

Preface

These essays are the product of intensive discussions held at the School of American Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, during April 1984. Following the school's format for "advanced seminars," conversations continued over a week, and the number of participants was strictly limited to ten. The group discussed papers circulated in advance and explored a wide range of topics relevant to the seminar's focus on "the making of ethnographic texts." Some of the participants had been recent innovators in the writing of ethnography (Paul Rabinow, Vincent Crapanzano, Renato Rosaldo, Michael Fischer); others had been systematically developing critiques of its history, rhetoric, and current prospects (Mary Louise Pratt, Robert Thornton, Stephen Tyler, Talal Asad, George Marcus, James Clifford). All were involved with advanced, ongoing work in textual criticism and cultural theory. Eight of the ten participants had backgrounds in anthropology, one in history, one in literary studies. The group's center of gravity in one field, cultural anthropology, ensured a common language and range of reference, thus allowing the exchanges to take place at an advanced level. But the seminar's scope was interdisciplinary. All the participants had questioned disciplines and genres in their recent work, drawing as needed from historical, literary, anthropological, political, and philosophical sources. More information is contained in the "Notes on Contributors" (pp. 295-96 below), and the volume's common Bibliography gives full citations of relevant works by each individual. Of the ten essays presented at the seminar, nine are included here. (For contingent reasons, Robert Thornton could not revise his in time to meet the deadline.)

By looking critically at one of the principal things ethnographers *do*—that is, write—the seminar sought both to reinterpret cultural anthropology's recent past and to open up its future possibilities. But while pursuing textual and literary analyses, the seminar also considered the limitations of such approaches. Several papers stressed, and the discussions repeatedly returned to, larger contexts of systematic

power inequality, world-systems constraints, and institutional formations that could only partly be accounted for by a focus on textual production. The seminar thus pursued a limited set of emphases self-critically in an attempt to come to terms with the politics and poetics of cultural representation. For a fuller account of the Santa Fe discussions (including topics that have not found their way into this volume), see the report published in *Current Anthropology* 26 (April 1985): 267–71. Some of the more blatant exclusions produced by the organization and focus of the seminar are discussed there, as well as in the Introduction that immediately follows this Preface.

The essays in this volume are all revised versions of the working papers presented at the seminar. Some are now quite different. As editors we have not prodded them toward thematic unity or tried to contrive artificial “conversations” between them. Readers will doubtless find friction as well as agreement. Nor have we tried to impose a uniformity of style on the essays; on the contrary, we have encouraged diversity. The sequential ordering of the volume’s parts does not hold any great significance. There is a general progression from studies with a literary bent toward those that question this emphasis—for example, Rabinow’s critical framing of the entire “textualist” approach. The essays tend, also, to move from retrospective critiques of ethnographic conventions to discussions of current possibilities for experimental work. By this logic, Tyler’s evocation of a “post-modern ethnography” might have been placed at the end. But in fact his essay looks to pre-modern sources for the post-modern and is generally unclassifiable. We did not wish to leave the impression that the volume as a whole points in any utopian or prophetic direction.

As editors, we would particularly like to thank the seminar participants for their cooperation and good humor; the School of American Research (notably its president, Douglas Schwartz, and its director of publications, Jane Kepp) for hospitality and encouragement; the Humanities Division at the University of California, Santa Cruz; and especially Barbara Podratz, with the help of Margi Wald, at Rice University, for assistance in preparing the manuscript. At the University of California Press, Naomi Schneider and James Clark offered editorial help and encouragement. We are grateful, also, to more than a few press and nonpress readers of the manuscript, not only for their specific suggestions, but especially for their general enthusiasm. They confirmed our hope that the book would strike an important, controversial chord in all those fields where ethnography and cultural criticism are becoming important. Many of these readers are fully as qualified to contribute to a volume on this topic as are the ten individuals who gathered at Santa Fe. The questions raised in the pages that fol-

low are being widely debated; we did not invent them. We trust that those who have already contributed to the debate will find themselves appropriately thanked, or at least engaged.

Finally, as an Invocation, we offer the following verses composed in mock despair by our first editorial reader, Jane Kepp, dictionary in hand.

The Hermeneut's Dilemma, or, A Jargon Poem

Twas prelapsarian, and the hermeneut
Sat huddled with his faithful trope,
Sunk in thaumasmus, idly strumming his lute,
Lost in subversion with nary a hope.

Then with heartfelt apoplanesis he cried,
O come, interlocutor, give me your ear!
In my pathopoeia I've slandered and lied;
Now of my grim project this discourse you'll hear.

I've dabbled in vile phenomenological rites,
And joined in a secret synecdoche,
Squandered my received knowledge in bibulous nights,
And embraced epistemological heresy.

O, but now my metonymy is too great to bear!
This ecphonesis has become too deictic to hide!
I've lost all the poesis I once held so dear . . .
And, with typical hypotyposis, he died.

James Clifford
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