RETHINKING ETHNOGRAPHY: TOWARDS A CRITICAL CULTURAL POLITICS

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CRITICAL theory is not a unitary concept. It resembles a loose coalition of interests more than a united front. But whatever it is or is not, one thing seems clear: Critical theory is committed to unveiling the political stakes that anchor cultural practices—research and scholarly practices no less than the everyday. On this point the participants in this forum agree. Yes, critical theory politicizes science and knowledge. Our disagreements arise from how we view (and value) the tension between science/knowledge and politics. Logical empiricists are dedicated to the *eviction* of politics from science. Critical theorists, on the other hand, are committed to the *excavation* of the political underpinnings of all modes of representation, including the scientific.

Ethnography, with its ambivalent meanings as both a method of social science research and a genre of social science text (see Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988), has been the most amenable of the social sciences to post-structuralist critique. It presents a particularly sensitive site for registering the aftershocks of critical theory. No group of scholars is struggling more acutely and productively with the political tensions of research than ethnographers. For ethnography, the undermining of objectivist science came roughly at the same time as the collapse of colonialism. Since then, post-colonial critics have set about unmasking the imperialist underpinnings of anthropology (Asad, 1973; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989; Miller, 1990), the discipline with which ethnography has been closely but not exclusively associated. Clifford Geertz explains (1988, pp. 131–132):

> The end of colonialism altered radically the nature of the social relationship between those who ask and look and those who are asked and looked at. The decline of faith in brute fact, set procedures, and unsituated knowledge in the human sciences, and indeed in scholarship generally, altered no less radically the askers' and lookers' conception of what it was they were trying to do. Imperialism in its classical form, metropoles and possessions, and Scientism in its, impulsions and billiard balls, fell at more or less the same time.

The double fall of scientism and imperialism has been, for progressive ethnographers, a *felix culpa*, a fortunate fall. The ensuing "crisis of representation" (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 7) has induced deep epistemological, methodological, and ethical self-questioning.

Though some assume defensive or nostalgic postures, most ethnographers would agree with Renato Rosaldo's current assessment of the field (1989, p. 37): "The once dominant ideal of a detached observer using neutral language to

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explain 'raw' data has been displaced by an alternative project that attempts to understand human conduct as it unfolds through time and in relation to its meanings for the actors." Moreover, a vanguard of critical and socially committed ethnographers argues that there is no way out short of a radical rethinking of the research enterprise. I will chart four intersecting themes in the critical rethinking of ethnography: (1) The Return of the Body, (2) Boundaries and Borderlands, (3) The Rise of Performance, and (4) Rhetorical Reflexivity.

RETURN OF THE BODY

Ethnography's distinctive research method, participant-observation fieldwork, privileges the body as a site of knowing. In contrast, most academic disciplines, following Augustine and the Church Fathers, have constructed a Mind/Body hierarchy of knowledge corresponding to the Spirit/Flesh opposition so that mental abstractions and rational thought are taken as both epistemologically and morally superior to sensual experience, bodily sensations, and the passions. Indeed, the body and the flesh are linked with the irrational, unruly, and dangerous—certainly an inferior realm of experience to be controlled by the higher powers of reason and logic. Further, patriarchal constructions that align women with the body, and men with mental faculties, help keep the mind-body, reason-emotion, objective-subjective, as well as masculine-feminine hierarchies stable.

Nevertheless, the obligatory rite-of-passage for all ethnographers—doing fieldwork—requires getting one's body immersed in the field for a period of time sufficient to enable one to participate inside that culture. Ethnography is an *embodied practice;* it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing. The embodied researcher is the instrument. James Clifford acknowledges (1988, p. 24): "Participant-observation obliges its practitioners to experience, at a bodily as well as an intellectual level, the vicissitudes of translation." In a posthumously published essay, "On Fieldwork," the late Erving Goffman emphasized the corporeal nature of fieldwork (1989, p. 125):

> It's one of getting data, it seems to me, by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, . . . so that you are close to them while they are responding to what life does to them.

This active, participatory nature of fieldwork is celebrated by ethnographers when they contrast their "open air" research with the "arm chair" research of more sedentary and cerebral methods.

Ethnographic rigor, disciplinary authority, and professional reputation are established by the length of time, depth of commitment, and risks (bodily, physical, emotional) taken in order to acquire cultural understanding. Letters of recommendation often refer approvingly to bodily hardships suffered by the dedicated ethnographer—malarial fevers, scarcity of food, long periods of isolation, material discomforts, and so forth, endured in the field.

Bronislaw Malinowski, credited with establishing modern standards of ethnographic fieldwork—whose own practice remains unsurpassed—recommended bodily participation, in addition to observation, as a mode of intensifying cultural understanding (1922/1961, pp. 21–22):

[I]t is good for the Ethnographer sometimes to put aside camera, note book and pencil, and to join in himself in what is going on. He can take part in the natives' games, he can follow them on their visits and walks, sit down and listen and share in their conversations.

Fifty years later, Geertz still affirms the corporeal nature and necessity of fieldwork (1973, p. 23):

It is with the kind of material produced by long-term, mainly (though not exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts that the mega-concepts with which contemporary social science is afflicted . . . can be given the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and concretely *about* them, but, what is more important, creatively and imaginatively *with* them.

Although ethnographic fieldwork privileges the body, published ethnographies typically have repressed bodily experience in favor of abstracted theory and analysis. In the shift from ethnographic method (fieldwork) to ethnographic rhetoric (published monograph), named individuals with distinct personalities and complex life histories are inscribed as "the Bororo" or "the Tikopia." Finely detailed speech and nuanced gesture are summarized flatly: "All the voices of the field have been smoothed into the expository prose of more-or-less interchangeable 'informants' (Clifford, 1988, p. 49). The interpersonal contingencies and experiential give-and-take of fieldwork process congeal on the page into authoritative statement, table, and graph. According to post-colonial feminist critic Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989, p. 56): "It is as if, unvaryingly, every single look, gesture, or utterance has been stained with anthropological discourse. . . ."

Recognition of the bodily nature of fieldwork privileges the processes of communication that constitute the "doing" of ethnography: speaking, listening, and acting together. According to Stephen Tyler (1987, p. 172), the postmodern recovery of the body in fieldwork means the return of speaking, communicating bodies, a "return to the commonsense, plurivocal world of the speaking subject." He pushes this point (1987, p. 171): "Postmodern anthropology is the study of [wo]man—'talking.' Discourse is its object and means." Trinh reminds us that interpersonal communication is grounded in sensual experience (1989, p. 121): "[S]peaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched." When modernist ethnographers systematically record their *observations,* they forget that "seeing is mediated by saying" (Tyler, 1987, p. 171).

Michael Jackson wants to recuperate the body in ethnographic discourse (1989, p. 18), to reestablish "the intimate connection between our bodily experience in the everyday world and our conceptual life." He argues (1989, p. 11): "If we are to find common ground with them [the people we study], we have to open ourselves to modes of sensory and bodily life which, while meaningful to us in our personal lives, tend to get suppressed in our academic discourse." Jackson wants to restore the epistemological and methodological, as well as etymological, connection between experience and empiricism. He names his project "radical empiricism" and positions it within and against "traditional empiricism." What traditional empiricism attempts to control, suspend, or bracket out—"the empirical reality of our personal engagement with and attitude to those others" (1989, p. 34)—radical empiricism privileges as "the

intersubjective grounds on which our understanding is constituted" (1989, p. 34):

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. Unlike traditional empiricism, which draws a definite boundary between observer and observed, between method and object, radical empiricism denies the validity of such cuts and makes the *interplay* between these domains the focus of its interest. (1989, p. 3)

The project of radical empiricism changes ethnography's traditional approach from Other-as-theme to Other-as-interlocutor (Theunissen, 1984), and represents a shift from monologue to dialogue, from information to communication.

Jackson provocatively argues that traditional ethnographic "pretenses" about detached observation and scientific method reveal anxiety about the uncontrollable messiness of any truly interesting fieldwork situation (1989, p. 3):

Indeed, given the arduous conditions of fieldwork, the ambiguity of conversations in a foreign tongue, differences of temperament, age, and gender between ourselves and our informants, and the changing theoretical models we are heir to, it is likely that 'objectivity' serves more as a magical token, bolstering our sense of self in disorienting situations, than as a scientific method for describing those situations as they really are.

The radical empiricist's response to the vulnerabilities and vicissitudes of fieldwork is honesty, humility, self-reflexivity, and an acknowledgement of the interdependence and reciprocal role-playing between knower and known:

In this process we put ourselves on the line; we run the risk of having our sense of ourselves as different and distanced from the people we study dissolve, and with it all our pretensions to a supraempirical position, a knowledge that gets us above and beyond the temporality of human existence. (Jackson, 1989, p. 4)

Johannes Fabian focuses on temporality as a strategy for bringing back the body-in-time in ethnographic discourse, and with it the body politic. In a trenchant rhetorical critique of ethnographic texts (1983, p. 148), he identifies the "denial of coevalness" as a strategy for "keeping Anthropology's Other in another time" and thereby keeping "others" in their marginal place. Coevalness is the experience of cotemporality, the recognition of actively sharing the same time, the acknowledgement of others as contemporaries. Fabian argues forcefully that ethnography manifests "schizochronic tendencies" (1983, p. 37). On the one hand, the discipline insists on the coeval experience of fieldwork as the source of ethnographic knowledge, and on the other hand, this coevalness is denied in professional discourse that temporally distances others through labels such as "tribal," "traditional," "ancient," "animistic," "primitive," "preliterate," "neolithic," "underdeveloped," or the slightly more polite, "developing," and so forth. Clifford (1988, p. 16) calls this tactic a "temporal setup." In a deeply contradictory way, ethnographers go to great lengths to become cotemporal with others during fieldwork but then deny in writing that these others with whom they lived are their contemporaries. Fabian warns (1983, p. 33): "These disjunctions between experience and science, research and writing, will continue to be a festering epistemological sore."

More problematically, he reveals (Fabian, 1983, p. 144) how the expansionist campaigns of colonialist-imperialist policies "required Time to accommodate the schemes of a one-way history: progress, development, modernity (and their negative mirror images: stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition). In short, *geopolitics* has its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*." Anthropology is complicit with imperialism and the ideology of progress when it rhetorically distances the Other in Time.

For Fabian, the way to prevent temporal reifications of other cultures is for ethnographers to rethink themselves as communicators, not scientists. He states this fundamental point in strong terms (1983, p. 71): "Only as communicative praxis does ethnography carry the promise of yielding new knowledge about another culture." Ethnographers must recognize "that fieldwork is a form of communicative interaction with an Other, one that must be carried out coevally, on the basis of shared intersubjective Time and intersocietal contemporaneity" (1983, p. 148). He privileges communication because "for human communication to occur, coevalness has to be *created*. Communication is, ultimately, about creating shared Time" (1983, pp. 30–31). Whereas Paul Ricoeur (1971) wanted to fix the temporal flow and leakage of speaking, to rescue "the said" from "the saying," contemporary ethnographers struggle to recuperate "the saying from the said," to shift their enterprise from nouns to verbs, from mimesis to kinesis, from textualized space to co-experienced time.

This rethinking of ethnography as primarily about speaking and listening, instead of observing, has challenged the visualist bias of positivism with talk about voices, utterances, intonations, multivocality. Sight and observation go with space, and the spatial practices of division, separation, compartmentalization, and surveillance. According to Rosaldo (1989, p. 41), "the eye of ethnography" is connected to "the I of imperialism." Sight and surveillance depend on detachment and distance. Getting perspective on something entails withdrawal from intimacy. Everyday parlance equates objectivity with aloofness. Being "too close" is akin to losing perspective and lacking judgment.

Metaphors of sound, on the other hand, privilege temporal process, proximity, and incorporation. Listening is an interiorizing experience, a gathering together, a drawing in, whereas observation sizes up exteriors. The communicative praxis of speaking and listening, conversation, demands copresence even as it decenters the categories of knower and known. Vulnerability and self-disclosure are enabled through conversations. Closure, on the other hand, is constituted by the gaze. The return of the body as a recognized method for attaining "vividly felt insight into the life of other people" (Trinh, 1989, p. 123) shifts the emphasis from space to time, from sight and vision to sound and voice, from text to performance, from authority to vulnerability.

BOUNDARIES AND BORDERLANDS

Geertz's well-known "Blurred Genres" essay (1983, pp. 19–35) charts ethnography's ambivalent participation in the postmodern redistribution of analytical foci from center to periphery, delimitation to dispersal, whole to fragment, metropole to margin. To be sure, ethnographers for a long time have been situated more characteristically in the peripheral village than in the metropolitan center. They have been predisposed professionally to seek out the frontier

and hinterlands, the colony rather than the capital. But this preoccupation with marginal cultures that obliged them figuratively and literally to live on the boundary did not prevent them from still seeing identity and culture, self and other, as discrete, singular, integral, and stable concepts. Once they crossed the border and pitched their tent on the edge of the encampment, they confidently set about describing "the Trobrianders," or "the Nuer," or "the ghetto," interpreting these cultures as distinct, coherent, whole ways of life. In so doing, they centralized the peripheral instead of de-centering the "metropolitan typifications" that they carried inside their heads (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 207).

All that confidence in continuous traditions and innocent encounters with pristine cultures has been shattered in our post-colonial epoch. Borders bleed, as much as they contain. Instead of dividing lines to be patrolled or transgressed, boundaries are now understood as criss-crossing sites inside the postmodern subject. Difference is resituated within, instead of beyond, the self. Inside and outside distinctions, like genres, blur and wobble. Nothing seems truer now than Trinh's pithy insight (1989, p. 94): "Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak."

Rosaldo believes that contemporary geo-politics, including decolonization and multinational corporations, requires thinking about boundaries not simply as barriers but as bridges and membranes (1989, p. 217): "All of us inhabit an interdependent late-twentieth-century world marked by borrowing and lending across porous national and cultural boundaries that are saturated with inequality, power, and domination." Further, the border-crossings emblematic of our postmodern world challenge ethnography to rethink its project: "If ethnography once imagined it could describe discrete cultures, it now contends with boundaries that crisscross over a field at once fluid and saturated with power. In a world where 'open borders' appear more salient than 'closed communities,' one wonders how to define a project for cultural studies" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 45). Rosaldo argues that the research agenda needs to move from centers to "borderlands," "zones of difference," and "busy intersections" where many identities and interests articulate with multiple others (1989, pp. 17, 28).

The major epistemological consequence of displacing the idea of solid centers and unified wholes with borderlands and zones of contest is a rethinking of identity and culture as constructed and relational, instead of ontologically given and essential. This rethinking privileges metonym, "reasoning part-to-part" over synecdoche, "reasoning part-to-whole" (Tyler, 1987, p. 151); it features syntax over semantics. Meaning is contested and struggled for in the interstices, *in between* structures. Identity is invented and contingent, not autonomous: " 'I' is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. 'I' is, itself, *infinite layers*" (Trinh, 1989, p. 94).

Clifford argues (1988, p. 10) that much of non-western historical experience has been "hemmed in by concepts of continuous tradition and the unified self." The presuppositions of pattern, continuity, coherence, and unity characteristic of classic ethnography may have had more to do with the West's ideological commitment to individualism than with on-the-ground cultural practices. "I argue," says Clifford (1988, p. 10), "that identity, ethnographically considered,

must always be mixed, relational, and inventive." The idea of the person shifts from that of a fixed, autonomous self to a polysemic site of articulation for multiple identities and voices.

From the boundary perspective, identity is more like a performance in process than a postulate, premise, or originary principle. From his historical study of the "colonial assault" on Melanesia, and his 1977 fieldwork study of a courtroom trial in Massachusetts where land ownership by Mashpee Native Americans was contingent upon "proof" of tribal identity, Clifford (1988, p. 9) came to understand identity as provisional, "not as an archaic survival but as an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished." In our postmodern world the refugee, exile, has become an increasingly visible sign of geopolitical turbulence as well as the emblematic figure for a more general feeling of displacement, dispersal, what Clifford describes (1988, p. 9) as "a pervasive condition of off-centeredness. . . ."

Betwixt and between worlds, suspended between a shattered past and insecure future, refugees and other displaced people must create an "inventive poetics of reality" (Clifford, 1988, p. 6) for recollecting, recontextualizing, and refashioning their identities. The refugee condition epitomizes a postmodern existence of border-crossings and life on the margins. With displacement, upheaval, unmooring, come the terror and potentiality of flux, improvisation, and creative recombinations. Refugees, exiles, homeless people, and other nomads enact the post-structualist idea of "putting culture into motion" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 91) through experiences that are both violent and regenerative. Taking the Carribean as an illuminating example, Clifford notes (1988, p. 15) that its history is one of "degradation, mimicry, violence, and blocked possibilities," but it is also "rebellious, syncretic, and creative."

In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Michel de Certeau (1984, p. 30) celebrates the interventions of marginal people whose creativity, "the art of making do," gets finely honed from living on the edge, a borderlands life:

> Thus a North African living in Paris or Boubaix (France) insinuates *into* the system imposed on him by the construction of a low-income housing development or of the French language the ways of 'dwelling' (in a house or a language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.

My own fieldwork with refugees and migrants in Thailand, the Gaza Strip, and inner-city Chicago resonates deeply with Clifford's observations (1988, p. 16): "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."

There are implications for rhetoric and communication studies from ethnography's current interest in boundary phenomena and border negotiations. Communication becomes even more urgent and necessary in situations of displacement, exile, and erasure. Trinh, a Vietnamese-American woman, speak-

ing as an exile to other exiles, articulates the difficulty and urgency of expression for all refugees and displaced people (1989, p. 80):

> You who understand the dehumanization of forced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice—you know. And often cannot *say* it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said.

The *discourse of displacement* is a project that beckons rhetorical and communication scholars.

And if the increasingly pervasive feeling of discontinuity and finding oneself "off center among scattered traditions" (Clifford, 1988, p. 3) incites us to speak, then we must draw on *topoi* from among multiple discursive styles and traditions. Jackson notes the intertextual and heteroglossic nature of discourse (1989, p. 176): "Reviewing the historical mutability of discourse, I am also mindful that no one episteme ever completely supercedes another. The historical matrix in which our present discourse is embedded contains other discursive styles and strategies, and makes use of them." Never has the rhetorical canon of *inventio* taken on more emphatic meaning than in the current rethinking of culture and ethos (see Wagner, 1980).

Cities throughout the United States have become sites of extraordinary diversity as refugees and immigrants, increasingly from the hemispheres of the South and the East, pour into inner-city neighborhoods. Rosaldo makes the point that one does not have to go to the "Third World" to encounter culture in the borderlands (1989, p. 28): "Cities throughout the world today increasingly include minorities defined by race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, and sexual orientation. Encounters with 'difference' now pervade modern everyday life in urban settings." For more than three years I have been conducting ethnographic research in one of these polyglot immigrant neighborhoods in inner-city Chicago. More than 50 languages and dialects are spoken by students at the local high school. The "Bilingual Student Roster" displays an exotic array of languages that in addition to Spanish, Korean, and Arabic, includes Assyrian, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Khmer, Hmong, Malayalam, Gujarati, Lao, Urdu, Cantonese, Greek, Pashto, Thai, Punjabi, Italian, Armenian, Dutch, Turkish, Ibo, Amharic, Slovenian, Farsi, and others. For the first 20 months of fieldwork I lived in an apartment alongside refugee and immigrant neighbors from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Iraq, Laos, Cambodia, Poland, Lebanon, as well as African-American, Appalachian White, and elderly Jew all living cheek-by-jowl in the same crowded, dilapidated tenement building. The local street gang with which I work reflects the same polyglot texture of the neighborhood. It is called the Latin Kings, originally a Puerto Rican gang, but the current members include Assyrian, African-American, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Salvadoran, Vietnamese, Lao, Korean, Palestinian, Filipino, Mexican, White, and others (Conquergood, Friesma, Hunter & Mansbridge, 1990)

Few phrases have more resonance in contemporary ethnography—and with my own fieldwork—than Bakhtin's powerful affirmation (1986, p. 2) that "the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries. . . ."

THE RISE OF PERFORMANCE

With renewed appreciation for boundaries, border-crossings, process, improvisation, contingency, multiplex identities, and the embodied nature of fieldwork practice, many ethnographers have turned to a performance-inflected vocabulary. "In the social sciences," Geertz observes (1983, p. 22), "the analogies are coming more and more from the contrivances of cultural performance than from those of physical manipulation." No one has done more than Victor Turner to open up space in ethnography for performance, to move the field away from preoccupations with universal system, structure, form, and towards particular practices, people, and performances. A dedicated ethnographer, Turner wanted the professional discourse of cultural studies to capture the struggle, passion, and praxis of village life that he so relished in the field. The language of drama and performance gave him a way of thinking and talking about people as actors who creatively play, improvise, interpret, and re-present roles and scripts. In a rhetorical masterstroke, Turner (1986, p. 81) subversively redefined the fundamental terms of discussion in ethnography by defining humankind as *homo performans,* humanity as performer, a culture-inventing, social-performing, self-making and self-transforming creature. Turner was drawn to the conceptual lens of performance because it focussed on humankind alive, the creative, playful, provisional, imaginative, articulate expressions of ordinary people grounded in the challenge of making a life in this village, that valley, and inspired by the struggle for meaning.

Distinguishing characteristics of performance-sensitive research emerge from Turner's detailed and elaborated work on social drama and cultural performance. The performance paradigm privileges particular, participatory, dynamic, intimate, precarious, embodied experience grounded in historical process, contingency, and ideology. Another way of saying it is that performance-centered research takes as both its subject matter and method the experiencing body situated in time, place, and history. The performance paradigm insists on face-to-face encounters instead of abstractions and reductions. It situates ethnographers within the delicately negotiated and fragile "face-work" that is part of the intricate and nuanced dramaturgy of everyday life (see Goffman, 1967).

Turner appreciated the heuristics of embodied experience because he understood how social dramas must be acted out and rituals performed in order to be meaningful, *and* he realized how the ethnographer must be a co-performer in order to understand those embodied meanings. In one of his earlier works (1975, pp. 28–29) he enunciated the role of the performing body as a hermeneutical agency both for the researcher as well as the researched:

> The religious ideas and processes I have just mentioned belong to the domain of performance, their power derived from the participation of the living people who use them. My counsel, therefore, to investigators of ritual processes would be to learn them in the first place "on their pulses," in coactivity with their enactors, having beforehand shared for a considerable time much of the people's daily life and gotten to know them not only as players of social roles, but as unique individuals, each with a style and a soul of his or her own. Only by these means will the investigator become aware. . . .

The bodily image of learning something "on the pulses" captures the distinctive method of performance-sensitive ethnography. The power dynamic of the

research situation changes when the ethnographer moves from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer to the intimate involvement and engagement of "coactivity" or co-performance with historically situated, named, "unique individuals."

The performance paradigm can help ethnographers recognize "the limitations of literacy" and critique the textualist bias of western civilization (Jackson, 1989). Geertz (1973, p. 452) enunciates the textual paradigm in his famous phrase: "The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong." In other words, the ethnographer is construed as a displaced, somewhat awkward reader of texts. Jackson vigorously critiques this ethnographic textualism (1989, p. 184):

> By fetishizing texts, it divides—as the advent of literacy itself did—readers from authors, and separates both from the world. The idea that "there is nothing outside the text" may be congenial to someone whose life is confined to academe, but it sounds absurd in the village worlds where anthropologists carry out their work, where people negotiate meaning in face-to-face interactions, not as individual minds but as embodied social beings. In other words, textualism tends to ignore the flux of human relationships, the ways meanings are created intersubjectively as well as "intertextually," embodied in gestures as well as in words, and connected to political, moral, and aesthetic interests.

Though possessed of a long historical commitment to the spoken word, rhetoric and communication suffer from this same valorizing of inscribed texts. A recent essay in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (Brummett, 1990, p. 71; emphasis mine) provides a stunning example of the field's extreme textualism: "Such a [disciplinary] grounding can only come about in the moment of methodological commitment *when someone sits down with a transcript of discourse* and attempts to explain it to students or colleagues—*in that moment we become scholars of communication.*" In the quest for intellectual respectability through disciplinary rigor, some communication and rhetorical scholars have narrowed their focus to language, particularly those aspects of language that can be spatialized on the page, or measured and counted, to the exclusion of embodied meanings that are accessible through ethnographic methods of "radical empiricism" (Jackson, 1989).

The linguistic and textualist bias of speech communication has blinded many scholars to the preeminently rhetorical nature of cultural performance—ritual, ceremony, celebration, festival, parade, pageant, feast, and so forth. It is not just in non-western cultures, but in many so-called "modern" communities that cultural performance functions as a special form of public address, rhetorical agency:

> [C]ultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting "designs for living." . . . Performative reflexivity is a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public "selves." (Turner, 1986, p. 24)

Through cultural performances many people both construct and participate in "public" life. Particularly for poor and marginalized people denied access to middle-class "public" forums, cultural performance becomes the venue for "public discussion" of vital issues central to their communities, as well as an arena for gaining visibility and staging their identity. Nancy Fraser's (1990, p. 67) concept of "subaltern counterpublics" is very useful: ". . . arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."

What every ethnographer understands, however, is that the mode of "discussion," the discourse, is not always and exclusively verbal: Issues and attitudes are expressed and contested in dance, music, gesture, food, ritual artifact, symbolic action, as well as words. Cultural performances are not simply epideictic spectacles: Investigated historically within their political contexts, they are profoundly deliberative occasions (see Fernandez, 1986).

Although cultural performances often frame a great deal of speech-making—formal oratory, stylized recitation and chant, as well as backstage talk and informal conversation—it would be a great mistake for a communication researcher simply "to sit down with a transcript of discourse" and privilege words over other channels of meaning. Turner (1986, p. 23) emphatically resists valorizing language or studying any of the multiple codes of performed meaning extricated from their complex interactions: "This is an important point—rituals, dramas, and other performative genres are often orchestrations of media, not expressions in a single medium." There is a complex interplay, for example, between song, gesture, facial expressions, and the burning of incense, and even incense has different meanings when it is burned at different times, and there are different kinds of incense. "The master-of-ceremonies, priest, producer, director creates art from the ensemble of media and codes, just as a conductor in the single genre of classical music blends and opposes the sounds of the different instruments to produce an often unrepeatable effect" (Turner, 1986, p. 23).

Turner encourages ethnographers to study the interplay of performance codes, focussing on their syntactic relationships rather than their semantics (1986, pp. 23–24):

> It is worth pointing out, too, that it is not, as some structuralists have argued, a matter of emitting the *same* message in different media and codes, the better to underline it by redundancy. The "same" message in different media is really a set of subtly variant messages, each medium contributing its own generic message to the message conveyed through it. The result is something like a hall of mirrors—magic mirrors, each interpreting as well as reflecting the images beamed to it, and flashed from one to the others.

The polysemic nature of cultural performances "makes of these genres flexible and nuanced instruments capable of carrying and communicating many messages at once, even of subverting on one level what it appears to be "saying" on another" (Turner, 1986, p. 24). The performance paradigm is an alternative to the atemporal, decontextualized, flattening approach of text-positivism.

Rethinking the "world as text" to the "world as performance" opens up new questions that can be clustered around five intersecting planes of analyses:

1. *Performance and Cultural Process.* What are the conceptual consequences of thinking about culture as a *verb* instead of a *noun,* process instead of product? Culture as unfolding performative invention instead of reified system, structure, or variable? What happens to our thinking about performance when we move it outside of Aesthetics and situate it at the center of lived experience?
2. *Performance and Ethnographic Praxis.* What are the methodological implications of thinking about fieldwork as the collaborative performance of an enabling fiction between observer and observed, knower and known? How does thinking about fieldwork as performance differ from thinking about fieldwork as the collection of data? Reading of texts? How does the performance model shape the conduct of fieldwork? Relationship with the people? Choices made in the field? Positionality of the researcher?
3. *Performance and Hermeneutics.* What kinds of knowledge are privileged or displaced when performed experience becomes a way of knowing, a method of critical inquiry, a mode of understanding? What are the epistemological and ethical entailments of performing ethnographic texts and fieldnotes? What are the range and varieties of performance modes and styles that can enable interpretation and understanding?
4. *Performance and Scholarly Representation.* What are the rhetorical problematics of performance as a complementary or alternative form of "publishing" research? What are the differences between reading an analysis of fieldwork data, and hearing the voices from the field interpretively filtered through the voice of the researcher? For the listening audience of peers? For the performing ethnographer? For the people whose lived experience is the subject matter of the ethnography? What about enabling the people themselves to perform their own experience? What are the epistemological underpinnings and institutional practices that would legitimate performance as a complementary form of research publication?
5. *The Politics of Performance.* What is the relationship between performance and power? How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology? How do performances simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony? How does performance accommodate and contest domination?

The most work has been done in Numbers One, Two, and Five, particularly One. Although we still need to think more deeply and radically about the performative nature of culture, Erving Goffman, Kenneth Burke, Dell Hymes, and a host of other social theorists have already set the stage. The expansive reach of conceptualizing performance as the agency for constituting and reconstituting culture, leads from performance as Agency to performance as ultimate Scene: "All the world's a stage." The popularity of Shakespeare's adage notwithstanding, we scarcely have begun to unpack and understand the radical potential of that idea.

Numbers Three and especially Four are the most deeply subversive and threatening to the text-bound structure of the academy. It is one thing to talk about performance as a model for cultural process, as a heuristic for understanding social life, as long as that performance-sensitive talk eventually gets "written up." The intensely performative and bodily experience of fieldwork is redeemed through writing. The hegemony of inscribed texts is never challenged by fieldwork because, after all is said and done, the final word is on paper. Print publication is the telos of fieldwork. It is interesting to note that even the most radical deconstructions still take place on the page. "Performance as a Form of Scholarly Representation" challenges the domination of textualism.

Turner (1986, pp. 139–155) advocated, practiced, and wrote about performance as a critical method for interpreting and intensifying fieldwork data. It is

quite another thing, politically, to move performance from hermeneutics to a form of scholarly representation. That move strikes at the heart of academic politics and issues of scholarly authority. Talal Asad points in this direction (1986, p. 159):

> If Benjamin was right in proposing that translation may require not a mechanical reproduction of the original but a harmonization with its *intentio,* it follows that there is no reason why this should be done only in the same mode. Indeed, it could be argued that "translating" an alien form of life, another culture, is not always done best through the representational discourse of ethnography, that under certain conditions a dramatic performance, the execution of a dance, or the playing of a piece of music might be more apt.

If post-structuralist thought and the postmodern moment continue to open up received categories and established canons, more of this experimentation with scholarly form might happen. If the Performance Paradigm simply is pitted against the Textual Paradigm, then its radical force will be coopted by yet another either/or binary construction that ultimately reproduces modernist thinking. The Performance Paradigm will be most useful if it decenters, without discarding, texts. I do not imagine life in a university without books, nor do I have any wish to stop writing myself. But I do want to keep thinking about what gets lost and muted in texts. And I want to think about performance as a complement, alternative, supplement, and critique of inscribed texts. Following Turner and others, I want to keep opening up space for nondiscursive forms, and encouraging research and writing practices that are performance-sensitive.

RHETORICAL REFLEXIVITY

Far from displacing texts, contemporary ethnography is extremely interested in and self-conscious about its own text-making practices. There is widespread recognition of "the fact that ethnography is, from beginning to end, enmeshed in writing" (Clifford, 1988, p. 25). These writings are not innocent descriptions through which the other is transparently revealed. "It is more than ever crucial for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another," Clifford affirms (1988, p. 23), "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." Geertz (1988, p. 141) argues that even "the pretense of looking at the world directly, as though through a one-way screen, seeing others as they really are when only God is looking . . . is itself a rhetorical strategy, a mode of persuasion."

Ethnography is being rethought in fundamentally rhetorical terms. Many of the most influential books recently published in ethnography are meta-rhetorical critiques. It seems that everyone in ethnography nowadays is a rhetorical critic. Many ethnographers now believe that disciplinary authority is a matter of rhetorical strategy not scientific method. Geertz is perhaps most blunt about the essentially rhetorical nature of ethnography (1988, pp. 143–144):

> The capacity to persuade readers . . . that what they are reading is an authentic account by someone personally acquainted with how life proceeds in some place, at some time, among some group, is the basis upon which anything else ethnography seeks to do . . . finally rests.

The textual connection of the Being Here and the Being There sides of anthropology, the imaginative construction of a common ground between the Written At and the Written About . . . is the *fons et origo* of whatever power anthropology has to convince anyone of anything—not theory, not method, not even the aura of the professorial chair, consequential as these last may be.

Much of the current rethinking of ethnography has been sobered and empowered by vigorous rhetorical critique of anthropological discourse.

Geertz is foremost among ethnography's practicing rhetorical critics. His rhetorical criticism of E.E. Evans-Pritchard's (E-P) ethnographic texts is exemplary (1988). He identifies E-P's stylistic token as "drastic clarity" (1988, p. 68) that translates onto the page as "a string of clean, well-lighted judgements, unconditional statements so perspicuously presented that only the invincibly uninformed will think to resist them," a sort of "first-strike assertiveness" (1988, p. 63). The rhetorical questions Geertz (1988, p. 64) puts to E-P's texts are: "How (why? in what way? of what?) does all this resolute informing inform?" His "deep reading" of E-P yields these insights (1988, p. 64):

How he does it: The outstanding characteristic of E-P's approach to ethnographic exposition and the main source of his persuasive power is his enormous capacity to construct visualizable representations of cultural phenomena—anthropological transparencies. *What he does:* The main effect, and the main intent, of this magic lantern ethnography is to demonstrate that the established frames of social perception, those upon which we ourselves instinctively rely, are fully adequate to whatever oddities the transparencies may turn out to picture.

According to Geertz (1988, p. 66) E-P produces a "see-er's rhetoric." With E-P's texts, like all rhetorical practice, "the way of saying is the what of saying" (1988, p. 68).

At a deep level, Geertz insightfully notes (1988, p. 70), E-P's discussion of the Nuer and the Azande underwrite his own cultural ethos as much as they illuminate the other:

. . . it validates the ethnographer's form of life at the same time as it justifies those of his subjects—and that it does the one by doing the other. The adequacy of the cultural categories of, in this case, university England, to provide a frame of intelligible reasonings, creditable values, and familiar motivations for such oddities as poison oracles, ghost marriages, blood feuds, and cucumber sacrifices recommends those categories as of somehow more than parochial importance. Whatever personal reasons E-P may have had for being so extraordinarily anxious to picture Africa as a logical and prudential place—orderly, straightforward and levelheaded, firmly modeled and open to view—in doing so he constructed a forceful argument for the general authority of a certain conception of life. If it could undarken Africa, it could undarken anything.

By bringing "Africans into a world conceived in deeply English terms" he thereby confirmed "the dominion of those terms" (1988, p. 70).

Geertz as rhetorical critic moves beyond formalist analysis and situates ethnographic texts within their distinctive institutional constraints and engendering professional practices (1988, pp. 129–130):

However far from the groves of academe anthropologists seek out their subjects—a shelved beach in Polynesia, a charred plateau in Amazonia; Akobo, Meknes, Panther Burn—they write their accounts with the world of lecterns, libraries, blackboards, and seminars all about them. This is the world that produces anthropologists, that licenses them to do the kind of work they do, and within which the kind of work they do must find a place if it is to count as

worth attention. In itself, Being There is a postcard experience ('I've been to Katmandu—have you?'). It is Being Here, a scholar among scholars, that gets your anthropology read . . . published, reviewed, cited, taught.

Geertz weights the Being Here writing it down side of the axis. To be sure, ethnography on the page constrains and shapes performance in the field. But it is also true, I believe, that experiential performance sometimes resists, exceeds, and overwhelms the constraints and strictures of writing. It is the task of rhetorical critics to seek out these sites of tension, displacement, and contradiction between the Being There of performed experience and the Being Here of written texts.

This rhetorical self-reflexivity has helped politicize ethnography: "The gap between engaging others where they are and representing them where they aren't, always immense but not much noticed, has suddenly become extremely visible. What once seemed only technically difficult, getting "their" lives into "our" works, has turned morally, politically, even epistemologically, delicate" (Geertz, 1988, p. 130). Ethnographic authority is the empowering alignment between rhetorical strategy and political ideology. Once shielded by the mask of science, ethnographers now have become acutely aware of the sources of their persuasive power (Geertz, 1988, pp. 148–149):

What it hasn't been, and, propelled by the moral and intellectual self-confidence of Western Civilization, hasn't so much had to be, is aware of the sources of its power. If it is now to prosper, with that confidence shaken, it must become aware. Attention to how it gets its effects and what those are, to anthropology on the page, is no longer a side issue, dwarfed by problems of method and issues of theory. It . . . is rather close to the heart of the matter. (148–149)

Trinh (1989, p. 43) enacts this struggle towards self-reflexive awareness of textual power in her book subtitled "Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism": ". . . what is exposed in this text is the inscription and de-scription of a non-unitary female subject of color through her engagement, therefore also disengagement, with master discourses."

It is ironic that the discipline of communication has been relatively unreflexive about the rhetorical construction of its own disciplinary authority. It would be illuminating to critique the rhetorical expectations and constraints on articles published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* or *Communication Monographs.* What kinds of knowledge, and their attendant discursive styles, get privileged, legitimated, or displaced? How does knowledge about communication get constructed? What counts as an interesting question about human communication? What are the tacitly observed boundaries—the range of appropriateness—regarding the substance, methods, and discursive styles of communication scholarship? And, most importantly for critical theorists, what configuration of socio-political interests does communication scholarship serve? How does professionally authorized knowledge about communication articulate with relations of power? About the connection between a field of knowledge and relations of power, Michel Foucault (1979, p. 27) offers this sobering insight: ". . . power produces knowledge . . . ; power and knowledge directly imply one another; . . . there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."

ENDNOTE

[1]I borrow the term "critical cultural politics" from James Clifford (1988, p. 147).

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