures of feeling (Raymond Williams), the study of scientific communities (following Thomas Kuhn), the semiotics of exotic worlds and fantastic spaces (Tzvetan Todorov, Louis Marin), and all those studies that focus on meaning systems, disputed traditions, or cultural artifacts.

This complex interdisciplinary area, approached here from the starting point of a crisis in anthropology, is changing and diverse. Thus I do not want to impose a false unity on the exploratory essays that follow. Though sharing a general sympathy for approaches combining poetics, politics, and history, they frequently disagree. Many of the contributions fuse literary theory and ethnography. Some probe the limits of such approaches, stressing the dangers of aestheticism and the constraints of institutional power. Others enthusiastically advocate experimental forms of writing. But in their different ways they all analyze past and present practices out of a commitment to future possibilities. They see ethnographic writing as changing, inventive: "History," in William Carlos Williams's words, "that should be a left hand to us, as of a violinist."

"Literary" approaches have recently enjoyed some popularity in the human sciences. In anthropology influential writers such as Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean Duvignaud, and Edmund Leach, to mention only a few, have shown an interest in literary theory and practice. In their quite different ways they have blurred the boundary separating art from science. Nor is theirs a new attraction. Malinowski's authorial identifications (Conrad, Frazer) are well known. Margaret Mead, Edward Sapir, and Ruth Benedict saw themselves as both anthropologists and literary artists. In Paris surrealism and professional ethnography regularly exchanged both ideas and personnel. But until recently literary influences have been held at a distance from the "rigorous" core of

the discipline. Sapir and Benedict had, after all, to hide their poetry from the scientific gaze of Franz Boas. And though ethnographers have often been called novelists manqué (especially those who write a little too well), the notion that literary procedures pervade any work of cultural representation is a recent idea in the discipline. To a growing number, however, the "literariness" of anthropology—and especially of ethnography—appears as much more than a matter of good writing or distinctive style.[2] Literary processes—metaphor, figuration, narrative—affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered, from the first jotted "observations," to the completed book, to the ways these configurations "make sense" in determined acts of reading.[3]

It has long been asserted that scientific anthropology is also an "art," that ethnographies have literary qualities. We often hear that an author writes with style, that certain descriptions are vivid or convincing (should not every accurate description be convincing?). A work is deemed evocative or artfully composed in addition to being factual; expressive, rhetorical functions are conceived as decorative or merely as ways to present an objective analysis or description more effectively. Thus the facts of the matter may be kept separate, at least in principle, from their means of communication. But the literary or rhetorical dimensions of ethnography can no longer be so easily compartmentalized. They are active at every level of cultural science. Indeed, the very notion of a "literary" approach to a discipline, "anthropology," is seriously misleading.

The present essays do not represent a tendency or perspective within a coherent "anthropology" (*pace* Wolf 1980). The "four-field" definition of the discipline, of which Boas was perhaps the last virtuoso, included physical (or biological) anthropology, archaeology, cultural (or social) anthropology, and linguistics. Few today can seriously claim that these fields share a unified approach or object, though the dream persists, thanks largely to institutional arrangements. The essays in this volume occupy a new space opened up by the disintegration of "Man" as *telos* for a whole discipline, and they draw on recent developments in the fields of textual criticism, cultural history, semiotics, hermeneutic philosophy, and psychoanalysis. Some years ago, in

2. A partial list of works exploring this expanded field of the "literary" in anthropology includes (not mentioning contributors to the present volume): Boon 1972, 1977, 1982; Geertz 1973, 1983; Turner 1974, 1975; Fernandez 1974; Diamond 1974; Duvignaud 1970, 1973; Favret-Saada 1980; Favret-Saada and Contreras 1981; Dumont 1978; Tedlock 1983; Jamin 1979, 1980, 1985; Webster 1982; Thornton 1983, 1984.

3. See the work of Hayden White (1973, 1978) for a tropological theory of "prefigured" realities; also Latour and Woolgar (1979) for a view of scientific activity as "inscription."

a trenchant essay, Rodney Needham surveyed the theoretical incoherence, tangled roots, impossible bedfellows, and divergent specializations that seemed to be leading to academic anthropology's intellectual disintegration. He suggested with ironic equanimity that the field might soon be redistributed among a variety of neighboring disciplines. Anthropology in its present form would undergo "an iridescent metamorphosis" (1970:46). The present essays are part of the metamorphosis.

But if they are post-anthropological, they are also post-literary. Michel Foucault (1973), Michel de Certeau (1983), and Terry Eagleton (1983) have recently argued that "literature" itself is a transient category. Since the seventeenth century, they suggest, Western science has excluded certain expressive modes from its legitimate repertoire: rhetoric (in the name of "plain," transparent signification), fiction (in the name of fact), and subjectivity (in the name of objectivity). The qualities eliminated from science were localized in the category of "literature." Literary texts were deemed to be metaphoric and allegorical, composed of inventions rather than observed facts; they allowed a wide latitude to the emotions, speculations, and subjective "genius" of their authors. De Certeau notes that the fictions of literary language were scientifically condemned (and esthetically appreciated) for lacking "univocity," the purportedly unambiguous accounting of natural science and professional history. In this schema, the discourse of literature and fiction is inherently unstable; it "plays on the stratification of meaning; it narrates one thing in order to tell something else; it delineates itself in a language from which it continuously draws effects of meaning that cannot be circumscribed or checked" (1983: 128). This discourse, repeatedly banished from science, but with uneven success, is incurably figurative and polysemous. (Whenever its effects begin to be felt too openly, a scientific text will appear "literary"; it will seem to be using too many metaphors, to be relying on style, evocation, and so on.)[4]

By the nineteenth century, literature had emerged as a bourgeois institution closely allied with "culture" and "art." Raymond Williams (1966) shows how this special, refined sensibility functioned as a kind of court of appeals in response to the perceived dislocations and vulgarity of industrial, class society. Literature and art were, in effect, cir-

4. "It might be objected that *figurative style* is not the only style, or even the only poetic style, and that rhetoric also takes cognizance of what is called *simple* style. But in fact this is merely a less decorated style, or rather, a style decorated more simply, and it, too, like the lyric and the epic, has its own special figures. A style in which figure is strictly absent does not exist," writes Gérard Genette (1982:47).

cumscribed zones in which nonutilitarian, "higher" values were maintained. At the same time they were domains for the playing out of experimental, avant-garde transgressions. Seen in this light, the ideological formations of art and culture have no essential or eternal status. They are changing and contestable, like the special rhetoric of "literature." The essays that follow do not, in fact, appeal to a literary practice marked off in an esthetic, creative, or humanizing domain. They struggle, in their different ways, against the received definitions of art, literature, science, and history. And if they sometimes suggest that ethnography is an "art," they return the word to an older usage—before it had become associated with a higher or rebellious sensibility—to the eighteenth-century meaning Williams recalls: art as the skillful fashioning of useful artifacts. The making of ethnography is artisanal, tied to the worldly work of writing.

Ethnographic writing is determined in at least six ways: (1) contextually (it draws from and creates meaningful social milieux); (2) rhetorically (it uses and is used by expressive conventions); (3) institutionally (one writes within, and against, specific traditions, disciplines, audiences); (4) generically (an ethnography is usually distinguishable from a novel or a travel account); (5) politically (the authority to represent cultural realities is unequally shared and at times contested); (6) historically (all the above conventions and constraints are changing). These determinations govern the inscription of coherent ethnographic fictions.

To call ethnographies fictions may raise empiricist hackles. But the word as commonly used in recent textual theory has lost its connotation of falsehood, of something merely opposed to truth. It suggests the partiality of cultural and historical truths, the ways they are systematic and exclusive. Ethnographic writings can properly be called fictions in the sense of "something made or fashioned," the principal burden of the word's Latin root, *fingere*. But it is important to preserve the meaning not merely of making, but also of making up, of inventing things not actually real. (*Fingere*, in some of its uses, implied a degree of falsehood.) Interpretive social scientists have recently come to view good ethnographies as "true fictions," but usually at the cost of weakening the oxymoron, reducing it to the banal claim that all truths are constructed. The essays collected here keep the oxymoron sharp. For example, Vincent Crapanzano portrays ethnographers as tricksters, promising, like Hermes, not to lie, but never undertaking to tell the whole truth either. Their rhetoric empowers *and subverts* their message. Other essays reinforce the point by stressing that cultural fictions are based on systematic, and contestable, exclusions. These may involve silencing incongruent voices ("Two Crows

denies it!") or deploying a consistent manner of quoting, "speaking for," translating the reality of others. Purportedly irrelevant personal or historical circumstances will also be excluded (one cannot tell all). Moreover, the maker (but why only one?) of ethnographic texts cannot avoid expressive tropes, figures, and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it. In this view, more Nietzschean than realist or hermeneutic, all constructed truths are made possible by powerful "lies" of exclusion and rhetoric. Even the best ethnographic texts—serious, true fictions—are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control.

Ethnographic truths are thus inherently *partial*—committed and incomplete. This point is now widely asserted—and resisted at strategic points by those who fear the collapse of clear standards of verification. But once accepted and built into ethnographic art, a rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact. A recent work by Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (1983), offers a good example of self-conscious, serious partiality. Price recounts the specific conditions of his fieldwork among the Saramakas, a Maroon society of Suriname. We learn about external and self-imposed limits to the research, about individual informants, and about the construction of the final written artifact. (The book avoids a smoothed-over, monological form, presenting itself as literally pieced-together, full of holes.) *First-Time* is evidence of the fact that acute political and epistemological self-consciousness need not lead to ethnographic self-absorption, or to the conclusion that it is impossible to know anything certain about other people. Rather, it leads to a concrete sense of why a Saramaka folktale, featured by Price, teaches that "knowledge is power, and that one must never reveal all of what one knows" (1983:14).

A complex technique of revelation and secrecy governs the communication (reinvention) of "First-Time" knowledge, lore about the society's crucial struggles for survival in the eighteenth century. Using techniques of deliberate frustration, digression, and incompleteness, old men impart their historical knowledge to younger kinsmen, preferably at cock's crow, the hour before dawn. These strategies of ellipsis, concealment, and partial disclosure determine ethnographic relations as much as they do the transmission of stories between generations. Price has to accept the paradoxical fact that "any Saramaka narrative (including those told at cock's crow with the ostensible intent of communicating knowledge) will leave out most of what the teller knows about the incident in question. A person's knowledge is supposed to grow only in small increments, and in any aspect of life

people are deliberately told only a little bit more than the speaker thinks they already know" (10).

It soon becomes apparent that there is no "complete" corpus of First-Time knowledge, that no one—least of all the visiting ethnographer—can know this lore except through an open-ended series of contingent, power-laden encounters. "It is accepted that different Saramaka historians will have different versions, and it is up to the listener to piece together for himself the version of an event that he, for the time being, accepts" (28). Though Price, the scrupulous fieldworker and historian, armed with writing, has gathered a text that surpasses in extent what individuals know or tell, it still "represents only the tip of the iceberg that Saramakas *collectively* preserve about First-Time" (25).

The ethical questions raised by forming a written archive of secret, oral lore are considerable, and Price wrestles with them openly. Part of his solution has been to undermine the completeness of his own account (but not its seriousness) by publishing a book that is a series of fragments. The aim is not to indicate unfortunate gaps remaining in our knowledge of eighteenth-century Saramaka life, but rather to present an inherently imperfect mode of knowledge, which produces gaps as it fills them. Though Price himself is not free of the desire to write a complete ethnography or history, to portray a "whole way of life" (24), the message of partiality resonates throughout *First-Time*.

Ethnographers are more and more like the Cree hunter who (the story goes) came to Montreal to testify in court concerning the fate of his hunting lands in the new James Bay hydroelectric scheme. He would describe his way of life. But when administered the oath he hesitated: "I'm not sure I can tell the truth. . . . I can only tell what I know."

~

It is useful to recall that the witness was speaking artfully, in a determining context of power. Since Michel Leiris's early essay of 1950, "L'Ethnographe devant le colonialisme" (but why so late?), anthropology has had to reckon with historical determination and political conflict in its midst. A rapid decade, from 1950 to 1960, saw the end of empire become a widely accepted project, if not an accomplished fact. Georges Balandier's "*situation coloniale*" was suddenly visible (1955). Imperial relations, formal and informal, were no longer the accepted rule of the game—to be reformed piecemeal, or ironically distanced in various ways. Enduring power inequalities had clearly constrained ethnographic practice. This "situation" was felt earliest in

France, largely because of the Vietnamese and Algerian conflicts and through the writings of an ethnographically aware group of black intellectuals and poets, the *négritude* movement of Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, René Ménil, and Léon Damas. The pages of *Présence Africaine* in the early fifties offered an unusual forum for collaboration between these writers and social scientists like Balandier, Leiris, Marcel Griaule, Edmond Ortigues, and Paul Rivet. In other countries the *crise de conscience* came somewhat later. One thinks of Jacques Maquet's influential essay "Objectivity in Anthropology" (1964), Dell Hymes's *Reinventing Anthropology* (1973), the work of Stanley Diamond (1974), Bob Scholte (1971, 1972, 1978), Gérard Leclerc (1972), and particularly of Talal Asad's collection *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (1973), which has stimulated much clarifying debate (Firth et al. 1977).

In popular imagery the ethnographer has shifted from a sympathetic, authoritative observer (best incarnated, perhaps, by Margaret Mead) to the unflattering figure portrayed by Vine Deloria in *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969). Indeed, the negative portrait has sometimes hardened into caricature—the ambitious social scientist making off with tribal lore and giving nothing in return, imposing crude portraits on subtle peoples, or (most recently) serving as dupe for sophisticated informants. Such portraits are about as realistic as the earlier heroic versions of participant-observation. Ethnographic work has indeed been enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities, and it continues to be implicated. It enacts power relations. But its function within these relations is complex, often ambivalent, potentially counter-hegemonic.

Different rules of the game for ethnography are now emerging in many parts of the world. An outsider studying Native American cultures may expect, perhaps as a requirement for continuing research, to testify in support of land claim litigation. And a variety of formal restrictions are now placed on fieldwork by indigenous governments at national and local levels. These condition in new ways what can, and especially cannot, be said about particular peoples. A new figure has entered the scene, the "indigenous ethnographer" (Fahim, ed. 1982; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). Insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways. The diverse post- and neocolonial rules for ethnographic practice do not necessarily encourage "better" cultural accounts. The criteria for judging a good account have never been settled and are changing. But what has emerged from all these ideological shifts, rule changes, and new compromises is the fact that a series of historical pressures have begun to reposition

anthropology with respect to its "objects" of study. Anthropology no longer speaks with automatic authority for others defined as unable to speak for themselves ("primitive," "pre-literate," "without history"). Other groups can less easily be distanced in special, almost always past or passing, times—represented as if they were not involved in the present world systems that implicate ethnographers along with the peoples they study. "Cultures" do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship.

The critique of colonialism in the postwar period—an undermining of "The West's" ability to represent other societies—has been reinforced by an important process of theorizing about the limits of representation itself. There is no way adequately to survey this multifarious critique of what Vico called the "serious poem" of cultural history. Positions proliferate: "hermeneutics," "structuralism," "history of mentalities," "neo-Marxism," "genealogy," "post-structuralism," "post-modernism," "pragmatism"; also a spate of "alternate epistemologies"—feminist, ethnic, and non-Western. What is at stake, but not always recognized, is an ongoing critique of the West's most confident, characteristic discourses. Diverse philosophies may implicitly have this critical stance in common. For example, Jacques Derrida's unraveling of logocentrism, from the Greeks to Freud, and Walter J. Ong's quite different diagnosis of the consequences of literacy share an overarching rejection of the institutionalized ways one large group of humanity has for millennia construed its world. New historical studies of hegemonic patterns of thought (Marxist, Annaliste, Foucaultian) have in common with recent styles of textual criticism (semiotic, reader-response, post-structural) the conviction that what appears as "real" in history, the social sciences, the arts, even in common sense, is always analyzable as a restrictive and expressive set of social codes and conventions. Hermeneutic philosophy in its varying styles, from Wilhelm Dilthey and Paul Ricoeur to Heidegger, reminds us that the simplest cultural accounts are intentional creations, that interpreters constantly construct themselves through the others they study. The twentieth-century sciences of "language," from Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jacobson to Benjamin Lee Whorf, Sapir, and Wittgenstein, have made inescapable the systematic and situational verbal structures that determine all representations of reality. Finally, the return of rhetoric to an important place in many fields of study (it had for millennia been at the core of Western education) has made possible a detailed anatomy of conventional expressive modes. Allied

with semiotics and discourse analysis, the new rhetoric is concerned with what Kenneth Burke called "strategies for the encompassing of situations" (1969:3). It is less about how to speak well than about how to speak at all, and to act meaningfully, in the world of public cultural symbols.

The impact of these critiques is beginning to be felt in ethnography's sense of its own development. Noncelebratory histories are becoming common. The new histories try to avoid charting the discovery of some current wisdom (origins of the culture concept, and so forth); and they are suspicious of promoting and demoting intellectual precursors in order to confirm a particular paradigm. (For the latter approach, see Harris 1968 and Evans-Pritchard 1981). Rather, the new histories treat anthropological ideas as enmeshed in local practices and institutional constraints, as contingent and often "political" solutions to cultural problems. They construe science as a social process. They stress the historical discontinuities, as well as continuities, of past and present practices, as often as not making present knowledge seem temporary, in motion. The authority of a scientific discipline, in this kind of historical account, will always be mediated by the claims of rhetoric and power.[5]

Another major impact of the accumulating political/theoretical critique of anthropology may be briefly summarized as a rejection of "visualism." Ong (1967, 1977), among others, has studied ways in which the senses are hierarchically ordered in different cultures and epochs. He argues that the truth of vision in Western, literate cultures has predominated over the evidences of sound and interlocution, of touch, smell, and taste. (Mary Pratt has observed that references to odor, very prominent in travel writing, are virtually absent from ethnographies.)[6] The predominant metaphors in anthropological research have been participant-observation, data collection, and cultural description, all of which presuppose a standpoint outside—looking at, objectifying, or, somewhat closer, "reading," a given reality. Ong's

5. I exclude from this category the various histories of "anthropological" ideas, which must always have a Whiggish cast. I include the strong historicism of George Stocking, which often has the effect of questioning disciplinary genealogies (for example, 1968:69–90). The work of Terry Clark on the institutionalization of social science (1973) and of Foucault on the sociopolitical constitution of "discursive formations" (1973) points in the direction I am indicating. See also: Hartog (1980), Duchet (1971), many works by De Certeau (e.g., 1980), Boon (1982), Rupp-Eisenreich (1984), and the yearly volume *History of Anthropology*, edited by Stocking, whose approach goes well beyond the history of ideas or theory. An allied approach can be found in recent social studies of science research: e.g., Knorr-Cetina (1981), Latour (1984), Knorr-Cetina and Mulkay (1983).

6. An observation by Pratt at the Santa Fe seminar. The relative inattention to sound is beginning to be corrected in recent ethnographic writing (e.g., Feld 1982). For examples of work unusually attentive to the sensorium, see Stoller (1984a, b).

work has been mobilized as a critique of ethnography by Johannes Fabian (1983), who explores the consequences of positing cultural facts as things observed, rather than, for example, heard, invented in dialogue, or transcribed. Following Frances Yates (1966), he argues that the taxonomic imagination in the West is strongly visualist in nature, constituting cultures as if they were theaters of memory, or spatialized arrays.

In a related polemic against "Orientalism" Edward Said (1978) identifies persistent tropes by which Europeans and Americans have visualized Eastern and Arab cultures. The Orient functions as a theater, a stage on which a performance is repeated, to be seen from a privileged standpoint. (Barthes [1977] locates a similar "perspective" in the emerging bourgeois esthetics of Diderot.) For Said, the Orient is "textualized"; its multiple, divergent stories and existential predicaments are coherently woven as a body of signs susceptible of virtuoso reading. This Orient, occulted and fragile, is brought lovingly to light, salvaged in the work of the outside scholar. The effect of domination in such spatial/temporal deployments (not limited, of course, to Orientalism proper) is that they confer on the other a discrete identity, while also providing the knowing observer with a standpoint from which to see without being seen, to read without interruption.

Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually—as objects, theaters, texts—it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (and gesture). The writer's "voice" pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced. Renato Rosaldo has recently argued, and exemplified, these points (1984, 1985). Other changes of textual enactment are urged by Stephen Tyler in this volume. (See also Tedlock 1983.) The evocative, performative elements of ethnography are legitimated. And the crucial poetic problem for a discursive ethnography becomes how "to achieve by written means what speech creates, and to do it without simply imitating speech" (Tyler 1984c:25). From another angle we notice how much has been said, in criticism and praise, of the ethnographic gaze. But what of the ethnographic ear? This is what Nathaniel Tarn is getting at in an interview, speaking of his experience as a tricultural French/Englishman endlessly becoming an American.

> It may be the ethnographer or the anthropologist again having his ears wider open to what he considers the exotic as opposed to the familiar, but I still feel I'm discovering something new in the use of language here almost every day.

> I'm getting new expressions almost every day, as if the language were growing from every conceivable shoot. (1975:9)

An interest in the discursive aspects of cultural representation draws attention not to the interpretation of cultural "texts" but to their relations of production. Divergent styles of writing are, with varying degrees of success, grappling with these new orders of complexity—different rules and possibilities within the horizon of a historical moment. The main experimental trends have been reviewed in detail elsewhere (Marcus and Cushman 1982; Clifford 1983a). It is enough to mention here the general trend toward a *specification of discourses* in ethnography: who speaks? who writes? when and where? with or to whom? under what institutional and historical constraints?

Since Malinowski's time, the "method" of participant-observation has enacted a delicate balance of subjectivity and objectivity. The ethnographer's personal experiences, especially those of participation and empathy, are recognized as central to the research process, but they are firmly restrained by the impersonal standards of observation and "objective" distance. In classical ethnographies the voice of the author was always manifest, but the conventions of textual presentation and reading forbade too close a connection between authorial style and the reality represented. Though we discern immediately the distinctive accent of Margaret Mead, Raymond Firth, or Paul Radin, we still cannot refer to Samoans as "Meadian" or call Tikopia a "Firthian" culture as freely as we speak of Dickensian or Flaubertian worlds. The subjectivity of the author is separated from the objective referent of the text. At best, the author's personal voice is seen as a style in the weak sense: a tone, or embellishment of the facts. Moreover, the actual field experience of the ethnographer is presented only in very stylized ways (the "arrival stories" discussed below by Mary Pratt, for example). States of serious confusion, violent feelings or acts, censorships, important failures, changes of course, and excessive pleasures are excluded from the published account.

In the sixties this set of expository conventions cracked. Ethnographers began to write about their field experience in ways that disturbed the prevailing subjective/objective balance. There had been earlier disturbances, but they were kept marginal: Leiris's aberrant *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934); *Tristes Tropiques* (whose strongest impact outside France came only after 1960); and Elenore Smith Bowen's important *Return to Laughter* (1954). That Laura Bohannan in the early sixties had to disguise herself as Bowen, and her fieldwork narrative as a "novel," is symptomatic. But things were changing rapidly,

and others—Georges Balandier (*L'Afrique ambiguë* 1957), David Maybury-Lewis (*The Savage and the Innocent* 1965), Jean Briggs (*Never in Anger* 1970), Jean-Paul Dumont (*The Headman and I* 1978), and Paul Rabinow (*Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* 1977)—were soon writing "factually" under their own names. The publication of Malinowski's Mailu and Trobriand diaries (1967) publicly upset the applecart. Henceforth an implicit mark of interrogation was placed beside any overly confident and consistent ethnographic voice. What desires and confusions was it smoothing over? How was its "objectivity" textually constructed?[7]

A subgenre of ethnographic writing emerged, the self-reflexive "fieldwork account." Variously sophisticated and naive, confessional and analytic, these accounts provide an important forum for the discussion of a wide range of issues, epistemological, existential, and political. The discourse of the cultural analyst can no longer be simply that of the "experienced" observer, describing and interpreting custom. Ethnographic experience and the participant-observation ideal are shown to be problematic. Different textual strategies are attempted. For example, the first person singular (never banned from ethnographies, which were always personal in stylized ways) is deployed according to new conventions. With the "fieldwork account" the rhetoric of experienced objectivity yields to that of the autobiography and the ironic self-portrait. (See Beaujour 1980, Lejeune 1975.) The ethnographer, a character in a fiction, is at center stage. He or she can speak of previously "irrelevant" topics: violence and desire, confusions, struggles and economic transactions with informants. These matters (long discussed informally within the discipline) have moved away from the margins of ethnography, to be seen as constitutive, inescapable (Honigman 1976).

Some reflexive accounts have worked to specify the discourse of informants, as well as that of the ethnographer, by staging dialogues or narrating interpersonal confrontations (Lacoste-Dujardin 1977, Crapanzano 1980, Dwyer 1982, Shostak 1981, Mernissi 1984). These fictions of dialogue have the effect of transforming the "cultural" text (a ritual, an institution, a life history, or any unit of typical behavior to be described or interpreted) into a speaking subject, who sees as well as is seen, who evades, argues, probes back. In this view of ethnography the proper referent of any account is not a represented "world"; now it is specific instances of discourse. But the principle of dialogical textual production goes well beyond the more or less artful presentation of "actual" encounters. It locates cultural interpretations in many sorts of reciprocal contexts, and it obliges writers to find diverse ways of rendering negotiated realities as multisubjective, power-laden, and incongruent. In this view, "culture" is always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power (Dwyer 1977, Tedlock 1979).

7. I have explored the relation of personal subjectivity and authoritative cultural accounts, seen as mutually reinforcing fictions, in an essay on Malinowski and Conrad (Clifford 1985a).

Dialogical modes are not, in principle, autobiographical; they need not lead to hyper self-consciousness or self-absorption. As Bakhtin (1981) has shown, dialogical processes proliferate in any complexly represented discursive space (that of an ethnography, or, in his case, a realist novel). Many voices clamor for expression. Polyvocality was restrained and orchestrated in traditional ethnographies by giving to one voice a pervasive authorial function and to others the role of sources, "informants," to be quoted or paraphrased. Once dialogism and polyphony are recognized as modes of textual production, monophonic authority is questioned, revealed to be characteristic of a science that has claimed to *represent* cultures. The tendency to specify discourses—historically and intersubjectively—recasts this authority, and in the process alters the questions we put to cultural descriptions. Two recent examples must suffice. The first involves the voices and readings of Native Americans, the second those of women.

James Walker is widely known for his classic monograph *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Sioux* (1917). It is a carefully observed and documented work of interpretation. But our reading of it must now be complemented—and altered—by an extraordinary glimpse of its "makings." Three titles have now appeared in a four-volume edition of documents he collected while a physician and ethnographer on the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation between 1896 and 1914. The first (Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 1982a, edited by Raymond DeMallie and Elaine Jahner) is a collage of notes, interviews, texts, and essay fragments written or spoken by Walker and numerous Oglala collaborators. This volume lists more than thirty "authorities," and wherever possible each contribution is marked with the name of its enunciator, writer, or transcriber. These individuals are not ethnographic "informants." *Lakota Belief* is a collaborative work of documentation, edited in a manner that gives equal rhetorical weight to diverse renditions of tradition. Walker's own descriptions and glosses are fragments among fragments.

The ethnographer worked closely with interpreters Charles and Richard Nines, and with Thomas Tyon and George Sword, both of whom composed extended essays in Old Lakota. These have now been translated and published for the first time. In a long section of *Lakota Belief* Tyon presents explanations he obtained from a number

of Pine Ridge shamans; and it is revealing to see questions of belief (for example the crucial and elusive quality of "*wakan*") interpreted in differing, idiosyncratic styles. The result is a version of culture in process that resists any final summation. In *Lakota Belief* the editors provide biographical details on Walker, with hints about the individual sources of the writings in his collection, brought together from the Colorado Historical Society, the American Museum of Natural History, and the American Philosophical Society.

The second volume to have appeared is *Lakota Society* (1982b), which assembles documents roughly relating to aspects of social organization, as well as concepts of time and history. The inclusion of extensive Winter Counts (Lakota annals) and personal recollections of historical events confirms recent tendencies to question overly clear distinctions between peoples "with" and "without" history (Rosaldo 1980; Price 1983). Volume three is *Lakota Myth* (1983). And the last will contain the translated writings of George Sword. Sword was an Oglala warrior, later a judge of the Court of Indian Offenses at Pine Ridge. With Walker's encouragement, he wrote a detailed vernacular record of customary life, covering myth, ritual, warfare and games, complemented by an autobiography.

Taken together, these works offer an unusual, multiply articulated record of Lakota life at a crucial moment in its history—a three-volume anthology of ad hoc interpretations and transcriptions by more than a score of individuals occupying a spectrum of positions with respect to "tradition," plus an elaborated view of the ensemble by a well-placed Oglala writer. It becomes possible to assess critically the synthesis Walker made of these diverse materials. When complete, the five volumes (including *The Sun Dance*) will constitute an expanded (dispersed, not total) text representing a particular *moment* of ethnographic production (not "Lakota culture"). It is this expanded text, rather than Walker's monograph, that we must now learn to read.

Such an ensemble opens up new meanings and desires in an ongoing cultural *poesis*. The decision to publish these texts was provoked by requests to the Colorado Historical Society from community members at Pine Ridge, where copies were needed in Oglala history classes. For other readers the "Walker Collection" offers different lessons, providing, among other things, a mock-up for an ethnopoetics with history (and individuals) in it. One has difficulty giving these materials (many of which are very beautiful) the timeless, impersonal identity of, say, "Sioux myth." Moreover, the question of *who writes* (performs? transcribes? translates? edits?) cultural statements is inescapable in an expanded text of this sort. Here the ethnographer no longer holds unquestioned rights of salvage: the authority long associated with bringing elusive, "disappearing" oral lore into legible textual form. It is unclear whether James Walker (or anyone) can appear as author of these writings. Such lack of clarity is a sign of the times.

Western texts conventionally come with authors attached. Thus it is perhaps inevitable that *Lakota Belief*, *Lakota Society*, and *Lakota Myth* should be published under Walker's name. But as ethnography's complex, plural *poesis* becomes more apparent—and politically charged—conventions begin, in small ways, to slip. Walker's work may be an unusual case of textual collaboration. But it helps us see behind the scenes. Once "informants" begin to be considered as co-authors, and the ethnographer as scribe and archivist as well as interpreting observer, we can ask new, critical questions of all ethnographies. However monological, dialogical, or polyphonic their form, they are hierarchical arrangements of discourses.

A second example of the specification of discourses concerns gender. I shall first touch on ways in which it can impinge on the reading of ethnographic texts and then explore how the exclusion of feminist perspectives from the present volume limits and focuses its discursive standpoint. My first example, of the many possible, is Godfrey Lienhardt's *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (1961), surely among the most finely argued ethnographies in recent anthropological literature. Its phenomenological rendition of Dinka senses of the self, of time, space, and "the Powers" is unparalleled. Thus it comes as a shock to recognize that Lienhardt's portrayal concerns, almost exclusively, the experience of Dinka men. When speaking of "the Dinka" he may or may not be extending the point to women. We often cannot know from the published text. The examples he chooses are, in any case, overwhelmingly centered on males. A rapid perusal of the book's introductory chapter on Dinka and their cattle confirms the point. Only once is a woman's view mentioned, and it is in affirmation of men's relation to cows, saying nothing of how women experience cattle. This observation introduces an equivocation in passages such as "Dinka often interpret accidents or coincidences as acts of Divinity distinguishing truth from falsehood by signs which appear to men" (p. 47). The intended sense of the word "men" is certainly generic, yet surrounded exclusively by examples from male experience it slides toward a gendered meaning. (Do signs appear to women? in significantly different ways?) Terms such as "the Dinka," or "Dinka," used throughout the book, become similarly equivocal.

The point is not to convict Lienhardt of duplicity; his book specifies gender to an unusual extent. What emerges, instead, are the history and politics that intervene in our reading. British academics of a cer-

tain caste and era say "men" when they mean "people" more often than do other groups, a cultural and historical context that is now less invisible than it once was. The partiality of gender in question here was not at issue when the book was published in 1961. If it were, Lienhardt would have directly addressed the problem, as more recent ethnographers now feel obliged to (for example, Meigs 1984:xix). One did not read "The Religion of the Dinka" then as one now must, as the religion of Dinka men and only perhaps Dinka women. Our task is to think historically about Lienhardt's text and its possible readings, including our own, as we read.

Systematic doubts about gender in cultural representation have become widespread only in the past decade or so, in certain milieux, under pressure of feminism. A great many portrayals of "cultural" truths now appear to reflect male domains of experience. (And there are, of course, inverse, though much less common cases: for example, Mead's work, which often focused on female domains and generalized on this basis about the culture as a whole.) In recognizing such biases, however, it is well to recall that our own "full" versions will themselves inevitably appear partial; and if many cultural portrayals now seem more limited than they once did, this is an index of the contingency and historical movement of all readings. No one reads from a neutral or final position. This rather obvious caution is often violated in new accounts that purport to set the record straight or to fill a gap in "our" knowledge.

When is a gap in knowledge perceived, and by whom? Where do "problems" come from?[8] It is obviously more than a simple matter of noticing an error, bias, or omission. I have chosen examples (Walker and Lienhardt) that underline the role of political and historical factors in the discovery of discursive partiality. The epistemology this implies cannot be reconciled with a notion of cumulative scientific progress, and the partiality at stake is stronger than the normal scientific dictates that we study problems piecemeal, that we must not overgeneralize, that the best picture is built up by an accretion of rigorous evidence. Cultures are not scientific "objects" (assuming such things exist, even in the natural sciences). Culture, and our views of "it," are produced historically, and are actively contested. There is no whole picture that can be "filled in," since the perception and filling of a gap lead to the awareness of other gaps. If women's experience has been significantly excluded from ethnographic accounts, the recognition of this absence, and its correction in many recent studies, now highlights

8. "The stork didn't bring them!" (David Schneider, in conversation). Foucault described his approach as a "history of problematics" (1984).

the fact that men's experience (as gendered subjects, not cultural types—"Dinka" or "Trobrianders") is itself largely unstudied. As canonical topics like "kinship" come under critical scrutiny (Needham 1974; Schneider 1972, 1984), new problems concerning "sexuality" are made visible. And so forth without end. It is evident that we know more about the Trobriand Islanders than was known in 1900. But the "we" requires historical identification. (Talal Asad argues in this volume that the fact that this knowledge is routinely inscribed in certain "strong" languages is not scientifically neutral.) If "culture" is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitively interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent. Representation and explanation—both by insiders and outsiders—is implicated in this emergence. The specification of discourses I have been tracing is thus more than a matter of making carefully limited claims. It is thoroughly historicist and self-reflexive.

In this spirit, let me turn to the present volume. Everyone will be able to think of individuals or perspectives that should have been included. The volume's focus limits it in ways its authors and editors can only begin to make apparent. Readers may note that its anthropological bias neglects photography, film, performance theory, documentary art, the nonfiction novel, "the new journalism," oral history, and various forms of sociology. The book gives relatively little attention to new ethnographic possibilities emerging from non-Western experience and from feminist theory and politics. Let me dwell on this last exclusion, for it concerns an especially strong intellectual and moral influence in the university milieux from which these essays have sprung. Thus its absence cries out for comment. (But by addressing this one exclusion I do not mean to imply that it offers any privileged standpoint from which to perceive the partiality of the book.) Feminist theorizing is obviously of great potential significance for rethinking ethnographic writing. It debates the historical, political construction of identities and self/other relations, and it probes the gendered positions that make all accounts of, or by, other people inescapably partial.[9] Why, then, are there no essays in this book written from primarily feminist standpoints?

9. Many of the themes I have been stressing above are supported by recent feminist work. Some theorists have problematized all totalizing, Archimedian perspectives (Jehlen 1981). Many have seriously rethought the social construction of relationship and difference (Chodorow 1978, Rich 1976, Keller 1985). Much feminist practice questions the strict separation of subjective and objective, emphasizing processual modes of knowledge, closely connecting personal, political, and representational processes. Other strands deepen the critique of visually based modes of surveillance and portrayal, linking them to domination and masculine desire (Mulvey 1975, Kuhn

The volume was planned as the publication of a seminar limited by its sponsoring body to ten participants. It was institutionally defined as an "advanced seminar," and its organizers, George Marcus and myself, accepted this format without serious question. We decided to invite people doing "advanced" work on our topic, by which we understood people who had already contributed significantly to the analysis of ethnographic textual form. For the sake of coherence, we located the seminar within, and at the boundaries of, the discipline of anthropology. We invited participants well known for their recent contributions to the opening up of ethnographic writing possibilities, or whom we knew to be well along on research relevant to our focus. The seminar was small and its formation ad hoc, reflecting our specific personal and intellectual networks, our limited knowledge of appropriate work in progress. (I shall not go into individual personalities, friendships, and so forth, though they are clearly relevant.)

Planning the seminar, we were confronted by what seemed to us an obvious—important and regrettable—fact. Feminism had not contributed much to the theoretical analysis of ethnographies as texts. Where women had made textual innovations (Bowen 1954, Briggs 1970, Favret-Saada 1980, 1981) they had not done so on feminist grounds. A few quite recent works (Shostak 1981, Cesara 1982, Mernissi 1984) had reflected in their form feminist claims about subjectivity, relationality, and female experience, but these same textual forms were shared by other, nonfeminist, experimental works. Moreover, their authors did not seem conversant with the rhetorical and textual theory that we wanted to bring to bear on ethnography. Our focus was thus on textual theory as well as on textual form: a defensible, productive focus.

Within this focus we could not draw on any developed debates generated by feminism on ethnographic textual practices. A few very initial indications (for example, Atkinson 1982; Roberts, ed. 1981) were all that had been published. And the situation has not changed dramatically since. Feminism clearly has contributed to anthropological theory. And various female ethnographers, like Annette Weiner (1976), are actively rewriting the masculinist canon. But feminist eth-

1982). Narrative forms of representation are analyzed with regard to the gendered positions they reenact (de Lauretis 1984). Some feminist writing has worked to politicize and subvert all natural essences and identities, including "femininity" and "woman" (Wittig 1975, Irigaray 1977, Russ 1975, Haraway 1985). "Anthropological" categories such as nature and culture, public and private, sex and gender have been brought into question (Ortner 1974, MacCormack and Strathern 1980, Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974, Rosaldo 1980, Rubin 1975).

nography has focused either on setting the record straight about women or on revising anthropological categories (for example, the nature/culture opposition). It has not produced either unconventional forms of writing or a developed reflection on ethnographic textuality as such.

The reasons for this general situation need careful exploration, and this is not the place for it.[10] In the case of our seminar and volume, by stressing textual form and by privileging textual theory, we focused the topic in ways that excluded certain forms of ethnographic innovation. This fact emerged in the seminar discussions, during which it became clear that concrete institutional forces—tenure patterns, canons, the influence of disciplinary authorities, global inequalities of power—could not be evaded. From this perspective, issues of content in ethnography (the exclusion and inclusion of different experiences in the anthropological archive, the rewriting of established traditions) became directly relevant. And this is where feminist and non-Western writings have made their greatest impact.[11] Clearly our sharp separation of form from content—and our fetishizing of form—was, and is, contestable. It is a bias that may well be implicit in modernist "textualism." (Most of us at the seminar, excluding Stephen Tyler, were not yet thoroughly "post-modern"!)

We see these things better, of course, now that the deed is done, the book finished. But even early on, in Santa Fe, intense discussions turned on the exclusion of several important perspectives and what to do about them. As editors, we decided not to try and "fill out" the volume by seeking additional essays. This seemed to be tokenism and to reflect an aspiration to false completeness. Our response to the problem of excluded standpoints has been to leave them blatant. The present volume remains a limited intervention, with no aspiration to be comprehensive or to cover the territory. It sheds a strong, partial light.

10. Marilyn Strathern's unpublished essay "Dislodging a World View" (1984), also discussed by Paul Rabinow in this volume, begins the investigation. A fuller analysis is being worked out by Deborah Gordon in a dissertation for the History of Consciousness program, University of California, Santa Cruz. I am indebted to conversations with her.

11. It may generally be true that groups long excluded from positions of institutional power, like women or people of color, have less concrete freedom to indulge in textual experimentations. To write in an unorthodox way, Paul Rabinow suggests in this volume, one must first have tenure. In specific contexts a preoccupation with self-reflexivity and style may be an index of privileged estheticism. For if one does not have to worry about the exclusion or true representation of one's experience, one is freer to undermine ways of telling, to focus on form over content. But I am uneasy with a general notion that privileged discourse indulges in esthetic or epistemological subtleties, whereas marginal discourse "tells it like it is." The reverse is too often the case. (See Michael Fischer's essay in this volume.)

A major consequence of the historical and theoretical movements traced in this Introduction has been to dislodge the ground from which persons and groups securely represent others. A conceptual shift, "tectonic" in its implications, has taken place. We ground things, now, on a moving earth. There is no longer any place of overview (mountaintop) from which to map human ways of life, no Archimedian point from which to represent the world. Mountains are in constant motion. So are islands: for one cannot occupy, unambiguously, a bounded cultural world from which to journey out and analyze other cultures. Human ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate, and subvert one another. Cultural analysis is always enmeshed in global movements of difference and power. However one defines it, and the phrase is here used loosely, a "world system" now links the planet's societies in a common historical process.[12]

A number of the essays that follow grapple with this predicament. Their emphases differ. How, George Marcus asks, can ethnography—at home or abroad—define its object of study in ways that permit detailed, local, contextual analysis and simultaneously the portrayal of global implicating forces? Accepted textual strategies for defining cultural domains, separating micro and macro levels, are no longer adequate to the challenge. He explores new writing possibilities that blur the distinction between anthropology and sociology, subverting an unproductive division of labor. Talal Asad also confronts the systematic interconnection of the planet's societies. But he finds persistent, glacial inequalities imposing all-too-coherent forms on the world's diversity and firmly positioning any ethnographic practice. "Translations" of culture, however subtle or inventive in textual form, take place within relations of "weak" and "strong" languages that govern the international flow of knowledge. Ethnography is still very much a one-way street. Michael Fischer's essay suggests that notions of global hegemony may miss the reflexive, inventive dimensions of ethnicity and cultural contact. (And in a similar vein, my own contribution treats all narratives of lost authenticity and vanishing diversity as self-confirming allegories, until proven otherwise.) Fischer locates ethnographic writing in a syncretic world of ethnicity rather than a world of discrete cultures and traditions. Post-modernism, in his analysis, is more than a literary, philosophical, or artistic trend. It is a general

12. The term is, of course, Wallerstein's (1976). I find, however, his strong sense of a unitary direction to the global historical process problematic, and agree with Ortner's reservations (1984: 142–43).

condition of multicultural life demanding new forms of inventiveness and subtlety from a fully reflexive ethnography.

Ethnography in the service of anthropology once looked out at clearly defined others, defined as primitive, or tribal, or non-Western, or pre-literate, or nonhistorical—the list, if extended, soon becomes incoherent. Now ethnography encounters others in relation to itself, while seeing itself as other. Thus an "ethnographic" perspective is being deployed in diverse and novel circumstances. Renato Rosaldo probes the way its rhetoric has been appropriated by social history and how this makes visible certain disturbing assumptions that have empowered fieldwork. The ethnographer's distinctively intimate, inquisitive perspective turns up in history, literature, advertising, and many other unlikely places. The science of the exotic is being "repatriated" (Fischer and Marcus 1986).

Ethnography's traditional vocation of cultural criticism (Montaigne's "On Cannibals," Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*) has reemerged with new explicitness and vigor. Anthropological fieldworkers can now realign their work with pioneers like Henry Mayhew in the nineteenth century and, more recently, with the Chicago school of urban sociology (Lloyd Warner, William F. Whyte, Robert Park). Sociological description of everyday practices has recently been complicated by ethnomethodology (Leiter 1980): the work of Harold Garfinkel, Harvey Sacks, and Aaron Cicourel (also neglected in the present volume) reflects a crisis in sociology similar to that in anthropology. Meanwhile a different rapprochement between anthropological and sociological ethnography has been taking place under the influence of Marxist cultural theory at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Stuart Hall, Paul Willis). In America fieldworkers are turning their attention to laboratory biologists and physicists (Latour and Woolgar 1979, Traweek 1982), to American "kinship" (Schneider 1980), to the dynastic rich (Marcus 1983), to truckers (Agar 1985), to psychiatric clients (Estroff 1985), to new urban communities (Krieger 1983), to problematic traditional identities (Blu 1980). This is only the beginning of a growing list.

What is at stake is more than anthropological methods being deployed at home, or studying new groups (Nader 1969). Ethnography is moving into areas long occupied by sociology, the novel, or avant-garde cultural critique (Clifford 1981), rediscovering otherness and difference within the cultures of the West. It has become clear that every version of an "other," wherever found, is also the construction of a "self," and the making of ethnographic texts, as Michael Fischer, Vincent Crapanzano, and others in this volume show, has always in-

volved a process of "self-fashioning" (Greenblatt 1980). Cultural *poesis*—and politics—is the constant reconstitution of selves and others through specific exclusions, conventions, and discursive practices. The essays that follow provide tools for the analysis of these processes, at home and abroad.

These essays do not prophesy. Taken as a whole, they portray historical constraints on the making of ethnographies, as well as areas of textual experiment and emergence. Talal Asad's tone is sober, preoccupied (like Paul Rabinow) with institutional limits on interpretive freedom. George Marcus and Michael Fischer explore concrete examples of alternative writing. Stephen Tyler evokes what does not (cannot?) yet exist, but must be imagined—or, better, sounded. Many of the essays (especially those of Renato Rosaldo, Vincent Crapanzano, Mary Pratt, and Talal Asad) are occupied with critical ground clearing—dislodging canons to make space for alternatives. Rabinow identifies a new canon, post-modernism. Other essays (Tyler on oral and performative modes, my own treatment of allegory) recapture old rhetorics and projects for use now. "For use now!" Charles Olson's poetic rule should guide the reading of these essays: they are responses to a current, changing situation, interventions rather than positions. To place this volume in a historical conjuncture, as I have tried to do here, is to reveal the moving ground on which it stands, and to do so without benefit of a master narrative of historical development that can offer a coherent direction, or future, for ethnography.[13]

One launches a controversial collection like this with some trepidation, hoping it will be seriously engaged—not simply rejected, for example, as another attack on science or an incitement to relativism. Rejections of this kind should at least make clear why close analysis of one of the principal things ethnographers do—that is, write—should not be central to evaluation of the results of scientific research. The authors in this volume do not suggest that one cultural account is as good as any other. If they espoused so trivial and self-refuting a relativism, they would not have gone to the trouble of writing detailed, committed, critical studies.

Other, more subtle, objections have recently been raised to the literary, theoretical reflexivity represented here. Textual, epistemo-

13. My notion of historicism owes a great deal to the recent work of Fredric Jameson (1980, 1981, 1984a, b). I am not, however, persuaded by the master narrative (a global sequence of modes of production) he invokes from time to time as an alternative to post-modern fragmentation (the sense that history is composed of various local narratives). The partiality I have been urging in this introduction always presupposes a local historical predicament. This historicist partiality is not the unsituated "partiality and flux" with which Rabinow (see p. 252) taxes a somewhat rigidly defined "post-modernism."

logical questions are sometimes thought to be paralyzing, abstract, dangerously solipsistic—in short, a barrier to the task of writing "grounded" or "unified" cultural and historical studies.[14] In practice, however, such questions do not necessarily inhibit those who entertain them from producing truthful, realistic accounts. All of the essays collected here point toward new, better modes of writing. One need not agree with their particular standards to take seriously the fact that in ethnography, as in literary and historical studies, what counts as "realist" is now a matter of both theoretical debate and practical experimentation.

The writing and reading of ethnography are overdetermined by forces ultimately beyond the control of either an author or an interpretive community. These contingencies—of language, rhetoric, power, and history—must now be openly confronted in the process of writing. They can no longer be evaded. But the confrontation raises thorny problems of verification: how are the truths of cultural accounts evaluated? Who has the authority to separate science from art? realism from fantasy? knowledge from ideology? Of course such separations will continue to be maintained, and redrawn; but their changing poetic and political grounds will be less easily ignored. In cultural studies at least, we can no longer know the whole truth, or even claim to approach it. The rigorous partiality I have been stressing here may be a source of pessimism for some readers. But is there not a liberation, too, in recognizing that no one can write about others any longer as if they were discrete objects or texts? And may not the vision of a complex, problematic, partial ethnography lead, not to its abandonment, but to more subtle, concrete ways of writing and reading, to new conceptions of culture as interactive and historical? Most of the essays in this volume, for all their trenchant critiques, are optimistic about ethnographic writing. The problems they raise are incitements, not barriers.

These essays will be accused of having gone too far: poetry will again be banned from the city, power from the halls of science. And extreme self-consciousness certainly has its dangers—of irony, of elitism, of solipsism, of putting the whole world in quotation marks. But I trust that readers who signal these dangers will do so (like some of the essays below) *after* they have confronted the changing history, rhetoric, and politics of established representational forms. In the wake of semiotics, post-structuralism, hermeneutics, and deconstruction there has been considerable talk about a return to plain speaking and to realism. But to return to realism one must first have left it! Moreover, to

14. The response is frequently expressed informally. It appears in different forms in Randall (1984), Rosen (1984), Ortner (1984:143), Pullum (1984), and Darnton (1985).

recognize the poetic dimensions of ethnography does not require that one give up facts and accurate accounting for the supposed free play of poetry. "Poetry" is not limited to romantic or modernist subjectivism: it can be historical, precise, objective. And of course it is just as conventional and institutionally determined as "prose." Ethnography is hybrid textual activity: it traverses genres and disciplines. The essays in this volume do not claim ethnography is "only literature." They do insist it is always writing.

I would like to thank the members of the Santa Fe seminar for their many suggestions incorporated in, or left out of, this Introduction. (I have certainly not tried to represent the "native point of view" of that small group.) In graduate seminars co-taught with Paul Rabinow at the University of California at Berkeley and Santa Cruz, many of my ideas on these topics have been agreeably assaulted. My special thanks to him and to the students in those classes. At Santa Cruz, Deborah Gordon, Donna Haraway, and Ruth Frankenberg have helped me with this essay, and I have had important encouragement and stimulus from Hayden White and the members of the Research Group on Colonial Discourse. Various press readers made important suggestions, particularly Barbara Babcock. George Marcus, who got the whole project rolling, has been an inestimable ally and friend.

MARY LOUISE PRATT

Fieldwork in Common Places

In his introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) Bronislaw Malinowski celebrates the advent of professional, scientific ethnography: "The time when we could tolerate accounts presenting us the native as a distorted, childish caricature of a human being are gone," he declares. "This picture is false, and like many other falsehoods, it has been killed by Science" (Malinowski 1961 : 11). The statement is symptomatic of a well-established habit among ethnographers of defining ethnographic writing over and against older, less specialized genres, such as travel books, personal memoirs, journalism, and accounts by missionaries, settlers, colonial officials, and the like. Although it will not supplant these genres altogether, professional ethnography, it is understood, will usurp their authority and correct their abuses. In almost any ethnography dull-looking figures called "mere travelers" or "casual observers" show up from time to time, only to have their superficial perceptions either corrected or corroborated by the serious scientist.

This strategy of defining itself by contrast to adjacent and antecedent discourses limits ethnography's ability to explain or examine itself as a kind of writing. To the extent that it legitimates itself by opposition to other kinds of writing, ethnography blinds itself to the fact that its own discursive practices were often inherited from these other genres and are still shared with them today. At times one still hears expressed as an ideal for ethnography a neutral, tropeless discourse that would render other realities "exactly as they are," not filtered through our own values and interpretive schema. For the most part, however, that wild goose is no longer being chased, and it is possible to suggest that ethnographic writing is as trope-governed as any other discursive formation. This recognition is obviously fundamental for those who are interested in changing or enriching ethnographic writing or simply in increasing the discipline's self-understanding. In this essay I propose to examine how some tropes of ethnographic writing are deployed and how they derive from earlier discursive traditions. In particular, I propose to focus on the vexed but important relation-