

humans and other living organisms with which we share and exchange genetic material.

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A Polyphonic Nine Canto *Singspiel* after 25 Years of *Writing Culture* and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*

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Introduction: Historical Horizons, Emergent Futures

1. *Rhizomes*

From a Rice University perspective, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986, henceforth ACC), *Writing Culture* (1986, henceforth WC), the inauguration of the journal *Cultural Anthropology* (1986) under George Marcus' editorship, along with the Center for Cultural Studies (CCS) (which I directed 1987-93 and which grew out of the

Rice Circle), and the eight volumes in the 1990s of the *Late Editions* series were organic, rhizomatic, parts of one another. ACC in particular was a reading of our generation's effort to produce ethnographies that marked out somewhat new terrains and approaches, such as, for instance, attention to dream analysis and small group dynamics in Amazonian bands (Kracke 1978), or the sonic phenomenological and cosmological-moral critical apparatuses of New Guinea (Feld 1982). Both of these required readers to engage in the cultural and strategic richness of local knowledges as they would with their own, including changing sensibilities about location in larger than local worlds. Above all, we insisted that anthropology get past the silly polemics about materialist versus symbolic or interpretive approaches, since both are required, particularly in a changing world where both are contested and reworked. While ACC was a call for renewal of

anthropology's goals of providing frameworks for comparative humanities, social reform, social theory, translations or confrontations across epistemes and positionalities in the global economy, as well as renewed methodological critique, WC proved to be a hinge of conversation across the humanities, involving the new interdisciplines of media studies, feminist studies, comparative literature, post-colonial studies, cultural studies and new historicism. Oddly, the reception of WC often reduced attention to single texts in a manner quite contrary to anthropology's (and ACC's) larger goals and to the experiences of the "sixties generation" of which we were a part.

2. *Ethnographic Authority*

If one assumes and acknowledges that ethnographers always step into prior streams of representations, re-representations, evocations, montages, performatives and genres, many of the apparent difficulties of "ethnographic authority" are shifted so that the focus becomes the circuits, modalities, and discursive apparatuses in their social and historical contexts and their postings back and forth between prior and subsequent generations.

3. *Contexts and Collaborations*

ACC and WC happened between a series of overlapping major historical horizons: (a) socio-politically between the Iranian revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union, both of which transformed the theatres of global politics; (b) in terms of generational sensibility, between the 1960s (the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Peace Corps) and the 1990s (the World Wide Web, Gen X and Y entering the labour force as captured by Douglas Coupland (1991), MTV, the first Gulf War, the dot.com and biotech bubbles); (c) between anthropology done in teams of researchers of large projects over several decades, and anthropology done by individuals;¹ (d) between the simultaneous entry onto the American academic stage of structuralism and poststructuralism at The Johns Hopkins University's 1966 conference, "The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" (Macksey and Donato 1972)² and the introduction in the 1990s of the World Wide Web, the digital and genomics revolutions, and the shift of focus from interdisciplinary conversations between anthropology and the humanities in the 1980s to ones in the 1990s with the sciences, science studies, new biologies, comparative media studies, and studies of the global political economy ("globalization").

4. *Corpus*

In my own trajectories, ACC became the first of a trilogy of volumes on anthropology as cultural critique, ethno-

graphic methods, and the mutations and evolution of social theory articulating the historical and ethnographic contexts from which they arose. This trilogy inter-braided with a quartet of volumes that provided some of my own fieldwork as one set of ethnographic groundings for those reflections on theory, method, genre and explorations of adapting form and content to one another. The first was a study of the city of Yazd and its villages in dialogue with towns and city in Western India as settings for comparative religion and development of communities of Zoroastrians, Jews and Baha'is, including sections on the famines of the 19th century and emigration to India, the structure of bazaars as social-moral arenas, and the spatial and social dramas of riots and inscriptions of state and religious "truth" on the bodies of minorities (Fischer 1973). The second (Fischer 1980) was a study of the town of Qum as a training centre for religious leaders who propagated class-linked styles of religiosity across Iran, including a "Karbala paradigm" that mobilized a revolution, generated immanent or internal critique; a paradigm that could be evaluated both against other scholastic traditions of disputation (in Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism) as well as so-called "post-modern" deconstruction. This was part of a seven-country set of comparative projects each done by paired "native" and American analysts (in my case Shahrough Akhavi and Mehdi Abedi). A third (Fischer and Abedi 1990) juxtaposed contesting oral, written, and visual media worlds, including how Khomeini overcame his recognition that his mobilization of the critical apparatus of Shi'ism would be insufficient to ground his desire for guardianship by the cleric (*velayat-e faqih*) to be read as a way for clerics to intervene as governors of the political system. Using that case as a teaching tool for understanding the critical apparatus of Shi'ite hermeneutics, the small media of the revolution including the contestations among the revolution's factions in the extraordinary graphics of the revolution's posters, and an early account of what would become central to Iranian culture in the 2000s, it was a double weaving of that culture from one end of the loom in Iran and another end of the loom in America and Europe. A fourth study examined three non-homogenizable understandings of Iran's Zoroastrian heritage in Zoroastrianism itself (ritual), in the national epic (parable), and in philosophy (gnostic imagery), as well as on Iranian cinema from the 1970s through the 1990s reflecting particularly on how social repair is attempted after war, first in Khuzistan, then Kurdistan, then Afghanistan, over the course of the 1990s (Fischer 2004).

5. Essay as Form

These seven volumes form a foundation from which many essays also spin off exploring fieldwork, genres of culture (both native genres and analysts' genres), anthropology as cultural critique, and social theory as responses to worlds that outrun the pedagogies in which their inhabitants were trained. Among these were essays in the *Late Editions* series, produced by editorial collaboratives on *Perilous States* after the fall of the Soviet Union (Fischer 1997), new *Technoscientific Imaginaries* (Fischer 1995), on the generationally- and social justice-charged print work of artist and psychiatrist Eric Avery (Fischer 2000a), and on the millennial anxiety manifested in the potential Y2K bug, lodged like land mines within patched and repatched legacy codes of the digital infrastructure (Fischer 2000b). Other such essays were part of another collaborative endeavour: volumes that emerged from the decades long-running Friday morning seminars at Harvard led by Byron and Mary Jo Good, in which I participated (see Biehl et al. 2007), associated also with the journal *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry, Postcolonial Disorders* (Good 2008), and *A Medical Anthropology Reader: Theoretical Trajectories, Emergent Realities* (Good et al. 2010).

My essay in WC, carefully plotted with female and male voices, proved to be one of three studies on ethnicity, religion, and science, about how people give accounts of themselves through single-voiced meldings of split or multiple heritages ("postmodern arts of memory"), double voiced accounts of historical figures refigured as projective screens of contemporary dilemmas of religious facing new historical circumstances ("torn religions"), and formally homologous accounts of scientific fields and selves ("I/eying" the sciences).³

6. 1986

The times in 1986 were a-changing with an acceleration that was placing writing itself under an anxiety of being displaced by digital and multimedia circuits.⁴ The year ACC and WC were published was two years after the year of Orwell's 1984 had quietly passed and the Apple MacIntosh was introduced with its famous Ridley Scott commercial: "You will see why 1984 won't be like 1984." It was two years after Bhopal had exploded, Indira Gandhi was assassinated, and the Ahmedabad communal riots contested affirmative action in engineering and medical school admissions. It was the year that Pixar Animation Studios opened, electronic trading on the London Stock Exchange (the Big Bang) was initiated, the first computer virus (Brain) infected MS-DOS personal computers, and

Selim Jehan "Eddy" Shah launched the U.K. newspaper *Today* forcing all UK national papers to abandon linotype and letterpress machines for electronic production and colour printing (involving considerable labour unrest and suppression). It was the year William J. Schroeder, the second artificial heart recipient, died after 620 days, the US space shuttle Challenger exploded and the Chernobyl nuclear power station exploded. More positively, it was the year Voyager 2 reached Uranus, the Mir space station launched, the Japanese Suisei probe flew by Halley's Comet studying its UV hydrogen corona and solar winds, and Ferdinand Marcos was ousted by massive demonstrations mobilized with the aid of cell phones.

7. Polyphony

I offer below a condensed light-hearted reading and critique of *Writing Culture* from an *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* point of view. I intend the good vibes of a lively School of American Research (SAR) conference to be audible, full of harmonics and differences. I intend to recover WC's enduring parts, fending off what I sense are misreadings, misapprehensions, misappropriations.

"Ear of the Other, Voices of the Pages": A Polyphonic Nine Canto *Singspiel*

Ethnography is hybrid textual activity: it traverses genres and disciplines.

—James Clifford (1986:26)

JC: OY! Mea culpa! mea culpa! I know, I know. I come from UC Santa Cruz. They are going to crucify me in *Signs* for not inviting (more) feminists. I think we've got two out of ten, but they haven't worn it on their sleeves.⁵

MP [*Lit Crit and Chick Lit Canto of Beginnings*⁶ and *Arrivals*]: Oh come off it, all you wannabe alpha-males who think you are doing concept work and breaking into new epistemes. You are just repeating "arrival scenes" over and over, as we comp lit types have been pointing out, ever since the 15th century. Remember Vasco da Gama's Portuguese Jewish physican Garcia da Orta's (1563) "*Dialogue or Colloquies on the Simples*" in Kerala with the toddy tappers, pandits, and faqirs and his rival from the old country. That comparative interrogatory on botany and pharmacy is a virtual *pharmakon* of dialogic tactics. It provided a basis on which Linnaeus built his collaboratory, I mean classificatory system. [*Sotto voce, with saudade, the sadness of longing*: she recites a canto or two of *Os Lusíadas*, Luís Vaz de Camões' 1572 (1863) Homeric-style epic of Vasco da Gama's voyage to India.]

[*Refrain*] *Look for the women!* You guys are just too fixated on realism and denying singular phallic truth. Look to Irigaray or Cixous on polyerogeny. Remember Florinda Donner-Grau's *Shabono* (1982), which is or is not plagiarized from Helena Valero's *Yanoama: The Narrative of a White Girl Kidnapped by Amazonian Indians* (1970), and "is and is not based on fieldwork," "may or may not be true, is and is not ethnography, is and is not autobiography, does and does not claim professional and academic authority...and so on" (WC:30).⁷ [*Sotto voce*: O it's disciplinary boundary work, who is authorized as professional anthropologist and who is not, and Carlos Castaneda's blurbing Donner's book does not help! O it's all a play of first-person experience ("subjective") framing third person description ("objective") and tropes of ethnographers as allegorical castaways, captives, of being a "suspected alien," and of the European visitor "welcomed like a messiah" (Valero 1970:36), shades of that later debate between Gananath Obeyesekere (1997) and Marshall Sahlins (1995) over whether the Hawaiians actually thought of Captain Cook as a god ("welcomed like a messiah," killed as a "suspected alien"). It's less about attribution of belief *per se* than a methodological querying of the force of discursive structures and ritual forms in strategically dealing with something new to experience (Sahlins), versus a resistance to seeing sharp epistemic boundaries (Obeyesekere).]

[*Refrain*] *O look for the women* and polymorphic multierogeny. I sing in memory of Marjorie Shostak and *Nisa*. [*Sotto voce*: Although Shostak's writing is as shot through with all the same problems as you guys, belly-aching too much about the tribulations of fieldwork and the craft of writing.] You make ethnography a "nightmare of contradiction" (Shostak 1981:44), "an awful scene of a real return of the repressed" (Shostak 1981:44), "one long frustrating master-servant feud" (Richard Burton, Evans-Pritchard), as if Evans-Pritchard and Maybury-Lewis were "frustrated and depressed" or Malinowski and Firth were "richly perceptive, but terribly unsystematic," and ethnography in general were "boring" (WC:33). You'd never know that the Shavante would send a representative to Maybury-Lewis' funeral as an expression of appreciation and emotional bonds built over the decades through both ethnography and advocacy for their cultural survival. You overlook that Malinowski had a self, "best understood not as a monolithic scientist-observer, but as a multifaceted entity" (39), and that the richness and openness of his texts provide the empirical evidence to allow reinterpretations as demonstrated particularly by Annette Weiner (among many others). Think of the crafting of the "being there" sensations so exciting to his students (Firth 1957),

and his systematic word-for-word translations, glosses and interpretations of Trobriand texts in *Coral Gardens* (1965). And anyway, whoever said that scientists are not full of passion, competitive drive, aggression, head over heels in love with their promissory fantasies and the never stable significance of discoveries they produce with their experimental systems? And what's this sloganeering against positivism as if knowledge produced piece-meal, contingently and uncertainly were bad?

RR [*Headhunter's Canto*]: Yes, she's right! In the Inquisition from which da Orta was fleeing, truth is made to appear in dialogue. The voice is Socrates' but the hand is Plato's; the voice is Jacob's but the hand is Esau's. In inquisitions, power relations are asserted and denied. Assertion-denial, writing-erasure, legibility-veiling, that's the dia-logue or dia-lectic. Historical ethnography and ethnographic history, they mirror each other. Evans-Pritchard (1949) tries to do ethnography financed by the military amidst a bombing campaign (human terrain anthropology [AAA 2007; Peacock et al. 2007], Project Camelot [Horowitz 1967], Laos). Le Roy Ladurie (1978) attempts to see the 14th century through the power position of bishop's questioning (think of how much good information we got in Abu Ghraib).

But guys, make it real: Garcia? Jerry Garcia is the only Garcia students know. [Reciting from Abelardo Delgado's 1969 Chicano anthem:]

Stupid america, see that chicano with a big knife on his steady hand, he doesn't want to knife you, he wants to sit on a bench and carve christfigures but you won't let him...he is the Picasso of your western states but he will die with one thousand masterpieces hanging only from his mind. [Delgado 2011:28]

Stanford's undergraduates need to expand their curriculum to include Ilongot and Chicano perspectives. It's not just a sop to the growing diversity of the student body, but important to their orientation in a world of inescapable multiculturalism.

I know, I know. There will be rage. I'll be pilloried in the university senate. The culture wars will rage. "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." It's what's happening. [*Sotto voce*: I've learned the bitter lessons of head hunters' grief, and travelled the painful memory-charred trails, tracked and collated the different tribal-oral and army-archival modes of historical chronotyping.]

VC [*Canto of Ritual Forms*]: All these Hermes Ninja ethnographers claiming to "uncover the masked, the latent, the unconscious!" (WC:51). But it's all a ruse, this business of ethnographic reports, especially interpretive ones that claim to participate in native struggles to under-

stand, strategize, joke, speculate and wink, while asserting meaning, when it's all contingent, "determined by the moment of the ethnographic encounter" (51). It's all in the pronouns, deixics, and shifters. Take rituals. Circumcision makes you a man, bullshit. It creates a lifelong anxiety structure that can be mobilized periodically across the life course, not intentionally, but psychodynamically, metapragmatically, even mystically as in the Hamadsha trances, or through Lacanian slippages round and round the moebius strip of split selves and ever-substitutable objects of desire in chains of linguistic thirds. Take my Moroccan tilemaker Tuhami (Crapanzano 1980), who would withdraw into the hospital whenever he couldn't handle his subalternness in (post)colonial relations, and the Hamadsha *zikh*-trance didn't work. Rituals are trickster shows, they unman you while saying you are becoming a man. Like Walter Benjamin's translations, they are only "somewhat provisional way[s] of coming to terms with the foreignness of [ritual] languages" (51).

Take three exemplars (though I can't decide if they are *Muster* [master plan exemplar] or *Beispiel* [illustration example]): George Catlin's description of the Mandan initiation, O-kee-pah, he attended in 1832 (Catlin 1841 I:245-288), Goethe's (1992) description of the Roman Carnival he observed in 1787, and Clifford Geertz's (1972) accounting for the forms and layered significations of Balinese cockfights in 1958 (seven years "before the fact" of the 1965 massacres). Catlin was really thrown by the skin-piercing hanging of initiates, never having seen the Hamadsha and Rifa'i sufi piercing rites, or hook hanging at Kataragama in Sri Lanka. Actually despite all my suspicions of his reporting, the consensus is that with his sketchbooks and notes from his translator, he actually got it right. Similarly Goethe, that Protestant stiff, like Hawthorne and Henry James after him, just didn't get the lewd revelry of Carnival. I must admit, though, he did get a lot right: the trickstering (trying to blow out each other's candles while shouting "death to anyone not carrying a candle"), the inversions of the carpets and chairs from inside the palaces brought outside onto the Corso with the subalterns as movers and shakers while the elite sit and watch, the bawdy satire of status and procreation. For his general exams, Goethe still needs to read Rabelais or at least Bakhtin on French carnival, Max Gluckman on rites of rebellion in Swaziland, and Julie Taylor's analysis of the transformations of Rio Carnival from competitions based on dance steps to spectacle watched from reviewing stands complete with Disney figures. But Geertz is inexcusable: his description of a football game, I mean soccer, I mean buzkashi, I mean cockfight, is ludic, I mean ludicrous. You can't just describe a game in general, as if

each game is not different. I don't believe his stuff about passion, how would he know? Red Sox Nation, New England Patriots fanaticism. Ridiculous. What's the evidence? And you can't just describe how bets are placed, and people get in over their heads as if there were a pattern to the size of bets related to the matched strength and public or kinship alliances (Brazilians commit suicide, governments weaken, when they lose a World Cup, ridiculous). It's stereotyping to say it's a masculine game of homosocial bonding—what's all that about patting of rumps and exaggeration of shoulders, and codpieces? He's as bad as Goethe, using ethnography for mythic and philosophical meditation. Nonsense about the rowdiness and fleeting joys of life needing to be reflected upon during Lent. Nonsense using Bali to refute Bentham's "deep play" (gambling being irrational should be outlawed). *Muster* [type] versus *Beispiel* [example], it's a Kantian play; *Vorbild und Nachbild*, a Dilthey play; "models of, models for," the Geertzian version.

JC [*Canto of Allegory*]: Oh come on Vince, you of all people should appreciate allegory. Ethnography is performance, emplotted with powerful stories, describing real events through which they make moral, ideological, and even cosmological statements (WC:98). You yourself, Jim Boon, Mick Taussig and Steve Tyler are all explicit about this (100fn2). "Allegory (more strongly than "interpretation") calls to mind the poetic, traditional, cosmological...adding a temporal aspect...generat[ing] other levels, [interrupting] the rhetoric of presence...double attention to the descriptive surface and to more abstract, comparative, and explanatory levels" (100-101). Take Marjorie Shostak's opening transcript of Nisa's oral account of giving birth (1981). *Nisa's* voicing immediately generates alternative norms as well as reflection on a common experience of women. Shostak's whole text braids together three, discordant, allegorical registers, providing a dramatic tension of polyvocality. Nisa speaks as a "person giving specific kinds of advice to someone of a particular age" (107). At the same time, Shostak's editing emerges from a crucial moment of feminist politics and epistemology: consciousness raising and the sharing of experiences by women, and of an assumption "newly problematic" of "common female qualities (and oppressions) across racial, ethnic, and class lines" (107).

The detour of ethnographic subjectivity is one of "belief-skepticism," and as Michelle Rosaldo taught in her "Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding" (1980), we need to pay attention to uses and abuses of appropriations of ethnographic data. A recognition of allegory draws attention to the translations, encounters, and recontextualizations that compose ethnographies:

they are always already palimpsests. Ethnographic virtuosos use them with tact, tactically and tactfully, exploring the historically bounded and coercive constraints of stories, as well as using their juxtapositions and interruptions as tools of critique.

ST [*Canto of Evocation*]: Aye lads and lassie, no word of the post-modern yet? Forget representation. Evocation of participatory emergence, that's the key. Evocation frees ethnography from mimesis and "the...rhetoric [of]... 'objects,' 'facts,' 'descriptions'" (130). Evocation leads towards poesis, ritual performance, and therapy. Post-modern ethnography will float like "the Lord Brahma in the emergent common sense world, motionless...all potentiality suspended within" (134), floating ever asymptotically approaching, withdrawing, without ever having arrived. Post-modern ethnography will evoke always unfinished emergent holisms out of the polyphony of participation.

Although its technological time of emergence, post-newspaper, post-radio, post-computer is correctly adduced by Lyotard's *Report on the Postmodern Conditions of Knowledge* (1984), neither he nor I can quite anticipate the workings of the emergent Internet and social media that will crowd source, empowering many-to-many disseminations of audio-visual-textual permutations, upsetting Foucault's disciplinary modernities with the new capillaries of code that shift governance to tracking, aggregating and targetting by marketers and by the commerce of simulations foreseen by the mesmerized Baudrillard and Chris Marker. Heil Walmart!, Google!, derivatives and structured securities, and the power of the Chinese market.

Our only defence: we need "a self-conscious return to an earlier and more powerful notion of the ethical character of all discourse, as captured in the ancient significance of the family of terms "'ethos,' 'ethnos,' 'ethics'" (WC:126), hence ethnography [ethosophy?]. We need to return to the ancient ethos of poesis, ritual performance, and therapy. We need ethnography that "defamiliarizes common sense reality in a bracketed context of performance, evokes a fantasy wholly abducted from fragments," taking us into "strange lands with occult practices—into the heart of darkness—where fragments of the fantastic whirl about in the vortex of the quester's disoriented consciousness ... and then returns participants to the world of common sense—transformed, renewed, and sacralized" (126). Heidegger had his Black Forest (130), I've got my tribal Koya in India.

"Life in the field is itself fragmentary...and except for unusual informants like...[Marcel Griaule's] Dogon sage Ogotemmêli [or Victor Turner's Ndembu symbol

analyst, Muchona], the natives [Koya., Terence Turner's Kayapo, those who speak prose without knowing it, or produce more or less correct sentences without knowing the rules of grammar] seem to lack communicable visions" (131). Nonetheless what we learn from them is the importance of face-to-face dialogue, conversation of the everyday, the only ethical form of ethnography, where one can correct misunderstandings until one comes to a working agreement if never a full understanding. Post-modern ethnography privileges discourse over text, dialogue over monologue, the collaborative over the transcendental observer (126). "In one of its ideal forms, [it] would result in a polyphonic text, none of whose participants would have the final word" (126). "Post-modern ethnography builds its program [err, I mean, we need to abandon illusions of programs, the gramme, grammar, grammatology (130)] from the rubble of [Benjamin, Adorno, and Derrida's] deconstruction[s]" (131). It is a "return to the idea of aesthetic integration as therapy...of restorative harmony" (134). "Post-modern ethnography is an object of meditation that provokes a rupture with the commonsense world and evokes an aesthetic integration whose therapeutic effect is worked out in the restoration of the commonsense world" (134). "It aims not to foster the growth of knowledge but to restructure experience" (135). It embraces texts that stage the tension between inner paradox and deceptive outer logic, neither denying ambiguity nor endorsing it, neither subverting subjectivity nor denying objectivity ... making purposes possible (paraphrasing 136). As St. Bernard said, "to read with the ears to hear the voices of the pages" (136). [*Sotto voce*: Or was it Derrida's ear of the other?]

TA [*Canto of Unequal Languages*]: Can we get back to concrete examples of real ethnographers and the ways they translate and distort? This is a real problem in British social anthropology. "Mary Douglas puts this nicely" (160): When an anthropologist "draws out the whole scheme" of the cosmology of a group like the Lele, with whom she worked, that cosmology is rarely an "object of contemplation and speculation" in that way, but "rather has evolved as an appanage of other social institutions" (160; citing Mary Douglas). [*Sotto voce*: To simplify I will ignore the question of why some societies develop elaborate theologies as in Christianity, and other societies develop debate traditions as in Islam, while yet others stress orthopraxis as in Zoroastrianism. Let's just pretend (sorry Mike) that anthropologists only deal with illiterate societies, and ones with undeveloped cosmologies. I will write a lot about Islam and Christianity, but, after all, I did my original fieldwork with the Kabbabish Arab nomads.] So, I want to warn about the slippage that occurs when

anthropologists exercise the tendency to read the *implicit* in alien cultures.

Second, I want to warn about translation across unequal languages, the politics of language change. Arabic since the 19th century “has begun...to undergo a transformation (lexical, grammatical, semantic)” that makes it closer to European languages (154). There is a long literature in religious studies on the problems of appropriating the concepts of other societies into Christian formulations, nowhere perhaps more importantly than in the debates over African religions, whose languages were first translated by missionaries and who were under pressure to Christianize.

The most vexed of these translation arenas is that of rationality in which the struggle between sociological and Anglo-analytic philosophy accounts are often argued into *reductio ad absurdum*. This was the so-called “Other Minds” debate, which one would have thought would have been settled by Evans-Pritchard’s two-spears solution (1976:25-28) for wit-craft, I mean witchcraft, among the Azande: moral or social explanations do not replace, but complement, pragmatic or material ones. But philosophers never leave “good enough” solutions alone, and Peter Winch and Ernest Gellner have been driving me crazy, especially Gellner who may be good on the problems of Czech nationalism and faux national epics, but is, as he ages, more and more insistent on portraying Islam as irrational. He’s right, of course, to insist on the difference between explaining and explaining away. But his insistence on finding examples of irrationalities and falsehoods is perverse, certainly neither therapeutic nor ethical in Steve Tyler’s sense of post-modern ethnography, something that, of course, Gellner finds anathema without understanding its technological, sociological, and philosophical grounds.

Just as Gellner grounds nationalism in the demands for literate workforces, so too computer society provides the grounds for Lyotard’s post-modern and Bill Readings’s *The University in Ruins* (1997)—governed by neoliberal performativity and hyper-capitalist rationality, not logical irrationality. For Gellner the hard-fought defense of secularism over the bloody course of European history is a red line in his understanding of the Islamic world. But this will become self-defeating without some commonsense post-modern openness to demographic changes, the struggles for education, self-determination and accountable responsibility for post-colonial relations. Wonder what he thinks of Salman Rushdie’s chutney of Urdu and Hindi and English in *Midnight’s Children* (1981), as a generational total revision of the nationalist liberation tale.

GM [*Canto of the World System*]: I want to go back to the notion of evocation and the typologies of ways micro-level ethnographies, either in single strategic locales or in complementary multiple locales, expose how larger political economies operate. It is a feature (maybe a bug, certainly buggy feature) of contemporary writing that there is “prominent metacommentary of the difficulties of doing ethnography in the modern world, while doing it” (195). The essay form, of course, lends itself particularly to this kind of writing, one that I practice quite frequently, and that was explored also in the *Late Editions* series I edited with a Rice-based editorial and writing collaborative. There are two major modes of doing this: first, ethnographically showing how the larger world system totally infuses and structures the intentional actions in local worlds. Paul Willis (1982) provides a truly flawed example based on only 12 lads, but it is my example of invoking a theory of political economy and plugging a locality into it. Vincent Crapanzano’s *Tuhami* (1980) and *Waiting* (1985) are other examples of this modernist essay style. In *Tuhami*, Lacanian displacements provide a focus of mediation on the hermeneutics of fieldwork (more than the intervention of a translator, employer, doctor or others in the wider social context). In *Waiting*, the text evokes the mix of Afrikaner stuckness and irony about their position in what from their perspective are a classic “times out of joint” setback.

The other solution that we are propagating in ACC and monographs at Rice is the multi-locale ethnography. There are two practitioners. First, there is Michael Fischer’s *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (1980). “Though it is much harder to pin down as ethnography than Willis’s explicitly labelled study” [*Sotto voce*: Sorry Mike, but for polemical reasons I have to make ethnography restrict itself in ways that can be easily criticized], it “nonetheless depends...on strategically situated ethnography, and self-consciously so” (190). And then in the wake of ACC, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogue in Postmodernity* [*Sotto voce*: Not postmodernism] and *Tradition* (Fischer and Abedi 1990) [*Sotto voce*: Note the chronology] stresses the forms of media and genres of expression, and circuits of dissemination across transnational boundaries. The other is Kim Fortun’s *Advocacy after Bhopal* (2001), which not only explores genres, but pursues the goal of doing repatriation of ethnography, doing it as seriously at home as abroad, really using the detour of ethnography to explore the chemical industry as it games national judicial and risk regimes.

MF [*Canto of the Vienna Waltz: Wien, Wien, nur du allein*]: Hey y’all, ’nuff now, why not experiment right down here in Texas with the ways in which gendered,

halfie, ethnic voices ventriloquize all these deep philosophical issues of lack of complete or explicit knowledge, sense of the buried coming to the surface, and compulsions of an id-like force, all these literary tactics of inquiry into what is hidden in language, what is deferred by signs, what is pointed to, what is repressed, implicit or mediated. Like travel accounts in the times of exploration, and the novel for bourgeois selves collecting bits of information scattered about in urban worlds where common shared experiences can guide no longer (Walter Benjamin, Ian Watt, Raymond Williams), perhaps the post-modern—postings back and forth among modernities, temporally and in different places, Derrida's postcards—arts of memory can not only create new identities (being Chinese-American has no model) but revitalize ethnography as a mode of cultural critique, probing, testing, contextualizing, experimenting, watching how disseminations and provocations, including suturing and textured elements of feminist and psychoanalytic stitching, male and female authors, males and female imagery work together to create third spaces of emergent forms of life. Some of these are talk-stories (Maxine Hong Kingston), transferences—"My ancestors talk to me in dangling myths, Each word a riddle"—Diana der Hovanessian (203)—multiple voices and perspectives that critique hegemonic discourses (Leslie Marmon Silk's young Native American men in uniform in southeast Asia "severely disturbed by the inability to distinguish the enemy from kinfolk" [213]), bilingual insistences, interferences, inter-references—Within the dark *morada* average chains rattle and clacking prayer wheels jolt, the hissing spine to uncoil wailing tongues of Nahuatl converts who slowly wreath rosary whips to flay one another" (Burciaga and Zamora 1976)—humour and satire.

So y'all, I remain bemused by (and resistant to) the insistence on reducing ethnography to the frame of a single text (e.g., Marcus is explicit on p. 168, but others are equally reductive). For me, ethnographies participate in a variety of overlapping, intersecting, juxtaposed, cross-checking and alternative (subaltern, non-guild, gendered, mediated) archives of forgetting and reinvention. These include the corpus of an ethnographer's work and driving questions over a lifetime, the depth of regional geographical-ethnographic-historical studies in comparative perspective gathered through multiple different national traditions of investigation, zoomings in and out of imagined worlds (both cultural constructions of personhood, and reworkings of local worlds by global ones), and gendered, class, status, linguistic and other contests of position, power, material-semiotic switches and mediations (oral, written, filmic, electronic).

I sing of the Vienna, I mean Rice, Circle's critique (not criticism) and pragmatism—practice, "meaning is the use in social context" [Wittgenstein], praxis (goal-oriented practice, often with unintended consequences [Marx]). I come from comparative ethnographic work on Jamaican stratification and religious styles and non-Protestant stratifications in several religious groups over historical time [*Zoroastrian Iran Between Myth and Praxis* (1973)]. Evocation, of course, description too, social theory as developed in different times and places for context (comparative study of revolutions being only one such frame) and much more. Polyvocality, affects, cultures of death and cultures of life, film and graphic arts, epics, rituals and parables, all that and more—'tis the mission of ethnography. Postmodern conditions, postmodernities (Japanese cool, Fredric Jameson's flattening [Jameson 1990:325], David Harvey's [1990] Big Bang of time-space compression, Donna Haraway's cyborg [1991] and companion species futures), postings back and forth among modernities—all are grist to ethnographies keeping up with the emergent forms of life.

PR: Oh come on, guys, forget ethnography! We've got to do concept work, break through like Foucault (the voice is Foucault, the hand is Weber and Kant) to an appreciation of productive power through discourses (hmm, Marx said that, no? Making things appear natural and universal). All this talk of interpretive, critical, political is irrelevant, it is (forgive me, Steve Sangren for stealing your thunder, but Talal Asad also said something like this; and just as Pierre Bourdieu would say) minor symbolic capital in academic tenure politics. Follow me and "study up." I work on French imperial urban planning of the 1920s ("studying up"? Or is it studying archives? 1920s?). I think we need to be critical cosmopolitans (oops, that was Kant again, no?). Lines of flight from ethnography (forget improving *Reflections on Fieldwork* [1977]) into *assemblage, equipe, problematique* (sounds better in French, no?).

Anyway, enough of this old stuff, I'm interested in the adventures of Reason, the core of anthropos (Greek is almost as good as French) in the contemporary, so I'm turning to scientists. I've got this friend Tom White, a science-manager type who has finally opened the door to biotechnology for me (his wife had read *Writing Culture*). His company, Cetus, produced a kit for PCR, polymerase chain reaction, a tool for amplifying DNA, which got Kerry Mullis (terrible guy) the Nobel Prize. So then I could get Daniel Cohen at the Centre d'Etude du Polymorphisme Humain (CEPH) to let me watch their fund-raising telethon and other efforts in Paris, including a ringside seat when their negotiations with Millenium in Cambridge,

Mass., to share CEPH's family data on diabetes and obesity collapsed amidst populist fears that French DNA would be somehow alienated. And then, though this didn't really work out, I could get Kari Stefansson to talk to me about deCode, the Genome company in Iceland that was at the centre of the 1990s controversies about privacy, property rights, and linking medical records to other data sets for exploitation by transnational pharmaceutical companies. Ethnography? Forget it, we have bigger fish to fry.

GM: "The work of the seminar was to unfix, by literary therapy, the narrow frames in which ethnographies have typically been read" (266).

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Notes

- 1 In the pre-Second World War period one thinks not only of Boas and Malinowski's seminars that seeded or framed comparative work, but of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute's regional agendas as well as those of other colonial Institutes for Social and Economic Development. The late 1960s saw the waning of the era of large team ethnographic projects which had flourished in the postwar period such as: the MIT-Harvard Indonesia project; Harvard's Southwestern United States Five Cultures Project; other Harvard projects in Chiapas, the Amazon, the Kalahari, and Polynesia-Melanesia; Cornell's Peru; and Chicago's Comparative Family and Kinship Project and the Islam and Social Change Project, in both of which the author participated. Area Studies Programs also were beginning to wane, though consulting for modernization projects continued (Harvard's Institute for International Development was dissolved in 2000). Funding for anthropology was increasingly individualized, both loosening previous agendas and opening space for new experiments.
- 2 Lévi-Strauss was present. Neville Dyson-Hudson "represented" anthropology albeit from an uncomprehending perspective. David Schneider was invited but at the last moment could not attend. Derrida presented "Sign, Structure and Play." Other participants included Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Georges Poulet, Tzvetan Todorov, Jean Hyppolite, Lucien Goldman, Eugenio Donato, Charles Moraze and René Girard.
- 3 See Fischer 2003; also see Fischer 1997 and 2000a.
- 4 On the technological limbo and the anxiety of future influence on experiments in writing between pre and post web-based communication in the 1980s and 1990s, see Fischer 2000c.
- 5 The article in the journal *Signs* by Frances Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe and Colleen Ballerino Cohen, "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective" (1989) was widely read and cited. WC stirred up a number of misconceived retorts, particularly from some feminists who could not see beyond the passage

parodied here in Jim Clifford's "Introduction" to WC. Ruth Behar wrote in her introduction to *Women Writing Culture* (1996:5), "The fact is that *Writing Culture* took a stab at the heart of feminist anthropology," and admitted that many could see WC only through this passage of his introduction. Indeed, she displayed this propensity by misreading my essay as simply focused on "ethnic autobiography rather than on ethnography," choosing to ignore the concern with genres, discourses, styles, and cultural forms that people use to create their sense of ethnicity, choosing to ignore the essay's careful attention to women writing ethnicity (to which Behar's own work significantly contributes), and choosing to ignore the demonstration that attention to genres and forms of "native" writing and expression in literate cultures can also be one of the tools of ethnographic work (we are not restricted to orality) and can perform theoretical critique (in that case of older theories of socialization and transmission). For a list of other feminist readings of WC, see footnote 12 to Behar's "Introduction." Other equally misconceived responses were Richard Fox's edited volume, pointedly entitled *Recapturing Anthropology* (1991), and Richard Fardon's edited volume *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing* (1990).

6 See Said 1975.

7 Please note that all page references in this text to passages in *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) omit authors' names and the date for the sake of brevity, except where confusion would result.

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Anthropology's Ontological Anxiety and the Concept of Tradition

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"...one cannot think for oneself if one thinks entirely by oneself"

—Alasdair MacIntyre (1988:396)

Following anthropology's epistemological and ethical anxieties, frequently collapsed under the epithet of a "crisis of representation," in which we worried both whether we could describe others' social realities and whether we ought to do so, looms another I portentously refer to as the ontological anxiety.¹ Does anthropology have a future? Will it continue to exist? Does the centre hold? I thought both the epistemological and ethical anxieties were somewhat exaggerated, but chewing over the issues they raised undoubtedly produced some healthy gastric juices.² What of the ontological question? I argue that it is somewhat misplaced; what is under threat and how seriously to take it depends on how we define the context and ourselves. Such clarification may, in turn, suggest dangers rather different from those that excite the people who worry about our imminent demise.

The ontological question is limited both insofar as it presupposes a particular view of the world embedded in the material and political constraints of contemporary academic life in which disciplines are treated as so many competing, essentialized entities and insofar as it assumes the loss of an ethnographic object. On the first point, one cannot have read Handler's *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture* (1988) without facing the very existence of such ontological questions with some skepticism. Anthropologists' worry about their collective survival is part of a process of self-objectification, akin to nationalist politics. To be sure, this objectification stems largely from the material conditions of our social reproduction—government and university bureaucracies and budgets—but it is also grounded in what Handler referred to as a logic of possessive individualism, a logic characteristic of capitalist modernity (cf. Macpherson 1964). Under this logic, entities are conceived as individuated beings on the order of natural species; they are bounded, homogeneous, and continuous—but also perpetually insecure