

**EXPRESSION AND AESTHETICS
IN SCIENCE AND ART:
ETHNOGRAPHY AS DISCURSIVE SABOTAGE
BENNETTA JULES-ROSETTE**

This article discusses ethnography as a form of discursive sabotage and uses the example of E.E. Evans-Prichard's work with the Nuer as the vehicle for discussion. Also, Jules-Rosette uses the multileveled communications in ethnography to discuss African tourist art with its concealed political and ideological meanings. A strong parallel can be drawn between Jules-Rosette's examination of the transformation of dialogue into ethnographic discourse and the transformation of the artist's work into the discourse of art making, viewing and criticism. This logic is embodied in the following concepts from the body of Jules-Rosette's (henceforth referred to as J-R) paper.

- 1) Sabotage refers to the ethnographer's wanting to know certain information from the subject (Cuol) and having the information withheld by Cuol. The ethnographer is thus forced to reformulate the question in order to obtain desired information. "What is sabotaged is the ethnographer's own sense of culture. Reformulation involves moving from the initial dialogue to discrete factual assertions, from inscription to explanation. Thus, it entails both an aesthetics of communication and an objectification of discourse." J-R examines the transformation of dialogue into ethnographic discourse and says that this process involves discursive sabotage, or the intersection of conflicting modalities of action during the process of inquiry and in the written transformation of ethnographic facts.
- 2) The aesthetic aspect of this process relates to the style in which information is communicated first by the subject to the ethnographer and then by the ethnographer to the broader audience (in this case scientific viewers). Aesthetics lies somewhere between the actual and the virtual. The conjunction of the two may be referred to as the "aesthetic turn" in a text (Umberto Eco uses the game analogy to describe artistic communication; everyone accepts an underlying set of rules and then breaks or stretches the rules to create an unexpected effect. He concludes that the result is a semiotic design which cunningly gives the design of nonsemiosis. The aesthetic expression, he says, thus requires a special interpretive leap.) Anthropological glossing is an interpretive leap or device whereby the anthropologist interprets native categories and then uses them as a descriptor for "social facts".
- 3) In discussing the transformation of ethnographic experience into scientific fact, J-R says that the ethnographic process involves a progression from the experienced event to the communicated event. She says that the Evans-Prichard dialogue raises questions about how the researcher transforms everyday discourse into a uniform and univocal ethnographic account. Ethnographies contain two major types of assertions: 1.) those that record dialogues and observations as factual data and 2.) those that make intertextual references to a larger corpus of ethnographic literature refers to the type of speech acts characteristic of ethnographic texts as expositives that affirm, describe, and inform. The movement from question-answer, or request-response, sequences to expositives is one of the principal transformations made in the final communication of an ethnography. In order to make these assertions scientific they must be placed within the context of other literature in the field. This process may be represented as a three phase progression involving the original dialogue (conversation), factual assertions about these materials (expositives), and scientific contextualization (intertextual references).

J-R asserts that although Cuol possesses the information wanted and holds a certain degree of power in the exchange, the ethnographer's ultimate power lies in his ability to remove this information from Cuol's control and place it in an alien context. She says, however, that if we equate inside knowledge of the society with power, the anthropologist becomes an important seeker, and the balance of power shifts.

- 4) The factual assertions are based on the suppressed memory of the dialogue. The sense of objective reality that emerges from the factual assertions moves them into intertextual references is based not only on the structure of the expositions but also on the allusions that are made (glosses and transparencies). The creation of these transparencies or visualizable representations of cultural phenomena are consistent with the anthropologist's frame of reference. When the final account is not self-reflexive the power of these allusions is hidden behind the assertive tone of the ethnographer's factual descriptions. Interpretation and evaluation of the dialogue are essential to the final ethnographic communication. The ethnographer returns to another community to present discoveries. This community is made up of not only scholars, but also the subjects of analysis used by the scholars to validate ethnographic points. Whose language is involved, and who verifies the procedures of translation and validation? No one outside of the immediate experience does. The interpretive process has become an autonomous intertextual convention.
- 5) The Aesthetic Turn: An aesthetic text organizes multiple messages on several different levels ambiguously. Through the ambiguity, an interplay is created between the sender and the receiver of the message whereby the multivocality of the message becomes an essential feature of its aesthetic quality. The differences in intent and point of view implicit in the message as it is communicated and the message as it is received constitute aesthetic distance. In artistic contexts, middlemen and art critics transform and interpret messages before they reach a larger audience. In that process of communication, the aesthetic value of a message is converted into exchange value. Thus, the process of signification involves the artistic, social, and material meanings of the object. J-R goes on to discuss African tourist art saying that it contains similar multileveled meanings (concealed political and ideological meanings appear as bland and repetitive images of landscapes, or burning villages that on one level appear as solely decorative contain veiled criticism of political policies). She says that these artistic representations reflect an aesthetics of communication through which intermediaries reinterpret and "sanitize" the art object for the consumption by a larger audience and , in the process, alter its meanings. The ethnographer becomes the major interpreter of convention and of the ambiguities present in the original discourse (with the details of the original exchange eliminated). The final ethnographic description creates a relationship between the original dialogue and the factual assertion such that the original object of study recedes creating an "occultation" or cognitive utopia in which the ethnographers voice emerges. This process is at the core of both scientific and artistic communications. Through the aesthetic turn, scientific and artistic texts play upon multiple levels of discourse and use ambiguity as a tool. In science, this ambiguity is transformed into canonical precision and specificity. In art, it becomes a source of creative technique and stylization. Multiple voices are, thus, transformed into a unique account. J-R sees a parallel between the ethnographer's and artist's use of interpretive techniques, between the ethnographer's receding subject and the artist's disappearing object. In both cases, description is intended to mask the very phenomena described behind the conventions of scientific and aesthetic expression.

EXPRESSION AND AESTHETICS IN SCIENCE & ART:
Ethnography as Discursive Sabotage

Bennetta Jules-Rosette, USCD, (American Journal of Semiotics,
Vol 6, no 1, 1988-89)

THE PERSONAL

Field Work --> Experiences (Collecting data, field interaction)

|

THE INTERPRETIVE PROCESS ACCORDING TO CONVENTIONAL FORM

Transformation of (ethnographic) experience into scientific fact
Filtering according to rules/beliefs/language of the specialization
(Scientific contextualization)
Placing experience into an intellectual framework

|

Scientific Document
(art object)

|

THE AESTHETIC VALUE OF A MESSAGE CONVERTED INTO EXCHANGE VALUE

Specialized audience (artists, critics, curators, museum)
(Professionals in the field)
The work transformed

|

Wider audience



Jean Genet

*Jean Genet
and the
Semiotics of
Performance*

By Laura Oswald

When Jean Genet, the *enfant terrible* of the French theater, died on April 15, 1986, he left a rich and controversial literary legacy. Genet, a homosexual and ex-convict, wrote about events and in a language that could ruffle the complacency of the most sophisticated reader. His work can be seen as a struggle of the social outcast to be heard from beyond the borders of the dominant, heterosexual culture. This challenging book tracks the effects of this struggle in Genet's novels, plays, film, and political essays by means of a general semiotics of performance.

By focusing on the role of the double in Genet's literary imagination and by reading Genet with his "others" in the realm of theory, Oswald comes to grips with the overriding concerns of a man whose life in literature was never very far from his life as prisoner, as outcast, as self-proclaimed exile.

Advances in Semiotics
\$32.50

At bookstores or from _____

INDIANA University Press

Tenth and Morton Streets • Bloomington, IN 47405
812-855-6804

**EXPRESSION
AND AESTHETICS
IN SCIENCE
AND ART:
ETHNOGRAPHY
AS DISCURSIVE
SABOTAGE**

BENNETTA
JULES-ROSETTE
University of California, San
Diego

Ethnography may be conceived of as a form of discursive "sabotage". This usage of the concept of sabotage is inspired by a quotation from E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940: 12): "Nuer are expert at sabotaging an inquiry and until one has resided with them for some weeks they steadfastly stultify all efforts to elicit the simplest facts and to elucidate the most innocent practices." In semiotic terms, sabotage refers to the ethnographer's "wanting to know" certain information and having this information withheld by the subject of inquiry (Greimas and Courtés 1979: 230-231). In the face of such refusal, the ethnographer is forced to reformulate the question in order to obtain the desired information. What is sabotaged is the ethnographer's own sense

DISCUSS

© The American Journal of Semiotics, Vol. 6, No. 1
(1988-89), 37-55

Bennetta Jules-Rosette is Professor of Sociology at the University of California, San Diego. Her research interests include semiotic studies of religious discourse, tourist art, and new technologies in Africa. Since 1969, she has conducted research in Zaire, Zambia, Ivory Coast, and Kenya and is the author of African Apostles (Cornell, 1975), A Paradigm for Looking (Ablex, 1977), The New Religions of Africa (Ablex, 1979), Symbols of Change (Ablex, 1981), and The Messages of Tourist Art (Plenum, 1984). She is currently completing a book on the effects of new technologies and computerization in Africa.

* of "cultu. . . Reformulation involves moving from the initial dialogue to discrete factual assertions, from inscription to explanation (Geertz 1973: 27). Thus, it entails both an aesthetics of communication and an objectification of discourse. Michel de Certeau (1980: 25) maintains that "a discourse that organizes a way of *thinking* into a form of *doing*" is the source of contemporary scientificity. This type of discourse epitomizes the relationship between sociological theory and ethnographic description.

Ethnography as discursive sabotage

X In this article, I wish to examine the transformation of dialogue into ethnographic discourse. This process involves discursive sabotage, or the intersection of conflicting modalities of action during the process of inquiry and in the written transformation of ethnographic facts. The scientific component of this process relies upon the content gleaned from the ethnographer's inquiries. What "facts", for example, is Evans-Pritchard able to present about Nuer kinship and social structure in accordance with the conventions of anthropological theory and method? The aesthetic aspect of this process relates to the style in which information is communicated first by the subject to the ethnographer and then by the ethnographer to a broader audience of scientific readers. Jacques Maquet (1986: 43-44) asserts that aesthetics lies somewhere between cognition and affectivity. It juxtaposes the actual and the virtual, or the modalities of "knowing" and "wanting" in different configurations.¹

le X This conjunction of the actual and the virtual may be referred to as the "aesthetic turn" in a text. Umberto Eco (1976: 271-272) uses a game model to describe the process whereby participants in an artistic communication accept an underlying set of rules or "system of mutual correlations" and then break or stretch these rules to produce an unanticipated effect. He states that "the aesthetic text is like a multiple match played by different teams at a time, each of whom follows (or breaks) the rules of their own game" (Eco 1976: 271). The result, he concludes, is "a semiotic design which cunningly gives the impression of nonsemiosis." The aesthetic expression, thus, requires a special interpretive leap. It involves a unique way of communicating about experiences that transcends the banal and the obvious.

Ethnographic description entails distinctive literary rules and figurative devices. For example, Garfinkel and Sacks (1970: 365) refer to the practice of anthropological glossing, or the procedure by which the anthropologist interprets native categories and uses them

as a descriptor for "social facts", as one such device. Stephen Tyler (1985: 89) describes the same procedure as "the trope of translation" in ethnographic writing. The anthropological gloss is merely the tip of a very deep iceberg. Exploring this descriptive device opens a Pandora's box that contains the larger problems of categorization and classification in the social sciences.

How do we classify a term as a member of a collection of categories and what procedures are used to shift themes of categorization, or semantic isotopies? Harvey Sacks (1972: 332-333) outlines rules of economy, adequate reference, and consistency to explain this discursive process. Through adequate reference, a term appears as an appropriate and recognizable member of a category. Under the consistency rule, this term must be used in a uniform manner to classify members of the same set or collection. In Evans-Pritchard's work, we may examine the category "Nuer" as a collective identification, or *actant collectif*. Evans-Pritchard inventories a number of cultural traits according to which the Nuer may be classified. These traits are classed with reference to livelihood, material culture, social arrangements, and political institutions.

A Nuer is known as such by his culture, which is very homogeneous, especially by his language, by the absence of lower incisors, and, if he is a man, by six cuts on his brow. All Nuer live in a continuous stretch of country. There are no isolated sections. However, their feeling of community goes deeper than recognition of cultural identity. Between Nuer . . . friendly relations are at once established when they meet outside of their country, for a Nuer is never a foreigner to another Nuer as he is to a Dinka or Shilluck. (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 123)²

This quote brings to mind an amusing story about an American anthropologist who encounters a tall and imposing man of "Nuer" appearance in New York City. He gleefully addresses the stranger with a well practiced Nuer greeting to which the man replies: "I am Dinka." Michael Moerman (1974: 61) delineates the pitfalls of trait analysis as a categorization device for ethnicity. He emphasizes that lists of traits are acontextual, retrospective, and potentially endless, for they are freefloating descriptors that can refer to virtually "anything that a population does". Traits are easily translated into anthropological glosses to support the ethnographer's decisions for assigning a particular identification to a category of people, objects, or events.

In analyzing the Lue of southeast Asia, Moerman (1974: 62) concludes that he considers the Lue as a tribe because "they successfully present themselves as one." This classification is contextually

... interpreted by the ethnographer. Who, after all, are the Nuer? For Evans-Pritchard, they constitute organizational units: a series of a collection of hierarchical and interlinking classifications. When do they consider themselves Nuer as opposed to Lou, Rengyan, Gatgan-kiir, or Jikany? Do they address or label themselves as Nuer? Is "Nuer" primarily an ethnological label or is it a term of self-identification? Who is "a Nuer" about whom Evans-Pritchard so frequently generalizes in his discussions? Is "a Nuer" perhaps Evans-Pritchard's early informant Cuol? We are now faced with a logical problem. Do "all Nuer" comprise a class inclusive of "a Nuer"? Is "a Nuer" equivalent to a particular Nuer subject, for example Cuol?

Keeping this background in mind, we may now proceed to Evans-Pritchard's "sabotaging" dialogue with a Nuer informant. I have divided the dialogue into four parts, each of which contains a request-response sequence. My segmentation is intended to emphasize key transitional points at which the ethnographer subsequently converts the dialogue into a string of expositives, or assertions of fact. This thirty-line dialogue is reproduced here (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 1-13).³

- Segment I:
1. I: Who are you?
 2. Cuol: A man.
 3. I: What is your name?
 4. Cuol: Do you want to know my name?
 5. I: Yes.
 6. Cuol: You want to know my name?
 7. I: Yes, you have come to visit me in my tent
 8. and I would like to know who you are.
 9. Cuol: All right. I am Cuol. What is your name?
- Segment II:
10. I: My name is Pritchard.
 11. Cuol: What is your father's name?
 12. I: My father's name is also Pritchard.
 13. Cuol: No, that cannot be true. You cannot have
 14. the same name as your father.
 15. I: It is the name of my lineage. What is the
 16. name of your lineage?
- Segment III:
17. Cuol: Do you want to know the name of my
 18. lineage?
 18. I: Yes.
 19. Cuol: What will you do with it if I tell you?
 20. Will you take it to your country?
 21. I: I don't want to do anything with it. I just
 22. want to know it since I am living at your
 23. camp.
 23. Cuol: Oh well, we are Lou.

25. I know that. I am asking you the name of
26. your lineage.
27. Cuol: Why do you want to know the name of
28. my lineage?
28. I: I don't want to know it.
29. Cuol: Then why do you ask me for it? Give me
30. some
30. tobacco.

Evans-Pritchard jokingly remarks that this type of frustrating dialogue tries the patience of ethnographers, literally drives them "crazy", and may cause them to suffer symptoms of "Nuerosis". The source of this emotional reaction is both a lack of reciprocity and an aesthetic "game" initiated by both speakers. This game involves playing upon a set of mutual correlations, or semiotic oppositions, in a manner that hinders the ethnographer's attempts to transform dialogue into factual data about lineages, kinship, and village social structure. This exchange emerges as a self-defeating power play between the ethnographer who claims he just wants "to know" and the subject who wants "to know why".

The style of the dialogue is characteristic of the reserved yet intimate tone found throughout Evans-Pritchard's journals and informal descriptions of field expeditions. Such diary-like descriptions, including "Operations on the Akobo", have been skillfully analyzed by Clifford Geertz (1983: 62-80). In the dialogue above and in his informal discourse, Evans-Pritchard refers to himself in the first person and manages to convey the immediacy of his experiences and surroundings while reflecting critically upon them. These familiar descriptions contrast with the ethnographer's unembellished and more distant expositive discourse. Geertz (1983: 71) describes Evans-Pritchard's "scientific" discourse as straightforward and almost austere.

Though E-P spoke at least French and Italian fluently, there are virtually no foreign phrases—aside, of course, from native vernacular—in his ethnographic writings; though he was very broadly educated, literary allusions play little role; and though he was a professional's professional in self-presentation, the absence of jargon, anthropological or other, is so nearly total as to seem ostentatious. The only speech act of any frequency is the flat declarative. (Geertz 1983: 71)

Geertz contrasts the flat declarative in Evans-Pritchard's ethnography with the "quizzical interrogatives" and "hedging conditionals" that are the linguistic tools of anthropological relativism.

Evans-Pritchard's writing constitutes a classic example of ethnographic realism as a genre of social science exposition. The dialogue above, however, is an uneasy attempt at interrogation that is marked by a startling lack of factual resolution. The stylistic homogeneity for which Geertz extols Evans-Pritchard is visibly absent throughout this multilayered, playful exchange during which, for a fleeting moment, the anthropologist removes his cassock of austerity and refrains from factual exhortation.

The two opening lines of Evans-Pritchard's dialogue resemble a riddle. Ragnar Johnson (1976: 195) refers to jokes and riddles as products of a "classificatory conflict created by social transaction". The conflict here stems from the ethnographer's ambivalent relationship to his subject. Referring to himself in the first person for purposes of transcription, Evans-Pritchard asks the informant: "Who are you?" Cuol responds: "A man." As in the case of any well known riddle, both participants have an appropriate answer in mind. The ethnographer, however, wishes to obtain an explicit signifier indicating Cuol's identity as a member of a specific collectivity or subgroup. Although "Who are you?" (line 1) appears to be a direct question, it qualifies as an indirect speech act. Searle (1975: 77) includes in the category of indirect speech acts those utterances that indicate the appearance of disturbing topics in discourse and, therefore, require circumlocution. The speaker uses indirect strategies to divert the hearer's potential criticism of or negative reaction to the emotional content of a statement or request. By first asking "Who are you?" instead of "What is your lineage?" Evans-Pritchard introduces an indirect request that stands in bold contrast to his straightforward and homogeneous factual descriptions of Nuer lineages based on ethnographic documentation. Modal emphasis occurs through the repetition of the opening interrogation as an indirect request in lines 7 and 8: "... you have come to visit me in my tent and I would like to know who you are."

Cuol's initial response is that he is a man may be read in a number of ways: man as opposed to non-man (a child, a woman, or a beast). Following the consistency rule, the meaning of Cuol's answer shifts depending on the categorization device that he is employing. Evans-Pritchard's (1940: 123) characterization of a Nuer man as an adult having six cuts on his brow (*gar*, or initiation marks) may give us a key to the isotopy that Cuol is using to refer to his age-set. As part of the semantic game, Cuol may also simply have opted for a generic rather than a specific response to the ethnographer's question or for an ironic answer. In any event, he selects an answer that does not require him to reveal important historical information about his ancestry and

Cuol's maneuver forces Evans-Pritchard to reformulate his question and shift frames (Goffman 1974: 91-92).⁴ In line 3, he specifies: "What is your name?" Cuol responds to this recycled question with two inquiries as to whether the ethnographer really wants to know his name (lines 4 and 6). These questions follow the format of a gag in which the informant appears to be putting on the ethnographer. In line 8, Evans-Pritchard clarifies and reiterates his initial question: "I would like to know who you are." Cuol responds with a name and returns the same question to the ethnographer.

As readers, we do not know the status of the name that Cuol has given Evans-Pritchard. Is it true or false, personal or classificatory? If Cuol's name refers to a specific lineage and age-set, it is historically and culturally fixed. Assigning him an arbitrary literary pseudonym would distort the ethnographic findings that Evans-Pritchard wishes to convey. This note of ambiguity terminates the first section of the exchange. When Cuol retorts with a question for Evans-Pritchard, we enter what Clifford (1986: 15) has referred to as the "dialogical mode" of ethnographic expression. The informant wants to know about the ethnographer and mirrors the ethnographer's cross-cultural questioning techniques.

In segment II, Evans-Pritchard states his name and his father's name, and Cuol expresses disbelief that they are identical. The ethnographer now has a vicarious datum concerning the distribution of personal, generational, clanic, and lineage names among the Nuer. He is quick to transform this information into a question about Cuol's lineage. Cuol eventually responds (line 23) by asserting, "Oh well, we are Lou." This response ends segment III of the dialogue with the second and final factual datum that Cuol provides for the ethnographer's journal. Cuol's answer contains an important key to understanding the entire exchange.

In the fourth segment, Evans-Pritchard expresses his knowledge and frustration concerning the information that Cuol has so grudgingly offered. Impatient with the subject, the ethnographer is now no longer a dialogant but instead a careful scientist. He demonstrates that his desire to know has a certain specificity and that he already possesses common cultural knowledge: "I did not ask you the name of your tribe. I know that. I am asking you the name of your lineage" (lines 24-26). Cuol responds with a disturbing question. Evans-Pritchard then gives up and presumably experiences the onset of Nuerosis. The ethnographer appears to have been manipulated by the informant to abandon his desired goal. At this point, Cuol requests tobacco, and segment IV of the dialogue ends.

Cuol's concluding request suggests the differences in motives

KEY
TO
INTERVIEW

reasons for asking their questions, but the types of favors that each seeks from the other differ. Evans-Pritchard desires knowledge that he can transform into scientific data while Cuol seeks, among other things, tobacco as a reward for his responses. Both wish to transform information into culturally pertinent material products but in different ways. The transformation of information from an object desired by the anthropologist to an abandoned goal parallels the process of transformation from lived experience to factual assertions in ethnographic writing. Both processes involve a transformation of goals and a sense of loss (see figure one).

Garfinkel and Sacks (1970: 365-366) describe the inadvertent telling of a joke in which the teller's statement elicits a surprise response of laughter. The teller then claims credit for what, by virtue of the audience response, must have been a good joke all along. In this sequence, neither Cuol nor Evans-Pritchard appears to be laughing in the immediate context, but the reader detects the humor of the exchange. The entire dialogue may be viewed as a masterful example of joking behavior as a type of rapport between anthropologist and interlocutor.

Although Evans-Pritchard appears to present this dialogue as a serious example of "pre-reflexive" anthropology, he follows it by the self-described pun on Nuerosis and, thereby, creates a bridge between his initial effort at dialogical anthropology and the return to a sober accounting of his field experience. This dialogue is part of Evans-Pritchard's introduction to *The Nuer*. Much of the introduction follows the form of a first-person disclaimer, concluding with such statements as, "I do not make far-reaching claims. I believe I have understood the chief values of the Nuer . . ." (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 15). Although these assertions would appear to support Geertz's argument concerning Evans-Pritchard's "undecorated" style, they involve a note of equivocation that contrasts with the author's bold ethnographic generalizations about "the Nuer". After the introduction, the ethnographic discourse shifts to the third person and remains largely in the present tense. The shift in tense from Evans-Pritchard's introductory statement in which descriptions of his field experiences are written largely in the past, to his factual descriptions in the following chapters, written largely in the present, is also a shift in register and voice. At first, the ethnographer speaks as a hesitant explorer in search of information and later as a self-assured scientist whose narrative presence is buried in expositive discourse.

The Transformation of ethnographic experience into scientific fact

The ethnographic process involves a progression from the experienced event to the communicated event. Elsewhere I have argued (Jules-Rosette 1978: 549-570) in favor of an ethnography of communication and discovery that moves from an initial experience in a particular domain of knowledge, through the processes of translating from experience into preconceived descriptive frameworks, and thence to the final ethnographic communication. Such a multifaceted model presupposes that an "original" experience—viewed in various ways by participants—exists and is reinterpreted by the ethnographer over time. Multiple subjectivities share this experience and extract a set of coded interpretations from a "swarm" of events. The semiotic themes, or isotopies, that organize these interpretations constitute the core of ethnographic description. The social and emotional exchange in which Evans-Pritchard is manipulated to withdraw his original question parallels the textual disengagement of the ethnographers as they move from dialogue to factual assertions in recording events.

Evans-Pritchard's dialogue raises questions about how the researcher transforms everyday discourse into a uniform and univocal ethnographic account. When does a "conversation" become an "interview"? How do the recording and transcription of conversations modify them to communicate the ethnographer's intent and point of view? Ethnographies contain two major types of assertions: (1) those that record dialogues and observations as factual data and (2) those that make intertextual references to a larger corpus of ethnographic literature (Tyler 1985: 83-98). Austin (1962: 160-162) refers to the type of speech acts characteristic of ethnographic texts as expositives that affirm, describe, and inform. The movement from question-answer, or request-response, sequences to expositives is one of the principal transformations made in the final communication of an ethnography. In order to render these assertions "scientific", ethnographers place them in the context of other literature in the field. This process may be represented as a three phase progression involving the original dialogue, factual assertions about these materials, and scientific contextualization.

In Evans-Pritchard's dialogue, Cuol presents two pieces of potential factual data: his name (line 9) and his tribe (line 23). Presumably, Evans-Pritchard notes this information in his journal for further analysis. In the first case (line 9), Cuol's question to the ethnographer cuts off further clarification of the status of the informant's name. In

PLACED
INTO
CONTEXT

the second instance, Evans-Pritchard indicates that he is not satisfied with the information as an adequate identification of Cuol's lineage, and he reposes the question (lines 24-26). Both speakers subject the dialogue to immediate interpretations from their respective frames of reference. During the course of the dialogue, the ethnographer attempts to elicit specific information and, thereby, to transform what could stand as an "everyday conversation" into an "interview". Cuol's frame of reference appears to be more ambiguous. he tests the ethnographer to determine what will be done with the information and whether he will take it away to another country. Because Cuol possesses the information that Evans-Pritchard wants, he holds a certain degree of power in the exchange.⁵ In contrast, the ethnographer's ultimate power lies in his ability to remove this information from Cuol's control and place it in an alien context.

FOCUSING
X DATA

The power-knowledge theme is played upon in the dialogue. In lines 25 and 26, Evans-Pritchard finally displays his cultural knowledge with regard to Nuer "tribal" groupings. His assertion, "I know that", challenges Cuol's knowledge and requests clarification. The power-knowledge challenge is an important feature of all anthropological dialogues. The problem of the relative power of the ethnographer in host societies has been widely analyzed in recent cultural criticism (Sperber 1982: 15-18; Fabian 1983: 32-33; Rabinow 1986: 235-261). If we equate inside knowledge of the society with power, however, the anthropologist becomes the important seeker, and the balance of power shifts.

Much information obtained by ethnographers may be considered to have semi-propositional rather than propositional content (cf. Sperber 1982: 74-80). A semi-propositional statement may be defined as an assertion of belief that has very weak criteria of rationality or fact. Cuol's assertion, "Oh well, we are Lou", may be regarded as a semi-propositional statement. The informant is not misrepresenting himself, for he may see his primary affiliation as Lou or deem this identification an adequate explanation for an outsider with little knowledge of his society. Note that Cuol shifts here from "I" to "we" as a collective identification device. In the meantime, Evans-Pritchard decides to reject the factual status of this information through a series of transformations that epitomize the ethnographer's discursive sabotage. Using a principle of transitivity, we may establish an equivalence among these transformations (see figure one).

The ethnographer and the informant hold contrary positions. Although Evans-Pritchard rejects Cuol's factual statement in disbelief, Cuol possibly misrepresents his own situation through non-

belief. In the final analysis, it is the ethnographer's evaluation that converts the response to a question into a factual assertion, a semi-propositional statement, or a misrepresentation.⁶ XXX

- (a) Function (Transformation) : Virtual Knowledge → Factual Knowledge [Transformation of the knowledge base] =
- (b) Function (Transformation) (Subject₁ ∪ Assertion₁) → (Subject₂ ∩ Assertion₂) [Transformation of the text] =
- (c) Function (Transformation) (S₁ ∪ O) → S₂[S₁ ∩ O] [Manipulation of the ethnographer to change his attitude toward the desired object]

Figure One: The Transformation of Dialogue and Experience into Ethnographic Fact

Evans-Pritchard's dissatisfaction with Cuol's responses and those of the rest of the Nyanding community of Nuer lead him to change locations. He states (1940: 13): "From Nyanding I moved, still without having made any real progress, to a cattle camp at Yakwac on the Sobat river . . . Here I remained . . . for over three months—till the commencement of the rains." After several frustrating experiences of Nuerosis, here is how Evans-Pritchard ultimately describes lineages among the Lou.

1. The trees of clan descent are presented in the following section in a form conventional to us, and which also commend itself to Nuer, who sometimes speaks of a lineage as *kar*, a branch . . . The Jinaca are the dominant clan in the Lou and Rengyan tribes . . . (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 194-195)⁷
2. All main clans have about ten to twelve generations from the present day to the ancestors who gave rise to them . . . When a Nuer is asked his lineage, he gives it by reference to an ancestor, the founder of his minimal lineage, who is from three to six, generally four to five steps in ascent from the present day (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 199)

In at least one case, however, a Nuer man did not respond in this manner. As already indicated, the entire exchange raises critical questions about who the Nuer are as a collective category and the applicability of this term to the groups that Evans-Pritchard studied. Upon close examination, the anthropological subject begins to recede. Further questions arise. Was Cuol hesitant to divulge the name of a venerated ancestor? Why was he concerned about whether Evans-Pritchard would take the information away with him? These

questions remain unanswered in the text. Instead, we may devise the model in figure two of the exchange in its presentational context.

1. Dialogue (conversation) → 2. Factual assertions (expositives) → 3. Intertextual references

Figure Two: The Presentation of Ethnographic Data

The factual assertions at the second stage are based upon the suppressed memory of the first stage of dialogical experience. The sense of objective reality that emerges from the factual assertions and moves them into intertextual references is based not only on the structure of the exposition but also on the allusions that are made, through anthropological glosses and translations, to the ethnographer's original experience. When the final account is not self-reflective, the power of these allusions is hidden behind the assertive tone of the ethnographer's factual descriptions. This process results in the creation of what Geertz (1983: 74) has termed "anthropological transparencies", or "visualizable representations of cultural phenomena" that are consistent with the anthropologist's preconceptions and frame of reference. Anthropological transparencies stand in contrast to a "translucent" ethnographic model through which the ethnographer strives to uncover each step involved in the transformation from dialogue and observations to factual exposition.

Among the nine features of sociosemiotics listed by Greimas and Courtés (1979: 355-358) are an analysis of the role of language in social context and an examination of the process of contextualization. They suggest that an "all-purpose communications theory" that claims to be sensitive to "context" but does not analyze the modalities of doing, wanting, and knowing that predicate action cannot be used to unravel the problem of scientific description.

In the dialogue, we see a conflict between the modalities of wanting and knowing from the contrasting perspectives of the anthropologist and his interlocutor. The anthropologist wants to know the individual and collective identification of the subject in order to define his otherness in more conventional and precise scientific terms. The categories man, tribe, clan, and lineage represent increasing degrees of specificity. The ethnographer does not accept an answer as "scientifically valid" until it reaches the degree of specificity appropriate for factual exposition in stages two and three of the second model.

Interpretation and evaluation of the dialogue are essential to the final ethnographic communication. The ethnographer returns to another community to present discoveries. The full community is not just a bounded group of scholars but, instead, a community that includes the subjects of analysis and uses them to validate ethnographic points (Jules-Rosette 1978: 566). Hence, the use of anthropological glosses, such as indigenous terms for kinship categories, becomes a referential device employed to support the validity of the description. Alfred Schutz (1962: 44) points toward this process of mutual communication when he suggests that theorists' terms must be translated into everyday language. But whose language is involved? Who verifies the procedures of translation and evaluation? Ultimately, no one outside of the immediate experience does. The interpretive process has become an autonomous intertextual convention.⁸ On the sociolinguistic level, this process involves a movement from the use of indirect speech acts to expositive assertions in the final communication.

The aesthetic turn

An aesthetic text organizes multiple messages on several different levels ambiguously. Through this ambiguity, an interplay is created between the sender and receiver of the message whereby the multivocality of the message becomes an essential feature of its aesthetic quality. The differences in intent and point of view implicit in the message as it is communicated and the message as it is received constitute aesthetic distance. In artistic contexts, middlemen and art critics transform and interpret messages before they reach a larger audience. In that process of communication, the aesthetic value of a message is converted into exchange value (Baudrillard 1972: 118). Thus, the process of signification involves the artistic, social, and material meanings of the object.

This process emerges in the dialogue between Evans-Pritchard and Cuol. The dialogants operate in multiple registers and create an artful, ironic exchange, which the ethnographer considers unsatisfactory from a scientific perspective. Similar cases have been recorded in countless anthropological studies. For example, while conducting research among the Navajo of Pine Springs, Arizona, Richard Chalfen was asked to sit on a Navajo sand painting (Worth and Adair 1972: 228-229). Such an act may be viewed as a joke pulled on the ethnographer because of its mildly obscene connotations. The Navajo subjects withheld this information from the ethnographer and created a situation resembling the power-knowledge balance in the Pritchard-Cuol dialogue.

→ SCIENTISTS
+
SUBJECTS

14
↓
difficult
↓
OVI
XX

XX

XX

X X

African traditional art contains similar multileveled communications. Artists conceal political and ideological meanings from consumers by painting apparently bland and repetitive images of landscapes. Paintings of burning villages, which appear on one level to be purely decorative, contain veiled criticism of political policies of village destruction and modern redevelopment schemes. Other images, such as the widespread mermaid or mami wata paintings, are both magical objects and moral commentaries on the dangers of modern urban life.⁹ These artistic representations reflect an aesthetics of communication through which intermediaries reinterpret and "sanitize" the art object for consumption by a larger audience and, in the process, alter its meanings. The model in figure three represents the role of aesthetic distance in artistic communication.

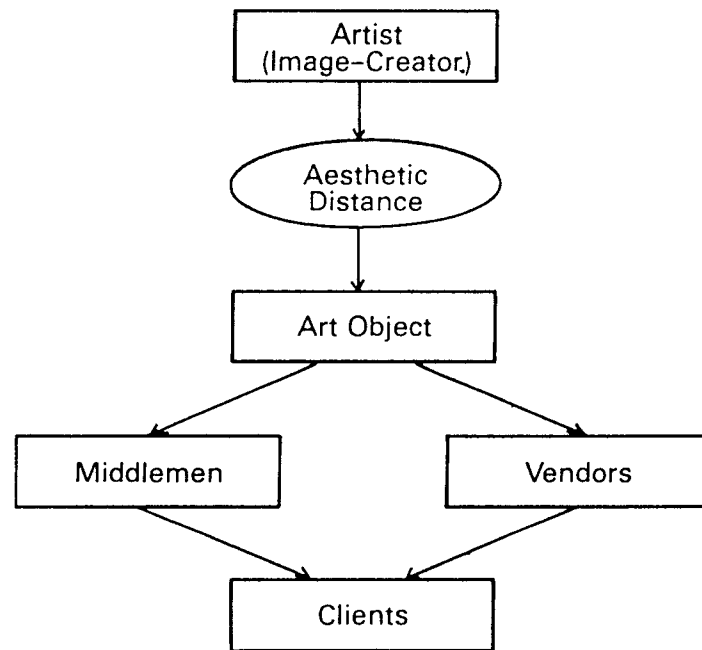


Figure Three: Aesthetic Distance in Artistic Communication.
An aesthetic distance exists between artist and audience and is embodied in the art object (Jules-Rosette 1984: 229).

As a result of the ambiguity of the initial phase of dialogue, similar aesthetic distance characterizes ethnography. During a dialogue, a set of conventions, or an aesthetic idiolect, develops around the

definition of what counts as knowledge and the precision and adequacy of responses. The final ethnographic report converts the aesthetic game into a knowledge and representational form that Evans-Pritchard describes as "conventional for us". The ethnographer, thus, becomes the major interpreter of convention and of the ambiguities present in the original discourse, but the details of the conversational exchange are eliminated. This ethnographic sleight-of-hand is based on the creation of a homology between the original dialogical experience and the factual assertion through covering the gap between the two in the final description. Tyler (1985: 95) refers to this process as the occult aspect of ethnographic texts. In his terms, this act of "occultation" creates a cognitive utopia, in which the ethnographic object of study recedes, and the ethnographer's muffled voice emerges through the creation of transparent imagery and impersonal subjects.

This process of occultation is at the core of both scientific and artistic communications. Through this aesthetic turn, scientific texts and artworks play upon multiple levels of discourse and use ambiguity as a tool. In science, this ambiguity is transformed into canonical precision and specificity. In art, it becomes a source of creative technique and stylization. Multiple voices are, thus, transformed into a unique account.

In his *Peintres Cubistes* (1913: 38), Apollinaire describes the art of Picasso's cubist phase as being produced by "the scientific method of a great surgeon". Apollinaire further comments:

Many new painters limit themselves to pictures which have no real subjects, and the titles which we find in catalogues are like proper names, which designate men without characterizing them The verisimilitude of the subject has little or no importance any more. (1913: 13)

In this statement, a parallel is evident between the ethnographer's and the artist's use of interpretive techniques, between the ethnographer's receding subject and the artist's disappearing object. In both cases, description is intended to mask the very phenomena described behind the conventions of scientific and aesthetic expression.

Conclusions: Some problems of description in the social sciences

If we accept the premise that all descriptions are representations, ×× there is no longer a need to share Apollinaire's lament about the

disappearance of verisimilitude. Ethnography, as a genre of social scientific description, however, is caught in the difficult situation of aspiring toward a direct correlation between the object as described and the object as it appears in the world. Yet, the dialogue through which the objects in the world are located and classified is lost in ethnographic realism.¹⁰ This loss of commitment to the ethnographic subject endows the final communication, including both the text and intertextual references, with an air of objectivity. In the process, the techniques and sources of the text's fabrication are obscured.

One answer to this problem lies in the semiotic analysis not only of ethnographies as texts but of ethnographies as lived experiences. At each stage of the ethnographic communication, from its initial conception to its communication, a mechanism may be built in for the analysis of the actual or implicit dialogue between the ethnographer and a changing audience. This dialogue includes the interventions of the ethnographic subject who, like Cuol, is simultaneously studying the ethnographer and participating in the creation of the final account. The discursive sabotage of ethnographer consists of the unexamined aesthetic distance between the ethnographer, subject, and audience—all of whom switch actantial positions and dialogical roles during the creation of an ethnographic account. These dialogical positions must be made explicit in order to move from anthropological transparencies to a translucent model of the ethnographic process. The analysis of ethnography as scientific discourse requires an examination of the dialogical roles, textual conventions, and processes of signification that link lived experience to ethnography as a scientific and aesthetic product.

NOTES

¹ The aesthetic turn in a text relies on an intentional ambiguity in communication within an established idiom, or aesthetic idiolect (Eco 1976: 270-273). A problem in ethnographic writing revolves around the fact that the ethnographer's initial dialogues and experiences fade away when they are incorporated into the "aesthetic idiolect" of scientific discourse.

² The italics in this quotation are mine. A referential ambiguity exists in establishing what is meant by "a Nuer", "all Nuer", and "another Nuer". The status of the term "Nuer" as a cultural label is not explicitly questioned in Evans-Pritchard's presentation.

³ I have numbered and segmented the lines in this transcript for purposes of analysis. The original dialogue is twenty-seven lines long in Evans-Pritchard's printed text. Although Evans-Pritchard does not discuss explicitly how the dialogue in question was recorded, translated, and transcribed, he does mention on several occasions his ease of fluency in Nuer and Anuak (Geertz 1983: 63-64). He does not, however, reveal directly how his journal entries are reflected in his final descriptions of Nuer clans and lineages.

⁴ Erving Goffman (1974: 87-103) refers to the hoax, or the playful fabrication, as a way of breaking from one framework of understanding into another. These responses may also be viewed as a series of ironies, a playful game in which the ethnographer ultimately becomes the victim. The difficulties with clarifying exactly what is taking place in the dialogue push us to re-examine ethnography as a form of inscription and reporting of interaction.

⁵ The power-knowledge axis introduces a second order of interpretation into the text that shares the flaws of the ethnographer's generalizations (Schegloff 1987: 222-29). This interpretation, however, may be supported by an analysis of the modalities of action (wanting and withholding information) present in the text. Along these lines, Evans-Pritchard may not be completely honest in saying that he does not intend to take the name of Cuol's lineage away with him. By the same token, Cuol manipulates Evans-Pritchard into a state of Nuerosis by refusing to divulge his lineage identification.

⁶ The acceptance of a semi-propositional statement is based on belief in the intent of the assertion, or what Polanyi (1958: 303) refers to as a fiduciary commitment to the statement. When Cuol states, "Oh well, we are Lou", Evans-Pritchard rejects the content in disbelief as an alleged fact. Cuol has already done the same concerning commitment to the belief assumptions of the ethnographer. This disbelief is often characteristic of cross-cultural exchanges.

⁷ I have italicized the phrase "in a form conventional to us" to emphasize the process of commutation from interview or dialogical data to the formal model of lineage trees presented by Evans-Pritchard (1940: 195-210).

⁸ In contrast to an approach that progresses from dialogue to factual and intertextual references by masking the ethnographic experience, a translucent and reflexive model would examine and attempt to preserve each phase of the ethnographic experience (Jules-Rosette 1978: 656-666). This reflexive model involves more than dissecting the "thick description" used by the ethnographer. Instead, it focuses on processes of experiential and factual transformation at each stage of the ethnographic experience.

⁹ The mermaid, or mami wata, is a well known figure in popular African painting (Szombati-Fabian and Fabian 1976: 1-22). It is thought to have been influenced by the appearance of Hindu poster art in West Africa during the 1940s (Drewal 1977). The mami wata is a totalizing sign that combines multiple references to traditional and modern culture.

¹⁰ The relationship between descriptive language and experience is an uneasy one. A gap persists between the observed and intended object and the generalization. Sacks (1963: 1-17) refers to this gap as the "et cetera problem", or the taken for granted information, the absence of which converts ethnography into allegoric description.

REFERENCES

- APOLLINAIRE, Guillaume.
1913. *Les Peintres Cubistes: Méditations esthétiques* (Paris: Eugène Figuière).
- AUSTIN, J. L.
1962. *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
- BAUDRILLARD, Jean.
1972. *Pour une Critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard).
- CLIFFORD, James.
1986. "Introduction: Partial Truths", *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1-26.

- DE CERREAU, Michel.
1980. "On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life", *Social Text: Theory, Culture, Ideology* 3 (Fall), 3-43.
- DREWAL, Henry.
1977. "The New Faces of African Art: European, Indian, and African Imagery in the Ritual Forms of Mami Wata", paper presented at the triennial symposium on African art, Washington, D.C., April 16.
- ECO, Umberto.
1976. *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press).
- EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. E.
1940. *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- FABIAN, Johannes.
1983. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- GARFINKEL, Harold and Harvey SACKS.
1970. "On Formal Structures of Practical Actions" in *Theoretical Sociology: Perspectives and Developments*, ed. John C. McKinney and Edward A. Tiryakian (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts), 337-366.
- GEERTZ, Clifford.
1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books).
1983. "Slide Show: Evans-Pritchard's African Transparencies", *Raritan Review* 3.2 (Fall), 62-80.
- GREIMAS, A. J., and J. COURTÉS.
1979. *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire Raisonné de la Théorie du Langage* (Paris: Hachette).
- JOHNSON, Ragnar.
1976. "Two Realms and a Joke", *Semiotica* 16.3, 195-221.
- JULES-ROSETTE, Bennetta.
1978. "The Veil of Objectivity: Prophecy, Divination, and Social Inquiry", *American Anthropologist* 80.3 (September): 549-570.
1984. *The Messages of Tourist Art: An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Plenum Publishing Corporation).
- MAQUET, Jacques.
1986. *The Aesthetic Experience: An Anthropologist Looks at the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- MOERMAN, Michael.
1974. "Accomplishing Ethnicity", in *Ethnomethodology*, ed. Roy Turner (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin), 54-68.
- POLANYI, Michael.
1958. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row).
- RABINOW, Paul.
1986. "Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology", in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press), 234-261.
- SACKS, Harvey.
1963. "Sociological Description", *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 8, 1-17.
1972. "On the Analyzability of Stories by Children", in *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, ed. John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), 325-345.
- SCHEGLOFF, Emanuel A.
1987. "Between Macro and Micro: Contexts and Other Connections", in *The Micro-Macro Link*, ed. J. Alexander, B. Giessen, R. Münch and N. Smelser (Berkeley: University of California Press), 207-34.
- SCHUTZ, Alfred.
1962. *Collected Papers*. Vol. 1., ed. Maurice Natanson (The Hague: Martinus-Nijhoff, 1962).
- SEARLE, John R.
1975. "Indirect Speech Acts", in *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 3: *Speech Acts*, ed. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic Press), 59-82.
- SPERBER, Dan.
1982. *Le Savoir des anthropologues* (Paris: Hermann).
- SZOMBATI-FABIAN, Ilona and Johannes FABIAN.
1976. "Art, History, and Society: Popular Painting in Shaba, Zaire", *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 3.1 (Spring), 1-21.
- TYLER, Stephen A.
1985. "Ethnography, Intertextuality, and the End of Description", *American Journal of Semiotics* 3.4, 83-98.
- WORTH, Sol, and John ADAIR.
1972. *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press).