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The Predicament of Culture

James Clifford

THE PREDICAMENT OF CULTURE ✧

*Twentieth-Century Ethnography,
Literature, and Art*

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Santa Cruz, California

J.C.

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CONTENTS

Introduction: The Pure Products Go Crazy	1
<i>Part One: Discourses</i>	19
1. On Ethnographic Authority	21
2. Power and Dialogue in Ethnography: Marcel Griaule's Initiation	55
3. On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning: Conrad and Malinowski	92
<i>Part Two: Displacements</i>	115
4. On Ethnographic Surrealism	117
5. A Poetics of Displacement: Victor Segalen	152
6. Tell about Your Trip: Michel Leiris	165
7. A Politics of Neologism: Aimé Césaire	175
8. The Jardin des Plantes: Postcards	182
<i>Part Three: Collections</i>	187
9. Histories of the Tribal and the Modern	189
10. On Collecting Art and Culture	215
<i>Part Four: Histories</i>	253
11. On <i>Orientalism</i>	255
12. Identity in Mashpee	277
References	349
Sources	371
Index	373

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 18 "White man," *Onyeocha*. Cole and Aniakor 1984:150. Photograph by Herbert M. Cole. Courtesy UCLA Museum of Cultural History.
- 66 Marcel Griaule developing photographic plates. Courtesy Mission Dakar-Djibouti Collection, Musée de l'Homme, Paris.
- 69 Marcel Griaule photographing. Courtesy Mission Dakar-Djibouti Collection, Musée de l'Homme, Paris.
- 81 Marcel Griaule and Michel Leiris prepare to sacrifice chickens. Courtesy Mission Dakar-Djibouti Collection, Musée de l'Homme, Paris.
- 114 Store, avenue des Gobelins. Photograph by Eugène Atget. Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Abbott-Levy Collection; partial gift of Shirley C. Burden.
- 164 Igorot man, Philippines, exhibited at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. Neg. No. 324375. Courtesy Department Library Services, American Museum of Natural History, New York.
- 186 Indian woman spinning yarn and rocking cradle. Neg. No. 11604. Courtesy Department Library Services, Boas Collection, American Museum of Natural History, New York.

- 194 The Making of an Affinity. (a) Pablo Picasso, *Girl before a Mirror*. 1932. Oil on canvas, 64 × 51¼". Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York; gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim. (b) Kwakiutl Mask, painted wood. Photograph by Gisela Oestreich. Courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin. (c) *Girl before a Mirror* (detail).
- 199 Affinities Not Included in the MOMA "Primitivism" Show. 1. Bodies. (a) Josephine Baker. Courtesy the Granger Collection, New York. (b) Wooden figure (Chokwe, Angola) published in Carl Einstein, *Negeplastik*, 1915. (c) Fernand Léger, costume design for *The Creation of the World*, 1922–23. Courtesy the Kay Hillman Collection, New York.
- 204, 205 Affinities Not Included in the MOMA "Primitivism" Show. 2. Collections. (a) Interior of Chief Shake's House, Wrangel, Alaska, 1909. Neg. No. 46123. Photograph by H. I. Smith. Courtesy Department Library Services, American Museum of Natural History, New York. (b) View of the Margaret Mead Hall of Pacific Peoples. Courtesy Department Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.
- 208 The Earth Deity, *Aia*, with her "children." Cole and Aniakor 1984:9. Photograph by Herbert M. Cole. Courtesy UCLA Museum of Cultural History.
- 210, 211 Affinities Not Included in the MOMA "Primitivism" Show. 3. Appropriations. (a) Mrs. Pierre Loeb in her family apartment, Paris, 1929. Courtesy Albert Loeb Gallery, Paris. (b) New Guinea girl with photographer's flash bulbs (included in the "Culture Contact" display at the Hall of Pacific Peoples). Neg. No. 336443. Photograph by E. T. Gilliard. Courtesy Department Library Services, American Museum of Natural History, New York.
- 252 Inside a Hopi *kiva*. Neg. No. 28345. Photograph by Robert Lowie. Courtesy Department Library Services, American Museum of Natural History, New York.

The Predicament of Culture

We were once the masters of the earth, but since the gringos arrived we have become veritable pariahs . . . We hope that the day will come when they realize that we are their roots and that we must grow together like a giant tree with its branches and flowers.

—FRANCISCO SERVIN, PAI-TAVYTERA, AT
THE CONGRESS OF INDIANS, PARAGUAY, 1974

Introduction: The Pure Products Go Crazy

SOMETIME AROUND 1920 in a New Jersey suburb of New York City, a young doctor wrote a poem about a girl he called Elsie. He saw her working in his kitchen or laundry room, helping his wife with the house cleaning or the kids. Something about her brought him up short. She seemed to sum up where everything was going—his family, his fledgling practice, his art, the modern world that surrounded and caught them all in its careening movement.

The poem William Carlos Williams wrote was a rush of associations, beginning with a famous assertion:

The pure products of America
go crazy—

and continuing almost without stopping for breath . . .

mountain folk from Kentucky

or the ribbed north end of
Jersey

with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves
 old names
 and promiscuity between

 devil-may-care men who have taken
 to railroading
 out of sheer lust for adventure—

 and young slatterns, bathed
 in filth
 from Monday to Saturday

 to be tricked out that night
 with gauds
 from imaginations which have no

 peasant traditions to give them
 character
 but flutter and flaunt

 sheer rags—succumbing without
 emotion
 save numbed terror

 under some hedge of choke-cherry
 or viburnum—
 which they cannot express—

 Unless it be that marriage
 perhaps
 with a dash of Indian blood

 will throw up a girl so desolate
 so hemmed round
 with disease or murder

 that she'll be rescued by an
 agent—
 reared by the state and

 sent out at fifteen to work in
 some hard pressed
 house in the suburbs—

some doctor's family, some Elsie—
 voluptuous water
 expressing with broken

 brain the truth about us—
 her great
 ungainly hips and flopping breasts

 addressed to cheap
 jewelry
 and rich young men with fine eyes

 when suddenly the angry description veers:

 as if the earth under our feet
 were
 an excrement of some sky

 and we degraded prisoners
 destined
 to hunger until we eat filth

 while the imagination strains
 after deer
 going by fields of goldenrod in

 the stifling heat of September
 Somehow
 it seems to destroy us

 It is only in isolate flecks that
 something
 is given off

 No one
 to witness
 and adjust, no one to drive the car

These lines emerged en route in Williams' dada treatise on the imagination, *Spring & All* (1923). I hope they can serve as a pretext for this book, a way of starting in with a predicament. Call the predicament ethnographic modernity: ethnographic because Williams finds himself off center among scattered traditions; modernity since the condition of rootlessness and mobility he confronts is an increasingly common fate. "El-

sie" stands simultaneously for a local cultural breakdown and a collective future. To Williams her story is inescapably his, everyone's. Looking at the "great/ungainly hips and flopping breasts" he feels things falling apart, everywhere. All the beautiful, primitive places are ruined. A kind of cultural incest, a sense of runaway history pervades, drives the rush of associations.

This feeling of lost authenticity, of "modernity" ruining some essence or source, is not a new one. In *The Country and the City* (1973) Raymond Williams finds it to be a repetitive, pastoral "structure of feeling." Again and again over the millennia change is configured as disorder, pure products go crazy. But the image of Elsie suggests a new turn. By the 1920s a truly global space of cultural connections and dissolutions has become imaginable: local authenticities meet and merge in transient urban and suburban settings—settings that will include the immigrant neighborhoods of New Jersey, multicultural sprawls like Buenos Aires, the townships of Johannesburg. While William Carlos Williams invokes the pure products of America, the "we" careening in his driverless car is clearly something more. The ethnographic modernist searches for the universal in the local, the whole in the part. Williams' famous choice of an American (rather than English) speech, his regionally based poetic and medical practice must not cut him off from the most general human processes. His cosmopolitanism requires a perpetual veering between local attachments and general possibilities.

Elsie disrupts the project, for her very existence raises *historical* uncertainties undermining the modernist doctor-poet's secure position.¹ His response to the disorder she represents is complex and ambivalent. If authentic traditions, the pure products, are everywhere yielding to promiscuity and aimlessness, the option of nostalgia holds no charm. There is no going back, no essence to redeem. Here, and throughout his writing, Williams avoids pastoral, folkloristic appeals of the sort common among other liberals in the twenties—exhorting, preserving, collecting a true rural culture in endangered places like Appalachia. Such authenticities would be at best artificial aesthetic purifications (Whisnant 1983). Nor does Williams settle for two other common ways of confronting the rush

1. "Elsie" also displaces a literary tradition. In Western writing servants have always performed the chore of representing "the people"—lower classes and different races. Domesticated outsiders of the bourgeois imagination, they regularly provide fictional epiphanies, recognition scenes, happy endings, utopic and distopic transcendences. A brilliant survey is provided by Bruce Robbins 1986.

of history. He does not evoke Elsie and the idiocy of rural life to celebrate a progressive, technological future. He shares her fate, for there really is "no one to drive the car"—a frightening condition. Nor does Williams resign himself sadly to the loss of local traditions in an entropic modernity—a vision common among prophets of cultural homogenization, lamenters of the ruined tropics. Instead, he claims that "something" is still being "given off"—if only in "isolate flecks."

It is worth dwelling on the discrepancy between this emergent, dispersed "something" and the car in which "we" all ride. Is it possible to resist the poem's momentum, its rushed inevitability? To do so is not so much to offer an adequate reading (of a poetic sequence abstracted from *Spring & All*) as it is to reflect on several readings, on several historical "Elsies." Let this problematic figure with her "dash of Indian blood," her ungainly female form, her inarticulateness stand for groups marginalized or silenced in the bourgeois West: "natives," women, the poor. There is violence, curiosity, pity, and desire in the poet's gaze. Elsie provokes very mixed emotions. Once again a female, possibly colored body serves as a site of attraction, repulsion, symbolic appropriation. Elsie lives only for the eyes of privileged men. An inarticulate muddle of lost origins, she is going nowhere. Williams evokes this with his angry, bleak sympathy—and then turns it all into modern history. Two-thirds of the way through the poem, Elsie's personal story shifts toward the general; her own path through the suburban kitchen vanishes. She, Williams, all of us are caught in modernity's inescapable momentum.

Something similar occurs whenever marginal peoples come into a historical or ethnographic space that has been defined by the Western imagination. "Entering the modern world," their distinct histories quickly vanish. Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by various technologically advanced socialisms, these suddenly "backward" peoples no longer invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional pasts, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it.

This book proposes a different historical vision. It does not see the world as populated by endangered authenticities—pure products always going crazy. Rather, it makes space for specific paths through modernity, a recognition anticipated by Williams' discrepant question: what is "given off" by individual histories like Elsie's? Are the "isolate flecks" dying sparks? New beginnings? Or . . . ? "Compose. (No ideas/but in things) Invent!" This was Williams' slogan (1967:7). In *Spring & All* the

human future is something to be creatively imagined, not simply endured: "new form dealt with as reality itself . . . To enter a new world, and have there freedom of movement and newness" (1923:70, 71). But geopolitical questions must now be asked of every inventive poetics of reality, including that urged by this book: Whose reality? Whose new world? Where exactly does anyone stand to write "as if the earth under our feet/were an excrement of some sky/and we . . . destined . . .?"

People and things are increasingly out of place. A doctor-poet-fieldworker, Williams watches and listens to New Jersey's immigrants, workers, women giving birth, pimply-faced teenagers, mental cases. In their lives and words, encountered through a privileged participant observation both poetic and scientific, he finds material for his writing. Williams moves freely out into the homes of his patients, keeping a medical-aesthetic distance (though sometimes with great difficulty, as in the "beautiful thing" sequences of *Paterson*, book 3). The meeting with Elsie is somehow different: a troubling outsider turns up *inside* bourgeois domestic space. She cannot be held at a distance.

This invasion by an ambiguous person of questionable origin anticipates developments that would become widely apparent only after the Second World War. Colonial relations would be pervasively contested. After 1950 peoples long spoken for by Western ethnographers, administrators, and missionaries began to speak and act more powerfully for themselves on a global stage. It was increasingly difficult to keep them in their (traditional) places. Distinct ways of life once destined to merge into "the modern world" reasserted their difference, in novel ways. We perceive Elsie differently in light of these developments.

Reading against the poem's momentum, from new positions, we are able to wonder: What becomes of this girl after her stint in William Carlos Williams' kitchen? Must she symbolize a dead end? What does Elsie prefigure? As woman: her ungainly body is either a symbol of failure in a world dominated by the male gaze or the image of a powerful, "disorderly" female form, an alternative to sexist definitions of beauty. As impure product: this mix of backgrounds is either an uprooted lost soul or a new hybrid person, less domestic than the suburban family home she passes through. As American Indian: Elsie is either the last all-but-assimilated remnant of the Tuscaroras who, according to tradition, settled in the Ramapough hills of Northern New Jersey, or she represents a Native American past that is being turned into an unexpected future. (During the last decade a group of Elsie's kin calling themselves the Ramapough Tribe have actively asserted an Indian identity.)² Williams'

assimilation of his symbolic servant to a shared destiny seems less definitive now.

"Elsie," read in the late twentieth century, is both more specific and less determined. Her possible futures reflect an unresolved set of challenges to Western visions of modernity—challenges that resonate throughout this book. Elsie is still largely silent here, but her disturbing presences—a plurality of emergent subjects—can be felt.³ The time is past when privileged authorities could routinely "give voice" (or history) to others without fear of contradiction. "Croce's great dictum that all history is contemporary history does not mean that all history is *our* contemporary history . . ." (Jameson 1981:18) When the prevailing narratives of Western identity are contested, the political issue of history as emergence becomes inescapable. Juliet Mitchell writes in *Women: The Longest Revolution* (1984): "I do not think that we can live as human subjects without in some sense taking on a history; for us, it is mainly the history of being men or women under bourgeois capitalism. In deconstructing that history, we can only construct other histories. What are we in the process of becoming?" (p. 294). We are not all together in Williams' car.



Only one of Elsie's emergent possibilities, the one connected with her "dash of Indian blood," is explored in this book. During the fall of 1977 in Boston Federal Court the descendants of Wampanoag Indians living in Mashpee, "Cape Cod's Indian Town," were required to prove their identity. To establish a legal right to sue for lost lands these citizens of modern Massachusetts were asked to demonstrate continuous tribal existence since the seventeenth century. Life in Mashpee had changed dramati-

2. The Native American ancestry of the isolated and inbred Ramapough mountain people ("old names" . . . from "the ribbed north end of Jersey") is debatable. Some, like the folklorist David Cohen (1974), deny it altogether, debunking the story of a Tuscarora offshoot. Others believe that this mixed population (formerly called Jackson's Whites, and drawing on black, Dutch, and English roots) probably owes more to Delaware than to Tuscarora Indian blood. Whatever its real historical roots, the tribe as presently constituted is a living impure product.

3. "Natives," women, the poor: this book discusses the ethnographic construction of only the first group. In the dominant ideological systems of the bourgeois West they are interrelated, and a more systematic treatment than mine would bring this out. For some beginnings see Duvignaud 1973; Alloula 1981; Trinh 1987; and Spivak 1987.

cally, however, since the first contacts between English Pilgrims at Plymouth and the Massachusetts-speaking peoples of the region. Were the plaintiffs of 1977 the "same" Indians? Were they something more than a collection of individuals with varying degrees of Native American ancestry? If they were different from their neighbors, how was their "tribal" difference manifested? During a long, well-publicized trial scores of Indians and whites testified about life in Mashpee. Professional historians, anthropologists, and sociologists took the stand as expert witnesses. The bitter story of New England Indians was told in minute detail and vehemently debated. In the conflict of interpretations, concepts such as "tribe," "culture," "identity," "assimilation," "ethnicity," "politics," and "community" were themselves on trial. I sat through most of the forty days of argument, listening and taking notes.

It seemed to me that the trial—beyond its immediate political stakes—was a crucial experiment in cross-cultural translation. Modern Indians, who spoke in New England-accented English about the Great Spirit, had to convince a white Boston jury of their authenticity. The translation process was fraught with ambiguities, for all the cultural boundaries at issue seemed to be blurred and shifting. The trial raised far-reaching questions about modes of cultural interpretation, implicit models of wholeness, styles of distancing, stories of historical development.

I began to see such questions as symptoms of a pervasive postcolonial crisis of ethnographic authority. While the crisis has been felt most strongly by formerly hegemonic Western discourses, the questions it raises are of global significance. Who has the authority to speak for a group's identity or authenticity? What are the essential elements and boundaries of a culture? How do self and other clash and converse in the encounters of ethnography, travel, modern interethnic relations? What narratives of development, loss, and innovation can account for the present range of local oppositional movements? During the trial these questions assumed a more than theoretical urgency.

My perspective in the courtroom was an oblique one. I had just finished a Ph.D. thesis in history with a strong interest in the history of the human sciences, particularly cultural anthropology. At the time of the trial I was rewriting my dissertation for publication. The thesis was a biography of Maurice Leenhardt, a missionary and ethnographer in French New Caledonia and an ethnologist in Paris (Clifford 1982a). What could be farther from New England Indians? The connections turned out to be close and provocative.

In Melanesia Leenhardt was deeply involved with tribal groups who had experienced a colonial assault as extreme as that inflicted in Massachusetts. He was preoccupied with practical and theoretical problems of cultural change, syncretism, conversion, and survival. Like many American Indians the militarily defeated Kanaks of New Caledonia had "tribal" institutions forced on them as a restrictive reservation system. Both groups would make strategic accommodations with these external forms of government. Native Americans and Melanesians would survive periods of acute demographic and cultural crisis, as well as periods of change and revival. Over the last hundred years New Caledonia's Kanaks have managed to find powerful, distinctive ways to live as Melanesians in an invasive world. It seemed to me that the Mashpee were struggling toward a similar goal, reviving and inventing ways to live as Indians in the twentieth century.

Undoubtedly what I heard in the New England courtroom influenced my sense of Melanesian identity, something I came to understand not as an archaic survival but as an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished. In my studies of European ethnographic institutions I have cultivated a similar attitude.



This book is concerned with Western visions and practices. They are shown, however, responding to forces that challenge the authority and even the future identity of "the West." Modern ethnography appears in several forms, traditional and innovative. As an academic practice it cannot be separated from anthropology. Seen more generally, it is simply diverse ways of thinking and writing about culture from a standpoint of participant observation. In this expanded sense a poet like Williams is an ethnographer. So are many of the people social scientists have called "native informants." Ultimately my topic is a pervasive condition of off-centeredness in a world of distinct meaning systems, a state of being in culture while looking at culture, a form of personal and collective self-fashioning. This predicament—not limited to scholars, writers, artists, or intellectuals—responds to the twentieth century's unprecedented overlay of traditions. A modern "ethnography" of conjunctures, constantly moving *between* cultures, does not, like its Western alter ego "anthropology," aspire to survey the full range of human diversity or development. It is perpetually displaced, both regionally focused and broadly comparative, a form both of dwelling and of travel in a world where the two experiences are less and less distinct.

This book migrates between local and global perspectives, constantly recontextualizing its topic. Part One focuses on strategies of writing and representation, strategies that change historically in response to the general shift from high colonialism around 1900 to postcolonialism and neocolonialism after the 1950s. In these chapters I try to show that ethnographic texts are orchestrations of multivocal exchanges occurring in politically charged situations. The subjectivities produced in these often unequal exchanges—whether of “natives” or of visiting participant-observers—are constructed domains of truth, serious fictions. Once this is recognized, diverse inventive possibilities for postcolonial ethnographic representation emerge, some of which are surveyed in this book. Part Two portrays ethnography in alliance with avant-garde art and cultural criticism, activities with which it shares modernist procedures of collage, juxtaposition, and estrangement. The “exotic” is now nearby. In this section I also probe the limits of Western ethnography through several self-reflexive forms of travel writing, exploring the possibilities of a twentieth-century “poetics of displacement.” Part Three turns to the history of collecting, particularly the classification and display of “primitive” art and exotic “cultures.” My general aim is to displace any transcendent regime of authenticity, to argue that all authoritative collections, whether made in the name of art or science, are historically contingent and subject to local reappropriation. In the book’s final section I explore how non-Western historical experiences—those of “orientals” and “tribal” Native Americans—are hemmed in by concepts of continuous tradition and the unified self. I argue that identity, considered ethnographically, must always be mixed, relational, and inventive.

Self-identity emerges as a complex cultural problem in my treatment of two polyglot refugees, Joseph Conrad and Bronislaw Malinowski, Poles shipwrecked in England and English. Both men produced seminal meditations on the local fictions of collective life, and, with different degrees of irony, both constructed identities based on the acceptance of limited realities and forms of expression. Embracing the serious fiction of “culture,” they wrote at a moment when the ethnographic (relativist and plural) idea began to attain its modern currency. Here and elsewhere in the book I try to historicize and see beyond this currency, straining for a concept that can preserve culture’s differentiating functions while conceiving of collective identity as a hybrid, often discontinuous inventive process. Culture is a deeply compromised idea I cannot yet do without.

Some of the political dangers of culturalist reductions and essences

are explored in my analysis of Edward Said’s polemical work *Orientalism* (1978a). What emerges is the inherently discrepant stance of a postcolonial “oppositional” critic, for the construction of simplifying essences and distancing dichotomies is clearly not a monopoly of Western Orientalist experts. Said himself writes in ways that simultaneously assert and subvert his own authority. My analysis suggests that there can be no final smoothing over of the discrepancies in his discourse, since it is increasingly difficult to maintain a cultural and political position “outside” the Occident from which, in security, to attack it. Critiques like Said’s are caught in the double ethnographic movement I have been evoking. Locally based and politically engaged, they must resonate globally; while they engage pervasive postcolonial processes, they do so without over-view, from a blatantly partial perspective.

Intervening in an interconnected world, one is always, to varying degrees, “inauthentic”: caught between cultures, implicated in others. Because discourse in global power systems is elaborated vis-à-vis, a sense of difference or distinctness can never be located solely in the continuity of a culture or tradition. Identity is conjunctural, not essential. Said addresses these issues most affectingly in *After the Last Sky*, a recent evocation of “Palestinian Lives” and of his own position among them (1986a:150): “A part of something is for the foreseeable future going to be better than all of it. Fragments over wholes. Restless nomadic activity over the settlements of held territory. Criticism over resignation. The Palestinian as self-consciousness in a barren plain of investments and consumer appetites. The heroism of anger over the begging bowl, limited independence over the status of clients. Attention, alertness, focus. To do as others do, but somehow to stand apart. To tell your story in pieces, as *it is*.” This work appeared as I was finishing my own book. Thus my discussion of *Orientalism* merely anticipates Said’s ongoing search for nonessentialist forms of cultural politics. *After the Last Sky* actively inhabits the discrepancy between a specific condition of Palestinian exile and a more general twentieth-century range of options. It is (and is not only) as a Palestinian that Said movingly accepts “our wanderings,” pleading for “the open secular element, and not the symmetry of redemption” (p. 150).



I share this suspicion of “the symmetry of redemption.” Questionable acts of purification are involved in any attainment of a promised land, return

to "original" sources, or gathering up of a true tradition. Such claims to purity are in any event always subverted by the need to stage authenticity *in opposition to* external, often dominating alternatives. Thus the "Third World" plays itself against the "First World," and vice versa. At a local level, Trobriand Islanders invent *their* culture within and against the contexts of recent colonial history and the new nation of Papua–New Guinea. If authenticity is relational, there can be no essence except as a political, cultural invention, a local tactic.

In this book I question some of the local tactics of Western ethnography, focusing on redemptive modes of textualization and particularly of collecting. Several chapters analyze in some detail the systems of authenticity that have been imposed on creative works of non-Western art and culture. They look at collecting and authenticating practices in contemporary settings: for example the controversy surrounding an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City over the relations between "tribal" and "modern" art. How have exotic objects been given value as "art" and "culture" in Western collecting systems? I do not argue, as some critics have, that non-Western objects are properly understood only with reference to their original milieux. Ethnographic contextualizations are as problematic as aesthetic ones, as susceptible to purified, ahistorical treatment.

I trace the modern history of both aesthetic and ethnographic classifications in an earlier setting: avant-garde Paris of the 1920s and 1930s, a radical context I call ethnographic surrealism. Two influential museums, the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro and its scientific successor, the Musée de l'Homme, symbolize distinct modes of "art and culture collecting." Their juxtaposition forces the question: How are ethnographic worlds and their meaningful artifacts cut up, salvaged, and valued? Here culture appears not as a tradition to be saved but as assembled codes and artifacts always susceptible to critical and creative recombination. Ethnography is an explicit form of cultural critique sharing radical perspectives with dada and surrealism. Instead of acquiescing in the separation of avant-garde experiment from disciplinary science, I reopen the frontier, suggesting that the modern division of art and ethnography into distinct institutions has restricted the former's analytic power and the latter's subversive vocation.

Since 1900 inclusive collections of "Mankind" have become institutionalized in academic disciplines like anthropology and in museums of art or ethnology. A restrictive "art-culture system" has come to control

the authenticity, value, and circulation of artifacts and data. Analyzing this system, I propose that any collection implies a temporal vision generating rarity and worth, a metahistory. This history defines which groups or things will be redeemed from a disintegrating human past and which will be defined as the dynamic, or tragic, agents of a common destiny. My analysis works to bring out the local, political contingency of such histories and of the modern collections they justify. Space is cleared, perhaps, for alternatives.



This book is a spliced ethnographic object, an incomplete collection. It consists of explorations written and rewritten over a seven-year period. Its own historical moment has been marked by rapid changes in the terms—scientific, aesthetic, and textual—governing cross-cultural representation. Written from within a "West" whose authority to represent unified human history is now widely challenged and whose very spatial identity is increasingly problematic, the explorations gathered here cannot—should not—add up to a seamless vision. Their partiality is apparent. The chapters vary in form and style, reflecting diverse conjunctures and specific occasions of composition. I have not tried to rewrite those already published to produce a consistent veneer. Moreover, I have included texts that actively break up the book's prevailing tone, hoping in this way to manifest the rhetoric of my accounts. I prefer sharply focused pictures, composed in ways that show the frame or lens.

Ethnography, a hybrid activity, thus appears as writing, as collecting, as modernist collage, as imperial power, as subversive critique. Viewed most broadly, perhaps, my topic is a mode of travel, a way of understanding and getting around in a diverse world that, since the sixteenth century, has become cartographically unified. One of the principal functions of ethnography is "orientation" (a term left over from a time when Europe traveled and invented itself with respect to a fantastically unified "East"). But in the twentieth century ethnography reflects new "spatial practices" (De Certeau 1984), new forms of dwelling and circulating.

This century has seen a drastic expansion of mobility, including tourism, migrant labor, immigration, urban sprawl. More and more people "dwell" with the help of mass transit, automobiles, airplanes. In cities on six continents foreign populations have come to stay—mixing in but often in partial, specific fashions. The "exotic" is uncannily close. Conversely, there seem no distant places left on the planet where the pres-

ence of "modern" products, media, and power cannot be felt. An older topography and experience of travel is exploded. One no longer leaves home confident of finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighborhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth. This dis-"orientation" is reflected throughout the book. For example twentieth-century academic ethnography does not appear as a practice of interpreting distinct, whole ways of life but instead as a series of specific dialogues, impositions, and inventions. "Cultural" difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness; self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than of essence. A whole structure of expectations about authenticity in culture and in art is thrown in doubt.

The new relations of ethnographic displacement were registered with precocious clarity in the writings of Victor Segalen and Michel Leiris. Both would have to unlearn the forms that once organized the experience of travel in a time when "home" and "abroad," "self" and "other," "savage" and "civilized" seemed more clearly opposed. Their writings betray an unease with narratives of escape and return, of initiation and conquest. They do not claim to know a distanced "exotic," to bring back its secrets, to objectively describe its landscapes, customs, languages. Everywhere they go they register complex encounters. In Segalen's words the new traveler expresses "not simply his vision, but through an instantaneous, constant *transfère*, the echo of his presence." China becomes an allegorical mirror. Leiris' fieldwork in a "phantom Africa" throws him back on a relentless self-ethnography—not autobiography but an act of writing his existence in a present of memories, dreams, politics, daily life.

Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere individuals and groups improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols, and languages. This existence among fragments has often been portrayed as a process of ruin and cultural decay, perhaps most eloquently by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes tropiques* (1955). In Lévi-Strauss's global vision—one widely shared today—authentic human differences are disintegrating, disappearing in an expansive commodity culture to become, at best, collectible "art" or "folklore." The great narrative of entropy and loss in *Tristes tropiques* expresses an inescapable, sad truth. But it is too neat, and it assumes a questionable Eurocentric position at the "end" of a unified human history, gathering up, memorializing the world's local

historicitities. Alongside this narrative of progressive monoculture a more ambiguous "Caribbean" experience may be glimpsed. In my account Aimé Césaire, a practitioner of "neologistic" cultural politics, represents such a possibility—organic culture reconceived as inventive process or creolized "interculture" (Wagner 1980; Drummond 1981).⁴ The roots of tradition are cut and retied, collective symbols appropriated from external influences. For Césaire culture and identity are inventive and mobile. They need not take root in ancestral plots; they live by pollination, by (historical) transplanting.

The "filth" that an expansive West, according to the disillusioned traveler of *Tristes tropiques* (p. 38), has thrown in the face of the world's societies appears as raw material, compost for new orders of difference. It is also filth. Modern cultural contacts need not be romanticized, erasing the violence of empire and continuing forms of neocolonial domination. The Caribbean history from which Césaire derives an inventive and tactical "negritude" is a history of degradation, mimicry, violence, and blocked possibilities. It is also rebellious, syncretic, and creative. This kind of ambiguity keeps the planet's local futures uncertain and open. There is no master narrative that can reconcile the tragic and comic plots of global cultural history.

It is easier to register the loss of traditional orders of difference than to perceive the emergence of new ones. Perhaps this book goes too far in its concern for ethnographic presents-becoming-futures. Its utopian, persistent hope for the reinvention of difference risks downplaying the destructive, homogenizing effects of global economic and cultural centralization. Moreover, its Western assumption that assertions of "tradition" are always responses to the new (that there is no real recurrence in history) may exclude local narratives of cultural continuity and recovery. I do not tell all the possible stories. As an Igbo saying has it, "You do not stand in one place to watch a masquerade."

My primary goal is to open space for cultural futures, for the recog-

4. For recent work on the historical-political invention of cultures and traditions see, among others, Comaroff 1985; Guss 1986; Handler 1985; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Taussig 1980, 1987; Whisnant 1983; and Cantwell 1984. Familiar approaches to "culture-contact," "syncretism," and "acculturation" are pressed farther by the concepts of "interference" and "interference" (Fischer 1986:219, 232; Baumgarten 1982:154), "transculturation" (Rama 1982; Pratt 1987), and "intercultural intertexts" (Tedlock and Tedlock 1985).

inition of emergence. This requires a critique of deep-seated Western habits of mind and systems of value. I am especially skeptical of an almost automatic reflex—in the service of a unified vision of history—to relegate exotic peoples and objects to the collective past (Fabian 1983). The inclusive orders of modernism and anthropology (the “we” riding in Williams’ car, the Mankind of Western social science) are always deployed at the end point or advancing edge of History. Exotic traditions appear as archaic, purer (and more rare) than the diluted inventions of a syncretic present. In this temporal setup a great many twentieth-century creations can only appear as imitations of more “developed” models. The Elsie of the planet are still traveling nowhere their own.

Throughout the world indigenous populations have had to reckon with the forces of “progress” and “national” unification. The results have been both destructive and inventive. Many traditions, languages, cosmologies, and values are lost, some literally murdered; but much has simultaneously been invented and revived in complex, oppositional contexts. If the victims of progress and empire are weak, they are seldom passive. It used to be assumed, for example, that conversion to Christianity in Africa, Melanesia, Latin America, or even colonial Massachusetts would lead to the extinction of indigenous cultures rather than to their transformation. Something more ambiguous and historically complex has occurred, requiring that we perceive *both* the end of certain orders of diversity and the creation or translation of others (Fernandez 1978). More than a few “extinct” peoples have returned to haunt the Western historical imagination.⁵ It is difficult, in any event, to equate the future of “Catholicism” in New Guinea with its current prospects in Italy; and Protestant Christianity in New Caledonia is very different from its diverse Nigerian forms. The future is not (only) monoculture.⁶

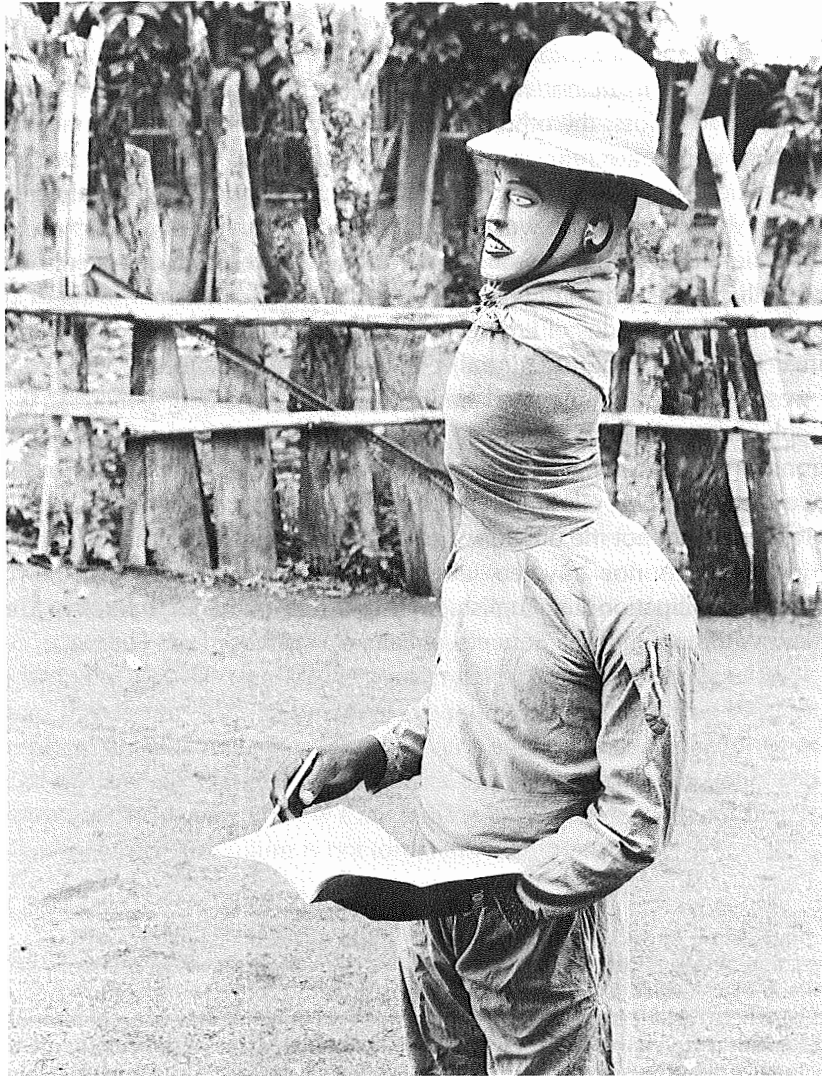
5. The continued tribal life of California Indians is a case in point. Even, most notorious of all, the genocidal “extinction” of the Tasmanians now seems a much less definitive “event.” After systematic decimations, with the 1876 death of Truganina, the last “pure” specimen (playing a mythic role similar to that of Ishi in California), the race was scientifically declared dead. But Tasmanians did survive and intermarried with aboriginals, whites, and Maori. In 1978 a committee of inquiry reported between four and five thousand persons eligible to make land claims in Tasmania (Stocking 1987:283).

6. Research specifically on this issue is being conducted by Ulf Hannerz and his colleagues at the University of Stockholm on “the world system of culture.” In an early statement Hannerz confronts the widespread assumption that “cultural diversity is waning, and the same single mass culture will soon be

To reject a single progressive or entropic metanarrative is not to deny the existence of pervasive global processes unevenly at work. The world is increasingly connected, though not unified, economically and culturally. Local particularism offers no escape from these involvements. Indeed, modern ethnographic histories are perhaps condemned to oscillate between two metanarratives: one of homogenization, the other of emergence; one of loss, the other of invention. In most specific conjunctures both narratives are relevant, each undermining the other’s claim to tell “the whole story,” each denying to the other a privileged, Hegelian vision. Everywhere in the world distinctions are being destroyed *and* created; but the new identities and orders of difference are more reminiscent of Williams’ Elsie than of Edward Curtis’ idealized “vanishing” American Indians. The histories of emergent differences require other ways of telling: Césaire’s impure cultural poetics, Said’s dispersed “Palestinian Lives,” Mashpee’s reinvented tradition—there is no single model. This book surveys several hybrid and subversive forms of cultural representation, forms that prefigure an inventive future. In the last decades of the twentieth century, ethnography begins from the inescapable fact that Westerners are not the only ones going places in the modern world.

But have not travelers always encountered worldly “natives”? Strange anticipation: the English Pilgrims arrive at Plymouth Rock in The New World only to find Squanto, a Patuxet, just back from Europe.

everywhere.” He is skeptical: “I do not think it is only my bias as an anthropologist with a vested interest in cultural variation which makes it difficult for me to recognize that the situation for example in Nigeria could be anything like this. The people in my favorite Nigerian town drink Coca Cola, but they drink *burukutu* too; and they can watch *Charlie’s Angels* as well as Hausa drummers on the television sets which spread rapidly as soon as electricity has arrived. My sense is that the world system, rather than creating massive cultural homogeneity on a global scale, is replacing one diversity with another; and the new diversity is based relatively more on interrelations and less on autonomy” (Hannerz n.d.: 6).



"White Man," Onyeocha, a performer at Igbo masquerades. Amagu Izzi, southeast Nigeria, 1982.

Part One ✧ Discourses

Clifford takes as his natives, as well as his informants, . . . anthropologists . . . We are being observed and inscribed.

—PAUL RABINOW, "REPRESENTATIONS ARE SOCIAL FACTS"

1. On Ethnographic Authority

THE 1724 frontispiece of Father Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages américains* portrays the ethnographer as a young woman sitting at a writing table amid artifacts from the New World and from classical Greece and Egypt. The author is accompanied by two cherubs who assist in the task of comparison and by the bearded figure of Time, who points toward a tableau representing the ultimate source of the truths issuing from the writer's pen. The image toward which the young woman lifts her gaze is a bank of clouds where Adam, Eve, and the serpent appear. Above them stand the redeemed man and woman of the Apocalypse, on either side of a radiant triangle bearing the Hebrew script for *Yahweh*.

The frontispiece for Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* is a photograph with the caption "A Ceremonial Act of the Kula." A shell necklace is being offered to a Trobriand chief, who stands at the door of his dwelling. Behind the man presenting the necklace is a row of six bowing youths, one of them sounding a conch. All the figures stand in profile, their attention apparently concentrated on the rite of exchange, a real event of Melanesian life. But on closer inspection one of the bowing Trobrianders may be seen to be looking at the camera.

- Direction
- Authority (use: full)

Lafitau's allegory is the less familiar: his author transcribes rather than originates. Unlike Malinowski's photo, the engraving makes no reference to ethnographic experience—despite Lafitau's five years of research among the Mohawks, research that has earned him a respected place among the fieldworkers of any generation. His account is presented not as the product of firsthand observation but of writing, in a crowded workshop. The frontispiece from *Argonauts*, like all photographs, asserts presence—that of the scene before the lens; it also suggests another presence—that of the ethnographer actively composing this fragment of Trobriand reality. Kula exchange, the subject of Malinowski's book, has been made perfectly visible, centered in the perceptual frame, while a participant's glance redirects our attention to the observational standpoint we share, as readers, with the ethnographer and his camera. The predominant mode of modern fieldwork authority is signaled: "You are there . . . because I was there."

✓ This chapter traces the formation and breakup of ethnographic authority in twentieth-century social anthropology. It is not a complete account, nor is it based on a fully realized theory of ethnographic interpretation and textuality.¹ Such a theory's contours are problematic, since the activity of cross-cultural representation is now more than usually in question. The present predicament is linked to the breakup and redistribution of colonial power in the decades after 1950 and to the echoes of that process in the radical cultural theories of the 1960s and 1970s. After the négritude movement's reversal of the European gaze, after anthropology's *crise de conscience* with respect to its liberal status within the imperial order, and now that the West can no longer present itself as the unique purveyor of anthropological knowledge about others, it has become necessary to imagine a world of generalized ethnography. With expanded communication and intercultural influence, people interpret others, and themselves, in a bewildering diversity of idioms—a global condition of

1. Only English, American, and French examples are discussed. If it is likely that the modes of authority analyzed here are able to be generalized widely, no attempt has been made to extend them to other national traditions. It is assumed also, in the antipositivist tradition of Wilhelm Dilthey, that ethnography is a process of interpretation, not of explanation. Modes of authority based on natural-scientific epistemologies are not discussed. In its focus on participant observation as an intersubjective process at the heart of twentieth-century ethnography, this discussion scants a number of contributing sources of authority: for example the weight of accumulated "archival" knowledge about particular groups, of a cross-cultural comparative perspective, and of statistical survey work.

what Mikhail Bakhtin (1953) called "heteroglossia."² This ambiguous, multivocal world makes it increasingly hard to conceive of human diversity as inscribed in bounded, independent cultures. Difference is an effect of inventive syncretism. In recent years works such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Paulin Hountondji's *Sur la "philosophie" africaine* (1977) have cast radical doubt on the procedures by which alien human groups can be represented without proposing systematic, sharply new methods or epistemologies. These studies suggest that while ethnographic writing cannot entirely escape the reductionist use of dichotomies and essences, it can at least struggle self-consciously to avoid portraying abstract, ahistorical "others." It is more than ever crucial for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another, as well as of the relationships of knowledge and power that connect them; but no sovereign scientific method or ethical stance can guarantee the truth of such images. They are constituted—the critique of colonial modes of representation has shown at least this much—in specific historical relations of dominance and dialogue.

The experiments in ethnographic writing surveyed in this chapter do not fall into a clear reformist direction or evolution. They are ad hoc inventions and cannot be seen in terms of a systematic analysis of post-colonial representation. They are perhaps best understood as components of that "toolkit" of engaged theory recently recommended by Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault: "The notion of theory as a toolkit means (i) The theory to be constructed is not a system but an instrument, a logic of the specificity of power relations and the struggles around them; (ii) That this investigation can only be carried out step by step on the basis of reflection (which will necessarily be historical in some of its aspects) on given situations" (Foucault 1980:145; see also 1977:208). We may contribute to a practical reflection on cross-cultural representation by undertaking an inventory of the better, though imperfect, approaches currently at hand. Of these, ethnographic fieldwork remains an unusually

2. "Heteroglossia" assumes that "languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways (the Ukrainian language, the language of the epic poem, of early Symbolism, of the student, of a particular generation of children, of the run-of-the-mill intellectual, of the Nietzschean, and so on). It might even seem that the very word 'language' loses all meaning in this process—for apparently there is no single plane on which all these 'languages' might be juxtaposed to one another" (291). What is said of languages applies equally to "cultures" and "subcultures." See also Volosinov (Bakhtin?) 1953:291, esp. chaps. 1–3; and Todorov 1981:88–93.

changes
in style
of
writing

sensitive method. Participant observation obliges its practitioners to experience, at a bodily as well as an intellectual level, the vicissitudes of translation. It requires arduous language learning, some degree of direct involvement and conversation, and often a derangement of personal and cultural expectations. There is, of course, a myth of fieldwork. The actual experience, hedged around with contingencies, rarely lives up to the ideal; but as a means for producing knowledge from an intense, intersubjective engagement, the practice of ethnography retains a certain exemplary status. Moreover, if fieldwork has for a time been identified with a uniquely Western discipline and a totalizing science of "anthropology," these associations are not necessarily permanent. Current styles of cultural description are historically limited and are undergoing important metamorphoses.

The development of ethnographic science cannot ultimately be understood in isolation from more general political-epistemological debates about writing and the representation of otherness. In this discussion, however, I have maintained a focus on professional anthropology, and specifically on ethnography since 1950.³ The current crisis—or better, dispersion—of ethnographic authority makes it possible to mark off a rough period, bounded by the years 1900 and 1960, during which a new conception of field research established itself as the norm for European and American anthropology. Intensive fieldwork, pursued by university-trained specialists, emerged as a privileged, sanctioned source of data about exotic peoples. It is not a question here of the dominance of a single research method. "Intensive" ethnography has been variously defined. (Compare Griaule 1957 with Malinowski 1922:chap. 1). Moreover, the hegemony of fieldwork was established earlier and more thoroughly in the United States and in England than in France. The early examples of Franz Boas and the Torres Straits expedition were matched only belatedly by the founding of the Institut d'Ethnologie in 1925 and

3. I have not attempted to survey new styles of ethnographic writing that may be originating outside the West. As Edward Said, Paulin Hountondji, and others have shown, a considerable work of ideological "clearing," oppositional critical work, remains; and it is to this that non-Western intellectuals have been devoting a great part of their energies. My discussion remains inside, but at the experimental boundaries of, a realist cultural science elaborated in the Occident. Moreover, it does not consider as areas of innovation the "para-ethnographic" genres of oral history, the nonfiction novel, the "new journalism," travel literature, and the documentary film.

the much-publicized Mission Dakar-Djibouti of 1932 (Karady 1982; Jamin 1982a; Stocking 1983). Nevertheless, by the mid-1930s one can fairly speak of a developing international consensus: valid anthropological abstractions were to be based, wherever possible, on intensive cultural descriptions by qualified scholars. By this point the new style had been made popular, institutionalized, and embodied in specific textual practices.

It has recently become possible to identify and take a certain distance from these conventions.⁴ If ethnography produces cultural interpretations through intense research experiences, how is unruly experience transformed into an authoritative written account? How, precisely, is a garrulous, overdetermined cross-cultural encounter shot through with power relations and personal cross-purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more or less discrete "other world" composed by an individual author?

In analyzing this complex transformation one must bear in mind the fact that ethnography is, from beginning to end, enmeshed in writing. This writing includes, minimally, a translation of experience into textual form. The process is complicated by the action of multiple subjectivities and political constraints beyond the control of the writer. In response to these forces ethnographic writing enacts a specific strategy of authority. This strategy has classically involved an unquestioned claim to appear as the purveyor of truth in the text. A complex cultural experience is enunciated by an individual: *We the Tikopia* by Raymond Firth; *Nous avons mangé la forêt* by Georges Condominas; *Coming of Age in Samoa* by Margaret Mead; *The Nuer* by E. E. Evans-Pritchard.

The discussion that follows first locates this authority historically in the development of a twentieth-century science of participant observation. It then proceeds to a critique of underlying assumptions and a review of emerging textual practices. Alternate strategies of ethnographic authority may be seen in recent experiments by ethnographers who self-consciously reject scenes of cultural representation in the style of Malinowski's frontispiece. Different secular versions of Lafiteau's crowded scriptorial workshop are emerging. In the new paradigms of authority the

4. In the present crisis of authority, ethnography has emerged as a subject of historical scrutiny. For new critical approaches see Hartog 1971; Asad 1973; Burridge 1973:chap. 1; Duchet 1971; Boon 1982; De Certeau 1980; Said 1978; Stocking 1983; and Rupp-Eisenreich 1984.

writer is no longer fascinated by transcendent figures—a Hebrew-Christian deity or its twentieth-century replacements, Man and Culture. Nothing remains of the heavenly tableau except the anthropologist's scumbled image in a mirror. The silence of the ethnographic workshop has been broken—by insistent, heteroglot voices, by the scratching of other pens.⁵



At the close of the nineteenth century nothing guaranteed, a priori, the ethnographer's status as the best interpreter of native life—as opposed to the traveler, and especially the missionary and administrator, some of whom had been in the field far longer and had better research contacts and linguistic skills. The development of the fieldworker's image in America, from Frank Hamilton Cushing (an oddball) to Margaret Mead (a national figure) is significant. During this period a particular form of authority was created—an authority both scientifically validated and based on a unique personal experience. During the 1920s Malinowski played a central role in establishing credit for the fieldworker, and we should recall in this light his attacks on the competence of competitors in the field. For example the colonial magistrate Alex Rentoul, who had the temerity to contradict science's findings concerning Trobriand conceptions of paternity, was excommunicated in the pages of *Man* for his unprofessional "police court perspective" (see Rentoul 1931a,b; Malinowski 1932). The attack on amateurism in the field was pressed even further by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, who, as Ian Langham has shown, came to epitomize the scientific professional, discovering rigorous social laws (Langham 1981:chap. 7). What emerged during the first half of the twentieth century with the success of professional fieldwork was a new fusion of general theory and empirical research, of cultural analysis with ethnographic description.

The fieldworker-theorist replaced an older partition between the "man on the spot" (in James Frazer's words) and the sociologist or anthropologist in the metropole. This division of labor varied in different national traditions. In the United States for example Morgan had personal knowledge of at least some of the cultures that were raw material for his

5. On the suppression of dialogue in Lafitau's frontispiece and the constitution of a textualized, ahistorical, and visually oriented "anthropology" see Michel de Certeau's detailed analysis (1980).

sociological syntheses; and Boas rather early on made intensive fieldwork the sine qua non of serious anthropological discourse. In general, however, before Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Mead had successfully established the norm of the university-trained scholar testing and deriving theory from firsthand research, a rather different economy of ethnographic knowledge prevailed. For example *The Melanesians* (1891) by R. H. Codrington is a detailed compilation of folklore and custom, drawn from his relatively long term of research as an evangelist and based on intensive collaboration with indigenous translators and informants. The book is not organized around a fieldwork "experience," nor does it advance a unified interpretive hypothesis, functional, historical, or otherwise. It is content with low-level generalizations and the amassing of an eclectic range of information. Codrington is acutely aware of the incompleteness of his knowledge, believing that real understanding of native life begins only after a decade or so of experience and study (pp. vi–vii). This understanding of the difficulty of grasping the world of alien peoples—the many years of learning and unlearning needed, the problems of acquiring thorough linguistic competence—tended to dominate the work of Codrington's generation. Such assumptions would soon be challenged by the more confident cultural relativism of the Malinowskian model. The new fieldworkers sharply distinguished themselves from the earlier "men on the spot"—the missionary, the administrator, the trader, and the traveler—whose knowledge of indigenous peoples, they argued, was not informed by the best scientific hypotheses or a sufficient neutrality.

Before the emergence of professional ethnography, writers such as J. F. McLennan, John Lubbock, and E. B. Tylor had attempted to control the quality of the reports on which their anthropological syntheses were based. They did this by means of the guidelines of *Notes and Queries* and, in Tylor's case, by cultivating long-term working relations with sophisticated researchers in the field such as the missionary Lorimer Fison. After 1883, as newly appointed reader in anthropology at Oxford, Tylor worked to encourage the systematic gathering of ethnographic data by qualified professionals. The United States Bureau of Ethnology, already committed to the undertaking, provided a model. Tylor was active in founding a committee on the Northwestern Tribes of Canada. The committee's first agent in the field was the nineteen-year-veteran missionary among the Ojibwa, E. F. Wilson. He was replaced before long by Boas, a physicist in the process of turning to professional ethnography. George

Stocking has persuasively argued that the replacement of Wilson by Boas "marks the beginning of an important phase in the development of British ethnographic method: the collection of data by academically trained natural scientists defining themselves as anthropologists, and involved also in the formulation and evaluation of anthropological theory" (1983:74). With Boas' early survey work and the emergence in the 1890s of other natural-scientist fieldworkers such as A. C. Haddon and Baldwin Spencer, the move toward professional ethnography was under way. The Torres Straits expedition of 1899 may be seen as a culmination of the work of this "intermediate generation," as Stocking calls them. The new style of research was clearly different from that of missionaries and other amateurs in the field, and part of a general trend since Tylor "to draw more closely together the empirical and theoretical components of anthropological inquiry" (1983:72).

The establishment of intensive participant observation as a professional norm, however, would have to await the Malinowskian cohort. The "intermediate generation" of ethnographers did not typically live in a single locale for a year or more, mastering the vernacular and undergoing a personal learning experience comparable to an initiation. They did not speak as cultural insiders but retained the natural scientist's documentary, observational stance. The principal exception before the third decade of the century, Frank Hamilton Cushing, remained an isolated instance. As Curtis Hinsley has suggested, Cushing's long firsthand study of the Zunis, his quasi-absorption into their way of life, "raised problems of verification and accountability . . . A community of scientific anthropology on the model of other sciences required a common language of discourse, channels of regular communication, and at least minimal consensus on judging method" (1983:66). Cushing's intuitive, excessively personal understanding of the Zuni could not confer scientific authority.

Schematically put, before the late nineteenth century the ethnographer and the anthropologist, the describer-translator of custom and the builder of general theories about humanity, were distinct. (A clear sense of the tension between ethnography and anthropology is important in correctly perceiving the recent, and perhaps temporary, conflation of the two projects.) Malinowski gives us the image of the new "anthropologist"—squatting by the campfire; looking, listening, and questioning; recording and interpreting Trobriand life. The literary charter of this new authority is the first chapter of *Argonauts*, with its prominently displayed photographs of the ethnographer's tent pitched among Kiriwinian dwellings. The sharpest methodological justification for the new mode is to be

found in Radcliffe-Brown's *Andaman Islanders* (1922). The two books were published within a year of each other. And although their authors developed quite different fieldwork styles and visions of cultural science, both early texts provide explicit arguments for the special authority of the ethnographer-anthropologist.

Malinowski, as his notes for the crucial introduction to *Argonauts* show, was greatly concerned with the rhetorical problem of convincing his readers that the facts he was putting before them were objectively acquired, not subjective creations (Stocking 1983:105). Moreover, he was fully aware that "in Ethnography, the distance is often enormous between the brute material of information—as it is presented to the student in his own observations, in native statement, in the kaleidoscope of tribal life—and the final authoritative presentation of the results" (Malinowski 1922:3–4). Stocking has nicely analyzed the various literary artifices of *Argonauts* (its engaging narrative constructs, use of the active voice in the "ethnographic present," illusive dramatizations of the author's participation in scenes of Trobriand life), techniques Malinowski used so that "his own experience of the natives' experience [might] become the reader's experience as well" (Stocking 1983:106; see also Payne 1981, and Chapter 3). The problems of verification and accountability that had relegated Cushing to the professional margin were very much on Malinowski's mind. This anxiety is reflected in the mass of data contained in *Argonauts*, its sixty-six photographic plates, the now rather curious "Chronological List of Kula Events Witnessed by the Writer," the constant alternation between impersonal description of typical behavior and statements on the order of "I witnessed . . ." and "Our party, sailing from the North . . ."

Argonauts is a complex narrative simultaneously of Trobriand life and ethnographic fieldwork. It is archetypical of the generation of ethnographies that successfully established the scientific validity of participant observation. The story of research built into *Argonauts*, into Mead's popular work on Samoa, and into *We the Tikopia* became an implicit narrative underlying all professional reports on exotic worlds. If subsequent ethnographies did not need to include developed fieldwork accounts, it was because such accounts were assumed, once a statement was made on the order of, for example, Godfrey Lienhardt's single sentence at the beginning of *Divinity and Experience* (1961:vii): "This book is based upon two years' work among the Dinka, spread over the period of 1947–1950."

In the 1920s the new fieldworker-theorist brought to completion a

ethnography
vs.
anthropology
(see [?]
[?])

powerful new scientific and literary genre, the ethnography, a synthetic cultural description based on participant observation (Thornton 1983). The new style of representation depended on institutional and methodological innovations circumventing the obstacles to rapid knowledge of other cultures that had preoccupied the best representatives of Codrington's generation. These may be briefly summarized.

First, the persona of the fieldworker was validated, both publicly and professionally. In the popular domain, visible figures such as Malinowski, Mead, and Marcel Griaule communicated a vision of ethnography as both scientifically demanding and heroic. The professional ethnographer was trained in the latest analytic techniques and modes of scientific explanation. This conferred an advantage over amateurs in the field: the professional could claim to get to the heart of a culture more quickly, grasping its essential institutions and structures. A prescribed attitude of cultural relativism distinguished the fieldworker from missionaries, administrators, and others whose view of natives was, presumably, less dispassionate, who were preoccupied with the problems of government or conversion. In addition to scientific sophistication and relativist sympathy, a variety of normative standards for the new form of research emerged: the fieldworker was to live in the native village, use the vernacular, stay a sufficient (but seldom specified) length of time, investigate certain classic subjects, and so on.

Second, it was tacitly agreed that the new-style ethnographer, whose sojourn in the field seldom exceeded two years, and more frequently was much shorter, could efficiently "use" native languages without "mastering" them. In a significant article of 1939 Margaret Mead argued that the ethnographer following the Malinowskian prescription to avoid interpreters and to conduct research in the vernacular did not, in fact, need to attain "virtuosity" in native tongues, but could "use" the vernacular to ask questions, maintain rapport, and generally get along in the culture while obtaining good research results in particular areas of concentration. This in effect justified her own practice, which featured relatively short stays and a focus on specific domains such as childhood or "personality," foci that would function as "types" for a cultural synthesis. Her attitude toward language "use" was broadly characteristic of an ethnographic generation that could, for example, credit as authoritative a study called *The Nuer* that was based on only eleven months of very difficult research. Mead's article provoked a sharp response from Robert Lowie (1940), writing from the older Boasian tradition, more philological in its orientation. But his was a rear-guard action; the point had been

generally established that valid research could, in practice, be accomplished on the basis of one or two years' familiarity with a foreign vernacular (even though, as Lowie suggested, no one would credit a translation of Proust that was based on an equivalent knowledge of French).

Third, the new ethnography was marked by an increased emphasis on the power of observation. Culture was construed as an ensemble of characteristic behaviors, ceremonies, and gestures susceptible to recording and explanation by a trained onlooker. Mead pressed this point furthest (indeed, her own powers of visual analysis were extraordinary). As a general trend the participant-observer emerged as a research norm. Of course successful fieldwork mobilized the fullest possible range of interactions, but a distinct primacy was accorded to the visual: interpretation was tied to description. After Malinowski a general suspicion of "privileged informants" reflected this systematic preference for the (methodical) observations of the ethnographer over the (interested) interpretations of indigenous authorities.

Fourth, certain powerful theoretical abstractions promised to help academic ethnographers "get to the heart" of a culture more rapidly than someone undertaking, for example, a thorough inventory of customs and beliefs. Without spending years getting to know natives, their complex languages and habits, in intimate detail, the researcher could go after selected data that would yield a central armature or structure of the cultural whole. Rivers' "genealogical method," followed by Radcliffe-Brown's model of "social structure," provided this sort of shortcut. One could, it seemed, elicit kin terms without a deep understanding of local vernacular, and the range of necessary contextual knowledge was conveniently limited.

Fifth, since culture, seen as a complex whole, was always too much to master in a short research span, the new ethnographer intended to focus thematically on particular institutions. The aim was not to contribute to a complete inventory or description of custom but rather to get at the whole through one or more of its parts. I have noted the privilege given for a time to social structure. An individual life cycle, a ritual complex like the Kula ring or the Naven ceremony, could also serve, as could categories of behavior like economics, politics, and so on. In the predominantly synecdochic rhetorical stance of the new ethnography, parts were assumed to be microcosms or analogies of wholes. This setting of institutional foregrounds against cultural backgrounds in the portrayal of a coherent world lent itself to realist literary conventions.

Sixth, the wholes thus represented tended to be synchronic, prod-

ucts of short-term research activity. The intensive fieldworker could plausibly sketch the contours of an "ethnographic present"—the cycle of a year, a ritual series, patterns of typical behavior. To introduce long-term historical inquiry would have impossibly complicated the task of the new-style fieldwork. Thus, when Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown established their critique of the "conjectural history" of the diffusionists, it was all too easy to exclude diachronic processes as objects of fieldwork, with consequences that have by now been sufficiently denounced.



These innovations served to validate an efficient ethnography based on scientific participant observation. Their combined effect can be seen in what may well be the tour de force of the new ethnography, Evans-Pritchard's study *The Nuer*, published in 1940. Based on eleven months of research conducted—as the book's remarkable introduction tells us—in almost impossible conditions, Evans-Pritchard nonetheless was able to compose a classic. He arrived in Nuerland on the heels of a punitive military expedition and at the urgent request of the government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. He was the object of constant and intense suspicion. Only in the final few months could he converse at all effectively with informants, who, he tells us, were skilled at evading his questions. In the circumstances his monograph is a kind of miracle.

While advancing limited claims and making no secret of the constraints on his research, Evans-Pritchard manages to present his study as a demonstration of the effectiveness of theory. He focuses on Nuer political and social "structure," analyzed as an abstract set of relations between territorial segments, lineages, age sets, and other more fluid groups. This analytically derived ensemble is portrayed against an "ecological" backdrop composed of migratory patterns, relationships with cattle, notions of time and space. Evans-Pritchard sharply distinguishes his method from what he calls "haphazard" (Malinowskian) documentation. *The Nuer* is not an extensive compendium of observations and vernacular texts in the style of Malinowski's *Argonauts* and *Coral Gardens*. Evans-Pritchard argues rigorously that "facts can only be selected and arranged in the light of theory." The frank abstraction of a political-social structure offers the necessary framework. If I am accused of describing facts as exemplifications of my theory, he then goes on to note, I have been understood (1969:261).

In *The Nuer* Evans-Pritchard makes strong claims for the power of

scientific abstraction to focus research and arrange complex data. The book often presents itself as an argument rather than a description, but not consistently: its theoretical argument is surrounded by skillfully observed and narrated evocations and interpretations of Nuer life. These passages function rhetorically as more than simple "exemplification," for they effectively implicate readers in the complex subjectivity of participant observation. This may be seen in a characteristic paragraph, which progresses through a series of discontinuous discursive positions:

It is difficult to find an English word that adequately describes the social position of *dil* in a tribe. We have called them aristocrats, but do not wish to imply that Nuer regard them as of superior rank, for, as we have emphatically declared, the idea of a man lording it over others is repugnant to them. On the whole—we will qualify the statement later—the *dil* have prestige rather than rank and influence rather than power. If you are a *dil* of the tribe in which you live you are more than a simple tribesman. You are one of the owners of the country, its village sites, its pastures, its fishing pools and wells. Other people live there by virtue of marriage into your clan, adoption into your lineage, or of some other social tie. You are a leader of the tribe and the spear-name of your clan is invoked when the tribe goes to war. Whenever there is a *dil* in the village, the village clusters around him as a herd of cattle clusters around its bull. (1969:215)

The first three sentences are presented as an argument about translation, but in passing they attribute to "Nuer" a stable set of attitudes. (I will have more to say later about this style of attribution.) Next, in the four sentences beginning "If you are a *dil* . . .," the second-person construction brings together reader and native in a textual participation. The final sentence, offered as a direct description of a typical event (which the reader now assimilates from the standpoint of a participant-observer), evokes the scene by means of Nuer cattle metaphors. In the paragraph's eight sentences an argument about translation passes through a fiction of participation to a metaphorical fusion of external and indigenous cultural descriptions. The subjective joining of abstract analysis and concrete experience is accomplished.

Evans-Pritchard would later move away from the theoretical position of *The Nuer*, rejecting its advocacy of "social structure" as a privileged framework. Indeed each of the fieldwork "shortcuts" I enumerated earlier was and remains contested. Yet by their deployment in different combi-

nations, the authority of the academic fieldworker-theorist was established in the years between 1920 and 1950. This peculiar amalgam of intense personal experience and scientific analysis (understood in this period as both "rite of passage" and "laboratory") emerged as a method: participant observation. Though variously understood, and now disputed in many quarters, this method remains the chief distinguishing feature of professional anthropology. Its complex subjectivity is routinely reproduced in the writing and reading of ethnographies.



"Participant observation" serves as shorthand for a continuous tacking between the "inside" and "outside" of events: on the one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts. Particular events thus acquire deeper or more general significance, structural rules, and so forth. Understood literally, participant observation is a paradoxical, misleading formula, but it may be taken seriously if reformulated in hermeneutic terms as a dialectic of experience and interpretation. This is how the method's most persuasive recent defenders have restated it, in the tradition that leads from Wilhelm Dilthey, via Max Weber, to "symbols and meanings" anthropologists like Clifford Geertz. Experience and interpretation have, however, been accorded different emphases when presented as claims to authority. In recent years there has been a marked shift of emphasis from the former to the latter. This section and the one that follows will explore the rather different claims of experience and interpretation as well as their evolving interrelation.

The growing prestige of the fieldworker-theorist downplayed (without eliminating) a number of processes and mediators that had figured more prominently in previous methods. We have seen how language mastery was defined as a level of use adequate for amassing a discrete body of data in a limited period of time. The tasks of textual transcription and translation, along with the crucial dialogical role of interpreters and "privileged informants," were relegated to a secondary, sometimes even despised status. Fieldwork was centered in the *experience* of the participant-observing scholar. A sharp image, or narrative, made its appearance—that of an outsider entering a culture, undergoing a kind of initiation leading to "rapport" (minimally acceptance and empathy, but usually implying something akin to friendship). Out of this experience

emerged, in unspecified ways, a representational text written by the participant-observer. As we shall see, this version of textual production obscures as much as it reveals. But it is worth taking seriously its principal assumption: that the experience of the researcher can serve as a unifying source of authority in the field.

Experiential authority is based on a "feel" for the foreign context, a kind of accumulated savvy and a sense of the style of a people or place. Such an appeal is frequently explicit in the texts of the early professional participant-observers. Margaret Mead's claim to grasp the underlying principle or ethos of a culture through a heightened sensitivity to form, tone, gesture, and behavioral styles, and Malinowski's stress on his life *in* the village and the comprehension derived from the "imponderabilia" of daily existence, are prominent cases in point. Many ethnographies—Colin Turnbull's *Forest People* (1962), for example—are still cast in the experiential mode, asserting prior to any specific research hypothesis or method the "I was there" of the ethnographer as insider and participant.

Of course it is difficult to say very much about experience. Like "intuition," it is something that one does or does not have, and its invocation often smacks of mystification. Nevertheless, one should resist the temptation to translate all meaningful experience into interpretation. If the two are reciprocally related, they are not identical. It makes sense to hold them apart, if only because appeals to experience often act as validations for ethnographic authority.

The most serious argument for the role of experience in the historical and cultural sciences is contained in the general notion of *Verstehen*.⁶ In the influential view of Dilthey (1914) understanding others arises initially from the sheer fact of coexistence in a shared world; but this experiential world, an intersubjective ground for objective forms of knowledge, is precisely what is missing or problematic for an ethnographer entering an alien culture. Thus, during the early months in the field (and indeed throughout the research), what is going on is language learning in the broadest sense. Dilthey's "common sphere" must be established and re-established, building up a shared experiential world in relation to which all "facts," "texts," "events," and their interpretations will be constructed.

6. The concept is sometimes too readily associated with intuition or empathy, but as a description of ethnographic knowledge *Verstehen* properly involves a critique of empathetic experience. The exact meaning of the term is a matter of debate among Dilthey scholars (Makreel 1975: 6–7).

Culture = one's experience of universe

Analysis
of experience
of universe

This process of living one's way into an alien expressive universe is always subjective in nature, but it quickly becomes dependent on what Dilthey calls "permanently fixed expressions," stable forms to which understanding can return. The exegesis of these fixed forms provides the content of all systematic historical-cultural knowledge. Thus experience is closely linked to interpretation. (Dilthey is among the first modern theorists to compare the understanding of cultural forms to the reading of "texts.") But this sort of reading or exegesis cannot occur without an intense personal participation, an active at-homeness in a common universe.

Following Dilthey, ethnographic "experience" can be seen as the building up of a common, meaningful world, drawing on intuitive styles of feeling, perception, and guesswork. This activity makes use of clues, traces, gestures, and scraps of sense prior to the development of stable interpretations. Such piecemeal forms of experience may be classified as aesthetic and/or divinatory. There is space here for only a few words about such styles of comprehension as they relate to ethnography. An evocation of an aesthetic mode is conveniently provided by A. L. Kroeber's 1931 review of Mead's *Growing Up in New Guinea*.

First of all, it is clear that she possesses to an outstanding degree the faculties of swiftly apperceiving the principal currents of a culture as they impinge on individuals, and of delineating these with compact pen-pictures of astonishing sharpness. The result is a representation of quite extraordinary vividness and semblance to life. Obviously, a gift of intellectualized but strong sensationalism underlies this capacity; also, obviously, a high order of intuitiveness, in the sense of the ability to complete a convincing picture from clues, for clues is all that some of her data can be, with only six months to learn a language and enter the inwards of a whole culture, besides specializing on child behavior. At any rate, the picture, so far as it goes, is wholly convincing to the reviewer, who unreservedly admires the sureness of insight and efficiency of stroke of the depiction. (p. 248)

A different formulation is provided by Maurice Leenhardt in *Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World* (1937), a book that in its sometimes cryptic mode of exposition requires of its readers just the sort of aesthetic, gestaltist perception at which both Mead and Leenhardt excelled. Leenhardt's endorsement of this approach is significant since, given his extremely long field experience and profound cultivation of a

Melanesian language, his "method" cannot be seen as a rationalization for short-term ethnography: "In reality, our contact with another is not accomplished through analysis. Rather, we apprehend him in his entirety. From the outset, we can sketch our view of him using an outline or symbolic detail which contains a whole in itself and evokes the true form of his being. This latter is what escapes us if we approach our fellow creature using only the categories of our intellect" (p. 2).

Another way of taking experience seriously as a source of ethnographic knowledge is provided by Carlo Ginzburg's investigations (1980) into the complex tradition of divination. His research ranges from early hunters' interpretations of animal tracks, to Mesopotamian forms of prediction, to the deciphering of symptoms in Hippocratic medicine, to the focus on details in detecting art forgeries, to Freud, Sherlock Holmes, and Proust. These styles of noncstatic divination apprehend specific circumstantial relations of meaning and are based on guesses, on the reading of apparently disparate clues and "chance" occurrences. Ginzburg proposes his model of "conjectural knowledge" as a disciplined, non-generalizing, abductive mode of comprehension that is of central, though unrecognized, importance for the cultural sciences. It may be added to a rather meager stock of resources for understanding rigorously how one feels one's way into an unfamiliar ethnographic situation.

Precisely because it is hard to pin down, "experience" has served as an effective guarantee of ethnographic authority. There is, of course, a telling ambiguity in the term. Experience evokes a participatory presence, a sensitive contact with the world to be understood, a rapport with its people, a concreteness of perception. It also suggests a cumulative, deepening knowledge ("her ten years' experience of New Guinea"). The senses work together to authorize an ethnographer's real but ineffable feel or flair for "his" or "her" people. It is worth noting, however, that this "world," when conceived as an experiential creation, is subjective, not dialogical or intersubjective. The ethnographer accumulates personal knowledge of the field (the possessive form *my people* has until recently been familiarly used in anthropological circles, but the phrase in effect signifies "my experience").



It is understandable, given their vagueness, that experiential criteria of authority—unexamined beliefs in the "method" of participant observation, in the power of rapport, empathy, and so on—have come under

(2) criticism by hermeneutically sophisticated anthropologists. The second moment in the dialectic of experience and interpretation has received increasing attention and elaboration (see, for example, Geertz 1973, 1976; Rabinow and Sullivan 1979; Winner 1976; Sperber 1981). Interpretation, based on a philological model of textual "reading," has emerged as a sophisticated alternative to the now apparently naive claims for experiential authority. Interpretive anthropology demystifies much of what had previously passed unexamined in the construction of ethnographic narratives, types, observations, and descriptions. It contributes to an increasing visibility of the creative (and in a broad sense poetic) processes by which "cultural" objects are invented and treated as meaningful.

What is involved in looking at culture as an assemblage of texts to be interpreted? A classic account has been provided by Paul Ricoeur, in his essay "The Model of Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text" (1971). Clifford Geertz in a number of stimulating and subtle discussions has adapted Ricoeur's theory to anthropological fieldwork (1973: chap. 1). "Textualization" is understood as a prerequisite to interpretation, the constitution of Dilthey's "fixed expressions." It is the process through which unwritten behavior, speech, beliefs, oral tradition, and ritual come to be marked as a corpus, a potentially meaningful ensemble separated out from an immediate discursive or performative situation. In the moment of textualization this meaningful corpus assumes a more or less stable relation to a context; and we are familiar with the end result of this process in much of what counts as ethnographic thick description. For example, we say that a certain institution or segment of behavior is typical of, or a communicative element within, a surrounding culture, as when Geertz's famous cockfight (1973: chap. 15) becomes an intensely significant locus of Balinese culture. Fields of synecdoches are created in which parts are related to wholes, and by which the whole—what we often call culture—is constituted.

Ricoeur does not actually privilege part-whole relations and the specific sorts of analogies that constitute functionalist or realist representations. He merely posits a necessary relation between text and "world." A world cannot be apprehended directly; it is always inferred on the basis of its parts, and the parts must be conceptually and perceptually cut out of the flux of experience. Thus, textualization generates sense through a circular movement that isolates and then contextualizes a fact or event in its englobing reality. A familiar mode of authority is generated that

how to read and analyze textually

discourse / discursivity

claims to represent discrete, meaningful worlds. Ethnography is the interpretation of cultures.

A second key step in Ricoeur's analysis is his account of the process by which "discourse" becomes text. Discourse, in Emile Benveniste's classic discussion (1971:217-230), is a mode of communication in which the presence of the speaking subject and of the immediate situation of communication are intrinsic. Discourse is marked by pronouns (pronounced or implied) *I* and *you*, and by deictic indicators—*this*, *that*, *now*, and so on—that signal the present instance of discourse rather than something beyond it. Discourse does not transcend the specific occasion in which a subject appropriates the resources of language in order to communicate dialogically. Ricoeur argues that discourse cannot be interpreted in the open-ended, potentially public way in which a text is "read." To understand discourse "you had to have been there," in the presence of the discoursing subject. For discourse to become text it must become "autonomous," in Ricoeur's terms, separated from a specific utterance and authorial intention. Interpretation is not interlocution. It does not depend on being in the presence of a speaker.

The relevance of this distinction for ethnography is perhaps too obvious. The ethnographer always ultimately departs, taking away texts for later interpretation (and among those "texts" taken away we can include memories—events patterned, simplified, stripped of immediate context in order to be interpreted in later reconstruction and portrayal). The text, unlike discourse, can travel. If much ethnographic writing is produced in the field, actual composition of an ethnography is done elsewhere. Data constituted in discursive, dialogical conditions are appropriated only in textualized forms. Research events and encounters become field notes. Experiences become narratives, meaningful occurrences, or examples.

This translation of the research experience into a textual corpus separate from its discursive occasions of production has important consequences for ethnographic authority. The data thus reformulated need no longer be understood as the communication of specific persons. An informant's explanation or description of custom need not be cast in a form that includes the message "so and so said this." A textualized ritual or event is no longer closely linked to the production of that event by specific actors. Instead these texts become evidences of an englobing context, a "cultural" reality. Moreover, as specific authors and actors are severed from their productions, a generalized "author" must be invented to account for the world or context within which the texts are fictionally

discourse

from discourse to text

The ethnographer systematizes, makes coherent, integrates

relocated. This generalized author goes under a variety of names: the native point of view, "the Trobrianders," "the Nuer," "the Dogon," as these and similar phrases appear in ethnographies. "The Balinese" function as author of Geertz's textualized cockfight.

The ethnographer thus enjoys a special relationship with a cultural origin or "absolute subject" (Michel-Jones 1978:14). It is tempting to compare the ethnographer with the literary interpreter (and this comparison is increasingly commonplace)—but more specifically with the traditional critic, who sees the task at hand as locating the unruly meanings of a text in a single coherent intention. By representing the Nuer, the Trobrianders, or the Balinese as whole subjects, sources of a meaningful intention, the ethnographer transforms the research situation's ambiguities and diversities of meaning into an integrated portrait. It is important, though, to notice what has dropped out of sight. The research process is separated from the texts it generates and from the fictive world they are made to call up. The actuality of discursive situations and individual interlocutors is filtered out. But informants—along with field notes—are crucial intermediaries, typically excluded from authoritative ethnographies. The dialogical, situational aspects of ethnographic interpretation tend to be banished from the final representative text. Not entirely banished, of course; there exist approved *topoi* for the portrayal of the research process.

words: images of omniscience

We are increasingly familiar with the separate fieldwork account (a subgenre that still tends to be classified as subjective, "soft," or unscientific), but even within classic ethnographies, more-or-less stereotypic "fables of rapport" narrate the attainment of full participant-observer status. These fables may be told elaborately or in passing, naively or ironically. They normally portray the ethnographer's early ignorance, misunderstanding, lack of contact—frequently a sort of childlike status within the culture. In the *Bildungsgeschichte* of the ethnography these states of innocence or confusion are replaced by adult, confident, disabused knowledge. We may cite again Geertz's cockfight, where an early alienation from the Balinese, a confused "nonperson" status, is transformed by the appealing fable of the police raid with its show of complicity (1973:412–417). The anecdote establishes a presumption of connectedness, which permits the writer to function in his subsequent analyses as an omnipresent, knowledgeable exegete and spokesman. This interpreter situates the ritual sport as a text in a contextual world and brilliantly "reads" its cultural meanings. Geertz's abrupt disappearance

The tools of the ethnographer: Geertz's self-effacement

words: images

into his rapport—the quasi-invisibility of participant observation—is paradigmatic. Here he makes use of an established convention for staging the attainment of ethnographic authority. As a result, we are seldom made aware of the fact that an essential part of the cockfight's construction as a text is dialogical—the author's talking face to face with particular Balinese rather than reading culture "over the[ir] shoulders" (1973:452).



Interpretive anthropology, by viewing cultures as assemblages of texts, loosely and sometimes contradictorily united, and by highlighting the inventive poesis at work in all collective representations, has contributed significantly to the defamiliarization of ethnographic authority. In its mainstream realist strands, however, it does not escape the general strictures of those critics of "colonial" representation who, since 1950, have rejected discourses that portray the cultural realities of other peoples without placing their own reality in jeopardy. In Michel Leiris' early critiques, by way of Jacques Maquet, Talal Asad, and many others, the unreciprocal quality of ethnographic interpretation has been called to account (Leiris 1950; Maquet 1964; Asad 1973). Henceforth neither the experience nor the interpretive activity of the scientific researcher can be considered innocent. It becomes necessary to conceive of ethnography not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed "other" reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects. Paradigms of experience and interpretation are yielding to discursive paradigms of dialogue and polyphony. The remaining sections of this chapter will survey these emergent modes of authority.

A discursive model of ethnographic practice brings into prominence the intersubjectivity of all speech, along with its immediate performative context. Benveniste's work on the constitutive role of personal pronouns and deixis highlights just these dimensions. Every use of *I* presupposes a *you*, and every instance of discourse is immediately linked to a specific, shared situation: no discursive meaning, then, without interlocution and context. The relevance of this emphasis for ethnography is evident. Fieldwork is significantly composed of language events; but language, in Bakhtin's words, "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's." The Russian critic urges a rethinking of language in terms of specific discursive situations: "There

are," he writes, "no 'neutral' words and forms—words and forms that can belong to 'no one'; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents." The words of ethnographic writing, then, cannot be construed as monological, as the authoritative statement about, or interpretation of, an abstracted, textualized reality. The language of ethnography is shot through with other subjectivities and specific contextual overtones, for all language, in Bakhtin's view, is "a concrete heteroglot conception of the world" (1953:293).

Forms of ethnographic writing that present themselves in a "discursive" mode tend to be concerned with the representation of research contexts and situations of interlocution. Thus a book like Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977) is concerned with the representation of a specific research situation (a series of constraining times and places) and (in somewhat fictionalized form) a sequence of individual interlocutors. Indeed an entire new subgenre of "fieldwork accounts" (of which Rabinow's is one of the most trenchant) may be situated within the discursive paradigm of ethnographic writing. Jeanne Favret-Saada's *Les mots, la mort, les sorts* (1977) is an insistent, self-conscious experiment with ethnography in a discursive mode.⁷ She argues that the event of interlocution always assigns to the ethnographer a specific position in a web of intersubjective relations. There is no neutral standpoint in the power-laden field of discursive positionings, in a shifting matrix of relationships, of *I's* and *you's*.

A number of recent works have chosen to present the discursive processes of ethnography in the form of a dialogue between two individuals. Camille Lacoste-Dujardin's *Dialogue des femmes en ethnologie* (1977), Jean-Paul Dumont's *The Headman and I* (1978), and Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (1981) are noteworthy examples. The dialogical mode is advocated with considerable sophistication in two other texts. The first, Kevin Dwyer's theoretical reflections on the "dialogic of ethnology" springs from a series of interviews with a key informant and justifies Dwyer's decision to structure his ethnography in the form of a rather literal record of these exchanges (1977, 1979, 1982). The second work is Vincent Crapanzano's more complex *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*, another account of a series of interviews

7. Favret-Saada's book is translated as *Deadly Words* (1981); see esp. chap. 2. Her experience has been rewritten at another fictional level in Favret-Saada and Contreras 1981.

that rejects any sharp separation of an interpreting self from a textualized other (1980; see also 1977). Both Dwyer and Crapanzano locate ethnography in a process of dialogue where interlocutors actively negotiate a shared vision of reality. Crapanzano argues that this mutual construction must be at work in any ethnographic encounter, but that participants tend to assume that they have simply acquiesced to the reality of their counterpart. Thus, for example, the ethnographer of the Trobriand Islanders does not openly concoct a version of reality in collaboration with his informants but rather interprets the "Trobriand point of view." Crapanzano and Dwyer offer sophisticated attempts to break with this literary-hermeneutical convention. In the process the ethnographer's authority as narrator and interpreter is altered. Dwyer proposes a hermeneutics of "vulnerability," stressing the ruptures of fieldwork, the divided position and imperfect control of the ethnographer. Both Crapanzano and Dwyer seek to represent the research experience in ways that tear open the textualized fabric of the other, and thus also of the interpreting self.⁸ (Here etymologies are evocative: the word *text* is related, as is well known, to weaving, *vulnerability* to rending or wounding, in this instance the opening up of a closed authority.)

The model of dialogue brings to prominence precisely those discursive—circumstantial and intersubjective—elements that Ricoeur had to exclude from his model of the text. But if interpretive authority is based on the exclusion of dialogue, the reverse is also true: a purely dialogical authority would repress the inescapable fact of textualization. While ethnographies cast as encounters between two individuals may successfully dramatize the intersubjective give-and-take of fieldwork and introduce a counterpoint of authorial voices, they remain *representations* of dialogue. As texts they may not be dialogical in structure, for as Steven Tyler (1981) points out, although Socrates appears as a decentered participant in his encounters, Plato retains full control of the dialogue. This displacement but not elimination of monological authority is characteristic of any

8. It would be wrong to gloss over the differences between Dwyer's and Crapanzano's theoretical positions. Dwyer, following Georg Lukács, translates dialogic into Marxian-Hegelian dialectic, thus holding out the possibility of a restoration of the human subject, a kind of completion in and through the other. Crapanzano refuses any anchor in an englobing theory, his only authority being that of the dialogue's writer, an authority undermined by an inconclusive narrative of encounter, rupture, and confusion. (It is worth noting that dialogic, as used by Bakhtin, is not reducible to dialectic.) For an early advocacy of dialogical anthropology see also Tedlock 1979.

approach that portrays the ethnographer as a discrete character in the fieldwork narrative. Moreover, there is a frequent tendency in fictions of dialogue for the ethnographer's counterpart to appear as a representative of his or her culture—a type, in the language of traditional realism—through which general social processes are revealed.⁹ Such a portrayal reinstates the synecdochic interpretive authority by which the ethnographer reads text in relation to context, thereby constituting a meaningful “other” world. If it is difficult for dialogical portrayals to escape typifying procedures, they can, to a significant degree, resist the pull toward authoritative representation of the other. This depends on their ability fictionally to maintain the strangeness of the other voice and to hold in view the specific contingencies of the exchange.



To say that an ethnography is composed of discourses and that its different components are dialogically related is not to say that its textual form should be that of a literal dialogue. Indeed as Crapanzano recognizes in *Tuhami*, a third participant, real or imagined, must function as mediator in any encounter between two individuals (1980:147–151). The fictional dialogue is in fact a condensation, a simplified representation of complex multivocal processes. An alternative way of representing this discursive complexity is to understand the overall course of the research as an ongoing negotiation. The case of Marcel Griaule and the Dogon is well known and particularly clear-cut. Griaule's account of his instruction in Dogon cosmological wisdom, *Dieu d'eau* (1948a), was an early exercise in dialogical ethnographic narration. Beyond this specific interlocutory occasion, however, a more complex process was at work, for it is apparent that the content and timing of the Griaule team's long-term research, spanning decades, was closely monitored and significantly shaped by Dogon tribal authorities (see my discussion in Chapter 2). This is no longer news. Many ethnographers have commented on the ways, both subtle and blatant, in which their research was directed or circumscribed by their informants. In his provocative discus-

9. On realist “types” see Lukács 1964, *passim*. The tendency to transform an individual into a cultural enunciator may be observed in Marcel Griaule's *Dieu d'eau* (1948a). It occurs ambivalently in Shostak's *Nisa* (1981). For a discussion of this ambivalence and of the book's resulting discursive complexity see Clifford 1986b:103–109.

sion of this issue Ioan Lewis (1973) even calls anthropology a form of “plagiarism.”

The give-and-take of ethnography is clearly portrayed in a 1980 study noteworthy for its presentation within a single work of both an interpreted other reality and the research process itself: Renato Rosaldo's *Ilongot Headhunting*. Rosaldo arrives in the Philippine highlands intent on writing a synchronic study of social structure; but again and again, over his objections, he is forced to listen to endless Ilongot narratives of local history. Dutifully, dumbly, in a kind of bored trance he transcribes these stories, filling notebook after notebook with what he considers disposable texts. Only after leaving the field, and after a long process of reinterpretation (a process made manifest in the ethnography), does he realize that these obscure tales have in fact provided him with his final topic, the culturally distinctive Ilongot sense of narrative and history. Rosaldo's experience of what might be called “directed writing” sharply poses a fundamental question: Who is actually the author of field notes?

The issue is a subtle one and deserves systematic study. But enough has been said to make the general point that indigenous control over knowledge gained in the field can be considerable, and even determining. Current ethnographic writing is seeking new ways to represent adequately the authority of informants. There are few models to look to, but it is worth reconsidering the older textual compilations of Boas, Malinowski, Leenhardt, and others. In these works the ethnographic genre has not coalesced around the modern interpretational monograph closely identified with a personal fieldwork experience. We can contemplate an ethnographic mode that is not yet authoritative in those specific ways that are now politically and epistemologically in question. These older assemblages include much that is actually or all but written by informants. One thinks of the role of George Hunt in Boas' ethnography, or of the fifteen “transcripteurs” listed in Leenhardt's *Documents néo-calédoniens* (1932).¹⁰

Malinowski is a complex transitional case. His ethnographies reflect

10. For a study of this mode of textual production see Clifford 1980a. See also in this context Fontana 1975, the introduction to Frank Russell, *The Pima Indians*, on the book's hidden coauthor, the Papago Indian José Lewis; Leiris 1948 discusses collaboration as coauthorship, as does Lewis 1973. For a forward-looking defense of Boas' emphasis on vernacular texts and his collaboration with Hunt see Goldman 1980.

the incomplete coalescence of the modern monograph. If he was centrally responsible for the welding of theory and description into the authority of the professional fieldworker, Malinowski nonetheless included material that did not directly support his own all-too-clear interpretive slant. In the many dictated myths and spells that fill his books, he published much data that he admittedly did not understand. The result was an open text subject to multiple reinterpretations. It is worth comparing such older compendiums with the recent model ethnography, which cites evidence to support a focused interpretation but little else.¹¹ In the modern, authoritative monograph there are, in effect, no strong voices present except that of the writer; but in *Argonauts* (1922) and *Coral Gardens* (1935) we read page after page of magical spells, none in any essential sense in the ethnographer's words. These dictated texts in all but their physical inscription are written by specific unnamed Trobrianders. Indeed any continuous ethnographic exposition routinely folds into itself a diversity of descriptions, transcriptions, and interpretations by a variety of indigenous "authors." How should these authorial presences be made manifest?



A useful—if extreme—standpoint is provided by Bakhtin's analysis of the "polyphonic" novel. A fundamental condition of the genre, he argues, is that it represents speaking subjects in a field of multiple discourses. The novel grapples with, and enacts, heteroglossia. For Bakhtin, preoccupied with the representation of nonhomogeneous wholes, there are no integrated cultural worlds or languages. All attempts to posit such abstract unities are constructs of monological power. A "culture" is, concretely, an open-ended, creative dialogue of subcultures, of insiders and outsiders, of diverse factions. A "language" is the interplay and struggle of regional dialects, professional jargons, generic commonplaces, the speech of different age groups, individuals, and so forth. For Bakhtin the polyphonic novel is not a tour de force of cultural or historical totalization (as realist critics such as Georg Lukács and Erich Auerbach have argued) but rather a carnivalesque arena of diversity. Bakhtin discovers a utopian tex-

11. James Fernandez' elaborate *Bwiti* (1985) is a self-conscious transgression of the tight, monographic form, returning to Malinowskian scale and reviving ethnography's "archival" functions.

tual space where discursive complexity, the dialogical interplay of voices, can be accommodated. In the novels of Dostoyevsky or Dickens he values precisely their resistance to totality, and his ideal novelist is a ventriloquist—in nineteenth-century parlance a "polyphonist." "He do the police in different voices," a listener exclaims admiringly of the boy Sloppy, who reads publicly from the newspaper in *Our Mutual Friend*. But Dickens the actor, oral performer, and polyphonist must be set against Flaubert, the master of authorial control, moving godlike among the thoughts and feelings of his characters. Ethnography, like the novel, wrestles with these alternatives. Does the ethnographic writer portray what natives think by means of Flaubertian "free indirect style," a style that suppresses direct quotation in favor of a controlling discourse always more or less that of the author? (Dan Sperber 1981, taking Evans-Pritchard as his example, has convincingly shown that *style indirect* is indeed the preferred mode of ethnographic interpretation.) Or does the portrayal of other subjectivities require a version that is stylistically less homogeneous, filled with Dickens' "different voices"?

Some use of indirect style is inevitable, unless the novel or ethnography is composed entirely of quotations, something that is theoretically possible but seldom attempted.¹² In practice, however, the ethnography and the novel have recourse to indirect style at different levels of abstraction. We need not ask how Flaubert knows what Emma Bovary is thinking, but the ability of the fieldworker to inhabit indigenous minds is always in doubt. Indeed this is a permanent, unresolved problem of ethnographic method. Ethnographers have generally refrained from ascribing beliefs, feelings, and thoughts to individuals. They have not, however, hesitated to ascribe subjective states to cultures. Sperber's analysis reveals how phrases such as "the Nuer think . . ." or "the Nuer sense of time" are fundamentally different from quotations or translations of indigenous discourse. Such statements are "without any specified speaker" and are literally equivocal, combining in a seamless way the ethnographer's affirmations with that of an informant or informants (1981:78). Ethnographies abound in unattributed sentences such as "The spirits re-

12. Such a project is announced by Evans-Pritchard in his introduction to *Man and Woman among the Azande* (1974), a late work that may be seen as a reaction against the closed, analytical nature of his own earlier ethnographies. His acknowledged inspiration is Malinowski. (The notion of a book entirely composed of quotations is a modernist dream associated with Walter Benjamin.)

turn to the village at night," descriptions of beliefs in which the writer assumes in effect the voice of culture.

At this "cultural" level ethnographers aspire to a Flaubertian omniscience that moves freely throughout a world of indigenous subjects. Beneath the surface, though, their texts are more unruly and discordant. Victor Turner's work provides a telling case in point, worth investigating more closely as an example of the interplay of monophonic and polyphonic exposition. Turner's ethnographies offer superbly complex portrayals of Ndembu ritual symbols and beliefs; and he has provided too an unusually explicit glimpse behind the scenes. In the midst of the essays collected in *The Forest of Symbols*, his third book on the Ndembu, Turner offers a portrait of his best informant, "Muchona the Hornet, Interpreter of Religion" (1967:131–150). Muchona, a ritual healer, and Turner are drawn together by their shared interest in traditional symbols, etymologies, and esoteric meanings. They are both "intellectuals," passionate interpreters of the nuances and depths of custom; both are uprooted scholars sharing "the quenchless thirst for objective knowledge." Turner compares Muchona to a university don; his account of their collaboration includes more than passing hints of a strong psychological doubling.

There is, however, a third present in their dialogue, Windson Kashinakaji, a Ndembu senior teacher at the local mission school. He brought Muchona and Turner together and shares their passion for the interpretation of customary religion. Through his biblical education he "acquired a flair for elucidating knotty questions." Newly skeptical of Christian dogma and missionary privileges, he is looking sympathetically at pagan religion. Kashinakaji, Turner tells us, "spanned the cultural distance between Muchona and myself, transforming the little doctor's technical jargon and salty village argot into a prose I could better grasp." The three intellectuals soon "settled down into a sort of daily seminar on religion." Turner's accounts of this seminar are stylized: "eight months of exhilarating quickfire talk among the three of us, mainly about Ndembu ritual." They reveal an extraordinary ethnographic "colloquy"; but significantly Turner does not make his three-way collaboration the crux of his essay. Rather he focuses on Muchona, thus transforming triologue into dialogue and flattening a complex productive relation into the "portrait" of an "informant." (This reduction was in some degree required by the format of the book in which the essay first appeared, Joseph Casagrande's impor-

tant 1960 collection of "Twenty Portraits of Anthropological Informants," *In the Company of Man*.)¹³

Turner's published works vary considerably in their discursive structure. Some are composed largely of direct quotations; in at least one essay Muchona is identified as the principal source of the overall interpretation; elsewhere he is invoked anonymously, for example as "a male ritual specialist" (1975:40–42, 87, 154–156, 244). Windson Kashinakaji is identified as an assistant and translator rather than as a source of interpretations. Overall, Turner's ethnographies are unusually polyphonic, openly built up from quotations ("According to an adept . . ." or "One informant guesses . . ."). He does not, however, do the Ndembu in different voices, and we hear little "salty village argot." All the voices of the field have been smoothed into the expository prose of more-or-less interchangeable "informants." The staging of indigenous speech in an ethnography, the degree of translation and familiarization necessary, are complicated practical and rhetorical problems.¹⁴ But Turner's works, by giving visible place to indigenous interpretations of custom, expose concretely these issues of textual dialogism and polyphony.

The inclusion of Turner's portrait of Muchona in *The Forest of Symbols* may be seen as a sign of the times. The Casagrande collection in which it originally appeared had the effect of segregating the crucial issue of relations between ethnographers and their indigenous collaborators. Discussion of these issues still had no place within scientific ethnographies, but Casagrande's collection shook the post-Malinowski professional taboo on "privileged informants." Raymond Firth on Pa Fenuatara, Robert Lowie on Jim Carpenter—a long list of distinguished anthropologists have described the indigenous "ethnographers" with whom they shared, to some degree, a distanced, analytic, even ironic view of custom. These individuals became valued informants because they understood, often with real subtlety, what an *ethnographic* attitude toward culture entailed. In Lowie's quotation of his Crow interpreter (and fellow "philologist") Jim Carpenter, one senses a shared outlook: "When you

13. For a "group dynamics" approach to ethnography see Yannopoulos and Martin 1978. For an ethnography explicitly based on native "seminars" see Jones and Konner 1976.

14. Favret-Saada's use of dialect and italic type in *Les mots, la mort, les sorts* (1977) is one solution among many to a problem that has long preoccupied realist novelists.

listen to the old men telling about their visions, you've just got to believe them" (Casagrande 1960:428). And there is considerably more than a wink and a nod in the story recounted by Firth about his best Tikopian friend and informant:

On another occasion talk turned to the nets set for salmon trout in the lake. The nets were becoming black, possibly with some organic growth, and tended to rot easily. Pa Fenuatara then told a story to the crowd assembled in the house about how, out on the lake with his nets one time, he felt a spirit going among the net and making it soft. When he held the net up he found it slimy. The spirit had been at work. I asked him then if this was a traditional piece of knowledge that spirits were responsible for the deterioration of the nets. He answered, "No, my own thought." Then he added with a laugh, "My own piece of traditional knowledge." (Casagrande 1960:17-18)

The full methodological impact of Casagrande's collection remains latent, especially the significance of its accounts for the dialogical production of ethnographic texts and interpretations. This significance is obscured by a tendency to cast the book as a universalizing, humanist document revealing "a hall of mirrors . . . in full variety the endless reflected image of man" (Casagrande 1960: xii). In light of the present crisis in ethnographic authority, however, these revealing portraits spill into the oeuvres of their authors, altering the way they can be read. If ethnography is part of what Roy Wagner (1980) calls "the invention of culture," its activity is plural and beyond the control of any individual.



One increasingly common way to manifest the collaborative production of ethnographic knowledge is to quote regularly and at length from informants. (A striking example is *We Eat the Mines, the Mines Eat Us* [1979] by June Nash.) But such a tactic only begins to break up monophonic authority. Quotations are always staged by the quoter and tend to serve merely as examples or confirming testimonies. Looking beyond quotation, one might imagine a more radical polyphony that would "do the natives and the ethnographer in different voices"; but this too would only displace ethnographic authority, still confirming the final virtuoso orchestration by a single author of all the discourses in his or her text. In this sense Bakhtin's polyphony, too narrowly identified with the novel, is a domesticated heteroglossia. Ethnographic discourses are not, in any

event, the speeches of invented characters. Informants are specific individuals with real proper names—names that can be cited, in altered form when tact requires. Informants' intentions are overdetermined, their words politically and metaphorically complex. If accorded an autonomous textual space, transcribed at sufficient length, indigenous statements make sense in terms different from those of the arranging ethnographer. Ethnography is invaded by heteroglossia.

This possibility suggests an alternate textual strategy, a utopia of plural authorship that accords to collaborators not merely the status of independent enunciators but that of writers. As a form of authority it must still be considered utopian for two reasons. First, the few recent experiments with multiple-author works appear to require, as an instigating force, the research interest of an ethnographer who in the end assumes an executive, editorial position. The authoritative stance of "giving voice" to the other is not fully transcended. Second, the very idea of plural authorship challenges a deep Western identification of any text's order with the intention of a single author. If this identification was less strong when Lafitau wrote his *Moeurs des sauvages américains*, and if recent criticism has thrown it into question, it is still a potent constraint on ethnographic writing. Nonetheless, there are signs of movement in this domain. Anthropologists will increasingly have to share their texts, and sometimes their title pages, with those indigenous collaborators for whom the term *informants* is no longer adequate, if it ever was.

Ralph Bulmer and Ian Majnep's *Birds of My Kalam Country* (1977) is an important prototype. (Separate typefaces distinguish the juxtaposed contributions of ethnographer and New Guinean, collaborators for more than a decade.) Even more significant is the collectively produced 1974 study *Piman Shamanism and Staying Sickness (Ka:cim Mumkidag)*, which lists on its title page, without distinction (though not, it may be noted, in alphabetical order): Donald M. Bahr, anthropologist; Juan Gregorio, shaman; David I. Lopez, interpreter; and Albert Alvarez, editor. Three of the four are Papago Indians, and the book is consciously designed "to transfer to a shaman as many as possible of the functions normally associated with authorship. These include the selection of an expository style, the duty to make interpretations and explanations, and the right to judge which things are important and which are not" (p. 7). Bahr, the initiator and organizer of the project, opts to share authority as much as possible. Gregorio, the shaman, appears as the principal source of the "theory of disease" that is transcribed and translated, at two separate

levels, by Lopez and Alvarez. Gregorio's vernacular texts include compressed, often gnomic explanations, which are themselves interpreted and contextualized by Bahr's separate commentary. The book is unusual in its textual enactment of the interpretation of interpretations.

In *Piman Shamanism* the transition from individual enunciations to cultural generalizations is always visible in the separation of Gregorio's and Bahr's voices. The authority of Lopez, less visible, is akin to that of Windson Kashinakaji in Turner's work. His bilingual fluency guides Bahr through the subtleties of Gregorio's language, thus permitting the shaman "to speak at length on theoretical topics." Neither Lopez nor Alvarez appears as a specific voice in the text, and their contribution to the ethnography remains largely invisible to all but qualified Papagos, able to gauge the accuracy of the translated texts and the vernacular nuance of Bahr's interpretations. Alvarez' authority inheres in the fact that *Piman Shamanism* is a book directed at separate audiences. For most readers focusing on the translations and explanations the texts printed in Piman will be of little or no interest. The linguist Alvarez, however, corrected the transcriptions and translations with an eye to their use in language teaching, using an orthography he had developed for that purpose. Thus the book contributes to the Papagos' literary invention of their culture. This different reading, built into *Piman Shamanism*, is of more than local significance.

It is intrinsic to the breakup of monological authority that ethnographies no longer address a single general type of reader. The multiplication of possible readings reflects the fact that "ethnographic" consciousness can no longer be seen as the monopoly of certain Western cultures and social classes. Even in ethnographies lacking vernacular texts, indigent readers will decode differently the textualized interpretations and lore. Polyphonic works are particularly open to readings not specifically intended. Trobriand readers may find Malinowski's interpretations tiresome but his examples and extended transcriptions still evocative. Ndembu will not gloss as quickly as European readers over the different voices embedded in Turner's works.

Recent literary theory suggests that the ability of a text to make sense in a coherent way depends less on the willed intentions of an originating author than on the creative activity of a reader. To quote Roland Barthes, if a text is "a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture," then "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (1977:146, 148). The writing of ethnography, an unruly, multisubjective

activity, is given coherence in particular acts of reading. But there is always a variety of possible readings (beyond merely individual appropriations), readings beyond the control of any single authority. One may approach a classic ethnography seeking simply to grasp the meanings that the researcher derives from represented cultural facts. Or, as I have suggested, one may also read against the grain of the text's dominant voice, seeking out other half-hidden authorities, reinterpreting the descriptions, texts, and quotations gathered together by the writer. With the recent questioning of colonial styles of representation, with the expansion of literacy and ethnographic consciousness, new possibilities for reading (and thus for writing) cultural descriptions are emerging.¹⁵

The textual embodiment of authority is a recurring problem for contemporary experiments in ethnography.¹⁶ An older, realist mode—figured in the frontispiece to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and based on the construction of a cultural tableau vivant designed to be seen from a single vantage point, that of the writer and reader—can now be identified as only one possible paradigm for authority. Political and epistemological assumptions are built into this and other styles, assumptions the ethnographic writer can no longer afford to ignore. The modes of authority reviewed here—experiential, interpretive, dialogical, polyphonic—are available to all writers of ethnographic texts, Western and non-

15. An extremely suggestive model of polyphonic exposition is offered by the projected four-volume edition of the ethnographic texts written, provoked, and transcribed between 1896 and 1914 by James Walker on the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation. Three titles have appeared so far, edited by Raymond J. DeMaille and Elaine Jahner: *Lakota Belief and Ritual* (1982a), *Lakota Society* (1982b), and *Lakota Myth* (1983). These engrossing volumes in effect reopen the textual homogeneity of Walker's classic monograph of 1917, *The Sun Dance*, a summation of the individual statements published here in translation. These statements by more than thirty named "authorities" complement and transcend Walker's synthesis. A long section of *Lakota Belief and Ritual* was written by Thomas Tyon, Walker's interpreter. The collection's fourth volume will be a translation of the writings of George Sword, an Oglala warrior and judge encouraged by Walker to record and interpret the traditional way of life. The first two volumes present the unpublished texts of knowledgeable Lakota and Walker's own descriptions in identical formats. Ethnography appears as a process of collective production. It is essential to note that the Colorado Historical Society's decision to publish these texts was stimulated by increasing requests from the Oglala community at Pine Ridge for copies of Walker's materials to use in Oglala history classes. (On Walker see also Clifford 1986a:15–17.)

16. For a very useful and complete survey of recent experimental ethnographies see Marcus and Cushman 1982; see also Webster 1982; Fahim 1982; and Clifford and Marcus 1986.

Western. None is obsolete, none pure: there is room for invention within each paradigm. We have seen how new approaches tend to rediscover discarded practices. Polyphonic authority looks with renewed sympathy to compendiums of vernacular texts—expository forms distinct from the focused monograph tied to participant observation. Now that naive claims to the authority of experience have been subjected to hermeneutic suspicion, we may anticipate a renewed attention to the subtle interplay of personal and disciplinary components in ethnographic research.

Experiential, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic processes are at work, discordantly, in any ethnography, but coherent presentation presupposes a controlling mode of authority. I have argued that this imposition of coherence on an unruly textual process is now inescapably a matter of strategic choice. I have tried to distinguish important styles of authority as they have become visible in recent decades. If ethnographic writing is alive, as I believe it is, it is struggling within and against these possibilities.

In fact the sociologist and his "object" form a couple where each one is to be interpreted through the other, and where the relationship must itself be deciphered as a historical moment.

—JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, *CRITIQUE DE LA
RAISON DIALECTIQUE*

2. Power and Dialogue in Ethnography: Marcel Griaule's Initiation

MARCEL GRIAULE cut a figure—self-confident and theatrical. He began his career as an aviator in the years just after the First World War. (Later, in 1946, as holder of the first chair in ethnology at the Sorbonne, he would lecture in his air force officer's uniform.) An energetic promotor of fieldwork, he portrayed it as the continuation—by scientific means—of a great tradition of adventure and exploration (1948c:119). In 1928, encouraged by Marcel Mauss and the linguist Marcel Cohen, Griaule spent a year in Ethiopia. He returned avid for new exploration, and his plans bore fruit two years later in the much-publicized Mission Dakar-Djibouti, which for twenty-one months traversed Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea along the lower rim of the Sahara. Largely a museum-collecting enterprise, the mission also undertook extended ethnographic sojourns in the French Sudan (now Mali), where Griaule first made contact with the Dogon of Sanga, and in Ethiopia (the region of Gondar), where the expedition spent five months. Among the mission's nine members (some coming and going at various points) were André Schaeffner, Deborah Lifchitz, and Michel Leiris, each of whom would make significant ethnographic contributions.

*There are many different kinds of Palestinian experience, which cannot all be assembled into one. One would therefore have to write parallel histories of the communities in Lebanon, the occupied territories, and so on. That is the central problem. It is almost impossible to imagine a single narrative: it would have to be the kind of crazy history that comes out in *Midnight's Children*, with all those little strands coming in and out.*

—EDWARD SAID, "ON PALESTINIAN IDENTITY,
A CONVERSATION WITH SALMAN RUSHDIE"

11. On *Orientalism*

IN 1939 Aimé Césaire published his searing long poem "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal." In it he wrote of his native Martinique, of colonial oppression, of rediscovered African sources; he coined the term *négritude*. His poem was written in the language of Lautréamont and Rimbaud, but it was a French spattered with neologisms, punctuated by new rhythms. For Césaire a "native land" was something complex and hybrid, salvaged from a lost origin, constructed out of a squalid present, articulated within and against a colonial tongue.

By the early 1950s the *négritude* movement was in full swing, thrusting an alternative humanism back at Europe; and in this new context it became possible to question European ideological practices in radical ways. Michel Leiris, who was a friend and collaborator of Césaire's, composed the first extended analysis of the relationship between anthropological knowledge and colonialism (Leiris 1950). His discourse opened a debate that has continued, with varying degrees of intensity, during the subsequent decades. How has European knowledge about the rest of the planet been shaped by a Western will to power? How have Western writers, both imaginative and scientific, been enmeshed in co-

lonial and neocolonial situations? How, concretely, have they ignored, resisted, and acquiesced in these enduring conditions of inequality? Leiris pointed to a basic imbalance. Westerners had for centuries studied and spoken for the rest of the world; the reverse had not been the case. He announced a new situation, one in which the "objects" of observation would begin to write back. The Western gaze would be met and scattered. Since 1950 Asians, Africans, Arab orientals, Pacific islanders, and Native Americans have in a variety of ways asserted their independence from Western cultural and political hegemony and established a new multivocal field of intercultural discourse. What will be the long-term consequences of such a situation—if it endures? How has it already altered what one can know about others, the ways such knowledge may be formulated? It is still early to judge the depth and extent of the epistemological changes that may be under way. (The literature on anthropology and colonialism is quite large. A few important works are Maquet 1964; Hymes 1969; Asad 1973; Firth 1977; Copans 1974, 1975; Leclerc 1972; and Nash 1975. In the field of Oriental and Islamic studies see Tibawi 1963; Abdel-Malek 1963; Hourani 1967; and Khatibi 1976.)



Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978a), a critical study of Western knowledge about the exotic, occupies this indeterminate historical context. If it presents itself as part of the general "writing back" against the West that Leiris announced, *Orientalism's* predicament is an ambiguous one that should be seen not in terms of a simple anti-imperialism but rather as a symptom of the uncertainties generated by the new global situation. It is important to situate Said's book within this wide perspective, for it would be all too easy to dismiss *Orientalism* as a narrow polemic dominated by immediate ideological goals in the Middle East struggle. It could be seen too as merely the personal protest of a Palestinian deprived of his homeland by a "uniquely punishing destiny," suffering from his externally imposed, abstract identity as "an Oriental," oppressed by "an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist" (pp. 26–27). Indeed Said writes forthrightly and eloquently of this, his own predicament; and he writes also from a conviction that "pure" scholarship does not exist. Knowledge in his view is inextricably tied to power. When it becomes institutionalized, culturally accumulated, overly restrictive in its definitions, it must be actively opposed by a counterknowledge. *Orientalism* is polemical, its analysis corrosive; but Said's book operates in a number

of registers, and it would be wrong to restrict its significance unduly. *Orientalism* is at once a serious exercise in textual criticism and, most fundamentally, a series of important if tentative epistemological reflections on general styles and procedures of cultural discourse.

Said's topic is usually thought of as a rather old-fashioned scholarly discipline allied with nineteenth-century philology and concerned with the collection and analysis of texts in Eastern languages. Raymond Schwab's encyclopedic *Renaissance orientale* (1950) is of course the classic history of this ensemble, which included Sinologists, Islamicists, Indo-Europeanists, literati, travelers, and an eclectic host of aficionados. Said does not attempt to revise or extend Schwab's work, for his approach is not historicist or empirical but deductive and constructivist. His study undertakes a simultaneous expansion and formalization of the field, transforming Orientalism into a synecdoche for a much more complex and ramified totality. Said calls this totality a "discourse," following Foucault. I shall discuss Said's adoption of a Foucauldian methodology and its hazards. For the moment, though, it is enough to say that the Orientalist "discourse" is characterized by an oppressive systematicity, a "sheer knitted-together strength" (p. 6) that Said sets out to reveal through a reading of representative texts and experiences.

Although Said discovers "Orientalism" in Homer, Aeschylus, the *Chanson de Roland*, and Dante, he situates its modern origins in Barthélemy d'Herblot's *Bibliothèque orientale*. This compendium of oriental knowledge is criticized by Said for its cosmological scope and for its construction as a "systematic" and "rational" oriental panorama. It is significant that Said's reading of Herblot's seventeenth-century work makes no attempt to analyze it as Foucault would in *Les mots et les choses*—that is, "archaeologically"—in relation to a synchronic epistemological field. The approach of *Orientalism* is thus clearly indicated as genealogical. Its central task is to describe retrospectively and continuously the structures of an Orientalism that achieved its classical form in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Said's two criticisms of Herblot are constitutive of his object: Orientalism is always too broadly and abstractly pitched, and it is always overly systematic.

Said proceeds to apply these reproaches, with varying degrees of plausibility, to a diverse range of authors, institutions, and typical experiences. There are analyses of Sylvestre de Sacy, Ernest Renan and the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt's scholarly product, the massive *Description de l'Égypte*. The speeches of politicians such as Balfour and

Cromer (juxtaposed with Henry Kissinger); the Indian journalism of Marx; the oriental voyages of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Nerval, and Flaubert; the adventures of Burton and Lawrence; the scholarship of H. A. R. Gibb and Louis Massignon are all woven into an intertextual unity. This ensemble—though it leaves some room for historical mutation, different national traditions, personal idiosyncrasies, and the genius of “great” writers—is designed to emphasize the systematic and invariant nature of the Orientalist discourse. There is no way to summarize the complex interweavings of Said’s critical method—associative, sometimes brilliant, sometimes forced, and in the end numbingly repetitive. It succeeds at least in isolating and discrediting an array of “oriental” stereotypes: the eternal and unchanging East, the sexually insatiable Arab, the “feminine” exotic, the teeming marketplace, corrupt despotism, mystical religiosity. Said is particularly effective in his critical analysis of Orientalist “authority”—the paternalist privileges unhesitatingly assumed by Western writers who “speak for” a mute Orient or reconstitute its decayed or dismembered “truth,” who lament the passing of its authenticity, and who know more than its mere natives ever can. This methodical suspicion of the reconstitutive procedures of writing about others could be usefully extended beyond Orientalism to anthropological practice generally.

If Orientalism, as Said describes it, has a structure, this resides in its tendency to *dichotomize* the human continuum into we-they contrasts and to *essentialize* the resultant “other”—to speak of the oriental mind, for example, or even to generalize about “Islam” or “the Arabs.” All of these Orientalist “visions” and “textualizations,” as Said terms them, function to suppress an authentic “human” reality. This reality, he implies, is rooted in oral encounter and reciprocal speech, as opposed to the processes of writing or of the visual imagination. Said’s limited polemical goal is well served by such an analysis. “Authentic” human encounter can be portrayed as subjugated to the dead book. (Flaubert does not, for example, really experience Egypt as much as he recopies a passage from earlier “voyages to the East.”) The theoretical issues raised by *Orientalism* as a case study of a cultural discourse cannot be disposed of, however, by means of any simple contrast between experience and textuality.

Said is not a simple polemicist. His critical approach is restless and mordant, repeatedly pushing its analyses to epistemological limits. Behind the immediate influence of Foucault lies an ambivalent admiration

for Nietzsche. At various moments in his book Said is led to argue that all cultural definitions must be restrictive, that all knowledge is both powerful and fictional, that all language distorts. He suggests that “authenticity,” “experience,” “reality,” “presence” are mere rhetorical conventions. The general influence of the French theory that Said has done so much to interpret for American readers is here most apparent (see particularly his “Abcdarium Culturae” in Said 1975:277–344). While he cites Lévi-Strauss and Barthes as well as Foucault, at the same time Said makes frequent appeals to an old-fashioned existential realism. In the multivocal world situation I have outlined this sort of uncertainty is crucial. Should criticism work to counter sets of culturally produced images such as those of Orientalism with more “authentic” or more “human” representations? Or if criticism must struggle against the procedures of representation itself, how is it to begin? How, for example, is an oppositional critique of Orientalism to avoid falling into “Occidentalism”? These are fundamental issues—inseparably political and epistemological—raised by Said’s work.



Said never defines Orientalism but rather qualifies and designates it from a variety of distinct and not always compatible standpoints. The book begins by postulating three loose “meanings” of Orientalism, “historical generalizations” that comprise the “backbone” of his subsequent analyses. First, Orientalism is what Orientalists do and have done. An Orientalist is “anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient . . . either in its specific or its general aspects.” Included in this group are academics and government experts: philologists, sociologists, historians, and anthropologists. Second, Orientalism is a “style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (p. 2). Any writing, Said goes on to suggest, at any period in the history of the Occident that accepts as its starting point a basic dichotomy between East and West and that makes essentialist statements about “the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny, and so on” is Orientalist. Finally, Orientalism is a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient,” which, during the colonial period following roughly the late eighteenth century wields the power of “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3). This third designation, unlike the other two, is pitched at a rigorously transindividual, cultural level and suggests “an enormously systematic”

mechanism capable of organizing and largely determining whatever may be said or written about the Orient.

One notices immediately that in the first and third of Said's "meanings" Orientalism is concerned with something called the Orient, while in the second the Orient exists merely as the construct of a questionable mental operation. This ambivalence, which sometimes becomes a confusion, informs much of Said's argument. Frequently he suggests that a text or tradition distorts, dominates, or ignores some real or authentic feature of the Orient. Elsewhere, however, he denies the existence of any "real Orient," and in this he is more rigorously faithful to Foucault and the other radical critics of representation whom he cites. Indeed the absence of anything more than a brief allusion to the "brute reality" of the "cultures and nations whose location is in the East . . . their lives, histories and customs" represents a significant methodological choice on his part. Orientalist inauthenticity is not answered by any authenticity. Yet Said's concept of a "discourse" still vacillates between, on the one hand, the status of an ideological distortion of lives and cultures that are never concretized and, on the other, the condition of a persistent structure of signifiers that, like some extreme example of experimental writing, refers solely and endlessly to itself. Said is thus forced to rely on nearly tautological statements, such as his frequent comment that Orientalist discourse "orientalizes the Orient," or on rather unhelpful specifications such as: "Orientalism can thus be regarded as a manner of regularized (or Orientalized) writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient" (p. 202).

If redundancy haunts Said's account, this is not, I think, merely the result of a hermeneutical short circuit in which the critic discovers in his topic what he has already put there. Nor is it simply an effect of his insistence on the sheer knitted-togetherness of a textual unity that is constantly in danger of decomposing into its discontinuous functions, authors, institutions, histories, and epistemologically distinct epochs. Beyond these problems (faced by any interpreter of constructed, complex cultural ensembles) lies a substantial and disquieting set of questions about the ways in which distinct groups of humanity (however defined) imagine, describe, and comprehend each other. Are such discourses ultimately condemned to redundancy, the prisoners of their own authoritative images and linguistic protocols? Orientalism—"enormously systematic," cosmological in scope, incestuously self-referential—emerges

as much more than a mere intellectual or even ideological tradition. Said at one point calls it "a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture." As such it "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (p. 12).

The quotation marks placed by Said around *our* may be understood to have generated his entire study. The reasons for this are not simply personal but lead us to what Said rightly identifies as "the main intellectual issue raised by Orientalism. Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?" (p. 45). The result of such distinctions, he argues, is to create invidious and imperially useful oppositions that serve to "limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies" (p. 46). (It is worth noting in passing that we-they distinctions of the kind Said condemns are also useful to anti-imperialism and national liberation movements.) The key theoretical issue raised by *Orientalism* concerns the status of *all* forms of thought and representation for dealing with the alien. Can one ultimately escape procedures of dichotomizing, restructuring, and textualizing in the making of interpretive statements about foreign cultures and traditions? If so, how? Said frankly admits that alternatives to orientalism are not his subject. He merely attacks the discourse from a variety of positions, and as a result his own standpoint is not sharply defined or logically grounded. Sometimes his analysis flirts with a critique of representation as such; but the most constant position from which it attacks Orientalism is a familiar set of values associated with the Western anthropological human sciences—existential standards of "human encounter" and vague recommendations of "personal, authentic, sympathetic, humanistic knowledge" (p. 197).

In Said's discussion of the Orientalist as humanist these assumptions are thrown into sharp relief. There has, of course, been a sympathetic, nonreductive Orientalist tradition, a strand that Said downplays. He does, however, on one occasion grapple with this "good" Orientalism in the person of its most representative figure, Louis Massignon. Massignon must stand for those Orientalists—one thinks of scholars such as Sylvain Lévi, Marcel Mauss, Henry Corbin—whose involvement with the foreign traditions they studied evolved into a deep personal and dialogical quest for comprehension. Such writers have characteristically presented themselves as spokesmen for oriental or primitive "wisdom" and also as democratic reformers and humanist critics of imperialism.

Said's discussion of Massignon, the most interesting in his book, is a crucial test case for the theory of Orientalism as a pervasive and coercive cultural discourse. Here Said can no longer generalize sweepingly and categorically about "the Orientalist" and "Orientalism." (Indeed his critical manner sometimes appears to mimic the essentializing discourse it attacks.) Said gives full and generous recognition to Massignon's profound empathy with Islamic mysticism, to his subtlety and range of expression, and to his political commitment on behalf of exploited orientals; but he argues that the great scholar's work is still finally defined within a restricted "discursive consistency." He deploys his most Nietzschean arguments to the effect that any representation must be "implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth,' which is itself a representation" (p. 272).

Said shows rather effectively the limits of Massignon's intellectual world. The most important of these is the scholar's tendency to perceive present Middle Eastern realities with reference to traditionally defined cultural or spiritual values. Massignon saw the earthbound experiences of colonialism, economic oppression, love, death, and so on through the "dehumanized lens" of a quasi-metaphysical conception of Semitic essence. He perceived the Palestinian conflict, for example, in terms of the quarrel between Isaac and Ishmael. Here as elsewhere Said makes short work of appeals beyond a corrupt present to an authentic tradition. Such appeals, however sympathetic, are always suspect in their disparagement of current processes of cultural and political invention. Ultimately Massignon could not avoid participation in a "will to knowledge over the Orient and on its behalf" (p. 272).

If even a "genius" such as Massignon can be so restricted, it becomes difficult to escape the bleak though rigorous conclusion that all human expression is ultimately determined by cultural "archives," and that global truth must be the result of a battle of "discursive formations" in which the strongest prevails. Said is uneasy with so Foucauldian a conclusion. He goes on to reassert a transcendent humanist standard, rescuing Massignon, who is after all "a very human being" from an institutional determination now qualified as only a "dimension" of his "productive capacity." Massignon does in the end rise above his culture into a "broader history and anthropology." Massignon's statement "*nous sommes tous des Sémites*" shows, according to Said, "the extent to which his ideas about the Orient could transcend the local anecdotal circumstances of a Frenchman and of French society" (p. 274). A very human

being becomes a humanist. But the privilege of standing above cultural particularism, of aspiring to the universalist power that speaks for humanity, for the universal experiences of love, work, death, and so on, is a privilege invented by a totalizing Western liberalism. This benevolent comprehension of the visions produced by mere "local anecdotal circumstances" is an authority that escapes Said's criticism.

Said sometimes presents his critical posture as "oppositional" (p. 326), a stance of open attack on imperial power and knowledge (see Said 1976, 1979). More frequently, though, he qualifies himself positively as a humanist. This stance seems to presuppose a particularist, even individualist attitude combined with cosmopolitanism and a general valorization of creative process. For example T. E. Lawrence is taken to task for writing (in a rather admirably self-conscious passage) of "Arabs" rather than of "individual Arabs with narratable life histories" (p. 229). Such general statements, Said argues, "necessarily subordinate" an Arab's specific feeling of joy, of sadness, of injustice in the face of tyranny, and so on. Said castigates Orientalism for its construction of static images rather than historical or personal "narratives." The "human experience," whether that of the individual Orientalist or of his or her objects of study, is flattened into an asserted authority on one side and a generalization on the other. Said characterizes the human realities thus elided with quotations from Yeats—"the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor," in which all humans live," and "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart" (pp. 230, 110).

It is still an open question, of course, whether an African pastoralist shares the same existential "bestial floor" with an Irish poet and his readers. And it is a general feature of humanist common denominators that they are meaningless, since they bypass the local cultural codes that make personal experience articulate. Said's resort to such notions underlines the absence in his book of any developed theory of culture as a differentiating and expressive ensemble rather than as simply hegemonic and disciplinary. His basic values are cosmopolitan. He approves as an alternative to Orientalism the cultural hermeneutics of Erich Auerbach, Ernst Robert Curtius, and Clifford Geertz. He appears to endorse the anthropological commonplace that "the more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision" (p. 259). The anthropologist as outsider and participant-observer (existential shorthand for the hermeneutical circle) is a familiar

modern *topos*. Its wisdom—and authority—is expressed with a disturbing beauty by Hugh of St. Victor (quoted by Said from Auerbach): “The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land” (p. 259).



Said’s humanist perspectives do not harmonize with his use of methods derived from Foucault, who is of course a radical critic of humanism. But however wary and inconsistent its appeals, *Orientalism* is a pioneering attempt to use Foucault systematically in an extended cultural analysis. Its difficulties and successes should thus be of interest to historians, critics, and anthropologists.

We have already encountered the central notion of discourse. For Said a discourse is the cultural-political configuration of “the textual attitude” (pp. 92–94). The most extreme example of this attitude is *Don Quixote*; its condensed modern formulation is Flaubert’s *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. People prefer order to disorder; they grasp at formulas rather than actuality; they prefer the guidebook to the confusion before them. “It seems a common human failing,” Said writes, using the word *human* with significant ambivalence, “to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human” (p. 93). In certain conditions this textual attitude hardens into a body of rigid cultural definitions that determine what any individual can express about a certain actuality. This “reality” coalesces as a field of representations produced by the discourse. The conditions for discursive hardening are not clearly defined by Said, but they appear to be related to an ongoing imbalance of power that permits—perhaps obliges—a politically and technologically stronger culture or group to define weaker groups. Thus in Said’s analysis occidental culture through the discourse of Orientalism “suffused” the activity of orientals with “meaning, intelligibility, and reality.” The Orientalist discourse, which, according to Said, did not significantly change after the late eighteenth century, generated a dumb show of oriental images. “Actual human interchange between Oriental and Westerner” (p. 95) was systematically repressed. Orientals had no voice on the “Orientalist Stage.”

Said’s general attempt to extend Foucault’s conception of a discourse into the area of cultural constructions of the exotic is a promising one. Foucault’s overall undertaking has of course been scrupulously ethno-

centric. In attempting to isolate the epistemological strata of European thought he has avoided all comparative appeals to other worlds of meaning. There are no evocations of *pensée sauvage*, of Hopi linguistic categories, and the like. Foucault probably believes such appeals to be methodologically dubious, and he contrasts Western civilization only whimsically to Borges’ “Chinese encyclopedia” at the outset of *Les mots et les choses*. Foucault is interested in the ways in which a given cultural order constitutes itself by means of discursive definitions: sane-mad, healthy-sick, legal-criminal, normal-perverse. The illicit categories for Foucault exist not as areas of an outlaw freedom but as culturally produced, arranged experiences.

Said extends Foucault’s analysis to include ways in which a cultural order is defined externally, with respect to exotic “others.” In an imperialist context definitions, representations, and textualizations of subject peoples and places play the same constitutive role as “internal” representations (for example of the criminal classes in nineteenth-century Europe) and have the same consequences—discipline and confinement, both physical and ideological. Therefore “the Orient,” in Said’s analysis, exists uniquely for the Occident. His task in *Orientalism* is to dismantle the discourse, to expose its oppressive system, to “clear the archive” of its received ideas and static images.

Foucault is not easily imitated. His writing has been a series of experiments and tactical interventions rather than a methodical program. Said’s appropriation of Foucault strikes a committed, moral note. Contrasting (and preferring) Foucault to Derrida, Said notes that the latter’s “endless worrying of representation” from “within” canonical Western texts does not permit critical attention to move beyond the written (however “indecidable”) to the social and political, to the *institutions* underlying an imperial and hegemonic “Western thought.” Foucault’s brand of criticism, unlike Derrida’s, “reads” a prison or a hospital, a legal system, or—as Said does in *Orientalism*—a geopolitical artifact such as De Lesseps’ canal (seen as an Orientalist inscription). “By virtue of Foucault’s criticism we are able to understand culture as a body of disciplines having the effective force of knowledge linked systematically, but by no means immediately, to power.” Culture as Said conceives it is little more than “a massive body of self-congratulating ideas” and of “disciplines” that the critic must unmask and oppose without claiming—by virtue of a system or sovereign method—to stand outside of “history, subjectivity, or circumstance.” “The critical consciousness . . . having initially detached

itself from the dominant culture" thereafter adopts "a situated and responsible adversary position" (Said 1978b:709, 690, 713).

It is rather difficult, however, to qualify Foucault's restless guerrilla activity on behalf of the excluded, against *all* totalizing, defining, essentializing alliances of knowledge and power as "situated and responsible." Said himself deploys a rather loose collection of "adversary theoretical models" derived from Foucault, Gramsci, Lukács, Fanon, and others (1979:16). A key political term for Said is *oppositional*, and it is fairly clear what this means in the limited context of a book such as *Orientalism*, which "writes back" at an imperial discourse from the position of an oriental whose actuality has been distorted and denied. More generally, however, it is apparent that a wide range of Western humanist assumptions escape Said's oppositional analysis, as do the discursive alliances of knowledge and power produced by anticolonial and particularly nationalist movements.



Beyond his overall stance as "oppositional" cultural critic Said makes use of other Foucauldian approaches that should be discussed briefly. Most significant is his adoption of the posture of critical retrospection that Nietzsche called genealogy. In this Said is true to Foucault's later evolution away from the methodology of layered "archaeological" discontinuity exemplified in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and towards a presentation of the lineages of the present, as exemplified in *Discipline and Punish* and especially *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1.

The field of Orientalism is genealogically distributed in two ways: synchronically (constituting in a unified system all Western textual versions of the Orient) and diachronically (plotting a single lineage of statements about the East, running from Aeschylus to Renan to modern political sociology and "area studies"). Like all genealogies Said's grows more specific as it approaches the present it has been constructed to explain and affect. Thus the bulk of his account describes the heyday of Orientalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is followed by an attempt to generate meanings in the current Middle East situation with reference to this classical tradition. The aim here is not, of course, the one most usual in genealogies—a new legitimation of the present—but rather, as in Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and *Madness and Civilization*, radical *de*-legitimation. A certain degree of anachronism is

openly embraced.¹ Genealogy, like all historical description and analysis, is constructive. It makes sense in the present by making sense selectively *out of* the past. Its inclusions and exclusions, its narrative continuities, its judgments of core and periphery are finally legitimated either by convention or by the authority granted to or arrogated by the genealogist. Genealogy is perhaps the most political of historical modes; but to be effective it cannot appear too openly tendentious, and Said's genealogy suffers on this score. To his credit he makes no secret of the restrictive choices involved.

First, Said limits his attention almost exclusively to statements about the Arab Middle East—omitting, regretfully but firmly, the Far East, India, the Pacific, and North Africa. The omission of the Maghreb is crucial, for it ensures that Said will not have to discuss modern French Orientalist currents. In a French context the kinds of critical questions posed by Said have been familiar since the Algerian war and may be found strongly expressed well before 1950. It would simply not be possible to castigate recent French "Orientalism" in the way that he does the discourse of the modern American Middle East "experts," which is still shaped by Cold War patterns and by the polarized Arab-Israeli conflict.

Said's second genealogical limitation restricts the national traditions under consideration to the British and French strands, with the addition of a recent American offspring. He is obliged to rule out Italian, Spanish, Russian, and especially German Orientalisms. The highly developed nineteenth-century German tradition is cast as peripheral to French and English pioneers but, more important, as not constituted like these two in a close relationship with colonial occupation and domination of the Orient (pp. 16–19). In effect, German Orientalism is too disinterested and thus atypical of a genealogy that *defines* the discourse as essentially colonialist. If Said's primary aim were to write an intellectual history of Orientalism or a history of Western ideas of the Orient, his narrowing and rather obviously tendentious shaping of the field could be taken as a

1. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975:35) Foucault writes of his intention to produce a history of the prison: "Par un pur anachronisme? Non, si on entend par là faire l'histoire du passé dans les termes du présent. Oui, si on entend par là faire l'histoire du présent" (p. 35). His fullest statement on genealogy is "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1977). This chapter discusses only those works by Foucault that were available at the time of publication of *Orientalism*. I do not consider his refinements and transgressions of historical method following the first volume of *History of Sexuality*.

fatal flaw. But his undertaking is conceived otherwise and is openly an oppositional genealogy. If Said's genealogy sometimes appears clumsily rigged (the final all-too-predictable zeroing in on the Middle East and abrupt jump from Continental to American "Orientalism" is the least convincing of its "continuities"), one need not reject the entire critical paradigm.

Said is perfectly correct to identify retrospectively a "discourse" that dichotomizes and essentializes in its portrayal of others and that functions in a complex but systematic way as an element of colonial domination. It is important that this discourse be recognized wherever it exists; but the discourse should not be closely identified with the specific tradition of Orientalism. Its field of application has been far more general. The problem with the book, at least from a theoretical standpoint, is its title. In attempting to derive a "discourse" directly from a "tradition," Said abandons the level of cultural criticism proposed by Foucault and relapses into traditional intellectual history. Moreover, in portraying the discourse as based on essentially nineteenth-century modes of thought, Said gives himself too easy a target. He does not question anthropological orthodoxies based on a mythology of fieldwork encounter and a hermeneutically minded cultural theory—orthodoxies he often appears to share.

It is apparent that "discourse" analysis cannot safely be founded on redefined "traditions." Nor can it be derived from a study of "authors." The general tendency in modern textual studies has been to reduce the occasion of a text's creation by an individual subject to merely one of its generative or potentially meaningful contexts. While recognizing the importance of this separation of the text from the work (Barthes: "The work is held in the hand, the text in language"), Said has resisted radical structuralist attacks on phenomenology and on the essential (beginning and continuing) function of an authorial intention. *Beginnings* (1975), which preceded *Orientalism*, is a detailed and perspicuous meditation on this set of issues. It is concerned precisely with the problem, experienced by a wide range of modernist writers, of being an "author." Steering a complex course between individualist conceptions of creativity on the one hand and on the other reductions of "the moving force of life and behaviour, the *forma informans*, intention" (p. 319) to an external system, whether cultural or critical, Said suggests an intermediate analytical *topos* that he calls a "career." The modern author's intention is not so much to produce works as it is to begin (and to continue beginning) to write. A

career is the ensemble of these complex historically and culturally situated intentions. It is always in process, always being begun in specific situations, and never possessing either a stable essence or a shaped biographical finality. The author is reconceived, and in the face of structuralist dissolution rescued.

It is not surprising, then, that Said, in discussing Orientalism as a discourse and a tradition, adopts what he calls a "hybrid perspective." "Foucault believes that in general the individual text or author counts for very little; empirically, in the case of Orientalism (and perhaps nowhere else) I find this not to be so" (1978a:23). This doggedly empirical and curiously qualified assertion separates Said sharply from Foucault. What is important theoretically is not that Foucault's author counts for very little but rather that a "discursive formation"—as opposed to ideas, citations, influences, references, conventions, and the like—is not produced by authorial subjects or even by a group of authors arranged as a "tradition." This methodological (not empirical) point is important for anyone involved in the kind of task Said is attempting. One cannot combine within the same analytic totality both personal statements and discursive statements, even though they may be lexically identical. Said's experiment seems to show that when the analysis of authors and traditions is intermixed with the analysis of discursive formations, the effect is a mutual weakening.

None of the authors discussed in *Orientalism* is accorded a "career" in the complex sense posited by *Beginnings*, but all are portrayed as instances of Orientalist discourse. Unlike Foucault, however, for whom authorial names function as mere labels for discursive statements, Said's authors may be accorded psychohistorical typicality and are often made through their texts to have representative Orientalist experiences. One example among many, chosen for the familiarity of its subject, is Said's reading of a passage from Marx—the end of his article "The British Rule in India" (Said 1978a:153–157).

Marx denounces an affront to "human feeling"—the spectacle of Indian social life brutally disrupted, "thrown into a sea of woes" by imperialism; but he quickly reminds his readers that "these idyllic village communities" have always been the foundation of "Oriental despotism." They have "restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules, depriving it of all its grandeur and historical energies." England, Marx goes on to say, is history's agent; its task is to "lay

the material foundations of Western Society in Asia." Said scents Orientalism in the reference to despotism and in a later citation of Goethe's *Westöstlicher Diwan*. He identifies a "romantic redemptive project," which assumes the general Western privilege of putting the Orient—stagnant, dismembered, corrupt—back together. Marx is also convicted of subsuming "individuals" and "existential human identities" under "artificial entities" such as "Oriental," "Asiatic," "Semitic," or within collectives such as "race," "mentality," and "nation."

Here an effective reading begins to get out of hand. It is unclear why Said does not also convict Marx of subsuming individuals under the "artificial entities" "class" and "history." Furthermore, if Marx's participation in Orientalism derives from his inattention to existential, individual cases, one wonders how social or cultural theory is ever to be "humanly" built. In addition, it is well known that Marx heaped "Orientalist" scorn and condescension upon the "idiocy of rural life" wherever he found it, believing that such stagnant, repressive situations had to be violently transformed before they could improve. Here Said skirts "unfairness" to Marx. While legitimately isolating Orientalist aspects of the text, he too quickly skims over its rhetorical intentions. Moreover, Said soon abandons any discussion of Orientalist *statements* and goes on to uncover in the text a typical Orientalist *experience*. Marx, we are told, at first expressed "a natural human repugnance" toward the suffering of orientals; he felt a "human sympathy," a "fellow feeling." This "personal human experience" was then "censored" by a process of Orientalist labeling and abstraction, "a wash of sentiment" was repressed by "unshakable definitions." (Said writes in the past tense, as if this is what really happened in Marx's mind.) "The vocabulary of emotion dissipated as it submitted to the lexicographical police action of Orientalist science and even Orientalist art. An experience was dislodged by a dictionary definition" (p. 155). By now Said could not be farther from Foucault's austere pages, where all psychologizing is forbidden and where authors escape at least having to go through such instructive "experiences." Said's descriptions of Orientalist discourse are frequently sidetracked by humanist fables of suppressed authenticity.

Discourse analysis is always in a sense unfair to authors. It is not interested in what *they* have to say or feel as subjects but is concerned merely with statements as related to other statements in a field.² Escaping

2. On the initial definition of this field, which he calls a "discursive formation," see Foucault's strictures in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969: chap.

an impression of unfairness and reductionism in this kind of analysis is a matter of methodological rigor and stylistic tact. Foucault, at least, does not appear unfair to authors because he seldom appeals to any individual intentionality or subjectivity. "Hybrid perspectives" such as Said's have considerably more difficulty escaping reductionism.³

Indeed Said's methodological catholicity repeatedly blurs his analysis. If he is advancing anthropological arguments, Orientalism appears as the cultural quest for order. When he adopts the stance of a literary critic, it emerges as the processes of writing, textualizing, and interpreting. As an intellectual historian Said portrays Orientalism as a specific series of influences and schools of thought. For the psychohistorian Orientalist discourse becomes a representative series of personal-historical experiences. For the Marxist critic of ideology and culture it is the expression of definite political and economic power interests. Orientalism is also at times conflated with Western positivism, with general definitions of the primitive, with evolutionism, with racism. One could continue the list. Said's discourse analysis does not itself escape the all-inclusive "Occidentalism" he specifically rejects as an alternative to Orientalism (p. 328).



Though Said's work frequently relapses into the essentializing modes it attacks and is ambivalently enmeshed in the totalizing habits of Western humanism, it still succeeds in questioning a number of important anthropological categories, most important, perhaps, the concept of culture. In this final section I shall sketch out some of these issues, the most far-reaching questions raised by *Orientalism*.

The effect of Said's general argument is not so much to undermine

2). Foucault's method ignores "influences" and "traditions," demotes "authors," and holds in suspense any criteria of discursive unity based on the persistence or commonality of "objects," "styles," "concepts," or "themes." It may be noted that Said makes use of all these familiar elements from the history of ideas.

3. Said's critical approach can in fact be quite disturbing, especially when he is uncovering Orientalism in lesser-known figures than Marx, among whom the disjuncture between discursive statements and personal expressions is less immediately apparent. A particularly blatant example may be seen in his use of the great Sanskrit scholar and humanist Sylvain Lévi in order to show the connection of Orientalism with imperial politics (Said 1978:249–250). The misleading image of someone intensely concerned with European "interests" in the Orient (the word *interest* is inserted into Lévi's discourse) is nowhere qualified. For an affirmation that modern Orientalists have been far less reductive than Said portrays them to be see Hourani 1979.

the notion of a substantial Orient as it is to make problematic "the Occident." It is less common today than it once was to speak of "the East," but we still make casual reference to "the West," "Western culture," and so on. Even theorists of discontinuity and deconstruction such as Foucault and Derrida continue to set their analyses within and against a Western totality. Said shares their assumptions inasmuch as he portrays the Western culture of which Orientalism is an exemplar as a discrete entity capable of generating knowledge and institutional power over the rest of the planet. Western order, seen this way, is imperial, unreciprocal, aggressive, and potentially hegemonic. At times, though, Said permits us to see the functioning of a more complex dialectic by means of which a modern culture continuously constitutes itself through its ideological constructs of the exotic. Seen in this way "the West" itself becomes a play of projections, doublings, idealizations, and rejections of a complex, shifting otherness. "The Orient" always plays the role of origin or alter ego. For example Renan working in his "philological laboratory" does not simply concoct the scholarly *topos* of the Semitic Orient but in the same process produces a conception of what it means to be European and modern (pp. 132, 146).

Here Said's argument reinforces Stanley Diamond's (1974) contentions that Western culture can conceive of itself critically only with reference to fictions of the primitive. To this dialectical view we may usefully add the overall perspective of Marshall Hodgson's historical work, which portrays "Europe" as, until the late eighteenth century, merely "a fringe area of the Afro-Eurasian zone of agrarianate citted life" (see particularly Hodgson 1974, 1963, and Burke 1979, an excellent survey of Hodgson's complex work). If we adopt along with these perspectives a generally structuralist suspicion of all quests for origins (the origins of the West in Greece or in Christianity), we are left with a totality in process, composed and recomposed in changing external relations.

When we speak today of the West, we are usually referring to a force—technological, economic, political—no longer radiating in any simple way from a discrete geographical or cultural center. This force, if it may be spoken of in the singular, is disseminated in a diversity of forms from multiple centers—now including Japan, Australia, the Soviet Union, and China—and is articulated in a variety of "micro-sociological" contexts (see Duvignaud 1973). It is too early to say whether these processes of change will result in global cultural homogenization or in a new order of diversity. The new may always look mono-

lithic to the old. For the moment, in any event, all dichotomizing concepts should probably be held in suspicion, whether they be the West-rest ("Third World") split or developed-underdeveloped, modern-premodern, and so on. It is at this level that Said's critique of the discourse he calls Orientalism becomes most significant. Moreover, if all essentializing modes of thought must also be held in suspense, then we should attempt to think of cultures not as organically unified or traditionally continuous but rather as negotiated, present processes. From this standpoint Said's refusal to appeal to any authentic and especially traditional oriental realities against the false stereotypes of Orientalism is exemplary. His main concern is not with what was or even what is but with what is becoming. Although of this process he tells us very little, the fundamental question is posed: on what basis may human groups accurately (and we must also add morally) be distinguished?

The concept of culture used by anthropologists was, of course, invented by European theorists to account for the collective articulations of human diversity. Rejecting both evolutionism and the overly broad entities of race and civilization, the idea of culture posited the existence of local, functionally integrated units. For all its supposed relativism, though, the concept's model of totality, basically organic in structure, was not different from the nineteenth-century concepts it replaced. Only its plurality was new (see Chapter 10, section 2). Despite many subsequent redefinitions the notion's organicist assumptions have persisted. Cultural systems hold together; and they change more or less continuously, anchored primarily by language and place. Recent semiotic or symbolic models that conceive of culture as communication are also functionalist in this sense (see Leach 1976:1, Geertz 1973, Schneider 1968).⁴

A submerged but crucial emphasis of Said's study is his restless suspicion of totality. His critique of Orientalist procedures for enclosing and characterizing "the Orient" may be applied to the presumably more precise and even "natural" entity of culture. I have already noted with the example of Massignon Said's distaste for the most sympathetic appeals to

4. Geertz offers a striking and problematical image of cultural organization not as a spider or a pile of sand but as an octopus "whose tentacles are in a large part separately integrated, neurally quite poorly connected with one another and with what in the octopus passes for a brain, and yet who nonetheless manages to get around and to preserve himself, for a while anyway, as a viable, if somewhat ungainly entity" (1973:407-408). Culture remains, barely, an organism.

tradition. Having stressed so thoroughly that the Orient is a constituted entity, he goes on to suggest "that the notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically 'different' inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture or racial essence proper to that geographical space is equally a highly debatable idea" (1978a:332). In his final pages he asks the most important theoretical questions of his study. "How does one represent other cultures? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one?" (p. 325).

Such questions need to be posed and need to be allowed to stand in sharp relief. Having asked them, one does well to avoid quick recourse to alternate totalities. (As we have seen, Said himself has recourse to humanist cosmopolitanism and conceptions of personal integrity as well as to a notion of authentic development alternately glossed as "narrative" or as a vaguely Marxist "history.") It is high time that cultural and social totalities are subjected to the kind of radical questioning that textual ensembles have undergone in recent critical practice (for example Derrida 1970; Barthes 1977; Said 1978b and 1975). Said's attack on essences and oppositional distinctions is here very much to the point; but collectively constituted *difference* is not necessarily static or positionally dichotomous in the manner of Orientalism as Said describes it. There is no need to discard theoretically all conceptions of "cultural" difference, especially once this is seen as not simply received from tradition, language, or environment but also as *made* in new political-cultural conditions of global relationality.

How are these new conditions to be conceived now that the "silence" of the Orient is broken; now that ethnography, as Leiris suggested, can be multidirectional; now that authenticity, both personal and cultural, is seen as something constructed vis-à-vis others? In these circumstances should our ideas of relationality be drawn from the metaphors of conversation, hospitality, and exchange, as humanists such as Massignon, Sylvain Lévi, and Mauss have urged? Or must we prefer the figures of military maneuver sometimes invoked by Foucault. It may be true that the culture concept has served its time. Perhaps, following Foucault, it should be replaced by a vision of powerful discursive formations globally and strategically deployed. Such entities would at least no longer be closely tied to notions of organic unity, traditional continuity, and the enduring grounds of language and locale. But however the culture concept is finally transcended, it should, I think, be replaced by some set of relations that preserves the concept's differential and relativist functions

and that avoids the positing of cosmopolitan essences and human common denominators.

It should be pointed out that these prescriptions are in the nature of what Conrad urged in *Heart of Darkness*—a "deliberate belief." The planet's cultural future may indeed reside in the entropy Lévi-Strauss laments in *Tristes tropiques* or in the ideological hegemony Said portrays in his bleaker passages (1978a:323–325). Like Said's commitment to the human, any residual faith in culture—that is, in the continuing ability of groups to make a real difference—is essentially an idealistic choice, a political response to the present age in which, as Conrad wrote, "we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel" (19:11:1). It is the virtue of *Orientalism* that it obliges its readers to confront such issues at once personally, theoretically, and politically. For its author, as for Conrad, there can be no natural solutions. Palestine is perhaps the twentieth century's Poland, a dismembered nation to be reinvented. Said, like the Polish-English writer whom he admires and frequently quotes, recognizes that personal and cultural identities are never given but must be negotiated. This is an important emphasis of Said's first book, a penetrating study of Conrad (1966). It would be wrong to dismiss this kind of situation as aberrant, as the condition of exiles. The unrestful predicament of *Orientalism*, its methodological ambivalences, are characteristic of an increasingly general global experience.

Its author's complex critical posture may in this sense be taken as representative. A Palestinian nationalist educated in Egypt and the United States, a scholar deeply imbued with the European humanities and now professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia, Said writes as an "oriental," but only to dissolve the category. He writes as a Palestinian but takes no support from a specifically Palestinian culture or identity, turning to European poets for his expression of essential values and to French philosophy for his analytical tools. A radical critic of a major component of the Western cultural tradition, Said derives most of his standards from that tradition. The point in saying this is to suggest something of the situation within which books such as *Orientalism* must inevitably be written. It is a context that Said has elsewhere (in discussing George Eliot and the roots of Zionism) called "a generalized condition of homelessness" (1979:18). Such a situation generates difficult questions.

What does it mean, at the end of the twentieth century, to speak like Aimé Césaire of a "native land"? What processes rather than essences are involved in present experiences of cultural identity? What does it mean

to write as a Palestinian? As an American? As a Papua–New Guinean? As a European? From what discrete sets of cultural resources does any modern writer construct his or her discourse? To what world audience (and in what language) are these discourses most generally addressed? Must the intellectual at least, in a literate global situation, construct a native land by writing like Césaire the notebook of a return?

*Lo, a people dwelling alone, and not reckoning itself among
the nations! —NUMBERS 23:9*

12. Identity in Mashpee

IN AUGUST 1976 the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council, Inc., sued in federal court for possession of about 16,000 acres of land constituting three-quarters of Mashpee, "Cape Cod's Indian Town." (The township of Mashpee extends inland from the Cape's southern shore, facing Martha's Vineyard, between Falmouth and Barnstable.) An unprecedented trial ensued whose purpose was not to settle the question of land ownership but rather to determine whether the group calling itself the Mashpee Tribe was in fact an Indian tribe, and the same tribe that in the mid-nineteenth century had lost its lands through a series of contested legislative acts.

The Mashpee suit was one of a group of land-claim actions filed in the late 1960s and 1970s, a relatively favorable period for redress of Native American grievances in the courts. Other claims were being initiated by the Gay Head Wampanoag Tribe on Martha's Vineyard; the Narragansets of Charlestown, Rhode Island; Western Pequots, Schaghticoke, and Mohegans in Connecticut; and Oneidas, St. Regis Mohawks, and Cayugas in New York. The Mashpee action was similar in conception to a much-publicized suit by the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot