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 esthetic-ism 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).

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

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).

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 ethnography 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.

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).

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-

JAMES CLIFFORD

On Ethnographic Allegory

1. a story in which people, things and happenings have another meaning, as in a fable or parable: allegories are used for teaching or explaining.

2. the presentation of ideas by means of such stories. . . .[1]

In a recent essay on narrative Victor Turner argues that social performances enact powerful stories—mythic and commonsensical—that provide the social process "with a rhetoric, a mode of emplotment, and a meaning" (1980:153). In what follows I treat ethnography itself as a performance emplotted by powerful stories. Embodied in written reports, these stories simultaneously describe real cultural events and make additional, moral, ideological, and even cosmological statements. Ethnographic writing is allegorical at the level both of its content (what it says about cultures and their histories) and of its form (what is implied by its mode of textualization).

An apparently simple example will introduce my approach. Marjorie Shostak begins her book *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* with a story of childbirth the !Kung way—outside the village, alone. Here are some excerpts:

I lay there and felt the pains as they came, over and over again. Then I felt something wet, the beginning of the childbirth. I thought, "Eh hey, maybe it is

1. *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 2nd ed. In literary studies definitions of allegory have ranged from Angus Fletcher's (1964:2) loose characterization ("In the simplest terms, allegory says one thing and means another") to Todorov's reassertion (1973:63) of a stricter sense: "First of all, allegory implies the existence of at least two meanings for the same words; according to some critics, the first meaning must disappear, while others require that the two be present together. Secondly, this double meaning is indicated in the work in an *explicit* fashion: it does not proceed from the reader's interpretation (whether arbitrary or not)." According to Quintilian, any continuous or extended metaphor develops into allegory; and as Northrop Frye (1971:91) observes, "Within the boundaries of literature we find a kind of sliding scale, ranging from the most explicitly allegorical, consistent with being literature at all, at one extreme, to the most elusive, anti-explicit and anti-allegorical at the other." The various "second meanings" of ethnographic allegory I shall be tracing here are all textually explicit. But ethnographies slide along Frye's scale, exhibiting strong allegorical features, usually without marking themselves *as* allegories.

the child." I got up, took a blanket and covered Tashay with it; he was still sleeping. Then I took another blanket and my smaller duiker skin covering and I left. Was I not the only one? The only other woman was Tashay's grandmother, and she was asleep in her hut. So, just as I was, I left. I walked a short distance from the village and sat down beside a tree. . . . After she was born, I sat there; I didn't know what to do. I had no sense. She lay there, moving her arms about, trying to suck her fingers. She started to cry. I just sat there, looking at her. I thought, "Is this my child? Who gave birth to this child?" Then I thought, "A big thing like that? How could it possibly have come out from my genitals?" I sat there and looked at her, looked and looked and looked. (1981:1–3)

The story has great immediacy. Nisa's voice is unmistakable, the experience sharply evoked: "She lay there, moving her arms about, trying to suck her fingers." But as readers we do more than register a unique event. The story's unfolding requires us, first, to imagine a different *cultural* norm (!Kung birth, alone in the bush) and then to recognize a common *human* experience (the quiet heroism of childbirth, feelings of postpartum wonder and doubt). The story of an occurrence somewhere in the Kalahari Desert cannot remain just that. It implies both local cultural meanings and a general story of birth. A difference is posited and transcended. Moreover, Nisa's story tells us (how could it not?) something basic about woman's experience. Shostak's life of a !Kung individual inevitably becomes an allegory of (female) humanity.

I argue below that these kinds of transcendent meanings are not abstractions or interpretations "added" to the original "simple" account. Rather, they are the conditions of its meaningfulness. Ethnographic texts are inescapably allegorical, and a serious acceptance of this fact changes the ways they can be written and read. Using Shostak's experiment as a case study I examine a recent tendency to distinguish allegorical levels as specific "voices" within the text. I argue, finally, that the very activity of ethnographic *writing*—seen as inscription or textualization—enacts a redemptive Western allegory. This pervasive structure needs to be perceived and weighed against other possible emplotments for the performance of ethnography.

Literary description always opens onto another scene set, so to speak, "behind" the this-worldly things it purports to depict.

MICHEL BEAUJOUR, "Some Paradoxes of Description"

Allegory (Gr. *allos*, "other," and *agoreuein*, "to speak") usually denotes a practice in which a narrative fiction continuously refers to another pattern of ideas or events. It is a representation that "interprets" itself. I am using the term allegory in the expanded sense re-

claimed for it by recent critical discussions, notably those of Angus Fletcher (1964) and Paul De Man (1979). Any story has a propensity to generate another story in the mind of its reader (or hearer), to repeat and displace some prior story. To focus on ethnographic allegory in preference, say, to ethnographic "ideology"—although the political dimensions are always present (Jameson 1981)—draws attention to aspects of cultural description that have until recently been minimized. A recognition of allegory emphasizes the fact that realistic portraits, to the extent that they are "convincing" or "rich," are extended metaphors, patterns of associations that point to coherent (theoretical, esthetic, moral) additional meanings. Allegory (more strongly than "interpretation") calls to mind the poetic, traditional, cosmological nature of such writing processes.

Allegory draws special attention to the *narrative* character of cultural representations, to the stories built into the representational process itself. It also breaks down the seamless quality of cultural description by adding a temporal aspect to the process of reading. One level of meaning in a text will always generate other levels. Thus the rhetoric of presence that has prevailed in much post-romantic literature (and in much "symbolic anthropology") is interrupted. De Man's critique of the valorization of symbols over allegory in romantic esthetics also questions the project of realism (De Man 1969). The claim that nonallegorical description was possible—a position underlying both positivist literalism and realist synecdoche (the organic, functional, or "typical" relationship of parts to wholes)—was closely allied to the romantic search for unmediated meaning in the event. Positivism, realism, and romanticism—nineteenth-century ingredients of twentieth-century anthropology—all rejected the "false" artifice of rhetoric along with allegory's supposed abstractness. Allegory violated the canons both of empirical science and of artistic spontaneity (Ong 1971:6–9). It was too deductive, too much an open imposition of meaning on sensible evidence. The recent "revival" of rhetoric by a diverse group of literary and cultural theorists (Roland Barthes, Kenneth Burke, Gerard Genette, Michel de Certeau, Hayden White, Paul De Man, and Michel Beaujour among others) has thrown serious doubt on the positivist-romantic-realist consensus. In ethnography the current turn to rhetoric coincides with a period of political and epistemological reevaluation in which the constructed, imposed nature of representational authority has become unusually visible and contested. Allegory prompts us to say of any cultural description not "this represents, or symbolizes, that" but rather, "this is a (morally charged) *story* about that."[2]

2. An "allegorical anthropology" is suggested fairly explicitly in recent works by Boon (1977, 1982), Crapanzano (1980), Taussig (1984), and Tyler (1984a).

The specific accounts contained in ethnographies can never be limited to a project of scientific description so long as the guiding task of the work is to make the (often strange) behavior of a different way of life humanly comprehensible. To say that exotic behavior and symbols make sense either in "human" or "cultural" terms is to supply the same sorts of allegorical added meanings that appear in older narratives that saw actions as "spiritually" significant. Culturalist and humanist allegories stand behind the controlled fictions of difference and similitude that we call ethnographic accounts. What is maintained in these texts is a double attention to the descriptive surface and to more abstract, comparative, and explanatory levels of meaning. This twofold structure is set out by Coleridge in a classic definition.

> We may then safely define allegorical writing as the employment of one set of agents and images with actions and accompaniments correspondent, so as to convey, while in disguise, either moral qualities or conceptions of the mind that are not in themselves objects of the senses, or other images, agents, fortunes, and circumstances so that the difference is everywhere presented to the eye or imagination, while the likeness is suggested to the mind; and this connectedly, so that the parts combine to form a consistent whole. (1936:30)

What one *sees* in a coherent ethnographic account, the imaged construct of the other, is connected in a continuous double structure with what one *understands*. At times, the structure is too blatant: "During the ceramic manufacturing process, women converse gently, quietly, always without conflict, about ecosystem dynamics . . ." (Whitten 1978:847). Usually it is less obvious and thus more realistic. Adapting Coleridge's formula, what appears descriptively to the senses (and primarily, as he suggests, to the observing eye) seems to be "other," while what is suggested by the coherent series of perceptions is an underlying similitude. Strange behavior is portrayed as meaningful within a common network of symbols—a common ground of understandable activity valid for both observer and observed, and by implication for all human groups. Thus ethnography's narrative of specific differences presupposes, and always refers to, an abstract plane of similarity.

It is worth noting, though I cannot pursue the theme here, that before the emergence of secular anthropology as a science of *human* and *cultural* phenomena, ethnographic accounts were connected to different allegorical referents. Father Lafitau's famous comparison (1724) of Native American customs with those of the ancient Hebrews and Egyptians exemplifies an earlier tendency to map descriptions of the other onto conceptions of the "*premiers temps*." More or less explicit biblical or classical allegories abound in the early descriptions of the New World. For as Johannes Fabian (1983) argues, there has been a pervasive tendency to prefigure others in a temporally distinct, but lo-

catable, space (earlier) within an assumed progress of Western history. Cultural anthropology in the twentieth century has tended to replace (though never completely) these historical allegories with humanist allegories. It has eschewed a search for origins in favor of seeking human similarities and cultural differences. But the representational process itself has not essentially changed. Most descriptions of others continue to assume and refer to elemental or transcendent levels of truth.

This conclusion emerges clearly from the recent Mead-Freeman controversy.[3] Two competing portrayals of Samoan life are cast as scientific projects; but both configure the other as a morally charged alter ego. Mead claimed to be conducting a controlled "experiment" in the field, "testing" the universality of stressful adolescence by examining a counter instance empirically. But despite Boasian rhetoric about the "laboratory" of fieldwork, Mead's experiment produced a message of broad ethical and political significance. Like Ruth Benedict in *Patterns of Culture* (1934), she held a liberal, pluralist vision, responding to the dilemmas of a "complex" American society. The ethnographic stories Mead and Benedict told were manifestly linked to the situation of a culture struggling with diverse values, with an apparent breakdown of established traditions, with utopian visions of human malleability and fears of disaggregation. Their ethnographies were "fables of identity," to adapt Northrop Frye's title (1963). Their openly allegorical purpose was not a kind of moral or expository frame for empirical descriptions, something added on in prefaces and conclusions. The entire project of inventing and representing "cultures" was, for Mead and Benedict, a pedagogical, ethical undertaking.

Mead's "experiment" in controlled cultural variation now looks less like science than allegory—a too sharply focused story of Samoa suggesting a possible America. Derek Freeman's critique ignores any properly literary dimensions in ethnographic work, however, and instead applies its own brand of scientism, inspired by recent developments in sociobiology. As Freeman sees it, Mead was simply wrong about Samoans. They are not the casual, permissive people she made famous, but are beset by all the usual human tensions. They are violent. They get ulcers. The main body of his critique is a massing of counterexamples drawn from the historical record and from his own fieldwork. In 170 pages of empirical overkill, he successfully shows what was already explicit for an alert reader of *Coming of Age in Samoa*: that Mead constructed a foreshortened picture, designed to propose

3. Mead (1923), Freeman (1983). I have drawn on my review of Freeman in the *Times Literary Supplement*, May 13, 1983, 475–76, which explores the literary dimensions of the controversy. For another treatment in this vein, see Porter 1984.

moral, practical lessons for American society. But as Freeman heaps up instances of Samoan anxiety and violence, the allegorical frame for his own undertaking begins to emerge. Clearly something more is getting expressed than simply the "darker side," as Freeman puts it, of Samoan life. In a revealing final page he admits as much, countering Mead's "Apollonian" sense of cultural balance with biology's "Dionysian" human nature (essential, emotional, etc.). But what is the scientific status of a "refutation" that can be subsumed so neatly by a Western mythic opposition? One is left with a stark contrast: Mead's attractive, sexually liberated, calm Pacific world, and now Freeman's Samoa of seething tensions, strict controls, and violent outbursts. Indeed Mead and Freeman form a kind of diptych, whose opposing panels signify a recurrent Western ambivalence about the "primitive." One is reminded of Melville's *Typee*, a sensuous paradise woven through with dread, the threat of violence.

Le transfert de l'Empire de la Chine à l'Empire de soi-même est constant.
VICTOR SEGALEN

A scientific ethnography normally establishes a privileged allegorical register it identifies as "theory," "interpretation," or "explanation." But once *all* meaningful levels in a text, including theories and interpretations, are recognized as allegorical, it becomes difficult to view one of them as privileged, accounting for the rest. Once this anchor is dislodged, the staging and valuing of multiple allegorical registers, or "voices," becomes an important area of concern for ethnographic writers. Recently this has sometimes meant giving indigenous discourse a semi-independent status in the textual whole, interrupting the privileged monotone of "scientific" representation.[4] Much ethnography, taking its distance from totalizing anthropology, seeks to evoke multiple (but not limitless) allegories.

Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa* exemplifies, and wrestles with, the problem of presenting and mediating multiple stories.[5] I shall dwell on it at some length. Shostak explicitly stages three allegorical registers: (1) the representation of a coherent cultural subject as source of scientific knowledge (Nisa is a "!Kung woman"); (2) the construction of a gendered subject (Shostak asks: what is it to be a woman?); (3) the story of a mode of ethnographic production and relationship (an intimate dia-

4. On the origins of this "monotone," see De Certeau 1983: 128.

5. The rest of this section is an expanded version of my review of *Nisa* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, September 17, 1982, 994–95.

logue). Nisa is the pseudonym of a fifty-year-old woman who has lived most of her life in semi-nomadic conditions. Marjorie Shostak belongs to a Harvard-based research group that has studied the !Kung San hunter-gatherers since the 1950s. The complex truths that emerge from this "life and words" are not limited to an individual or to her surrounding cultural world.

The book's three registers are in crucial respects discrepant. First, the autobiography, cross-checked against other !Kung women's lives, is inserted within an ongoing cultural interpretation (to which it adds "depth"). Second, this shaped experience soon becomes a story of "women's" existence, a story that rhymes closely with many of the experiences and issues highlighted in recent feminist thought. Third, *Nisa* narrates an intercultural encounter in which two individuals collaborate to produce a specific domain of truth. The ethnographic encounter itself becomes, here, the subject of the book, a fable of communication, rapport, and, finally, a kind of fictional, but potent, kinship. *Nisa* is thus manifestly an allegory of scientific comprehension, operating at the levels both of cultural description and of a search for human origins. (Along with other students of gatherer-hunters, the Harvard project—Shostak included—tend to see in this longest stage of human cultural development a baseline for human nature.) *Nisa* is a Western feminist allegory, part of the reinvention of the general category "woman" in the 1970s and 80s. *Nisa* is an allegory of ethnography, of contact and comprehension.

A braided narrative, the book moves constantly, at times awkwardly, between its three meaningful registers. *Nisa* is like many works that portray common human experiences, conflicts, joys, work, and so on. But the text Shostak has made is original in the way it refuses to blend its three registers into a seamless, "full" representation. They remain separate, in dramatic tension. This polyvocality is appropriate to the book's predicament, that of many self-conscious ethnographic writers who find it difficult to speak of well-defined "others" from a stable, distanced position. Difference invades the text; it can no longer be represented; it must be enacted.

Nisa's first register, that of cultural science, holds its subject in firm relation to a social world. It explains Nisa's personality in terms of !Kung ways, and it uses her experience to nuance and correct generalizations about her group. If *Nisa* reveals intersubjective mechanisms in unusual depth, its polyvocal construction shows, too, that the transition to scientific knowledge is not smooth. The personal does not yield to the general without loss. Shostak's research was based on systematic interviews with more than a score of !Kung women. From these conversations she amassed a body of data large enough to reveal

typical attitudes, activities, and experiences. But Shostak was dissatisfied by the lack of depth in her interviews, and this led her to seek out an informant able to provide a detailed personal narrative. Nisa was quite unusual in her ability to recall and explain her life; moreover there developed a strong resonance between her stories and Shostak's personal concerns. This posed a problem for the expectations of a generalizing social science.

At the end of her first sojourn in the field, Shostak was troubled by a suspicion that her interlocutor might be too idiosyncratic. Nisa had known severe pain; her life as she recalled it was often violent. Most previous accounts of the !Kung, like Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's *The Harmless People* (1959), had shown them to be peace-loving. "Did I really want to be the one to balance the picture?" (350). On a return trip to the Kalahari, Shostak found reassurance. Though Nisa still exerted a special fascination, she now appeared less unusual. And the ethnographer became "more sure than ever that our work together could and should move forward. The interviews I was conducting with other women were proving to me that Nisa was fundamentally similar to those around her. She was unusually articulate, and she had suffered greater than average loss, but in most other important respects she was a typical !Kung woman" (358).

Roland Barthes (1981) has written poignantly of an impossible science of the individual. An insistent tug toward the general is felt throughout *Nisa*, and it is not without pain that we find Nisa generalized, tied to "an interpretation of !Kung life" (350). The book's scientific discourse, tirelessly contextual, typifying, is braided through the other two voices, introducing each of the fifteen thematic sections of the life with a few pages of background. ("Once a marriage has survived a few years beyond the young wife's first menstruation, the relationship between the spouses becomes more equal" [169]. And so forth.) Indeed, one sometimes feels that the scientific discourse functions in the text as a kind of brake on the book's other voices, whose meanings are excessively personal and intersubjective. There is a real discrepancy. For at the same time that Nisa's story contributes to better generalizations about the !Kung, its very specificity, and the particular circumstances of its making, create meanings that are resistant to the demands of a typifying science.

The book's second and third registers are sharply distinct from the first. Their structure is dialogical, and at times each seems to exist primarily in response to the other. Nisa's life has its own textual autonomy, as a distinct narrative spoken in characteristic, believable tones. But it is manifestly the product of a collaboration. This is particularly true of its overall shape, a full lifespan—fifteen chapters including

"Earliest Memories," "Family Life," "Discovering Sex," "Trial Marriages," "Marriage," "Motherhood and Loss," "Women and Men," "Taking Lovers," "A Healing Ritual," "Growing Older." Although at the start of the interviews Nisa had mapped out her life, sketching the main areas to be covered, the thematic roster appears to be Shostak's. Indeed, by casting Nisa's discourse in the shape of a "life," Shostak addresses two rather different audiences. On one side, this intensely personal collection of memories is made suitable for scientific typification as a "life-history" or "life-cycle." On the other, Nisa's life brings into play a potent and pervasive mechanism for the production of meaning in the West—the exemplary, coherent self (or rather, the self pulling itself together in autobiography). There is nothing universal or natural about the fictional processes of biography and autobiography (Gusdorf 1956; Olney 1972; Lejeune 1975). Living does not easily organize itself into a continuous narrative. When Nisa says, as she often does, "We lived in that place, eating things. Then we left and went somewhere else," or simply, "we lived and lived" (69), the hum of unmarked, impersonal existence can be heard. From this blurred background, a narrative shape emerges in the occasion of speaking, simultaneously to oneself and another. Nisa tells her life, a process textually dramatized in Shostak's book.

As alter ego, provoker, and editor of the discourse, Shostak makes a number of significant interventions. A good deal of cutting and rearranging transforms overlapping stories into "a life" that does not repeat itself unduly and that develops by recognizable steps and passages. Nisa's distinct voice emerges. But Shostak has systematically removed her own interventions (though they can often be sensed in Nisa's response). She has also taken out a variety of narrative markers: her friend's habitual comment at the end of a story, "the wind has taken that away," or at the start, "I will break open the story and tell you what's there"; or in the middle, "What am I trying to do? Here I am sitting, talking about one story, and another runs right into my head and into my thoughts!" (40). Shostak has clearly thought carefully about the framing of her transcripts, and one cannot have everything—the performance with all its divagations, and also an easily understandable story. If Nisa's words were to be widely read, concessions had to be made to the requirements of biographical allegory, to a readership practiced in the ethical interpretation of selves. By these formal means the book's second discourse, Nisa's spoken life, is brought close to its readers, becoming a narration that makes eloquent "human" sense.

The book's third distinct register is Shostak's personal account of fieldwork. "Teach me what it is to be a !Kung woman" was the question she asked of her informants (349). If Nisa responded with peculiar aptness, her words also seemed to answer another question, "What is it to be a woman?" Shostak told her informants "that I wanted to learn what it meant to be a woman in their culture so I could better understand what it meant in my own." With Nisa, the relationship became, in !Kung terms, that of an aunt talking to a young niece, to "a girl-woman, recently married, struggling with the issues of love, marriage, sexuality, work and identity" (4). The younger woman ("niece," sometimes "daughter") is instructed by an experienced elder in the arts and pains of womanhood. The transforming relationship ends with an equality in affection and respect, and with a final word, potent in feminist meaning: "sister" (371). Nisa speaks, throughout, not as a neutral witness but as a person giving specific kinds of advice to someone of a particular age with manifest questions and desires. She is not an "informant" speaking *cultural* truths, as if to everyone and no one, providing information rather than circumstantial responses.

In her account, Shostak describes a search for personal knowledge, for something going beyond the usual ethnographic rapport. She hopes that intimacy with a !Kung woman will, somehow, enlarge or deepen her sense of being a modern Western woman. Without drawing explicit lessons from Nisa's experience, she dramatizes through her own quest the way a narrated life makes sense, allegorically, *for another*. Nisa's story is revealed as a joint production, the outcome of an encounter that cannot be rewritten as a subject-object dichotomy. Something more than explaining or representing the life and words of another is going on—something more open-ended. The book is part of a new interest in revaluing subjective (more accurately, intersubjective) aspects of research. It emerges from a crucial moment of feminist politics and epistemology: consciousness raising and the sharing of experiences by women. A commonality is produced that, by bringing separate lives together, empowers personal action, recognizes a common estate. This moment of recent feminist consciousness is allegorized in *Nisa*'s fable of its own relationality. (In other ethnographies, traditionally masculine stories of initiation and penetration differently stage the productive encounter of self and other.)[6] Shostak's explicit feminist allegory thus reflects a specific moment in which the construction of "woman's" experience is given center stage. It is a moment of continuing importance; but it has been challenged by recent countercurrents within feminist theory. The assertion of common female qualities (and oppressions) across racial, ethnic, and class lines is newly problematic. And in some quarters "woman" is

6. On ethnography as an allegory of conquest and initiation, see Clifford 1983b.

seen, not as a locus of experience, but as a shifting subjective position not reducible to any essence.[7]

Shostak's allegory seems to register these countercurrents in its occasionally complex accounts of the processes of play and transference, which produce the final inscription of commonality. For the book's intimate relationships are based on subtle, reciprocal movements of doubling, imagination, and desire, movements allegorized in one of the stories Shostak tells in counterpoint to Nisa's narrative—an incident turning on the value of a girl-woman's body.

> One day I noticed a twelve-year-old girl, whose breasts had just started to develop, looking into the small mirror beside the driver's window of our Land Rover. She looked intently at her face, then, on tiptoe, examined her breasts and as much of her body as she could see, then went to her face again. She stepped back to see more, moved in again for a closer look. She was a lovely girl, although not outstanding in any way except being in the full health and beauty of youth. She saw me watching. I teased in the !Kung manner I had by then thoroughly learned, "So ugly! How is such a young girl already so ugly?" She laughed. I asked, "You don't agree?" She beamed, "No, not at all. I'm beautiful!" She continued to look at herself. I said, "Beautiful? Perhaps my eyes have become broken with age that I can't see where it is?" She said, "Everywhere—my face, my body. There is no ugliness at all." These remarks were said easily, with a broad smile, but without arrogance. The pleasure she felt in her changing body was as evident as the absence of conflict about it. (270)

A great deal of the book is here: an old voice, a young voice, a mirror . . . talk of self-possession. Narcissism, a term of deviance applied to women of the West, is transfigured. We notice, too, that it is the ethnographer, assuming a voice of age, who has brought a mirror, just as Nisa provides an allegorical mirror when Shostak takes the role of youth. Ethnography gains subjective "depth" through the sorts of roles, reflections, and reversals dramatized here. The writer, and her readers, can be both young (learning) and old (knowing). They can simultaneously listen, and "give voice to," the other.[8] *Nisa*'s readers follow—and prolong—the play of a desire. They imagine, in the mirror of the other, a guileless self-possession, an uncomplicated feeling of "attractiveness" that Shostak translates as "I have work," "I am productive," "I have worth" (270).

7. On racial and class divisions within feminism, see the rethinking of Rich (1979), and the work of Hull, Scott, and Smith (1982), Hooks (1981), and Moraga (1983). Strong feminist critiques of essentialism may be found in Wittig (1981) and Haraway (1985).

8. Ethnographies often present themselves as fictions of learning, the acquisition of knowledge, and finally of authority to understand and represent another culture. The researcher begins in a child's relationship to adult culture, and ends by speaking with the wisdom of experience. It is interesting to observe how, in the text, an author's enunciative modes may shift back and forth between learning from and speaking for the other. This fictional freedom is crucial to ethnography's allegorical appeal: the simultaneous reconstruction of a culture and a knowing self, a double "coming of age in Samoa."

Anthropological fieldwork has been represented as both a scientific "laboratory" and a personal "rite of passage." The two metaphors capture nicely the discipline's impossible attempt to fuse objective and subjective practices. Until recently, this impossibility was masked by marginalizing the intersubjective foundations of fieldwork, by excluding them from serious ethnographic texts, relegating them to prefaces, memoirs, anecdotes, confessions, and so forth. Lately this set of disciplinary rules is giving way. The new tendency to name and quote informants more fully and to introduce personal elements into the text is altering ethnography's discursive strategy and mode of authority. Much of our knowledge about other cultures must now be seen as contingent, the problematic outcome of intersubjective dialogue, translation, and projection. This poses fundamental problems for any science that moves predominantly from the particular to the general, that can make use of personal truths only as examples of typical phenomena or as exceptions to collective patterns.

Once the ethnographic process is accorded its full complexity of historicized dialogical relations, what formerly seemed to be empirical/interpretive accounts of generalized cultural facts (statements and attributions concerning "the !Kung," "the Samoans," etc.) now appear as just one level of allegory. Such accounts may be complex and truthful; and they are, in principle, susceptible to refutation, assuming access to the same pool of cultural facts. But as written versions based on fieldwork, these accounts are clearly no longer *the* story, but a story among other stories. *Nisa*'s discordant allegorical registers—the book's three, never quite manageable, "voices"—reflect a troubled, inventive moment in the history of cross-cultural representation.

> Welcome of Tears *is a beautiful book, combining the stories of a vanishing people and the growth of an anthropologist.*
>
> MARGARET MEAD, blurb for the paperback edition of Charles Wagley's *Welcome of Tears*

Ethnographic texts are not only, or predominantly, allegories. Indeed, as we have seen, they struggle to limit the play of their "extra" meanings, subordinating them to mimetic, referential functions. This struggle (which often involves disputes over what will count as "scientific" theory and what as "literary" invention or "ideological" projection) maintains disciplinary and generic conventions. If ethnography as a tool for positive science is to be preserved, such conventions must

mask, or direct, multiple allegorical processes. For may not every extended description, stylistic turn, story, or metaphor be read to mean something else? (Need we accept the three explicit levels of allegory in a book like *Nisa*? What about its photographs, which tell their own story?) Are not readings themselves undecidable? Critics like De Man (1979) rigorously adopt such a position, arguing that the choice of a dominant rhetoric, figure, or narrative mode in a text is always an imperfect attempt to impose a reading or range of readings on an interpretive process that is open-ended, a series of displaced "meanings" with no full stop. But whereas the free play of readings may in theory be infinite, there are, at any historical moment, a limited range of canonical and emergent allegories available to the competent reader (the reader whose interpretation will be deemed plausible by a specific community). These structures of meaning are historically bounded and coercive. There is, in practice, no "free play."

Within this historical predicament, the critique of stories and patterns that persistently inform cross-cultural accounts remains an important political as well as scientific task. In the remainder of this essay I explore a broad, orienting allegory (or more accurately, a pattern of possible allegories) that has recently emerged as a contested area—a structure of retrospection that may be called "ethnographic pastoral." Shostak's book and the Harvard hunter-gatherer studies, to the extent that they engage in a search for fundamental, desirable human traits, are enmeshed in this structure.

In a trenchant article, "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding," Michelle Rosaldo has questioned a persistent tendency to appropriate ethnographic data in the form of a search for origins. Analyses of social "givens" such as gender and sexuality show an almost reflexive need for anthropological just-so-stories. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's founding question, "What is woman?" scholarly discussions "move . . . to a diagnosis of contemporary subordination and from then on to the queries 'Were things always as they are today?' and then 'When did "it" start?'" (1980:391). Enter examples drawn from ethnography. In a practice not essentially different from that of Herbert Spencer, Henry Maine, Durkheim, Engels, or Freud, it is assumed that evidence from "simple" societies will illuminate the origins and structure of contemporary cultural patterns. Rosaldo notes that most scientific anthropologists have, since the early twentieth century, abandoned the evolutionary search for origins, but her essay suggests that the reflex is pervasive and enduring. Moreover, even scientific ethnographers cannot fully control the meanings—readings—provoked by their accounts. This is especially true of representations that

have not historicized their objects, portraying exotic societies in an "ethnographic present" (which is always, in fact, a past). This synchronic suspension effectively textualizes the other, and gives the sense of a reality not in temporal flux, not in the same ambiguous, moving *historical* present that includes and situates the other, the ethnographer, and the reader. "Allochronic" representations, to use Johannes Fabian's term, have been pervasive in twentieth-century scientific ethnography. They invite allegorical appropriations in the mythologizing mode Rosaldo repudiates.

Even the most coolly analytic accounts may be built on this retrospective appropriation. E. E. Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* (1940) is a case in point, for it portrays an appealingly harmonious anarchy, a society uncorrupted by a Fall. Henrika Kuklick (1984) has analyzed *The Nuer* (in the context of a broad trend in British political anthropology concerned with acephalous "tribal" societies) as a political allegory reinscribing a recurrent "folk model" of Anglo-Saxon democracy. When Evans-Pritchard writes, "There is no master and no servant in their society, but only equals who regard themselves as God's noblest creation," it is not difficult to hear echoes of a long political tradition of nostalgia for "an egalitarian, contractual union" of free individuals. Edenic overtones are occasionally underscored, as always with Evans-Pritchard, drily.

> Though I have spoken of time and units of time the Nuer have no expression equivalent to "time" in our language, and they cannot, therefore, as we can, speak of time as though it were something actual, which passes, can be wasted, can be saved, and so forth. I do not think that they ever experience the same feeling of fighting against time or of having to coordinate activities with an abstract passage of time, because their points of reference are mainly the activities themselves, which are generally of a leisurely character. Events follow a logical order, but they are not controlled by an abstract system, there being no autonomous points of reference to which activities have to conform with precision. Nuer are fortunate. (103)

For a readership caught up in the post-Darwinian bourgeois experience of time—a linear, relentless progress leading nowhere certain and permitting no pause or cyclic return, the cultural islands out of time (or "without history") described by many ethnographers have a persistent prelapsarian appeal. We note, however, the ironic structure (which need not imply an ironic tone) of such allegories. For they are presented through the detour of an ethnographic subjectivity whose attitude toward the other is one of participant-observation, or better perhaps, belief-skepticism (See Webster 1982:93). Nuer are fortunate. (We are unfortunate.) The appeal is fictional, the temporal ease

and attractive anarchy of Nuer society are distant, irretrievable. They are lost qualities, textually recovered.

This ironic appeal belongs to a broad ideological pattern that has oriented much, perhaps most, twentieth century cross-cultural representation. "For us, primitive societies [*Naturvölker*] are ephemeral. . . . At the very instant they become known to us they are doomed." Thus, Adolph Bastian in 1881 (quoted in Fabian 1983:122). In 1921, Bronislaw Malinowski: "Ethnology is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, to forge its proper tools, to start ready for work on its appointed task, the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity" (1961:xv). Authentic Trobriand society, he implied, was not long for this world. Writing in the 1950s, Claude Lévi-Strauss saw a global process of entropy. *Tristes Tropiques* sadly portrays differentiated social structures disintegrating into global homogeneity under the shock of contact with a potent monoculture. A Rousseauian quest for "elementary" forms of human collectivity leads Lévi-Strauss to the Nambikwara. But their world is falling apart. "I had been looking for a society reduced to its simplest expression. That of the Nambikwara was so truly simple that all I could find in it was individual human beings" (1975:317).

The theme of the vanishing primitive, of the end of traditional society (the very act of naming it "traditional" implies a rupture), is pervasive in ethnographic writing. It is, in Raymond Williams's phrase, a "structure of feeling" (1973:12). Undeniably, ways of life can, in a meaningful sense, "die"; populations are regularly violently disrupted, sometimes exterminated. Traditions are constantly being lost. But the persistent and repetitious "disappearance" of social forms at the moment of their ethnographic representation demands analysis as a narrative structure. A few years ago the *American Ethnologist* printed an article based on recent fieldwork among the Nambikwara—who are still something more than "individual human beings." And living Trobriand culture has been the object of recent field study (Weiner 1976). The now-familiar film *Trobriand Cricket* shows a very distinct way of life, reinventing itself under the conditions of colonialism and early nationhood.

Ethnography's disappearing object is, then, in significant degree, a rhetorical construct legitimating a representational practice: "salvage" ethnography in its widest sense. The other is lost, in disintegrating time and space, but saved in the text. The rationale for focusing one's attention on vanishing lore, for rescuing in writing the knowledge of old people, may be strong (though it depends on local circumstances and cannot any longer be generalized). I do not wish to deny

specific cases of disappearing customs and languages, or to challenge the value of recording such phenomena. I do, however, question the assumption that with rapid change something essential ("culture"), a coherent differential identity, vanishes. And I question, too, the mode of scientific and moral authority associated with salvage, or redemptive, ethnography. It is assumed that the other society is weak and "needs" to be represented by an outsider (and that what matters in its life is its past, not present or future). The recorder and interpreter of fragile custom is custodian of an essence, unimpeachable witness to an authenticity. (Moreover, since the "true" culture has always vanished, the salvaged version cannot be easily refuted.)

Such attitudes, though they persist, are diminishing. Few anthropologists today would embrace the logic of ethnography in the terms in which it was enunciated in Franz Boas's time, as a last-chance rescue operation. But the allegory of salvage is deeply ingrained. Indeed, I shall argue in a moment that it is built into the conception and practice of ethnography as a process of writing, specifically of textualization. Every description or interpretation that conceives itself as "bringing a culture into writing," moving from oral-discursive experience (the "native's," the fieldworker's) to a written version of that experience (the ethnographic text) is enacting the structure of "salvage." To the extent that the ethnographic process is seen as inscription (rather than, for example, as transcription, or dialogue) the representation will continue to enact a potent, and questionable, allegorical structure.

This structure is appropriately located within a long Western tradition of pastoral (a topic also developed by Renato Rosaldo in this volume). Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973), while drawing on an established tradition of scholarship on pastoral (Empson 1950, Kermode 1952, Frye 1971, Poggioli 1975, among others) strains toward a global scope wide enough to accommodate ethnographic writing. He shows how a fundamental contrast between city and country aligns itself with other pervasive oppositions: civilized and primitive, West and "non-West," future and past. He analyzes a complex, inventive, strongly patterned set of responses to social dislocation and change, stretching from classical antiquity to the present. Williams traces the constant reemergence of a conventionalized pattern of retrospection that laments the loss of a "good" country, a place where authentic social and natural contacts were once possible. He soon, however, notes an unsettling regression. For each time one finds a writer looking back to a happier place, to a lost, "organic" moment, one finds another writer of that earlier period lamenting a similar, previous disappearance. The ultimate referent is, of course, Eden (9–12).

Williams does not dismiss this structure as simply nostalgic, which it manifestly is; but rather follows out a very complex set of temporal, spatial, and moral positions. He notes that pastoral frequently involves a *critical nostalgia*, a way (as Diamond [1974] argues for a concept of the primitive) to break with the hegemonic, corrupt present by asserting the reality of a radical alternative. Edward Sapir's "Culture, Genuine and Spurious" (1966) recapitulates these critical pastoral values. And indeed every imagined authenticity presupposes, and is produced by, a present circumstance of felt inauthenticity. But Williams's treatment suggests that such projections need not be consistently located in the past; or, what amounts to the same thing, that the "genuine" elements of cultural life need not be repetitiously encoded as fragile, threatened, and transient. This sense of pervasive social fragmentation, of a constant disruption of "natural" relations, is characteristic of a subjectivity Williams loosely connects with city life and with romanticism. The self, cut loose from viable collective ties, is an identity in search of wholeness, having internalized loss and embarked on an endless search for authenticity. Wholeness by definition becomes a thing of the past (rural, primitive, childlike) accessible only as a fiction, grasped from a stance of incomplete involvement. George Eliot's novels epitomize this situation of participant-observation in a "common condition . . . a knowable community, belong[ing] ideally in the past." *Middlemarch*, for example, is projected a generation back from the time of its writing to 1830. And this is approximately the temporal distance that many conventional ethnographies assume when they describe a passing reality, "traditional" life, in the present tense. The fiction of a knowable community "can be recreated there for a widely ranging moral action. But the real step that has been taken is withdrawal from any full response to an existing society. Value is in the past, as a general retrospective condition, and is in the present only as a particular and private sensibility, the individual moral action" (180).

In George Eliot we can see the development of a style of sociological writing that will describe whole cultures (knowable worlds) from a specific temporal distance and with a presumption of their transience. This will be accomplished from a loving, detailed, but ultimately disengaged, standpoint. Historical worlds will be salvaged as textual fabrications disconnected from ongoing lived milieux and suitable for moral, allegorical appropriation by individual readers. In properly *ethnographic* pastoral this textualizing structure is generalized beyond the dissociations of nineteenth-century England to a wider capitalist topography of Western/non-Western, city/country oppositions. "Primitive," nonliterate, underdeveloped, tribal societies are constantly yielding to progress, "losing" their traditions. "In the name of science, we anthropologists compose requiems," writes Robert Murphy (1984). But the most problematic, and politically charged, aspect of this "pastoral" encodation is its relentless placement of others in a present-becoming-past. What would it require, for example, consistently to associate the inventive, resilient, enormously varied societies of Melanesia with the cultural *future* of the planet? How might ethnographies be differently conceived if this standpoint could be seriously adopted? Pastoral allegories of cultural loss and textual rescue would, in any event, have to be transformed.[9]

Pervasive assumptions about ethnography as writing would also have to be altered. For allegories of salvage are implied by the very practice of textualization that is generally assumed to be at the core of cultural description. Whatever else an ethnography does, it translates experience into text. There are various ways of effecting this translation, ways that have significant ethical and political consequences. One can "write up" the results of an individual experience of research. This may generate a realistic account of the unwritten experience of another group or person. One can present this textualization as the outcome of observation, of interpretation, of dialogue. One can construct an ethnography composed of dialogues. One can feature multiple voices, or a single voice. One can portray the other as a stable, essential whole, or one can show it to be the product of a narrative of discovery, in specific historical circumstances. I have discussed some of these choices elsewhere (1983a). What is irreducible, in all of them, is the assumption that ethnography brings experience and discourse into writing.

Though this is manifestly the case, and indeed reflects a kind of common sense, it is not an innocent common sense. Since antiquity the story of a passage from the oral/aural into writing has been a complex and charged one. Every ethnography enacts such a movement, and this is one source of the peculiar authority that finds both rescue and irretrievable loss—a kind of death in life—in the making of texts from events and dialogues. Words and deeds are transient (and au-

9. In my reading, the most powerful attempt to unthink this temporal setup, by means of an ethnographic invention of Melanesia, is the work of Roy Wagner (1979, 1980). He opposes, perhaps too sharply, Western "anticipations of the future" with Melanesian "anticipations of the future." The former are associated with the idea of culture as a structuring tradition (1979: 162). Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams* (1982) offers a subtle and precise attempt to portray the hunting life of Beaver Indians in northwest Canada as they confront world-system forces, an oil pipeline, hunting for sport, etc. He presents his work as a political collaboration. And he is careful to keep the future open, uncertain, walking a fine line between narratives of "survival," "acculturation," and "impact."

thentic), writing endures (as supplementarity and artifice). The text embalms the event as it extends its "meaning." Since Socrates' refusal to write, itself powerfully written by Plato, a profound ambivalence toward the passage from oral to literate has characterized Western thinking. And much of the power and pathos of ethnography derives from the fact that it has situated its practice within this crucial transition. The fieldworker presides over, and controls in some degree, the making of a text out of life. His or her descriptions and interpretations become part of the "consultable record of what man has said" (Geertz 1973:30). The text is a record of something enunciated, in a *past*. The structure, if not the thematic content, of pastoral is repeated.

A small parable may give a sense of why this allegory of ethnographic rescue and loss has recently become less self-evident. It is a true parable.[10] A student of African ethno-history is conducting field research in Gabon. He is concerned with the Mpongwé, a coastal group who, in the nineteenth century, were active in contacts with European traders and colonists. The "tribe" still exists, in the region of Libreville, and the ethno-historian has arranged to interview the current Mpongwé chief about traditional life, religious ritual, and so on. In preparation for his interview the researcher consults a compendium of local custom compiled in the early twentieth century by a Gabonese Christian and pioneering ethnographer, the Abbé Raponda-Walker. Before meeting with the Mpongwé chief the ethnographer copies out a list of religious terms, institutions and concepts, recorded and defined by Raponda-Walker. The interview will follow this list, checking whether the customs persist, and if so, with what innovations. At first things go smoothly, with the Mpongwé authority providing descriptions and interpretations of the terms suggested, or else noting that a practice has been abandoned. After a time, however, when the researcher asks about a particular word, the chief seems uncertain, knits his brows. "Just a moment," he says cheerfully, and disappears into his house to return with a copy of Raponda-Walker's compendium. For the rest of the interview the book lies open on his lap.

Versions of this story, in increasing numbers, are to be heard in the folklore of ethnography. Suddenly cultural data cease to move smoothly from oral performance into descriptive writing. Now data also move from text to text, inscription becomes transcription. Both informant and researcher are readers and re-*writers* of a cultural invention. This is not to say, as some might, that the interview has ended

10. My thanks to Henry Bucher for this true story. I have told it as a parable, both because it is one, and because I suspect he would tell it somewhat differently, having been there.

in a sterile short circuit. Nor need one, like Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, lament the erosion of memory by literacy. The interview has not, suddenly, become "inauthentic," the data merely imposed. Rather, what one must reckon with are new conditions of ethnographic production. First, it is no longer possible to act as if the outside researcher is the sole, or primary, bringer of the culture into writing. This has, in fact, seldom been the case. However, there has been a consistent tendency among fieldworkers to hide, discredit, or marginalize prior written accounts (by missionaries, travelers, administrators, local authorities, even other ethnographers). The fieldworker, typically, starts from scratch, from a research *experience*, rather than from reading or transcribing. The field is not conceived of as already filled with texts. Yet this intertextual predicament is more and more the case (Larcom 1983). Second, "informants" increasingly read and write. They interpret prior versions of their culture, as well as those being written by ethnographic scholars. Work with texts—the process of inscription, rewriting, and so forth—is no longer (if it ever was) the exclusive domain of outside authorities. "Nonliterate" cultures are already textualized; there are few, if any, "virgin" lifeways to be violated and preserved by writing. Third, a very widespread, empowering distinction has been eroded: the division of the globe into literate and nonliterate peoples. This distinction is no longer widely accurate, as non-Western, "tribal" peoples become increasingly literate. But furthermore, once one begins to doubt the ethnographer's monopoly on the power to inscribe, one begins to see the "writing" activities that have always been pursued by native collaborators—from an Ambrym islander's sketch (in a famous gesture) of an intricate kinship system in the sand for A. B. Deacon to the Sioux George Sword's book-length cultural description found in the papers of James Walker. (See the Introduction of this volume, p. 15.)

But the most subversive challenge to the allegory of textualization I have been discussing here is found in the work of Derrida (1974). Perhaps the most enduring effect of his revival of "grammatology" has been to expand what was conventionally thought of as writing. *Alphabetic* writing, he argues, is a restrictive definition that ties the broad range of marks, spatial articulations, gestures, and other inscriptions at work in human cultures too closely to the representation of speech, the oral/aural word. In opposing logocentric representation to *écriture*, he radically extends the definition of the "written," in effect smudging its clear distinction from the "spoken." There is no need here to pursue in detail a disorienting project that is by now well known. What matters for ethnography is the claim that *all* human groups write—if they articulate, classify, possess an "oral-literature," or inscribe their world in ritual acts. They repeatedly "textualize"

meanings. Thus, in Derrida's epistemology, the writing of ethnography cannot be seen as a drastically new form of cultural inscription, as an exterior imposition on a "pure," unwritten oral/aural universe. The logos is not primary and the *gramme* its mere secondary representation.

Seen in this light, the processes of ethnographic writing appear more complex. If, as Derrida would say, the cultures studied by anthropologists are always already writing themselves, the special status of the fieldworker-scholar who "brings the culture into writing" is undercut. Who, in fact, writes a myth that is recited into a tape recorder, or copied down to become part of field notes? Who writes (in a sense going beyond transcription) an interpretation of custom produced through intense conversations with knowledgeable native collaborators? I have argued that such questions can, and should, generate a rethinking of ethnographic authority (Clifford 1983a). In the present context I want merely to underline the pervasive challenge, both historical and theoretical in origin, that presently confronts the allegory of ethnographic practice as textualization.

It is important to keep the allegorical dimensions in mind. For in the West the passage from oral to literate is a potent recurring *story*—of power, corruption, and loss. It replicates (and to an extent produces) the structure of pastoral that has been pervasive in twentieth-century ethnography. Logocentric writing is conventionally conceived to be a *representation* of authentic speech. Pre-literate (the phrase contains a story) societies are oral societies; writing comes to them from "outside," an intrusion from a wider world. Whether brought by missionary, trader, or ethnographer, writing is both empowering (a necessary, effective way of storing and manipulating knowledge) and corrupting (a loss of immediacy, of the face-to-face communication Socrates cherished, of the presence and intimacy of speech). A complex and fertile recent debate has circled around the valorization, historical significance, and epistemological status of writing.[11] Whatever may or may not have been settled in the debate, there is no doubt of what has become unsettled: the sharp distinction of the world's cultures into literate and pre-literate; the notion that ethnographic textualization is a process that enacts a fundamental transition from oral experience to written representation; the assumption that something essential is lost when a culture becomes "ethnographic"; the strangely ambivalent authority of a practice that salvages as text a cultural life becoming past.

These components of what I have called ethnographic pastoral no

11. The "debate" centers on the confrontation of Ong (1967, 1977, 1982) and Derrida (1973, 1974). Tyler (1978, 1984b) tries to work past the opposition. Goody (1977) and Eisenstein (1979) have made important recent contributions.

longer appear as common sense. Reading and writing are generalized. If the ethnographer reads culture over the native's shoulder, the native also reads over the ethnographer's shoulder as he or she writes each cultural description. Fieldworkers are increasingly constrained in what they publish by the reactions of those previously classified as nonliterate. Novels by a Samoan (Alfred Wendt) can challenge the portrait of his people by a distinguished anthropologist. The notion that writing is a corruption, that something irretrievably pure is lost when a cultural world is textualized is, after Derrida, seen to be a pervasive, contestable, Western allegory. Walter Ong and others have shown that something is, indeed, lost with the generalization of writing. But authentic culture is not that something—to be gathered up in its fragile, final truth by an ethnographer or by anyone else.

Modern allegory, Walter Benjamin (1977) tells us, is based on a sense of the world as transient and fragmentary. "History" is grasped as a process, not of inventive life, but of "irresistible decay." The material analogue of allegory is thus the "ruin" (178), an always-disappearing structure that invites imaginative reconstruction. Benjamin observes that "appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to redeem them for eternity, is one of the strongest impulses in allegory" (quoted by Wolin 1982:71). My account of ethnographic pastoral suggests that this "impulse" is to be resisted, not by abandoning allegory—an impossible aim—but by opening ourselves to different histories.

Allegories are secured . . . by teaching people to read in certain ways.
TALAL ASAD (comment on this essay at the Santa Fe seminar)

I have explored some important allegorical forms that express "cosmological" patterns of order and disorder, fables of personal (gendered) identity, and politicized models of temporality. The future of these forms is uncertain; they are being rewritten and criticized in current practice. A few conclusions, or at least assertions, may be drawn from this exploration.

- There is no way definitely, surgically, to separate the factual from the allegorical in cultural accounts. The data of ethnography make sense only within patterned arrangements and narratives, and these are conventional, political, and meaningful in a more than referential sense. Cultural facts are not true and cultural allegories false. In the human sciences the relation of fact to allegory is a domain of struggle and institutional discipline.

The meanings of an ethnographic account are uncontrollable. Neither an author's intention, nor disciplinary training, nor the rules of genre can limit the readings of a text that will emerge with new historical, scientific, or political projects. But if ethnographies are susceptible to multiple interpretations, these are not at any given moment infinite, or merely "subjective" (in the pejorative sense). Reading is indeterminate only to the extent that history itself is open-ended. If there is a common resistance to the recognition of allegory, a fear that it leads to a nihilism of reading, this is not a realistic fear. It confuses contests for meaning with disorder. And often it reflects a wish to preserve an "objective" rhetoric, refusing to locate its own mode of production within inventive culture and historical change.

A recognition of allegory inescapably poses the political and ethical dimensions of ethnographic writing. It suggests that these be manifested, not hidden. In this light, the open allegorizing of a Mead or a Benedict enacts a certain probity—properly exposing itself to the accusation of having *used* tribal societies for pedagogical purposes. (Let those free of such purposes cast the first stone!) One need not, of course, purvey heavy-handed "messages," or twist cultural facts (as presently known) to a political purpose. I would suggest as a model of allegorical tact Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*. No one would deny its scientific importance or scholarly commitment. Yet from the outset, and especially in its concluding chapter, the work's aim is patent: "to draw conclusions of a moral nature about some of the problems confronting us in our present economic crisis" (1967:2). The book was written in response to the breakdown of European reciprocity in World War I. The troubling proximity it shows between exchange and warfare, the image of the round table evoked at the end, these and other urgent resonances mark the work as a socialist-humanist allegory addressed to the political world of the twenties. This is not the work's only "content." The many rereadings *The Gift* has generated testify to its productivity as a text. It can even be read—in certain graduate seminars—as a classic comparative study of exchange, with admonitions to skim over the final chapter. This is a sad mistake. For it misses the opportunity to learn from an admirable example of science deploying itself *in* history.

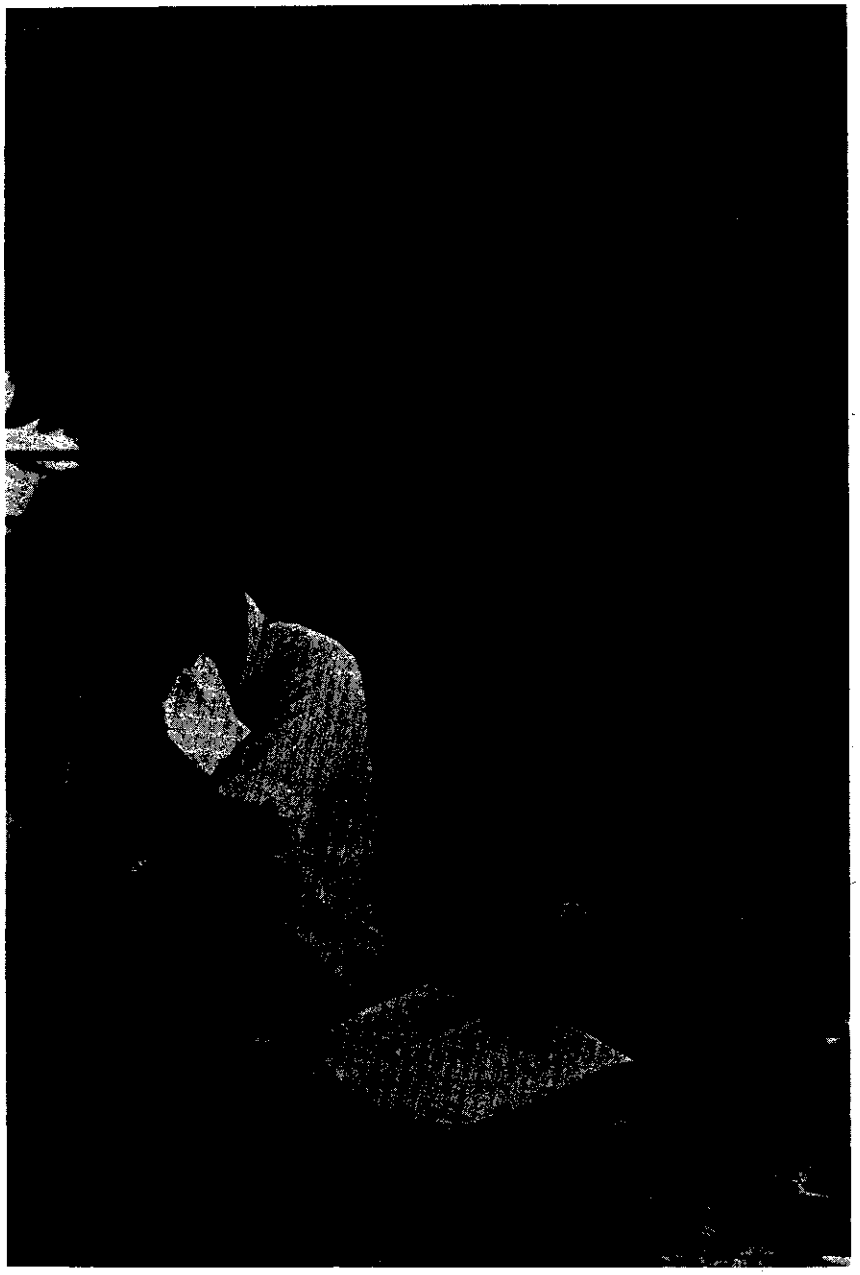
A recognition of allegory complicates the writing and reading of ethnographies in potentially fruitful ways. A tendency emerges to specify and separate different allegorical registers within the text. The marking off of extended indigenous discourses shows the

ethnography to be a hierarchical structure of powerful stories that translate, encounter, and recontextualize other powerful stories. It is a palimpsest (Owens 1980). Moreover, an awareness of allegory heightens awareness of the narratives, and other temporal setups, implicitly or explicitly at work. Is the redemptive structure of salvage-textualization being replaced? By what new allegories? Of conflict? Of emergence? Of syncretism?[12]

Finally, a recognition of allegory requires that as readers and writers of ethnographies, we struggle to confront and take responsibility for our systematic constructions of others and of ourselves through others. This recognition need not ultimately lead to an ironic position—though it must contend with profound ironies. If we are condemned to tell stories we cannot control, may we not, at least, tell stories we believe to be true.

12. For recent changes in these underlying stories, see note 9, above, and Bruner 1985. See also James Boon's 1983 exploration of anthropology's satiric dimensions. A partial way out can perhaps be envisioned in the pre-modern current that Harry Berger has called "strong" or "metapastoral"—a tradition he finds in the writing of Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Milton, Marvell, and Pope. "Such pastoral constructs within itself an image of its generic traditions in order to criticize them and, in the process, performs a critique on the limits of its own enterprise even as it ironically displays its delight in the activity it criticizes" (1984:2). Modern ethnographic examples are rare, although much of Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* certainly qualifies.

For helpful criticisms of this paper I would like to thank Richard Handler, Susan Gevirtz, David Schneider, Harry Berger, and the Santa Fe seminar participants, especially Michael Fischer.



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

Writing Culture

The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography

EDITED BY JAMES CLIFFORD
AND GEORGE E. MARCUS

A School of American Research
Advanced Seminar

University of California Press
BERKELEY LOS ANGELES LONDON