

DECONSTRUCTING CRITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY:  
Transcendence and Subversion in Anthropology  
and Elsewhere

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ABSTRACT

In a review of Critical Anthropology, this paper argues that Critical Anthropology misinterprets 'deconstruction' because it continually aims to transcend Western metaphysical categories. Drawing on my fieldwork experience in Papua New Guinea, I propose instead a self-deconstructing ethnography that locates itself in inescapable interpretive paradoxes by considering the postmodern 'withdrawal of reality' through an examination of the difference between both our own and others' ideal concepts, and the historical enactment of those concepts, and how these ideals are subverted through the inimical historical interaction between Western and non-Western 'other' cultures.

RÉSUMÉ

Grâce à une revue de l'Anthropologie Critique, ce papier détermine que l'Anthropologie Critique mésinterprète le concept de "déconstruction" parcequ'elle tente continuellement de transcender les catégories métaphysiques Occidentales. En me basant sur mon expérience de recherche anthropologique en Nouvelle-Calédonie, je propose, par contre, l'épanouissement d'une enthrographie auto-déconstruisante qui se situe dans des paradoxes interprétifs incompréhensibles en considérant la 'fuite de la réalité' post-moderne à travers d'une examination de la difference entre nos concepts idéaux et de ceux des autres, ainsi que de la mise en pratique historique de ceux-cis, ainsi que de la façon dont ces idéaux sont pervertis par l'interaction historiquement inimicale entre les cultures Occidentales et 'les autres'.

## INTRODUCTION

Though the title of this paper suggests a critique of Critical Anthropology, I do not wish to join Friedman (1987) and others and bemoan the relativization of anthropology and postmodern culture. Rather I wish to suggest that Critical Anthropology has been both too critical and not critical enough.

Anthropology's critical assessments have generally been directed against others -- other scholars within anthropology (many of whom have long since died), scholars from other disciplines, or other bearers of Western culture. Even the recent spat of 'reflexive' ethnographies (in which anthropologists question the fieldwork enterprise by admitting to having tricked and used their informants or having been party to a colonial order [e.g. Rabinow 1977, Dumont 1986]) has been used to advance new agendas and new claims about the way the world works and should be studied or simply should be (Marcus and Fischer 1986, Clifford and Marcus 1986).

The philosophy from which the term 'deconstruction' derives, however, does not use this term to express the need to undo others' discourses, but to dismantle one's own. This is thus a perspective of which Critical Anthropology could use a good dose. Though self-deconstruction may not seem very appealing on the face of it, I wish to show why it is necessary and even useful, first discussing how the term 'deconstruction' has been misappropriated by Critical Anthropology, and then showing how an analysis based on a perspective gleaned from 'deconstructive' philosophy applies to an ethnographic situation.

## DECONSTRUCTION AND CRITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

'Deconstruction', of course, comes from the language of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who derives it from Heidegger (1982:23).<sup>1</sup> Never mind that Derrida (1988:85) claims never to have liked the word very much, and never intended it to become the touchstone for a school of literary criticism in America (at Yale), based on the interpretation of his work (c.f. Bloom 1979). It should be sufficient to note that Derrida is not responsible for the way in which this word has been misappropriated by Critical Anthropology.

When anthropologists have adopted the term 'deconstruction' they have employed it as a means of subverting and hence transcending Western metaphysical categories in order to better deal with non-Western/'other' cultures and viewpoints. The

feminist critics, Harris and Young (1981:111,142), claim to 'deconstruct' the category of 'woman' in Western culture by questioning the essentialist treatment of 'woman' as a universal category associated (particularly by Marxists like Meillasoux) with the sphere of domestic reproduction. The authors suggest that one should look instead at the "different social relationships in which women, men, and children are located" in specific societies "to understand women, not merely as 'means of reproduction', or as the opposite of men, but in all the complexity of life" (1981:142).

Citing Harris and Young, Strathern (1985:194) takes their argument further and speaks of "the 'deconstruction' of gender" as a two step process: the first step being "to demolish essentialist definitions of 'women'" by divesting women of their supposed 'natural' attributes, and the second step being one of "accounting for the very notion of role or society" in order to avoid simply replacing women's erroneous 'natural' attributes with 'cultural' ones. Strathern goes on to suggest an analysis of how social relations are constituted in terms of the relationship between persons and, in 'other' non-Western societies, 'inalienable' things.<sup>2</sup>

Strathern's two step 'deconstructive' process is reminiscent of the oft-cited "general strategy of deconstruction" that Derrida (1981:41-42) once mentioned in an interview. He described the first step of this 'strategy' as "overturning" a given opposition by showing that the term previously thought to govern the pair is actually subordinate to the element it was thought to govern (e.g. speech/writing, nature/culture, men/women). The second step consists of, as Derrida puts it, "marking the interval" between the opposed pair. For Derrida, this does not mean an analysis of the way that roles and relations are constituted, as Strathern would have it, but the analysis of metaphysical oppositions in terms of Derrida's 'différance'. To drastically oversimplify, Derrida's 'différance' deals with the relation between cultural ideals and the cultural historical enactments (which ceaselessly differ from and defer those ideals) wherein those ideals are always only partially approximated and realized, and 'reality' is always escaping, impinging upon, withdrawing from, and subverting those ideals.

The avowed purpose of the second step in Derrida's "general strategy of deconstruction" is "to avoid both simply neutralizing the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply residing within the closed field of these oppositions" (1981:41). While most critical anthropologists intend to escape the oppositions they deconstruct, they do not avoid neutralizing oppositions. Indeed their acknowledged purpose is precisely this neutralization.

This is the meaning given to 'deconstruction' by Lindenbaum. In her incisive synthesis of the essays collected in Gilbert Herdt's Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia, Lindenbaum (1984:337) credits the authors with "the anthropological deconstruction of our notions of gender, sexual expression, and forms of social relatedness". In her conclusion she designates this 'deconstruction' as the 'overthrow' of the dualities nature/culture, female/male, domestic/political, and private/public. Because this pattern of thought "does not hold for much of the world much of the time", she writes, "these dualities lose the authority they once had over us" (ibid).

Derrida (1981:41) speaks expressly against "simply neutralising the binary oppositions of metaphysics" because as he sees it, this can only lead, implicitly or explicitly, admittedly or not, to the replacement, in a Hegelian fashion (of 'lifting up' or *Aufhebung*: both conserving and negating), of one set of metaphysical concepts with another. In this case the set of ritualized homosexual practices detailed in Herdt's volume are being offered to counter Western metaphysical categories relating to gender. Harris, Young, and Strathern similarly offer non-Western social relations, or modes of constructing social relations, as alternatives to Western social practices. This allows these critics to have their cake and eat it too -- by criticizing metaphysics on principle in order to endorse particular metaphysical systems -- those which naturally call into question Western modes of thinking and being.<sup>3</sup>

Given this desire to neutralize oppositions and transcend Western metaphysics, it is not surprising to find commentators misappropriating 'deconstruction' as a means of fulfilling the desire to transcend Western metaphysical categories. Moreover, they want to use such 'deconstruction' to criticize Derrida's call to avoid neutralizing oppositions and his view that there is no deconstructive way out of metaphysics and no archimedean standpoint that escapes the ceaseless movement of differing and deferring of différance.

Despite the fact that Derrida shares Heidegger's contempt for the very idea of method,<sup>4</sup> the literary critic Jonathan Culler has spoken of Derrida's "general strategy of deconstruction" as a critical "method of reading and interpretation", which "aspires to be both rigorous argument ... and displacement of philosophical categories or ... attempts at mastery" (1982:85).

Having thus reduced Derrida's philosophy, Culler believes that Derrida shares the same foundational principles of logic he seeks to

undermine (ibid. 87, 92, 109). Culler thus misses the second step and hence the entire point of Derrida's strategy of deconstruction. Whereas Culler wants to adopt deconstruction as a logical method to subvert foundational philosophical categories, the point of deconstruction is that there is no logic or foundation that escapes the ceaseless differing and deferring of movement of différance. Derrida's deconstruction is a means to advance the analysis of that movement.

The Marxist critic Michael Ryan (1982:50) likewise refers to deconstruction as a "method ... to show that the so-called natural or real is itself already structured" and culturally derived, even though he believes that this "method ... is potentially very useful for a marxist critique of ideology ... [or] the set of ideas and practices which reproduce class rule" (1982:38). Ryan feels that because Derrida "lacks a social theory", he is "not politically radical in character" and instead remains idealist and metaphysical. Like Culler, Ryan views deconstruction as a method of overcoming Western categories and oppositions, particularly the class opposition. Yet contra Ryan, the second step of Derrida's strategy is to avoid neutralizing metaphysical oppositions and the Hegelian exercise of historically replacing one set of ideals with another.

The anthropological linguist Stephen Tyler is most explicit about the relation of Critical Anthropology to Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction in this regard. In his challenging book The Unspeakable, Tyler says of Derrida and other modern critics that "postmodern ethnography builds its program[me] not so much from their principles as from the rubble of their deconstruction" (1987:208). Accordingly, Tyler reacts against Derrida's disdain for Hegel's historical dialectically constructive upward movement, saying:

Against this upward movement toward the light of reason, the sun of thought, the motionless hyperspace of abstractions consciously constructed, Derrida proposes a downward, decompositional movement toward the dark, energetic, pathematic, passionate realm of the moonlike aleatory unconscious ... His opposition to dialectic leads him down the gyring path to the underworld where science has preceded him into the sunset of the modern age, into the postmodern umbra broken only by the anaclastic light of distant, already dead stars (1987:49).

Tyler draws upon Whorf to attack the spatialized, visual, rational, representational organization of Western logical thought in

order to replace it with his notion of verbal 'discourse'. Tyler finds that Derrida, like the many modern theorists he critiques, "privileges images over sound" (ibid:37) and "still speaks of space, mimesis and representation" (ibid:38) in a 'rhetoric' that is "visualized, and spatialized" (ibid:47).<sup>5</sup>

Tyler advocates instead an anthropology consisting of what he calls 'discourse'. "Postmodern anthropology", he says,

is the study of men -- 'talking'. Discourse is its object practice, and it is this reflexivity between object and means that enables discourse and that discourse creates (1987:171).

His recipe for postmodern ethnography calls for

a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of the possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect (1987:202).

What strikes the critic sympathetic to Derrida most about Tyler's discourse is that Tyler apparently believes that he can transcend Western modes of thought by focusing his attention on verbal discourse. Yet when viewing the proliferation of carefully numbered diagrams in The Unspeakable, which Tyler dubs "thought pictures", and considering Tyler's textual analysis of "key-term schemata", to use his phrase, the acute critic can easily turn Tyler's method of critique against him.<sup>6</sup>

The difference between Tyler and Derrida is simply that where Tyler aims at transcending what he sees as the problems of Western metaphysics, Derrida is quite content to remain within the dilemmas and paradoxes he discovers there. This is indeed what separates Derrida's practice of 'deconstruction' from the anthropological misuse of it. While anthropologists seek to escape and transcend Western metaphysical categories in order to get on with the business of doing anthropology and constructing understandings of other cultures, Derrida instead perceives the impossibility of doing so, and substitutes the analytic of 'différance' which recognizes the historical movement of endless differing and deferring engendered by such idealist aims.

Most Critical Anthropology adopts some combination of two critical strategies. The first is to side with some non-Western tradition and use it to oppose Western colonialism and overcome Western metaphysical categories. The other is to produce an 'auto-critique' which draws its critical apparatus from within the Western tradition.

The second strategy may be called an 'auto-critique' both in the sense that it is autochthonous and in the sense that it is automatic. The criticism of culture has become a culture of criticism to the point that it can be conceived as a list of such criticisms readily available for the censure of other scholars, missionaries, colonialists, Westernized natives, and unaware anthropological colleagues. The critique of modern individualism from Tocqueville (1945), Dumont (1986), and Mauss (1985) via Carrithers et al. (1985) seems to me to be one such standard reproach. The entire critique of ethnocentrism upon which the ethnographic enterprise depends seems to me to be another automatic condemnation.<sup>7</sup>

Autochthonous criticism is not apparent where anthropological discourse is directly involved in internal Western political struggles as in much Marxist and feminist discourse, and in the new literary critique of ethnographic writing propounded by Clifford, Marcus, Fischer, and others. Criticism which locates itself in non-Western perspectives is the mainstay of much anthropology and ethnographic literature, and is readily apparent in Benedict's "Us-Not Us" strategy of writing, as Geertz (1988) describes it, and in Taussig's (1980) development of local Colombian and Bolivian metaphors for the evils of world capitalism, to name but two instances.

For Derrida (1982:135) these two critical strategies constitute two "false exits". He terms them "false exits" because, when one attempts auto-criticism, "one risks ceaselessly confirming, consolidating . . . at an always more certain depth, that which one allegedly deconstructs", and when one attempts to locate oneself in non-Western traditions to escape one's own metaphysical categories, one "can be caught, thereby inhabiting more naively and more strictly than ever the inside one declares one has deserted".

Though Derrida advocates "A new writing [which] must weave and interlace these two motifs of deconstruction" (ibid.), he does not mean to endorse employing these two strategies in a complementary fashion in the way that many anthropologists do -- which allows them to have their cake and eat it too, by arguing within a Western discourse from a perspective supposedly outside of that discourse -- but rather to view these two strategies as antagonistic to one another. He means instead to construct a discourse which fully

recognizes and takes into account this antagonism, and which locates and deconstructs its own discourse within such critical paradoxes, dilemmas, and false exits.

To adopt Derrida's deconstructive strategy would mean that Critical Anthropology give up the aim of transcending Western discourses and categories through false exits -- either ever increasing theoretical sophistication or through endless critical regression, as in the current fashion of discourse about discourse or writing about writing. To paraphrase Heidegger, in order to escape metaphysics not only must we overcome metaphysics, we must overcome overcoming.<sup>8</sup> A self-deconstructive discourse requires, instead, that anthropology engage the world through more forceful and direct ethnography -- ethnography, that is, with a 'différance'.

Ethnography with a différance engages the world in the sense that Heidegger speaks of 'worlding' in his essay The Origin of the Work of Art. "The work [of art]", he says " ... sets up a world ... " (ibid:45), and "In setting up a world, the work set forth the earth" (ibid:46) or "that which is by nature undisclosable" (ibid:47).

The cultural symbolic 'worlds' which anthropologists engage 'set-up' this inexhaustible, self-secluding 'earth' through a process of what Roy Wagner (1975, 1978, 1986) calls symbolic "obviation". Obviation is the recursive expansion and realization of cultural tropes or metaphors to the paradoxical point of their self-cancellation, self-encompassment, and exhaustion, rendering obvious their own meaning by disposing of their conventional arbitrariness.

Obviation recognizes the inexhaustible glosses and unattainable certainties of cultural tropes and metaphors, and its analysis wagers, Wagner says, "the open, nascent, 'black-hole' qualities (nonqualities) of metaphor, as model, against its own expansion into myth or ritual" (1986:11). Wagner (ibid.) has shown that symbolic obviation works itself out differently in Western and Melanesian cultures: Melanesian cultures take several generations to serially work through a set of recursive cultural institutions, and Western cultures take many centuries to work through a succession of (non-recursive) historical epochs.

The difference between Wagner and Derrida is that where Wagner analyzes how cultural tropes and metaphors are constructed against and encompass the unnameable uncertainty and inexhaustibility that haunts them, Derrida denies dialectical self-encompassment in favor of the irreducible alterity that engenders endless substitutions of signs and movements of différance. This might be because Derrida works within Western epochal time. But even in traditions that employ tropes recursively, there is room for the inescapable



otherness that continually disrupts the attempt to encompassment it. Analyses of how tropes are constructed (through obviation) against this alterity and how they are disrupted by it (via différance) are thus complementary. Ethnography with a différance intertwines these two types of analysis.

In what follows I will suggest how this sort of ethnography would look among the Rawa people I encountered in Papua New Guinea.

## AN ETHNOGRAPHY WITH A DIFFÉRENCE

The Rawa are a group of about 5000 people who live in the tropical forest on the steep southern slopes of the Finisterre Mountains in the northeast of Papua New Guinea. The Rawa are typical of many Eastern Highlands groups who practice sweet potato agriculture, pig husbandry, and, more recently, coffee cash cropping. In the recent past, the Rawa were middlemen in the shell trade between the Rai Coast and the central highlands, and devised an elaborate system of shell valuables. The Lutheran church replaced the men's spirit house as the Rawa experienced colonial 'pacification' and moved into large nucleated settlements. Western currency has been increasingly incorporated into the system of shell valuables with varying consequences. Large scale singsing rituals, wherein numerous pigs were slaughtered and sold for shell valuables, have been replaced by coffee cash cropping and, to a lesser degree, informal beer markets.

Any account of Rawa culture could hardly ignore the importance of money and kunawo: shell valuable/body decorations. This is because the Rawa have artistically elaborated kunawo as core cultural symbols, and adopted money in their place with great gusto. They have done so as both shells and western money inflated in Papua New Guinea throughout this century. This inflation is basically an inflation of symbols which are dissociated from that which they represent: shells are the remaining 'houses' of dead marine animals and symbols of a production that has been spent. Money is a universal abstract measure of anything that can be bought or sold. The inflation of symbols without fixed referents of this sort effects a problem of meaning.

The Rawa have created meanings for shells by forming and fabricating them into an elaborate set of kunawo body decorations. Each decoration corresponds with a part of the body, and kunawo form recursive sets, based on an analogy with the human anatomy, which are counted in a similarly recursive analogy to the digits of

the hands and feet. Sets of kunawo are also traded for persons in bridewealth and (in former times) bloodwealth death compensation payments.

These payments mediate social relations between groups and enable domestic groups to maintain a store of wealth and people and to thereby grow and multiply. But they draw an analogy that literally has teeth in it, for kunawo also separate different domestic groups, making them to a degree de facto patrilineal, and create competition between them to see which one 'wins'.

The decorations themselves are made up of sharp male teeth and tusks, associated with hunting, killing, and transgression, and round shells of various sorts and circular strings of shells associated with feminine encompassment and containment. They thus display the opposed tendencies of bride and blood wealth payments as a struggle between masculine and feminine. Kunawo are ranked in value, and the most important and symbolically comprehensive kunawo -- which supposedly contains the magical power of a community to have and control many kunawo -- is a lime powder gourd. The gourd is made up of masculine and feminine parts. The (male) sharpened cassowary bone lime powder scoop is contained by the (feminine) gourd, and through its association with betel chewing, the gourd forms a complex analogy involving the sexual mixture of blood and procreation.

The lime powder gourd kunawo was obtained in exchange for pork in ritual singsings along with its complement, a net bag decorated with dogs' teeth in which the gourd and other kunawo were kept. Singsings were central symbolic ritual creations in former times: through a complicated series of symbolic inversions and eversions involving male and female elements, ritual singsings collapsed these antinomies into a paradox that defines the parameters of human existence. Through the ritual exchange of pork and shell valuables, an equation was drawn between kunawo, blood, and fecundity. At the end of the ritual presentation, the lime powder gourd kunawo was placed in the dogs' teeth net bag, which contained and protected the gourd with an implied threat of transgression, and masculine and feminine principles were brought into an irresolvable proximity.

Kunawo as tropes are expanded as the metaphoric equation of kunawo, and blood is extended through the complex of exchanges that takes place when sets of kunawo are employed in bridewealth. The bride's kin either partially refuse and return the bridewealth, or share the bridewealth with the bride's mother's kin, who are otherwise prevented from receiving her bridewealth by the fact that

they received her mother's bridewealth. Both of these strategic moves underscore the difference between blood and bridewealth. In ceremonial exchanges between affines celebrating their first-born offspring, the bride's kinsmen give kunawo for pork and forfeit the right to foster their sister's children, again marking the separation of blood through the exchange of kunawo. Finally, at funeral wakes, the body of the deceased is decorated with kunawo, or its modern day equivalent, new western clothing, to mark the containment of the deceased's spirit, and the themes of masculine separation and feminine containment are collapsed such that the latter encompasses the former.

This encompassing polarity was reversed in retaliatory raids and death compensation payments. When someone died divination techniques were often used to identify a sorcerer and a retaliatory raid culminated in death compensation being paid to the sorcerer's kinsmen -- which consisted of the same combination of kunawo that comprised a bridewealth payment. After a successful raid the kunawo decorating the corpse were distributed among the war party, and the tangible images of containment were disseminated and scattered through many households. The containment of the deceased's spirit was thereby resolved into, and encompassed by, the separation and disappearance of kunawo.

The Rawa tell stories of kunawo being used to hire sorcerers and warriors and to instigate treachery against enemies. The lack of historical depth of Rawa narratives makes it difficult to tell whether or not such uses of kunawo increased with the inflation of shells. Such an historical shift, however, is apparent with the inflation of money, which has largely come to replace shell valuables in bridewealth and affinal exchanges.

To the best of my knowledge money has never been used in a death compensation payment, for the advent of Western currency followed colonial pacification. But besides being employed in bridewealth through the same recursive expansion as kunawo, Western money has inflated to the point that it is also used in many bisnis (business) ventures and has engendered a proliferation of village trade stores and an obsession with gambling in card games. These uses are all avowedly competitions between different domestic groups to grow and expand at one another's expense in a universe of limited goods. And these uses are not encompassed by the recursive expansion of kunawo employed in exchanges involving the human life cycle. Instead they are countered by church revivals and occasional failed cargo cults.

It is difficult to say if this state of affairs will produce a new encompassing dialectic of another order, perhaps one in which male separation encompasses feminine containment rather than the other way around (as in the death compensation payments of past days), or one in which these encompassments themselves collapse into a captivating paradox that defines the parameters of the human condition (as in singsings of olden times). One thing that is certain, however, is this uncertainty.

## DISCUSSION

The Rawa have involved themselves more and more, and problematically so, in the Western world economy. It is thus appropriate to designate the Rawa's obviation of kunawo 'modern', and the subsequent adoption of modern money 'postmodern'. I call the Rawa creation of kunawo 'modern' first because it corresponds almost exactly, given a slight lag, with the period that is generally thought of as modern in European culture -- that is, from slightly before until slightly after the two world wars. Secondly, it shares with the 'modern' the characteristic of being concerned with what Lyotard (1984) calls "the withdrawal of reality" -- that is, the dissociation between modern cultural ideals and modern historical experiences, and between symbols (like kunawo) and that which they represent (like fecundity and growth). I suppose that the Rawa have experienced this dissociation increasingly with the inflation of bridewealth and money. The cultural invention of kunawo as tropes, moreover, shares with the 'modern' the characteristically sublime creation of artistic forms and images which, in face of this dissociation, continues to offer some form of solace and pleasure.

The Rawa adoption of money might be called 'postmodern' because the cultural attempts to contain and encompass the separations, competition, and conflicts engendered by the inflation of money witness the confusion and pain entailed in the subversion of Rawa ideals instead of the pleasure of artistic creation. Like 'postmodern' art, the Rawa adoption of modern money, as Lyotard (1984:81) says, "denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable ... in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable".

If anthropologists invent 'cultures' out of their differences, by tracing the negative outlines of different 'cultures' against one another (Wagner 1975), these differences might also be the basis of

an otherness or alterity that disrupts these cultures. Ethnography with a *différance* shows how cultural symbolic worlds set forth an earth through the recursive exhaustion of tropes, as well as how the earth "juts through" and disrupts this world -- which includes how Western culture acts as an irreducible 'other' for cultures, and how those cultures act as irreducible others for ours.

It seems, then, that in order to understand our historical coevalness with Melanesians, we must appreciate our mutual alterity. This is perhaps the paradox that a self-deconstructing ethnography must substitute for the aim of transcending Western metaphysics. A self-deconstructing ethnography locates itself in the historical interaction between Western and 'other' non-Western cultures, and takes into account their contrariety.

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#### NOTES

1. The difference between Heidegger and Derrida is that, whereas Heidegger thinks that beyond philosophy and metaphysics, the task of thinking is thinking of the ontological difference, i.e. the difference between Being and beings, Derrida gives up naming the difference and substitutes instead an irreducible, unnameable otherness that always disrupts any humanly constructed metaphysical system (c.f. Brogan 1988). Since Heidegger thinks that the forgetting of Being is a basic human condition, Derrida might be seen as doing something more akin to Kant's "practical anthropology" by 'deconstructing' various metaphysical oppositions he encounters in diverse writings, and Heidegger might be seen as engaging in something like Kant's "pure philosophy" by discovering the universal principles of difference.

2. The view that 'deconstruction' consists of uncovering the principles, mode, or model whereby a text or society is produced seems to be shared among anthropologists Strathern, Wagner (1988:52), and Hung (1989:16).
3. 'Metaphysics' refers to a kind of Platonism or thought that considers man, or any thing or being, as having an essence that defines it and that is present in it. For both Heidegger and Derrida, the problem with metaphysics is that in Western culture it produced a liberal humanist view of man, which Western society then imposes on other cultures, without taking into account alternative views of man, without considering the ontological difference between Being and beings, and without taking into account that which always surpasses and escapes the ideal concept of 'man'. Insofar as other traditions construct views of man grounded in, for example, bodily substances and their essences, without considering that which surpasses and escapes them, they too may be deemed 'metaphysical'.
4. Both would object to the assumption 'method' implies -- that there is a reality 'out there' that one can grasp if one just applies the proper procedure or technique.
5. Tyler similarly attacks 'dialogic anthropology' for offering "dialogue rendered as text . . . no longer dialogue but a text masquerading as a dialogue, a mere monologue about dialogue" (1987:66).
6. To be fair, Tyler's very first "thought picture", which he calls "The Structure of Desire", looks like so many happy faces, and may thus indicate that he sees the irony of his argument.
7. Geertz (1983:55-70) points out the fallacy in such criticism and suggests that anthropology can at best be a "dialectical tacking" between local detail and general interpretations.
8. Heidegger's expression is "Therefore, our task is to cease all overcoming and leave metaphysics to itself" (1972:24).

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