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**ON DIALOGUE AND DESTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS:
PROBLEMS IN NARRATING NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY**

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Recent proposals for 'dialogic' narrative ask anthropologists not merely to include the voices of others in their ethnographic narratives, but explicitly to share 'ethnographic authority' with them. Yet such a strategy may not be well suited for narrations about realities one wants to explore critically. For example, the analysis of nationalist politics reveals a set of basic presuppositions about the nature of culture that most anthropologists share with nationalist ideologues. In this case to share narrative authority simply traps ethnographic writers in a discourse from which they might need to distance themselves.

SYMPATHETIC CRITICS of ethnographic literature have identified narrative authority as a key problem facing those writing ethnography 'experimentally.' Current concerns about the provisionality of cultural interpretation challenge anthropologists to call into question the validity, veracity, and objectivity of their ethnographic accounts. Yet such questioning makes it increasingly difficult to 'do'—which is to say, to write—ethnography, since the implicit conventions of the genre require writers to establish authoritative personae in control of the depiction of other cultural worlds. As Marcus and Cushman (1982:46) put it, "The balancing skill in writing consists . . . in not overdetermining what is recognized as indeterminant, while not cutting the ground of authority from the text by thoroughly disorienting the reader." One response to this dilemma has been what Dennis Tedlock (1979) has called the "Emergence of a Dialogical Anthropology." To build dialogue (which, for the moment, I will define as a nonmanipulative inclusion of other voices) into ethnographic narrative might lead, it is suggested, to a salutary dispersal or breakup of ethnographic authority (Clifford 1983:141; Marcus and Cushman 1982:43). Given our current epistemological uncertainties, to adopt a rhetorical strategy emphasizing dialogue is no more than to practice what we preach.

Yet dialogic narrative is no panacea, and we must think carefully about its appropriateness for a variety of ethnographic tasks. The present essay examines some rhetorical problems that arise in writing an ethnography of a nationalist movement in a modern Western setting.¹ Nationalism and ethnicity are social phenomena constituted not merely by cultural differences, *but by a Western theory of cultural difference*. Moreover, the culture theory of nationalist ideologues and ethnic leaders neatly matches that of mainstream anthropology, which envisions (and authoritatively depicts) a world of discrete, neatly bounded cultures. Given such deep-seated agreement between scientist and native, outsider and insider, observer and object, students of nationalism and ethnicity must take special care to ensure that their respect for their subjects' world view does not degenerate into a romantic desire to preserve inviolate the other's subjectivity. In other words nationalism and ethnicity challenge us as ethnographers to distance ourselves from a culture theory, grounded in Western common sense, that we share with the subjects of our studies. Rather than dialogue we need an analysis of our own common sense—what Edward Sapir once called a "destructive analysis of the familiar" (1921:94).

Proponents of dialogue point out, quite rightly, that anthropologists seeking to emulate positivistic science will be doomed to reduce (at least in our published scientific accounts) the living subjects of fieldwork interactions to objects resembling the butterflies in a museum collection. Objects do not speak intentionally to those who examine them; we act upon objects, but do not interact with them. In conventional ethnographies individuals speak as depersonalized representatives of their culture, if they speak at all. Yet the human interactions that lead to the construction of ethnographic objects are grounded not in a neatly bounded culture, but in an ongoing negotiation between two or more points of view. Both Clifford (1983:133, quoting the Russian literary critic Bakhtin 1981:293) and Tedlock (1979:388) insist on what Tedlock calls the “*betweenness* of the world of the dialogue”: “The anthropological dialogue creates a world, or an understanding of the *differences between* two worlds, that exists between persons who were indeterminately far apart, in all sorts of different ways, when they started out on their conversation.”

This notion of an open-ended and in-between world, created out of the ongoing interactions of conversants who bring different personal and social experiences to bear as they interpret and reinterpret one another, does not jibe with our common-sense notion of a world of bounded and distinctive cultures. Yet mainstream anthropology (what Tedlock calls the Analogical Tradition) eliminates dialogue and replaces it with a realistic description suggesting, first, that the other exists within and as a cultural object and, second, that that object can be adequately known and understood *in our terms*:

Analogical anthropology . . . involves the replacement of one discourse with another. It is claimed that this new discourse . . . is equivalent or proportionate, in a quasi-mathematical sense, to the previous discourse. Ana-logos, in Greek, literally means “talking above,” “talking beyond,” or “talking later,” as contrasted with the talking back and forth of dialogue. The dialogue is a continuing process and itself illustrates process and change; the analogue, on the other hand, is a product, a result (1979:389).

To reduce the subjects of one’s research to reified products can have politically potent results. To take but one example, Sievers (1983) has argued that public opinion polling, which has become a central feature of politics in the ‘advanced’ democracies, is a manipulative social interaction masquerading as a dispassionate search for scientific fact. Since polling involves questions and responses, it is a communicative exchange, a social interaction; but because pollsters conceive of themselves as neutral observers—and *because their subjects have accepted that scientific self-definition*—they can shield themselves from the ordinary social responsibility to respond to the initiatives of one’s counterparts. Pollsters effectively control their dialogues with respondents, forcing them to define their ‘opinions’ in terms of narrow responses to questions that only the pollsters have the right to formulate. That process both reduces and reifies opinion (Sievers 1983:337):

To hold an opinion is to be engaged in thinking and believing in a particular way, taking a tentative stance in the ebb and flow of consciousness, and putting things together for further reflection and consideration . . . [But] an arbitrary depiction of thinking as answers to interviewers’ questions or behavioral responses amounts to a reduction of the polymorphous

character of thinking into a formula that is technically manageable but misses the essence of what it is to think and opine.

When the results of polls are projected onto a collective subject—the “popular will” or “public mood”—polling, according to Sievers (1983:338–39), “contradicts the dialogic nature of private and public thinking,” and “democracy emerges as a managerial, not a political, phenomenon.”

The anthropologist’s equivalent of the public will is, of course, the notion of culture, conceived as a set of beliefs and values that mark off those who ‘share’ them as ‘a’ culture, or integrated social group. Clifford (1983) has discussed the manner in which fieldwork and its textual representation in ethnographies have been used, both by structural-functionalists and their critics, to establish the “ethnographic authority” that allows anthropologists to present themselves as masters of other cultures. The titles of such classics as *The Nuer* and *The Andaman Islanders* suggest that readers will find within their pages the whole of an exotic culture, scientifically analyzed and explained. Malinowski has emerged as the crucial figure in the establishment of the anthropologist as expert. His insistence on fieldwork ‘in the village,’ on the use of the native language, and on scientific observation grounded in appropriate theoretical abstractions provided the model with which anthropologists could parlay their personal research experiences into knowledge that a wider public would accept as authoritative (Clifford 1983:124–27; see also Stocking 1983:93–112).

As the structural-functional paradigm disintegrated in the face of various semiotically inspired critiques, anthropologists became increasingly aware of the implausibility of some of their prior pretensions to scientific authority. Geertz’s claim (1973:13–20) that anthropological writings are interpretations of interpretations (and that anthropology as an interpretive science cannot be expected to progress in the linear fashion that Western common sense expects of science) has been particularly influential. Yet Clifford (1983:130–33) neatly shows that interpretive anthropology continues, like its more scientific competitors, to reduce others to cultural objects—in particular, to texts. In interpretive anthropology the fieldworker’s experience is transformed into a text that can then be read to establish an account of ‘the culture’ under study (Clifford 1983:131–32):

Data constituted in discursive, dialogical conditions are appropriated only in textualized form. . . . The data thus reformulated need no longer be understood as the communication of specific persons. An informant’s explanation or description of custom need not be cast in a form that includes the message “so and so said this.” . . . Instead, these texts become evidences of an englobing context, a “cultural” reality.

Clifford goes on to analyze Geertz’s famous essay on the Balinese cockfight, showing that Geertz initially establishes his authority by an anecdotal account of personal experience (in which Geertz, his wife, and their Balinese hosts figure together as the characters) and then abruptly disappears “into his rapport.” We have, then, “an established convention for staging the attainment of ethnographic authority,” followed by “the quasi-invisibility of participant-observation.” Clifford’s analysis recalls the narrative theory of James Joyce’s (1964[1916]:215) young artist: “The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.” But unlike Joyce’s young artist, proponents of dialogue believe that the invisibility of the eth-

nographer, together with the depersonalization of his or her interlocutors and their replacement by a reified culture, fundamentally distorts the narration of cross-cultural interactions and leads as well to an inadequate theory of culture.

If 'dialogue' refers to the inclusion of other voices alongside that of the author, there is ample precedent for it in traditional ethnographies. Collections of native texts, life histories, and extensive quotations from myths and tales or from informants' accounts, are but some of the forms in which other voices have been worked into anthropological writing. Yet such forms have not usually been allowed to challenge the primacy of the single, controlling author. As Clifford (1983:134, 137) remarks, such "representations of dialogue" can "displace ethnographic authority" while "still confirming the final, virtuoso orchestration by a single author of all the discourses in his or her text" (see also Marcus and Cushman 1982:43-46). Thus, to give one example, we might react with skepticism to Todorov's ingenuous claim (1984:250), at the end of *The Conquest of America*, to have established a dialogue with the Conquistadors. Todorov's book is a sustained critique of imperialistic and ethnocentric interpretations of native American societies on the part of Columbus, Cortés, and even such defenders of the 'Indians' as Las Casas. Todorov dissects the chronicles of these authors as examples of nondialogic interpretations of other cultures, yet proclaims his own analysis of their writings to be dialogic: "I have sought not a terrain of compromise but the path of dialogue. I question, I transpose, I interpret these texts; but also I let them speak (whence so many quotations) and defend themselves" (1984:250). However, it is one thing to let others (in this case, the sixteenth-century Europeans) speak in words they once uttered but no longer control, through texts that we choose, edit, and contextualize. It is quite another to invite them to share in the final preparation of a text that will be presented to the public. Clifford (1983:142) carries this argument to its logical conclusion when he asks for "a utopia of plural authorship," producing works aimed at a heterogeneous audience that will include natives from many cultures, able to comment upon and reinterpret ethnographic texts from a variety of viewpoints.

DESTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS

The portrayal of social realities in terms of reified cultures, each imagined as neatly bounded and distinctive from all others, is as central to nationalist rhetoric and ideology as it is to the traditional anthropological worldview. I have examined the reifying presuppositions of nationalist ideology elsewhere (Handler 1983, 1984, 1985), and will return to them in the next section of this paper. But first I want to state the case for "destructive analysis."

An analytic method (and here I employ commonsense language, not technical or philosophical terms) aims to break down the complex phenomena of experience into their constituent parts in order to understand the relations between those parts, and to achieve a new and more profound understanding of the whole. There is a sense in which all interpretation involves analysis, for interpreters must take in a text as it presents itself to them, then decompose it in order to discuss what the significant units are, what they mean, how they relate to one another, and how they contribute to the whole text. Such a project is relevant to the interpretation of social 'texts' as well: presumably fieldworkers experience what seems to them to be a seamless social reality, which they ultimately must analyze into meaningful components.

Sapir's phrase, "destructive analysis," and his exploration of the grammatical underpinning of commonsense categories, should be compared to the systematic doubt of Descartes, which can be taken as the first major exposition of an analytic method in modern Western thought. In *Meditations on First Philosophy*, originally published in 1641, Descartes sets out to doubt all commonsense presuppositions until he can arrive at a bedrock of irrefutable truth. Two aspects of that project are of interest to us here as points of comparison to Sapir's method. First, like Sapir, Descartes attempts to subject what he calls "prejudice," "opinions," "custom," and "habit"—that is, all the presuppositions of common sense that we unreflectively believe—to self-conscious scrutiny. Second, and strikingly unlike Sapir, Descartes' goal is certainty, not doubt.

From the outset Descartes (1967:135) tells his readers that he seeks proofs for first principles that will be "equal to, or even surpass in certainty and evidence, the demonstrations of Geometry." The "utility of . . . Doubt," he tells us, is that "it makes it impossible for us ever to doubt those things which we have once discovered to be true" (1967:140). Thus the method of doubt is intended to lead Descartes to an Archimedian point, "fixed and immoveable" (1967:149), upon which a true philosophy can be built. He is driven, it seems, by something close to an abhorrence for what he calls "regression into infinity" (1967:169)—that is, the terrifying possibility that nothing can be known with certainty.

To arrive at a fixed point of certain truth, Descartes undertakes "the destruction of the foundations" of common sense; he seeks to "attack those principles upon which all my former opinions rested" (1967:145). He has set himself this task, he tells us, because he has come to realize (1967:144) "how many were the false beliefs that I had from my earliest youth admitted as true, and how doubtful was everything I had since constructed on this basis." Thus Descartes's meditations stem from a revolt against all those commonsense opinions that, he finds, have become "masters of my belief," as well as from a desire to escape his "habit of deferring to them" without conscious reflection (1967:148).

In the end Descartes finds justification for many of those commonsense beliefs, which enables him to accept with equanimity much of what he doubted in his meditations. The famous resolution of Descartes's quest for certainty—his proofs of the existence of self and of God—need not detain us here. It is worth noting, however, that his enunciation of the proof concerning self *precedes* that of the proof concerning God, and that both precede his meditation on the existence of empirical realities. And though he claims (1967:166) that knowledge of God is logically prior to knowledge of self, his rhetorical ordering of the arguments—proof of self before proof of God—suggests an anthropocentrism not unrelated to the ethnocentrism of "Analogical Anthropology."

Unlike Descartes's attempt to destroy the foundations of common sense, Sapir's destructive analysis does not lead inward, to the self, nor does it aim for certainty. To the contrary, "destructive analysis of the familiar," Sapir tells us, "is the only method of approach to an understanding of fundamentally different modes of expression" (1921:94). This pronouncement follows his painstaking analysis (1921:86) of "a simple sentence that involves various kinds of concepts—the farmer kills the duckling."

In his analysis Sapir shows that *the farmer kills the duckling* expresses at least thirteen

concepts, such as “definiteness of reference” (*the farmer, the duckling*), “subjectivity” and “objectivity” (it is the farmer who acts, the duckling who is acted upon), and “singularity” (a single farmer, a single duckling). Moreover many of those thirteen concepts are concepts that, as Boas (1911:43) put it, “according to the morphology of the language, *must* be expressed.” In other words, in English one cannot speak grammatically without specifying (that is, without encoding at the surface level) whether a noun is singular or plural, subject or object, definitely or indefinitely known by the speaker.

Other languages require the expression of other arbitrarily categorized aspects of experience, yet speakers of any language naively assume that their language accurately portrays the structure of the world ‘out there.’ Hence the necessity of destructive analysis of *the familiar*, for without such a project one is doomed to misunderstand (and, at worst, to belittle or denounce) what will appear as the arbitrariness of other modes of thought compared to the logicity or naturalness of one’s own:

When one has learned to feel what is fortuitous or illogical or unbalanced in the structure of his own language, he is already well on the way towards a sympathetic grasp of the expression of the various classes of concepts in alien types of speech. Not everything that is “outlandish” is intrinsically illogical or far-fetched. It is often precisely the familiar that a wider perspective reveals as the curiously exceptional. From a purely logical standpoint it is obvious that there is no inherent reason why the concepts expressed in our sentence should have been singled out, treated, and grouped as they have been and not otherwise. . . . This is the case, to a greater or lesser degree, in all languages . . . (Sapir 1921:94).

Sapir goes on to give examples of the obligatory expression of arbitrarily delineated concepts in other languages, “wandering” (1921:95) farther and farther afield, from English to German to Yana to Chinese to Kwakiutl. Indeed destructive analysis of the familiar followed by corresponding examples from other languages is the rhetorical movement throughout *Language*, a book written for a general audience. Yet this superficially one-directional movement conceals a constant back-and-forth, or comparative, project; it is, as Sapir tells us, “a wider perspective” that illuminates the familiar. And destructive analysis of the familiar in turn enables analysts to apprehend sympathetically the categories of other languages. We are, it would seem, within a hermeneutic circle (or, perhaps, an infinite regression) where our progress constantly yields new insights, but never certainty (see also Silverstein 1979:231–34).

Nowhere is the fundamentally comparative dimension of destructive analysis more apparent than in Whorf’s (1956[1941]) masterly analysis of the implicit ontology built into Hopi and “Standard Average European” (SAE) languages. Whorf explicates the presuppositions about time, space, substance, and matter that inform and sustain Western common sense by, first, suggesting their basis in SAE grammatical categories and, second, comparing that grammatical patterning to the patterns of Hopi. These two moments of Whorf’s project (destructive analysis of the familiar and of the exotic) are in fact simultaneous, each being necessary to the other. This is so because, as Whorf tells us, if we analyze an exotic language without being willing to call our own language into question, we will be condemned to an ‘analogical linguistics,’ that is, to replacing an exotic scheme of categorization with our own (Whorf 1956[1941]:137–38):

But the difficulty of appraising such a far-reaching influence [of language on habitual

thought and behavior] is great because of its background character, because of the difficulty of standing aside from our own language, which is a habit and a cultural *non est disputandum*, and scrutinizing it objectively. And if we take a very dissimilar language, this language becomes a part of nature, and we even do to it what we have already done to nature. We tend to think in our own language in order to examine the exotic language. . . . Yet the problem, though difficult, is feasible; and the best approach is through an exotic language, for in its study we are at long last pushed willy-nilly out of our ruts. Then we find that the exotic language is a mirror held up to our own.

Thus destructive analysis of the familiar and of the exotic must proceed together, though for a given audience the analyst may choose to emphasize one aspect of the project over the other. For example the rhetorical force of Whorf's essay is brought primarily to bear on Western thought. He begins with examples drawn from his experience in the fire-insurance business, then focuses his analysis in order to make explicit those Western patterns of thought implicit in (and, he suggests, responsible for) his illustrative industrial accidents. To be sure each presupposed, hence invisible, aspect of Western ontology is brought into sharp focus through comparison with Hopi patterns—that is, with a way of thought whose arbitrary categorizations of experience would have seemed, before the analysis, beyond the powers of the Western mind to imagine. Yet the rhetorical role of the Hopi examples remains, in this essay, supporting: Whorf's problem is, as he tells us, to find an "approach" to his own language that will enable him at least provisionally to 'stand aside' from it. In "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language," Hopi functions as "a mirror held up to" SAE, which becomes, for the moment, a familiar object subjected to destructive analysis.

NARRATING NATIONALISM

Proponents of dialogue have argued that the elimination of dialogue from the narrative representation of anthropological research allows us to reduce our subjects and what Tedlock calls the betweenness of the field situation to objects, to bounded cultures. These textualized objects can come to take the place of an ongoing process of mutual interpretation; constructed by scientist-writers as the products of their research, they serve as the pieces of the 'real world' for which anthropologists have expert responsibility and that, therefore, justify anthropology's claim to be an authoritative science. At the same time, the public does not expect the objects of the experts' studies to respond to those studies; anthropologists, even if they disagree among themselves, have not only the last word, but a monopoly of the word.

The objectifying vision of the human world that permeates anthropological procedure—the insistence on the boundedness of cultural differences—is shared by many of the natives we study, particularly those choosing to define themselves in terms of Western political categories and social theories. This occurs both to non-Western peoples in postcolonial contexts and to minorities or interest groups forced, or seeking, to differentiate themselves within a Western polity. As Parsons (1975:63–71), following David Schneider, has suggested, the formula for claiming cultural distinctiveness is always the same. Those proclaiming the existence of an ethnic group point to the possession of certain cultural features (language, religion, dress, food, daily custom) that can be contrasted to the habits of others; those features are said to inhere 'naturally' (or, what amounts to the same thing, by birth and early social-

ization) in the members of the group (see also Handler and Linnekin 1984:276–79); and group members, by virtue of their common possession of such traits, are said to be bound together as a ‘natural’ and objectively existent social unit—a culture, ethnic group, or nation (see also Handler 1984:59–60).

The fact that claims of distinctiveness are always made in the same idiom, according to the same social theory, suggests a massive commonality underlying and facilitating the construction or interpretation of cultural difference. And those common assumptions (concerning the existence of cultures as bounded, real-world objects) are largely shared by the social scientists who study national and ethnic groups. Given such agreement, it seems to me that destructive analysis of shared premises is more important than a dialogue with those who share them. Indeed in this case dialogue will amount to little more than mutually confirming, rather than critically examining, each other’s beliefs (although scientists can always dignify their “secondary explanations” [Boas 1911:68] of common sense by constructing them out of jargon). By contrast destructive analysis, because it challenges common sense, may pave the way to a more genuine dialogue, that is, to one in which both parties are led to reevaluate their positions.

What are the consequences of destructive analysis for the narrative form of an ethnography about a nationalist movement or ethnic group? The following suggestions are tentative and have emerged from my ongoing attempt to write an ethnography of nationalism and the politics of culture in Quebec. However, I take them to be applicable to similar projects focused on any people defining themselves in terms of nationalist or ethnic ideology.

1) The author must resist all collective terms and rhetorical strategies that suggest the existence of a bounded cultural object. Since his or her subjects will explain themselves and their social project in precisely such terms, the ethnographer’s interpretive task must take the form of destructive analysis. The alternative is to ‘buy into’ the native ideology.

2) An extremely common form of buying into nationalist and ethnic ideologies is to refer to one’s subjects as they refer to themselves: as (in the case of my own research) ‘the Quebecois’ or ‘the Quebec nation.’ It is difficult to avoid such terminology, since it is so thoroughly embedded in the conventions of ethnographic writing. One needs, as Clifford (1983:131–32) hints, to attribute remarks explicitly to those who have uttered them; at the same time, one must draw constantly (and, alas, tediously) on such qualifying phrases as ‘according to,’ ‘what seems to these people to be,’ or ‘what my friend saw as.’

Avoiding people’s preferred self-designation may seem heretical, especially given the recent fashion of rejecting names arbitrarily assigned by colonial authorities to the people under their control, in order to restore what is claimed (by some, at least) to be their ‘true’ or ‘original’ collective designation. Yet this stricture on naming is aimed not so much at the substantive center of the proper name (‘Quebec’) but at the grammatical form in which it is cast. For example, in a phrase such as ‘the Quebecois nation,’ both the definite article and the noun suggest the existence of a bounded object in the real world; while ‘Quebecois’ suggests individuals sharing a common essence which defines each of them singly and all of them together as ‘a’ group.

3) Collective designations that project a group of people as a unified actor fre-

quently feed into metaphors that depict the personified people acting—thinking, willing, moving through history, confronting its destiny. Such actions confirm the reader's belief in the existence and reality of the actor. In other words only an agent can act, and action requires an agent; to personify the nation allows one to speak of its actions, its life; and to speak of such things reinforces our belief in the objectified existence of the nation. Uncritical use of rhetoric such as the following (taken from an excellent book on Quebec nationalist politics) should be avoided (Quinn 1979:3–4):

The success of the people of Quebec in maintaining a French and Catholic culture for over three hundred years on a continent where the vast majority are English-speaking and Protestant has often been referred to as “the French-Canadian miracle.” This “miracle” has only been possible, however, because the people of that province, as well as their leaders, have always shown a determination to survive, a “will to live” as a cultural group. The French Canadians have had a sense of mission, of a duty to preserve French Catholic culture in America against all forces which would destroy it. This sense of mission has given them a direction, a goal which has aided them greatly in maintaining their identity.

Such rhetoric is identical to that found in much nationalist writing (see Levesque 1968:14–15, for a historically important example). In the quoted example, despite some suggestion that “the people” are not a monolithic entity (“the people” are distinguished from “their leaders”), the unqualified and persistent use of such terms as “the people of Quebec” and “the French Canadians” quickly convinces readers to presuppose the existence of the group. Similarly the effect of placing dramatic phrases such as “miracle” and “will to live” within quotation marks, thereby marking them as native utterances distinct from the narrative voice, is offset by the weight of the passage, which confirms (without quotation marks) the “success” of the people “in maintaining their identity” and “culture.” In other words the narrator agrees with his subjects: the people's will to live has indeed wrought this miracle of successful maintenance of the culture. Finally concurring with one's subjects in the choice of evolutionary metaphors (“success,” “survive,” “will to live”) contributes forcefully to the suggestion of a personified, objectified social actor.

4) Historical narrative presents particular dangers to those writing about nations and ethnic groups. Though many historians acknowledge the provisionality of historical tales, the rhetoric of historic narration inevitably objectifies its actors, and the principal actor of a national history is a nation. National historiography thus endows the nation with a reality that is difficult for readers to question. As de Certeau (1983:129–30), writing about a more general problem, has put it:

every story that relates what is happening or what has happened constitutes something real to the extent that it pretends to be the representation of a past reality. It takes on authority by passing itself off as the witness of what is or of what has been. . . . Historiography acquires this power insofar as it presents and interprets the “facts. How can readers resist discourse that tells them what is or what has been?”

Social-scientific writing often doubly presupposes this authoritative constitution of reality by taking historical scholarship for granted as background, to be used as a prelude to some variety of synchronic sociological analysis. That strategy obliterates any sense of history as story or construct. Relegated to the background, history can be presented as facts. The existence of such facts in turn proves the existence of the

'thing' the facts are about. Thus to begin an ethnographic narrative with historical background becomes a powerful rhetorical device for establishing the reality of the object of one's study. This procedure is standard for social-scientific and nationalistic accounts of Quebec, especially those focused on the total society (rather than isolated aspects of it) and those addressed to outsiders presumed unacquainted with Quebec (the typical situation for social-scientific monographs in which Quebec figures as the exotic Other). In sum to understand the nation's situation, one must know 'its' story, and Western conventions of storytelling inevitably constitute protagonists as bounded, individuated actors.

5) To introduce an ethnography by presenting a neutral, or even admittedly partisan, historical summary allows the narrator to call upon 'solid facts' to establish the reality of the kind of social entity that conventionally justifies the telling of an anthropological tale. This is always the case for nations and ethnic groups, and usually for other types of grouping that can be said to 'have' a history. To refuse this expected historical gambit as well as the others outlined above, however, is to risk violating readers' expectations about how they should be situated with respect to an anthropological analysis. But what are the alternatives? How does one go about beginning and then sustaining a narrative about nationalism or ethnicity?

With respect to the Quebec case, that is, to the ethnography of a nationalist movement about which much has been written from a variety of vantage points, the anthropologist should make no pretense of mastering knowledge about 'the total society.' As is the case with much current anthropological writing, even that concerned with 'small-scale societies,' one chooses an aspect of the large situation, but *without suggesting that the larger situation exists as a bounded social field*. Rather one enters a world of many dialogues, a world of debate, controversy, prejudice, and faith (and, significantly, a world awash in a sea of print) and one adds yet another account to be commented upon and criticized. The rhetorical problem is to call upon as many of the available accounts as are relevant (interview materials, newspaper writing, political propaganda, government documents, fiction, histories, social-scientific analyses) and to use them to construct a narrative that is both coherent (even readable) and explicitly tentative. Perhaps one can orchestrate these varied materials by arranging them in terms of one's idiosyncratic interests, as these have emerged out of fieldwork, in which case fieldwork anecdotes can serve as a unifying feature of the narrative. In a sense we are back to what Clifford (1983:120–24) has warned us against—the use of personal experience to establish authority. But now it is a question more of narrative coherence than of scientific authority and its rhetorical representation. One's experiences have led one to such and such interests, upon which such and such texts comment. The anthropologist, master of no text (nor of any of the academic or social fields from which they emanate) brings texts promiscuously together in order to see how they can be made to comment upon one another (see Marcus and Cushman 1982:63). The goal, at least in an ethnography of nationalism, is destructive analysis of the familiar, presented in a textual collage meant to challenge common sense.

6) Since destructive analysis of the familiar and of the exotic must proceed together, it is important in narrating nationalism to include discussions of texts that depict nonnationalistic, nonobjectifying forms of sociopolitical organization. For example, Geertz's study (1980) of the Balinese *negara* shows us a world in which polity

(if the term still applies) simply does not exist in the form of a bounded geographical unit. Sorensen's study (1967) of multilingualism in the northwest Amazon basin challenges the conventional wisdom of both nationalists and social scientists who assume that a common language is crucial to social solidarity. Such examples can be used to sharpen our awareness of the arbitrary assumptions of our own common sense and can help us bring into view what was before invisible.

7) The promiscuous juxtaposition of texts from a variety of sources, familiar and exotic, suggests that disagreements, dissonance, and competing viewpoints must be explored rather than suppressed. We might call this, following Sapir (1949[1938]:569), the Two-Crows-denies-this principle. By showing that our subjects continually call into question one another's beliefs and opinions, and that agreement on one issue often leads to disagreement on another, we can resist the temptation to portray our subjects as members of a unified cultural entity. More difficult rhetorical problems include explicitly stated disagreement between narrator and subjects and openly recognized contradictions in the narrator's theoretical position. In every case unresolved disputes can be used to convey to readers our conviction that cultural interpretation happens *between* people and viewpoints, rather than *to* cultural objects.

In the anthropological study of nationalism and ethnicity, to accept the natives' theory of cultural differences (and their very definition of themselves as a distinctive people) is to confine oneself to a common sense that conventional ethnographic writing and mainstream social theory largely presuppose. Clifford, Tedlock, and others have attempted to demystify those presuppositions in their discussions of anthropological rhetoric. But in my case, writing an ethnography of nationalism, the demystifying process, which I have termed destructive analysis, must be located as a central feature within ethnographic writing, rather than left to literary-critical commentary upon such writing. Moreover for the anthropological student of nationalism and ethnicity, the dialogic narrative recommended as an antidote to reification may be less important than a destructive analysis that will inevitably seem, to representatives of the grouping in question, hostile, offensive, or just plain wrong (see Parman 1979). Yet if cultural distinctiveness and boundedness are arbitrary constructions, products of particular narrative and rhetorical strategies, it will be unrewarding for both anthropologists and natives to go on believing them to be objective features of the 'natural' world. Perhaps a destructive analysis of our shared presuppositions can become the anthropologist's contribution to a dialogue that respects natives by challenging rather than romanticizing them.

NOTE

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