

INTRODUCTION

Supreme Fictions: Is it Time to Choose?

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AN HISTORICAL OVERTURE

"Always Historicize!" Thus begins Frederick Jameson's book, The Political Unconscious. It is also the call to arms in the debates about poststructuralism and postmodern anthropology, at least in those led by the proponents of a more classically conceived Critical Anthropology. As though to fulfil Evans-Pritchard's prophecy that anthropology will become history or nothing at all, our practitioners seem extraordinarily concerned with the problem of history these days: our own disciplinary history (Jarvie, 1989); the history of those previously labelled, in Wolf's (1982) poetic terms, "the people without history"; the problem of historiography itself (de Certeau, 1988).

When we first conceived the idea of a conference on Critical Anthropology, Maria-Ines Arratia and I imagined that it would be a forum in which the heirs and defenders of Frankfurt School critical theory, or more generally Marxist critical theory, would take up the literature of the contemporary interpretivists. History, we assumed, would constitute a kind of fulcrum on which the sides of the debate would be placed and then evaluated. Our 'Call for Papers' was amply general, broad enough to cover almost anything that currently goes under the rubric critical, including literary critical, and the response was similarly diverse. For a number of reasons, the diversity of the conference has been reduced in this publication. Although reflecting various positions and intellectual affiliations, the papers gathered here are more focused and less disparate than might have been the case if we had simply produced a volume of collected proceedings. But such an endeavour would have been more than our scarce resources could have managed. Instead, we have attempted to create a thematically coherent set of papers that in some way exemplifies the issues and debates that were more thoroughly aired at York University earlier this year.

The purpose of this 'Introduction' is not to review the conference, nor to summarize the papers that follow. Rather, my intention is to examine the debates and the issues that arose during the proceedings in terms of the broader philosophical traditions from

which they have grown and to which they refer. My concern here is primarily with North American Cultural Anthropology as it stands in relation to other disciplinary traditions. It is hoped that this 'Introduction' will foreground some of the main ideas and theoretical problems to be addressed by other contributors. But at the same time, it is intended as a foil for the subsequent papers. Moreover, it makes those papers foils for each other by insisting upon the mutual contrariety of their authors' positions. It poses questions about political and moral accountability as well as about logical and theoretical consistency. As such it is an overture, an opening in the sense of a beginning and in the sense of an absence or gap (from the French overture) that has yet to be filled.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT: RETHINKING ANTHROPOLOGY?

Our anticipations about the problem of history and the role that it would play at the conference were not entirely well-founded, or rather, they were poorly formulated. There were few papers that directly and explicitly confronted anthropology's relationship to historical discourse. And yet, despite this lacuna in the proceedings, history was very much present. Aside from the fact that all reflection is, by definition, historical, the assessments of recent trends in North American cultural anthropology varied according to people's orientation to history writ large, History as telos in the Marxist sense. This is another way of saying that the conference staged a modest debate between historical materialism and idealism. Frequently, this meant analyzing, from both positive and negative perspectives, the deconstructionist attempt to overcome or evade this dichotomy altogether (see especially Dalton, Cadieux and Mourrain). To say that history is at the centre of this debate is not to surrender anthropological territory but to acknowledge the centrality of issues having to do with narrative, temporality and, in some profound sense, the indeterminacy of meaning (nobody disputed Geertz' original claim that anthropology is an interpretive endeavour).

These are not particularly original claims. Indeed, they are not claims at all, except in the sense that they delimit a territory in which philosophical or empirical claims can be made. But it may appear that, in circumscribing the issues for debate in this manner, I have effectively given the authors of Writing Culture (1986) a kind of head start in the continuing battle over what anthropology should be. This is true to the extent that I, and all the writers

represented here, acknowledge the inevitability as well as the intellectual and political necessity of taking on (both trying out and combatting) the theories of postmodernism, poststructuralism and deconstructionism. It is not true, however, if this at all implies an agreement with the ways in which many American anthropologists (Clifford, Tyler, Marcus, etc.) have appropriated continental, poststructuralist theory. At the conference, Writing Culture became -- perhaps too easily -- the reference point for discussion about anthropological method and epistemology in the context of postmodernism. More than most collections, Writing Culture has been seen as a representative text, as a manifesto for postmodern anthropology and, consequently, the internal tensions and differences between authors have been ignored in favour of their commonalities. It may be guilty of similar homogenization, but I think the book as a whole does constitute a significant event in the history of North American anthropology, if only for the amount of debate and critical analysis it has spurred. And for my purposes here, the commonalities are as important and as revealing as the differences. I want to begin with this important book but depart from it in an attempt to understand how we might comprehend such a text as a social product and as a synthesizing response to disparate and conflicting philosophical traditions.

ON WRITING AND CULTURE

In a paper that introduces the Writing Culture volume, James Clifford remarks that

[t]he writing and reading of ethnography are overdetermined by forces ultimately beyond the control of either an author or an interpretive community. These contingencies -- of language, rhetoric, power, and history -- must now be openly confronted in the process of writing (1986:25).

In making such remarks, Clifford takes us close to the heart of postmodern anthropology, where the world is understood as a set of discursive constructions determined in the act of interpretation. When Clifford concludes the essay by claiming that the essays in Writing Culture are not "only literature" but "always writing", he implies two things. The first is a silent indebtedness to Jacques Derrida whose notion of écriture and whose deconstruction of the

speech/writing dichotomy¹ initiated the poststructuralist argument against the notion of 'context' as something 'extratextual'. The second implication is that Clifford, like every other contributor to Writing Culture, is not prepared to endorse the radical conclusions that a fully Derridian analysis would entail.

I want to argue that the first issue, the textualizing of context, has grave importance for anthropology because it renders traditional anthropological analysis (cross-cultural comparison, etc.) impossible. There is not space here to explore the full implications of poststructuralism for the discipline of cultural anthropology, but we may glimpse some of the possible directions to which such a position might lead and, in so doing, understand why Clifford and his sympathizers have not followed Derrida all the way to his logical conclusions. Derrida himself simply refuses to conclude.

The first and, I think, most crucial aspect of the debate, centers on the question of critique. Here it should be noted that the papers included in this volume, like most of those delivered at the conference, are uniformly concerned with criticizing and therefore historicizing the claims of contemporary interpretive anthropology. Regardless of their different dispositions (Rabinow's indebtedness to Foucault, Tyler's purchase on Derrida, Clifford's affinity with André Breton and Walter Benjamin)², the interpretive anthropologists have all addressed the matter of how anthropology produces and legitimates its knowledge. To the extent that they are concerned with, and critical of, the relations of production of knowledge, they are all indebted to historical materialism. But questions remain as to the point from which these theorists carry out their critique. What is their vantage point? How are their claims authorized? What makes their readings legitimate? It is useful to recall that while interpretive anthropology is heavily indebted to poststructuralism and its emphasis on textuality, it is equally concerned with social and political critique. This is apparent in Marcus' and Fischer's omnibus review, Anthropology as Cultural Critique, but the auto-critical enterprise has a longer tradition, extending to the writings of Stanley Diamond and the contributors to Reinventing Anthropology and, even further, to Boas, Mead and Benedict, among others.³

THE WORLD, THE TEXT AND THE ETHNOGRAPHER

In the current milieu, the debate about post-structuralism and postmodern anthropology will probably be decided by pragmatic

questions about criticism and textuality. The two are inextricably related and they are, in turn, knotted into a complex relationship with history. What does Clifford mean when he says that ethnography is overdetermined by language, rhetoric, power and history? He is not, in the first place, saying anything as simple as "Ethnography is historically determined". That would entail reference to an extra-textual point, a context that transcends the individual formations in which texts (broadly construed) are interpreted. To say that it is historically determined is to say that we can unearth the 'true' meaning of an ethnography as text by considering the historical moment of its production and that, in so doing, we approach the reality to which such a text refers. If I understand him correctly, this is not what Clifford has in mind. Let us look elsewhere.

In his essay, "Texts in History", Tony Bennett summarizes the poststructuralist argument on textuality as follows:

According to most formulations, context is conceived as social; that is, as a set of extra-discursive and extra-textual determinations to which the text is related as an external backdrop or set of reading conditions. The concept of reading formation, by contrast, is an attempt to think context as a set of discursive and intertextual determinations, operating on material and institutional supports which bear in upon a text not just externally, from outside in, but internally, shaping it -- in the historically concrete forms in which it is available as a text-to-be-read -- from the inside out (1989:72).

Now, if the concept of reading formation seems more appropriate to literature than to ethnography, it can be rehabilitated with reference to the metaphor of culture as text which, although problematic, suggests that anthropologists are engaged in the interpretation, and hence reading, of social behaviour (Geertz 1973; Marcus and Cushman 1982). This is an admittedly (early) Geertzian conception of anthropology, a vision of ethnographic analysis as phenomenological hermeneutics. However, the textual metaphor is extremely polysemic. The poststructuralist usage displaces the objectivist orientation of phenomenology and puts the temporally infinite and indeterminate text in the place of shared symbols and systems. Ethnographic reading, understood in Bennett's terms, becomes a Sysiphean climb on the slippery slope of plural signification.

Bennett is adamant that his concept of reading formation is not simply another gloss for partiality. In this respect it cannot be reconciled with James Clifford's (1986) argument about the partial nature of ethnographic truths (see also Trickovic in this volume). For Bennett, the issue of truth is almost irrelevant. He explicitly argues that the notion of reading formation does not lead to a position

... according to which the text is somewhere 'there' (wherever that might be) but unknowable, but that there is no 'there' in which its existence might be posited other than the varying reading formations in which the actual history of its functioning is modulated ... (1989:75).

If we take Bennett seriously, then we must relinquish all hopes for any final reading, any reference to "the last instance", and any claims to inherent scientific, moral or political value that we may wish to make for our theories.

It would seem logical that cultural anthropology, with its long and esteemed history of relativism, would prove to be the discipline most receptive to poststructuralist theory, a receptivity that has recently been lamented by Michel Beaujour (1987) (see also David Howes in this issue). Poststructuralist theory, after all, radicalizes relativism, denying any fixed meaning, any final truths, any privileged interpretations of the world. It does so by destroying the ground on which such claims are made, by expanding the realm of the contingent and subjecting all schemes of valuation to the rules of difference and deferment (united in Derrida's neologism, différance) that prevent final pronouncements of any sort (see also Dalton and Mourrain in this volume). It is not a question of poststructuralism being anti-historical as some (Said 1978; Jameson 1981; Eagleton 1983) claim but rather, that it is so thoroughly historical that it may prevent us from making valuative judgments at all.⁴

This fact is brought home with extraordinary clarity when Geoff Bennington and Robert Young claim that:

Insofar as Derrida's différance names the historicity of history, then any attempt to explain différance historically (in terms of the recent political and intellectual history of France, for example) is condemned to misunderstand the question opened by poststructuralism (1989:9).

This ought to be a provocative statement for any anthropologist because it denies the possibility of an "anthropology of postmodern anthropology" in terms of, say, the history and social structure of the academy, the penetration of capitalism into non-market economies, the emergence of information economies and of indigenous nationalisms, etc. And this is why I believe a radical deconstructionist approach to anthropology negates its project, or at least transforms it so thoroughly as to make it virtually unrecognizable. Poststructuralism in these terms does not permit reference to metanarratives such as homogenization or invention (Clifford, 1988a:17) except insofar as it acknowledges those external histories as narratives, as discursive constructions. Anthropologists, thus stripped of their authority and any claim to getting it right', are humbled, set loose in an existential and philosophic, but strangely capitalist (see Jameson 1984) democracy where truths circulate like commodities. This may be an extremely liberating move. Yet emancipation from the obligation to at least try to 'get it right' carries its own burdens.

And it is here that the proponents of critical tTheory find the impetus for their frequently passionate assaults on poststructuralism. For them, the question is not so much a matter of historicity as of History (they will not play by poststructuralist rules). How does one choose between interpretations? How does one critique fascism (this is the point of reference in post-war Europe) without the possibility of invoking a notion of history that includes a post-historical state (even if only as model) from which the past, including our future, can be evaluated?

BETWEEN RELATIVISM AND ABSOLUTISM: EITHER/OR?

It may appear that in the opposition set up here between "relativism and absolutism, an unmeditated confrontation emerges between pure historicism and pure transcendentalism" (Habermas, 1985:193). Habermas, the Frankfurt School's heir-apparent, rejects this dichotomy although he sees such oppositions as peculiarly characteristic of modernity. Habermas wants to be able to distinguish between "good arguments and those which are merely successful for a certain audience at a certain time" (ibid:194). And he claims the ability to do so through reference to an epistemology that is supposedly neither purely relativist nor wholly absolutist. He writes that

[f]rom the perspective of the first participant (in communicative interaction), a moment of unconditionedness is built into the conditions of action oriented toward reaching understanding (ibid:195).

This may seem too easy; Habermas' defense of history is an evasion of the questions posed by poststructuralism (in this case, questions posed by Richard Rorty), not a refutation of their conclusions. His premise is that contingency and universality are co-existent and, further, that the interrelation of these two modes makes rational understanding possible. He eschews the kind of ad hoc criticism that Adorno practices precisely because it did not provide for a "moment of unconditionedness". Habermas rejects such criticism -- here he includes much poststructuralist theory -- because it cannot distinguish between those arguments that are universally true and those that are valid only from a historical or aesthetic perspective.

Many find Habermas' faith in rationalism untenable. Moreover, his derisive remarks about ethnography, about its contrived relativism and its failure to produce any transcendental categories, have alienated him from many cultural anthropologists. Yet, even among those who attack Habermas for Enlightenment idealism, his critique of poststructuralism strikes a resonant chord (see also EppHeise in this volume). It appeals to those who are not prepared to abandon the possibility of "getting it right" if that forms the basis for political action in the world. For it is here, kicking at the stone of poverty and 'real-word' politics, that Habermas and his followers get their strength.

Such issues have been differently posed in anthropology by Rabinow (1985), Scholte (1986), and Polier and Roseberry (1989), among others. Scholte rightly questions the social (class) position from which many American interpretive anthropologists write. And several theorists have noted the almost systematic marginalization of feminist discourse in much postmodern anthropology (see especially Gordon 1988). But such criticism becomes problematic in the poststructuralist arena because the notions of class and gender as transcendental categories have been rendered impotent. They are reduced under the pressure of anti-universalism; they are made merely fictional and, although poststructuralism applies the same critique to all concepts, the stigma of the fictive is a devastating one. The debate between these two positions, between the materialists and the poststructuralists, may be explicable in terms of the different objectives of either one. Poststructuralism offers

theories of representation, while Marxist theories seek explanations of experience. The distance between the two can be measured only in epistemological terms. One asks about the nature of the real, the other asks about our visions of the real and how they are differentially constituted in time. It might appear that the latter, the poststructuralist position, has the greatest political potential because it contains the possibility of rejecting any universalist arguments in favour of a particular interest group's power. But at the same time, it provides no ground from which to carry out such assaults. We are thus left with difficult but important choices. On the one hand, the critical imperative claimed by many anthropologists on the basis of a relativizing cross-cultural encounter demands that we expose the contingency of all ideational systems. On the other hand, this very claim is subject to the same critique. Unless we can admit of some universal value with which to weigh alternatives, we cannot denigrate one system in favour of another.

And so, to borrow from one of Modernism's premier poets, Wallace Stevens (1982:250):

The prologues are over. It is a question now,
Of final belief. So, say that final belief
Must be in a fiction. It is time to choose.

Stevens, that ambiguous master of the modern, suggests both the necessity of a system, of "final belief", and the impossibility of the totality to which such systems or final beliefs aspire. A fiction, even a "supreme fiction" as he describes it elsewhere, remains somehow insubstantial. In Stevens we find an analogy for modernism, perhaps even structuralism itself. Containing the seeds of its own displacement, Stevens' poetry embodies both the grandeur of language and its complete alienation from experience. It contains none of the romantic desire for organicism. Instead it elevates the intellectual, makes virtue of self-consciousness and refuses the temptation for unity. So too modernism. But the triumph of the artist, the exaltation of construction, finds itself undone by a postmodernism that focuses not on the magnificence of the edifice but on the fact that the edifice is artifice.

Yet, Stevens' question remains. Or rather, his insistence on choosing remains. Many interpretive anthropologists, Clifford among them, are loathe to make this choice because they fear that it will necessitate either 1) a dishonest faith in rationality and an acceptance of epistemological totalitarianism or, 2) a disavowal of

the right and the ability to take action in the world. In the essays of Writing Culture, authors continually approach the theories of poststructuralism and then shy away. They frequently adopt a position, aptly expressed in a negative review by Polier and Roseberry, which grants that knowledge is "made, but not made up". Polier and Roseberry, in articulating their concerns thusly, extend their criticisms to Clifford Geertz, who first drew anthropologists' attention to the etymological affinity of fictio and facto and thus to the false dichotomy between discovery and invention in science (Geertz 1973:19). But Polier and Roseberry's critique obscures the frequently unacknowledged underside of interpretive anthropology as it is currently being articulated in the American milieu. There are heavy doses of both materialism and pragmatism in the essays that comprise Writing Culture and their authors seem unwilling to jettison the 'real world', despite their pretensions to the contrary. Clifford (1986:7) hedges his bets by speaking about the partiality of knowledge, as though some invisible, signified whole lay behind it, and Marcus and Fischer (1986) retreat into empiricism and a doctrine of pure representation disguised as stylistic experimentation. Rabinow extols the virtues of a new "salutary tentativeness" while seeking refuge in a notion of practice derived from Foucault, and elsewhere justifies anthropology with reference to a moral project, the "criticism of the barbarism of civilization" (1985:12).

There is no need to multiply such examples. Suffice it to say that interpretive anthropologists are not, in general, casting their lot with poststructuralism or deconstructionism cast in the Derridian vein (although some, such as Tyler, may aspire to this). They are, however, clearly influenced by it. I want to make clear that I do not oppose this grounding in materialism or pragmatism; indeed I am sympathetic to both. However, I believe that the evasion of questions about the tensions between these doctrines and that of poststructuralism must be confronted head on. It cannot be evaded in a retreat to a catch-all concept like difference, which has been surreptitiously naturalized as part of the poststructuralist conceptual canon while rightfully belonging to its precursor, Saussurian structuralism (see below).

It is unclear to me whether a poststructuralist anthropology has more to offer than, say, an existentialist one to the extent that both leave us knowing that we cannot know anything for certain. The existentialist responds to this by claiming that political action (and ethnographic research?) must be based on a willfully contrived 'as if' orientation to the world, but it is unclear whether or not poststructuralism will permit us even this little solace.⁵ Nor does

poststructuralism offer a methodology that is strikingly different from Saussure's semeiotic structuralism, which has been too frequently misconstrued through Levi-Strauss' reading. Levi-Strauss did pay lip service to the diachronic dimension of polar opposition but his emphasis was on structure as system rather than structuration as process. Saussurian semiotics, like poststructuralism, posits difference as the foundation of meaning. And it is this concept of difference that most attracts interpretive anthropologists. Recent ethnographies abound in references to "difference", and its relatives "alterity" and "polyphony", etc. In contrast, we read relatively little about such things as "trace", "space", or "epistemological rupture", other concepts equally integral to Derrida's original deconstructionist project. There are, of course, significant departures, the most notable being the poststructuralist rejection of closure and, hence, system. Yet interpretive anthropologists have frequently neglected these and fixed on those concepts that originated with Saussure's structuralism. I think this explains why postmodern anthropology, though clothed in the language of France's latest intellectual fashion, is not fully poststructuralist.

Some see this 'inadequacy' simply as a matter of time. In the introduction to Writing Culture, Clifford blushing admits that not all of its authors were "yet thoroughly 'postmodern'". But while Clifford seems to assume growth in this direction, he himself hesitates, seeking direction not from Derrida but from Marcel Griaule, Michel Leiris and, finally, Walter Benjamin. And while it is not Benjamin's Marxism but his almost surrealist cultural criticism that attracts Clifford, this intellectual lineage reveals Clifford's embrace of a philosophical project that is, in many regards, at odds with poststructuralism. Clifford can maintain these opposed epistemologies only by aestheticizing them both and it is for this reason that The Predicament of Culture (1988), his own response to Writing Culture, reads so much like a treatise in art history rather than ethnography.⁶ For Clifford, ethnography is not a matter of comparison but of juxtaposition. Hence, it is not explanatory but effective. If cultural anthropology began by democratizing Culture and taking it away from the aestheticians (see also Whittaker in this volume), Clifford ennobles culture and makes artists of us all. This aspect of his enterprise, however, may be typically, if not inherently, poststructuralist.

Post-structuralism seems to have emerged in the third of Weber's life-worlds, the aesthetic -- as distinct from the rational and the moral. And it is with some difficulty that its theory can be

marshalled into the service of any overtly political battles. I take this to be a central problem and evading it, in deference to a misplaced notion of academic purity, strikes me as a betrayal of our informants and ourselves. So, one of the most important questions to be asked of poststructuralism is whether or not, momentarily granting the validity of its method, it permits judgment without recourse to history (as opposed to historicity). A provocative argument is made in its favour by Tony Bennett, who suggests that the political project of poststructuralist criticism is one of intervention. He argues that 'theory's' purpose is purely analytical, but that

... criticism's concern is to intervene ... to make texts mean differently by modifying the determinations which bear in upon them -- that it should seek to detach texts from socially dominant reading formations and to install them in new ones (1987:71).

Shades of Gramsci, but this time there is no possibility of counter-hegemony. There will be no end to displacements. No dictatorships of truth. While poststructuralism values the displacement of texts and reading formations, it does so on methodological grounds, not out of any faith in the new reading formation -- which will eventually be subject to the same over-throwing. And so it goes. History will not close with the attainment of some final utopia. History will not close at all. With this much, many of us have no quarrels. But, from a Marxist perspective, one wants to ask: Is every reading formation as good or as bad as the next? If the answer to this is yes, then why criticize? (One assumes that poststructuralists do in fact privilege their own assertions over others.) Or, in contrast, is every consecutive reading formation better than the previous one? If the latter holds, then post-structuralism is itself guilty of endorsing a metanarrative of progress and of privileging the most recent, both of which are eschewed in its attack on other philosophies, and other epistemologies.

It is time to choose. For myself, I am not prepared to relinquish the notion that oppression is a fundamental wrong, or that structures determining unequal access to power (social, economic and intellectual) should be resisted. Nor am I alone in this regard. Insofar as Tony Bennett (and other poststructuralists such as Gayatri Spivak) argues for the displacement of dominant reading formations, he presumes the moral inferiority, the unacceptability, of domination. He thereby posits a universal value. And it should

be remembered (kindly, I think) that Michel Foucault, the Nietzschean prophet of total relativism, worked diligently for prison reform. That he could argue against one penal system in favour of another suggests that he too could not let go of all transcendental categories. Even Jacques Derrida has denounced South African apartheid as an intolerable evil. What I am trying to suggest is that poststructuralism is subject to the inverse critique of its apparent enemy, historical materialism, and that, on some level, this amounts to saying that both fail because they are internally inconsistent. The poststructuralists accuse the historical materialists of self-contradiction but admit to a valorization of paradox -- of trying to say what cannot, by definition, be said. Insofar as each of these positions is self-contradictory, neither can claim philosophical supremacy. Thus our choice may have to be made on methodological (pragmatic) grounds. Or, it may rest with political considerations. The scientific purists will argue for the former. I have argued for the latter. But, regardless of what decides the debate, it is certain that only history will tell.

The papers that follow are variously concerned with the problems summarized here. They are neither in agreement, nor addressed to the same sets of questions, although, as I have suggested, they can all be situated in the debate generated by poststructuralism and taken up in Writing Culture. The first three papers, by Whittaker, Lyons and Howes, came out of a larger panel titled, "Critical Anthropology: Canadian Contributions and Directions". They form a kind of frame for the other papers, and indeed the plenary panel of the conference fulfilled a similar function. Andrew Lyons and David Howes differently address local concerns and consider the state of anthropology in Canada. Their papers are followed by one by Elvi Whittaker, who appears somewhat more sympathetic to postmodernism than her co-presenters at the conference. These initial essays raise, in embryo, many of the issues that appear again in later papers, but they do so from a somewhat different perspective. Andrew Lyons' grounded critique of experimentalist ethnography resonates with David Howes' own assault on the American-centred bias of interpretive anthropology. But Howes' opposition comes from a structural-functionalist orientation and not a Marxist one. And his concern with a Canadian canon belies his distance from Whittaker's self-proclaimed indebtedness to Gramsci. Whittaker's paper attempts to contain both the Grascian and postmodernist impulses as they threaten to pull apart under an almost centripetal force. Her embrace of postmodernism is a moral one and so her essay stands in an almost ironic relation to many of

the subsequent papers, which systematically undercut the very possibility of utopian thought in the postmodern context.

The many voices that follow here are not, as I indicated earlier, aligned. There is much tension between them and, in some cases, writers take up diametrically opposed positions. The extremities of the debate are marked by J.A.P. Mourraine's provocative and occasionally parodic analysis of postmodern ethnography, and by Andrew Orta's careful examination of images and icons in a Nicaraguan performance of the "Stations of the Cross". Between these limits are other points of conflict, such as that between Andrew Miller's endorsement of Bourdieu's notion of habitus and Ron Cadieux's deconstruction of Bourdieu's concept of practice. Cadieux's affinity for Derrida is echoed by Doug Dalton in a consideration of Rawa exchange, and the Neitzschean concern with power so admired by the French deconstructionists is addressed by Linda EppHeise in her paper on the dialogic of life-histories. But Critical Anthropology, which rubric all of the authors claim, is itself called into question by Dejan Trickovic in a paper that attends to the oft-neglected Marxist roots of Critical Anthropology in the United States. The papers are arranged in terms of a continuum, beginning with those that emerge from the older tradition of critical theory, the neo-Marxist, and continuing with those that bear the stamp of poststructuralist theory in its various forms. To this extent, the volume reflects the conference and succeeds in fulfilling its objective of stimulating discussion about the opportunities and the risks posed by postmodern anthropologies. It is my hope that this issue of NEXUS will extend and invigorate renewed debate about such 'critical' matters.

NOTES

This paper was revised in response to discussion and debate with Ron Cadieux, Stephen Gaetz, Daphne Winland, Margaret Rodman and William Rodman. I am grateful for their incisive comments and cogent criticisms. However, the paper remains my exclusive responsibility.

1. Derrida's deconstruction of the traditional dichotomy between speech and writing, achieved through a subversion of the accepted hierarchy that posits speech as origin, is elaborated in

Writing and Difference (1977). I am grateful to Ron Cadieux for discussion on this point.

2. As indicated earlier, these differences are important for positioning interpretive anthropologists in relation to each other. Rabinow (1985) has clearly stated his ambivalence toward Clifford's project and Clifford (1986) notes the distance between himself and Stephen Tyler. However, in opposition to other schools in the discipline (structuralism or functionalism, for example) I think these theorists can be clearly united under a single banner.
3. One might also make a case for the Levi-Strauss of Tristes Tropiques. It should also be noted that the social criticism of American Anthropology has not always been so self-critical and that the prerogative to undertake critique has been jealously protected within the academy. Zora Neale Hurston's alienation from the discipline stands as an example of the way in which critique has been controlled. I am indebted to Nahum Chandler for discussion on this point.
4. This historicizing is accomplished by the term différence which entails the continuous deferment of meaning in time.
5. To be sure, the poststructuralist subject differs from its existentialist precursor in that it is not reducible to the individual. But the notion of the fragmentary subject has not yet been worked out and is only beginning to appear in anthropological theory. A notable attempt to pursue its implications can be found in Marilyn Strathern's 1988 paper, "Partial Connections". Strathern discusses the issue in terms of feminist discourse and practice. One persisting question deserves consideration: is it coincidental that the notion of fragmentary subjectivity emerged precisely at that moment in history when others (the Other) were laying claim to a full and total subjectivity previously denied them in the representational strategies of Western (Orientalist) discourse?
6. I don't want to suggest, in any way, that I disapprove of an anthropology sensitive to and directly concerned with aesthetics. However, there is a danger in reducing anthropology to surrealism, as is suggested by Clifford's essay "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1988) in that other cultures, other people, are

reduced to the objects of our aesthetic appreciation. They become little more than curios in a global shopping mall of the exotic.

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