

WRITTEN OR LIVING CULTURE?

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A set of critiques of the vocabulary of positivism has recently been espoused in the volume *Writing Culture* edited by Clifford and Marcus (1986) and in Clifford Geertz's *Works and Lives* (1988). Both books attempt to deal with anthropology and ethnography as writing, there being considerable variation in the approaches represented in *Writing Culture*. James Clifford, writing for all the contributors in his Introduction, insists that ethnography is always writing (1986: 26) - which, with the exception of films, photographs and the spoken word, it is - and for Geertz ethnography is 'a kind of writing' (1988: 1). Nevertheless, through a discussion centred on Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer*, and essays dealing with Evans-Pritchard, I hope to display the flaws central to most of those approaches that deal with anthropology purely as writing.

The essays in *Writing Culture* and Geertz's *Works and Lives* largely steer clear of the vocabulary of subjectivity/objectivity, subject/object - 'inter-subjectivity' or 'the self and other' creeps in occasionally when they do not. However, if the vocabulary of positivism gave rise to the image of the all-seeing social scientist, the concentration on writing gives rise to a shadowy mimicry of that figure, the all-manipulating writer whose major concern is self-presentation to gain authority, and for whom the world turned to trope is at his or her fingertips. In dealing

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centrally with text at best only as writing, the problem is not so much that the context of life is excluded but that life can enter this reading of texts only as context. What is written is not seen as part of, or at least just of, the world(s), or human social lives in and of which it is written, but rather those worlds or lives are merely seen as an appendage, a supplement, divorced from writing or text from the outset by use of the word 'context'. This divorce of the text from human life, this bracketing and ignoring of the world(s) as mere context, can be seen to take on three forms. First, being no longer a medium of communication, the text becomes merely a product of the author, and any reader is ignored in the discussion of it. Secondly, the world in which it is written is either ignored, or conceptualized in an extremely simplistic manner. Thirdly, the world about or of which it is written hardly figures at all, being entirely subservient to the style of the author. Each of these divorces is displayed only by some of the texts under discussion. Nevertheless, when taken together they constitute the central pitfalls of dealing with anthropology as only writing. Schopenhauer once wrote:

There are above all two kinds of writer: those who write for the sake of what they have to say and those who write for the sake of writing. The former have had ideas or experiences which seem to them worth communicating; the latter need money....You can soon see they are writing simply in order to cover paper and as soon as you see it you should throw the book down, for time is precious....As a matter of fact, the author is cheating the reader as soon as he writes for the sake of filling up the paper, because his pretext for writing is that he has something to impart. (1970: 198-9)

The concentration on anthropology solely as writing sometimes seems to treat it merely as writing for the sake of writing. As such, it ignores the place of books in the world as a form of communication, as written to be read. The importance of reading is also ignored, as if anthropology is condemned from the outset as writing for writing's sake and any readers of anthropological books have taken Schopenhauer's advice and 'thrown them down'. Perhaps they have, but their writers, I think, at least hold the illusion that they are or will be read.

1. *Geertz and the Death of the Reader*

Geertz is one of the most 'readerly' of anthropological authors. However, this first divorce of writing and books (of 'the text') from its place in the world, in human life, is clearly exemplified in Geertz's *Works and Lives*. Here the concentration on writing obscures reading. In his Introduction, which he entitles 'Being There - Anthropology and the Scene of Writing', Geertz addresses himself to two central questions - or are they, as he muses, 'perhaps the same one doubly asked' (1988: 8)?

(1) How is the 'author-function' (or shall we, so long as we are going to be literary about the matter, just say 'the author'?) made manifest in the text? (2) Just what is it - beyond the obvious tautology 'a work' - that the author authors? The first question, call it that of signature, is a matter of the construction of a writerly identity. The second, call it that of discourse, is a matter of developing a way of putting things - a vocabulary, a rhetoric, a pattern of argument - that is connected to that identity in such a way as it seems to come from it as a remark from the mind. (Ibid.: 8-9)

Here we can see a concentration on the author that perhaps can only be pre-echoed in the most solipsistic forms of subjectivism; any readers or other people are replaced by text, or discourse, seen in - perhaps - solely textual terms as 'a vocabulary, a rhetoric, a pattern of argument'. This perspective is made clearer when Geertz claims that 'the oddity of constructing texts ostensibly scientific out of experiences broadly biographical...is thoroughly obscured'. It is, for Geertz, a problem of signature. But somehow according to Geertz, 'it is represented as arising from the complexities of self/other negotiations rather than those of self/text ones' (ibid.: 10-11), as it presumably should be represented. In Geertz's approach, readers of the text, those for whom 'the text' is presumably written, disappear into 'the text', and ontological and epistemological questions become solely questions of writing, as those about, of, or concerning whom, the text is written are similarly dragged into, forgotten and devoured by this new dyad: the 'self/text'.

Geertz goes on, in a later chapter, to deal with Evans-Pritchard's article 'Operations on the Akobo' (1973), which was published in *The Army Quarterly*, as, perhaps, *the* example of Evans-Pritchard's style. He claims it gives 'a nutshell image of the limits of E-P's discourse that are, as are anyone's, the Wittgensteinian limits of his world' (Geertz 1988: 51) - that of the Oxbridge senior common room. It seems likely that 'worlds' are united more by style, or tone, than concepts. Furthermore, one can see, with Geertz, that there is a typical Oxbridge tone: at least I - and I suppose most of us - have an ideal type, or stereotype, of that tone in our heads, but perhaps we all have different ones, and these are all approximated to in very different ways by different members of Oxbridge senior common rooms. Furthermore, to equate this tone, or what for Geertz is a style, with discourse, is a very different question. Surely even the ideal type of tone or style is broad enough to embrace very different concepts, or words. Moreover sociological and anthropological questions of why this stereotype of tone has authority, and for whom it has authority, are precluded, as the reader is omitted from the ontological statements made in Geertz's introduction and elsewhere. For me, and I write as a white middle-class Englishman at Oxford, there is perhaps nothing that seems more liable to discredit what someone says than it being said in that tone, one which many people find pompous and complacent.

In dealing with 'Operations on the Akobo', questions of how much the style of that particular article is directed towards the readers of *The Army Quarterly*, where a particular ideal tone of Oxbridge senior common room authority may have

been particularly appropriate, are ignored as a unitary style is constructed for Evans-Pritchard. This style is said to be one of simple sentences, without literary allusion and without jargon but most of all full of assertions with implied 'of courses' (Geertz 1988: 58, 60) and 'promulgatory declarations' (ibid.: 63). It is also said to be intensely visual. Geertz terms it 'Akobo Realism' (ibid.: 61) and claims that it can be seen to lie throughout Evans-Pritchard's writings.

In dealing with this style, Geertz, in passing - and following Denis Donoghue - points in two sentences to a reader. After indicating difficulties in isolating the means of Evans-Pritchard's 'elaborate text-building strategy' he goes on to suggest:

Clearly this strategy rests most fundamentally on the existence of a very strictly drawn and carefully observed narrative contract between writer and reader. The presumptions that connect the author and his audience, presumptions that are social, cultural, and literary at once, are so strong and so pervasive, so deeply institutionalized, that very small signals carry very big messages. (Ibid.: 58)

The presumptions he points to are presumed by him and not specified, nor is the supposed contract. Through their shared presumptions Geertz so thoroughly homogenizes the reader with the author, as to become one with the author, so that the text hardly has to be written for him/her. In terms of the style, the implied 'of courses' must presumably be added by the reader. Even with spoken 'of courses' in Oxbridge or public-school English, there are possibilities of variations in tone and visual signals. Even I, coming at least partially from that background, find it difficult to distinguish between the assertive 'of course', the 'of course' of agreement and the sarcastic, or ironic 'of course' that tugs its forelock at received authoritative truth, while simultaneously sneering at it. In writing, it is even more difficult to distinguish between them. In implied writing? Similarly, precisely where a 'promulgatory declaration' is read as an assertion, 'a statement of fact', an observation or impression is dependent on the reader. The point at which simple sentences are clear, or just simple, and the point at which literary allusions express thoughts cogently or are mere artifices or pretentious fillers, or even where what may seem simple sentences are allusions, must be seen by the reader. Thus Geertz ignores a preliminary question: why any or some, or which bits of Evans-Pritchard's texts have an 'authority' or credibility. He does this by precluding another preliminary question - exactly for whom, if anyone, they have 'authority'? To point to 'promulgatory declarations' already begs the question. Instead of obliterating the reader under the 'self/text' dyad, what is needed to deal with such questions is an anthropology of reading, which deals empirically with questions of textual authority and credibility, and relates varying readings of the text to the social situation of reading and the social position, background or world of the reader.

Nevertheless, many of the stylistic points isolated by Geertz do seem to be aspects of Evans-Pritchard's writings. As such, Geertz's writing on the subject can only lay claim to a pure formalism. However, these aspects of style are not only present in Evans-Pritchard's writings, as Geertz notes when he gives a long list

of English anthropologists he claims portray such a style. Nor are these aspects of style, or many of them, expressive purely of the world of the Oxbridge senior common room, as Geertz perhaps can see when he writes: 'Even most Americans sound, by now, a bit like "Operations on the Akobo"' (1988: 59). Surely Hemingway was famed for short, staccato, assertive sentences? Geertz's concentration on the writerly aspects of writing perhaps ignores its communicative aspects. Simple sentence structure can at least be seen as an attempt to make communication easier, while assertions of fact, and the absence of qualifying clauses, are at least as much a consequence of a simple positivist epistemology as a cause of it, as is the conception of the social world being transparently present to view - in this respect one thinks of 'the gaze' in Michel Foucault's study of eighteenth-century medicine, *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973).

In the final section of his chapter on Evans-Pritchard, Geertz attempts in passing to link Evans-Pritchard, through his judgements and assumptions rather than purely his style, to the world of 'university England'. Looking at the social function of Evans-Pritchard's writing, he states: 'E-P's classic studies all begin with the discovery that something we have in our culture is lacking in that of the other....They all end with the discovery that something else...works well enough instead (1988: 69). He then claims that

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 somewhat more than parochial importance. (Ibid.: 70)

The blood feud, for example, is explained in terms of 'the principle of contradiction', and 'there is always contradiction in the definition of a political group, for it is a group only in relation to other groups' (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 147); thus the political life of the Nuer is seen as an example of 'ordered anarchy'. Neither Evans-Pritchard's specific concept of a shifting principle of contradiction, nor ordered anarchy were, I would suggest, common cultural categories in Oxford prior to *The Nuer*. Again and again in *The Nuer* Evans-Pritchard points to the lack of any simple correspondence in translation, to no class, no status and no authority, three common cultural categories of the world of middle-class England. Thus many of the statements said to display the lack of institutions of our world or, in Rosaldo's words, 'to point to absences', can also be read as pointing rather to the inapplicability of 'our', or the English universities', cultural categories. Furthermore, ordered anarchy was and often still is 'a contradiction in terms' in that world. Although Evans-Pritchard does claim to provide some kind of comprehension of Nuer life in the absence of institutions of the state, he does so through an alteration of the cultural categories of middle-class England. Although he writes *The Nuer* in English - it would be difficult to write a book for an English or for that matter an Anglo-American audience in any other language - he does not validate the previous cultural categories of university England. Although he used

the cultural categories of the 'university England' of his time - such as 'order', for example - he transformed them in the process of using them, to give us, for example, 'ordered anarchy', in which the use of the word 'order' seems to play quite a different role to what it would at an Oxford tea party.

In Geertz's *Works and Lives*, questions of an author's position in one world and his/her relations and attitudes towards other worlds are precluded or prejudged by the monolithic presentation of a world. All Geertz can tell us about Evans-Pritchard's writings is that they are in a style (although he also claims a content), an expression of a world - that of the Oxbridge senior common room. This is surely the presupposition from which he starts to construct that style, and anyway, almost as much can be gleaned quite simply from reading the back cover of the paperback edition of *The Nuer*. What Geertz ignores above all else in his presentation of Evans-Pritchard's work in the light of a unitary world of the Oxbridge senior common room are the political divisions within any world and the political position of the author. These are perhaps particularly pertinent to 'Operations on the Akobo', which was written of a war against the Italian occupation of Abyssinia which the British Left of the time had seen as an act of Fascist aggression. The operations on the Akobo were thus both anti-Fascist and anti-Imperialist.

On the other side of a similar coin is Rosaldo's (1986) article in *Writing Culture*, 'From the Door of his Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor'. In this piece Rosaldo draws an analogy between Evans-Pritchard as an investigator and the inquisitorial records upon which Le Roy Ladurie drew in his *Montaillou* (1978). Referring to Foucault's vision of Bentham's Panopticon, Rosaldo claims that 'the fieldworker's mode of surveillance uncomfortably resembles Michel Foucault's Panopticon, the site from which the (disciplining) disciplines enjoy gazing upon (and subjecting) their subjects' (1986: 92). For Rosaldo, *The Nuer* is written in one of the 'pastoral modes of domination' (ibid.: 96) which 'appear[s] to transcend inequality and domination, yet [it] obliquely reveals inequalities in the relations that produced ethnographic knowledge' (ibid.: 97). I hope to deal elsewhere with the extended use of the pastoral. However, we can note here that the world in which Rosaldo places Evans-Pritchard is as monolithic as that of Geertz, although instead of that of 'the Oxbridge common room' it is one governed by a monolithic colonial domination. Geertz ignores considerations of power altogether; Rosaldo seems to ignore the possibility of resistance as well as Foucault's injunction that 'where there is power there is resistance'. Like Geertz he presents Evans-Pritchard as a stereotype of colonial Oxbridge England, glossing over the political complexities of his work, some of which are pointed to by Wendy James in her essay on 'The Anthropologist as Reluctant Imperialist' (1973) in Asad's *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, for example, and which - as I hope to show elsewhere - can be seen in *The Nuer* itself.

2. *The Fading of the World and Introductions*

A second divorcing of the world, or human life, of *Dasein* from 'the text' or writing, can be seen most clearly in Marie Louise Pratt's essay, 'Fieldwork in Common Places' (1986), in the *Writing Culture* volume (although it also occurs to some degree in Geertz's *Works and Lives*). 'Fieldwork in Common Places' deals with the opening passages of ethnographies, which, as Pratt writes, are traditionally often personal in contrast to the 'objectivity' of the later chapters. However, she deals with these opening passages only as trope and places what she sees as tropes only within the history of travel writing, particularly that of the region with which they deal. Thus Firth in *We, The Tikopia* (1936) is seen as introducing himself 'via the classic Polynesian arrival scene' (Pratt 1986: 35), and she states that

Firth reproduces in a remarkably straightforward way a utopian scene of first contact that acquired mythic status in the eighteenth century and continues with us today in the popular mythology of the South Sea paradise (alias Club Méditerranée/Fantasy Island). Far from being taken for a suspicious alien, the European visitor is welcomed as a messiah by a trusting populace ready to do his or her bidding. (Ibid.: 36)

The 'messiah' and his or her 'bidding' perhaps brings a little hyperbolic colour to Firth's opening passages, or for that matter to Louis de Bougainville's arrival scene, to which she compares and traces Firth's passages.²

Once aspects of Firth's opening passages have been traced back to Bougainville's travel writing, Evans-Pritchard's story of woes in the introductory chapter of *The Nuer* - where he is constrained by the weather, loses his supplies and is faced with bearers that run off - is similarly traced by Pratt back to the East African travel writing of Richard Burton.

What is lacking from Pratt's view of these texts is the possibility of, or at least concentration on, the referential aspects of writing. It is as if the paucity of any simple mimetic or correspondence view of the reference of texts, the written word or language precludes the possibility of all external reference or representation - Wittgenstein's 'language game' comes to mind as the beginnings of such an alternative possibility. Such a view - that a text is not mimetic, a simple copy of the world - would not enable the world to fade out of view behind a monothetic concentration on tropes and their origins only in other writing. The absence of any referential aspect of 'the text' surely owes much to structuralism's absence of

2. Nor does it seem arbitrary that she uses this trope. Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, suggests that styles are appropriate to character or habits - 'those moral states that form a man's character' (1408, 6, 7). For Aristotle 'there is something youthful about hyperboles; for they show vehemence' (1413, 16). It seems appropriate that hyperbole should be found in an approach to anthropology that is still 'youthful' and attacking a traditional approach.

reference to the world and is specifically exemplified by Pratt when she states that 'Bougainville's version of the scene uses one trope Firth does not reproduce, the sentimental commonplace whereby the natives try to undress the foreigners to determine the humanity and, symbolically, level the difference between them' (1986: 37). And also where, in reference to *The Nuer*, colonialism enters the picture at the mythological edge of discursive convention, when Pratt states (again a little hyperbolically perhaps) that

With respect to discursive conventions, Evans Pritchard must also be thought of as producing a highly degraded version of the utopian arrival scene exemplified in Bougainville and Firth. This is the first contact in a fallen world where European colonialism is given and the native and the white man approach each other with joyless suspicion. (Ibid.: 40)

More broadly, in dealing only with the relation of ethnography to other texts, Pratt fails to place the difference between the opening passages of *The Nuer* and *We, The Tikopia*, and for that matter Burton and Bougainville, in the differences between the respective social histories of the regions. These differences in the introductions are not only tropic. As well as the history of wars between the tribes of the Sudan, the whole East African region had been subject to Arab colonialism, neo-colonialist trade and slave trading for a considerable period before European expansion into the region. However, the Pacific did not have the same (pre-) colonial history as East Africa. With such socio-historical differences, it is not surprising to find differences in relations with strangers in the two areas, and traditions of travel writing in both areas have also been affected accordingly.

If we look more closely at both of these opening passages - the Introduction to *The Nuer* is also dealt with by Renato Rosaldo in 'From the Door of his Tent' and that of *We, The Tikopia* is also dealt with by Geertz in *Works and Lives* - we can see that there is a rhetorical similarity between them. Both *We, The Tikopia* and *The Nuer* start, in rhetorical terms, with an extended diminutio. This rhetorical device can certainly be traced back to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* - when it was consciously known as such - and is traceable in the opening passage of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. With Evans-Pritchard this diminutio can be seen to take the form of, or take on the content of, his tales of woe concerning his travels and the Nuer. The central points of the last few paragraphs are that he was not able to conduct 'scientific' participant observation among the Nuer, but that he was at least quite intimate with them. He ends his Introduction with the following passage:

I do not make far reaching claims. I believe that I have understood the chief values of the Nuer and am able to present a true outline of their social structure, but I regard, and I have designed, this volume as a contribution to the ethnography of a particular area rather than as a detailed sociological study, and I shall be content if it is accepted as such. There is much that I did not see or did not enquire into and therefore plenty of opportunity for others to make investigations

in the same field and among neighbouring peoples. I hope that they will do so and that one day we may have a fairly complete record of Nilotic social systems. (1940: 15)

It is a fairly classic, although slightly ambivalent, *diminutio* that concludes seven pages of *diminutio*.

Pratt and Geertz both deal with the opening paragraphs of *We, The Tikopia*, both quoting the opening three, very consciously literary, paragraphs and ignoring the fourth. It is after these four paragraphs that Firth himself breaks the text, with the heading of the second section of the book. This fourth paragraph deals with 'the anthropologist' in the situation of arriving in another culture:

Even with the pages of my diary before me it is difficult to reconstruct the impressions of that first day ashore - to depersonalize the people that I later came to know so well and view them merely as part of the tawny surging crowd; to put back again in that unreal perspective events which afterwards took on such different values. In his early experiences in the field the anthropologist is constantly grappling with the intangible. The reality of native life is going on all around him, but he is not yet in focus to see it. He knows that most of what he records will at first be useless; it will either be definitely incorrect, or so inadequate that it must later be discarded. Yet he must make a beginning somewhere. He realises that at this stage he is incapable of separating the patterns of custom from the accidentals of individual behaviour, he wonders if each slight gesture does not hold some meaning which is hidden from him, he aches to be able to catch and retain some of the flood of talk he hears on all sides, and he is consumed with envy of the children who are able to toss about so lightly that speech which he must so painfully acquire. He is conscious of good material running to waste before him moment by moment; he is impressed by the vastness of the task that lies before him and of his own feeble equipment for it; in the face of a language and custom to which he has not the key, he feels he is acting like a moron before the natives. At the same time he is experiencing the delights of discovery, he is gaining an inkling of what is in store; like a gourmet walking round a feast that is spread, he savours in anticipation the quality of what he will later appreciate in full. (1936: 2)

In this section Firth raises a whole series of issues that cannot be answered by literary reference alone, such as memory and depersonalization - which occurs in literary writing ('the tawny crowd') but possibly not, for Firth, in anthropology. It does involve a change of voice, from 'I' to 'the anthropologist', and this will be returned to later, but it involves questions not answerable solely in, at best, terms of the relationship between self and 'text' since it involves human relationships between the writer and reader as well as those written about. Furthermore, Firth's writing points to the eventual possibility of anthropological knowledge - a theme to which he returns in the concluding paragraph of his next section - and it is possibly directed against travel writing. But it is, above all, a *diminutio* - he is

'consumed by the envy of children', he is 'impressed...by his own feeble equipment' and is 'acting like a moron before the natives'. The preceding paragraphs build up to this diminutio and hint towards the idiocy and ugliness of 'the anthropologist' and of our whole culture.

As well as the three introductory paragraphs of *We, The Tikopia*, Geertz deals with the Introduction to Loring Danforth's *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (1982) in his own Introduction and with the introductory paragraph of 'Operations on the Akobo' in his chapter on Evans-Pritchard. For him, these and presumably all introductions are a question of 'signature' - 'the construction of writerly identity' (1988: 9) - but they are also an aspect of their 'capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, or having, one way or another, truly been there' (ibid.: 4-5). Thus from the first three paragraphs of *We, The Tikopia*, Geertz can state: 'there can be little doubt from this that Firth was, in every sense of the word, "there"' (ibid.: 13).

Undoubtedly, one of the claims to ethnographic credibility is and was that the writer is and was simply there, but as to having 'truly been there', or having 'actually penetrated another form of life'? Evans Pritchard is ambivalent about 'truly being there', claiming that he 'knew the Nuer more intimately than the Azande' (1940: 15), but stating that 'When I entered a cattle camp it was not only as a stranger but as an enemy' (ibid.: 11). And later:

Besides physical discomfort at all times, suspicion and obstinate resistance encountered in the early stages of research, absence of an interpreter, lack of adequate grammar and dictionary, and the failure to procure the usual informants, there developed a further difficulty as the inquiry proceeded.... As soon as I began to discuss a custom with one man another would interrupt the conversation in pursuance of some affair of his own or by an exchange of pleasantries and jokes....I was seldom able to hold confidential conversations and never succeeded in training informants capable of dictating texts and giving detailed descriptions and commentaries. (ibid.: 14-15)

Firth, however, is more explicit. We have already noted his 'moron before the natives' comment in the paragraph following those quoted by Geertz. In the concluding paragraph of the following section Firth states, and I quote the section in full:

Like most anthropologists I regard with scepticism the claims of any European writer that he has 'been accepted by the natives as one of themselves'. Leaving aside the question of self-inflation, such a claim is usually founded on the misapprehension of native politeness or of a momentary emotional verbal identification with themselves of a person who shares their sympathies. I myself have been assured a number of times that I was 'just like a Tikopia' because I conformed in some particulars to the economic and social habits of their people, as in dancing with them and observing the etiquette of (pseudo-)kinship, or

because I espoused their point of view on some problem of contact with civilization. But this I regarded as a compliment of much the same order as a reference to 'our' canoe or 'our' orchard ('yours and mine') by one of my courtesy brothers, which did mean certain concrete privileges, but not a share in real ownership. This problem of identification with the native culture is not merely an academic one. Europeans who allege that they 'have become a member of the tribe', or 'are regarded by the natives as one of themselves', are prone to lay claim to knowing what the native thinks, to being qualified to represent the native point of view. On a particular issue this may be in substance true, but too often dogmatic statements about ideas are substituted for detailed evidence of observed behaviour. (1936: 11)

Thus both Firth and Evans-Pritchard disavow 'having truly been there', 'having penetrated another form of life'. Indeed, the only anthropological text that seems to claim 'having truly been there', at least that I can recall, is Geertz's own 'Deep Play' (1975), where he claims 'rapport' and being 'quite literally "in"' (ibid.: 1975: 416), and where - as Crapanzano points out in his essay 'Hermes' Dilemma: the Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description' (1986) in *Writing Culture* - Geertz uses *double entendre* to 'create a collusive relationship between the ethnographer and... his readers' (ibid.: 69) in the culture of the then recently sexually liberated America.

This brings into play another series of issues. Both Evans-Pritchard's and Firth's diminutios concern epistemological problems - the question of 'How do they know what was going on among the Nuer and Tikopia?' Both answer these problems in terms of observation. Surely we can to some degree accept these at face value as questions and answers concerning epistemology, not as authorial anxieties. What Geertz does, in effect, is to say, 'What is really going on here is a question of signature.' He claims, for example, that 'the text is nervously signed and re-signed throughout' (1988: 13). He is seeing a deep occluded structure hidden from the native.

Recently there has been some questioning of this type of anthropology. Overing's criticism of Lévi-Strauss's 'metaphorical safety net' is one tip of that particular iceberg - but Geertz's 'textual criticism' goes beyond the bounds even of these analytic 'discourses'. It is neither an observation of the hidden logical relations between concepts, nor even a search for references to social or other relations in the text; it is simply a restatement of what one person (Firth or Evans-Pritchard) says in terms of what another person (Geertz) thinks he or she should have said. Geertz neither claims nor could claim any grounds for his reinterpretations of Firth or Evans-Pritchard not being false aside from the rhetorical force of his writing. Not only is further epistemological questioning precluded in his concentration on writing and authorship, but also these questions are already answered in his placement of anthropology between literature and science, both of which make different epistemological claims concerning their truth. Could not the authorial questions under which epistemological questions have been subsumed be reinterpreted as epistemological and social-ontological

questions, and the epistemological questions be re-interpreted in this light as epistemological questions?

Both Marie Louise Pratt, in 'Fieldwork in Common Places', and Renato Rosaldo, in 'From the Door of his Tent', view Evans-Pritchard's writing in these opening passages as self-presentation, the latter a self-presentation to gain authority, the former a self-presentation chosen not haphazardly, but in connection with 'the tradition of African colonial exploration and writing' (Pratt 1986: 40). The question of the 'authority' of an anthropological text is such a complex one that it cannot fully be dealt with here, but there are some preliminary remarks that can be made in criticism of the way this topic has been raised in the *Writing Culture* volume.

The 'authority' of *The Nuer* rests on a whole series of bases that have little to do with presentation of self within the text. First, the authority of printed matter in the Western world - behind which lie a whole series of questions and social relationships concerning what is printed. Secondly, the authority of any single academic, of academia itself and of the later position of Evans-Pritchard within academia as Professor of Social Anthropology at Oxford (the present paperback edition of *The Nuer* refers to this position of authority quite explicitly on the back cover); behind this authority lie the political relations of academia. Thirdly, the situation of anthropological books within the pedagogic practice of universities and within teacher-pupil relationships, behind which lie a whole series of socio-political conventions and again the political relationships of academia. Also relevant are the vocabulary of objectivity and the cover of epistemological borrowings from science, which lent its authority to the social sciences, and the 'scientific' fieldwork methodology of participant observation. As we have already noted, to deal with these fully what is needed is an anthropology of reading.

Within this whole series of factors establishing the authority of *The Nuer* the diminutio with which it begins seems more like a disclaimer of authority than a claim to it. Questions of how this diminutio works as a claim, perhaps to something like authority and certainly to credibility, cannot be answered by viewing it simply in terms of authority, certainly not in any crude dyadic vision of authority.

However, one possible way of viewing the extended diminutio at the beginning of *The Nuer* is to see it not as a choice of self-presentation so much as a quite highly conditioned cultural form present in English culture and perhaps widely absent from American culture. Rosaldo points towards this when he claims that Evans-Pritchard's 'posture resembles what Paul Fussell... has called British phlegm' (1986: 89), or even again when he claims that 'Evans-Pritchard's mode verges on the comic' (ibid.: 90).

Diminutio is, or was, a fairly standard form of British speech and writing. Without it *The Nuer*, or for that matter a whole series of other everyday statements, would seem, to a British audience, arrogant, conceited, loud. To an American it may well seem comic or even affected, 'a posture', but for many British readers it may be not so much that it leads to something akin to authority

as that it leads away from disgust - and as such it does, of course, add to the text's credibility. In the genre of traveller's tales, there is, and was, perhaps nothing more liable than the absence of diminutio to elicit a response of disbelief.

Many questions concerning the diminutio remain: such as how much it was consciously seen as such, how much ironical intent was present and what its role was in the self-effacement of the author and in establishing his subjectivity as a preliminary to objective writing? Nevertheless, diminutio, in the introductions to *The Nuer* and *We, The Tikopia*, is not reducible solely to the terms of the history of a particular form of colonial writing or of the overriding intention of the writer to gain authority, and it could be seen to lie behind or within many post-colonial statements concerning 'the relation with the other'. Furthermore, seeing this form as diminutio tells us very little, this being one of the pitfalls of any purely formalistic writing about rhetoric. One last point is that given recent criticisms of *The Nuer* (e.g., Holy 1979, Free 1988), Evans-Pritchard's diminutio concerning the difficulties of fieldwork and the lack of detail in his account rings very true, not only to his own culture but also to his relations to the Nuer.

Conclusions

We have seen that the recent stress on anthropology as writing has involved three divorces from the world(s). First, an ignoring of the reader in a dualistic relationship between author and text has been presented, rather than a triadic relationship between author and reader through the text, or between author and text and then reader and text. Secondly, there is an ignoring of the world about or of which the text is written, as critics comment on the internal aspects of a discourse rather than coherently confronting the problems of representation. Thirdly, there is a glossing of the world within which a text is written as a monolithic world: that of Oxbridge England devoid of any political divisions in the case of Geertz, or the monolithic world of colonial domination in the absence of any mention of resistance in the case of Rosaldo. Both of these are based on stereotypes, and both avoid any mention of the philosophical ancestry of anthropology and of anthropological works and their interrelated, and often complex political positions, as philosophy becomes subsumed under literature.

Of these divorces, perhaps the most important is that of the relation of anthropology with those other worlds. The vocabulary of 'self and other' points to the dependence of these worlds, but at the same time it can easily render independence an ontological impossibility. Although 'objectivism' could be seen as replicating the power relations of colonialism, it did at least assert the independence and reality of other people. Unfortunately, some of the epistemological problems of anthropology in 'the crisis of representation' do seem to correspond all too closely with the change in its relationship to the Third World.

Colonialism pushed the colonized into focus and seemed to force many anthropologists into an ethical position where they had to recognize its reality and the reality of the people they studied and thus perhaps even to side against colonialism. With de-colonization, the dependence of 'the Third World' faded from view, domination was replaced by an exploitation hidden in every object, and colonialism was hidden in everyday reality at the same time as it appeared on the surface of academic life. People involved in anthropology do have a moral responsibility to the people they 'study', and with whom they live, and many of these are people in the Third World. Although many of the essays in *Writing Culture* present politically inspired critique, the crisis of representation, particularly in the form of writing about writing as only writing, can perhaps be seen to testify to the unreality of the Third World, to the absence of any real moral relationship with this world. With 'self and other', the Third World can fade into soft focus. With writing about writing only as writing, 'the Third World' can disappear in a puff of trope.

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