Clifford Geertz on Ethnography and Social Construction

GARY A. OLSON

Clifford Geertz says it all in one crisp, succinct sentence: "I'm probably a closet rhetorician, although I'm coming out of the closet a bit." For over three decades, Geertz has been attempting to steer anthropological scholarship away from a rigidly scientific model and toward a humanistic, interpretive, hermeneutic model-apparently with great success. Perhaps it is Geertz's preoccupation with seeing science and scholarship as *rhetorical, as* socially constructed, that makes his work so eminently appealing to many of us in rhetoric and composition. Geertz sees rhetoric as *central* to his own life and work. From his college days as an English major at Antioch College and a copyboy at the *New York Post* to 1988 and his *Works and Lives* (where he "reads" the work of four major anthropologists as if he were a literary critic explicating canonical texts), Geertz has been consumed with questions of language, rhetoric, interpretation.

For years he has pondered exactly what makes a text in anthropology persuasive. As he explains in this interview, it's not simply a matter of presenting a body of facts; it has much more to do with the author's ethos, with the power of his or her presentation. This is why, according to Geertz, a kind of New Critical close reading of texts is essential. All texts in the social sciences are in one way or another "fictions," constructions, and we need to treat them as such, not as inviolable, unassailable statements of scientific truth. Treating research reports and the like as "texts," be they in anthropology or in rhetoric and composition, does not diminish their usefulness or even their "truthfulness"; rather, it opens these texts up to a richer, more significant interpretation that leads to broader understanding of the subject at hand.

Geertz sees rhetoric and composition as similar in many ways to anthropology, especially in the relative youth of both disciplines and in the fact that neither has "a distinct subject matter" or a "real method" of research. Members of both disciplines share the fate of fields that "don't track something in the real world very closely": a great deal of anxiety over disciplinary identity. Speaking of anthropology and, by extension, of composition, Geertz says, "There's a sense that somehow we don't have an identity, that somehow the field doesn't hold together internally." But to Geertz, an atmosphere of pluralism, diversity, debate, and conflict is productive because it keeps a discipline intellectually vital: "If you want that certainty, and if wobbling around in the water bothers you, then you should go into chemistry, not anthropology-and, I have a feeling, not into rhetoric and composition either."

Understandably, then, Geertz recommends the same modes of inquiry for composition that he does for anthropology. While he's unwilling to rule out any research modes, even experimentation, he gravitates toward interpretive modes, such as ethnography, that will lend insight into the workings of human activities. Yet he rails against notions of ethnographic research that assume that researchers must be objective, detached, scientifically uninvolved in the community under investigation. To represent ethnography "as though it were a laboratory study of some sort" is, according to Geertz, "almost in a kind of positivist *sense false."* Instead, he continues to champion a studied self-reflexivity, or what Renato Rosaldo has called the "positioned observer"-a recognition that "you *are* somebody: you come out of a certain class; you come out of a certain place; you go into a certain country; you then go home; you do *all* of these things." As if to underscore the importance of this recognition, Geertz is preparing a new book *After the Fact,* in which he is surveying the work of his long career in an attempt to "reconceptualize" his life's work in terms of research conducted not by some impersonal, objective "scientist," but "by human hands-that is, *mine."*

Geertz is particularly frustrated with attempts to maintain a sharp distinction between the humanities and the sciences. Not only is such an artificial distinction "false." but it is used to make value judgments between "what is legitimately rigorous and objective and what is soft and stupid." Geertz believes we should "deconstruct this dichotomy and be done with it," especially since this very distinction has often

A I've spent a lot of time in the field-almost a dozen years in Southeast Asia and North Africa-where I don't do any writing at all. I can't write in the field. I write a lot of field notes, but I can't compose anything. I once started to write a book review in the field, but that didn't work. I just can't do it. I think there's a much greater separation in anthropology, especially among field anthropologists, than in a lot of social sciences between the research and the writing-at least as I do it. You do two or two-and-a-half years in Java in which all you do is live with the people, write down everything, and try to figure out what the hell is going on; then you come back and write-out of the notes, out of your memories, and out of whatever is going on in the field. So, for me at least, it's a fairly divided life. I don't write in the field; I write after I return. Mostly, *here* I write and *there* research.

As far as *how* I write, there's no single answer. I hesitate to confess this in public because I think it's a very bad way to do things, but I'll do it anyway: I don't write drafts. I write from the beginning to the end, and when it's finished it's done. And I write very slowly. That may seem odd, because I've written a lot, but I've often been in situations like this one here in Princeton where I've had a lot of time to write. I never leave a sentence or a paragraph until I'm satisfied with it; and except for a few touch-ups at the end, I write essentially one draft. Once in a while people ask me for early drafts, but these drafts just don't exist. So I just go from line one to line X-even in a book. I have an outline, especially if it's a book, but I hardly pay attention to it. I just build it up in a sort of craft-like way of going through it carefully, and when it's done it's done. The process is very slow. I would not advise that other people write this way. I know people who can write a first draft and not care whether it's idiotic. They'll write "blah, blah, blah," and put zeros to hold space for something to be filled in later. Good writers do this. I wish I could too, but for reasons that are probably deeply psychological, it's impossible. I usually write about a paragraph a day, but at least it's essentially finished when it's done. And all of this is not due just to the computer, because I've only used the computer for a year or so. I write by hand; even now I write by hand. I just type text in to the computer so I can print it out and read it.

Q. In discussing what constitutes persuasive discourse in anthropology, you've observed that the persuasiveness of a text does not rest on the accretion of facts and details but on "the ability of the anthropologist [or any writers] to get us to take what they say seriously"-that is, on what rhetoricians call the writer's ethos. Exactly what factors do you think make discourse particularly persuasive? What is it about a given text that makes us take the author and the text seriously?

A. In *Works and Lives* that's a question I *asked* rather than tried to give a definitive answer to. So my first response is that I don't know. If you look in anthropology, the diversity of kinds of texts that have been persuasive and have had purchase in the field militates against any simple conclusion. *In Works and Lives, I* really wasn't trying to establish a canon; rather, I was trying to say, "This seems to be the canon; why do we believe Evans Pritchard and Levi-Strauss and Malinowski and Benedict and some others?" I think the answer to your question is itself empirical, and I think it's empirical in a discipline that is yet to come-that is, rhetorical analysis in anthropology. We need to think more about the nature of rhetoric in anthropology, and that's what I tried to begin. There isn't a body of knowledge and thought to fall back on in this regard.

Q. Is it that we just know persuasive writing, good rhetoric, when we see it?

A I think people *are* making judgments, but I don't think they know what basis they're making them on. In recent years, there's been more and more writing about anthropological writing, but still there's not that much. You could name a half dozen books and another dozen articles and pretty well exhaust the stuff that's worth reading. It's not a vast field. I'm sometimes amused by people who are furious about *Works and Lives* because they think it's an abandonment of the field to literature. I respond, "It's the only book like this I ever wrote and probably the only one like it that I ever will write. 'Me field is not really dissolving into this; most anthropologists are doing straightforward ethnography, and should do it." So in that book I tried to examine how at least these four people managed to be persuasive, and it turned out to be a little bit different each time. Even the factuality problem is not that simple. It certainly is true that just the assembly off acts is not going to make a text persuasive; if it were, there would be a lot of very dull books that would be a lot more famous than they are. Somehow, the sense of circumstantiality and

been made regarding his own work, with critics charging that he is "not a reasonable scientist." Such critics,
Geertz counters, are succumbing to a simplistic two-cultures notion that fails to account for the complexity of the intellectual universe.

It will be of little surprise that Geertz considers himself a social constructionist, that he believes "meaning is socially, historically, and rhetorically constructed." He stops short, however, of calling himself a poststructuralist, thinking of himself instead as a "late modernist under pressure." Yet Geertz does find poststructuralist perspectives useful, and he has always opposed the structuralists for their essentialism and hyper rationalism. And though he agrees with the critiques of the New Critics, he has a special affinity for the kind of close textual analysis they championed.

Clearly, what makes Geertz especially influential in composition scholarship is that throughout his career he has wrestled with the very same issues that we ourselves have: the nature of interpretation, the role of rhetoric, the nature of persuasiveness, the social construction of meaning, the relative value of various modes of inquiry, the role of the researcher in ethnographic research. In many ways Geertz is, as he rather proudly admits, a rhetorician; and in many ways his life's work has been a sustained and impassioned study of rhetoric, its uses and abuses. Clifford Geertz may very well think of himself as a "novelist manqué," but to many of us in rhetoric and composition he is a rhetorician *accompli*.

Q. It's often been noted that your prose, even in your more technical anthropological writings, is very readable-even, at times, *entertaining, in* the best sense of that word. In your recent book, *Works and Lives,* you examine the notion that ethnography itself is "a kind of writing, putting things on paper." In what ways do you think *of yourself* as a writer?
A. In all kinds of ways. I started out to *be* one; that's the first answer. I wanted to be a novelist and a newspaper man. As an undergraduate, I had the notion-maybe an antiquated one by now-that one could work on a newspaper and written novels in the evening. I went to Antioch College and majored in English, at least in the beginning, with the intention of doing something like that. In high school I had edited a newspaper and a literary magazine-the usual sort of thing. So I wanted to be a novelist. I even wrote a novel (though I didn't publish it) and some short stories. Antioch had a co-op program so I went to work for the *New York Post* as a copyboy when I decided I didn't want to be a newspaper man; it was fun, but it wasn't practical. After a while I shifted into philosophy as a major, but I never had any undergraduate training at all in anthropology and, indeed, very little social science outside of economics. I had a lot of economics but nothing else. Anthropology wasn't even taught at Antioch then, although it is now. And except for a political science course or two and lots of economics, I didn't have any social sciences. So I was in literature for at least half the time I was there, the first couple of years, and then I shifted to philosophy, partly because of the influence of a terrific teacher and partly because in a small college you can run out of courses. 'Men I got interested in the same sort of thing I'm interested in now: values, ideas, and so on. Finally, one of my professors said, "Why don't you think about anthropology?" That was the first time I had thought seriously about being an anthropologist, and then I began to think about it and I went to Harvard and so on.
So I came in preformed as a writer and put writing aside for awhile because I had to learn what anthropology was all about and do research and get a kind of union card as a working anthropologist. But, yes, I really am a novelist manqué. (Some of my enemies would say I'm still a novelists fiction writer anyway.) So it's not accidental; I've always had that bent, I gum, and I still do. I think of myself as a writer who happens to be doing his writing as an anthropologist. I've often been accused of making anthropology just into literature, but I don't believe I'm doing that. Anthropology is also field research and so on, but writing is central to it.

Q. Would you describe your writing process? For example, do you spend substantial time gathering information and synthesizing it before you draft? Do you prepare an outline, revise extensively, use a computer?

of power in reserve (if an anecdote or an example doesn't sound strained but sounds like you've got fifty others and this is the best one you chose) are factors that are rhetorically important. I guess I want to dodge the issue, mostly because I just don't know the answer.

What I want to see get started is a lot more reflection about these matters. Book reviews in *The American Anthropologist* hardly ever concern themselves with rhetoric. The most you ever hear is, "It's well written," or "It's lousily written," or "It's obscure," but no real sense of how the book is put together. You almost never get anything about how composition occurs, how the text is constructed, how the argument is developed, and why it is or isn't persuasive. There's very little about "writing" in that sense. So we're operating in the dark. Yet at the same time, and this is what started me with the kinds Of concerns addressed in *Works and Lives,* there's a fair consensus in the field about what the canonical books are. We aren't in that much of a debate about them. We may like or not like what A or B says, but nobody is going to say that Levi-Strauss is not an important anthropologist or that Evans-Pritchard or Malinowski wasn't influential. Most people would say that these are significant people. But we just don't 'now why their works are persuasive.

Q. So you'd like to see more self-reflection on the part of anthropologists, especially about how anthropological texts are constructed.

A. Yes, that's the point of "literary criticism" or "rhetorical analysis" in anthropology-not to replace research, but to find out how it is that we are persuasive. It is odd in anthropology, because if you read a book by me on Java or some other place, you either take it or leave it. You don't know anything about the place. You could read another couple of books and probably get more confused, but there's no way of matching it to "reality." *(If* the correspondence theory of truth ever does work, it doesn't work here.) If I write about the Balinese cockfight, who knows what's what? A few readers might be able to make *some* comparisons, but the average reader is just left with the text and what I'm saying about the subject. So why the cockfight piece has been popular, why that took hold, is interesting to me. Why certain papers, certain articles, certain pieces, certain books, certain writers have a kind of persuasiveness, why we

believe them, is curious. Again, we don't know anything about the Nuer, the people Evans-Pritchard wrote about. I've never seen a Nuer, and I never will probably, and ninety percent of the students won't. Maybe a few will, but even they will go at a different time from the original investigator-E-P. If there's ever a place where you *can't* argue that you can put the facts over here and the text over there and see if they fit, it is surely in anthropology. Also, a lot of books that have been influential don't meet the usual stereotypes of why we believe them. They're not very factual. I gave an example of Leach's *Highland Burma* book, which I do think is very good, but he doesn't have much in the way of facts in it. And there are lots of others. Why do we believe Leach, or at least more so than we do other people? It isn't really theory, because anthropological theory is not that impressive, in my view. I don't think we know, and I think the way to know is what I at least was trying to do and what some other people are trying to do: to look at the texts as a close reader. I was trained in the fifties, so I was trained as a New Critic. Close reading is important to me. Though I agree with many of the critiques of the New Critics, I often remember what literature was like before the New Critics, when people stood up and talked about Shelley's "soul" and such things. I still have a fair amount of nostalgia for New Critical discipline and for close reading, and there hasn't been that in anthropology. It's beginning a bit, but it's still minuscule. So, close reading is what I want to happen, and if it happens enough, perhaps in twenty years I could answer your question-though, of course, I won't be around then. At the moment I can't answer it because I don't think we have a body of knowledge yet.

Q. Certainly, a feasible kind of project for someone in rhetoric and composition would be to look at various anthropological texts and apply a kind of rhetorical analysis to in.

A. That's the kind of thing I wanted to do. I wanted to get other people interested in doing this because, like practitioner history, practitioner criticism isn't always the best sort of thing. Anthropologists have certain commitments to what they're doing and they have certain distortions. I would hope that one of

the results of *Works and Lives*, whether anybody likes the readings given there or not, is that those outside the field would be stimulated to look at anthropology as textual construction.

Q. In discussing textual construction, you've drawn on the work of Foucault and especially Barthes to distinguish between an "author" (and a "work") and a "writer" (and a "text"). What crucial distinctions do *you* see between the two concepts?

A The Barthes piece actually impresses me more than Foucault's. Barthes' distinction, and I think it means something to me, is that for him, if I remember correctly, a writer is someone who wants to convey information. that is, language or writing is a code: I want to tell you how many days a week the Balinese have rituals, and I'm just trying to convey in formation. The other image is that it's a theater of language; that is, you're trying to convey a sense of what things are like, and you want to use language itself as a mode of construction. Again, this is what's interesting about anthropology in this regard: anthropologists can't really opt for either of these. Obviously, I can't give up telling you how many Balinese there are and what they do and getting it right. On the other hand, I do want to convey something of the inner significance of Balinese culture, and that demands a theater-of-language kind of authorship. There, all kinds of other things come into play because voice and signature and things like that really play a role that they perhaps don't to the same extent in communicative writing. 'Mat is the axis upon which I wanted to try to see what an author in anthropology is. I think the question of what the relationship between author and text is has never really been raised before in anthropology.

Q. Perhaps this is the distinction you were searching for before about what really makes a text persuasive. Of course, it's still a vague distinction.

A. And it won't be persuasive if the writer's side is missing either. There are lots of "literary" books (in the bad sense) in anthropology that nobody believes because readers just don't feel the writer **really** understands what the X indians or the Y natives are all about, and they feel, therefore, that the text **is in** the bad sense a "fiction." On the other hand, it *has to be* something of a fiction: it has to be *made;* **it has** to be *constructed. That's* the mule image that I gave. We have to be both of those things. That's **what** interests me about the Barthes distinction; he was concerned at least somewhat with this problem. **[In** *Works and Lives,* Geertz speaks of "the North African mule who talks always of his mother's brother, **the** horse, but never of his father, the donkey" as an example of how we suppress parts of our heritage **"in** favor of others supposedly more reputable."]

Q. In the preface to *Works and Lives, you* say that the work of Kenneth Burke was that **book's** "governing inspiration at almost every point," and often in the past you've cited his work. In what **ways** has Burke's scholarship been an influence on yours?

A. Burke is important to me. I first encountered his work as an undergraduate in literature. There are **lots** of things about Burke that I like. I guess the main thing is the notion of symbolic action-the notion **that** writing is a form of action and that action is a form of writing or a form of symbolic behavior; that **you** can take (and I've done this; the Balinese cockfight pie= is an example) a ritual or a repetitive event **as a** text, even take the state as a text, to "read" action in symbolical terms as Burke was one of the first **to do** (at least that I ever ran into); that writing, on the other hand, is itself a form of action, that it **has a** pragmatical/practice dimension and that's what it's about. Burke healed the division between what **goes** on in the "real" world (activity) and what goes on in the "unreal" world (that is, writing about it) **without** fusing them. There's a marvelous line of his that often gets quoted. "Having children by marriage **is not** the same as writing a poem about having children by marriage." You can see that both having **children** by marriage and writing a poem about having children by marriage are forms of action and forms **of** symbolic action. *That's* what I get out of it, and the whole emphasis is on rhetoric. Two people **have** been really liberating in my mind for what I was doing; one is Wittgenstein and the other is Burke. **As a** very young man in college, I read Burke-before he was a secular saint, before everyone was **reading** him. Even then I thought this is what literary criticism ought to be.

Q. In "Ideology as a Cultural System," you make a case for "the study of symbolic action" (in Burke's sense) as an important interpretive, analytical tool of sociologists, especially those examining ideology; and you show how ideology draws on metaphor and other tropes to socially construct a complex web of interrelated meanings. In the decades since you wrote that essay, there has been, of course, intense interest in tropology, especially among poststructuralists. Do recent discussions of tropology shed new light on the project that you were articulating back then?
A. Sure. I think what is true is that what seemed then a rather odd thing to say now seems a rather banal thing to say. That's happened. People have begun to do more of this, even in anthropology-I'm not just talking about literature. Certainly, the whole notion of tropology has become more and more important, but what I see is that when I wrote "Ideology as a Cultural System," as far as anthropology or social science in general was concerned, even the stuff that did exist, like Burke and the beginnings of what later became deconstruction, had no effect. So I don't see myself as being ahead of the world in doing this but as mediating to anthropology or the social sciences. I'm not even alone in that, but if I was ahead of the game at all, it was in saying that we ought to look this way. Later on I wrote specifically about looking toward literature and these kinds of matters, saying that we should stop looking at levers and hydraulics and such things and start thinking in that symbolical way. What has come along, of course, is hermeneutics, which has enriched this stuff immensely because it encouraged us to study it. I just called for it and others have begun to organize the discussion of it. I find some of this scholarship useful, even though I have some reservations about far-out versions of it.

Q. So do you see yourself as a poststructuralist?
A. No, I don't. I'm certainly not a structuralist, as I early on was hostile to structuralism; it's a kind of hyper rationalism that I oppose.

Q. But you don't see yourself as involved in the same project as the poststructuralists?
A. I don't see myself as a poststructuralist. Someone recently wrote about me, saying I was a late modernist *in extremes,* which may not be too far off. Maybe *in extremes* is a little extreme, but I'm certainly a late modernist under pressure. I still regard myself as that. I'm not sure what I mean by all this, except that I'm unwilling to let signifiers float entirely freely, and I'm unwilling to have a scrapbook approach to the composition of texts, and so on. So while I've learned an enormous amount from the poststructuralists, I'm not willing to be categorized as one.

Q. You've said, "Human thought is consummately social: social in its origins, social in its functions, social in its form, social in its applications." Such comments and your work in general have led some compositionists to call you a leading "social constructionist." Do you consider yourself a social constructionist?
A. Yes, that one I'll buy. In fact, I'm writing a review right now of three books on feminism and science, and it's about social constructionism. Yes, I would say I'm a social constructionist, whatever that means. Like most people I hate to adopt labels, but the whole business about the social construction of meaning seems to me to be right. Your question about what's happened since I wrote "Ideology"-all that has happened. Again, I think it was there in Burke and in all kinds of things, but it has been thematized, analyzed, brought forward; and I do think that meaning is socially, historically, and rhetorically constructed. If you want to call me anything, call me that. I don't think there is a field or a movement called social constructionism that *I belong* to, but I'm sympathetic to that notion.

Q. The concept of social construction is quite important in rhetoric and composition right now since language is, of course, central to anything that's being socially constructed.
A. That's what I wanted to see in *Works and Lives. I* wanted to see how anthropologists socially constructed people, which doesn't mean that they're all wrong, or they' re all made up - that's part of a very advanced sort of poststructuralism I don't want to buy. I'm not willing to say they just made it up. I just gave some lectures, the Harvard-Jerusalem Lectures, that will be compiled in a book called *After the Fact*, and it's essentially an argument for a social constructionist view of anthropology-in fact, explicitly

so. It's sort of a looking back at my work over forty years and figuring out how I constructed the images of Morocco and Bali-how I constructed them and what foundations I had for doing so. So I'm trying to do that. (I guess it's an attempt at self-historicizing or something of that sort.) So yes, I don't mind the term social constmctionist, except that I don't like labels in general.

Q. In *Local Knowledge* you discuss Richard Rorty's concept of *normal* and *abnormal* discourse, and you suggest that the terms *standard and nonstandard* discourse would be more appropriate. You explain that your "preference for standard/nonstandard stems from a dislike of the pathology overtones of normal/abnormal (itself a revision of Kuhn's rather too political-sounding normal/revolutionary) and from a dislike of pure types, dichotomous dualisms, and absolute contrasts." Your sense of the concept of nonstandard discourse seems more useful than Rorty's grander notion of abnormal discourse (in JAC he said abnormal discourse is a "gift of God") and seems more in line with how compositionists use it. Would you elaborate on your understanding of standard and nonstandard discourse?
A. The main reason I didn't like the normal/abnormal business is that both in my field and in general it has all the overtones of abnormal as *sick. I* don't like the medical model applied in general, so I wanted to get away from that. It's amusing that Richard, who is a diehard atheist, is talking about "gifts of God." Nonstandard discourse is something that reaches beyond the conventionalities of ongoing discourse, and in anthropology you almost always have to do that. We always have two problems when we write about others- the Javanese, for example. One is making them sound like Martians, like they're just wired so differently that we can't understand them; the other is making them sound just like ourselves. If you use standard discourse, you do end up making them sound just like ourselves-or like Martians-because those are the only alternatives. So you need to develop some sort of mode of description or argument that mediates between the two extremes; and this mode is nonstandard. Generally, I'm not wildly experimental, but my own writings in anthropology are certainly nonstandard. They're not wild or off the edge of the map or anything, but they aren't the way most anthropologists write. And certainly when I started they weren't. There are more people doing it now.

Q. Your writings are nonstandard because they're not part of the conventional discourse of the discipline?
A. Yes, there's been mimicry of the sciences in an attempt to sort of be fashioned after them-you write an introduction, then the findings, then the conclusions. I've written-not only me but more and more other people have written-in a much more off-the-wall sort of way in an attempt, among other things, to cope with that end in dilemma of not making the Balinese or the Moroccans or the Javanese sound like they live on the moon but also not making them sound like they live next door. 'Mey don't do either of those things. To cope with that dilemma I think some sort of experiments in prose are necessary, some sort of departure from received canons of description.

Q. So you don't see abnormal discourse as something that happens only once every few decades or so with some sort of major find, but as something that happens all the time with certain people in certain circumstances.
A. More so. One thing about terms like *standard and nonstandard* is they come in degrees. There are people who write much less standard discourse than I do. Some of the people to the intellectual left feel that I'm still writing linear prose, which they see as a big mistake. (I should be putting things in all capital letters and that kind of thing.) I don't think necessarily that nonstandard prose is always better than standard prose or standard writing. I just think that in anthropology and the social sciences the received canons are limiting. So yes, I do think it's something that goes on all the time, and it goes on in degrees. Every once in a while, somebody really revolutionizes the way things are done; most of the time, they inch up on it and after a while you notice that it's really done in quite a different way than it was before. It's always amusing to look at how something early in the twentieth century was written in anthropology and how it's written now. You can see that somehow there's been an enormous shift in how it's done, but yet you can't put your finger on someone who actually did this-there's no Joyce, for example. But that can happen, too. One of the small problems with Tom Kuhn's work (which I like very

much; Tom's a good friend of mine) is that because he dealt with physics and with particular events in physics, he did tend to have a normal/abnormal radical distinction. I don't think that model fits so well in biology, for example. But shifts can be more gradual, and the concept of standard/nonstandard has to be relativized that way.

Q. In "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind," you discuss some of the difficulties in studying the concept of mind. Recently in JAC Noam Chomsky complained of a "pernicious epistemological dualism," in that "questions of mind are just studied differently than questions of body." Do you agree that in studying the mind scholars have tended to ignore the role of biology and what Chomsky calls "innate structures"?

A I agree with Chomsky in almost nothing. That's too strong-he's made major contributions in studies in syntax and so On, but in Philosophy and in Philosophy of mind I certainly don't agree with him, for the same] reasons I don't agree with Levi-Strauss. They share the same kind of hyperrationalism that I don't. When it comes to innate structures and so on, I'm very skeptical.

Q. He apparently feels quite frustrated with this Movement away from biology toward social forces. Fie said, "Look, if you're going to study puberty, you don't study peer pressure. When I chuckled, he said, "You're laughing. Why do people laugh nowadays when I say that? You would automatically go, for something like puberty, to biology. So why don't you do the same for the study of the mind?"

A I don't disagree with the notion that we need to consider the body as well as the brain. That's what I argued for years ago in the "Evolution of Mind" article, and I still argue for that. I recently gave a talk in which I said that I think advances in neurology are going to make an enormous difference in the way we think about mind. So there Chomsky and I don't disagree. Where he and I would disagree is that he has an intensely nativist view of the structure of the brain and mind which I think wildly over simple. Also, he's an odd man to be making that point, because he doesn't study the brain; he studies computers and language. He's been criticized by a lot of people on the grounds that if you really want to study the brain, you need to study the brain and not project your theories into it in a deductive way, which is what I think Chomsky does.

I think what's known about neurology is still scattered and uncertain, but, yes, I think we need to know about the body. As you say, I've written about it, though I haven't written about it recently. Certainly, I'm not a dualist in that sense. I think genuine investigations into the structure of the brain or the structure of the nervous system should help us understand thought. What I am opposed to is two ways of approaching the subject. One is Chomsky's kind of immatism, where you postulates central processing mechanism-the problems with that are enormous. The whole central processing view of psychology, I think, is quite unworkable. That' s one way to do it. The other way is sociobiology, which is highly adaptationist. And

when you protest, as I have on a number of occasions, against one or both of these with some vigor, the countercharge is that you don't care about the body or biology, which is false. It's just that I think that neither neoDarwinism nor neo-rationalism is the way to go.

Q. So obviously you also wouldn't agree with the evolutionary epistemologists, such as Karl Popper? A. No, I wouldn't.

Q. Do you think they're having much influence?

A Well, Chomsky, of course, at one time did. He isn't as influential as he was, at least in social psychology and certainly in anthropology. Sociobiology is a trickier business. Popper-no. I Don't think he's had much influence in America.

Q. You mentioned that you're writing a review of some books on feminism and science. Do you believe that Western culture in general and U.S. society in particular have made substantial progress toward gender equity?

A. I think there have been some advances, but what I think has happened in a rather short period (When was Betty Friedan's book published? One always tends to date it from that) is an enormous development of thought and self-reflection about gender, and not only among feminists (though particularly among them) but among everybody. Everyone, I think, is much more conscious of these matters than they were, and that's certainly an advance. And gender consciousness has become involved in almost every intellectual field: history, literature, science, anthropology. So in that sense, I think there's been an extraordinary advance. I suppose there's also been some progress in the marketplace because there are many more women working; so there has been *some* correction, I suppose, of gross inequality-but there are also many gross inequalities still left. What *is* different-I guess because I'm an anthropologist I think about culture-is that the culture has changed. I do think the attempt to raise consciousness has in that sense succeeded. People are very aware of gender concerns now. There is much greater legitimacy of investigations from the point of view of gender concerns in everything, again, from literature to science. Also, there has been more consciousness about sexual harassment in the workplace. But whether or not things have gotten radically better *there is* not something I'm really able to say.

Q. So it's both yes and no: our consciousness has been raised somewhat, but we still have quite a way to go.
A. Well, again, I live in a university environment and *there* it's changed. There are many, many more women present. That's not to say that equity has occurred, just that it has compared to what it was. When I first came here twenty years ago, there was only one woman professor at Princeton. Now there are a lot, there's a critical mass. The women are there and they're influential. Whether it's like that in the banking industry, I honestly don't know.

Q. Chomsky said that "for cultural reasons, the move away from patriarchy is a step upwards. It's a step toward understanding our true nature." Do you agree that the elimination of sexism is an "evolutionary" step, and that there's a "true" human nature that we *can* approach?
A. I certainly think that it's an advance; it's a moral advance of major proportions that needs to be sustained. I would not myself formulate it in terms of "human nature" or evolution toward some intrinsic essence of man-generic man. I just don't think that way. But I don't have any disagreement with the notion that it's a moral advance. I can't briefly say why, but it wouldn't have to do with the fact that we're getting closer to our nature. My arguments would all be from arguments of moral justice and equity and things of that sort, not from somehow approaching some preexistent inner essence that we are evolving toward. That sort of language always bothers me because everybody has his or her own notion of what that essence might be. You've got people peddling this stuff on every street corner (and I'm not speaking of Chomsky here). So I certainly don't disagree with the ethos of the statement, but I wouldn't put it the way Chomsky did; that's not the way I would argue for it.

Q. Has feminism had an effect in anthropology itself? Has feminist inquiry, for example, changed how you do things or how anthropologists do things? A. Yes, very much so. It's had an enormous influence. Anthropology in general has always been fairly hospitable to female scholars, and even to feminist scholars. There's always been a number of women who have been really quite influential in the field--not only Mead and so on. They weren't always feminists in the modern sense of the word, but some of them were. There have been enormous advances in the number of women who are teaching-though, again, the process is far from complete. Has feminism made us all more conscious? Yes, I think it has. Feminist critiques of anthropological masculine bias and so on have been quite important, and they certainly have increased my sensitivity to that kind of issue. I think feminism has had a major impact on anthropology. We were talking before about making discourse less scientistical; feminism has been something of an assistance in all that; some of the support for that has come from feminism.

Q. Because rhetoric and composition is a highly interdisciplinary field, drawing on work in anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and so on, the whole range of modes of scholarly inquiry-from experiment to ethnography to theoretical speculation-is available to us. Currently,

compositionists are engaged in an important debate over which modes of inquiry are most appropriate for the making of knowledge in our field. Do you feel that it would be advantageous for a discipline like composition to use a multiplicity of modes of inquiry, or should it rely primarily on one or two modes that seem especially productive?

A. It's hard to give advice to a discipline I have so little knowledge of, but I'm an inveterate fox and not a hedgehog, so I always think you should try everything. My intuition would be yes, try multiple approaches to these matters. I'm a little at a loss because I don't quite know what they are and what the problems are and what ones, if you were a hedgehog, you would cling to.

Q. Well, let me give you an example. Some think that since our roots are in the humanities, we really ought to work with our strengths and do theoretical, speculative kinds of scholarship. But we do have a very strong science orientation in the discipline, and so others argue that we should conduct empirical research, even experiments with control and experimental groups and randomized selection of student writers, and so on. Then there are all the different modes in between, many drawn from the social sciences, including, and especially, ethnography, which has emerged as one of our major modes of inquiry. I'm not trying to get you to take sides *in our* debate; I'm just curious about what your intuition tells you about these matters.

A. It's hard for me to believe that a field like rhetoric and composition has arrived at such a state of paradigm consolidation that it would know which way to go with some certainty. One has to be somewhat critical and not just do any silly thing, but I would think, especially since it seems to be a discipline still very much in the process of formation, that it would be unwise to have premature closure on anything-certainly not ethnography, or even experimental research. I myself think that experimental research would probably not be of much use, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. It just means that if it were me, I would find that a step in the wrong direction.

I also think that we ought to break down these kinds of large-scale distinctions between the humanities and social sciences, not in the sense of absolutely having no differences, but we at least ought to make them permeable. Certainly, there is a difference between doing literary criticism and doing chemistry. I'm not trying to say it's all together in one great big mishmash, but the notion that these fields don't have anything to say to each other or offer to each other strikes me as odd. For a field that looks to be somewhat interstitial like rhetoric and composition (it seems somewhat like anthropology: a bit of a mule, a bit of everything), it would seem very unwise to hedgehog and to say you're not going to do certain things. At the same time (I guess I'm getting into the "on the one hand and on the other hand" about this) if you have some things that are vital, you need to support them. As I say, it's a field I don't know much about.

Q. One reason I ask this question is that some people-for example, many of my graduate students and also well-known scholars in the field-feel somewhat in secure when they see all the bickering-some arguing we need hard "fact," others urging us to go with our strengths, to stay with theory because "experiments aren't going to tell us anything worth knowing." As a result, many in the field often become dismayed over this seeming chaos.

A. That resonates. Anthropology is like that. Some professors and especially younger anthropologists have the notion that anthropology is *too* diverse. The number of things done under the name of anthropology is just infinite; you can do anything and call it anthropology. (That's perhaps a little extreme.) In my field I have always argued for the pluralistic approach to things rather than solidification into some particular line (even my own line) of work. But there is a great deal of anxiety. I think it is true that scholars, both young and old, are overly anxious about pluralism, diversity, conflict-younger ones especially because when they're first getting into a field they want to know what it is they're supposed to know, but older ones, too, because they somehow yearn for a lost paradise when everyone knew what they were doing. I think that's the nature of things, and I don't think things are moving toward an omega point; I think they're moving toward more diversity anyway. So being an inveterate pluralist (of course, I don't know anything about rhetoric and composition), my instincts are always against people who want to fasten some sort of hegemony onto things. I myself don't feel that an

atmosphere of debate and total disagreement and argument is such a bad thing. I think it's a good thing; it makes for a vital and alive field. There may be a similarity between rhetoric and composition and anthropology. L know this is true for anthropology, and I ask you whether this is true for rhetoric and composition: because anthropology never has had a distinct subject matter (of course, primitives and so on, but that doesn't really give you much to go on) and because it doesn't have a real method, there's a great deal of anxiety over what it is. People keep asking how anthropology is different from sociology, and everybody gets nervous about that. There's a sense that somehow we don't have an identity, that somehow the field doesn't hold together internally. That leads to the rise of ideology as a way of unifying it. One of my former teachers said anthropology is a poaching license; it's just, everything and anything. People for whom that produces anxiety want to close it up, and I think it's often true of fields that don't track something in the real world very closely or that have a long theoretical tradition. I think that if you don't like that kind of anxiety, you should go into organic chemistry. I don't want to pick on chemists. I'm sure there are lots of disputes in organic chemistry, and real fights, but at least you know what organic chemistry is. You know who the old organic chemists are, and you know who the new ones are; you know what the traditions are, and you know what the methods are. If you want that certainty, and if wobbling around in the water bothers you, then you should go into chemistry, not anthropology-and, I have a feeling, not into rhetoric and composition either. Q. I've never thought of these similarities between anthropology and rhetoric and composition, but I think you're right. A colleague of mine just read *Works and Lives* and said to me, "I must confess that I'm really a closet anthropologist. I'd much rather be doing what Geertz is doing in this book."

A. Well, I'm probably a closet rhetorician, although I'm coming out of the closet a bit.

Q. The work of Shirley Brice Heath has served as a model for many compositionists interested in conducting ethnographic research. Are you familiar with her work?
A. Yes, but not as well as I should be. I *read Ways with Words,* and it's extraordinarily good. I think what she's doing is very very good, very very interesting.

Q. Do you think this is the kind of research compositionists should pursue? A. Yes, I would like to see more of that sort of thing being done. I certainly
would not like to see it being closed off by people who think you should have control groups and so on. They can do that type of research, too; but yes, I do think that this is the kind of research that should go on.
Q. For example, compositionists might (and do) study how people who are growing up in ghettos are writing in their own environments, or they might study writers in corporate environments, and so on-writers in their own environments.
A. I certainly would like to see somebody do that, whether it's rhetoric and compositionists or not, but somebody ought to be doing it. (Of course, Shirley Brice Heath is an anthropologist.) Indeed, I call for something like that in a paper called "The Way We Think Now," which is an attempt to say we should have an ethnography of the disciplines and begin to think about that sort of thing. It addresses some of the issues we talked about in relation to Chomsky: about different notions of how to study mind and how to study intelligence. Its main argument is that we need to get some understanding of representations and of the ways texts are put together and of the ways thought patterns go in the disciplines. I was brought to the subject by being here at Princeton, because after a while I realized that the way in which mathematicians and physicists and historians talk is quite different, and what a physicist means by physical intuition and what a mathematician means by beauty or elegance are things worth thinking about. I'm interested in trying to think about those things in a cultural anthropological way. You also find in talking to mathematicians and physicists that they're really conscious of writing differences; even though they would all claim that truth is truth and writing doesn't really matter, they also are aware of the fact that there are different styles and that rhetoric is important.

Q. You write that the "establishment of an authorial presence within a text has haunted ethnography from very early on.... Finding somewhere to stand in a text that is supposed to be at one and the same time an intimate view and a cool assessment is almost as much of a challenge as gaining the view and making the assessment in the first place." Since ethnography is emerging as probably our key scholarly mode of inquiry, what steps can an ethnographer take to achieve this balance between being in the text and being perceived by readers (given the typical expectations of readers of research) as sufficiently detached so as to have authorial credibility?

A. Actually, most of that kind of problem has centered on the question we usually refer to as "reflexivity." In *Works and Lives I* have some sardonic things to say about some attempts in that direction, though I think it's the direction to move. It's very hard to do this. On the other hand, a recent book by Renato Rosaido talks, in terms that I think are better than reflexivity, of the "positioned observer." At least in the kind of anthropology that I and people like Renato and others do-as I've said, there are lots of kinds of anthropology-we are part of what we study, in a way; we're there. And it seems to me almost in a kind of positivist sense false not to represent ourselves as being so-false, or at least an imperfect representation. Now, I've never done it. Well, in the piece on religion in Java and in the cockfight piece and in a few other pieces I'm there, I'm self-represented; once in a while I've done it. But I've never really thoroughly done it, and I've written a lot of books which are written from the moon-the view from nowhere. I am persuaded that at least for some works, for a lot of works, we've really got to get ourselves back into the text, to have ourselves truly represented in the text. I've always argued that in part I'm represented in my texts by my style, that at least people won't think my books were written by anybody else, that there's a kind of signature in them. But I think Renato is right: we have to go further than that; we have to situate our selves within the text. In the book I'm writing now, *After the Fact,* that's what I'm trying to do. It's not confessional anthropology, and it's not about what I was feeling or something of that sort; it's trying to describe the work I've been doing with myself in the picture.

Q. So you're going back to your earlier pieces and analyzing them?

A. I'm going back to my whole career-not the pieces so much, just to the work-and trying to reconceptualize it in these terms. I'm trying to restate it as work that was done by human hands-that is, *mine. As* I say, I think in my earlier work there are places where this occurs, and in my writing style even more so; but I think one needs to go further, and the whole problem is that it's very difficult to do. Now, I don't like confessional anthropology. Part of the confessional anthropology came out of the sixties when, for example, I had a hard time convincing students that they were going to North Africa or someplace to understand the North Africans, not to understand themselves. I'm in favor of people understanding themselves, and that's in a certain way what anthropology's about; but you really want to know what the *Moroccans* are like, and I still do that. That's what my vocation seems to be to me. But these people are right(as I say, thinking on these lines has advanced a bit) that you can't do that as though you were, again, on the moon. We need to find ways of bringing ourselves in. There are different ways to do it, and there are some silly ways to do it. People take photographs with their own shadow in them; that doesn't seem to me to be a particularly marvelous solution. The whole question is how to do this without being awkward. Take ethnographic cinema. A friend of mine did a movie on Nepal and is inclined as I am toward this line of thought, but she finally kept herself out of the film because the other ones in the series where the anthropologists tried to get themselves literally in the picture were awkward and silly. It's a very hard thing to do, and I think it's something, getting back to writing, that we don't know how to do rhetorically. We don't know how to do it effectively. We're getting better, perhaps, and there are some successes and some failures and some semi-successes. In any case, what I'm doing now is that I'm really trying to see whether I *can* do it unawkwardly. But it's a writing task, as far as I'm concerned.

Q. Assuming that we *can* get to a point where we can do it smoothly, would you say that what really needs to change, perhaps, is the expectation that an ethnographer must be somehow detached?

A. Well, these expectations are wrong. Evans-Pritchard is a good example. There's very little of E-P as a person in what he does. And Levi-Strauss either. None of the people in that generation-Malinowski did a

bit, but the others didn't-brought themselves into the picture. It was not considered the thing to do. But they of course *were* in the picture. That's the point. Maybe that's a fair representation of looking through a microscope; I'm not sure. But it isn't a reasonable representation of what I've been doing for forty years. I really did live among these people; I did talk to them. They did react to me; I did react to them. This is again Renato's notion of the positioned scholar. You are somebody: you come out of a certain class; you come out of a certain place; you go into a certain country; you then go home; you do *all* of these things. To represent it as though it were a laboratory study of some sort, in the traditional sense, seems to me to misrepresent it. So the expectations that have been formed, and that have been formed by ethnographic writers, that the anthropologist is not involved in what's going on, are false. It's not really a veridical picture, in a very simple sense of *veridical,* of what anthropological research is all about. How you undo that preoccupation with a sense of distance and so on is difficult to know. More and more people are trying, especially the younger group.

Q. What about those people who want to write off that kind of ethnographic writing, whether it's in your field or mine, as not being rigorous simply because you *are* there?
A. I don't see why such research is necessarily less rigorous. I would agree that a lot of it isn't very rigorous, including my own, but I don't see any reason why it *can't* be rigorous. That's exactly what we need to do: to rethink how ethnography has been written, how it might be written. And I think the only way to do that is interpretive. As I said earlier, that's what I hoped *Works and Lives* wouldstimulate, not so much agreement with my particular readings (though that would be nice). It's an interesting book because with my colleagues it provides a kind of vocational Rorschach test: some love the Evans-Pritchard chapter and don't like the Levi-Strauss, and others have the exact opposite reaction. I think we need to do more of that kind of reading and more thinking about the problems of text construction, text building, and not start from preconceived notions of what ethnography ought to be. That's why even my use of Barthes and Foucault was tentative; it was a way into the topic, but the real heart of it was to get to a position where I could say something cogent or at least apparently cogent about actual texts.

Q. You describe a "pervasive nervousness" among ethnographers in an atmosphere of "deconstructive attacks on canonical works, and on the very idea of canonicity as such; *Ideologiekraitik* unmaskings of anthropological writings as the continuation of imperialism by other means; clarion calls to reflexivity, dialogue, heteroglossia, linguistic play, rhetorical selfconsciousness," and so on. Does this poststructural atmosphere undermine ethnography as a mode of scholarly inquiry or strengthen it by encouraging perpetual self-critique? Or both?
A. I think the critique has been and is very valuable. It has shaken up those of us who were a little dissatisfied and didn't know why and, even more valuably, those who didn't even know they were dissatisfied. That's not the same thing as saying I'm always happy about the actual critiques. These people have raised issues that really can't be evaded, that have to be dealt with. I think they've raised them more effectively than they've dealt with them, but I think they've raised issues that you just can't laugh off, including reflexivity and problems of representation and of the relation of power in representation. These are issues that we can no longer pass off with genuflections to the scientific method. In that sense, such critiques have been immensely valuable. I read something by an English anthropologist-I can't remember who-who said that in his view the life of postmodernism in anthropology would be short but its effect would be profound. I think that's about right. Poststructuralism has had an enormous influence. We can't go back to what we were, and I think those kinds of critiques are very valuable. I don't know which way to move entirely either, so I can't be too harsh with the poststructuralists. What does sometimes happen is a certain kind of self-indulgence which I'm not too happy with (it's easy to sort of wing it). I guess I'm positive about the critique, less positive about response to the questions it raises. But even those are sometimes suggestive, and I find a lot there.

Q. Are you equally satisfied with the whole ideological awareness agenda of Dell Hymes?
A. I think ideological awareness is very important in anthropology. We do come from somewhere. One of the things I'm trying to do in *After the Fact* is to think about how I function as an anthropologist in a

certain time. From the 1950s to the 1990s, there was a tremendous change in the ideological framework under which I operated, not so much in my own ideology (though some in that too) but in the ideological ambiance of 1950 and the cold war, and 1990 and the end of it-not to mention a lot of things in between, including changes that have gone on in the Third World: the whole notions of optimism and pessimism, development and nondevelopment, changes of relations between the Third World and the rest of the world, internationalization, and so on. Yes, we do have to be conscious of those factors and think about them. I'm not quite sure what of Dell's you're referring to, but I like Dell's work in general. We don't always coincide ideologically, but I have no objection to the notion that ideology is important.

Q. It's a common assumption, expressed often in the popular press, that the U.S. is experiencing a literacy crisis. Some scholars, however, argue that rather than massive illiteracy there are multiple literacies competing against one privileged literacy that helps maintain white, male culture in general and the military/industrial complex in particular. What are your thoughts on this subject?
A. I know very little about the multiple literacies discussion. One of the problems is I don't teach anymore so I don't quite know. I don't find in the people I do teach, when I do teach at Princeton, that they can't read anymore; they do.

Q. As well as they used to?
A. Yes, and they may even be better in some ways. I don't feel that we're going to hell in a handcart. What is happening is that this country is becoming much more plural than it was, and we can't make believe that it's the same as when not only white males but only a certain class-segment of them went to college. Now we've got all kinds of people, and we have to develop a new way of educating them. That doesn't necessarily mean educating them to our standards either. So there are obviously new problems of how to teach writing and modes of literacy that just didn't appear before now, and I don't think they can be evaded. I'm trying to think about this business of plural literacies; the rhetoric about the military/industrial complex I find to be "rhetoric" in its bad sense. I think attention to such matters as registers in language is very important; it's the sort of thing that Dell is interested in, along with a lot of other people. I'm all in favor of trying to see how people do put language together-how they write, how they talk, and so on-and trying to come toward them in some way in order to enable them to participate in literate culture. I don't have the notion, though, that everybody has to write in some single academic style.
My daughter teaches Native Americans in the Southwest. She teaches on a Navajo reservation, so she faces this sort of thing on the firing line. She's concerned with how to get Native American kids to be effective with the written word. Neither is a solution: just trying to make them into whites, or just saying they're Indians and so they're intuitive and they understand the world and that's all we need to do. She has to *teach* them. That kind of pluralism is inevitable. American society, insofar as it ever was, has been particularly homogeneous, certainly in the educational class side of things. There was the WASP ascendancy and so on, but that's gone and it's gone for good. How many Spanish speakers are there now in the nation? There's no sense in making believe that such diversity isn't what we're faced with. I don't think the response to it is to try to construct some kind of high old tradition, but I also don't think we can just say that any old way will do. Most of these things we won't know how to do until we work with them. Of course, I myself live in a fairly homogeneously literate world (not that we write well or anything), and I don't come up against illiteracy much.

Q. You say in the preface to The Interpretation of Cultures, "At a time when the American university system is under attack as irrelevant or worse, I can only say that it has been for me a redemptive gift." Do you still have faith in the university system, especially considering recent reports critical of the quality of education in the U.S.? A. Yes, I do; but I'm not mindless. There are problems, and they're serious ones, and it's a continual fight to keep things going. Universities, and schools in general, are being asked to do an enormous number of things they never had to do with a much more complex population than they ever had to do it with. But certainly I'm against the Allan Bloomean sort of business. I really don't find that a reasonable response to what's going on. I think the American

university system still seems to be the best system in the world. I haven't done a systematic study, but it still seems to me extraordinarily good. It has had some blows, and it will have more. It does have lots of problems, but I meant that business about it being a redemptive gift. I thought I ought to say that at least once. Perhaps because I'm in a somewhat unrepresentative part of academia, it looks better here than if I were teaching in the Bronx or somewhere else. But, I do still think we're not doing that bad.

Q. A great many people in and out of anthropology support your project. However, your work has generated a fair amount of criticism, such as recent critiques by Paul Shankman and others. Are there any important misunderstandings of your work that you'd like to address at this time? A. Yes, but I don't quite know what to say in a few well-chosen words. I think the perception of there being a deep gulf between science and the humanities is false. Those who have that false perception tend to want to put me on one side or the other-usually on the humanities side, saying that I'm not a reasonable scientist. I resist that. I really don't think that's the way to think about it. The notion of what science is both varies from discipline to discipline and changes in time, and the attempt to make a simple distinction between what is legitimately rigorous and objective and what is soft and stupid is a dichotomy or dualism that could stand a little poststructural analysis. I really think we should deconstruct this dichotomy and be done with it. Much of the worst misunderstanding of my work comes from people who are trapped in that conceptual framework. It's everywhere. (It's perhaps a little stronger in anthropology in Britain than it is in the United States, but it is strong in the United States, too.) I'm speaking of the notion that, for example, literature is one thing and science is another, that they are eternally different, that they don't change, that they mean the same thing in any field. When I resist these notions, and when I resist the imposition by anthropologists (not by physicists) of hard science notions on anthropology where I think they're inapplicable, or where they don't even work, I'm often interpreted as being anti-science or unrigorous. And I think that's just wrong. Of course, some criticisms are quite cogent, so don't get me wrong; I don't want to reject everything anyone has ever said about me. But when critics divide the world into real scientists and real (or "unreal," usually) humanists and decide that this gulf is an absolute-the two-cultures notion-I think that all of what I do and a good deal of what other people in the social sciences do just drops through the cracks because it's a *third* culture, a *different* sort of thing. Many of these critics really have yet to grasp that, and when they don't grasp it then they misread. Because they see a departure from what they learned, they make distinctions between explanation and understanding that really are not sustainable. They make all kinds of distinctions that I think are not sustainable and, therefore, misread both the intentions of my work and, indeed often enough, what is actually said on the page.

Q. Well, you must get terribly frustrated by the increasing specialization of the university system then. Doesn't it tend to militate against that kind of broad cross-disciplinary interaction?
A. Well, one thing this social science school here tries to do is go the other way: to *not* make those sharp distinctions. When I and a few others first started with this kind of work, I really did feel peripheral and marginal, or discriminated against. Now there are a lot of us around, and-this is parallel to the question of feminism-the battle has been joined in a way that it didn't used to be. It used to be just a weak protest against a massive establishment. I don't feel that way now. As I've said in some other place, "I think we're gaining on the bastards." So I don't think that things are really so frustrating.

Q. So you expect this interdisciplinarity to continue?
A. Yes, I see it all over. Your journal is full of this very interdisciplinatity. There's a lot of it. It's not a matter of dissolving, and it's not even a matter of interdisciplinarity; it's a matter of being open to something outside your tradition as strictly defined. Even economists (who were almost always the most self-sufficient) are beginning to be more permeable towards it. One example is Don McCloskey's work in *The Rhetoric of Economics,* in which he's beginning to look at something besides just what he learned at Chicago in microeconomics. During my ten years at Chicago, I taught the introductory graduate course in anthropology a number of times; it's a critical course for the making of anthropologists. I kept trying to get them, not without success, to see that people who are officially "anthropologists" are not

their only ancestors and are not the only people they should be reading. I got them to read a lot of people: Cassirer, Suzanne Langer in those days-people who would not otherwise be on anthropology syllabi. It wasn't that I was trying to get students out of anthropology, or get them to be amateur philosophers. Today I find in the field that everybody's read Richard Rorty, and some have even read Charles Taylor-which is even better. I find it much less of a provincial discipline in some ways than it had been. I don't want to sound too upbeat; it isn't that marvelous. As you say, there are a lot of people who react very strongly against all of this and against me for promoting it. I guess I'm aging, but again, if I look at'50 and'90, forty years of it, I think things are better. From where I stand, things look better