

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL POETICS

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Poetics is a topic usually associated with the systematic study of literature, but, especially in its modern concern with texts as “cultural artifacts,” it extends to anthropology in several ways.<sup>1</sup> One obvious connection is that, like other academic disciplines, anthropology is “literary” in that it conveys its information primarily through writing. This textual base lets anthropology share with more conventional studies of poetics an interest in text construction, the authority of the text, semiotic behavior and the production of meaning in discourse, and, in general, all the philosophical and critical problems associated with mimesis—the representation and successful communication of experience in any form, especially as problematized in texts. It also brings to the fore

something that anthropology is predisposed to engage because of its own diverse history: debate over the place of art and science in the social sciences and the humanities. Anthropology has intellectual camps at both extremes, that is, strong science orientations that conscientiously attempt to exclude more artistic or humanistic methods and interpretations, and vice versa (see Fujimara, 1998). Overall there is a compromise of identity: Anthropology sees itself as an “artful science” (Brady, 1990a, 1993). That leaves room for engaging a variety of postmodern challenges from other disciplines, including much that has arisen under the labels *literary* and *poetic* (Brady, 1991b).

Cultural anthropology in particular encompasses both individualized studies and system-

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atic comparisons of cross-cultural experience, so its potential poetic sources are broadly based. That has allowed anthropologists to feed into and draw reciprocally on several disciplines while developing their own specialized studies of the forms and content of poetic production in their own societies, in other cultures, as well as in their communications *about* other cultures.<sup>2</sup> Playing in such fields begs a variety of critical issues, from cultural relativism to competing philosophies of representation that have long histories of contemplation in other disciplines and less attention in anthropology. Theorists from other disciplines have reached into anthropology on similar issues (see Clifford, 1988; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Krupat, 1992). But the cross-poaching that underwrites anthropology's "literarization" and the "anthropologizing" of literary studies is hard to measure and subject to various interpretations.<sup>3</sup> It has also resulted in some confusion over the degree to which anthropology ought to rely on other disciplines instead of creating its own adaptive solutions to the challenges posed, for example, regarding "the effort to situate discourses sociologically, to show how discourses function, compete, and clash within sociopolitical arenas, and to trace how discourses are transformed historically" (Fischer, 1988, p. 8; compare Krupat, 1992, pp. 51-52; Taylor, 1996).

One famous connection between anthropology and other disciplines that study poetics is structuralism. Although now less popular (having been relegated mistakenly by some to the graveyard of things buried by "postmodern" growth—see Brady, 1993), the structuralism developed in this century by linguists Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky, psychologist Jean Piaget, and especially anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss had a profound impact on literary studies in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup> The concept of poetics and what might constitute a legitimate study of it has been permanently changed as a result, and the possibilities for demarcating something clearly as *anthropological* poetics have been complicated in the process.<sup>5</sup> That doesn't disappoint most of the modern critics who operate happily between the cracks

of conventional divisions. Poetics is now more than ever an interdisciplinary topic that rightfully resists such reductions. Nevertheless, anthropology's footprints tend to be distinctive, so marking its path through this terrain is not impossible. Even though anthropological inquiry into poetics lacks coherence as a specialized field, we can locate it pragmatically by inspecting what anthropologists have done with it and by marking the intersections of their work with like-minded activities from elsewhere.

Without departing entirely from the common literary grounds of writing as a form of expression and what constitutes *author*-ity in the first place, anthropological studies of poetics differ from those of most other disciplines by reaching into performance issues in discourse, including studies of ritual and worldview, from tribal societies to modern theater, and their relationships to language and culture.<sup>6</sup> Ethnopoets in particular—cultural anthropologists, linguists, and poets who study other cultures from a poetic perspective—never lose sight of the language that structures and facilitates discourse, in oral or written form.<sup>7</sup> These are some of the reasons the subject of anthropological poetics gravitates naturally to sociolinguistics and linguistics in general (which has its own gradations of science-minded versus more artful practitioners), residually to the empirically rigorous studies of semantics and culture popularized in anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s as "cognitive anthropology" (see Tyler, 1969), and directly to discourse-centered production in any form, including writing. They are tied together by the instrumental role language plays in each instance.

The emphasis on the centrality of language in culture was also one of the original attractions of structuralism and poetics to linguistics and at the same time a brace for some of the earliest discontents with logical positivism in ethnography, which historically has tried to keep its rhetorical bases and authorship "invisible" as a pretext of clinical distance. An increased understanding of the collaborative nature of fieldwork and the need for more "reflexive" perspectives on it relative to constructivist (e.g., the

reader reception theories of scholars such as semiologist Umberto Eco and literary critic Roland Barthes) and multivocal interpretations of literature (following especially the seminal work of Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin) have also spurred the development of a critical dialogics for linguistics and anthropology as a whole.<sup>8</sup> The challenge for a dialogic poetics is that it “must first of all be able to identify and arrange relations between points of view: It must be adequate to the complex architectonics that shape the viewpoint of the author toward his characters, the characters toward the author, and all of these toward each other” (Holquist, 1990, p. 162). Ethnographers have been attracted to this kind of argument precisely because it defines both the relationships and the constraints on self-conscious cross-cultural research and writing. But the subsequent turn to linguistics as science and model for cultural and textual studies and to language in some strict sense as the key to ethnographic investigation has proved to be inadequate—or at least incomplete—and is the source of many of the indeterminacies in philosophy and method that characterize current debate on ethnographic representation and interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

The interdisciplinary stretch of what can be marked as the anthropological version of poetics thus covers a lot of ground. It ranges from a self-conscious interest in *poetry*, conceived brightly by poet Rita Dove (1994) as “the art of making the interior life of one individual available to others” (p. 25; see also Prattis, 1986, 1997), on the one hand, to much more inclusive analytic interests that are perhaps best contained by French critic Paul Valéry’s (1964) concept of poetics as “everything that bears on the creation or composition of works having language at once as their substance and their instrument” (p. 86; see also Brady, 1991a), on the other. Splicing into that fuzzy framework from many directions, anthropological poetics nevertheless settles mainly into three subcategories of inquiry, which are not mutually exclusive: (a) ethnopoetics, (b) literary anthropology, and (c) anthropological poetry.

### ◆ *Ethnopoetics*

Ethnopoetics may be the most conspicuously anthropological activity in a poetic domain. Dennis Tedlock (1992), a pioneer in the field, defines it as the “study of the verbal arts in a worldwide range of languages and cultures” (p. 81). It focuses primarily on “the vocal-auditory channel of communication in which speaking, chanting, or singing voices give shape to proverbs, riddles, curses, laments, praises, prayers, prophecies, public announcements, and narratives” (p. 81). The goal in such studies is “not only to analyze and interpret oral performances but also to make them directly accessible through transcriptions and translations that display their qualities as works of art” (p. 81). Much has been done to reach this goal since ethnopoetics was invented as a special genre of inquiry in the United States in the late 1960s.

Poet-ethnographer Jerome Rothenberg coined the term *ethnopoetics* in 1968 and is properly considered to be “the father of American ethnopoetics” (Tarn, 1991, p. 75). His most instructive thoughts on this topic are collected in edited volumes that also illustrate the diverse intellectual inspiration this movement owes to various social scientists, ethnographers, and poets (including especially Henry David Thoreau, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Arthur Rimbaud, and William Blake), and to other influential social thinkers (such as Giambattista Vico and surrealist Tristan Tzara—see Rothenberg & Rothenberg, 1983). Some of Rothenberg’s other work (e.g., 1981, 1985) digs deeper into the roots of “oral poetry” (see Finnegan, 1992a, 1992b) and related traditions as old as the late Pleistocene (see Brady, 1990b; Tarn, 1991, p. 15) and as momentous as the birth of theater and poetry in shamanism (Rothenberg, 1981). A common theme throughout is an attempt to close the distance modern thinking tends to put between “us” and “them,” both historically and as these artificial boundaries are used to separate us from the performative traditions of “ex-primitives” around the globe today (see Bauman, 1977, 1992; MacCannell, 1992; Schechner, 1995). The au-

thor of numerous books of poetry, Rothenberg was also a cofounder (with Dennis Tedlock) and coeditor of the radical magazine *Alcheringa/Ethnopoetics*, which featured “transcripts, translations, and tear-out disc recordings of performances by indigenous verbal artists from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas” (D. Tedlock, 1992, pp. 81-82). It was keenly focused on developing ethnopoetics, on freeing poetries of all kinds from the “monolithic great tradition” of Western literature, and on exploring new techniques of translating the poetry of tribal societies. Although *Alcheringa* is no longer in print, its experimentalism continues to characterize the field of ethnopoetics today (see especially Tedlock, 1983, 1990, 1992).

The innovative work of linguist-anthropologists Dell Hymes, Robert Duncan, and George Quasha, anthropologist-poet Stanley Diamond, and other poets who, like Rothenberg, have had some training in anthropology or linguistics, including David Antin and Gary Snyder, must also be considered in calculating the intellectual history of ethnopoetics. Their collective scholarship has influenced all the others who have contributed to the development and preservation of this genre since the early 1970s. One such person was anthropologist Victor Turner. Writing more than a decade and half ago about the connection of ethnopoetics to his own work on ritual, Turner (1983) suggested that ethnopoetics offers a way of renewing recognition of “the deep bonds between body and mentality, unconscious and conscious thinking, species and self” that “have been treated without respect, as though they were irrelevant for analytical purposes” in much of the intellectual discourse from anthropology’s colonial period (p. 338). He also noted poignantly that the resurgence of ethnopoetics “comes at a time when knowledge is being increased of other cultures, other worldviews, other life styles, when Westerners, endeavoring to trap non-Western philosophies and poetries in the corrals of their own cognitive constructions, find that they have caught sublime monsters, eastern dragons, lords of fructile chaos, whose wisdom makes our knowledge look somehow shrunken and inadequate” (p. 338). Appropriate to bridging ethnopoetics

and anthropology’s struggle for a postcolonial identity, such concerns also lead directly into the realm of humanistic anthropology.<sup>10</sup>

Anthropologist-linguist Keith Basso (1988) points to another major problem still on the ethnopoetic horizon that is centered in the larger issue of hegemonic discourse—a cultural bias or override in the linguistic and intellectual forms we use to appropriate and represent cross-cultural experience. There is, Basso says, “a growing conviction among linguistic anthropologists that the oral literatures of Native American people have been inaccurately characterized, wrongly represented, and improperly translated.” For the better part of a century, “the spoken productions of Native American storytellers have been presented as pieces of prose whose formal divisions are marked by paragraphs and sentences.” Recent research indicates that this is a fundamental distortion of the record. It appears that “Native American storytellers often spoke—and in some Indian communities continue to speak today—in forms of measured verse” (p. 809).<sup>11</sup> The ethnopoetic task is to decide on the kinds of evidence that “attest to the existence of these poetic forms” and to answer a variety of related questions: “Given a properly recorded text, together with a knowledge of the language in which it was made, how should analysis proceed? What kinds of theoretical constructs are called for along the way, and how should these constructs be modified and refined?” (Basso, 1988, p. 809).<sup>12</sup> Answering these questions sweeps through many of the postmodern challenges that have surfaced in ethnopoetics and anthropology in general in the past 20 years. The concerns cluster around cultural and historical “situatedness”—our inability to devise a culture-free or purely objective view of anything. It is hard to avoid the argument that scholarly work is culturally constructed, rhetorically conditioned, tropological, empowered with a point of view, and addled with imperfections, distortion, and incompleteness. Everything a scholar produces is, in effect, “textual” in every sense of the term (see also Rorty, 1979, 1981; White, 1973, p. xii). Just how “literary” anthropology wants to be in the face of these challenges has

emerged as a serious question and a point of much debate.

### ◆ *Literary Anthropology*

While the study of relations between anthropology and literary theory is still unfolding,<sup>13</sup> the major points of entry into them were pioneered in anthropology by Clifford Geertz (1973, 1983, 1988). In much the same way that Hayden White's celebrated "contention of the inherent 'literariness' of history significantly prefigured the way a number of theorists and historians are now reading anthropology, that is, as text, as writing that is necessarily bound within the parameters of discourse," so it is that "Clifford Geertz's anthropological writings over the past two decades have similarly affirmed the ultimately discursive nature of anthropology by holding that cultural interplay is itself semiotic, a system of signs that can be interpreted by the culture-reader" (Manganaro, 1990b, p. 15). Pursuing this has had a dramatic effect on ideas about the craft and purpose of ethnography, but the linking up with literary interests has not been too much of a stretch for anthropology in some respects: "We know many reasons to emphasize what literature shares with other kinds of human expression. We know how readily we transform literary to non-literary knowledge, and vice versa. We also know how fuzzy matters may be at their intellectual margins" (Miner, 1990, p. 12)—and therein lies much of the problem: It is "fuzzy" on the boundaries. That notwithstanding for the moment, with both the same and a different subject by metaphoric extension—"texts" and "cultures as texts"—some anthropologists have pushed Geertz's premises to argue that their discipline can function as a form of cultural critique not unlike that promoted in more obviously literary circles.<sup>14</sup> Transcending the naïve conception of ethnography as easily apprehended cross-cultural description, influential anthropologist-critic George Marcus (1988) gives its poetic a simultaneous shot of

aesthetic value and authority: "When done artfully," he says, "description takes the form of authoritative narration of cultural processes" (p. 68). It has the character of allegory (Clifford, 1988) in any case and produces a kind of layered artifact loaded with variable cultural dispositions and competing political concerns that are situated in "terms of the social construction of literary realism" (Feld, 1987, p. 190). The much-discussed perspectives of "interpretive anthropology" were born of such concerns.<sup>15</sup>

By keeping questions of authorship at center focus and by exploring the evocative equation of cultures *as* texts that participant observers must learn how to "read" in culturally authentic ways,<sup>16</sup> Marcus and several other anthropologists have since the early 1980s devoted considerable effort to evaluating the utility of such metaphors and to understanding how the methods and theories of interpreting literature might transfer to the interpretation of their own writings, to the study of other cultures so conceived, as well as to the specific study of indigenous oral narratives.<sup>17</sup> The "rich contemporary production of fiction and literature from most parts of the third world" is another "object of analysis that combines ethnography and literary criticism" (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 74).<sup>18</sup> It is "important not only as a guide for . . . inquiries in the field . . . [but also] for suggesting ways in which the form of the ethnography might be altered to reflect the kind of cultural experiences that find expression both in indigenous writing and in the ethnographer's fieldwork" (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 74) and ultimately function "as a form of cultural critique of ourselves" (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 1; see also Williams, 1998).

This work has been expanded critically<sup>19</sup> and extended creatively<sup>20</sup> in various ethnographic and historical contexts. But the growing literariness of the process has become increasingly problematic, including the issue of *how* to write as an anthropologist and questions about the place of fiction in "realistic" ethnographies (see Banks & Banks, 1998; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Rapport, 1997). Geertz (1988) first raised the issue of anthropological writing's being inescapably fictional in the sense of being "something made, something constructed"—a strategic fab-

rication that is not necessarily untrue, but cannot escape its fictional character simply by adopting realism as a mode of exposition or by claiming clear authority on another form of life only on the basis of having “been there” (pp. 4-5). Ethnographic authority derives necessarily from a much more creative, self-interested, historically and culturally situated circumstance in which the author is inevitably a confabulator between his or her own experiences and those of Others in some mutually constructed communication. It is established most directly as a “writerly act” (Geertz, 1988); ethnographic knowledge is “*really* created by conventions of writing” (Fabian, 1990, p. 762). By being dedicated generally to representing peoples without writing, ethnography differentiates itself from the writing of literature and history per se (Manganaro, 1990b). But, despite its needs for objectivity and the defiance of ethnocentrism, ethnographic writing can “no longer be seen as a natural or organic extension of content”; the anthropological writer “either plugs into preexisting plot structures or creates a new structure out of the amalgam of old forms” (Manganaro, 1990b, p. 15). By allowing no culturally or linguistically unconstructed access to reality—no story structures unconditioned by history—and by virtue of its roots in the “fuzzy” cross-cultural margins of anthropological fieldwork, ethnographic representation is thus conducive to developing the kinds of competing interpretations that go with the declaration of “fuzzy” boundaries on any topic. In that capacity it easily lends itself to further analogizing of the situation as ambiguous “text.”<sup>21</sup>

The attempt to reconcile the role of the author, the place of fiction, and related literary enmeshments in ethnography’s realist writing tradition leads to two underexamined developments in the field, one old and one new, and it begs a third. First, it shows the need for a critical reexamination of writing constructions and realist assumptions in anthropology’s only established poetic genre, the ethnographic novel.<sup>22</sup> Second, there is an active search on in many quarters of anthropology to adopt more obviously literary forms that can be used to enhance

communication of the ethnographic experience in the realist tradition, including those with greater “writer consciousness” (e.g., where the author appears in first person as narrator and actor in the ethnographic account, contrary to the positivist tradition).<sup>23</sup> Although there are now many variations on this theme,<sup>24</sup> Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* (1961) is by far the best known of all such works and was foundational in “its resistance to the duty of directly rendering the anthropological subject.”<sup>25</sup> It “represents the anthropological text that perhaps most influenced current speculation on the nature of anthropological representation” (Manganaro, 1990b, p. 17). One enduring consequence is that anthropologists are much more alert to their roles as writers and critics today in ethnographic and historical research,<sup>26</sup> and to the role of writing and criticism more generally in anthropological method and theory.<sup>27</sup>

Third, the new emphasis on creative construction and prolonged attention to anthropology’s inevitable textual involvement has created a kind of epistemological havoc. It not only pits positivism against all of the great deconstructive “undoings” of late, it also means the loss of invisibility in writing as part of the realist tradition. That is a direct challenge to science’s mythical perpetuation of the unobtrusive sign (compare Barthes, 1972). By accentuating the form of the message rather than the contents of its speech acts, the literary or poetic takes for its primary object what science does not. In the formalist sense, we can cull out a measure of literariness in any text and call it *poeticity*: the degree to which a work flags the linguistic nature of its own being; the degree to which it emphasizes materiality versus transparency through self-referencing linguistic forms (see Jakobson, 1987). A text high in poeticity, whether prose or verse, in this sense signals itself in place instead of disappearing; it celebrates the signifier over the signified without abandoning the basic communication function it shares as discourse with more scientific or historically authentic calculations, albeit through very different channels (compare Levine, 1987, 1994). Writing in a way that does not call attention to itself in order to allow the objective observer to focus directly on

the “reality” of the subject is a delusion—a special kind of fiction and desire that helps to turn “culture” into “nature” in the common view. It hides precepts and politics alike behind the power of the sign and makes them look invisible (Brady, 1991a, p. 216). The narrative discourse of science, as in art, is created out of the interaction of such cultural conventions and situations, the way the author deploys them through particular language codes, and the reader’s process of reception (creative construction) that releases meaning from the text. Clarity of meaning itself takes on new meaning in this context. It lacks absolutes. It becomes a manipulable cultural code, reckoned with familiarity and history—still “fuzzy” around the edges. It cannot be a culture-free peek at the universe enabled by a mythical objectivity (Brady, 1991b, p. 19; see also Bruner, 1986, 1990; compare Barthes, 1968).

Science, of course, needs language to function, but unlike literature, it neither asserts nor sees itself as situated *within* language. The conspicuously poetic author willingly appears in his or her text as an artisan whose constant display is the craft of language (the language and form of the poem is claimed by the poet and must be read through that claim—a proprietary function) or as a person who visibly leads the prose narrative from within. The scientific author tries to avoid both, aspiring to invisibility in every place except the opening credits of his or her cover page (compare Geertz, 1988, pp. 7-8; Manganaro, 1990b, pp. 15-16). The resulting gap between author and text is a pit for various detached composition strategies, including anthropology’s great timeless fiction of writing in the ethnographic present. Authorial invisibility enhances the prospect for smuggling distancing time frames (we are “present” and full of time; Others are “past” and “timeless”)<sup>28</sup> into the argument, not to mention excessively clinical assumptions of philosophy, including the possibility of “mirror of nature minds” in observation and communication and related forms of objectivity (Rorty, 1979). Calling “into question the very language by which modern science knows its language,” thereby bringing its invisible signs back

into conscious orbit, Barthes (1986, p. 5) concludes, can thus only be done by writing, itself a condition of language.

Philosophical justification in the criticism of interpretive anthropology and its textual turn have waned since Dreyfus and Rabinow’s (1983) challenging evaluation of Michel Foucault’s thinking and its relevance to cultural anthropology.<sup>29</sup> Any serious reengagement of interpretive anthropology with modern science (and, to some degree, with archaeology and physical anthropology—compare Hodder, 1986; Tilley, 1990) will have to resurrect the historical points at which epistemological concerns began to recede in anthropology and then build from there. Literary anthropology, as part of the emerging critical tradition in textual studies, rests on a similar fate if it is ever to close the loop of its critical departure from modern science concerns with *explanation* per se and much that has been rejected arbitrarily in the zeal to construct powerful arguments about representation, historical situatedness, and *author-ity* in general. As Fabian (1990) suggests, “Dialogical and poetic conceptions of ethnographic knowledge touch the heart of questions about othering. But they have a chance to change the shape of ethnography only if they lead to literary processes that are hermeneutic-dialectical, or ‘practical,’ rather than representational” (p. 766). On the other hand, many of the participants in anthropology’s literary turn have no interest whatsoever in closing that larger loop with any method, theory, or language that resembles the status quo ante in their field (Brady, 1991b, pp. 12-13). Theirs is a more creative turn to be considered critically before any larger inclusions are attempted.<sup>30</sup> Following ideas that have “already been claimed by various forms of radical anthropology,” which see “the discipline as a handmaiden to an era of European and American imperialism,” Nathaniel Tarn (1991) suggests that intellectual studies—perhaps properly conceived as Wittgensteinian language games—should keep their identities as such and not be promoted to some Archimedian level of essential Truth or “used for oppressive purposes or any pretence at superior knowledge” (p. 57).<sup>31</sup> Anthropological poetry has surfaced in a similar humanistically grounded con-

text as a distinctly literary activity crossed over to social science.

### ◆ *Anthropological Poetry*

If ethnopoetics is the most conspicuous anthropological activity in a poetics domain, anthropological poetry is easily qualified in the converse as the most conspicuously poetic activity in an anthropological domain.<sup>32</sup> Such work tends to focus on cross-cultural themes, esoteric cultural information, the experiences of doing fieldwork in other cultures, and so on. Its distinctive characteristic is the presentation of that information in marked poetic form. Set in an anthropological mode, poetry is a conspicuously linguistic message loaded with critical commentary on the nature of the world and our place in it (Brady, 1991a, p. 216). Through poetic portrayal, although perhaps fictional at the level of precise time and sequence of events, anthropological poets often attempt to convey the cross-cultural circumstances and events of their fieldwork in an authentic and penetrating way (see Flores, 1982, 1999; Prattis, 1986). The aim in this poetry is not to exist only for its own sake or self, or merely to entertain, but to flag its language without losing its historical or ethnographic referentiality and authenticity—thereby constituting a paradox of the first order.<sup>33</sup> But it is the conspicuously linguistic forms (such as the self-halting process of poetic line phrasing) that give it poeticity, not its commentary—that is its anthropological part. This raises the issue of writer consciousness once again, the degree to which authors should or must appear as such in their discourse, and therefore crosses the boundary that traditionally has divided scientific writing (and observation) from other forms.

Poetics leads to the aesthetic, which, as part of a general concern for the making of meaning in what we do and study (see Brady, 1991b; Flores, 1985), can be engaged in radical forms, including but not limited to poetry, without completely abandoning seemingly contrary in-

terests such as scientific observation. Although poetry is not science and does not aspire to be science (Diamond, 1986c, p. 132), some of the work of at least the kind of science produced by ethnographers is intruded upon by the anthropological poet. By varying their forms of expression to include poetry, anthropologists attempt to say things that might not be said as effectively or at all any other way. This is consistent with the need to discover and examine critically all of the ways a subject (including social and cultural relationships) can be represented. In that diversity the anthropological poet finds a measure of truth. But the Cartesian critic sees another version: By reporting fieldwork experiences through poetry, the author invokes a form of subjectivity to do the work of a form of objectivity, the conventional ethnography (see Tarn, 1991, p. 246). In the process, information may be conveyed more as what “might” or “could be” than “what is” or “what was” as concrete historical fact, and that is problematic (counter-intuitive) to modern science and to ethnography that emulates its methods.

The pecking order of arguments in this instance has not always been the same. Poetry has occupied more respectable positions in some of the Truth camps of the past. It has not always been so marginalized as intellectual activity.<sup>34</sup> Aristotle recognized 2,400 years ago that because poetry exacts universal judgments from action, from history, it can be considered (with more than a little irony for the present argument) at one level *more* scientific (or philosophical) than history. It is a medium in which “the lessons of history do not become any more intelligible and they remain undemonstrated and therefore merely probable, but they become more compendious and therefore more useful” (Collingwood, 1956, p. 25). Nevertheless, rejected as method by the received wisdom of science since the Enlightenment, in part for its declaration of “ringing true” rather than “being true” in some particular empirical and historical accountability of “what actually happened,” in part for working in a kind of “fifth dimension,” independent of time and therefore “of a sort that scientists cannot recognize” (Graves, 1971, p. 35; see also Bruner, 1986, p. 52), poetry is re-

introduced only with difficulty to any context of specific empirical accountability, such as concerns anthropology and the social sciences.<sup>35</sup>

The challenge of poetry for anthropology thus has several aspects. In addition to studying the uses to which poetry can be put, the contexts in which it appears as discourse, and the variability of its forms in specific cultures (its ethnopoetic dimensions), the challenge includes the development of a genre of writing and reporting that systematically tries to incorporate satisfying and edifying poetic quality (foregrounding for clarity as well as aesthetic functions and the practical use of metaphor as a tool of discovery) without sacrificing the essence of ethnographic accountability. In writing anthropological poetry, an author attempts to evoke a comparable experience or set of experiences through the reader's experience with the text on the twin assumptions that all humans are tied together through certain substantive universals of being and that the beings we encounter are sufficiently like ourselves to be open to empathic construction, discovery, and reporting (Quine's principal of charity—see Shweder, 1996).

Perhaps one can also “extend to all discourse what has been said of poetic discourse alone, because it manifests to the highest degree, when it is successful, the effect which consists in awakening experiences which vary from one individual to another. . . . The paradox of communication is that it presupposes a common medium, but one which works—as is clearly seen in the limiting case in which, as often in poetry, the aim is to transmit emotions—only by eliciting and reviving singular, and therefore socially marked, experiences” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 39). In this way, whether through poetry, a great novel, or a play, the anthropological writer invites us to “live through” other experiences vicariously and, “through the power of metaphor, to come away with a deeper understanding of . . . the human condition” (Coward & Royce, 1981, p. 132). Anthropological humanists (some of whom are poets) look at this as the challenge of writing “from within” rather than “without”

and that of “good writing” in general, which, as mentioned earlier, is an important part of anthropology's emerging poetics.<sup>36</sup>

Clifford Geertz is well-known for the quality of his writing, as are a few other anthropologists.<sup>37</sup> But theirs is not typical writing in the discipline. In fact, as noted previously, and contrary to the kind of disciplinary protection history claims generally for the public accessibility of its writings against the obtuse jargonizing of the social sciences, not all anthropologists strive for more interesting and edifying ways of communicating anthropological experience. Appearing “too literary” (and certainly writing poetry begs the issue) is generally believed to undermine scientific authority.<sup>38</sup> It can put the writer in the “wrong” intellectual camp, and that can have severe career consequences for research funding, promotions, and other political concerns. Some of the resistance is simply against passion in discourse (see Fabian, 1994, p. 100; Taussig, 1987). For holistic anthropology (with its interest in preserving the four-field character of the discipline: cultural anthropology, archaeology, physical anthropology, and linguistics), the real danger in exaggerating the focus on “author-centrism” is slipping into a purely rhetorical or aesthetic legitimization of ethnography “by ontologizing representation, writing, and literary form” (Fabian, 1994, p. 91). That may elide or preempt altogether the question of objectivity, which—as one of the few gates of conversation open to reconciling conventional scientific concerns with advancing poetics and the need for epistemological study in ethnography—nevertheless is a neglected issue in postmodern anthropology (Fabian, 1994, p. 91; see also Megill, 1994; Tiles, 1984). In the middle of it all is an ongoing confusion between powerful explanation and good vocabulary (Rorty, 1981, p. 158; see also Abrahams, 1986; Brady, 1991b).

Lamenting the generally sad state of anthropological discourse today—that it is often “painful to read,” enormously self-serving, corrupted with esoteric and bland jargon, incestuous in its preoccupations when it might be better served with a more outward vision of its purposes and communication strategies—Tarn (1991) suggests that “if the latest generation writes well it

may be due to mass alienation from the academic side of the discipline (with all its dangers) and to such phenomena as ‘ethnopoetics’” (p. 56)—with its emphasis on comparative expression. A properly modern anthropology would find a way to reintegrate its writing of science and its humanisms. “It would pay the greatest attention to the way in which . . . ethnography was written, striving to go beyond *belles lettres* toward a language with scientific and literary properties both, but governed primarily by literature, so that its results could be available to all culturally literate readers” (Tarn, 1991, p. 57). Addressing in particular what authors have attempted in what he calls “auto-anthropologies” (“personal ethnography,” “reflexive ethnography,” and so on; see Crapanzano, 1980; Dumont, 1978; Rabinow, 1977), Tarn (1991) says that such efforts run parallel to his “argument that the genre so long looked for which would assure a complete union of the poetic and anthropological enterprises [without reducing either completely to the other, without sacrificing the option of lopsided emphasis, of an anti-union, or of for all practical purposes complete independence in the conscious formulation of anthropological discourse] (should such be desirable) lies not in the keeping of the anthropologist who cannot, for all his/her efforts, get beyond *belles lettres*, but with the poet who, in theory, still can. This is the question of a language which, without turning away from scientific veracity, abdicates not one jot of its literary potential. Undoubtedly utopian, the search is at home in poetry, incurably utopian, and probably nowhere else” (p. 256; see also Richardson, 1994; Rose, 1991b).

As poets, anthropologists still have to get some purchase on their audiences. Will it be poetry addressed to the existing elite, to anthropologists as such, perhaps as a form of extending the ethnographic tradition, or addressed to “the people at large, or that section of it which has not been consumerized out of existence as a reading and listening public?” (Tarn, 1991, p. 64). Market matters, and some poetry published in the social sciences is of dubious quality by literary standards and therefore less marketable.<sup>39</sup> But what makes the distinction? What is

defensibly good or agreeably bad poetry? There is a whole industry of writing about this in general, of course, and there has been since the first critics forayed as experts into a world not of their own making. I will not attempt to sort that pile out here, especially at the level of craft (although such discussion is relevant), except to echo some early-in-the-century thinking by I. A. Richards (1929): “It is less important to like ‘good’ poetry and dislike ‘bad,’ than to be able to use them both as a means of ordering our minds”; and that what matters is the quality of the reading we give to poems, “not the correctness with which we classify them” as good or bad, right or wrong (p. 327). The ease with which a poem might slip into the mind to good effect is as much a function of the reader’s susceptibility by topic and variable inclination to appropriate such things as it is a function of form. There may be wide agreement on the value of a particular poem or body of work, but there are no absolutes of poetic stimulation and effectiveness. Much depends on the situation at hand. As with any text, the same poem can travel with very different effects across personal and cultural boundaries.

Nonetheless, after all is said and done, perhaps we can agree that the most effective poetry stirs something up in you—an emotion or passion that reaches beyond the shallow, that gravitates to deeper experiences and the sublime. The best of it is powerfully orienting, inspirational, if not more directly mantic or prophetic.<sup>40</sup> In ethnographic or cross-cultural poetry, the effect is likely to be a significant realization of identity with what otherwise could not possibly be claimed as Own. Through words and their specialized forms, a kinship is evoked that is grounded in empathy and interpretation. It huddles with the universality of being human and sends a large message: Perhaps we are all Cheyenne, Arapaho, Tuvaluan, and Ik. Perhaps we are also all ethnographers now, as Rose (1991b, 1993) says. The best poets can make these things work as ideas and as platforms for social action (compare Rothenberg, 1994).

The late anthropologist-poet-social-activist Stanley Diamond (1987), reflecting on the ugly, the beautiful, and the sublime in poetry (and

quarreling with Keats's famous line that "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever"), wrote:

The mere deepening of gratification from the "joyful" experience of beauty as truth does not achieve the sublime. The experience of the sublime is both transcendental and quintessentially cultural at the same time. Language itself is the transcendence of the biological, it is the medium of culture, and culture is a rope-bridge thrown across a biological chasm. As the objective realizations of the human essence, that is, as the existentializing of our human possibilities, culture(s) is the arena for the construction of meanings: it represents a struggle that is constant and renewed in each generation, and evident in the lives of individuals as they strive to become cultured human beings. . . . There are no certainties here, only struggle and contingency, pain and realization. Gratification, satisfaction, or happiness are not at issue. But, we encounter *joy*. This is the joy that one finds in Lear, as he hurls his words into the terrible gulf that engulfs him. The joy is in the words, in his matured sensibility, in his challenge to nature and human defeat. The joy is in the challenge, and in the formulation of his meanings. Or observe the final shuffling off of guilt by Oedipus at Colonnus, as Sophocles etherealizes him in a beam of light. Or the conclusion of the Winnebago medicine rite, when the initiate finally achieves his emancipation from society, after bearing all the abuse that society may heap upon him. Or, for that matter, the ordinary rituals of maturing and variegated experience known in every primitive society, whereby growth is attended by pain, where a new name may be earned, and where the past is arduously incorporated into the present, preparing the individual for the next ritual round as he moves higher in the spiritual hierarchy of his society. That is where the joy is. And finally, it is this joy, not Keats's beauty or truth, which defines the sublime, beyond the confines of the merely aesthetic, breaking all the formal rules of aesthetics, beyond the range of the romantic imagination. For we are not talking of imagination here, but of experience and its meanings, whether in the culture of dreams, the culture of the hunt, or in the ceremonies of rebirth. And finally, I am talking of the sacred space, the sacred silence that lies beyond language, but remains grounded in language. (pp. 270-271; compare Burke, 1958)

All but the most serious and sensitive writers would be hard-pressed to capture these existential dimensions in generally accessible lan-

guage. Ethnopoets strive for such experience and communication, even as they eschew as unrealistic any expectations of ever reducing the sacred or the sublime to strictly clinical or analytic forms. A battle is fit on this very quest: If the artist sees it, she believes she has some prospect of saying it poetically, of conveying with less prospect of empirical distortion the nature of the experience as panhuman emotion; if the scientist sees it or grips its "felt meaning," she can only hasten its transformation into something else (or some things else) by attempting to appropriate and express it through clinical forms. Either way, there is a problem. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" refuses reduction to the subject of sailors and seawater or to critical summaries of its formal properties and inspirations, just as the statistical expression of cross-cultural trait distributions in the ancient Middle East cannot yield its exactness and rhetorical integrity to interpretive statements high in poeticity or uncommon metaphor.<sup>41</sup> Poetizing such things may reveal new dimensions of the problem, to be sure, and that can be a profound contribution to humanistic concerns, but it is not necessarily a proper substitute for the original statement or form. While the upshot of such things can be shared widely in language, culture, and experience, the confining exactitudes of competing poetic and scientific linguistic forms restrict movements and thus hook again into that entangled truth of disciplinary and intellectual discourse: Not all subjects travel equally well.<sup>42</sup> The movement is not hopeless. Translation is possible. But it is by definition a changing frame.

Beyond that we need to ask who does the poet speak *for*? There is debate over this in anthropology, not only for its poets but for all of its writers, as there is in every discipline that has entered the crisis of representation. Sticking to anthropological poets for the moment, for they may have stretched the forms of representation in the social sciences the most, consider Diamond's (1982, p. 94) poem "Shaman's Song":

I talk to flowers  
My fingertips withstand  
The glance of roses

What do you know of the Bear  
 His body, my spirit  
 Rises everywhere  
 Seeing what the leaf sees  
 And the cloud  
 Ambiguous as a woman  
 Drifting through stones

I have lain with the otter  
 Under white water  
 On beds softer than birds

What do you know of the Fox  
 Bearing the message of death?

Diamond was not a shaman. He was not a Native American, although the spirit of indigenous cultures of the Americas resonates through this work and through the multiple (Native American, Anglo, and anthropomorphized animal) voices that structure his epic poem *Going West* (1986a).<sup>43</sup> In these works, as in all others he produced, especially in the waning years of his life, Diamond aimed for the sublime by drawing on the Everyman he met time and again through cross-cultural experience and by taking on that persona. Here was Aristotle's universal—and Diamond's mine. Penetrating and conspicuous experiences were laid out before him like so much crackable glass and Diamond felt it under his feet with every cross-cultural step. Tread lightly, he said, and his poetry was the gateway sign: "Things can break here." In that he spoke for everyone, as brother, as kin, as alienated Jew, as Everyman who has ever suffered the great smotherings of life and identity that flow from cross-cultural oppression. Translation and multivoice reporting of human commonalities in purpose, interests, pasts, and futures were not only possible, they were, to Diamond's eternal credit, imperative (see Rose, 1983/1991a). Everyman was for him simultaneously author, subject, and audience, a social unit whose variable parts were collapsed into reciprocal self-awareness through the rituals of poetry.

Two related themes found throughout Diamond's work, including his provocative "How to Die in America" (1986b), are that individuals and cultures transcend that which consumes them, no matter how painful the circumstances, or perhaps because of the pain, and that vast unintended consequences come from colonial cannibalizing, with its miles and miles of cross-cultural casualties on the beachheads of the world, in Biafra, India, New Mexico, the Dakotas, New York, and California—not to mention the great erasures of tribal peoples in Russia, Spain, Iraq, Australia, China, and the other Americas. Diamond's poetry seems to come from everywhere because his quest for internalizing and expressing the sublime had no firm cultural boundaries. Transcultural mysteries and truths were in his view everywhere subject to appropriation through the carefully opened eye and ear, once saturated with experience. Diamond believed that no culture could hide its fundamental life from the prying eyes of the mystic or the excavations of the traveling poet, especially when a mature social scientist carried them both on his shoulders. His discourse was full of crossovers and changing centers. He knew that anthropology struggled for such knowledge and he believed that none of it would come without intellectual passion in discovery and representation. By shucking preconceptions to the best of his ability and immersing himself in the lives of others, he devoted the last years of his life to saying these things through poetry, having been, as he said, "first a poet, then an anthropologist, then a poet again" (personal communication, March 1983; see also Diamond, 1982; Rose, 1991b). His writings make it obvious that he never really changed professions, only from time to time his manner of professing.

Is the truth of Diamond's poetic work mixed up with beauty and yet anchored empirically in valid ethnography (compare McAllister, 1998)? Is it best judged as poetry, as skill in form, plussed by the enJOYment or illuminating and edifying introspection it produces? Or is it best judged like all fiction, not exclusively or necessarily in terms of its historical accuracy, but on a sliding scale of erotics and believability in the

realm of being human? Does it stir something valuable up in us, perhaps rare or otherwise unobtainable, even as it rings true on life as we know it, or argue it, or both? These are but a few problematic slices of Geertz's (1973) claim that all ethnography is in important ways fictional—something constructed, something fashioned, and never from whole cloth. The crisis of representation in anthropology followed most directly from that pioneering work. The poets have never held center stage in the ensuing melee, but we can assert here that the fundamental issues of ethnographic representation do not change for conspicuously poetic versus more clinical texts. They are textual through and through, no matter what the purported form of representation.<sup>44</sup>

By the same token, as convention would have it in society generally, and specifically in the curious mix of subtle inferences, methodological mandates, and editorial imperialism in the Western world concerning appropriate language for scientific reporting, the form of address often depends heavily on the nature of the problem to be addressed. As it happens, Miles Richardson (1998a) says, “social scientists have long turned to poetry” as a reportorial mode, but the content generally has diverged from the academic centers of their fieldwork and therefore from a collision course with more conventional forms of ethnographic reporting: “Their poems . . . rarely addressed the rich ethnographic record they compiled nor the anguish they felt about the free individual encountering coercive culture” (p. 461). Some of the most notable poetry written by anthropologists in previous generations—by Edward Sapir, Loren Eiseley, and Ruth Benedict, who make up most of a short list—was similarly decentered as ethnography per se but competitive enough to be published in nonanthropological media oriented toward such concerns. But no anthropology journals catered to such interests, and the mainstream sentiment was generally then what it is now: Poetry is an aside, an amusement, that belongs elsewhere. Other than what might be called a “poetic mentality” in the humanism of the

times, and for some an affinity with the enticingly poetic work of Sir James Frazer, there was no ideology afoot that might sponsor or enfranchise a more specifically poetic genre of anthropological writing, including poetry.

That climate has changed perceptibly with the growth of more explicitly interpretive works in the field, that is, with the advent of post-modernism, the growth of “textualism” because of its focus on text construction and consumption, and the linguistic emphases of influential structuralists such as Jakobson (1987) and Lévi-Strauss (1962). Iain Prattis's *Reflections: The Anthropological Muse* (1986), a collection of poetry and artwork specifically addressed to fieldwork experiences by cultural anthropologists and linguists, established a precedent. So did reviews of Stanley Diamond's and Paul Friedrich's poetry in anthropology's flagship journal, the *American Anthropologist*, in the early 1980s.<sup>45</sup> At a time when much of this was at least a source of heated debate in the field, then editor George Marcus published Diamond's “How to Die in America” (1986b) poem in the first volume of *Cultural Anthropology*. As the editor of *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly*, Miles Richardson initiated a poetry and fiction competition that featured the winners in the journal. The competition has been continued by the present editor, Edith Turner, and by her poetry editor, Dell Hymes, and the topics continue to widen. Friedrich's *Bastard Moons* (1979a), Diamond's *Going West* (1986a), and Dennis Tedlock's Turner Prize-winning *Days From a Dream Almanac* (1990) “explore issues of language, ethnographic truth, and shamanic dreams” (Richardson, 1998a, p. 461). Recent poetry in the *American Anthropologist*, under the editorship of Barbara and Dennis Tedlock, includes contributions by Friedrich (1995), Hymes (1995), and Richardson (1998b) on a variety of themes central to ethnographic experience. A new journal devoted to poetry, poetics, ethnography, and cultural and ethnic studies, called appropriately *Cross-Cultural Poetics [Xcp]* and edited by Mark Nowak, published its first issue in 1997. Now the journal *Qualitative Inquiry*, under the editorship of Yvonna Lincoln

and Norman Denzin, is following suit (see Brady, 1998a; Richardson, 1998a). It will carry poetry and fiction as regular features, not because it is trendy to do so, say the editors, but because “social scientists have for too long ignored these important forms of ethnographic representation and interpretation” (N. K. Denzin, personal communication, November 8, 1998).

Looking in another direction, if the anthropologist-poets have been few in number to date (albeit increasing in the postmodern afterglow), anthropology as a whole has inspired numerous poets from other disciplines. “Poets precisely because of their ‘otherness’ in their home societies are attuned to otherness wherever it may be found. Hence they find an affinity, and to their own delight a *social* affinity, with the fruits of other cultures, particularly those of the ‘despised and rejected’ ” (Turner, 1983, p. 339). To which Tarn (1991) adds: “The inspiration that anthropology has afforded poets—to go no further back than Pound or Eliot, or St. John Perse and Segalen, or Neruda, Vallejo, and Paz, in the age of Frazer, Harrison, or the author of *From Ritual to Romance*—to say nothing of Marx and Engles, Freud or Jung, Mauss, Durkheim or Lévi-Strauss—can scarcely be said to have abated when we now have a virtual school of ‘ethnopoetics’ devoted both to the accessing of ‘primitive and archaic poetries’ into our culture through the best available techniques of *twentieth century* translation *and* to the mutual effect upon each other of such poetries and our own—granted that Native poets very much continue to produce poetry all over this world” (p. 63).

Anticipating mutual effects, it is reasonable to ask where one goes with a penchant to write poetry in anthropology. Just adopting poetry as a form of writing guarantees nothing. But poetry can be informative and useful, even exhilarating when it reaches the sublime. Properly cast, it can be both fire bellows for and bubbling lid on the pot of intellectual life, a source of transformation that is admirably unquiet in any position: It “turns everything into life. It is that form of life that turns everything into language” (Meschonnic, 1988, p. 90). It is in fact an art “far larger than any description of its powers”

(Vendler, 1988, p. 6). For these reasons and others already detailed, some competition between poetry and science as genres may in fact be “healthy and entertaining” (Fabian, 1990, p. 766), even functional (Brady, 1993). It follows that having a hall full of poets (as nightmarish as that may seem to some scientists) can give academies of arts and sciences a better overall pulse, if not a better future of discourse and discovery. Writing poetry has also “helped individual anthropologists to overcome alienation from experience” (Fabian, 1990, p. 766) and that, as much as anything, has serious implications for engaging postmodern concerns about authority in ethnography. The penchant of the anthropologist to wax poetic, if honed and pointed in these ways, can push into the heart of ethnographic contemplation, epistemology, and theory. Hanging out in that zone for a while (as nightmarish as that may seem to some poets) might give way to progress in the conversation over what divides us so readily in the academy today.

There are many other paths to that end, of course. Poetry is not necessarily the right tool for every job. As the old adage goes, if one has only a hammer to work with, after a while everything starts to look like a nail. In this instance, “To seek the solution for a problem regarding the production of knowledge in different or better representations of knowledge is to reaffirm, not to overcome, the representationist stance,” with all of its compulsions to order in conceptions of language and culture and related problems (Fabian, 1990, p. 766; see also Friedrich, 1979b). Remaining attentive to “the transformative, creative aspects of ethnographic knowledge” (Fabian, 1990, p. 766) is not entailed automatically by writing poetry (or reproducing dialogues) as an alternative to strict representational ethnography. “To preserve the dialogue with our interlocutors, to assure the Other’s presence against the distancing devices of anthropological discourse, is to continue conversing with the Other on all levels of writing, not just to reproduce dialogues” (Fabian, 1990, p. 766) or to slip unwittingly from being “natural historians into itinerant bards, clowns, or preachers” in a humanistic

or poetic commitment to “being with others” (Fabian, 1990, pp. 766-767; see also Tarn, 1991, p. 75). We can do better—and more.

One more thing to do in this writer’s arena is to counter sole reliance on the centrifugal or “distancing” devices of anthropological discourse—the “Others are never Us” ideas, substituting third-person writing for first-person experiences, writing in the ethnographic present, and so on. Developing alternatives depends on paying special attention to the processes through which ethnographic knowledge is produced in the first place (Fabian, 1994).<sup>46</sup> That does not require a lapse into the old static models of structuralism, although much of what a poetics yields as the sublime might be seen as the recognition of common deep structures (*langue*) in a variable field of surface particulars (*parole*). Certainly there is room for some edifying resuscitation here. But the movement to more centripetal or “closing” discourse in anthropology should at minimum include an ontological and ethnopoetic emphasis on the performative aspects of culture, those that can be “acted out,” as opposed to focusing exclusively on the more limited category of “what members of a culture know [that] is ‘informative’ in the sense that it can be elicited and produced as discursive information” (Fabian, 1994, p. 97).<sup>47</sup>

Such concerns necessarily draw ethnographers and poets into the larger philosophical fields of process, structure, and agency—including the dynamics of knowledge and ritual, theater and history (see Brady, 1999; Richardson, 1994)—and thereby increase the prospects of producing larger-level understandings of the experiential fields we draw from as observers and contribute to as actors and writers. But it should also be remembered that the original point of creative mystery in every study is also where the Muses call on the writer, and that is precisely “where humanistic anthropology must both stall the process of knowing and open it up intellectually—where we must catch ourselves in the act of rushing headlong into conventional formats, of jumping to conclusions about where the experience must take us and how to communicate it to others, and be-

gin to build a successful poetics into the framework” (Brady, 1991b, p. 20). By attempting to reconcile the spread in this connection between analytic problems and the substance of fieldwork, anthropological poetics can do more than capture (or create) and convey the poetics and literatures of various cultures. It can require greater philosophical justification for its ethnographic endeavors and at the same time help to erase some unnecessary distortions of detachment from its objects of inquiry.

### ◆ Coda

Here, then, is the poetic turf more anthropologists than ever are traversing nowadays. It is neither defined nor covered exclusively by anthropologists or traditional anthropological interests. As observers of common problems (in and out of their own societies), anthropologists differ in research methods and strategies and sometimes produce incomparable results. Adding other disciplines from the wings only seems to complicate matters. But common ground for all is not beyond the pale. One source of that for anthropologists and other social scientists is that they all seek ways of “speaking in the name of the real” about the people and behaviors they study—of representing fairly and accurately what cannot easily be known or demonstrated in the foggy partialities of cross-cultural experience, the imperfections of culturally situated observations, and the many voices insinuated in mutually constructed truths (compare Brady, 1983, 1991c). Another, as poet Tarn (1991) says, lies in the knowledge that “nothing can hide from us for long the fact that we all face the same problems in the end; that the poetic fate, like the human, is universal” (p. 14).

Discovering and assessing the common denominators of human existence has always had some priority in anthropology,<sup>48</sup> and the need to bridge the inherently hermeneutic studies of ethnography and larger-level statements about the whole organism (universals of language, culture, cognition, and behavior) is getting renewed attention—in full view of past limitations, such as

incommensurate theory construction, language biases, political and pragmatic relations between ethnographers and the groups they study, the impossibility of absolute objectivity, and the need for successful measures of validity in ethnographic assertions.<sup>49</sup> But the poets have traditionally approached human commonalities differently, hanging more on meaning than behavior—more on humanistic interpretations than clinically validatable truths. From the perspective of anthropological poetics, resurrecting a systematic scientific examination of what is universal in life and culture—“thinking big” again (see Simpson, 1994)—is more than a big task. It requires jumping the gap of irony and paradox from a great (Geertzian) descent into details of local knowledge, “thick descriptions,” and related critical intellectual developments over the past 20 years, back into the whole package of logical positivist methods and assumptions that have been criticized so extensively by the great descenders. Besides, as Aristotle discovered, the poets’ generality is exposed in the rich particulars of their work. The poets believe that the commonalities of life can be plucked from there by large-minded observers of whatever persuasion. Whether or not these apparent sharings can be defended as unassailable or universal truths by other standards is another matter. The paths for collecting them are different, so are the logbooks, and therefore the form of the arguments down the line. Scientists normally create conglomerates from heavily laundered particulars, drawn from wide fields of clinically cut cloth, to reach their generalities.

So which to choose? No matter which extreme is harnessed—soft art, hard science—let me reiterate what can be called by now (via my pressing redundancies) the maxim that some things can’t be said exactly or as effectively any other way. Extremes are validated and perpetuated by that defensible fact, even as the proponents themselves exaggerate it in their bookend fights over turf and exclusivity. But what about the stretch in between? Rifts are made to be mended; the challenge in gulfs is to bridge them. The boldest of anthropology’s new interpreters and poets have gone halfway around the horns of this problem by trying to raise the illumina-

tion of our human commonalities to an art form without losing the ability to inform more traditional social science concerns at the same time, in part on the premise that the collective work of scientists and poets is in the broadest view complementary. In the pool of common knowledge, the pattern is ancient and very human: many in the one, one in the many. How you travel depends on where you start. The destination is in the longest of long runs the same: the audiovisual room, the bookshelf, the electronic library, and, perhaps above all else, the mirror in the center of the house of Who-Are-We?<sup>50</sup> Inquiring minds want to know. We have always wanted to know. Who has the key? Never mind. There seems to be more than one door and some of them aren’t locked. See you inside.

[Refrain: *Is this just more anthropological borrowing from the multiple-reality world of physics? No. An argument for uncompromising relativism, or just for tolerance of diversity of argument and approach in the absence of an overarching paradigm for cultural anthropology? Neither. Do ethnographic methods have to be reduced to “deep hanging out” (Geertz, 1998)? No. Do we have to abandon the search for commensurate theories and universals of language, culture, and behavior? No. Should we force nostalgia-driven models of the past on present ethnographic research for the next millennium? No need to ask. Won’t work.*]

## ■ Notes

1. But compare Bachelard (1964) on the “poetics of space,” Bachelard (1971) on the “poetics of reverie,” Brown (1977) on a “poetic for sociology,” and Hallyn (1990) on the “poetic structure of the world.”

2. For ethnographers, the poetic focus on communications about other cultures is as much a concern about how the story of fieldwork is told as anything else. See Bruner (1984), Prattis (1986), Van Maanen (1988), Manganaro (1990a), Brady (1991a), and O’Neill (1994).

3. See Beaujour (1987, p. 470) and Fischer (1988, p. 8); compare Burke (1989, p. 188), Krupat (1992, pp. 51-52), Robbins (1987), Tarn

(1991, p. 63), Tsing (1994), and James, Hockey, and Dawson (1997).

4. See Lévi-Strauss (1962, 1967, 1969), Riffaterre (1970), Scholes (1974), Culler (1975, 1977), Todorov (1977, 1981), and Harland (1987).

5. See Boon (1972), Todorov (1981), Eagleton (1983), Brady (1991a), and Brooks (1994). The burgeoning domain of “cultural studies” also begs the question of disciplinary division and proprietary interests in these subjects (compare Marcus, 1998). Although there is much more in book form and articles elsewhere using this label, a comparison of the range of interests covered in the literary journals *Cultural Critique* and *Poetics Today* relative to those of the *American Anthropologist*, *Cultural Anthropology*, and *Anthropology and Humanism* is instructive.

6. See Turner (1974, 1982a, 1982b), Bauman (1977, 1992), Schechner (1985, 1995), Graham (1995), Denning (1996), and Brady (1999).

7. Drawing on the oral behavior of the speech community, for example, ethnopoet David Antin (1983), paraphrasing Dell Hymes, writes: “All over the world in a great variety of languages people announce, greet, take leave, invoke, introduce, inquire, request, demand, command, coax, entreat, encourage, beg, answer, name, report, describe, narrate, interpret, analyze, instruct, advise, defer, refuse, apologize, reproach, joke, taunt, insult, praise, discuss, gossip. Among this grab-bag of human language activities are a number of more or less well-defined universal discourse genres, whose expectation structures are the source of all poetic activity. If there is any place that we should look for an ETHNOPOETICS it is here, among these universal genres, where all linguistic invention begins. . . . I take the ‘poetics’ part of ETHNOPOETICS to be . . . the structure of those linguistic acts of invention and discovery through which the mind explores the transformational power of language and discovers and invents the world itself” (p. 451). Albeit less dynamic in orientation and less concerned with cultural process than product, there is also connective tissue in that perception for structural studies of the ways what has been discovered and invented is put into place in particular societies, that is, the logical and symbolic arrangements that characterize the cognitive content and social relations of whole cultures (including

anthropology itself—see Boon, 1982, 1984, 1989; Brady, 1993).

8. For more on dialogics, see Tedlock (1983, 1987b), Hill (1986), Feld (1987), Holquist (1990), Weiss (1990), Brady (1991b), Bruner and Gorfain (1991), Duranti (1993), and Emerson (1997).

9. See Harland (1987), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Clifford (1988), Fabian (1994), Marcus (1998), and Geertz (1998).

10. See, for example, Tarn (1991), Wilk (1991), Scott (1992), and Brady and Turner (1994).

11. See also Rothenberg (1981, 1985), Swann (1983), Tedlock (1983), Tedlock and Tedlock (1985), Kroskrity (1985), and Sherzer and Woodbury (1987). On the anthropology of folk narratives, see Jackson (1982), Wilbert and Simoneau (1982), Swann (1983), Sherzer and Woodbury (1987), Narayan (1989), Abu-Lughod (1993), Basso (1995), Graham (1995), Candre and Echeverri (1996), and Reichel-Dolmatoff (1996).

12. Compare D. Tedlock (1972, 1985, 1987a, 1991, 1993), Culler (1977, p. 8), Riffaterre (1984), Sherzer (1987), and Graham (1995).

13. If not literature per se—see, for example, Spradley and McDonough (1973), Langness and Frank (1978), Dennis and Aycock (1989), Handler (1983, 1985, 1990), Handler and Segal (1987), Richardson (1990), and Benson (1993).

14. See also Marcus and Fischer (1986), Handler (1983, 1985, 1990), Handler and Segal (1987), Fischer (1991), and Marcus (1998).

15. Of course, the whole enterprise is “interpretive.” Furthermore, interpretive anthropology—as part of the poststructuralist, deconstructionist movement in contemporary philosophy and social science—is not necessarily (a) antiempirical (How can any discipline operate without an empirical ground?), (b) antiobjective (see Brady, 1991b; Rorty, 1979, pp. 361-363; Spiegelberg, 1975, pp. 72-73), or (c) antiscience (compare Barrett, 1996; Holton, 1993; Jennings, 1983; Knauff, 1996; Lett, 1997; Maxwell, 1984; O’Meara, 1989; Sangren, 1991; Shankman, 1984). But responsible social science of this kind does reject (as necessarily incomplete, among other problems) dogmatic empiric-ism that forecloses on the study of meaning in favor of an exclusive focus on behavior (see Brady, 1993, p. 277, n. 28; Fernandez, 1974; Polanyi & Prosch, 1975; Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987).

16. Following especially Geertz's (1973) classic observations on a Balinese cockfight.

17. See Marcus and Fischer (1986, p. 72), Marcus (1980, 1998), Marcus and Cushman (1982), Boon (1972, 1982, 1989), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Fernandez (1974, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989), and much that has been published in the journal *Cultural Anthropology*, the discussion of anthropology and Irish discourse in Taylor (1996), and note 11, above, on folk narratives. See also Fischer (1988, 1989, 1991), Fabian (1990, p. 767: "If writing is part of a system of intellectual and political oppression of the Other, how can we avoid contributing to that oppression if we go on writing?"), Manganaro (1990a), Tarn (1991), Karp and Levine (1991), Said (1991), Krupat (1992), Marcus's (1993) review of Krupat, and Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen (1993) on some important aspects of the politicizing that follows from ethnographic encapsulations of other people's texts and customs.

18. See, for example, the best-selling novels by Silko (1977) and Momaday (1989), and Slater's (1982) ethnographic exegesis of Brazilian *literatura de cordel*.

19. See, for example, Dennis and Aycock (1989), Rosaldo (1989), Manganaro (1990a), B. Tedlock (1991), Brady (1991b), Benson (1993), James et al. (1997), and Marcus (1998).

20. See, for example, Feld (1982), Jackson (1986), Turner (1987), Dennis (1989), Fox (1989), Stewart (1989), Richardson (1990), B. Tedlock (1992), Gottlieb and Graham (1993), Limón (1994), Behar (1993, 1996), Stewart (1996), and Denning (1998a, 1998b).

21. For related readings on textual authority and ethnographic representation, see Geertz (1973, 1983, 1988, 1995, 1998), Lanser (1981), Bruner (1984), Fernandez (1985, 1986), Webster (1986), Fabian (1990), Weinstein (1990a, 1990b), Simms (1991), Tsing (1994), Denning (1996, 1998a, 1998b), Rapport (1997), and Banks and Banks (1998); compare Taussig (1993) and Motzafi-Haller (1998). For a recent debate on who speaks for whom in historical ethnography, see Obeyesekere (1992), Sahlins (1996), and Borofsky (1997); compare Brady (1985).

22. On that account, see the diverse works of LaFarge (1929), Bohannan (writing as Elenore Smith Bowen, 1954), Turnbull (1962), Stewart (1962), Matthiessen (1963, 1975), Kurten (1980), Thomas (1987), Handy (1973), Thompson (1983), Jackson (1986), and Knab (1995);

compare the narrative form in Turner's (1987) empathic memoir.

23. See Turnbull (1962, 1972), Rabinow (1977), Dumont (1978), Crapanzano (1980), Turner (1987), Dennis (1989), Dennis and Aycock (1989), and B. Tedlock (1992).

24. See especially the innovative combination of Gottlieb and Graham (1993), Fischer (1988) on Michel Leiris's effort "to combine sympathetic observation of the Other, the unavoidability of literary self-inscription, and the imperative of cultural critique" (p. 8); compare Beaujoir (1987), Tarn (1991), and Wolf (1992).

25. Tarn (1991) echoes a sentiment shared by many about Lévi-Strauss: He might have been a creative writer with equal success, "had he chosen that path of expression" (p. 56). Manganaro (1990b) adds, "The writerly sense of *Tristes Tropiques*, importantly, arises not only out of a literary style adopted by the anthropologist-author, but from the very perspective that the writer takes to his subject" (p. 16). It is also noteworthy that Lévi-Strauss has been roundly criticized for the formalism of his other works (see, e.g., Eagleton, 1983; Geertz, 1973, pp. 345-359; Harland, 1987; Prattis, 1986; compare Boon, 1972, 1982; Brady, 1993). The large-minded Lévi-Strauss seems to have touched all the bases at one time or another.

26. A theme plainly visible in Denning (1980, 1998a), Geertz (1998), and Borofsky (2000).

27. See Fox (1991), Poggie, DeWalt, and Dressler (1992), Borofsky (1994), Barrett (1996), Jessor, Colby, and Shweder (1996), Knauff (1996), Denzin (1997), Lett (1997), James et al. (1997), Layton (1997), Rapport (1997), and Marcus (1998); compare O'Meara (1997).

28. For important statements on this problem, see Wolf (1982), Fabian (1983), Borofsky (1987, 2000), Thomas (1989, 1991), and Denning (1995, 1996).

29. See Rabinow (1983, 1984, 1986), Jarvie (1983), Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen, and Kurzweil (1984), Ulin (1984), Rabinow and Sullivan (1987), Boon (1982), Swearingen (1986), Loriggio (1990), Brady (1991a, 1993), Duranti (1993), and Rapport (1997); compare Scholte (1966) for some earlier thinking, and, more recently, continuing the epistemological effort in anthropology with smart and practical arguments, Davies (1999).

30. See, for example, Reck's (1978) Mexican ethnography, Rose (1993) on the death of "Malinowski-style" ethnography and the birth of a more poetic and multigenre manifesto as its replacement, Boon (1982, pp. 9-12) on some of the confusions of this style and its supposed differentiation as "ethnography" from the "armchair" speculations of Sir James George Frazer, Burke (1989, pp. 188ff.) on the need for anthropologists to "recognize the factor of rhetoric in their own field" (Marcus, 1980), and Boon (1982) on "standards of 'convincingness' in various cross-cultural styles and genres, just as there are canons of verisimilitude in realist ethnography" (p. 21).

31. For more on the relativity and eligibility of such material as language games or similar focus frames, see Guetti (1984), de Zengotita (1989), Denzin (1997), and Gellner (1998).

32. This is less true on both counts in linguistics—see, for example, Napoli and Rando (1979) and Bright (1983, 1985).

33. Dilemma is the other side of paradox. As Paul de Man once observed: "It is in the essence of language to be capable of origination, but of never achieving the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object. Poetic language can do nothing but originate anew over and over again; it is always constitutive, able to posit regardless of presence but, by the same token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as an intent of consciousness" (quoted in Donoghue, 1989, p. 37).

34. See Vendler (1985, 1988) on the variable marginality of poetry. Not all cultures share America's questionable valuation of poetry. It has conspicuously more status as an activity elsewhere (Brazil, Spain, England—to name a few). See Bishop and Brasil (1972), Lorde (1984, p. 87) on poetry being something other than a luxury, Tarn (1991, p. 15) on poetry's "survival value" for humankind, Lavie (1990) and Behar's (1993) sensitive and rich texts on the tribulations of letting their poetry and poetic mentalities out in oppressive contexts, and Richardson (1994) on poetry being a "*practical and powerful* method for analyzing social worlds" (p. 522).

35. Tarn (1991, p. 254) sees this as a kind of competition of "vocations" that can be most discouraging in its personal, political, and philosophical entanglements. But it should be remembered that these seemingly insurmountable

problems do not prevent great artists from also being great scientists (and vice versa—e.g., Goethe; see Gould, 1991), that "contempt for one is no qualification for citizenship in the other" (Brann, 1991, p. 775), and that the opposition that pits imagination against reason, when overdrawn on the battlegrounds of art and science, may be a kind "synecdochic fallacy" anyway—a category mistake in its opposition (see Brady, 1991a; Burke, 1989, p. 87).

36. For more on anthropological humanism and writing, see Wilk (1991) and Brady and Turner (1994); compare Harris (1997, p. 293) and Lett (1997).

37. See, for example, Lévi-Strauss (1961), Turnbull (1962, 1972), Van Lawick-Goodall (1971), Harris (1977, 1987), Denning (1980), Sahlin (1981, 1985, 1996), Jackson (1986), Thomas (1987), Rosaldo (1989), Narayan (1989), D. Tedlock (1990), Laderman (1991), B. Tedlock (1992), Rose (1993), and Behar (1993, 1996). Fabian (1990) notes wryly that "Geertz probably deserves credit for initiating the new literary awareness in anthropology not so much because he fraternized with literary critics but because he dared to write well and got away with it" (p. 761). Fernandez (personal communication, February 27, 1998), playing on some of his own influential work (e.g., 1974, 1986), says that Geertz is above all else a "master metaphorist."

38. However, separating these genres and doing both can generate a laudable effect. Scientists who also write novels, poetry, or very "literary" memoirs only seem to enhance their reputations (see, e.g., Levi, 1984; Lightman, 1993; Sagan, 1980, 1985). On a related matter, when asked if his exercises in poetry improved his science, Nobel Prize-winning chemist and estimable poet Roald Hoffmann said no, at least not directly. Writing poetry for Hoffmann makes him feel better about himself as a person, as a human being, and *that* helps his science considerably (personal communication, February 26, 1997; see also Chandrasekhar, 1987; Hoffmann, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1995). Even with separation in practice or redefinition in humanistic terms, the functional linkage of art-*in*-science cannot be denied. It may be less direct, less obvious, less explored, and less reported than it could be. But it is always present.

39. There are important exceptions. See, for example, Friedrich (1979a), Diamond (1982, 1986a, 1986b), some of Pratts (1986), various

contributions over the years to *Anthropology and Humanism* (*Quarterly*), Fox (1989), Stewart (1989), Tedlock (1990), Richardson (1998a, 1998b), and Flores (1999); compare Hall (1988) on phases in becoming a poet.

40. Leavitt (1997) is pioneering work on poetry and prophecy, words and power, mantic prose and ecstatic experiences—"stirrings" that range from the aesthetic and emotional to fundamentally physical responses and their diverse cultural expressions in ritual, politics, healing, and messianic movements, to name a few. See also Abu-Lughod (1986), Trawick (1988, 1997), Dobin (1990), and Csordas (1997).

41. See Fernandez (1974) for an important argument (with discussion) on sensitivity to and the mastery of metaphors (tropes) in ethnographic narration and related highly organized expressive activities, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff and Turner (1989) for a clear enunciation of common versus uncommon metaphors in everyday life, Van Den Abbeele (1992) on travel as a common metaphor and much that is smuggled into its use, and Fernandez (1986) and Fernandez and Herzfeld (1998) on the place of social and cultural poetics in the study of meaning in performance.

42. Playing out these constraints is in part how logical positivism got to be known less as the backbone of universally applicable methods and more as a list of things that could not (or were not allowed to) be studied in depth, or at all (e.g., meaning versus behavior, aesthetics and emotions, and so on).

43. It is not the same thing as letting multiple authentic voices surface in a single text or performance (see Trawick, 1997), of course, but Diamond believed in—and displayed (by assuming the roles of other speakers) in some of his poetry—the prospect that some people could speak for others to advantage for all on some occasions; that certain knowledge boundaries could be crossed with insight and power, without imperialism or blind cultural exploitation, without a franchise of superiority or oppressive ethnocentrism. Early in his *Going West* (1986a), for example, the anthropomorphized Otter speaks for the Mohicans and Algonquins (as representatives of still other Native Americans) through esoteric knowledge of their impending collision with history: "Because we knew the future / And we understood their [Mohican, Algonquin] legends / Better than they did" (p. 11).

A larger point of this boundary crossing that is not always obvious, especially where ethnic pride is at stake, is that indigenous identity doesn't necessarily translate to expert on all that contextualizes it. Much depends on the form and cultural origins of the questions asked and the cultural and intellectual range of answers sought (see Brady, 1985).

44. There are no separate languages for science and poetry, only specialized vocabularies and variable contexts—cultural "pre-texts" and "subtexts" that reassure, inform, and might even misinform through manipulations designed to present the truth we *want* to find, as opposed to something that might be calculated through other measures as more accurate, analytically satisfying, or less prejudicial. Moreover, there is plenty of slippage in the division of labor between scientific and poetic texts. Asserting bias control, for example, including unmasking ethnocentrism, is seen as obligatory in scientific observation. Disclosing observational bias directly by emulating ("flagging") it in performance and text is a poetic option that may accomplish much the same thing, albeit through a radically different channel and probably for different ends. Here, as elsewhere, context is practically everything for determining meaning, and on occasion it can itself be all but slave to authorial intentions and sociolinguistic form.

45. As book review editor of the *American Anthropologist* at the time, I commissioned these reviews (see Rose, 1983/1991a; Tyler, 1984). One earlier and interesting example of poetry in the *AA* was published by then editor Sol Tax. Referred to as "Puzzled Ph.D. Candidate," and published anonymously (Anonymous, 1954), the poem was sent to Tax by Melville Herskovits, who took it off the bulletin board at the Department of Anthropology, Northwestern University. It was actually "Wasn't It a Thought Titanic" by then graduate student (and now anthropologist and poetics scholar at the University of Chicago) James W. Fernandez.

46. For special takes on the production of ethnographic knowledge, see Borofsky (1987, 2000), Geertz (1973, 1983, 1988, 1995, 1998), Denning (1980, 1996, 1998a, 1998b), Brady (1991b), and Behar (1993, 1996).

47. See also Tedlock (1983, 1990), Schechner (1985, 1995), Fernandez (1988), Graham (1995), Denning (1996), and Taylor (1996). Poetry, of course, fits into the performative tradi-

tions of its makers directly, and it can be an important source for understanding indigenous histories. As Charlot (1985) says of Hawaiian poetry, "The fact that poetry has been used frequently for important occasions and purposes suggests that it has a utility thus far overlooked by historians" (p. 29). See also Vendler (1995, p. 6) on the historical meaning of rhythms, stanza forms, personae, and genre; and Fernandez and Herzfeld (1998) for a strong argument that "poetic principles guide all *effective* and *affective* social interaction" (p. 94) and a discussion of how that articulates with the problem of performativity in human action generally.

48. See Brown (1991) and Lévi-Strauss's whole corpus of writings; see also Whitten (1988) and Kilbride (1993),

49. See, for example, Jessor et al. (1996), Shore (1996), Bloch (1998), and Brady (1998b); compare Wierzbicka (1996).

50. Some poets live there, along with a group of narcissists, clever historians, and a tinhorn totalitarian or two. They are visited regularly by social and natural scientists. The project is to see what makes the residents tick. The problem is that everyone in the room is ticking. Everyone is looking back at everyone who's looking at. Nobody knows for sure who's studying whom, or, for that matter, whose conversation should dominate. Somebody said there was order in the chaos. Two poets and the ghost of Aristotle said, "We told you so." Two scientists wanted to bottle it but couldn't get a grip on either its substance or its meaning. New schools of methods grew up in the exact spot of this discovery. A plaque marks it to this very day: THE FOUNTAIN OF MUSES STARTED HERE. LANGUAGE OF TRUTH SOLD NEAR HERE. PLEASE DO NOT LOITER.

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