REVIEW ESSAY: THE CAPACITY FOR CULTURAL CRITIQUE WITHIN THE ROMANTIC MOTIVES OF CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGY

Paths Toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry
Michael Jackson
Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press. 1985. 239 pp. $35.00 (cloth), $12.95 (paper)
Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis.
Renato Rosaldo
Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press. 1989. 253 pp. $31.50 (cloth)
Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility (History of Anthropology, Vol. 6).
George W. Stocking, Jr., editor
Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press. 1989. 286 pp. $25.00 (cloth)

Reviewer: George E. Marcus
Rice University

After assigning me the volumes by Jackson and Rosaldo, the review editor of this journal then asked me to include *Romantic Motives*, the latest in the distinguished annual series of collected papers in the history of anthropology, edited by George Stocking. This addition to the review was an inspired suggestion because it signalled both an interesting focus and an historical perspective by which to assess the other two works.

In his introduction, which tries to give thematic unity to his volume, Stocking distinguishes between two visions of knowledge production in anthropology: a major-key one, derived from the Enlightenment, that emphasizes scientific progress and the search for general laws, and a minor-key one, rooted intellectually in German romanticism and traditions of exploration and natural history, that emphasizes experience, subjectivity, reflexivity and holistic understanding. This minor-key vision has been realized through fieldwork, ethnography and the contemporary focus on interpretation, but, according to Stocking, the historiography of anthropology has not fully or explicitly acknowledged these "romantic motives" in the shaping of the discipline.

Stocking is not so much interested in exploring the methodological implications of the romanticist legacy in anthropology, but rather "what is at issue is a matter of "sensibility"" (p.5). It remains, however, unclear why the issue of sensibility is important for an historical understanding of the production of anthropological

Anthropologica XXXII (1990) 121-125

knowledge in the name of science. Or does raising the issue of sensibility call into question the scientific claims and enlightenment self-image that anthropologists have otherwise historically cultivated for themselves? This is the science-versus-humanism question that is so polemically discussed in contemporary anthropology and that badly needs historical and scholarly perspective. This volume, unfortunately, does little more than pose the question.

Stocking also avoids trying to define romanticism in anthropology in relation to the complex typological and conceptual debates among humanists about romanticism as an aesthetic and as a group of recurrent artistic movements in European history. Rather, the six papers of the volume diversely explore specific aspects of the relationship between anthropology and historical romanticism broadly or narrowly construed for the purposes of each paper. For me, most impressive is Thomas de Zengotita's long essay which brilliantly pairs Rousseau with Lévi-Strauss, and Herder with Sapir, and then appropriately ends with perhaps the most interesting commentary yet on the so-called postmodern move in contemporary anthropology. James Boon offers an irresistible and erudite contrapuntal duet for Lévi-Strauss and Wagner. Stocking's own piece explores the relationship between scientism and romanticism, as sensibilities in American anthropology, by surveying the salience of a romantic sensibility in 1920s anthropology and then focussing on the famous controversies that developed from the restudies of the work of Robert Redfield and Margaret Mead. The other papers in this volume are of the same superb quality. This volume, then, meets the high standards in scholarship, writing, and editing of its companions, making these among the most distinguished publications in anthropology, as well as in the history of social sciences.

It is among the most essential sources for contemporary debates in anthropology, too. Stocking himself has the persona of a careful, accomplished historian, keeping his distance professionally from current trends in the discipline on which he focusses. Yet, obliquely, from the margins and asides in his contributions to each volume, he very clearly indicates that he is shaping these annuals in the shadow of what seem to be the major turnings and internal critiques of American anthropology that have been occurring from the early 1880s to the present. Stocking notes, at the conclusion of his introduction to the present volume: "It is clear that this volume is itself the product of a particular (postmodern?) moment in the history of anthropology, in which a number of tendencies expressive of a romantic sensibility ("reflexive," "hermeneutic," "interpretive," "deconstructive," etc.) are quite strongly manifest" (p. 7).

The recent critical focus on the ethnography as a kind of writing, embodying a distinctive rhetoric and set of characteristics as discourse, has opened a rich discussion and meditation on all aspects of the production of anthropological knowledge at the end of the 20th century. It is this contemporary historical condition of a so-called crisis of representation in anthropology, and in the human sciences in general, that constitutes the major motives for the efflorescence of a romantic sensibility as Stocking has thematized it. A critical edge especially marks this sensibility at present. The value placed upon subjectivity—the writer's as well as the subject's—as a mode of knowing, on the senses and full-bodied experience, on narratives, and on the aesthetics of everyday existence is usually developed against, in particular, the once hegemonic post-World War II positivist sensibility of social science, marked by value neutrality. The question for me is this: to what kinds of

projects and commitments of knowledge production might such a keenly critical romantic sensibility attach itself, once released from the reductionism, objectifications and naïve faith in reason of much past social science?

The books by Rosaldo and Jackson are exemplary romanticist and critical works of the moment. They have much in common. Both are assemblages of essays that each scholar has produced, and in several cases previously published, over the past decade. Strong autobiographical threads run through each. In Rosaldo's case, it is the death of a spouse, bereavement, falling in love again, changes in the representation of Chicano identity, and the stakes involved in current academic debates over what is to count as knowledge. Jackson also writes of the loss of a spouse and also of his experience and struggles as a poet. But the central experience and fund of personal knowledge from which each writes evocatively, anecdotally and, on occasion, analytically is that of the career-defining activity of fieldwork—among the Ilongot of the Philippines for Rosaldo, and the Kuranko of West Africa for Jackson. The act of interpreting otherness in the fieldwork context is the framework that defines the *mise-en-scène* of most of the essays in both books. It also defines the limits of what each author might say critically about the epistemology he writes against and about the kind of knowing that might replace it. There is very little originality in these books' arguments or philosophical positions—each gladly acknowledges various sources of intellectual influence. Their power, rather, is in weaving these influences precisely into the expression of the sensibility that Stocking has labelled romantic—the sensibility that depends on a constant meditation upon feeling, acting and knowing within the scene of fieldwork. The question is how much intellectual weight can this kind of work be made to bear for readers familiar with a now decades-old genre of writing about "reflections on fieldwork in X."

Of the two works, I prefer Rosaldo's to Jackson's for his attempt to create a range of associations beyond the scene of fieldwork and for relating the basic and restrictive humanism of the lone, self-reflective anthropologist in the field to other frameworks, positionings and discourses about cultural difference. Jackson remains quite radically conservative (and romanticist) in his restatement of the creed from which many anthropologists slipped in the decades of post-World War II positivism. Jackson's key term is "radical empiricism," taken from William James, which emphasizes knowing through reflecting on the experience of intersubjectivity: "The importance of this view for anthropology is that it stresses the ethnographer's interactions with those he or she lives with and studies, while urging us to clarify the ways in which our knowledge is grounded in our practical, personal, and participatory experience in the field as much as our detached observations" (p. 3). The heralding of this position—which comes close to being the sole point of putting these mostly fine ethnographic essays together in a single volume—will hardly be news to an anthropology in 1990 which has seen, since the early 1980s, equally eloquent expressions of this same position.

In Jackson's essays there is a gifted ethnographer at work. Many interesting points are made through example and illustration about the body, personhood, poetics and the senses in the constitution of cultural phenomena. But the metadiscourse that this work develops is oddly out of touch with the important critiques of classic humanism that it, and most expressions of the romantic sensibility in anthropology, exemplifies. In such humanism, the virtue of an "other" is used to

state preferred *Western* value, in defining the subjectivity of the humanist writing. Correspondingly, Kuranko experience and Jackson's own define the position of radical empiricism as a preferred way of knowing. The very same emphases on the senses, poetics, and personhood have been used (e.g., by Stephen Tyler and James Clifford) in recent debates about ethnography to call into question the radical empiricism of the lone humanist voice that Jackson romanticizes. This would have been a much more interesting and useful volume had Jackson more openly and centrally engaged the ongoing debates, rather than assuming the identity of the essayist, the artist, rather alone, not only in the world of the Kuranko but also in his own academic culture.

Rosaldo makes somewhat different use of this sensibility of knowing through rich experiences among others. Most of his papers were originally talks delivered in public forms. They were not produced in the persona of a classic essayist for his own pleasure or for an implied reader, but rather were prepared for specific occasions and listeners. They imply a politics and a social activism that Jackson's do not. Beyond castigating bad epistemology, which is the point of a number of his papers, Rosaldo generally tries, in each paper, to expand the kinds of discourses to which ethnographically grounded discourse might be related. While speaking from ethnographic authority, he is certainly not chauvinist for it.

For Rosaldo, the key terms are, perhaps, "narratives" and "borders." The main use of ethnography is in relativizing itself among other, distinctly non-academic discourses for the purposes of cultural critique. Narratives, autobiographies and ethnohistories, gleaned in ethnographic work, cross the borders and blur the boundaries of genre, subject-object and disciplinary authority. Ultimately the identity of these latter must change in the academy, and in Rosaldo's epilogue ("The Raging Battle," about liberal education in contemporary American universities), the stakes are very high for knowledge/power in American culture: "In my view, the current battle about how best to prepare students for life in the twenty-first century revolves around questions of the degree and significance of human differences, whether change or stasis is the nature state of society, and to what extent struggle shapes the course of human events. . . . The choice of what we want to know is primarily political and ethical, hence the intensity of feelings brought to and aroused by the conflict" (p. 224).

In the way Rosaldo crafts his essays—around the romantic sensibility of fieldwork experience—his radically critical purposes are finally constricted. Still the lone knower of the Ilongot (despite the brilliant insights of his paper, "Imperialist Nostalgia"), Rosaldo can only approach the borderlands of the various discourses overlapping ethnography, evoking them without ever crossing over. Nonetheless, as talks, these papers, with their warmth, insight and ironies, have undoubtedly been very effective communications in the politics concerning what is to count as knowledge in the human sciences.

The romantic sensibility in contemporary anthropology, a discipline now full of debate about past purpose and present possibility, is thus double-edged. As in Rosaldo, it can begin to transform (deconstruct?) itself under pressure of other kinds of sensibilities into which it blurs, creating a different sort of knowledge space such as is now mapped by the human sciences. Or, as in Jackson, it can reinforce the humane knower, sustaining the unity and autonomy of his/her own experience among that of others, who remain his/her subjects. In this latter reaffirma-

tion of the romantic sensibility in anthropology, we have a sense of what seems good and true within a tradition of knowing, but we have no sense of how that tradition itself might be transformed. This is the question that Rosaldo's constituencies compel him to address.