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ETHNOGRAPHIES AS TEXTS

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Introduction

Anthropologists have finally begun to give explicit attention to the writing of ethnographic texts, a subject long ignored either by conceiving of ethnography primarily as an activity that occurs in the field or by treating it as a method, rather than product, of research. Although a few articles have appeared which consider some of the rhetorical and narrative dimensions of ethnographic writing (13, 17, 20, 24, 25, 31, 32, 71, 101, 102, 105,), the major issues have been directly explored within several recent ethnographies themselves (e.g. 1, 12, 14, 16, 26, 29, 30, 35, 50, 61, 62, 73, 74, 78, 84–86, 90, 92, 93, 103, 110). These collectively represent a growing trend of experimentation in ethnographic writing, largely as a philosophically informed reaction to the genre conventions of ethnographic realism about which there has been a tacit and artificial consensus in Anglo-American anthropology during approximately the past 60 years. Such experimentation may not just be altering the traditional nature of the ethnography; it may also mark the beginning of a profound reshaping of the theoretical ambitions and research practices of a discipline which has increasingly depended on ethnographic texts for both data and the development of theoretical perspectives. In the absence of a substantial historical and critical literature on the ethnographic genre, this paper will review a set of topics about which there is considerable self-consciousness on the part of recent writers. These topics pertain to how ethnographies achieve their effect as knowledge of "others."

The major characteristic shared by experimental ethnographies is that they integrate, within their interpretations, an explicit epistemological concern for how they have constructed such interpretations and how they are representing them textually as objective discourse about subjects among whom research was conducted. In a sense, contemporary ethnographic writing attempts to synthesize the classic debate on hermeneutics (75) between philosophical reflection about the nature of interpretation, which

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emphasizes the open-endedness of interpretive activity, and the methodological attempt to create a science of interpretation, which emphasizes the possibility of systematic, self-contained interpretations. Whether ethnographies can, as a matter of convention, balance both *reflection on* understanding and *an* understanding itself in a single text is still largely unresolved by these experiments. Nevertheless, the goal of exploring epistemological issues as an integral, vital part of cultural analysis distinguishes these texts, and, in addition, is making their authors, as well as their readers, increasingly conscious of their narrative structures and rhetoric.

It needs, perhaps, to be emphasized that what is at issue in the self-reflectiveness of recent ethnographies is not merely a methodologically oriented retelling of field conditions and experiences, such as is to be found in the confessional fieldwork literature which has appeared over the last 15 years. While such works have certainly helped to stimulate the kind of questioning of the tacit assumptions of research practice that now has led to a more trenchant critical perspective on ethnographic writing itself, their main aim has been to demystify the process of anthropological fieldwork whose veil of public secrecy has been increasingly embarrassing to a "scientific" discipline. Such accounts, because they are typically conceived and published as ends in themselves—as separate books or articles—are at best seldom more than tenuously related to their authors' ethnographic enterprises. The writers of experimental ethnographers, in contrast, often represent fieldwork experiences as a vital technique for structuring their narratives of description and analysis.

In these experiments, reporting fieldwork experience is just one aspect of wide-ranging personal reflections which manifest themselves in stronger and weaker forms. These range from very explicit, focused discussion within the text itself about the relationship between the form of the text and the nature of the interpretation (e.g. 4, 35, 62, 86, 92), to occasional references to problems of interpretation (e.g. 1, 50, 61, 85, 90, 103, 110), to more diffuse epistemological concerns, largely implicit in the novel ways material and interpretations are presented (e.g. 26, 84, 93). Such diversity exists because creativity is not only required but also encouraged in historic circumstances where conventional forms do not suit the way ethnographic problems are posed. While standard ethnographies are still being produced continually, considerable rewards are offered, both in degree of publisher interest and positive critical response, to ethnographers who couch their work in more personal and novelly structured ways. In this emergent situation, ethnographers read widely among new works for models, being interested as much, if not more, in styles of text construction as in their cultural analysis, both of which are difficult to separate in any case. Thus, the current trend is characterized by texts that are very personally written,

and are nonetheless emulative in search of new conventions, quite like the classic pattern of development in literary genres.

Although the topic of ethnographic writing can, and ideally, should, be construed in a broad fashion, the following discussions have been bracketed by a number of exclusions and distinctions to define a manageable subject matter. First, a broader perspective on ethnographic writing than that attempted here would not only look at the full history of the ethnography within Anglo-American anthropology, including pre-Malinowskian forms which arose from very different projects of research, but would also encompass ethnographic work outside the Anglo-American tradition and outside the discipline of anthropology: for example, travel accounts, the work of missionaries, and colonial administrators' reports, which overlapped with the early development of ethnography in anthropology; French, German, and Italian ethnographic traditions; and the interest in cultural interpretation and the exotic in Continental literary traditions (see 21 in particular). A full account would also relate ethnographic writing to filmmaking (2, 51, 66) and to its piecemeal use in more problem-focused, theoretical works that are not directly presented as the simple outcome of field research (e.g. 36, 99, 100). In this paper, however, we limit ourselves to an examination of the current trend of experimentation (some of which is inspired by the revival of earlier ethnographic styles) against the background of the last 60 years of Anglo-American ethnographic realism.

Second, we define an ethnography simply as an account resulting from having done fieldwork, a relatively undisciplined activity, the folklore of which has given identity to an academic discipline. Doing fieldwork is quite different from representing it within an ethnography, but just as certain conventions of documentation mark a work as history, so evidence of fieldwork, however written into a text, marks a work as ethnography. We must, therefore, be concerned with the representation of fieldwork in texts, but it is valid to exclude what actually happens in the field from consideration here. Further, for simplicity, we do not consider the very interesting relationship between the production of a published ethnographic text and its intermediate written versions in the form of field notes, dissertations, or articles.

In the pioneer stage of ethnographic realism, the work of ethnography was conceived to encompass several projected volumes (as with Malinowski, Firth, and Evans-Pritchard)—a conception of format which carried over from the earlier prefieldwork context of ethnography. In contrast, the contemporary fashion, dominated by more problem-focused research, is the single volume tied to a period of fieldwork and combining several complex descriptive and interpretive tasks. The multitext ethnographic project might, de facto, be making a comeback (e.g. 29, 30, 78, 79), but the perspec-

tive here is limited to the single volume account symmetrical with one or two periods of fieldwork.

Third, our point of view in presenting this topic is that of the practicing anthropologist who writes and reads ethnography with an overriding empirical interest in the production of cultural knowledge about other forms of life. The perspective of the intellectual historian of anthropology, or of the social or cultural theorist interested in ethnographic writing, might overlap considerably with that of the practitioner, but their precise handling of the topic would be different. Our underlying concern is the utility of a critical perspective on ethnographic writing at this moment in the development of the discipline for the community of anthropologists who view themselves as ethnographers.

Fourth, and last, among the current experiments it is important, although not necessarily easy, to distinguish two subtrends. Most experimental ethnographies attempt to change genre conventions, in line with a shift in theoretical orientations toward problems of meaning, but without changing the fundamental ethnographic goals of description and interpretation. As yet, fewer but more extreme ethnographic experiments change genre conventions with a basic open-endedness about what the purposes and concerns of ethnographic writing, still based on fieldwork, should be. As Fredric Jameson has said (55, p.106), "Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a cultural artifact." The former ethnographies, in pursuing theoretically modified but traditional goals of a discipline, still operate according to the concept of genre, however richer it has become. In their apparent disregard for any kind of "policing" function, inherent in the notion of genre, the latter ethnographies seem to let a writing project explore its own rather than disciplinary goals.[1] The fact that the whole field of experimentation is emergent and that both trends of writing share common characteristics, noted above, make distinguishing them difficult in some cases. Nonetheless, our primary attention in this paper is directed to the majority of experiments which are self-restrained by genre and disciplinary considerations, but which pose considerable difficulty for anthropologists in classifying and critically evaluating ethnographic works, now so heavily dependent on their varied rhetorics for their effect [e.g. compare the critiques by Mangarella (70) and Crapanzano (27) of a recent ethnography by Geertz and colleagues, based on the hedges in its rhetoric].

[1]An analogy within recent fiction to the distinction of subtrends I have made here is John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* as an unusual, creative experiment well within the tradition of literary realism, and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie,* as an equally unusual, creative experiment that self-consciously assaults realist characteristics, especially in its temporal dimensions.

The remainder of this paper will address each of the following topics: the historic development of ethnographic realism as a set of genre conventions and of the reaction to it in the contemporary trend of ethnographic writing; the challenge to realist conventions through the key related issues in current experiments concerning how authority is established in ethnographies, how the plausibility and authenticity of their interpretations are achieved, and how they are variably received by differing readerships; sources in literary criticism that might inform a perspective on ethnographic texts; the relationship between the current trend in ethnographic writing, the doing of fieldwork, and changing theoretical interests in cultural and social anthropology; a consideration of experiments in ethnographic writing outside the predominant trend; and finally, a concluding assessment of the importance of the experimental realist ethnography and of the utility of a critical perspective on ethnographic writing in anthropology.

Ethnographic Realism

Ethnographic realism—to borrow from the literary conception of nineteenth century fiction (3, 97)—is a mode of writing that seeks to represent the reality of a whole world or form of life. As Stern says of a descriptive diversion in a Dickens novel (97, p.2), "The fullest purpose of the diversion is to add and superadd to that sense of assurance and abundance and reality that speaks to us from every page and every episode of the novel . . ." Similarly, realist ethnographies are written to allude to a whole by means of parts or foci of analytical attention which constantly evoke a social and cultural totality. Close attention to detail and redundant demonstrations that the writer shared and experienced this world are further aspects of realist writing. In fact, what gives the ethnographer authority and the text a pervasive sense of concrete reality is the writer's claim to represent a world as only one who has known it first-hand can, which thus forges an intimate link between ethnographic writing and fieldwork. Ethnographic description is by no means the straightforward, unproblematic task it is thought to be in the social sciences, but a complex effect, achieved through writing and dependent upon the strategic choice and construction of available detail. The presentation of interpretation and analysis is inseparably bound up with the systematic and vivid representation of a world that seems total and real to the reader.

The emergence of the realist ethnography as the approved genre within anthropology clearly depended upon the fusion to two historical developments—the establishment of anthropology as an academic discipline and the elaboration of professional fieldwork as the essential prerequisite for ethnographic accounts. Interestingly enough, these two developments occurred in opposite order within the American and British traditions. In

America, decades of fieldwork experience under the stimulus of the American Bureau of Ethnology preceded the appointment of Boas to Columbia University, whereas in England, anthropology was already firmly established in the universities before Malinowski's elaboration of fieldwork as a method [itself expressed within an ethnography (68)] and his linking it to the writing of ethnography as the proper professional activity of the individual anthropologist. These defined conditions of research practice which dramatically broke with the immediate British past in which fieldwork was done either by expeditions or by observers who often had no part in the anthropological texts, based on their observations. Despite their tweedledee and tweedledum historical development, and despite their differing theoretical orientations (cultural vs social structural), the American and British ethnographic traditions converged by consolidating the position of ethnographic realism as *the* genre for anthropology, as *the* "literary institution" serving positivist scientific goals.

One result of such consolidation was that English-speaking ethnographers came to expect adherence to certain genre conventions in each other's writings. Nevertheless, neither in British social anthropology, where the realist ethnography was more thoroughly disciplined due to Malinowski's influential professional labors as institution builder, nor in American cultural anthropology, where the style of ethnographic writing had remained somewhat more diffuse and experimental, was any explicit, critical examination accorded to these conventions. Consequently, they were for a long period narrowly and, for the most part, uninterestingly developed. Furthermore, such poor articulation of standards directly affected the haphazard way in which critical judgments about the adequacy of specific ethnographies were formed (e.g. in critiques of doctoral dissertations and especially in journal reviews); one simply had to acquire a "feel" for the conventions that made for a solid or weak text.

As it is precisely these realist genre conventions that are now being subjected to diverse kinds of experimentation and in a few cases are being transcended, perhaps in the direction of a different conception of ethnography, we shall now attempt to identify and characterize them in some detail. We started by attempting to apply the standard literary discriminations of plot, point of view, characterization, content, and style. However, as our analysis proceeded, we found that the fourth and fifth factors needed to be broken down into smaller, more manageable analytic categories (content into three categories, style into three), and hence our total of nine conventions to delineate the genre of ethnographic realism. We would stress the point that it was through the conjunction of these conventions within particular works that traditional ethnography managed to project that distinctive illusion of holism—that notion of creating a sense of a whole

world—which, as we noted earlier, is the most basic characteristic of realist writing.

1. The narrative structure of total ethnography

The typical narrative structure of the traditional ethnography developed out of a simplistic dependence on either cultural or functionalist/structuralist analytical imagery, both of which offered an easy, and strikingly congruent, answer to the problem of representing part-whole relationships. The aim of the anthropological writer being "total ethnography" (the complete description of another culture or society), the obvious solution to the problem of textual organization was to traverse, in sequential fashion, the units (cultural complexes or social institutions) into which cultures or societies were conceived, on theoretical grounds, to be divided. The result was the minimally orthodox table of contents (geography, kinship, economics, politics, and religion) and the eventual creation of the HRAF Files. Such a normative narrative structure has prevailed in anthropology from the days of the reconstructions of American Indian cultures, through the grandiose ethnographic projects of Malinowski and Firth where chapters became volumes, through the "community study" of the late forties and fifties, to the increasingly common "part" ethnography (the religion of the so-and-so, for example, where it is assumed that later studies will fill out the other "missing" parts of the total ethnography). At least two alternative narrative structures have been developed in the more recent experiments with ethnographic writing. One is to convert the temporal nature of the fieldwork experience into a spatial framework for the text (12, 15a). The other is to pose a cultural problem or paradox in the first chapter and, through a number of chapters devoted to the examination of relevant material, arrive at a solution in the conclusion.

2. The unintrusive presence of the ethnographer in the text

Experimentation with point of view has long been one of the key elements distinguishing fictional from nonfictional modes of writing. In addition, early anthropologists were highly sensitive to the existence of a close predecessor and contemporary parallel to the professional ethnography—the travel account.[2] One of the primary differences between the travel account and realist ethnography is the marked absence in the latter of the narrator as a first-person presence in the text and the dominance instead of the

[2]Unfortunately, the similarities remained irresistible for philosophers such as Louch (65), and also for ethnographers of certain peoples such as the Bedouin, where a tradition of travel accounts has had a compelling and acknowledged impact on professional writing [see Cole's ethnography (23) which pays homage to and clearly is in the tradition of T. E. Lawrence, Charles Doughty, and Wilfred Thesiger].

scientific (invisible or omniscient) narrator who is manifest only as a dispassionate, camera-like observer; the collective and authoritative third person ("the X do this") replaces the more fallible first-person ("I saw the X do this"). The resulting effect, of course, is a paradoxical one. While the use of the omniscient author heightens the sense of scientific objectivity projected by the text, such usage also helps to sever the relationship between what the ethnographer knows and how he came to know it. While there were indeed some striking exceptions among pioneer realist ethnographies to the sterile absence of the narrator from the text, even these exceptions relegated the author to prefaces, footnotes, and appendices.[3] Bateson's *Naven* (8) long remained virtually alone as an oddity among realist accounts in its explicit concern with its textuality in relation to its analytical goals.

3. Common denominator people

Because of the overwhelming concern of early anthropologists to establish culture or society as a legitimate focus for inquiry, the existence of the individual was usually suppressed in professional ethnographic writing. In his place was substituted a composite creation, the normative role model or national character. Early exceptions did exist, but only as a separately conceived genre, that of the "anthropological biography" (7, 10). Again, the same paradox arises as in the case of point of view: a disconnection between fieldwork data and reulting ethnographic generalization. The exclusion of individual characters from the realist ethnography probably accounts, more than any other single factor, for the dry, unreadable tone of such texts, something for which the essentially illustrative use of the case study (actually an attempt to sneak characterization in by the back door) could only partly compensate. Moreover, it is worth noting the shift back toward characterization that takes place as one turns from the ethnography written for fellow professionals to the ethnography designed for consumption by the general public. In recent works there has been an increasing tendency

[3]See in addition to Malinowski's introduction to *Argonauts* the textually more interesting *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (69). In particular, the Appendix, entitled "Confessions of Ignorance and Failure" (69, Vol. 5, pp. 452–82), is very much in the contemporary spirit of self-reflection and self-criticism, but is even more notable in that it critiques, not the fieldwork, but the entire research project through what the text itself conveys in retrospect. Also, see, for example, Evan-Pritchard's brief, but tantalizing Introduction to *The Nuer* (34, pp. 1–15) and the atypical self-reflective style of *Oracles, Witchcraft, and Magic Among the Azande* (33), atypical because of its unusual intellectual project. There were other works, which were personal accounts within functionalist constraints, such as Lienhardt's *Divinity and Experience* (63), but they were clearly outside the mainstream.

toward a far richer and more particularistic sytle of characterization—so much so in some works that the traditional boundary between factual and fictional modes of writing has been severely strained (15a, 26, 103a).

4. The marking of fieldwork experience

From the very beginnings of the realist ethnography, some direct indication of fieldwork conditions and experiences was crucial to establishing the overall authority of anthropological texts as a sort of covering legitimacy under which specific arguments and claims of evidence could be made. This meant, given the enormous pretensions of the attempt to write "total ethnography" and given the necessarily limited time spent in the field, that the ethnographer had, ironically, to admit his fallibility in order to establish the overall credibility of his specific claims. The highly stereotyped solution, itself a cofunction of the treatment of point of view discussed above, was to relegate information about the actual fieldwork undertaken to prefaces, footnotes, and appendices, with an occasional foray into an introductory chapter. Further reinforcement was provided by the distribution, throughout a typical study, of maps, drawings and photographs, the presence of which as symbolic makers of "having really been there" was at least as important as the information they were intended to convey. In essence, the standard that developed from the pioneering models was to mark the conditions of fieldwork, but only as a marginal and relatively unintegrated aspect of the full text. It was this virtual silence that gave rise to the fieldwork account, which naively anticipated and partly initiated the current trend of experimentation in writing where there has been a general effort to exploit the fieldwork experience in the ethnographic analysis itself.

5. The focus on everyday life situations

The presentation of details through the analysis of spatially and temporally bounded situations or events has constituted a common form of representing real life in realist ethnographies. Not only does such analysis indirectly tend to validate the sense of an ethnographer's intimacy with his subjects, but it also provides perhaps the perfect synthesis of interpretive and realist goals: the concepts of analysis overlap, and are often identical, with the basic terms in which a situation can be described. In functionalist ethnography, this convention achieved its most sophisticated development in the ethnography produced by the Manchester "school," and most particularly in the work of Victor Turner (104). The technique of case analysis was elaborated by Manchester anthropologists both to organize ethnographic texts and to guide the collection of field material. Under the strong influence of Max Gluckman's legal perspective, the case method appealed

to a kind of authority, alternative to the positivist canons of science, but which remained well within legitimate modes of supporting arguments in Western academia. Only legal reasoning had as much prestige as the scientific method. Thus, the case method represented the most original solution during the functionalist period to the problem of legitimating the production of knowledge with reference to general models of evidence while still employing a semiliterary medium. More recently there has occurred a concentrated and diverse borrowing of theoretical frameworks by ethnographers from those thinkers and disciplines which could provide conceptualizations for the study of face-to-face interaction. This has included a wide array of linguistic, phenomenological, symbolic interactionist, and uniquely individual perspectives, such as that of Erving Goffman.

6. Representation of the native point of view

The travel account is generally self-confident and authoritative in tone, and certain of a readership that wants a culturally shared translation of another way of life (41), but the realist ethnographic account has long been almost dogmatically dedicated to presenting material as if it were, or faithfully represented, the point of view of its cultural subjects rather than its own culture of reference. The aim of representing the reality of a world has entailed the attempt to represent the others' world as they see it, the problematic of which has only recently been subject to sophisticated theoretical discussion. The following are successive phases in the development of this doctrine: in early realist ethnography the doctrine took the form of simple unexamined assertions that a given account does or should present the native perspective (as in Malinowski's ethnographies); to the use of native statements with translations in order to "let them speak" but only under the ethnographer's close editing (as in Firth's ethnographies); to a long period of a presumed but unexamined notion that the functionalist account embodied within itself or was at least true to the native point of view; to a shift toward a distinctly mentalist view of social structure and native viewpoints due to the influence of Lévi-Strauss; to the systematic but naive project of ethnosemantics; to the latest phase of philosophical legitimation framing interpretations in ethnographic accounts by a meditation on translation and problems of meaning. The latter, a focusing concern in many current experiments, finally confronts the scope of the problem of trying to achieve what this convention entails. Yet it is precisely the unresolved status of this issue that has made it so productive in generating a variety of analyses, once it was opened to examination in discourse among anthropologists on their own writing practice. As will be seen, those contemporary accounts which question most strongly the possibility of repre-

senting realistically and nonfictionally the subjectivity of an other are those which are experimenting at the borders or beyond the frontiers of the realist genre.

7. The stylistic extrapolation of particular data

Taking "total ethnography" as their goal, authors of realist ethnographies early developed a distinctive style of writing which has long constituted one of the dominant characteristices of the genre. Despite the fact that the fieldwork on which any study was based was necessarily severely restricted, both spatially and temporally, the style of reportage was always pushed firmly toward generalization rather than maintained at the level of a mere detailing of the particular facts accumulated through research. The particulars of whatever was being investigated (rituals, marriage practices, forms of political organization, etc) were seldom presented in their individuality, but rather were teased into a statement of typicality (a typical ritual, a typical marriage practice, a typical village council, etc). What is significant here is that this effect was achieved through a style of writing which, when coupled with the other characteristics of the genre, managed successfully to divorce both the experience of fieldwork and the information so derived from what was conveyed to the reader. For better or for worse, this discontinuity has meant that it is impossilbe to work back from final account to original fieldwork enterprise in anything like the way a chemist can work back through an experiment reported by another chemist. The recent spate of experimentation has tried to bridge this gap essentially by scaling down the style of writing to the presentation of the particular evidence obtained from the field, accompanied by a self-conscious working out of generalizations.

8. Embellishment by jargon

Another important element of style in the realist ethnography was the development and use of jargon words, the very presence of which has been one of the clearest generic demonstrations that a given text was an ethnography. Indeed, their absence from a work has been one of the essential signs that it was intended for a popular, rather than an academic, readership. The inclusion of jargon has also served both as a symbolic statement of the anthropological competence of the author and as a reinforcement of the generalizing style discussed above. Nevertheless, ethnographers have always had to be somewhat restrained in the use of jargon or else run the risk of creating too generalized a representation of a particular cultural reality, a potential paradox avoided by a judicial balancing of jargon with native concepts. The more recent experimental ethnographies tend to avoid this

paradox simply by jettisoning jargon and by concentrating on the explication of native concepts, a strategy which often gives such writing a superficially even more realistic tone.

9. Contextual exegesis of native concepts and discourse

Since working in the native language is a foundation of fieldwork as well as a preferred base for discussing the native point of view, evidence, however indirect, of the ethnographer's linguistic competence is one of the key, yet most sensitive, representations to achieve in a realist text. In critical reaction to an ethnographic project, it is one of the most salient criteria by which it is judged. Yet it is also the one aspect of field experience about which there is generally the most silence in texts—this is something that must be "read into" an account. To admit incompetence or the extensive use of interpreters is to seriously undermine the authority of the writer (of at least the classic realist account). But it is not necessarily a matter of imposed dishonesty—most ethnographers do work in the subject's language, but most never achieve the ideal of perfect control of a field language. It is thus difficult to write with precision and in general terms about one's linguistic competence.

In the functionalist ethnography, which was built on conceptual abstractions that bypassed direct attention to language, the ethnographer could get by with silence about his control of the language as an entailment of the simple marking of field experience, mentioned above. However, with the impact of linguistic models and theories of meaning that depend on the exegesis of indigenous concepts, the silence about language competence had to be broken. In recent works, ethnographers are still reluctant to be explicit about their control of the language, but they must manifest linguistic competence as an integral part of analysis. The contextual exegesis of key concepts is a major way of structuring ethnographic analysis in several recent texts (e.g. 85, 90). Contextual exegesis of native concepts is to interpretive ethnography as kinship and social structure were to the functionalist ethnography—in both cases, ethnographers could organize accounts without having done the unrealistic amount of fieldwork necessary to achieve the conventions as ideally conceived. Both are modes of representation that allow the ethnographer to tell what he does know in an authoritative way. It may be that a total linguistic control is not necessary for ethnographic authority, but rather just control of that part of the language that informs a defined task of interpretation. Part of the job of interpretation is then to gain a particularly high but selective level of competence of the language, through intensive inquiry and checking, necessary for a particular analysis. The ideal of linguistic control has thus been brought into line with a more realistic basis for ethnographic authority, confined to the concerns of the

text and not to a myth of the omniscient fieldworker which it previously evoked.

Generally classifying ethnography as a descriptive art which fit awkwardly into predominantly positivist methodologies, the social sciences foreclosed the kind of critical discourse on ethnographic practice in the form of the above conventions that might have had subversive implications for their own methods. In the same way that privileging literature as an art, mystifying it as an activity, cuts off inquiry into its practice (116), so conceiving ethnography as an art compromises by both respecting it and holding it at a distance, away from mainstream social research. For a long time, anthropologists were themselves caught between social science membership and the use of methods without a framework for assessing them critically. The resulting ambivalent silence about the very research activity which gave the discipline a core identity was broken first by a confessional fieldwork literature and then, most importantly, by new theoretical orientations markedly concerned with meaning rather than action. These have been derived from European social theory and have had a disruptive impact on "first principles" across the social sciences, except perhaps for economics (9, 46, 48, 49). The impact has been perhaps most trenchant in anthropology, because ethnography had literally been waiting for such a body of theory. Characteristically, rather than giving rise to a new autonomous body of theory in anthropology to succeed structuralism, which while tremendously stimulating, played out as a paradigm for research because it did not guide ethnography, these orientations have had salience precisely because they could be tried out, so to speak, in the writing of ethnographic analyses from fieldwork. Their manifestation is not a spate of theoretical treatises, but the proliferation of experiments in the writing of ethnographic texts.

In this trend, Clifford Geertz has been an influential figure, not only as a writer of ethnography, but as an introducer of sources of theoretical stimuli. There is no Geertzian school as such, but the discussion of his work and that of his students forms one, perhaps the strongest, center in these diverse experiments. Ethnography has become a way of talking about theory, philosophy, and epistemology while holding to the traditional task of interpreting different ways of life. There are other, older stylistic models for current experiments than Geertz (especially, Bateson and Evans-Pritchard), and the mere innovative spirit of the current trend—trying to get away from a genre—means that writers are reluctant to recognize explicitly their shared efforts as constituting anything like a "school." Nonetheless, Geertz is at least historically important to the trend, both because of his marked independence of style and because his work, coming at the end of function-

alist vigor, served to inspire, as the most proximate pioneer, the current trend of experimental projects. More important than his ethnographies has been his series of articles, beginning with the Balinese cockfight paper (44), which has at least monitored and encouraged the trend. Thus, Geertz perhaps led the trend early on, and promulgated it more broadly within anthropology and to other relevant directions in the humanities and social sciences through highly literate papers, but he in no way artificially dominates the array of very personally wrought ethnographies that have appeared recently.

Having both sketched the conditions which gave rise to the current challenge to established realist conventions and briefly outlined the conventions themselves, we can now discuss the nature of the experiments in current ethnographies. To avoid the risk of developing too doctrinaire and unreadable a catalogue—which would certainly be the case if we continued to frame our discussion in terms of the nine conventions laid out above—we have chosen to recast our analysis in terms of three fundamental, overlapping issues: from the perspective of the writer, how the conventions have been modified or superceded to establish new forms of textual authority, how the authenticity and plausibility of interpretations in a text are communicated to the reader, and how differing readerships receive ethnographic writing.

Authority of Ethnographic Texts

The positivist may ask why the experimental ethnographic writer does not conduct his epistemological reflection in private and then just publish dispassionately supported results as certain, objective knowledge. This misses the fundamental break of scholarship, informed by hermeneutic methods, with the rational tradition originating in the Enlightenment. As articulated by Gadamer (42), the interpretive act, conceived as a process of translation in a continuing dialogue between interpreter and interpreted, depends on the *explicit* examination of one's bias and preunderstandings as a basic, positive step of analysis that moves forward in a dialectical way. In terms of rhetoric and ethnographic writing practice, this comes down to how authority is established in a text, which is informed by hermeneutic concerns. Authority is the combined structure of a covering legitimation and the styles of evidence derived from it for the page-by-page descriptions and claims of a text. This structure, integral to the text, should constantly reinforce unselfconsciously the reader's confidence in the author's knowledge as sufficient credibility for what the text states.

Most current experiments are not transcending realist goals or conventions of ethnography, but rather are bringing them into line with the shift

toward a much more explicit guiding interest in problems of meaning and the hermeneutic sensitivity this entails. The emergent mode of expressing authority in ethnographies is manifest in the previously noted salient feature of experimental texts which offer and support arguments through the ethnographer's self reflection and calculated intrusion. Only in the context of the hermeneutic program does this characteristic make sense as the dynamic by which textual authority is achieved.

Authority is best assessed by discussing three constructive tasks confronted in contemporary ethnographic writing: establishing a narrative presence, envisioning a textual organization, and pre-encoding the presentation of data. Collectively these tasks revise realist conventions by a questioning of the epistemological feats required of fieldworkers and which the textual expression of these conventions presumed. The hermeneutic influence in contemporary experiments is in a sense an even more realistic representation within the text of the achievement of realist conventions. The question, addressed briefly below, is at what point in the writing of experimental ethnographies might these conventions be fundamentally transformed and the traditional goals of ethnography with them.

1. Establishing a narrative presence

In current ethnographic writing, the marginally developed, or even repressed, intrusion of the ethnographer and his fieldwork experience characteristic of classic ethnographic realism has become perhaps the core focus for elaboration and experimentation. This focus arises from the substantive theoretical role that self-reflection has gained through the influence of perspectives on meaning and interpretation. Careful attention by readers should be given to the various ways in which marks of enunciation (i.e. the authorial first person), fables of rapport in the field, and more generally, the representation of fieldwork experience are written into the text, precisely because they constitute the basic rhetoric of authority which legitimates whatever is said and claimed about "the other."

Once a framework for narrative presence is established in conjunction with the other tasks discussed below, then the intrusion of personal testimony at various points in a text plays a very crucial and subtle role as support for specific points and arguments made in the course of description. For instance, in Schieffelin's *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers* (90), the first-person incident occasionally appears in the narrative, usually as a "clincher" or final elaboration of a point of interpretation. However, such intrusions are much more than the marginal illustrations they would have been in functionalist texts. Rather, Schieffelin's text is written and introduced in such a self-reflective way that the intrusion of

personal testimony under a cover of hermeneutic legitimation is the most persuasive form of support for his interpretive arguments.

As a problem of writing, many of the aspects of establishing a narrative presence are resolved in the way the ethnographer begins his text. In current ethnographies, one of the most effective and common ways in which self-reflection is introduced is to place oneself on an historical continuum with all those prior outsiders who have observed and lived among the group being written about. This is a particularly effective beginning when one can orient the current ethnography in direct relation to the lacunae or problems of earlier ethnographies (see 85 and 110 especially). One pinpoints a problem or puzzle for the work to solve that is located not so much within the culture itself as in the way that it has been interpreted in the past. The authority of the current text is thus precisely set in a hermeneutic context and what then follows is naturally open to the rhetorical support of description and claims by personal testimony.

2. Envisioning a textual organization

An ethnographic text requires an overall conception in the form of some kind of organizational imagery of its subject matter within which its concerns will be confined. The authority of the ethnographic writer is thus ultimately bound to the kind of story he sets for himself to tell. The historical narrative may lend itself better to a story format, but the effect of the ethnographic narrative is no less shaped by the kind of organizational frame in which it captures and focuses the reader's attention on descriptive detail.

The functionalist ethnography relied on the concept of social structure (read, kinship) as a framework within which accepted pigeonhole topics such as religion, economics, and politics, all differentiated as institutions in complex societies, could be discussed systematically. Idiosyncratic textual organizations were offered by writers such as Bateson, Turner, Evans-Pritchard, and Monica Wilson and had appeal, but there was no conscious, widespread development or adaptation of them until very recently. Once again, most current experiments are merely enriching, under more explicitly hermeneutic influences, what was marginal or ignored in traditional realist ethnographies. There are a variety of established ways of organizing subject matter through a holistic conception of what an ethnography is doing: meditating on an event, ritual, practice, or concept that is presented initially as problematic (e.g. 62, 90, 92); picking apart a unit (e.g. 47, 96); moving along with an activity (e.g. 68); following actors or groups through a temporal process, including a century, year, or even a day in the life of a village or group, the individual life history, and the life stages of person-

hood in general, differentiated by age and gender (e.g. 85). These are basic organizational forms which are subject to combination and creative elaboration by contemporary ethnographic writers. In this trend of experimentation, there also appear unique texts which are difficult to relate to the above modes, such as Gregor's *Mehinaku* (50), inspired by Erving Goffman, which systematically presents the "negative image" of privacy in a close-knit tribal society, and Favret-Saada's *Deadly Words* (35), which perhaps more successfully than any account we have read uses the experience of fieldwork as the organizational image for an analysis that is primarily about the "other."

One of the most effective and common modes of textual organization is the first one listed above, which was first prominently developed in Bateson's *Naven* (8): presenting a richly described event or practice that is intended to embody a puzzle for the reader, then moving through a series of topics that deal generally with the culture, yet reflect back on the original puzzle, and finally reconsidering the event or practice, with its problem solved or explained for the reader by having contextualized it through the intervening chapters on cultural and social organization. This organizational concept is potentially very effective because it is capable of integrating all the realist conventions introduced in the last section into a single narrative strategy that has the coherence of storytelling, but allows also for digression and topical descriptions.

However, the texts with which we are familiar that have used this organization have so far failed to overcome the impression that this technique is merely a self-conscious and clever device rather than an integrated narrative organization. The intervening ethnography in these texts often goes beyond the detail necessary to explore the focal introductory event, finally explicated in the conclusion of each text, and there is a sense of clumsiness in the organization. The contrived nature of the effect comes from merging literary qualities of the introduction and conclusion with the sparer, analytical language of the discussions that compose the body of the text. Nevertheless, there seems to be a general respect and approval for these experimental efforts, and currently, the transparency of the technique does not arouse criticism that might otherwise inhibit its further evolution as one distinctive mode of writing ethnography. Yet as such texts become more fully shaped to serve their organizational problematic of explicating the puzzling event or practice, the concern with form might have an even more selective effect on what is and is not reported than in its present clumsy use in which intervening chapters have tended to cover a range of topics without a recognition of the need to be restrained by the organizing puzzle.

3. Pre-encoding the presentation of data

What is represented in the text as the facts or empirical phenomena under analysis depends very much on how the previous two dimensions of textual authority have been handled by the writer. The stance which the narrator selects in relation to an object of study shapes the form of data. For example, ethnographers sometimes suggest the analogy that they are like children or apprentices, learning the rules of everyday or ritual behavior from the perspective of actors. Alternatively, and now more fashionably, they may conceive of themselves as translators who confront cultural performances to be interpreted or decoded. The former fits cognitive, linguistic, and phenomenological theoretical interests which have underlain ethnographic writing and generates descriptions of behavior, classifications, language games, and rule systems as data. The latter fits semiotic, structuralist, and more generally symbolic theoretical interests and generates descriptions of framed sequences of interaction as symbolic performance. The way the organizational space of a text has been designed accommodates the stance of the narrator and further refines the "setting up" of data for interpretation. Scenarios (90), social dramas (104), texts (44), taxonomies (95), key concepts or categories in use (85), and ritual events (62), among others, have all served as framing devices in selecting details for textual presentation while at the same time being interpretive frames. Thus, interpretive analysis is closely implicated in and nearly indistinguishable from the manner that its object has been represented as data.

To understand the current development of experimental ethnographic writing, it is important to distinguish two prominent styles in the accomplishment of the above task of relating textual descriptions to their interpretation. Either that which is interpreted is set primarily in the interactions of the ethnographer with significant others in the culture, such as the classic key informant, or it is constructed as isolates which are at least one step removed from the fieldwork contexts of dialogue and interaction in which the ethnographer is a major, eliciting presence. In the former, data are represented as embedded in dialogues between informant and the ethnographer, who, for background, has his observations on which to rely; in the latter, the ethnographer as observer or translator is separate from that which he interprets and relies marginally on background dialogue with informants to shape his analyses of disembodied texts, scenarios, situations, or rituals.

Many ethnographies combine these styles of presenting data, but one or the other style is predominant as a focus in defining the ethnography's subject matter. In an excellent but yet unpublished paper on ethnographic authority (20), Clifford compares the dialogical mode, embodied in the

discourse between ethnographer and informant [and common to psychologically oriented ethnographies such as those by Levy (61) and Crapanzano (26)], with the textual mode, in which the ethnographer is concerned with native performances, abstracted from specific contexts of performance where the ethnographer is present as participant. Through one variant or another, ethnographic realism in its classic and experimental forms has used the textual mode of representing subject matter, which finds its most elaborated and self-conscious expression in the papers of Clifford Geertz (43–45). Ricoeur (see 83) provides the theoretical stimulus for accomplishing the textualization of fieldwork discourse so that data can be framed in a way that complements the conception of the ethnographer as translator or reader of texts. To extend the literary analogy, these generalized texts, set up for interpretation by the ethnographic writer, are presumably authored by the culture.

The dialogical model depends on a representation of the actual discourse of fieldwork, and while no less a construction of the ethnographic writer than Geertz's textualization, it at least attempts to stay close in its representation of data to the material from which cultural texts are abstracted for interpretation. What is more, it attempts to show that the heart of ethnographic analysis must be in the negotiation between ethnographer and subject of shared realities. Clifford then suggests that the form of the ethnography alternative to the dialogical model would be the literary presentation of what he calls dispersed authority, the achievement of which he views as the crucial problem of contemporary experiments in ethnographic writing. Dispersed authority is the attempt to overcome the domestication of the ethnographic text by the controlling author through the recognition that knowledge of other forms of life involves several de facto authors who should have narrative presence in ethnographies (see 4a and 14). How other authoritative voices are to be represented in a text along with that of the ethnographic writer, who recognizes the goal of dispersed authority, is a crucial problem for experimentation toward which current examples of the dialogical mode of presenting an ethnography's subject matter (e.g. 26) might be seen as moving.

All three of the constructive tasks discussed in this section affect the covering textual authority of the ethnographic writer. The first two, and routinely the third as well, have remained within the traditional realist goals of the ethnographic genre, however much long-standing conventions have been transformed creatively. Despite all the epistemological qualifications, most experimental writing stubbornly holds to the goal of presenting an authoritatively real view of other forms of life for a professional readership. It is only with the third task of setting a descriptive focus for the subject matter of ethnographies, and within that, the exploration of alternatives to

the dialogical focus, that there is an apparent movement beyond realist goals. And as Clifford suggests, this transformation depends on a challenge to the structure of a single dominant authority in the ethnography on which realist conventions have depended for their expression. Ethnography might presumably become not so much a coherent interpretation of the other as the mix of multiple negotiated realities written into ethnographic texts of dispersed authority. In a sense, this move might be seen as a quite radical reassociation with the prerealist view of ethnography as the publishing of native texts. However, now the complex relation of the ethnographer who writes and the native who speaks, as well as the control of the communication of meanings in a text for a predominantly Western readership, must all be considered in the incorporation of native voices.

The value of this kind of experimentation without concern for the boundaries of realism may not be well understood by many contemporary anthropologists, and it may be cogently critiqued by others who examine its grounds. For example, Tyler (105, p.3) has said in a recent paper:

> Those who would make . . . dialogue the focus of ethnography are in a sense correct, for dialogue *is* the source of text, but dialogue rendered as text, which must be the consequence, is no longer dialogue, but a text masquerading as a dialogue, a mere monologue about a dialogue since the informant's appearances in the dialogue are at best mediated through the ethnographer's dominant authorial role. While it is laudable to include the native, his position is not thereby improved, for his words are still only instruments of the ethnographer's will. And if the dialogue is intended to protect the ethnographer's authority by shifting the burden of truth from the ethnographer's words to the natives' it is even more reprehensible for no amount of invoking the "other" can establish *him* as the agent of the words and deeds attributed to him in a record of dialogue unless he, too, is free to reinterpret it and flesh it out with caveats, apologies, footnotes, and explanatory detail (per conra Crapanzano 1980). These then, are not dialogues, but sophistic texts like those pretenses at dialogue perpetrated by Plato.

For the writers of traditional and experimental ethnographies within the bounds of realism, experiments with dispersed authority risk giving up the game, so to speak, which has defined cultural and social anthropology, and while it is the nature of experiments to take risks, they may stimulate, in reaction, a careful reassessment of what is desirable as research practice. So in the continuation of ethnographic realism, by traditional or experimental means, the radical experiments beyond the dialogical mode serve to emphasize by contrast the writing skills necessary to achieve the uneasy balance of a text that objectively represents other forms of life while saliently reflecting back on both the fieldwork and literary means of its production. The hermeneutic fashion encourages the achievement of textual authority based on trying to find this balance, and the more radical experiments highlight both the limits of this enterprise and what kinds of issues and texts might be explored beyond it.

For completeness, it is worth noting one other issue that is tangentially related to the above aspects of ethnographic authority, but nonetheless importantly affects the capacity of the writer to appear as both scientist and interpreter. This is the duality imposed on ethnographers by the historic spanning of the genre between social scientific and humanist traditions. On one hand, there is an ingrained tendency for analysis written into ethnographies to exhibit closure, consistency, and the formality of a systems framework—the marks of reliable, certain knowledge for the reader. On the other hand, a basic "message" of much of the hermeneutic and interpretive spirit in current ethnographic experiments is that meanings are contingent upon ever changing contexts of interaction, that they are impossible to express as determinant knowledge, nailed down, so to speak, and that both ethnographers and their readers must possess a high tolerance for unending ambiguity as an aspect of understanding in place of a satisfying explanation of a fixed object of analysis. It is not that interpretive analysis is necessarily soft or fuzzy in conceptualization, but only that it confines itself to the conditions by which meaning is produced in social life. Some kinds of interpretation, such as those derived from structuralism, are conducted by means of formal systems and methods which appear to produce self-contained, formal interpretations. These have been particularly difficult to adapt as informing frameworks for ethnographic writing. Other kinds of interpretation, such as those encouraged by Geertz and symbolic interactionist theorists in anthropology generally, are achieved by the force of their literary expression and imagery in discussing the essential open-ended nature of cultural meaning. These are much more at home in ethnographic writing, but it is difficult to abstract a theoretical system or method from their various textual expressions [e.g. see Rice's close analysis (82) of Geertz's varied uses of the culture concept in his different writings]. As a problem of writing practice, there is thus the possible clash of two kinds of rhetoric in any experimental ethnography—that which attempts to close off an account neatly with a satisfying self-contained explanation (which is what readers expect of anthropology as social science), and that which leaves the world observed as open-ended, ambiguous, and in flux (which might be disturbing to readers, but is in part the goal or point of many experiments).

Experimental ethnographies often handle this tension unevenly. They develop some analytical tasks and parts of the text with closure and certitude; other parts of the same text are left dangling and messy—the writer self-consciously chooses not to be authoritative in his orchestration of these parts, because they are presumably commensurate with the ambiguity of the phenomenon represented (e.g. 85). This may be a much more honest and interesting means of text construction, but to readers of traditional realist

texts, it can be disconcerting. The balancing skill in writing consists thus in not overdetermining what is recognized as indeterminant, while not cutting the ground of authority from the text by thoroughly disorienting the reader. Perhaps the writer can sustain a tolerance for ambiguity in the reader by the literary qualities of his writing and narrative organization and more generally by the skill with which he has accomplished the constructive task of establishing authority discussed above. Failing this, the authority of a text is eroded if it does not tie its own ends together in systematic analysis. The essential risk of current ethnographies is that they try to operate with both kinds of rhetoric in the same text, while persuading readers to shift criteria by which they trust in and accord the text authority.

Authenticity and Plausibility—A Problem of Rhetoric

Aside from its legitimating function as a form of hermeneutic authority, a second major effect of the explicit epistemological worrying with which contemporary ethnographic experiments are infused is that it facilitates the expression of cultural differences in a manner that makes them appear both authentic and plausible to an ethnography's readers. The expression of these differences inheres in fulfilling the realist convention of representing the native point of view, which can be a source of skepticism among readers. Cast metaphorically in the role of translators of cultural texts or situations, the writers of experimental ethnographies face the classic double bind of conventional translators of strictly linguistic texts, so well posed by Quine (77, p.58): "Wanton translation can make natives sound as queer as one pleases. Better translation imposes our logic upon them . . ."

Because of the particular importance for realist ethnography of the convention of representing the native point of view, the ethnographer's claims and descriptions must be meaningful to his readers on two levels, the interrelationship of which is a major problematic of the language of description in ethnographic writing. Not only must the ethnographer's conceptual and descriptive language make (common) sense to his readers within their own cultural framework, but it must communicate meanings to these same readers which they are persuaded would make (again, common) sense to the ethnographer's subjects.

The writer uses a language of description that carries embedded deep within it associations that entail the common sense of his own culture, without which communication with his readers would be impossible. How then does he represent plausibly to readers the profound differences he perceives through the use of language which is at base subtly ethnocen-

tric?[4] Thus far, the only solution to this conundrum has been the elaborate task of construction involved in the writing of ethnographic texts, which must steer a course between not portraying cultural differences in native meanings as so profoundly different ("making them sound as queer as one pleases") so as to totally disorient the common sense of the reader, and at the same time, portraying the differences represented as authentically the natives' own, rather than as the product of the ethnographer's rhetorical artifice.

In current experimental ethnographies, there is indeed a marked interest in representing the meaning systems of native worlds as radically different from our own. So even if the writers of these texts must rely on a culturally biased language of description, they strive to make cultural difference a key goal of textual construction. Consequently, the tasks of preparing readers for at least a partial suspension of their own common sense assumptions, and further, of persuading them of the authenticity of what is offered as native meanings, are matters of crucial rhetorical invention in these experiments.

The epistemological worrying in experimental ethnographies can be seen as a philosophical meditation that carries on in public a radical questioning of the ethnographer's preunderstanding and assumptions. This both prepares the way for and ornaments descriptions and analyses that, as representations of native worlds, may otherwise appear so strange and implausible to a readership, set in its common sense expectations, as to stimulate an overwhelming skepticism. By detailing his own epistemological shock or surprise at critical points in the narrative, the ethnographer leads his readers toward a particular stance in relation to cultural differences. The writer does not explicitly speak to the reader and inform him that what follows will seem strange, as in some eighteenth and nineteenth

[4]If it is our assumptions about the nature of persons as social actors, embodying culture-bound notions of agency, motivation, and patterns of emotional response, that get subtly embedded in the ethnographic language of description, then the most innovative of recent experiments, which confront this deep-level conceptual bias, are those that take as their subject matter theories of personhood in other cultures (see 60, 61, 85, for example). These works directly address issues that are buried as assumptions in the language of other ethnographies, the analytical foci of which are set at different levels. Yet, while ethnographies of the person deal with perhaps the most radical way in which cultures differ—at the level of personal agency and definition—they themselves do not extend their systematic views of personhood to other levels of analysis. We have yet to see a text where models of the person and models of social action are integrated. This is precisely the kind of text which requires radical experimentation in the convention of representing native worlds most authentically from their own perspective and experience, while still accomplishing an analytical project that is defined within the bounds and theoretical interests of a Western academic discipline.

century travel accounts. Rather he offers an account of his intellectual and fieldwork experience with which readers can identify, and through the writer's self-reflection as a narrative vehicle, they slide into a receptivity for descriptions that could otherwise appear implausible to them. Epistemological self-reflection thus guarantees against the risk of skepticism from a common sense reaction to the strange. Not only is this mode of marking the representation of cultural difference far more subtle than past modes, but it is quite characteristic of the introspective, existential inclinations in modern thought generally.

Aside from preparing readers epistemologically for radical differences, self-reflection serves to sharpen the separation between the ethnographer and his representation of difference, thus achieving the effect that native worlds are authentically different from his (and our) own. This is despite the fact that the textual representation of difference is squarely the constructive work of the ethnographer's writing practice. In this sense, epistemological self-reflection should be seen as only the most contemporary and sophisticated form of a rhetorical technique of comparative contrast that has long been employed in realist ethnographies. The point of such contrast is to affirm redundantly and explicitly the authenticity with which native worlds are perceived by readers. In order to see how the current epistemological self-reflection in ethnographies fits into this developmental context, it is worth sketching the history of the use of comparative contrast as an aspect of the realist convention concerned with representing the native point of view.

The comparison of an ethnography's contents with its readers' cultural practices has always been an implicit, constitutive rationale of the genre, whether ethnographic writers explicitly incorporate comparisons in their works or not. Yet, while a comparative dimension is implied in the act of ethnographic writing itself, the explicit use of the comparative contrast for rhetorical effect or as a mode of textual organization appeared in many pioneering realist ethnographies. For example, both Mead and Malinowski used us-them comparisons not only to provide a basic rationale for why some of their texts were written, but also to support, by contrast, some of the major points of cultural difference in the phenomena they focused upon. In these pioneering works, the comparisons were offered in a didactic way to readers and obviously were partially an effort to legitimize a fledgling discipline to a Euro-American public. Comparison in the text suggested a utility for anthropology on two counts: it demonstrated that by understanding the cultures of others, we could better understand our own in contrast, and it was the mode by which ethnographic writing communicated the doctrine of cultural relativity, which was the one widely recog-

nized contribution of anthropology as a liberal minded discipline in the West.

Moving beyond its pioneering and early legitimating beginnings, which required anthropology to define goals that were useful in its own cultural context, ethnography continued to incorporate comparative contrast as a common rhetorical and organizational feature without so blatant a need to point up its usefulness to life in the Western societies. In a demonstrative way, ethnographies have been punctuated with explicit us-them differences, in which the "us" is monolithically referred to as the West, Euro-American culture, or modern industrial society, and is contrasted to the "them", which is the *specific* village, group, or culture as subject of the ethnography.[5] While these comparative citations are gross and certainly would not be satisfactory in texts which were manifestly and systematically comparative in their purpose, they do provide a very strong rhetorical support for making the native practices and meanings, set off from our own, seem authentically their own, rather than just the work of the ethnographic writer's imaginative bricolage from the knowledge he has acquired of another form of life. Thus, the comparative contrast in ethnographies has shifted subtly from serving as a didactic rationale for anthropology in its own culture to serving as a routine device for achieving the genre convention of representing difference, and especially difference that pertains to native subjectivity.

Comparative contrast in ethnographies has taken an additional turn and has come to be seen as the embodiment of the key problem of cultural translation discussed above. This is the conundrum of expressing cultural differences through the use of subtly biased language and concepts, which anthropologists borrowed either from everyday usage in their own culture or else from specialized disciplines, such as economics and law, oriented

[5]As exemplary exercises in Weberian ideal typing, some recent, theoretically reflective works have employed the writer's knowledge of specific others to construct holistic contrasts between the monolithic other, i.e. traditional society in all its varieties, and an equally monolithic modernity, for which the social historian's view of Western capitalism has provided the imagery (see 99, 107, for example). Unlike comparative contrast in contemporary ethnographic texts, where the point of comparison is to focus attention on *them*, the ideal typical comparative contrast in these works uses characterizations of the other to focus critical attention upon *us*. These works are thus the direct, but much more sophisticated legacy of the didactic function of comparison in pioneering realist ethnographies. Now with comparison detached from the conventional ethnographic form and made the core of autonomous theoretical discourse, these works have adopted a much more radically critical perspective on the West than was present in early ethnographies, in which cultural relativity steered a narrow course between a strictly objective rhetoric and one that could be seen as mildly critical of Western practices.

toward the study of Western institutions. A series of debates arose in social and cultural anthropology during the 1950s and 1960s which dominated its subfields of interest and in some cases actually served as their founding issue. These debates took the form of arguing for and against the use of Western concepts to describe and interpret non-Western phenomena: in legal anthropology, there was the Bohannan-Gluckman controversy about the appropriate terms in which to conceive law in tribal societies; in economic anthropology, there was the formalist-substantivist debate about the appropriateness of application of concepts of Western economic theory to so-called primitive economics; and in kinship studies, there was Schneider's radical culture theory argument which attempted to deconstruct kinship as a field of interest, based on (Western) genealogical conceptions. While these debates rested on extremely important philosophical issues at the heart of ethnographic analysis, none could be resolved by the kind of theoretical discourse intended to inform empirical research. Consequently, they eventually exhausted themselves as potential theoretical guidelines by which research could be conducted. In fact, these debates were underlain by a core issue that could only be resolved, more or less satisfactorily, in the writing of any particular ethnographic text. It was thus not an issue conducive to theoretical debate, but one intimately involved in ethnographic writing practice.

With the impossibility of purging from ethnographies the kind of subtle clash of cultures that gets written into any text through the common sense assumptions embodied in language, one important alternative has been to frame cultural differences in the text by the rhetorical use of comparative contrast on a different plane of representation than in the past. Rather than using the classic "us-them," didactic form of this device, experimental ethnographies have shifted to a self-reflective "me-them" form of contrast, which, as noted, invites readers to empathize with the revealed experience of the ethnographer, and in so doing to prepare themselves for discussions of cultural practices which while appearing radically different, will also seem authentic as well as plausible. The reader is no longer instructed, but is rather witness to how shared cultural meanings with the ethnographer are challenged through the latter's confrontation with differences that require interpretation.

Thus, the older, more direct comparative contrast in realist ethnographies has been transformed into an important dimension of the epistemological self-reflection characteristic of current experiments. Just as the problem of dispersed authority might represent the most critical challenge for radical experimentation in the expression of ethnographic authority, so the problem of describing satisfactorily to readers other forms of life that deeply question preunderstandings embedded in the language of description may

represent a similar challenge for radical experimentation in this philosophically unresolved issue basic to ethnography, conceived as cultural translation.

Differing Readerships of Ethnography

The artificial consensus about ethnography that has in part sustained cultural and social anthropology as a discipline is most revealingly unmasked if we switch from a perspective on writers to that of the varied readerships of ethnography, both within and outside anthropology. An ethnography may be written with a particular readership in mind, but the various readerships each have a homogenous, albeit poorly articulated sense of what an ethnography *in general* is or should be. Thus, the current unease about what, if any, standards there are for ethnographic writing is most strikingly apparent when the expectations of a particular readership about ethnography in general are not met by a specific text which would meet the expectations of other readerships better.

The following differentiation of readerships distinguishes them by positing their major interest in any given ethnographic text which defines the source of their critical reaction to it. Of course, individual readers might merge some of the distinctions (especially 1 and 2 below), but merely as collective critical orientations to texts, the categories are worth distinguishing.

1. The area specialist readership, having the most familiarity with the text's subject matter, is primarily interested in details and the finer points of interpretation, and is the most likely to be sensitive to and critical of the quality of the fieldwork as well as the connection between fieldwork and resulting generalization. The writing itself only becomes a matter of critical awareness if it is seen to hedge on the clarity or implications of ethnographic details.

2. The general anthropological readership tends to be most concerned with the overall arrangement of a work and with the way theory is brought to bear upon the facts under consideration. Increasingly, however, this readership is paying attention to the narrative form, rhetoric, and language of a text, that is, the expressive features by which it presents an argument or interpretation. Accuracy or clarity of detail is less important than the shape and coherence of the "story the text tells." This category points to readers who are themselves practicing ethnographic writers and whose main critical interest is in the craftsmanship of a text, which may offer for emulation a style of argumentation expressed in its handling of realist conventions. The trend of ethnographic experiment encourages the growth of critical sophistication and awareness in this readership.

3. Readerships from the other social sciences treat fieldwork simplistically as a method like any other and ethnography as description. Anthropology's achievement from this perspective is thus to provide facts about marginal societies to be marginally used by Western social sciences. As noted, any revision of what an ethnography is or offers through a reflection on how it is written is potentially subversive to positivist methodologies and goals. Thus, with ethnography respectfully marginalized as a medium for providing trivial information, the general social science readership is probably the least sensitive among these categories to variation in ethnographic writing and the most puzzled by the significance of the theoretical and epistemological problems the current experiments pose.

4. The student readership is the only group discussed here which lacks a formalized arena for critiquing the ethnographies designed for them and which is without a clearly identifiable interest. The ethnographies produced for this readership, of which the Holt, Rinehart series is only the oldest and most prolific, too often seem to be conceived as watered down and highly simplified versions of professional ethnographies. As such, they often exhibit a pedestrian adherence to the conventions of ethnographic realism discussed earlier.

5. The action oriented readership, consisting of government officials, program administrators, and military personnel, are interested in the content of ethnographies and particularly in information which can be directly translated into practical policies and procedures. For better or worse, anthropologists have always been highly sensitive about writing ethnography tailored to the needs of this readership.

6. The popular readership looks to ethnography for its message or truth in a culturally familiar framework and demands readability with only enough jargon to legitimize the expertise of the account. This is probably the most naive readership from the perspective of professional anthropology. There has been an underlying criticism of professionals who prominently engage in such writing, e.g. Margaret Mead; a suspicion, justified or not, of integrity as in the Castaneda series of books (e.g. 15a) that in themselves challenge the definition of ethnography; or finally, naked condemnation as in a recent, memorable case mentioned below [Barth's (5) calling Turnbull to account for *The Mountain People*]

Breaches in any presumed consensus about ethnography are most evident in journal reviews, and the most common case is that of an area specialist reader critiquing the obstructions and hedges in the writing of an ethnographer who has in mind a general readership as in 2 above [(27, 40, 67, 70) are good illustrations of this, because the reviews pinpoint the rhetoric of these texts as an obstruction to knowledge]. There are numerous other

reviews where this kind of criticism is friendlier and made in passing (e.g. 89). Perhaps for a study of the current trend, the most interesting substantive critiques are those by writers of experimental ethnographies who read the works of other experimenters with the kind of readership interest of 2 above (see 27, 91). Such reviews have become a forum for at least the raising of several issues discussed in earlier sections of this paper.

Criticisms by area specialist and general anthropological readerships of works written for a popular readership are interesting for what they reveal about the former's view of the limits on the ethnographic form as a serious, or even ethical, medium for claims of knowledge. Fredrik Barth published an extremely severe attack on Colin Turbull in *Current Anthropology* (5), precisely in this context: a work that seemed to be passing as professional ethnography incorporated within it moral observations on the world as well as controversial suggestions concerning policy affecting the fate of the Ik. The response to this attack in a later issue (117) included the moderating commentaries of area specialists, which at least tended to give a more balanced grounding to the ethnographic material which Turnbull had shaped according to his writing project. While these exchanges were about the purposes for which realist conventions might be used (after all, Turnbull could have written an essay stating his views which might have elicited a less vehement attack by Barth), none of the moderating parties raised the important issue of the role of the ethnographic medium in stoking the flames of this controversy.

Finally, ethnographers, who write for area specialist and general readerships, often criticize ambitious, broad comparative analyses attempted in anthropology for their violations of both detail and the rich complexity explored within the ethnographies, used as data sources for the comparisons. We avoid discussion here of how the current experiments appear to be moving even further away from the possibility of grand comparison in the aged, ever unresolved controversy in anthropology between the ethnographer and the comparativist, who sees the purpose of ethnography as a data, rather than a theoretical, source for eventual abstraction in inductive, nomothetic projects. In effect, the work of the general comparativist as it is usually conceived appeals to the social science readership of 3 above. The very nature of these projects offends the conception of ethnography and the uses to which it can be put, held by readers representing categories 1 and 2 [e.g. see Weiner's long, negative review (111) of Rosman and Rubel's comparative synthesis of the complex New Guinea materials].

Thus, the kinds of criticisms of contemporary ethnography and of the use of ethnographic material in comparisons by readers who are themselves ethnographers demonstrate most clearly that disagreements about what ethnographies as texts should be run deep below the tacit consensus of the

discipline and are still only partly or indirectly articulated in anthropology's self-critical discourse.

Literary Sources

There are numerous alternative frameworks in contemporary literary criticism that might inform a perspective on ethnographic writing, useful to habitual readers of ethnography. Yet it would be a mistake to think that anthropology in flux has found a stable source of ideas to draw upon. Rather, contemporary trends in literary criticism are just as volatile. The convergence and perceived mutuality of problems, alive both in literary criticism [see, for example, White's assessment (115) of the deconstructionist trend in a review of a book by Paul de Man] and ethnographic writing, have drawn experimental ethnographers and their sympathetic readers to the more explicitly developed, but nonetheless richly varied discourse on textual analysis in literary criticism.

Some of these frameworks will be mentioned below, but most pertinent to the kinds of issues raised in this paper is the recent literature which has attempted to resurrect the significance of rhetoric by removing the taint it has had in Western thought from its treatment by classic philosophers (most prominently, Plato and Aristotle) in the debate between dialectics and rhetoric (57, 58).[6] Rhetoric was originally concerned with speaking and was a self-consciously developed body of theory for the use and training of orators. It was sharply distinguished from dialectical argument, which was the embodiment of abstract logic, by its focus on techniques of impression management—how logic is ornamented and made persuasive with an audience in mind. The modern treatment of rhetoric as a critical perspective differs considerably from the classic perspective. It focuses on writing rather than speaking from the point of view of the critical reader rather than of the writer. This is a natural consequence of the historic decline of rhetoric as a body of consciously applied theory for speakers or writers.

Rhetorical functions are thus an unself-conscious, integral dimension of any kind of written expression, inseparably bonded to the substantive content of the narrative, interpretation, or analysis presented. Just as the logic of argument of a text is abstractable for a certain purpose such as theoretical discussion, so the rhetorical dimension of a text and its arguments are abstractable for a certain purpose such as a critical discussion of how a text

[6]Almost any version of current theories of discourse might also be a possible stimulus for perspectives on ethnographic or historical writing, but my impression is that those versions which have been tried have not worked very successfully [e.g. see Waldman's flawed use of Grice in a study of Islamic historiography (108)]. In contrast, a rhetoric approach as developed by Hayden White has worked brilliantly for historical writing, and is obviously the kind of perspective most in line with how we have posed issues in this paper.

persuades and effectively communicates its meanings. In either case, the recognized integration of these aspects of a text is suspended for the sake of a particular kind of analysis, but whereas logic denies or ignores the importance of rhetoric in viewing it as a contaminant, rhetoric, as now conceived, never loses sight of its complementary relationship in practice to the logical content of an argument or interpretation, nor to the embeddedness of the latter in the rhetoric of its linguistic expression.

In the modern resurrection of rhetoric, Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (76) provided a strong and sophisticated statement, still relating to speech activity. Kinneavy (59) has written a comprehensive review of classic and modern sources on rhetoric as well as an attempt at synthetic theory. In literature, Frye (39) and Burke (15) are pioneers in insisting on and showing the importance of rhetoric in fictional and nonfictional prose. Booth (11) produced an influential rhetorical perspective on fiction, and most recently Valesio (106) has written an articulate conceptual study of what he calls rhetorics along with a less satisfying attempt at a formal theory of rhetorics. However, the work of Hayden White (112–114) is perhaps the most useful for a perspective on ethnographic writing, not only because of the sophistication and systematic nature of his insights, but also because he applies a perspective developed in literary criticism [in his major work (112) his primary debt is to Northrop Frye] to a discipline of writing, outside literature, but which employs a literary medium—history. In his essays (113, 114), White provides convincing samples of the application of his ideas to the rhetorical analysis of selections of historical writing.

Applying an analysis of rhetoric to history is perhaps a more interesting and obvious project than applying it to ethnography, at least before the current trend of experimentation. This is because historiography is a much older and deeper interest among historians than ethnographic writing has been among anthropologists, because historical narrative lends itself more directly to storytelling than ethnographic narrative, and because the historical imagination has had a much greater freedom in developing appropriate textual forms, since it has not been tied either to a dominating research practice like fieldwork or to goals of general theory. Nonetheless, there have always been genre conventions in historical writing as in ethnographic writing, however much more lively an area of discussion and innovation they have been in the former.

While White's elaborate formal tropological scheme may have limited applicability to ethnography, most of the points he makes about the rhetorical basis of historical writing are just as valid for ethnographic writing. For example, in the following argument, one need only substitute the word ethnographic for historical (113, p. 105):

> If Jakobson is right, then historical writing must be analyzed primarily as a kind of prose discourse before its claims to objectivity and truthfulness can be tested. This means subjecting any historical discourse to a *rhetorical* analysis, so as to disclose the poetical understructure of what is meant to pass for a modest prose representation of reality. Such an analysis would provide us, I maintain, with a means . . . to disclose the extent to which a given historical discourse is more accurately classified by the language used to describe its object of study than by any formal analytical techniques it applies to that object in order to "explain" it.
>
> A rhetorical analysis of historical discourse would recognize that every history worthy of the name contains not only a certain amount of information and an explanation (or interpretation) of what this information "means," but also a more or less overt message about the attitude the reader should assume before *both* the data reported *and* their formal interpretation . . .

Thus, what rhetorical analysis reveals that a mere evaluation of arguments does not is how the language and narrative construction of an historical or ethnographic text pre-encodes both the object of analysis (what counts as data) and the grounds for a specific explanatory argument. As with historical writing, a rhetorical perspective should be an analytically autonomous dimension of the critical evaluation of ethnographies, but it is in no way a substitute for a complementary evaluation of the logic and evidence for a text's arguments.[7]

Just to mention other sources of literary criticism that might be useful to a perspective on ethnographic writing: Roland Barthes' elaborate, formal analysis of realism in Balzac (6); Raymond Williams' perspective, informed by Marxism (116); Jacques Derrida as a source for the deconstruction of texts, independent of authorial intention (28); reader-oriented criticism (37, 54, 98); and Michel Foucault's idiosyncratic, complex development of concepts such as discourse and episteme (38). Foucault is interesting here because an attempt has been made by a literary scholar to incorporate his ideas into a project which includes some consideration of nineteenth century ethnographic writing (87). The difficulty with using Foucault as a stimulus for thinking about ethnographic writing is that his analytical frame of reference denies the autonomy of specific texts and authors, but rather sets the concept of discourse in broader spatial and temporal terms. This makes it difficult to appropriate his method for one's own project, however stimulating the substantive insights that might be derived from close atten-

[7]With White, we would suggest that rhetorical analysis is prior to an evaluation of truth claims because explanation and theory-building cannot escape the rhetoric of the language in which they are expressed. A sensitivity to the language of conceptualization clears the way for a discussion of claims and evidence. The recent assessment by Alan Jenkins of Lévi-Strauss's social theory (56) follows a practice which links a prior discourse analysis of concepts to a following consideration of their abstracted logic in a critical analysis of theoretical rather than ethnographic writing.

tion to Foucault's system. In his acute review of Said (19), Clifford explores the inherent difficulties of combining an interest in the analysis of particular texts with Foucault's broadly conceived view of discourse. He also concludes with an extended commentary on Said's radical questioning of the assumptions that legitimate interpretations of other cultures with obvious implications for ethnographic writing (unfortunately, Said studiously ignores contemporary ethnography, except for a passing, positive reference to Geertz).

In undertaking to suggest sources in literary criticism, especially the perspective of rhetoric, that might stimulate discussion of ethnographic writing, we do not intend them to serve as how-to models of emulation for writers or readers of ethnography. This would repeat the fatal mistake of hypostatization in classic rhetoric, isolating it as a body of applied theory and, as such, leaving it vulnerable to charges that it is all manipulation of form and no content. It is precisely the formal paradigms and typologies in the writings of modern writers on rhetoric (e.g. White, Valescio, and Kinneavy) that become difficult to follow and that stand in striking contrast to the elegance of the issues and insights, expressed in more conventionally styled discourse, that they somehow generate. One can only conclude that these formalisms, while they appear to be models that others might emulate, are in fact the personal models of their creators, originated as a heuristic to their own thought. The textual presentation of these formal models are themselves rhetorical exercises meant to appeal to readers in an intellectual era that places great store in a rhetoric of formal analysis and method. Readers and writers who attempt to appropriate seemingly useful models—so productive in the hands of their creators—often find them mechanistic in their own hands.

The effectiveness of rhetorical analysis thus does not depend on a method but on the clear statement of issues and the convincing demonstration by critics of their worth as a consideration in both the writing and reading of texts. For the ethnographic writer, an awareness of rhetorical issues, however rhetorically stimulated by critics, could enrich the personal thought process that goes into producing a text without resurrecting a hypostatized notion of rhetorical technique. There is indeed a danger of paralysis in the self-consciousness about one's writing practice that reflection about rhetorical issues might produce, or else danger of a drift of a text away from its subject matter toward an involution and introspective concern with its own production (this is, of course, one of the possible objections to the direction in which some experimental ethnographies appear to be going and highlights even more forcefully the creative balance necessary between reflexivity and concern with the other in these experiments). For the reader of ethnographies, a critical sensitivity to issues of rhetoric can only enhance

the subtlety with which anthropological knowledge in ethnographic form is routinely assessed. An awareness of a text's rhetorical dimension by its writer or reader is finally not at all subversive to sophisticated rather than absolutist standards of objective knowledge, but is an integral part of both generating and evaluating claims to objectivity as well as explanations abstractable from their written contexts.

Ethnographic Writing Experiments, Fieldwork Practice, and Theory

Because of the silence about fieldwork practice during most of the period of ethnographic realism, it seems that the way ethnographies were written has had little feedback on the way fieldwork has been conducted. In fact, when fieldwork experience was eventually discussed at length in the large confessional literature of the late 1960s and the 1970s, which detailed the experiences of researchers who entered the field with diverse theoretical and problem orientations, one is impressed with how generally similar are these experiences, allowing for personal variation. Unfortunately, we do not have near the same number of accounts which deal with fieldwork as an intellectual odyssey, foregrounding precisely how interpretations arise in the fieldwork process. The works of Rabinow (79), Dumont (30), and Crapanzano (26) notwithstanding, Silverman's paper (94), to our knowledge, is the only contemporary account which provides a detailed straightforward view of research epistemology. Clifford's biographical study of Maurice Leenhardt, as a man, fieldworker, and ethnographic writer (17, 18, 22), is an equally rare, holistic reconstruction of an historic figure's research epistemology. While the folklore of fieldwork served as the silent dominating influence, shaping the conventions of realist ethnography, there was nothing in realist ethnography itself that might have opened up discussion or reshaped how fieldwork was conceived as intellectual inquiry rather than as a kind of personal experience.

This unidirectional influence of fieldwork on ethnographic conventions may change with the trend in experimental ethnographies, if only because the latter are so self-reflectively concerned with how the total process of knowing, including an intellectual representation of fieldwork, relates to the interpretations and explanations which are offered. That is, ethnographers are thinking much more retrospectively about their fieldwork practice as an integral part of constructing an ethnographic text. While the reality of doing fieldwork will always remain somewhat chaotic and at least partially beyond the control of the fieldworker, the reflection on fieldwork relevant to a narrative strategy and style of explanation may finally have some direct impact on the way fieldwork is conducted by the professional readers of experimental ethnographies. What it took to produce such experiments was the kind of modification of realist conventions which questioned the unreal-

istic epistemological feats in the field implicitly entailed by these conventions. In so doing, this change has led at least to a more lucid representation of field practices in relation to the kinds of explanations which it legitimates and for which it provides textual authority.

Ethnography's relation to the development of theory in anthropology has been somewhat different than its relation to fieldwork practice. In one sense, theory in anthropology is conceived as a body of lawlike statements on certain general topics of empirical interest such as kinship, religion, and economics, built up from comparisons of data, abstracted in turn from ethnographies. There has long been an underlying antagonism to this kind of theory and ethnography's relation to it by those who see themselves primarily as ethnographers. Manifestly in the social sciences, the eventual construction of broad topical theories based on the inductive use of ethnographies has been the rationale for social and cultural anthropology, but ethnographers and comparative theorists—supposedly part of the same enterprise—have often been different people with different outlooks.

The current trend of experimental ethnographies only tends to move ethnography further away, this time explicitly, from its covering comparative rationale. Theoretical interests are even more inwardly focused on the linked descriptive and interpretive problems posed by a subject, strictly bounded by the text, which itself becomes part of the domain of theoretical interest.

Controlled comparisons of overlapping cultural subjects (and presumably overlapping textual concerns in ethnography by small "communities" of researchers) are perhaps acceptable to ethnographers since there is close control of the contexts represented in ethnography, which are otherwise lost in grand or highly abstract comparison. Much more sophisticated kinds of comparative theories might be constructed eventually through the comparison of experimental ethnographies among area specialists, but this would be a by-product of a more direct contemporary concern with the kind of grounding theory that provides an ethnographer with a way to think about his material, and more to the point here, a means to construct a text that is both descriptive and explanatory.

In this *other* sense of theory in anthropology, the building of general theory proceeds by refinements in the way that field material is handled textually by successive ethnographic writers rather than by collecting more data for covering theory built on comparisons. What *is* compared is the adequacy of alternative ways or styles of explaining a similar phenomenon developed in different accounts. This is precisely the kind of theory that depends on innovative variants in different ethnographies and thus experiments in ethnographic writing.

In this kind of theoretical interest, anthropologists have typically looked for stimuli beyond their own boundaries; they invoke and develop for their

own purposes the ideas of past and recent "greats" like Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Ricoeur, Barthes, and Wittgenstein. Anthropology has not produced purely in its own tradition a grounding theory for ethnographic research. Rather, ethnographers have been theoretical bricoleurs in informing their primary interest in the linked activity of fieldwork and ethnographic writing. In the past, at least, rather than having created social or cultural theory to serve their accounts, ethnographers have been specialists in the testing and elaboration of general theoretical perspectives, developed in other disciplines and by other thinkers, for their usefulness to tasks of explanation and interpretation, emanating from a tradition of research and writing activity. Shifts in theoretical interest thus depend very much on critical review and dissatisfaction with the way that particular theoretical influences "look" as they are repeatedly tried out in ethnographic writer projects.

The clearest evidence of anthropology's priority interest in the ethnographic text over the informing theoretical work is the fact that theoretical works in anthropology (e.g. 88) are usually motivated by a reflection on ethnographic materials, even though they are pitched more abstractly, and that they have a limited currency, eventually becoming relevant only as documents in the history of ideas. In contrast, ethnographic texts live and have a much more durable relevance. This may be a result of the distinctive continuity and cumulative quality in the geographical frameworks through which anthropologists define their ethnographic research from one generation to the next. Yet beyond this, ethnographers (in readership category 2 of the previous section) seem to admire the ethnographic text as a source of inspiration to be rediscovered and revived, and theoretical works are constantly being generated from this primary attention to how problems are textually addressed in ethnographic writing.

The current trend of experiments in ethnography seems to be in line with this traditional relationship of ethnography to the grounding theory which informs it. However, now there is a much richer range of theoretical perspectives to be explored in ethnographic projects. This is unlikely to change the basic relationship between ethnography and theory, but as noted, among the unique multi-interested texts now being produced, those experiments which seem to go beyond a realist rationale are using the ethnographic medium for theoretical discourse in itself. Field experience may lead to the kind of reflection that at least inspires a systematic theory completely indigenous to anthropology and which informs its priority concern with producing ethnography.

Finally, it is worth mentioning here Hayden White's treatment of the debate between philosophy of history and historiography at the end of the nineteenth century (112, pp. 267–79) because of its similarity with the present moment in anthropology, in which there is a parallel debate between

ethnography as the servant of general topical theory developed outside it and ethnography as its own goal, reinforced by broad social theories which are its service. A major difference between history and anthropology here is that in the former, innovative theoretical systems (i.e. philosophy of history dominating the meaning of the individual historical account) intruded through Marx and Nietzsche upon a much more established historiographical tradition which focused on the autonomy of accounts and their construction as texts, whereas in anthropology, the situation has been reversed: a concern with accounts and theories that inform them in the current trend of experimentation has intruded upon a stable tradition with general theory as its putative goal. In history, the historiographical position, developed by Croce, prevailed. It remains to be seen how a broadly similar historic moment in cultural and social anthropology will be resolved.

Other Senses of Experimentation

Thus far our discussion has been limited to only a certain number of currently written ethnographies, and for good reason. Although they are perhaps a minority of all texts written, they appear to be attracting a disproportionate general interest in anthropology. Most ethnographies remain outside this realm of experimentation because in their production they do not make problematic either the construction of descriptions and interpretations or their writing practice. In contrast to current experiments, the theoretical interests and conventional realist forms of these ethnographies lead them away from a focus on the social construction of their subjects' worlds, which has been perhaps the major stimulus for developing explicit self-reflective discourse on writing practice within ethnographic experiments themselves. In a sense, then, these experiments stand as a de facto critique of all those other contemporary ethnographies which do not incorporate a reflection on their own production as a vital component of the analyses they offer.

The lively discussion of so-called perspectives on meaning in contemporary anthropology has been in striking contrast to the relative stagnation of behavioral or systems perspectives, concerned more with analytical models of explanation than with the definition of indigenous meaning frameworks. This discussion has arisen as an elaboration of the long-standing interest in realist ethnography of representing the native point of view. Systems analysis, of which traditional functionalism was a crude form, has only been advanced with theoretical sophistication in cultural ecology, economic anthropology, and Marxist projects, and these are fields in which ethnographic writing has been largely unproblematic.

Amid a welter of ethnographies that have no particular distinction as textual forms, Roy Rappaport's *Pigs for the Ancestors* (80) stands out as a

model text for the systems oriented ethnography because it so self-consciously attempts to offer a narrative framework which accommodates rigorous conceptualization and quantification in analysis that traditional functionalist works intimated but never realized. It is thus an experimental ethnography outside the current trend of experimentation. While sensitive to where native conscious models might fit in his text, Rappaport did explicitly attempt to justify in the text why he need not be predominantly concerned with them. In later essays (81), Rappaport has produced a fully detailed scheme for how "cognized models" might fit logically into a hierarchically arranged, multilevel systems framework of considerable complexity. These essays may be satisfying as further advances in theoretical conceptualization which in fact do preserve the primacy of analyst models, otherwise so neglected in the current attention to meaning perspectives. However, they have yet to prove themselves as workable models or guides for the writing of systems analysis ethnographies that go beyond *Pigs for the Ancestors* in text experimentation. It should not be construed that texts such as Rappaport's are exempt from an analysis of their rhetorical and narrative strategies as writing practice. They are just less self-conscious and give less recognition to their rhetoric of construction than interpretive ethnographies which welcome and call attention to their epistemological and literary underpinnings.

The involuted, self-reflective nature of recent experiments in ethnographic writing may be considered perverse by some—a sign of crisis rather than health in the discipline. It might further be held that productive experimentation in ethnography should be focused more externally on new ways to express textually research problems that are posed in traditional fieldwork but transcend in their handling the perspective gained from research in closed communities or small groups. This other kind of textual experimentation thus arises from projects for which the ethnographic text as directly symmetrical with fieldwork is partially relevant but in itself is too limited a medium in which to develop a broadly conceived research problem. Conversely, ethnographic writing experiments may arise in areas of research within anthropology where the ethnographic medium (or its facsimile) is seized upon as an innovative way to present data and explanations.

Many social and cultural anthropologists never produce a published ethnography from their notes and usually the dissertations that derive from fieldwork. This may be a result of laziness, a change in career interests, or a dissatisfaction and ambivalence which are rooted in doubts about the adequacy of one's work, given the unrealistic epistemological demands implicit in realist conventions. It also may be that the ethnography itself is too limiting for the kind of problems in which anthropologists who do

fieldwork become interested during the course of their research. Of all the social sciences, anthropology has been the most enthusiastically interdisciplinary in exploring relevant avenues of inquiry for any problem. Where the conventional ethnography is limited, such scholars jump over, so to speak, the ethnographic text tied to fieldwork and define problems for themselves that require a much different kind of textual expression.

Two kinds of texts in which one's first-hand ethnography may be included as part of a larger design are the problem or topic focused comparative study and the study of complex societies (and units greater than, but including the village, community, or city), which combines social history, ethnography, and political economy organized around a key argument [(53, 72, 99) would be recent examples of the former; (36, 99, 100, 109) would be recent examples of the latter]. Fieldwork, at least in the geographical area of interest, is an informing research experience behind these texts and still forms at least part of their authority, but many more perspectives, gained from theoretical and historical reading, are brought to bear on the central themes of such works, for which the ethnographic medium alone would be inadequate.

In the comparative study, fieldwork may give one the interpretative idea, but it can only be developed on a broader scale by comparing one's own work against other relevant cases. In the study of large-scale processes in complex society, the merging of ethnography with other perspectives is necessary to transcend the criticism of much complex society ethnography as useful in a limited way, but essentially parochial and blind to other perspectives which are pertinent to any case and which focus on macro-processes [e.g. see Magubane's critique (67) of Alverson's ethnography]. In the texts cited above, the authors are not willing to leave diverse perspectives which affect their field material to other kinds of specialists. Rather, in their own composite texts they take on several levels of significance and range over a variety of perspectives and sources of informing ideas and data, of which their own first-hand fieldwork is just one. Achieving textual coherence is the writing problem in such projects, and they consequently are vulnerable to criticisms from anthropological readers that they are unwieldy and do not read like anthropology. Of course, this kind of reaction is precisely an index of their experimental state. Particularly in the study of complex societies, fieldwork may remain the core research activity of anthropologists, supplemented by diverse reading and broader reflection, but it will only partly dominate composite texts in which the presentation and discussion of ethnographic material will be one component among others.

Experiments in which the ethnography is a new opportunity for expression, given past modes of reportage in certain domains of research within

anthropology, are rarer but striking nonetheless. Psychological studies and related work in the newer field of medical anthropology have favored either the life history (which some may consider an ethnographic subgenre, but which we have ignored in this paper) or cross-cultural comparisons that have evolved from representation by impressionistic rhetoric to a rhetoric which is the closest approximation in social anthropology to the hypothesis testing model of positivist social science. Within the body of experiments concerning realist conventions, some have been equally experimental in the sense of using the realist ethnographic medium to describe and explain psychological characteristics of a population in texts that are not focused on life history, are not heavily or explicitly laden with a theoretical apparatus such as Freudian psychology, and do not conform to positivist formal rhetoric. Robert Levy's *Tahitians* (61) in psychological anthropology and Shirley Lindenbaum's *Kuru Sorcery* (64) in medical anthropology can be cited as effective uses of the ethnographic medium in fields of interest within anthropology where ethnographic writing in the realist tradition has been undeveloped.

Finally, the field of sociobiology might lend itself increasingly to textual expression in a form very close to ethnographic realism. Because of the controversy about the mutual relevance (or irrelevance) of sociobiology and the traditional concerns of social anthropology, an ethnographic look to reports of field studies of primates (or other orders) would require deft handling. Sara Blaffer Hrdy's *Langurs of Abu* (52) is just such a text that is careful in its claims but approximates the conventions of a realist ethnography.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most obvious concluding question for this paper is where the contemporary experimental ethnography is leading social and cultural anthropology, so long identified with its distinctive practice of fieldwork and ethnographic accounts. A response from the point of view of what we characterized as radical experiments, distinguished by their lack of concern for adherence to realist genre conventions, would be nowhere fundamentally different—most experiments, however interesting the historic conditions which gave rise to them, are refinements and represent an essentially involutionary period in the twentieth century history of realism. The future, from this yet murkily defined radical perspective [embodied in Clifford's characterization (20) of such experiments as involved with the textual problem of dispersed authority], is in ethnographies that are based on very different notions about how cultural distinctions should be defined and textually represented in a contemporary world unlike that previously,

which at least plausibly offered closed systems—tribes, peoples—as subjects through which ethnographic realism historically developed.

Admittedly, this radical perspective is so far only a slight voice in the discipline, and the conventional responses to the experiments within the bounds of realist practice range from dismay to unreserved enthusiasm. Any shift in focus of interest might expectedly be accompanied by such varied reactions, but the reflexively critical function, entailed in this particular focusing of interest on the ethnographic text, poses an unprecedentedly sophisticated and searching review of the ethnographic enterprise at the heart of the rationale for social and cultural anthropology. In this respect, the experiments are disturbing the tacit consensus about "what anthropologists do." This can be read either as path-breaking or subversive, but either way, the current interest in ethnographic writing is more than just another passing fashion or focus of attention.

An appropriate point on which to end this review, then, concerns for whom and in what way the development of a critical perspective on ethnographic texts might be most useful in anthropology. One must admit that the richest and most sophisticated development of this perspective would rest with full-time specialists in the history of anthropology and more generally in the intersecting fields of intellectual history and social theory. A scholar has considerable advantages in studying ethnography when the subject is the work of a past, recognized "great," such as Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Mead, or Leenhardt [the latter is the subject of the pioneering work of Clifford (17, 18, 22) which goes beyond conventional intellectual biography]. Not only can a text be seen as part of a total corpus, but biographical details, intermediate writings such as fieldnotes, and perhaps even surviving informants and associates of the ethnographer may be available. Where a text can be analyzed against a corpus, and this in turn against a career and life, the most fruitful conditions are present for the development of a perspective on ethnographies as texts.

Yet our emphasis has intentionally been different in this paper; it has been on the professional reader in anthropology who has had little consciousness about textual considerations in reading ethnographies. Even if a reader is sensitive to the rhetoric of individual, contemporary texts, he has only a very thin context, if any, about career and corpus in which to place individual works. Except for the much discussed writings of Geertz and the autobiographical accounts of writers such as Dumont and Rabinow, who have included them as part of their research projects, the reader only has what the text itself reveals as a basis for critical judgment. The work of intellectual historians that include attention to writing will certainly inform contemporary reading practices. However, ethnographies will only be fairly assessed when the development of what amounts to a critical sense for the

forms as well as the manifest content of ethnographic discourse becomes a part of routine professional practice. The virtue of the trend of ethnographic experimentation is that it is encouraging, if not forcing, this critical awareness on the part of readers of ethnography, not by the imposition of methods of criticism, but by a de facto disruption of the conventions which have long been the professional common sense of readers and writers of ethnography. What *is* necessary is more critical discussion by and for ethnographers of each other's works, which in paying attention to rhetoric would not lose sight of the goal of constructing systematic knowledge of other cultures. It is precisely the absence of such a literature that has necessitated this review to focus on the critique of ethnographic realism as an internal function of current experimental ethnographies.

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