

Anthropology as Cultural Critique

AN EXPERIMENTAL MOMENT
IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer

Second Edition

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Preface

In the United States and elsewhere, recent decades have witnessed a profound challenge to the purpose and styles of theory that have guided the social sciences since their late nineteenth-century origins as professional academic disciplines. Widespread perceptions of a radically changing world order have fueled this challenge and undermined confidence in the adequacy of our means to describe social reality, on which any generalizing social science must be based. Thus, in every contemporary field whose subject is society, there are either attempts at reorienting the field in distinctly new directions or efforts at synthesizing new challenges to theory with established programs for research.

These debates are not new to the Western intellectual tradition—they are, in effect, a replaying of the hopes for a natural science of society, challenged by theories of interpretation that say people must be treated differently from nature. But their historical expression at the moment is both fresh and revealing of the current conditions of knowledge, shaped by particular political, technological, and economic events. At the broadest level, the contemporary debate is about how an emergent postmodern world is to be represented as an object for social thought in its various contemporary disciplinary manifestations.

Discussions of current intellectual trends can be weightless and unconvincing if they do not concern themselves with the situations of particular disciplines. For us, developments in contemporary anthropology reflect the central problem of representing social reality in a rapidly changing world. Within anthropology, ethnographic fieldwork and writing have become the most lively current arena of theoretical discussion and innovation. Ethnography's concern is with description, and present efforts to make ethnographic writing more sensitive to its broader political, historical, and philosophical implications place anthropology at the vortex of the debate about the problem of representing society in contemporary discourses. We believe that our examination of social and cultural anthropology's "experimental moment," as we call it, reveals much about this general intellectual trend as well.

This essay, then, in substance is an effort at clarifying the present situation of cultural and social anthropology. Although including historical reviews of past work, it is not intended to be a history of anthropology. Although referring to many of our colleagues, it is not intended to be a complete bibliographic survey. We apologize to those we have not cited and ask the indulgence of those we have.

We will focus on developments in American anthropology, but much of what we have to say applies as well to British anthropology and perhaps more widely. During the 1950s and 1960s, British anthropology was more disciplined by a research paradigm than was American anthropology, and it had what appeared to be a more rigorous notion of what an ethnographic description and analysis of another culture should be. It had great prestige and influence on American anthropology, and in most major graduate schools, there was a merging of the two traditions. The vitality of the British tradition expended itself in the 1960s, just as the current experimental period was emerging. The direction of influence today has reversed: the output of American cultural anthropology significantly guides British efforts. The ascendant American tradition, meanwhile, is being strongly influenced by the third major tradition of modern anthropology, the French. In this regard, some of the experimental moves in contemporary American anthropological writing would appear familiar to French anthropologists, as reminiscent of an exciting period of innovation there during the interwar years (see Clifford 1981). Our focus on the American situation, thus, reflects a historical development in which anthropology in the United States seems to be synthesizing the three national traditions.

This is, moreover, a time when heightened awareness of global interdependence challenges the idea of distinct national traditions in scholarship itself. Such traditions remain subtly important, but increasingly, they are operating less as barriers to communication and interaction. New anthropologies in Brazil, India, Israel, Japan, and Mexico, among other countries, are developing by a mix of locally informed issues of concern and of classic issues of Western social theory (Gerholm and Hannerz 1982). The fact of multiple distinct anthropologies opens up for the first time the realistic possibility of multiple cross-cultural readerships for anthropological works, which should eventually have a profound effect on the way that they are conceived and written in the United States and Europe.

In discussing this essay with various colleagues, we have noticed a persistent tendency to drag all discussions back to the classic works of

the first generations of modern fieldworkers. In contrast, our purpose in this essay is to help forge a useful discourse about contemporary and future work. Quibbles that authors of pioneering descriptive accounts of other cultures such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, or Gregory Bateson already “said something like that,” or that experimentation in ethnographic writing is as old as anthropology are not helpful if they do not focus on how we can do better. A fortiori, the fad of excoriating the sins of our ancestors is wearisome and impotent, if it does not lead to better contemporary works.

Rereading and reanalyzing the classics are indeed a venerable anthropological exercise that hones analytic skills and often leads to new insights. And yet, we argue, it is not only our ancestors who wrote well. Indeed, many of our contemporary colleagues with a keen critical sense of their discipline’s past have done even better. Many more have written extremely interesting, if often flawed, accounts of their subjects. It is for their engaging provocation that we term them “experiments,” and for drawing attention to their flaws that we ask indulgence: the flaws are often signs of intellectually interesting problems, which represent a struggle to reformulate old questions and raise new issues.

For our students and the public, we hope this essay will make contemporary anthropological writing seem less exotic and will suggest new contexts of relevance for it. For our colleagues, we hope to amplify a discourse that we feel is very much in the air. We do not see ourselves as proclaiming a manifesto or as envisioning a new direction; we certainly advocate no particular “ism” or “ic.” Rather, our only brief is to take a “reading” of what is already happening, distilling the corridor discussions that inform the reception and production of ethnographies today into a series of articulate issues.

“What is happening” seems to us to be a pregnant moment in which every individual project of ethnographic research and writing is potentially an experiment. Collectively, these are in the process of reconstructing the edifices of anthropological theory from the bottom up, by exploring new ways to fulfill the promises on which modern anthropology was founded: to offer worthwhile and interesting critiques of our own society; to enlighten us about other human possibilities, engendering an awareness that we are merely one pattern among many; to make accessible the normally unexamined assumptions by which we operate and through which we encounter members of other cultures. Anthropology is not the mindless collection of the

exotic, but the use of cultural richness for self-reflection and self-growth. To accomplish this in the modern world of increased interdependence among societies and mutual awareness among cultures requires new styles of sensibility and of writing. Such exploration in anthropology lies in the move from a simple interest in the description of cultural others to a more balanced purpose of cultural critique which plays off other cultural realities against our own in order to gain a more adequate knowledge of them all.

A period of experimentation is characterized by eclecticism, the play of ideas free of authoritative paradigms,¹ critical and reflexive views of subject matter, openness to diverse influences embracing whatever seems to work in practice, and tolerance of uncertainty about a field's direction and of incompleteness in some of its projects. Such periods entail risks of possible blind alleys as well as great potentials, and they are by nature relatively ephemeral and transitional between periods of more settled, paradigm-dominated styles of research. Taking a reading of such a current trend in anthropology is precisely the one job that experimental projects do *not* do for themselves—it is almost antithetical to them—and it is in initiating some discussion about what is going on in a period that celebrates its lack of definition that we hope to make a contribution.

Many discussions are appearing which intend to take the pulse of anthropology or to analyze a perceived malaise (see, for example, Ortner 1984; Shankman, 1984; Sperber, 1982; and MacCannell and MacCannell, 1982), and these are indeed a register that some sort of transition is occurring. We differ from most such discussions in the following way. They tend to be framed thoroughly within a paradigmatic style of thinking about knowledge, in which research is, or should be, conducted under a unifying theoretical system. That is, they seek to defend an old paradigm or assert a new one, or else, more noncommittally, they view the current situation as a clash of alternative paradigms. For instance, in anthropology, the situation is often pictured as the challenge of newer, interpretive² programs of research to reigning positivist³ ones. Our perspective is that at the current moment, interpretive perspectives, although still “anti-establishment” in ethos, are as much an accepted and understood part of the contemporary discourse as are positivist perspectives. To still pose one paradigm against the other is to miss the essential characteristic of the moment as an exhaustion with a paradigmatic style of discourse altogether. Indeed, it was precisely the challenge of interpretive perspectives, now thoroughly conventionalized in disciplinary debates, that in part led to

a suspicion of all totalizing styles of knowledge, including interpretive ones themselves. Thus, while contemporary discussions of the state of anthropology are certainly addressing cogent issues, they usually speak as advocates from within one established tradition or another, and consequently lack a more detached perspective on the character of current anthropological discourse itself. We have tried to position ourselves differently, to avoid a rhetoric of a clash of paradigms in order to confront more directly the extreme fragmentation of research interests and the theoretical eclecticism of the best work, which seem to us to be the most compelling traits of anthropology today.

We fully recognize also that much of the uncertainty in contemporary anthropology and other related disciplines could be significantly attributed to an institutional or professional crisis which parallels the intellectual crisis that we perceive. There is a marked decline of government interest in, and support for, research in a number of fields, including anthropology. Enrollments have been declining nationally in undergraduate programs of anthropology, among other disciplines of the social sciences and humanities; the number of teaching-research positions in universities has radically decreased; graduate programs have declined in number, as potential scholars seek more secure professions in law, business, and medicine.

There has indeed already been the painful loss of a generation of highly trained anthropology PhDs to other occupations. Those lucky enough to hold tenured appointments do not escape demoralization and vulnerability to cynicism. For them, the professional rules of the game that applied to immediately preceding generations have changed markedly. For one thing, they are lonelier: their work addresses less a new generation of graduate students than each other, who are survivors of a period of cutbacks. Also, they are well aware, more than ever, of the marginality of their discipline purely in terms of how little it is valued or how suspiciously it is held by those in power at home (who are ultimately responsible for providing funding) or by the powerful abroad (who are exercising far more care and discrimination in the granting of research permits). One result is the prevalence of a strategy of doing whatever is necessary to ensure solvency (for example, the creation of applied programs and the tailoring of courses and research proposals largely to meet the demands of certain constituencies or possible patrons).

Yet, however valid, this picture of demoralization and cynicism is perhaps too dire. Demographic trends and fashions in graduate education have been cyclical in the past and are likely to be in the future. It is

perhaps a healthy development that in this period of fragmentation and disunity, younger anthropologists in secure positions are not concerned with superficial piety toward their mentors, and not burdened with preserving an authoritative pose for large bodies of eager graduate students. Many were professionally schooled during the politically self-conscious atmosphere of the 1960s, and in these quieter, but more desperate times in academia, they are free to play and experiment with ideas in their discipline to an unprecedented degree. We believe that it is just such positive institutional effects of an otherwise dire period that sociologically explains the experimental moment.

While they deserve full separate treatment, we give the above kinds of institutional factors that shape contemporary trends little further attention in this essay. We reject the notion that the intellectual crisis, on which we do focus, might be merely a reflection of the underlying play of interests involved in the institutional crisis we have outlined. There are indeed connections, but we have chosen to emphasize the intellectual response in anthropology to the confluence of certain developments in the history of the discipline and certain political, economic, and social changes in the world which are most directly challenging its practice. We believe these to be of more specific importance in understanding the current salience of problems in ethnographic description and writing than is the institutional situation of anthropology.

The idea for this essay was developed by Marcus during a year at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton in 1982–83, and he sketched a first version of the argument while there. The Institute is indeed an ideal setting for taking stock of broad intellectual trends, but the deeper impetus for the essay originated in the collective thinking and discussions among members of the Rice anthropology department, who share an interest in pushing contemporary interpretive anthropology toward a more politically and historically sensitive critical anthropology. Consequently, Marcus invited his colleague Michael Fischer to be a coauthor and to continue their ongoing dialogue with the aim of a written product in mind.

During the fall of 1983 at Rice, Marcus refined the organizing argument for the essay and produced a rough, complete draft of the present work. In the spring of 1984, Fischer recast the argument, substantially reworked the first draft, and added most of the commentaries that constitute the examples and close analyses of texts in the final version. Through the summer of 1984, we worked jointly on this version, and it was collaboration in the most satisfying sense.

Many colleagues have contributed to this project directly or indirectly beyond their writings. For Marcus, the year at the Institute was a special time and place for initiating the essay; Fischer would like to acknowledge the stimulation of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Brasilia in the spring-summer of 1982, where he discussed his ideas about the function of critique for anthropology and drafted an essay (1982a) on changes in the current interpretive trend of anthropological theory. Portions of the present essay were presented to the Rice Circle for Anthropology, and to the Rice Humanities Seminar on the Culture of Capitalism, during 1983–84. Arguments were also tried out at a seminar, organized by Marcus and James Clifford, at the School of American Research, Santa Fe, on “The Making of Ethnographic Texts,” in April, 1984. We are grateful to the participants in all these events for the criticisms and encouragements that we received.

The authors owe a special debt of gratitude to the historian Patricia Seed who carefully read and edited the manuscript at a critical point of revision when they lacked the needed perspective on their work to make certain important improvements in style, organization, and logic of argument. We also wish to thank the several referees for presses, whose astute readings of the manuscript aided us in our final revisions and editing. In particular, we are grateful to the following readers who made themselves known to us: Ivan Karp, Michael Meeker, Renato Rosaldo, and David M. Schneider.

Introduction to the Second Edition

Michael M. J. Fischer and George E. Marcus

THE PROJECT OF ANTHROPOLOGY AS CULTURAL CRITIQUE: PAST AND FUTURE

Anthropology as Cultural Critique was part of a wave of critical revisions during the 1980s of existing modes of interpreting society and culture. There were several initiatives within anthropology that concerned an exchange of perspectives across the boundaries of anthropology and disciplines such as literary studies, philosophy, and history with which it always had strong, but undeveloped, affinities (perhaps best exemplified in the volume *Writing Culture*, also published in 1986, but also by the inauguration of such journals as *Cultural Anthropology*, *Public Culture*, and *Positions*; and by the annual *Late Editions* series). Particularly important in these exchanges was the environment of new transdisciplinary approaches—including feminism, deconstruction, film and media studies, critical cultural studies, and science studies—and the effort to revive area studies programs with fresher ideas about how to perform comparisons. Many problems that were theorized in a general way in the 1980s came to have very concrete contexts in the 1990s requiring new methods of inquiry and research strategies. We think there are four issues that could usefully be reassessed in rereading *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* as we pass from the 1990s into the 2000s.*

*The first draft of this introduction emerged from daily breakfast discussions we had during August of 1997 in Cape Town, South Africa, at the cafeteria of the University of Cape Town's Business School, housed in an interesting renovation of a prison that had once been occupied by "Bushmen" (San) convicts who had provided the labor to build Cape Town's picturesque harbor. We were in the new South Africa to jointly teach a short course on currents in critical anthropology since the 1980s and to participate in Professor Pamela Reynolds' graduate seminar on the postapartheid-era Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings that were then occurring. We had thought to use our sojourn in Cape Town to produce some statement for a second edition of our book that the Press had proposed to us. The ironies, anxieties, and sense of unfinished business palpable within the characteristically easygoing calm and charm of Cape Town turned out to be a very appropriate setting for the discussions leading to this statement. It was Fischer who produced a full draft that reflected our discussions, a text that we did not return to until the spring of 1998, as we looked forward to mutual participation in another set of seminars in Rio de Janeiro in August. Just as South Africa was the back-

I. THE NATURE OF CULTURAL CRITIQUE

The notion of “critique” (as opposed to mere criticism) derives from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment effort to clarify concepts, to evaluate the relation between their logical grounds and their degree of validity. We have learned over the past three centuries that universality is not a necessary, or even usual, characteristic of reliable and useful concepts. Indeed one of the fundamental contributions of anthropology as a comparative study of cultural processes has been to insist upon the relation between the production of knowledge and its diverse contexts or grounds. This is as true of geometry—which was often thought to be an example of universal deductive reason in the days before non-Euclidean geometries were elaborated and put to practical use—as of concepts of kinship or childrearing, of grammatical notions of time, space, or personhood.

Cultural critique, as used in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, referred not merely to conditions for the validity of knowledge, but to methods of inquiry directed at evaluating cultural and social practices. We cited three predecessor styles of cultural critique from the 1930s that informed those of the 1970s and 1980s: the early Frankfurt School in Germany, surrealism and its allies in anthropology in France, and documentary realism in America during the era of the Great Depression.

As we pass into the early twenty-first century, cultural critique faces new challenges due to massive demographic shifts that have challenged the idea of culturally homogeneous nation-states; transnational communication and visual media in new modalities, which arguably are effecting transitions as profound in modes of rationality and cognition as those earlier from orality to literacy; and the new technosciences, which provide both novel technologies affecting masses of people (if only through the production of toxicities and publicly shared risks) as well as new concepts and metaphors for the way we act in the world.

Most importantly for anthropology these conditions require new forms of inquiry and writing that attend to the various new actors and processes in the world. We cannot simply invoke traditional moralisms or political ideologies of evaluation. New forms of cultural cri-

drop to our conversations which pushed this reconsideration forward, it was the anticipation of discussions in Brazil that provided the backdrop for pushing it to a close. We can therefore appreciate this effort at a second take on our book produced in an interval between Cape Town and Rio as itself a token of the shifts into the late 1990s that we have tried to describe and advocate.

tique must emerge in the spaces of negotiation among increasing numbers of detailed spheres of expertise and interests. The traditional ethnography done by a single individual, writing with a distinctive voice of disciplinary and personal authority, increasingly may have to yield to explicit collaborative projects. Although collaborative projects—both with key informants (e.g. Franz Boas and George Hunt) or among different social scientists (e.g. the Indonesia project in which Clifford Geertz got his start)—have a long history in anthropology, the norms for ethnographic writing have remained individualistic; and norms for collaborative writing are less well articulated or recognized than in either laboratory sciences or some of the other field sciences such as ecological or biological field sciences or the medical clinical sciences. In the 1980s we spoke of collaborative and dialogic writing for multiple readerships. But what was insufficiently stressed was the degree to which the objects of these collaborative projects are not just rich ethnographic arenas to be described within the traditional practices of fieldwork, but are rather arenas that are puzzling to all collaborators—informants and experts as well as ethnographers and cultural translators.

The fact of overlapping and also variant intellectual interests among all parties to an ethnographic project requires an articulation among anthropologists of new conditions for such research for which neither the Malinowskian or Boasian professional ethos nor more recent and fashionable theorizations of “the Other” will do. Collaborators under these new conditions are not quite informants in the traditional mold, nor are they full partners in the anthropologists’ projects. But at least they are roughly equivalent to the anthropologist in social and intellectual position, and the sorting out of the similarities and differences around this equivalence is one of the key operations of the collaborations that constitute contemporary ethnography.

No longer, then, is the project of anthropology the simple discovery of new worlds, and the translation of the exotic into the familiar, or the defamiliarization of the exotic. It is increasingly the discovery of worlds that are familiar or fully understood by no one, and that all are in search of puzzling out. For instance, such projects involve the local effects of globalizing processes, particularly if we give up the assumption that modernity and the historical forces that are now redefining it generate similar results everywhere, and if we pay attention to the ways that the end of the Cold War might also be the end of bipolar or three-worlds simplifications. That there might well be powerful alternative emergent modernities within so-called globalization, requiring the sort

of exploration that little-known “peoples” once were subject to in anthropology, is the new working assumption of ongoing critical research.

2. FROM “REPATRIATION” TO MULTIPLE METHODS
AND POSITIONINGS OF ANTHROPOLOGY AS
CULTURAL CRITIQUE

In the 1980s we argued that anthropology, to live up to its promise from the 1920s to be the comparative study of cultures and societies around the world, needed to “repatriate” itself, that is, to study home societies with as much detail and rigor as comparative “other” societies. Since then, it has become increasingly obvious that this notion of repatriation was a bit too simple and binary, that many of the most interesting processes of social and cultural formations are translocal, operating across any distinct cultural boundaries. In the 1980s we argued that various forms of multilocal or multisited ethnography would be necessary as a conceptual framework, if not always a practical possibility for individual ethnographers as a fieldwork strategy. What we meant by “multilocal” or “multisited” was more than studying systematic cultural variation—for example, tracing how the same religion is transformed from village to town to urban settings, or assessing cultural change across diasporic migrations, or following the “social biography” of commodities. We had in mind also the difficult process of studying, say, socially mobile new black technocrats in South Africa whose decisions affect working-class people in Soweto, but whose worlds of census, financial, and economic statistical indexes only indirectly map, or model in aggregate approximation, the experiential worlds of the latter. The multisited project here would follow out and make explicit the numerous layers of mediation and incommensurability, making them visible and explicit. Or perhaps better yet, we had in mind the inability to extricate moral action from negative results, as in one’s relation (no matter where one is located in the system) to ecological issues where it is impossible for one to avoid contributing to the problem unless one could improbably sever all ties with the monetary economy. Complicities of all sorts are integral to the positioning of any ethnographic project, offering interesting possibilities for productively increasing the “cartographic” precision of ethnographic analysis, but at the cost of any easy “taking of sides.” The view that we argued for, and that became more obvious through the 1990s, is that fieldwork should be recognized as a complex web of interactions in which anthropologists in collaboration with others, conventionally

conceived as informants and located in a variety of often contrasting settings, track connections amid networks, mutations, influences of cultural forces and changing social pressures. At issue in the 1980s was experimentation with new genres and styles of writing, including those called collaborative or dialogic. What is clear now is how this earlier emphasis presaged the direction of the current remaking of the very norms that have defined fieldwork and research strategies themselves.

3. STRUGGLES OVER THE “CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION”:
THE RISE OF CULTURAL STUDIES AND SCIENCE STUDIES
WARS, AND THEIR EFFECTS ON “ANTHROPOLOGY AS
CULTURAL CRITIQUE”

Anthropology as a discipline has both an experimental edge and a deep conservative hinterland. Some anthropologists have been resistant to the idea of a crisis of representation—of the adequacy of their store of past concepts or of their capacity to create new frames of objective description. They have been so in part from an insistence on in-depth ethnographic knowledges in contrast to what many anthropologists feel are the superficialities of much cultural studies writing about ethnographic topics, inspired precisely by radical critiques of past frames of narration and representation. Nonetheless, the destabilizing of foundational knowledges in many arenas of instrumental practice (the law, the sciences, political economy) continues to proceed apace—this indeed is a central and distinctive ethnographic fact of the contemporary era. Leading practitioners in these arenas are among the first to articulate the sensibility that traditional concepts and methods are increasingly outrun by real-world events. It is these same practitioners who might become colleagues of anthropologists in mapping the emergent new worlds of late modernity, colleagues working with different ultimate goals, but sharing a puzzlement and curiosity about the complex interactions of ongoing social and cultural shifts.

Of particular interest is the use of ethnographic methods by non-anthropologists, be they engineers and architects who need to know more about users, sociologists of science arguing that philosophers of science are empirically naive or wrong, critical legal scholars or public health professionals interested in how those institutions actually work and affect lives, or investigative journalists who explore horizons of knowledge beyond a topical time frame. Some anthropologists are uncomfortable with what they see as too easy appropriations of methods and concepts which they consider their own (for example, the recent appropriation by literary studies of the anthropologists’ notion of “cul-

ture” and even of ethnographic practices). However, it is much more productive for anthropologists, given the current hyperfluidity of information and the consequent reconfiguration of settled disciplines, to absorb the best of these appropriations into new models of work for themselves—that is, to use these appropriations as clues to how they might systematically remake the tradition of ethnography in new circumstances.

More generally, we now find ourselves arguing that it is to the advantage of critical anthropology to recognize the fact that anthropology no longer operates under the ideal of discovering new worlds like explorers of the fifteenth century. Rather we step into a stream of already existing representations produced by journalists, prior anthropologists, historians, creative writers, and of course the subjects of study themselves. And, therefore, a primary framing task of any ethnography is to juxtapose these preexisting representations, attempting to understand their diverse conditions of production, and to incorporate the resulting analysis fully into the strategies which define any contemporary fieldwork project. In a sense, it is this need to incorporate the field of representations as existing social facts into the anthropologists’ practice of ethnography that impels both a multisited terrain for the latter and new norms and recognitions for the relationships so central to the tradition of fieldwork.

Experimentation with genres and modes of writing, we argued in the 1980s, was not only a revival of what the first generation of modern anthropologists had done, but was of value in experimenting with new forms of ethnographic practices as well. New modes of writing raised further issues of epistemology, which touched directly upon ways of thinking about research and how knowledge emerges from it, and of the rhetorical persuasiveness of ethnography as a mode of communication in competing regimes of representation. For example, a cascading of casual knowledge about other cultures purveyed through television and popular media raises the standards of precision to which academic accounts may be held, and even shifts the discursive space and function of anthropology in its own home society somewhat, away from an easily established and identifiable authoritative role as interpreters of cultural differences among peoples. Anthropology sustains this traditional function, but explicitly operating now within the greatly complicated additional critical premise that many others practice variants of this same function, and furthermore, that those others will be found to do so in any contemporary arena that an anthropologist chooses to make an object of ethnographic study.

4. NEW POLITICS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

In the mid-1980s we began by writing about two highly visible challenges to the validity of past ethnographic methods and knowledge: Edward Said’s classifying most anthropology as a form of “orientalism,” and Derek Freeman’s calling into question the accuracy of Margaret Mead’s fieldwork and famous interpretations of Samoans. We used these challenges as foils for the internal critiques of anthropology, arguing that certain new trends then apparent in anthropology were creatively addressing these challenges. The 1980s in fact was a period of florescence for sophisticated interpretive methods as well as inquiries into the nature of interpretation itself across a variety of mutually informing currents ranging from feminism to postcolonial studies, media studies, cultural studies, and science studies. Anthropology’s position among these has been as a partner, borrower, and teacher.

It is worth considering the degree to which anthropology and its ethnographic methods of critical inquiry have been borrowed and adapted by non-anthropologists. The field of science studies is a prime example, not only because anthropologists have been contributing to this field through their own work, but also because historians of science and technology have found anthropological concepts and methods to be illuminating and practical tools for their own work.

Postcolonial studies consists of several streams of thought, some of which continue or modify the kind of work Edward Said helped foster (for example, Gayatri Spivak moves in a more Derridean and feminist direction; Homi Bhabha in a more psychoanalytic direction), others of which are grounded directly in the reanalysis of historical materials from the Indian subcontinent (the Subaltern Studies historians, led by Ranajit Guha). Of interest is the degree to which postcolonial studies have been generalized to many other postcolonial societies (from James Joyce’s Ireland to Africa and parts of Asia), but also the degree to which they are grounded specifically in the Indian subcontinent, and as a result have been found to be of limited relevance in other locations, for example, among Chinese scholars open to perspectives for producing new critiques of their own history and cultures. Like theories of dependency earlier which worked best for Latin America, Africa, and Ottoman Turkey, such theoretical initiatives, of global or world historical import, have both universalizing and local valences. With its ethnographic insistence on in-depth knowledge of localities and their interactions with global processes, anthropology proves to be an

important contributor to such discussions of alternative modernities, relevant to ongoing efforts to reconstruct area studies programs for the next century.

An index of this emergent function of anthropology amid discourses about culture and change is the fact that universities in Africa which once shunned anthropology as a discipline of colonization are now establishing anthropology departments to address not only practical issues of development but also conceptual issues about cultural form and social life. This is equally true for the first-world societies in the increasing potential for anthropologists to play a role in forging public discussions about science and technology, a role that has long been played by the specialty of medical anthropology but which is now expanding to other arenas due to the emergence of risk as a public concern from the examples of communities subject to risks from industrial pollution or nuclear power generation, or of bodies and life itself redefined by the counterpoint of new medical technologies and ongoing environmental effects.

So the fact that ongoing ethnographic research has lost a traditional, prominent function—if not a monopoly—within official knowledge domains of the West of discovering and speaking authoritatively for cultural difference among the world's peoples is not as alarming or as devastating an event for anthropology as long predicted or feared. We can see that even in the shifts from the 1980s to the 1990s, the politics of knowledge that were signaled by the appearance of books like *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, *Writing Culture*, *Debating Muslims*, and the volumes of the *Late Editions* series have actually presented new opportunities for the long-needed renewal of anthropology itself. Some of these opportunities have certainly been exploited over the past decade; others await to be explored. Whether they will or not depends upon the courage, ingenuity, and openness of anthropologists in establishing fresh forms of authority for themselves that certainly seem to be in line with the way other related disciplines and fields of knowledge are being reconfigured. These forms will depend on the articulation of new norms and regulative ideals of ethnographic practice, in which collaboration and dialogue are no longer just theories and sentiments of ethnographic writing nor the revealed essence of what anthropologists have been doing all along, but become the starting points for novel research landscapes, agendas, and relationships stimulated by the equally new objects of study that anthropologists pose for themselves and for the general public.

NEW TOPICS

The core chapters of *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (chapters 3–6) identified strong currents of new work appearing in the early 1980s that seemed to be doing something different—even experimental—within the form of the anthropological monograph. They also tried to extend ethnography into an arena of cultural critique that would be shaped by taking up topics and associated objects of study that were new to anthropology, or had only been addressed as a secondary, less systematic genre of work in the past (for example, studies of modern medicine, business, technology, kinship in the West, urban policy—all those interests that if an anthropologist took them up, she or he would forever be queried, But isn't this sociology? At the time, we used the idea of repatriation to signal this other arena, consistent with our claim that the critique of modernity, the West, and of the home societies of anthropology as a Euro-American discipline had always been a strong implication and tendency of anthropology primarily focused elsewhere but had only been indulged as the secondary or minor-key genre.

By the late 1990s, most of the characteristics of writing and research within the traditional frame of the monograph that we identified as experimental have now become quite mainstream, if not *the* mainstream. These comprise the discussions that we provided in chapters 3 and 4 of the new and intense interest in the person, self, and emotions as organizing foci for ethnography of the peoples among whom fieldwork had traditionally been done, along with the various modalities of reflexivity that came to characterize the rhetoric and strategies of ethnographic writing, and also of the new ways in which ethnographers were contextualizing and constructing subjects of study in terms of issues of history and political economy. The former themes of the early 1980s are now current in the many works organized by questions of identity, and the latter were precursors to the proliferating work on the exploration of the construct of globalization through ethnographic studies of its local and regional expressions.

It is in the area of new topics—involving new frames and new subjects of study that cut across the sorts of divides between the traditional and the modern that previously distinguished the subject matter of anthropology—for which systematic research programs are needed as well as altered models and norms for doing ethnography. By the late 1990s, this possibility, which we tried in the 1980s, perhaps naively, to

work out in terms of a statement of a “repatriated” model of cultural critique based on enhancing existing strategies of defamiliarization, long a distinctive style of argumentation in anthropology, is far from the mainstream. But it does remain, we believe, a key arena of the most important challenges for the discipline. These new topics deal centrally with the questions of modernity, but not in the form of parochial notions of modernity that could be limited to the West or to Euro-Americans. Rather at stake in questions of late or post modernity are the transnational processes that are reshaping the expressions of cultures themselves. Such new topic arenas require the recultivation in very different circumstances of the older frames and ways of producing ethnographic case studies. If we were writing *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* for the first time now, these would be the experimental arenas that we would start with—arenas that are difficult to represent by specific texts or monographs in experimental transition like the ones we focused upon in the early 1980s to express what turned out to be protomainstream tendencies. So here, we very briefly describe three arenas of new work that might realize the project of cultural critique that we tried to outline and exemplify in the latter chapters (5 and 6) of *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*.

I. COMPUTER-MEDIATED-COMMUNICATION AND VISUAL TECHNOLOGIES

These moved from being a topic of anxious philosophical speculation about whether machines can think, and hence whether a new definition of the specificity of human beings was needed, to an exploration-in-use of a multifaceted medium of communication, the problems and possibilities of which unfold on a daily basis. Nor are these only issues for scientists, who developed networked computers and the Internet; bankers, who were among the first heavy users; or others in the high-tech sector where access to nearly instantaneous information anywhere on the globe is a requirement for remaining viable and competitive. They also became important for rapidly increasing numbers of users of e-mail, discussion lists, entertainment, commerce, organizational management, and databanks. Indeed, a growing parallel world in cyberspace creates multiple shadow personae of ourselves about which we have at best partial knowledge, as with our credit ratings (which can affect our access to insurance, jobs, housing, health care, and other goods). Cyberspace concretizes earlier abstract theoretical notions such as “deterritorialization,” challenging the controls of the

nation-state, as well as traditional legal concepts of intellectual property, the viability of local moral standards, boundaries between private and public, and perhaps notions of identity and gender, or even notions of realism and simulation. In this new setting, one can empirically and ethnographically observe how different users interact with machines in multiple contexts. More importantly for the argument of *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, software and hardware developers, users and clients, patent and copyright lawyers, financiers and others are among those who regularly say that the concepts by which they traditionally operated have been overtaken by the world in which they now operate, that new concepts and methods need to be formulated. Such people talking about their own worlds of expertise might be thought of as “organic intellectuals” who together with anthropologists are exploring the emergent new worlds about which they share a mutual curiosity. As we noted, the nature of the fieldwork relationship in such a world is no longer one of someone from one culture learning like a child or apprentice the basic elements of another relatively stable culture from elders or other key informants. Making paralleled cyberspace and ordinary contexts of everyday life the field of ethnographic study requires markedly different norms of fieldwork and writing than we could appreciate in the 1980s.

2. RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIETY AFTER TRAUMA

Events that were politically emergent in the 1980s have proceeded at a pace that is clearly transformative. The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, and the end of apartheid in South Africa through the early 1990s signaled new relationships between the West and other regions of the world. The result has not been, as one well-known political scientist argued, the substitution for a previous struggle between socialist and capitalist visions of modernity of struggles between regional civilizational blocks (Christian—secular democratic, Islamic-religious, Confucian-entrepreneurial) that draw upon longstanding ethnic and religious identity structures to justify aggression vis-à-vis one another. Rather the political changes and the economic incentives of the global economy have generated unprecedented, massive demographic shifts and reorganizations of societies that suffered collective traumas through world war, decolonization struggles, civil wars, and efforts at total command economies. First World (post)industrial societies in Europe and North America are experiencing new waves of immigration that challenge the traditional