

Ethnographic Amendments: Towards a Grammatological Ethnography

Grant Stirling

*Department of English
York University*

ABSTRACT: At least one challenge posed by our post-modern critical ethos is "the crisis of representation." This article examines the implications of this "crisis" as it effects ethnography. Outlining the radical challenge posed by post-modernism to an ethnography that is concerned with writing "the Other," this article illustrates how a ligature between ethnography and the Derridean strategy of grammatology can restore ethnography to its radical potential. Surveying some of the responses to the challenges of post-modernism that are articulated by scholars such as Tyler, Van Maanen, Clifford, and Roy Wagner, this article illustrates the shortcomings and contradictions within their responses, thereby pointing towards what might be called a "grammatological ethnography": that is, an ethnography that displaces traditional notions of reference and representation to produce a project dedicated simultaneously towards a new ethnographic writing and a new ethnographic reading.

The human sciences are in a state of turmoil. To focus the matter more pointedly, anthropological ethnography is in a state of crisis. Something has happened over the last few years, something variously described as post-modernism, post-structuralism, or deconstruction, and this something has brought about a profound change in how the human sciences conceive of everything from their methodology to their object of study. In terms of anthropological ethnography, this crisis is most often articulated in one of two ways: post-modernism either has made inaccessible the object of our investigation or has heightened our awareness of the means by which we access and represent the object of our investigations. If you like, these two articulations of the force of post-modernism *vis-à-vis* ethnography can be loosely described as highlighting the problems within *reading* culture and the problems within *writing* culture. But as the ethnographers under discussion in this paper indicate, the issues of reading and writing are never so cleanly separated.

In their overtly glib *Panic Encyclopedia*, Kroker, Kroker, and Cook note "the fateful discovery in contemporary physics that ninety percent of the natural universe is missing matter and no one knows where it has gone (physicists most of all)" (1989:15). Narcissistically surveying the *ethos* of contemporary North American culture, Kroker *et al* pronounce "that ninety percent of contemporary

society is also missing matter, just vanished and . . . no one knows where it is gone (sociologists most of all)" (1989:15-16). In the face of this missing matter, this inaccessibility of the object of study, Kroker *et al* attempt to forge new means of cultural critique that will respond adequately to what they describe as the frenetic panic of the post-modern age. The *Panic Encyclopedia* presents a montage of imagistic articulations of specific scenes or events that exemplify the evanescence and instability of the panic sense of culture held by Kroker, Kroker, and Cook. It must be left to individual readers to either embrace or repudiate the vision offered by the *Panic Encyclopedia*; there can be little doubt that the "hip and glib" style offered by Kroker *et al* will try the patience of many. But what Kroker, Kroker, and Cook highlight in terms of this present discussion is how post-modernism, for them, points to the problems within reading culture, how post-modernism makes the object of cultural study somehow inaccessible.

For an anthropologist such as James Clifford, the challenge of post-modernism to cultural studies highlights the problems within writing culture, the distances between the ethnographic account and culture that is purported to be represented through that account. Clifford clearly recognizes the impossibility of *reading* any ultimate "anthropological truth" within culture, but his concern quickly turns to how to continue *writing* culture in the face of the erasure of truth:

In cultural studies at least, we can no longer know the whole truth, or even claim to approach it. The rigorous partiality that I have been stressing here may be a source of pessimism for some readers. But is there not a liberation, too, in recognizing that no one can write about others any longer as if they were discrete objects or texts? And may not the vision of a complex, problematic, partial ethnography lead, not to its abandonment, but to more subtle, concrete ways of writing and reading, to new conceptions of culture as interactive and historical? (Clifford 1986:25).

Clifford directly addresses the challenge post-modernism poses to the means of ethnographic writing, to the methodological mode by which ethnographic accounts are produced. The problems within reading culture lead to similar problems within writing culture, and in this way, the concerns of reading and writing are brought together for Clifford. The challenge of post-modernism to Clifford comes on two fronts, and what Clifford explicitly asks is whether post-modernism brings the demise or the resurrection of anthropology, and more specifically, ethnography.

How can the loss of a positivistic basis be liberating for an ethnography which to some degree is concerned with writing a concrete Other? Does Clifford suggest that the positivistic basis is lost or is it maintained but merely inaccessible? If the Other is ineffable, is not the only liberation that of utter anarchy, a relativistic *melée*? How can such a liberation lead "to a more subtle, concrete" way of writing the Other? "Subtle" meaning even more deviously masking the silence within representation of the Other? How can the Other be "concrete" unless petrified in the stasis of the ethnographic pose? Will our "new conceptions of culture" point

toward the “interactive” discourse within the solipsism of academia, while the Other remains disregarded—and what’s more, unconcerned?

There are, of course, no simple answers, and there may be no answers at all, merely suggestions and intimations of directions and avenues. I am not able to delineate what a “new” post-modern anthropological study would look like. The best I will do is to offer a map, an indicative guide to give you a flavour of what direction post-modern anthropology might move in, or perhaps is moving in. I propose to highlight the problematization of ethnography through post-modernism and examine how various responses to that critique engage on differing levels of intensity the challenge thus posited. But before the answers, before the tentative forays, there must be the question; and the question seems to be implicitly acknowledged by all of the anthropologists discussed in this paper — Geertz, Tyler, Yengoyan, Clifford, Van Maanen — as well as most others who engage the challenge of post-modernism to ethnography, but they never seem to come right out and articulate it. Simply, what is the challenge of post-modernism to ethnography?

In order to attempt to answer this question, it is necessary to pare down the tag of post-modernism itself. This is no easy task because one of the salient characteristics of post-modernism is its resistance to the homogeneity imposed by definition. In the widest possible sense, post-modernism is an epistemic revolution that may be loosely described as a phenomenon that has arrived over the past twenty years and now infiltrates a range of disciplines from anthropology to philosophy, art history to psychology. The epistemic implications of post-modernism are multiple and wide-ranging, but what post-modernism does is disrupt what was thought stable, corrupt what was thought pure, chafe at the constraints of closure, profoundly challenge convention. In terms of anthropological ethnography, a chapter title from Marcus and Fischer in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* characterizes the challenge of post-modernism as a “Crisis of Representation.” If post-modernism does indeed problematize the notion of representation then the challenge to ethnography is clear. Ethnography is surely intimately associated with representation because the traditional task of ethnography is nothing if not to re-present culture, to re-present the Other.

Representation is a concept that has been under scrutiny as far back as Plato, but post-modernism has given the discussion of representation a particular currency by recasting this debate in linguistic terms. In the wake of structuralist linguistics — the science of linguistic signs called semiotics — outlined in the *Course in General Linguistics* of Ferdinand de Saussure, which was published posthumously in 1916, anthropology and post-modernism alike have had an entirely new vocabulary with which to express their respective fields. Without digressing into an extended examination of Saussurean structural semiology, it is important for this present discussion to keep in mind the basis axiom of Saussurean semiotics: the sign is the intimate but arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified. The signifier — the sound image — is united with

the signified — the concept — and the inseparable union between the two is the sign. Part of what post-modernism does is rupture this union between signifier and signified; post-modernism indicates how the sign is not a unified totality, but a radically heterogeneous entity inhabited by an internal difference.

If we understand ethnography to be intimately associated with representation, then the challenge of post-modernism is clear. The anthropological signifier — the ethnographic account — purports to directly relate to the anthropological signified — the Other or the culture under study. What post-modernism does is rupture that relationship between ethnography and Other, between what is written and what is read. By focusing upon post-modernism as the critique of representation, Clifford and Marcus invite the analogy of linguistics to elucidate the challenge of post-modernism to ethnography. Casting the challenge to ethnography in terms of

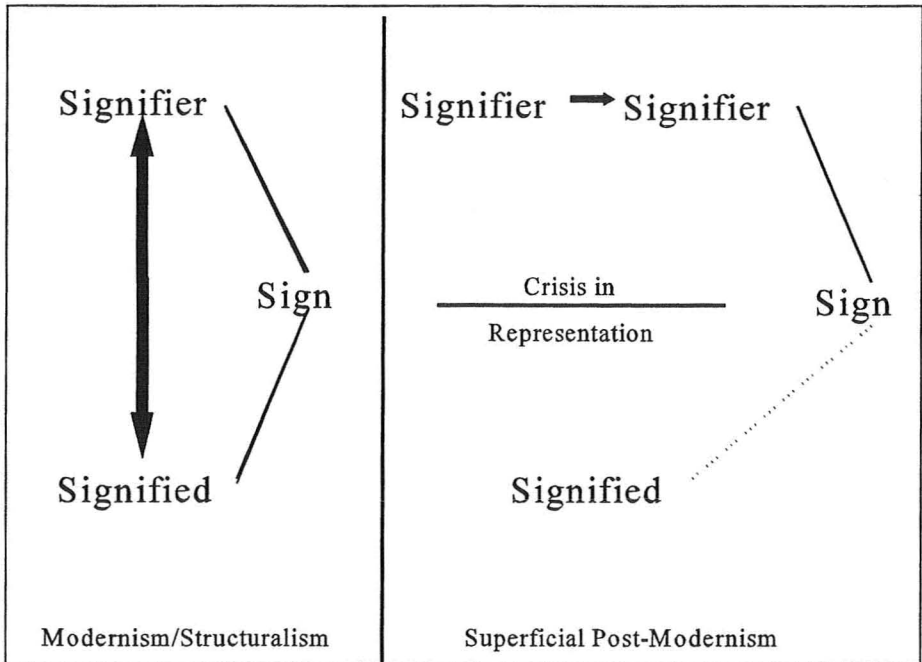


Figure 1 The Crisis in Representation

signifiers, signifieds, and signs provides a model which efficaciously and graphically illustrates the contestation of ethnography by post-modernism.

Figure 1 is divided into two parts; the left part illustrates the "modern" or "structuralist" conception of Saussurean linguistics or structuralist anthropology,

perhaps best exemplified by Levi-Strauss. The right part of Figure 1 represents the superficial response to the challenge of post-modernism. If post-modernism indicates that the sign is a defeasible entity, that the sign is not a unified totality but a radically divided entity within itself, then a common reaction to the post-modernism critique of representation is to declare the priority of the signifier. If the signifier — what the ethnographer writes—is divorced from the anthropological signified — what the ethnographer reads — then all we are tangibly left with is the signifier — the ethnographic account. This priority of the signifier is suggested by the right part of Figure 1. The ethnographic signifier hovers above the anthropological signified, condemned to relate only to other ethnographic signifiers, unable to directly link up with the signified at which it aims.

If, at this point, this discussion strikes you as presenting the challenge of post-modernism to ethnography with a certain lack of rigor, with a conspicuous absence of detail, that is completely justified. Up to this point, what I have tried to briefly outline is how the post-modern critique of representation directly bears upon the issue of ethnography. How that critique is articulated in post-modernism is part of a much larger story, only the skeleton of which can be sketched here.

Anthropology and semiology share the same history; they are both deeply inscribed within a tradition of structuralism. The affinities between Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and one of the most influential figures in the development of structuralism, Roman Jakobson, have been exhaustively researched and need not be repeated here. In order to see the co-incidence of structuralism in the anthropology of Levi-Strauss and the semiology of Saussure, one need only note how as Saussure posits the binary opposition between signifier and signified, so Levi-Strauss posits the binary opposition between various mythemes of cultural significance. As Saussure posits the direct relationship between the surface signifier word and deeper signified referent, so Levi-Strauss posits the direct relationship between the surface signifier of cultural *parole* and the deeper signified of cultural *langue* (Richter 1989:852). For Saussure, each signifier maps on to a signified and the two together comprise the Saussurean sign. For Levi-Strauss (here revealing his affinity with Jakobson), the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships between various mythemes points to the deep structural basis of culture. In this way, the modernist or structuralist tenor of Levi-Strauss and Saussure is characterized by order, schema, and systematization.

The crisis in representation to which Marcus and Fischer allude came, in one form, through a paper delivered by Jacques Derrida in 1966. His devastating critique of structuralism — directed towards the anthropology of Levi-Strauss but equally devastating for Saussurean linguistics — focuses upon the notion of the centre. Simply arguing that every structure necessarily has a centre which orients that structure, Derrida proceeds to deconstruct the structurality of structure by illustrating how the centre inhabits the paradoxical position of being both prior to yet posited by the structure of which it therefore both is and is not a part:

At the centre, the permutations or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. . . . Thus it has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted the very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its centre elsewhere. The centre is not the centre (Derrida 1989:960).

This critique of the centre is so profoundly simple that it is simply profound. The decentering of the centred structure radically challenges the notion of structured disciplines: ie. structural anthropology or structural linguistics. The centred structure of what Saussure and Levi-Strauss identify as *langue* — the structural law of language and culture — is broken. Consequently, the direct relationship between signifiers and signifieds is corrupted for both structural linguistics and structural anthropology¹.

The superficial response to this rupture proclaims, as I have indicated above on the right part of Figure 1, the priority of the signifier. Unable to directly link up to the signified, since any representational structure is predicated upon a general law of structural *langue*, the pessimistic — and curiously nostalgic — reaction to Derrida's challenge is to hover anxiously above the realm of the signified in a sort of rarefied sterility of signifiers referring to signifiers referring to signifiers, never able to bridge the gap and make reference to the "ground" of the signified. This model is pessimistic because it relegates linguistics and anthropology to a "hollow" and "empty" status since there is no "ground" or "substance" to the signifiers thus articulated. This paradigm is nostalgic because of the manifest desire to once again "link up" with the now distant signified. The trick is just how to do it without a compromised mediating representational structure such as language (some trick!).

By characterizing the challenge of post-modernism as "a crisis in representation," Clifford and Marcus recognize the problematization of reference, while expressing their desire to once again reestablish that linkage. This desire is clearly manifest in Clifford's consideration of stylistic innovation: if he could only write ethnography (the anthropological signifier) in a new way — maybe through Bakhtin's polyphony or heteroglossia- -the Other (the anthropological signified) might be displayed and ethnography could be redeemed. But Clifford admits his own defeat, the consequences of which will be discussed later. The rarefied sterility of the abstracted signifier, illustrated by the right of Figure 1, tries to play the old structuralist game, but with new rules. Those who try to play this game do not realize that the old stadium has been declared obsolete, and the fan club has

¹ For a more extended and focused critique of structuralism in its specific linguistic articulations, see Derrida's extended and profoundly challenging analysis of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* offered in "Part I: Writing Before the Letter" (Derrida 1974:1-93).

disbanded. Modernism dies with Derrida — or at least is radically challenged — but many anthropologists (most under discussion in this paper) are unable to assimilate that challenge. Their reactions to the post-modern critique of representation or of structuralism or of modernism — however you might cast it — vary widely: some attempt to engage, only to be swept away in a wave of anti-essentialist despair (Yengoyan); others engage but only on the most superficial level, not extending the critique of representation to that which is (purportedly) represented (Van Maanen, Clifford); and others engage, realize the depth of the challenge, and suggest that this challenge can revitalize anthropology:

They [post-modern challenges to anthropology and ethnography] threaten the very fabric of our academic and secular social order, but they also sustain this order by giving it a challenge and a relevance, something to talk about (Wagner 1981:152).

Wagner is surely one who attempts to engage the critique of anthropological ethnography offered by post-modernism, but what can anthropology say to post-modernism? Ptolemy had little to say after Copernicus; Galileo had little to say after Einstein; and now Einstein has little to say after Stephen Hawking. Yes, these figures may loosely describe the progression of “astronomy” or “astrophysics” as disciplines, but the distance between Ptolemy’s astronomy and Hawking’s is so great as to make them unrelated. This is the situation of anthropological ethnography in the face of post-modernism. The challenge of post-modernism is so radical to ethnography that the study which does not engage this critique stands as an primitive anthropological Ptolemy to the post-modern anthropological Hawking who engages the “crisis of representation” in his academic pursuit.

So if the modernist/structuralist game is always already compromised by its unacknowledged uncentered structurality, and the privileged sterility of abstracted signifiers is nostalgic and superficial, what game does one play to engage the crisis of representation? The game is called post-structuralism. Do away with our traditional notions of reference; do away with our traditional notions of representation. If modernism/structuralism is characterized by the systematization of *representation as reference*, and the privileged sterility of abstracted signifiers is *representation apart from reference*, then post-structuralism offers *representation sans reference*.

Unlike the modernist/structuralist models of stasis and solidity, post-structuralism does not stand still, is not stable, and does not render itself describable by the linkage of signifier to signified. Where the previous two models outlined in Figure 1 preserve the distinction between signifier and signified, although they may not refer — that is, link up — post-structuralism radically challenges the distinction between signifier and signified by enmeshing both within the creation of the other, so that the model of post-structuralism is an unmodeled model that no longer posits the opposition of signifier and signified, word and world. Rather, the signifier is caught up in the creation of the signified which in

turn is caught up in the creation of the signifier so that, yes, there is a sense of eternal anteriority as in the previously described figure, but the circularity of post-structuralism does not refer to a rarefied signifier, previous to it, devoid of signification. Post-structuralism does not recognize “devoid of signification” since such a position necessitates a distinction between signifier and signified which post-structuralism denies. Consequently, a post-structuralist anthropology offers the possibility of a revitalization of ethnography by presenting a rupture with the previously contested models of Figure 1.

Since I pledged to diagrammatically represent this conception of a post-modern ethnography — with the caveat that such a map is merely indicative or “flavourful” rather than programmatic in absolute terms — such a conception may be suggested by Figure 2.

Post-structuralism does not endorse the sign and semiology. The structural sign gives way to the post-structural *gram* as modernist semiotics gives way to post-modernist *grammatology*. In the *ethos* of modernism and structuralism the sign is characterized by the presence of the signified in the signifier. If the relationship between signifier and signified is broken, the signifier is relegated to the marker of an absence, an hollow status lamenting the loss of the signified. In the *ethos* of post-modernism and post-structuralism, the *gram* exceeds either the plenitude of a presence or the vacuity of a lack of content: “the *gram* is neither a signifier nor

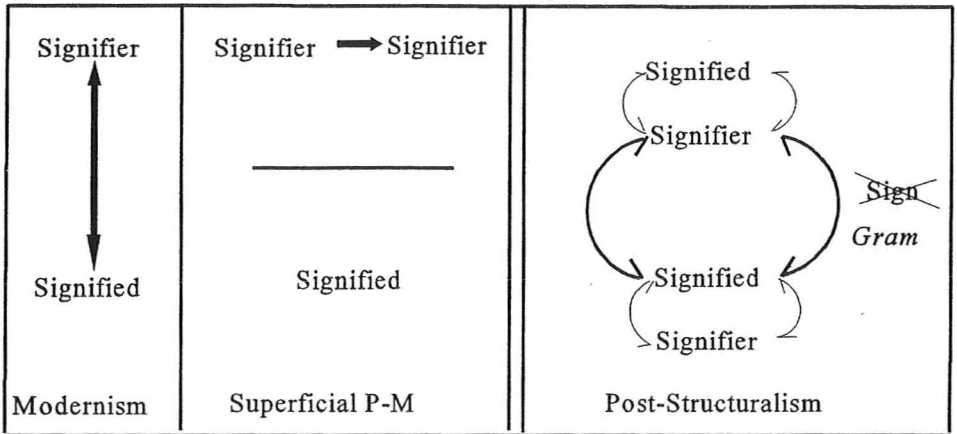


Figure 2 From Structuralism to Post-Structuralism

a signified, neither a presence nor an absence, neither a position nor a negation” (Derrida 1981:43). Surpassing semiology, exceeding the limitation of the sign,

grammatology and the *gram* offer the prospect

a new concept of writing. This concept can be called *gram* or *deference*. the play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple elements be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which is itself not simply present. This interweaving results in each "element" — phoneme or grapheme — being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textual, is the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. The *gram*, then, is the most general concept of semiology — which thus becomes grammatology — and it convers not only the field of writing in the restricted sense, but also the field of linguistics. . . . The *gram* as *differance*, then, is a structura and a movement no longer conceivable in the basis of the opposition presence/absence (Derrida 1981:26-27).

Rather than asserting the autonomous identity of the sign predicated upon a representational paradigm, grammatology repudiates the autonomous identity of reference by enmeshing the *gram* within a differential network. Rather than capturing the essence of a singularity through representation, the *gram* embraces a multiplicity of difference, a field that eclipses singularity.

It remains, of course, to demonstrate this high sounding *gram* in ethnographic *praxis*. As it stands now, this *gram* seems to hover at some remove from the task of field-work itself. But what I want to indicate is how anthropological ethnography is already moving towards this grammatological pole, how various anthropologists who attempt to grapple with the challenge of post-modernism to ethnography appear to assimilate the possibilities apparently offered by the non-representational paradigm of grammatology.

My task here is not to enact this grammatological model, but to illustrate how the various anthropologists under discussion range in their attempts to engage the challenge of post-modernism. Utilising the three broad demarcations between Modernism, Superficial Post-Modernism, and Post-Structuralism outlined in Figures 1 and 2, I place various scholars in a relative measure:

<u>Modernism/Structuralism</u>	<u>Superficial Post-Modernism</u>	<u>Post-Modernism</u>
Sd	Sr-Sr-Sr	Sr
<hr/>		
Sr	Sd	Sd
Levi-Strauss	Yengoyan	Tyler
Saussure Geertz	Clifford	Wagner
Jakobson	Van Maanen	Felman
		Derrida

Of course any diagram or map is contestable and Procrustean, but I have already given these figures a sense of provisionality, a sense of free-play. Indicative rather than prescriptive, flavourful rather than programmatic, these figures allow enough leeway so that the counters may vary their position slightly (ie. Geertz occupying a transitional space either closer or farther from the structuralist and superficial post-modernist positions). The placement of the figures is predicated upon, and therefore the leeway is restricted by, the (supposed) cogency of my argument so that no radical reordering occurs (ie. Geertz moving from his transitional position to occupy the furthest pole with Derrida and Felman).

One characteristic that places an individual to the left of the grammatological pole on this map is their maintenance of the distinction between signifier and signified, ethnographic text and the culture there inscribed. Purporting to be post-modern while maintaining this distinction brands one a superficial post-modernist; nostalgia gives one away. "And, as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire" (Derrida 1989:960). Geertz, Van Maanen, Tyler, Clifford, Wagner, Khun, and Yengoyan — among others — are coherently contradictory to varying degrees, and their nostalgic contradictions are indicative of their desire to maintain the ground that is challenged by post-modernism.

One need not read far into John Van Maanen's work to see this contradiction. *Tales of the Field*, from page eight to page thirteen, expresses this contradiction where Van Maanen recognizes the loss of ground precipitated by post-modernism on the one hand—"There is no direct correspondence between the world as experienced and the world as conveyed in a text, any more than there is a direct correspondence between the observer and the observed" (Van Maanen 1988:8)—while on the other hand maintaining that same ground: "The trick of ethnography is to adequately display the culture . . . in a way that is meaningful to readers without great distortion" (Van Maanen 1988:13). How can Van Maanen suggest such a contradiction unless he expresses his desire for the ground lost with post-modernism? And why is ethnography described as using a trick? Is this a parapraxis — a Freudian slip of the pen — revealing Van Maanen's anxiety about the post-modern challenge to ethnographic authority: evanescent significations and fleeting (non)ground? In order to maintain its facade of authenticity, must ethnography mask this aporia through stylistic innovation? Whatever the case, these two statements clearly position Van Maanen at the centre pole of our flavourful map. He recognizes the separation between signifier (ethnographic text) and signified (native/culture) but tries to bridge that gap and make them link up again. It is significant that the body of Van Maanen's *Tales of the Field* is an enactment of different modes of ethnographic representation: realist, impressionist, confessional. By comparing the degree to which each mode masks the separation between text and culture, world and word, Van Maanen implicitly places each on a scale of honesty: a relative measure of the degree to which each mode

self-declares its own artifice or distance from the ground of culture. Van Maanen neither extols nor denigrates this implicit self-reflexivity, but more significantly, he never suggests a mode which will move beyond the need for this acknowledgement of ethnographic artifice. This, of course, is due to the fact that Van Maanen is trapped in the superficial opposition between signifier and signified and that his project, if he indeed has any beyond the simple display of outdated modes of ethnographic writing, can only dwell on stylistic innovation within the confines of his structuralist episteme rather than making the rupture to post-structuralism.

Within the episteme exemplified by Van Maanen, there is a sense that stylistic innovation will be the panacea for ethnography in post-modernism. Clifford's project of stylistic innovation — outlined in *The Predicament of Culture* — expresses the same desire. Clifford considers an ethnographic text that might utilize the notions of *polyphony* or *heteroglossia* — literally a “many sounding” or “many voiced” text — first proposed in the first half of this century by the great Russian Formalist, Mikhail Bakhtin. Through his consideration of a radically polyphonic text, a text in which the single authorial voice would give way to a multiple voicing of natives and sundry others, Clifford reveals not his incipient post-modernism, but his fetish for the native. Clifford's whole project is dedicated towards a transparency theory of ethnography in which the native is valorized. By considering the utopian notion that the native could be presented in an unmediated fashion through dialogic textuality — the actual voice of the native uncontaminated by the ethnographic authority — or, better yet, a whole bunch of natives and sundry others through heteroglossia — dialogic times x — Clifford still expresses his superficial post-modernism and naive desire for the concrete Other.

The critique of Clifford is simple and in two parts. The first is offered by Clifford himself where he explicitly acknowledges that neither the dialogism of the polyphonic mode nor heteroglossia are attainable:

Quotations are always staged by the quoter . . . a more radical polyphony . . . would only displace ethnographic authority, still confirming the final virtuoso orchestration by a single author (Clifford 1988:50).

But even if the unmediated presence of the Other were possible in the ethnographic account, what would that mean? Would this indeed be the panacea of ethnography? Such a notion, Clifford's project for unmediated presence of the Other, is predicated upon the belief that the native has something of value to say to us, that the Other has some privileged inside information into their own culture which, if we could just hear it in unmediated fashion, would comprise our literal ethnographic account. But why should one person, an authentic native, be able to encapsulate the intricacies of their culture for the ethnographer? Is not that native merely an Other individual, contaminated with perceptions and biases like any Other? Is not their perspective as subjective, as interpretive, as the “traditional”

(ie. non-heteroglossic/non-polyphonic) ethnographic account that Clifford tries to escape?

But maybe the response to this objection is that if polyphony allows for the unmediated presence of one native, then there is no limit to the number of natives that could be present in the ethnography. Granted, but as the number of natives increases, so does the number of subtle differences in their accounts of the same subject matter. The authority then falls back to the interpretive ethnographer who must decide what is of "essential" significance and what is to be disregarded as "accidental" subjectivity with no cultural import: ie. personal hostility towards the ethnographer, marital strife, indigestion, whatever. Of course, that which the ethnographer disregards as insignificant subjective bias in order to fashion their ethnographic account may be of great cultural significance. Consequently, the unmediated presence of the native is eclipsed by the interpretive presence of the ethnographer since in their effort to separate the wheat from the chaff, the chaff that is discarded is inevitably the voice of a certain native. This utopian stylistic panacea for ethnography fails not only on pragmatic grounds, but on the very theoretical precept on which it is founded: the fetish for the native.

By considering stylistic innovation, Clifford, like Van Maanen, seeks to bridge the rupture between signifier and signified, ethnography and native, thereby characterizing superficial post-modernism. But more strongly than Van Maanen, Clifford expresses his desire for ground through the very style of ethnography he considers: polyphony and heteroglossia. Valorizing the voice of the native, and thereby arguing that the native has some privileged perspective, some first order knowledge which is above interpretation, Clifford reveals his deep sense of anxiety in the face of a loss of cultural truth.

Where Van Maanen illustrates different modes of representing the Other in ethnography, and indicates the degree to which each mode masks or reveals its own artifice, Clifford considers a means of representation which attempts to circumvent the artifice of representation through the unmediated presence of the Other, albeit unsuccessfully. Stephen A. Tyler considers representation, recognizes the limitations thereof, and moves his project to a mode which purportedly transcends representation through what he designates as evocation:

Transcendent then, neither by theory nor by practice, nor by their synthesis, [ethnography] describes no knowledge and produces no action. It transcends instead by evoking what cannot be known discursively or performed perfectly, though all know it as if discursively and perform it as if perfectly. Evocation is neither presentation nor representation. It presents no objects and represents none, yet it makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented. It is thus beyond truth and immune to the judgement of performance. It overcomes the separation of the sensible and the conceivable, of form and content, of self and other, of language and the world (Tyler 1986:123).

Tyler, with this evocative and elusive prose, positions evocation somewhere

between representation and negation, between absolute presence and absolute absence, between theism and nihilism. The sentiment is attractive for if such a mediation were possible, ethnography could escape the critique of representation and face the challenge of post-modernism undaunted. However, a moment's reflection indicates that Tyler's seductive mediation is ultimately another form of representation, only more alluringly masked than any illustrated by Van Maanen.

If evocation is neither representation nor production of action, does the evocative ethnography evoke one specific world or any number of possible worlds? If one specific world, then that evocation is damned close to representation. If any number of worlds, then why bother to write such an evocative piece about a specific culture in the first place? While the germinal world is specific to the ethnographer, the world evoked through the ethnography can and will be vastly different from that germinal world. But even prior to the above concerns: what can it mean "to evoke?" How is this accomplished? What are the icons of evocation? Is evocation textually regulated or will my subjective evocative response be influenced by the fact that I have indigestion from my lentil stew? What are the formal constraints on evocation? Is there a specific content to evocation?

The range of these questions is clearly fodder for another essay entirely, but fortunately, such an essay need not be written as Tyler himself provides the material needed to illustrate that his purported evocation collapses into yet another form of representation: "Perhaps the best we can do, short of inventing a new logograph, is a Heideggerian 'evoking'" (Tyler 1986:130). By invoking Heidegger's evoking, or more specifically, Heidegger's *aletheia*--"the unconcealedness of beings" (Heidegger 1971:51) — Tyler problematizes his own notion of evocation since *aletheia* is certainly a direct precursor of post-modernism, but is still under scrutiny within the post-modern episteme. Without digressing into a complete dissertation on hermeneutics, suffice it to say that *aletheia* is problematized by Heidegger's romantic reliance upon the transcendence of the human mediator. The only way *aletheia* can work in terms of Tyler's ethnographic evocation is if the evocative ethnography somehow transcends the subjective human observer, thereby revealing the essential truth of a culture above and beyond the subjective response of a reader.

Tyler's evocative ethnography might be likened to directing the scent of a pungent flower at a particular person with the hope that the other person will intercept that scent as evocative of the particular emotion with which the sender invests the aroma. Both the emotive scent-sender and Tyler seem to ignore the fact that their evocative transmissions — in Tyler's case, the evocative ethnographic account — are destined to be read by human observers, and consequently, will be variously interpreted by those same observers. It is another matter completely that *aletheia* is an uncovering or a clearing of a space in which the general essence of a thing is presenced (Heidegger 1971:37), a form of transcendence which at least suggests the representation that Tyler seeks to escape. Yet Tyler admits the

presence of representation within the realm of evocation, thereby indicating that the pragmatic aim of his evocative ethnography is, finally, the representation of a single seminal world:

[evocative ethnography] is no longer cursed with the task of representation. The key word in understanding this difference is "evoke," for if a discourse can be said to "evoke," then it need not represent what it evokes, *though it may be a means to a representation* (Tyler 1986:129 italics mine).

Characterizing evocation as a possible means to representation deflates the mediating stance that Tyler attempts to maintain for evocation. Cast in this fashion, evocation reduces to representation and is therefore indistinguishable from it. Tyler does, however, move further to the right of the centre of our flavourful map because unlike Van Maanen and Clifford, Tyler recognizes the limitations of representation and instead of trying to invent a new representation, seeks to repudiate it. Unfortunately, Tyler's project implicitly maintains the distinction between signifier and signified, ethnographic text and culture, and in so doing, his project is ultimately another attempt to constrain culture in the bounds of ethnographic representation. If Tyler could banish representation — as he tries to do — while simultaneously banishing the opposition between word and world, then grammarology of post-structuralism would be that much closer for him. But as Tyler outlines his project here, he falls far short of the post-structuralist pole.

What can be said of the fact that Joel Khan identifies the work of Clifford and Tyler as marking the introduction of post-modernism in ethnography?

The appearance of two books—Clifford and Marcus' *Writing Culture* and Marcus and Fischer's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* — has served to mark, if not on its own establish, a significant new tendency in American anthropology, a tendency which can best be labelled reflexive to the extent that it manifests itself in a renewed concern with the role of the anthropologist in the creation of anthropological knowledge (Khan 1989:10-11).

This question is worth raising because *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* grew out of a seminar held by the School of American Research in 1984 which was convened to discuss a number of issues relevant to ethnography, obvious among them the challenge of post-modernism to ethnography. What can these people—supposed to be some of the best and brightest in their field—have to say on this subject when Clifford explicitly announces in his introduction that "most of us at the seminar, excluding Stephen Tyler, were not yet thoroughly post-modern!" (Rainbow 1986:21)? Ironically, even Stephen Tyler is not "thoroughly post-modern" which only indicates the difficulty these scholars have in facing the challenge of post-modernism to their discipline. The situation is actually absurdly laughable since, on the one hand, we find an anthropologist who points to the work

of an anthropological seminar as marking the advent of post-modernism while the very anthropologists pointed to acknowledge that they are not post-modernists. Perhaps Kahn's point is that even though Clifford announces for all others there—excluding Tyler—that they are not post-modern, their very resistance to it or inability to assimilate its radical challenge serves to mark post-modernism's vital existence.

Radical and vital: both words characterize the position assumed by Roy Wagner. His radical break from the aforementioned anthropologists is clearly manifest in the opening pages of the preface to his *The Invention of Culture*. While Van Maanen, Clifford, and Tyler still maintain the opposition between signifier and signified—a distinction that leads to what Wagner calls “conventional symbolization” — Wagner moves to a post-structuralist stance which eludes that distinction—his “differentiating symbolization”:

Conventional symbolization draws a distinction between the symbols themselves and the things they symbolize. I call this distinction, which works to distinguish the two modes in their respective ideological weightings, contextual contrast. Differentiating symbols assimilate or encompass the things they symbolize. I call this effect, which always works to negate the distinction between modes, to collapse them, or derive one from the other, obviation (Wagner 1981: xv).

In Wagner's terminology, conventional symbolization is the name for that which is predicated upon contextual contrast: the contrast between signifier and signified, ethnography and culture. Differentiating symbolization is the name for that which is predicated upon obviation: the conflation of signifier and signified, ethnography and culture.

Cast in linguistic terms, Wagner's conventional symbolization clearly parallels what is called *constative language*:

According to the cognitive [constative] view . . . language is an instrument of transmitting *truth*, that is, an instrument of knowledge, a means of *knowing* reality. Truth is a relation of perfect congruence between utterance [signifier] and referent [signified] (Felman 1983:27).

Differentiating symbolization parallels what is called *performative language*, or the speech act, “language that itself functions as an act, not a report of one” (Johnson 1989:1042):

[Performative language produces] a referential language effect. This means that between language and referent there is no longer a simple opposition . . . language makes itself part of what it refers to . . . The referent is no longer simply a pre-existing *substance*, but an *act*, that is, a *dynamic movement* of modification of reality (Felman 1983:77).

With this distinction between *constative* and *performative* language, which glosses Wagner's *conventional* and *differentiating* symbolization, the paradigm is clearly set out. The conventional or constative corresponds to the furthest left, or structuralist orientation of our flavourful map, while the differentiating or performative corresponds to the furthest right, or post-structuralist pole. By illustrating the opposition between these two poles, Wagner and Felman do not create a binary opposition which can be deconstructed. Rather, both Wagner and Felman acknowledge that the latter post-structuralist pole subsumes the other structuralist pole so that all constative utterances may be seen as implicit performatives (Felman 1983:17) and all structuralist anthropological accounts rest on the epistemic illusion of the oppositional paradigm between signifier and signified challenged by differentiating symbolization (Wagner 1981:41).

So what does the post-structuralist orientation *do for* or *do to* anthropological ethnography? The answer is simply that post-structuralism offers a radical potential; no longer can ethnographers speak of "truth value" in a constative sense. As Wagner argues, ethnographic accounts—symbols in his terminology—no longer aim at some constative congruence with a reality or cultural signified in the world. Rather, symbols themselves create their own referents so that, effectively, what is written *is* culture:

When a symbol is used in some nonconventional way, as in the formation of a metaphor or some other sort of trope, a new referent is introduced simultaneously with the novel symbolization. . . . the act of symbolization can only be referred to as an event . . . an event manifests symbol and referent simultaneously. Thus the tension and contrast between symbol and symbolized collapse, and we may speak of such a construction as a "symbol" that stands for itself (Wagner 1981:43).

Upon first reading, Wagner appears to re-articulate the eternal anteriority of superficial post-modernism illustrated by the right of Figure 1. However, this is not the case. Wagner does not maintain that the ethnographic account — the symbol — hovers at some remove above the ground of the signified — culture. The ethnography posits its own signified so that, to some degree echoing Geertz — "[ethnographies] are anthropological because, in fact, it is anthropologists who profess them" (Geertz 1973:15) — they name what they are. This formulation, however, is incomplete and misleading, for a post-structuralist grammatological ethnography is not a simple arbitrary form of nominalism *à la* Nelson Goodman, the foremost relativist philosopher of this century. In a post-structuralist grammatological ethnography, the namer is also named through the very performance of articulation. That is, the ethnographer is not invested with some divine power of arbitrary creation, for they themselves are inscribed in the process they enact; they are determined both prior to this specific performance and subsequently upon the process of product they performatively produce:

[The anthropologist] will "participate" in the subject culture, not in the way that the native does, but as someone who is simultaneously enveloped in his own world of meanings, and those meanings will also participate (Wagner 1981:8).

This is not simply to say that the anthropologist has biases which influence their account of another culture. Rather, the anthropologist is in a position of constant dialogue . . . not only with the native but with themselves. Constantly mediating between the input of the created culture of the Other and the inscriptions of their personally created culture, the anthropologist reads the native through the filter of their personal cultural inscriptions, reifies their reading in the very process, and subsequently modifies their personal cultural inscription in an unending cycle, so the starting point has always already shifted, and the process always already starts again: "In the act of inventing another culture, the anthropologist invents his own, and in fact he reinvents the notion of culture itself" (Wagner 1981:4).

How, then, if the anthropologist is caught up in the eternal process of dialectical inscription of both Self and Other, can ethnography be produced? The post-structuralist grammatological conception of ethnography recognizes the aleatoric elements through which the ethnographer is inscribed, subsequently recognizing that the subject thus formulated is flux rather than fixity. Consequently, to write ethnography necessitates the fixing of this flux so that Culture and ethnographer can be inscribed in stasis on the page. This stasis, however, does not adequately reflect the flux from which it originates, and we are back to the seminal problem of representation once again. This is the problem as suggested by Wagner's position, and perhaps since he is an anthropologist with a stake in this debate, Wagner offers an intimation of answer which may prove unsatisfying since it entails the acceptance of illusionary stability in a sea of post-structuralist flux.

Wagner argues that to escape absolute relativism—which we do everyday through communication, community, etc.—the aforementioned conventional symbolization must be reified and instituted out of pragmatic necessity:

And so every communicating human enterprise, every community, every "culture," is strung on a relational framework of conventional contexts. These are never absolutely conventionalized, in the sense of being identical for all who share them; they are always loose ended, incompletely shared, in process of change, and they may or may not be consciously learned, in the sense of "rules." But the rather tenuous and poorly understood thing that we speak of optimistically as communication is only possible to the degree that associations are shared (Wagner 1981:40).

The material of ethnographic consideration cast here are the ever-shifting bounds of "tenuous", "loose ended" conventional contexts (opposing signifier and signified). As Wagner characterizes it, however, the material does not look promising. If convention does exist, it surely inscribes its own bounds; it does not, however, lucidly delimit those bounds. Further, those bounds are not fixed and they are predicated upon the epistemic illusion of contextual contrast. What, then, has the

ethnographer to study except evanescent elusive (non)limits that are posited personally collectively?

Looking even closer, we find that those conventional bounds are themselves contingent upon invention, which is in turn predicated upon convention — “The necessity of invention is given by cultural convention, and the necessity of cultural convention is given by invention” (Wagner 1981:52) — so that the ethnographer can never “freeze” their subject of study without themselves falling into the trap of valorizing the “given” of the conventional symbol over the “accidental” nature of the differentiating symbol.

The un-grounded flux of a post-modern grammatological anthropology might be expressed through Wagner’s far from original formulation:

The thing that makes man so interesting as a phenomenon is that he is precisely not what simplifiers have made him out to be. . . . And yet everything that he is he also is not, so his more constant nature is not one of being but one of becoming (Wagner 1981:139).

Humanity as a creature of flux, as a creature not statically “suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (Geertz 1973:5), but as a creature performing an improvisational dance irreducible to schematization of an analytic dissection due to aleatoric elements which influence both its creative motivation and imperfect performance: this is closer to the post-modern conception of humanity and culture.

Does such a position render ethnography ineffable? Does this ring the demise of ethnography? It does for the systematizers who insist upon the static isolation of conventional constative approaches opposing signifier and signified, ethnography and culture. But for those who accept the elision between these two poles, for those who recognize the illusory nature of reified conventional symbols, for those who move beyond the simple relativity that yes, there are cultures and not culture, will they still write ethnography? Derrida assents that

There is no sense in doing without the concept of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language — no syntax and no lexicon — which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest (Derrida 1989:961).

This is not, however, a desultory statement on the ultimate futility of any post-modern project, a pessimistic statement that grants *carte blanche* for a reversion to the conventional constative structuralist paradigm. Elsewhere, in “Semiology and Grammatology,” Derrida asserts that “grammatology is less another new science, a new discipline charged with a new content or new domain, than the vigilant practice of this textual division” (Derrida 1981:36). A vigilant practice, an epistemic vanguard that will not take convention seriously, that will not be seduced

by the subtle illusion of symbols that create "an image and impression of an absolute in a world that has no absolutes" (Wagner 1981:41): this may indicate the flavour of a post-modern ethnography.

By way of summation and to attempt to open other avenues of exploration, I note that those anthropologists who are placed short of the post-structuralist pole direct their projects towards new modes of *writing* ethnography. Wagner, too, tends towards this direction, but another simultaneous reading of Wagner's attempt to articulate a post-modern ethnography would emphasise precisely that: *reading*. Instead of *writing* ethnography in a new way, post-modernism offers a new *reading* of ethnography so that no longer is an ethnographic account seen in terms of "truth value" and "congruence with fact." Rather, each ethnography, each cultural instantiation, may be read as a performance that does not, and need not, fit into some hegemonic "master narrative" of whatever scope. A post-modern ethnography, then, could be simultaneously the project of new writing and a project of new reading. That new writing need not repudiate all that has been written before; rather, post-modernism as a reading strategy, a vigilant reading that avoids the reification of previous epistemic illusions, can re-write by re-reading all that has been written before, as well as suggesting new directions for future anthropological writing:

What I want to emphasize is simply that the passage beyond philosophy does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually comes down to philosophizing badly), but in continuing to read philosophers *in a certain way* (Derrida 1989:967).

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... so this paper too is a performance. And you must now apply the constative rule to that which attempts to repudiate it. Is the gap so wide I wonder? Surely the constative rule applies to areas of this discussion. I quote texts and surely one can consult the sources cited to discern whether such glyphs are in fact present on the pages indicated. But what of the more murky, less constative areas? Are all my quotations taken in context? Is there any contextual perversion? And what of my flavourful maps? Is my invocation of *provisionality* rather than *prescription* convincing or is this schema as Procrustean as any other? Am I just paying lip service to the anti-schematic, non-hegemonic, anti-master-narrative aroma of post-modernism while actually predicating my discussion upon the rigidity of that which I argue against?

These questions, too, apply to ethnography. There must be grounds for some constative investigation. Do the !Kung live in the north of the Kalahari? Simple I admit. Perhaps more murky and less constative is the challenge of Linda Connor to Geertz's assertion that "trance states are a crucial part of every [Balinese]

ceremony"² (Shankman 1984:271). Did Geertz count incorrectly? Did Balinese culture significantly change in between the respective times that Geertz and Connor were there? Did they see different ceremonies with different people? Are they both drawing different interpretive conclusions from pretty much the same evidence? Are they both guilty of contextual perversion?

Does the prospect of a grammatological ethnography do anything to ameliorate this type of constative dispute? No, a grammatological ethnography is not the panacea that resolves such conflicts. It merely moves these conflicts to a non-contestational arena in which difference is respected, where Conner and Geertz need not compete. A Post-structuralist ethnography allows these differing accounts to exist as simultaneous performative instantiations of Balinese culture. Rather than reading Geertz and Conner as pronouncing the *signs* of culture, signs predicated upon *representation*, read Geertz and Conner as pronouncing the *grams* of culture, grams performing the culture they inscribe. In this way, difference is respected, and the multiplicity of Balinese culture is suggested through the diversity of Conner and Geertz. The *gram* embraces field of heterogeneity, not a plot of homogeneity. Post-structuralism opens the avenue for a new understanding of the role of the anthropologist in ethnography. Post-modernism forces the issues of institutional influence in the co-creation of culture.

The attempt to reconcile Conner and Geertz valorize the constative over the performative by expressing contextual contrast through the repression of obviation. And so the process of amendments upon amendments upon amendments plays the old constative game. A post-modern grammatology is the game of *etcetera* (literally "and the other things").

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2 "[This] statement had not been made by any anthropologist working on Bali other than Geertz, and it would take only a few week's residence in most Balinese villages to conclude that trance is part of only a minority of ceremonies" (Shankman 1984:271).

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