Interpretive Social Science and the "Native's Point of View": A Closer Look

Interpretive Social Science and the "Native's Point of View": A Closer Look

TODD JONES
University of Nevada

In the past two decades, many anthropologists have been drawn to "interpretive" perspectives which hold that the study of human culture would profit by using approaches developed in the humanities, rather than using approaches used in the natural sciences. The author discusses the source of the appeal of such perspectives but argues that interpretive approaches to social science tend to be fundamentally flawed, even by common everyday epistemological standards.

In an effort to present themselves to the audience during the monkey performance, the monkey and trainer distance themselves from themselves. And this reflexive process enables them to transform their identity with nature into an identity with culture. The performance then, represents the culturalization process in two ways: transformation of nature (monkey) into culture (performing art) and transformation of self into sign. The latter is a basic feature of the human ability to symbolize.

While the monkey and trainer present the self as an agent to transform nature into culture, the audience of non-burakumin Japanese is amused at the animal attempting to be human and at the trainer, whom they see as being human and yet not quite fully human. The performing art of humans is reduced to an unsuccessful imitation by an animal.

However, when we examine the context of the performance, we see that the presentation of the collective self of the burakumin is to the non-outcaste audience. Therefore, by presenting themselves as the agent of the culturalization process, the outcastes force the non-outcaste audience to be reflexive about their own world, which should represent culture. . . . At the end of the performance, [the audience] realizes that it was they who were the untamed nature to be culturalized by the monkey. Put another way, the monkey and the outcast are the small eyes in yin and yang. For this reason, I think, even amidst the laughter at the monkey performance the audience is reminded, albeit

32

vaguely, of their darker side, as represented by the monkey and the outcast trainer.

(Ohnuki-Tierney 1984, 301-4)

What is going on here?

These paragraphs are taken from an article by a distinguished anthropologist. They provide a good example of the kind of work done under what can be termed the "interpretive" perspective in anthropology, a perspective that has emerged over the last two decades as one of the discipline's most influential research orientations. Advocates of the interpretive approach believe that the study of human beings should not try to emulate the techniques and results of the natural sciences, but should more closely approximate approaches used to understanding human behavior found in the humanities. The metaphor of human behavior being like a text whose meaning must be interpreted is often invoked by interpretivists. Many social scientists see this approach as freeing the study of human beings from the sterile confines of traditional social science theorizing. Others read paragraphs such as the ones above and react with little more than impatience and incredulity. Who is right?

1. UNDERSTANDING THE RISE OF INTERPRETIVISM

Why would a research program which bears more resemblance to literary criticism than to primate ethology suddenly rise to such prominence in a discipline where one still often sees impassioned defenses of its status as a science? I will begin my exploration of the interpretivism debate by looking (with what, necessarily, must be a bird's-eye view) at some of the main considerations that lead many social scientists to conclude that human beings are best studied along the lines suggested by advocates of the interpretive approach.

1.1. Clearing the Way—Losing Confidence in
Traditional Scientific Approaches to Social Science

Perhaps the central reason for the rise of the interpretivist perspective in recent years is a loss of faith in what could be seen as the "standard" social scientific approaches—approaches to studying human behavior that tried to emulate the methods and techniques of

natural sciences. This loss of faith had two parts. One part centered around the perceived inadequacies of social science theories constructed on natural science models ("naturalistic" social science) to give us the types of understandings of human behavior we desired. The other part was a much deeper loss of faith in science as an objective arbiter of truth.

1.1.1. The Inadequacy of "Scientistic" Social Science

At the time of interpretive anthropology's rise, there were numerous reasons to think that naturalistic social inquiry was not a productive way to understand human behavior. To begin with, it was widely perceived that, even according to its own standards of success, naturalistic social science was not meeting with the kind of successes that had been hoped for. While numerous social scientists had written that they, like natural scientists, were looking to discover laws that would enable them to predict phenomena, actual examples of finding such laws were few and far between. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre perhaps put it most bluntly: "the salient fact about [social] sciences is the absence of the discovery of any law-like generalizations whatsoever" (1981, 84). Comments such as this were not limited to philosophers. In 1968, Robert Merton, one of the most important and influential sociologists of our era, was forced to write, "Despite the many volumes dealing with the history of sociological theory and despite the plethora of empirical investigations, sociologists (including the writer) may discuss the logical criteria of sociological laws without citing a single example which fully satisfies the criteria" (p. 92).

1.1.2. Undermining the Objectivist Picture of Science

At the same time that particular styles of social scientific practice that emulated natural sciences were coming under fire, the general picture of science as an objective means of coming to understand the world was, itself, being attacked from a variety of angles. During the sixties and early seventies, when the interpretivist movement in social sciences began, there was a widespread perception that the scientific enterprise, in general, was a morally bankrupt attempt to control nature and human beings. A somewhat milder sentiment was that scientists came to the conclusions that they did on the basis of vast networks of subjective biases rather than on the basis of objective measurements of the world. The view that scientists came to the

results that they did on the basis of previous biases found an important (though perhaps unwitting) ally in a number of relativistic, anti-realist schools of thought that were emerging in the philosophy of science at this time. Here, Thomas Kuhn's (1962) work was perhaps the most influential. The conception of science Kuhn articulated in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was one where the questions asked and the answers discovered depended, not on the objective structure of the world, but on humanly constructed networks of accepted practices and background assumptions constituting particular paradigms. This picture of science as moving from paradigm to paradigm rather than giving us progressively increasing knowledge of reality fit quite well with the views of those who denied that scientific methodology brought us any closer to truth.

1.2. Interpretive Modes of Understanding

For interpretivists, however, just because the project aiming at objectively searching for social laws has been perceived to be a failure need not mean that we must give up on trying to understand social behavior. There have always been numerous types of things we've tried to understand without explicitly looking at them in terms of hypotheses, predictions, or deductions from universalistic causal laws. In trying to explain to a child or a foreigner why the players on a football field move around as they do, for example, we don't make use of universalistic terms or look for laws that will enable us to predict what will happen on the field next—we try to acquaint him with the rules of the game. Proponents of the interpretive perspective have argued that the sort of understanding sought in these sorts of cases should be used as our model of understanding in the social sciences. Some have argued, on a priori grounds, that this is how social science understanding *must* proceed. Others have argued that these sorts of cases merely show us *how to proceed*, by analogy.

The practice of giving philosophical a priori arguments that human behavior must be interpreted and not looked at causally has a long history, going back to Aristotle. For Aristotle, as for Hegel after him, the nature of explanation was a matter of making something intelligible in light of some overall teleological purposes, and not a matter of saying what caused it (see von Wright 1971). In the late 19th century, Wilhem Dilthey argued that the study of human affairs had to be thought of as a different enterprise from the natural sciences because of the importance, for human action, of subjective "inner" categoriza-

tions of reality, in addition to the external movements of bodies studied by the physical sciences. The most influential modern proponents of the idea that understanding human action is not a matter of tracing its causes, but of seeing how the action is defined and conceived of in the overall category systems of the performers of the actions, have been the followers of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

On the Wittgensteinian view, any human action has the status or meaningfulness that it has because of the existence of a socially constructed network of norms or rules which define what such an act will be taken to be. Being a particular type of action is a matter of satisfying socially recognized criteria, and not merely being a certain type of externally describable body movement.

Wittgenstein used the analogy of a game to describe how something's status depends on normative social factors. This analogy has proven to be particularly gripping for many social scientists. (Clifford Geertz once remarked that "what the lever did for physics, the chess move promises to do for sociology" [1983, 168].) The analogy also helps to make clear what is being claimed. On the Wittgensteinian view, being a handshake or a rainmaking ceremony has the same status as being a double play in baseball. What the action is is dependent on a socially recognized system of rules, and not merely on the intrinsic characteristics of the moving bodies. To understand what is going on in a double play, one needs to understand what batting, catching, bases, and perhaps stolen bases and forced running are. The action is understood in terms of the network of the norms and goals that constitute the game of baseball. Analogously, if we want to understand what a sale, a marriage, or a bar mitzvah is, we have to understand the rules that govern these activities. Understanding what a promise is involves us in a vast network of contextual assumptions of what it means to make a promise and what sorts of things constitute the breaking of one. Understanding a divination involves understanding the network of socially recognized norms and assumptions that make this a healing ritual, rather than merely the act of tossing a pile of chicken bones. Like understanding a double play, understanding the Eucharistic Celebration is a matter of seeing the rules determining how such a ceremony is categorized by the actors of that culture.

A second major positive source of appeal for the interpretive perspective comes from the idea that if we look at human behavior in terms of actions whose meanings can be interpreted, the vast realm of ideas and techniques used by those who study things (such as texts

or dreams) using interpretive approaches become available for use in the social sciences. Thus, if actions are conceived of as being like symbols, social scientists would be in a position to make use of the ideas about symbols developed by philosophers such as Pierce and Morris, or literary critics such as Langer and Fish. They might be able to use ideas developed by psychoanalysts about how one goes about finding the meaning of a symbol. Interpretivists believe that by thinking of human action this way and, thus, being in a position to use these ideas and techniques, we will be able to collect a wealth of information that we would be unable to discover using other methods of analysis.

One can readily see that there are a number of features of doing interpretive analyses of cultural behavior that would make it appealing to many people. To begin with, after looking holistically at how a particular action fits into a vast network of beliefs and practices, or looking at an array of symbolic associations an item or action comes to have, one does often feel one understands the system of categories that the natives use in guiding their actions. Seeing how the world is conceived of by the natives, their actions no longer seem to be perverse or random. Second, looking at social phenomena using the interpretive perspective may be seen as allowing us to understand a range of divergent phenomena in a unified way. In a football game, there are hundreds of different ways to run pass and hand-off patterns, but understanding what people are trying to do in running those various patterns is tremendously enhanced if they are all seen as various ways of trying to score a touchdown. Similarly, if we view the Brazilian carnival as "a symbolic embrace that all give to everyone" as Damata instructs us to, the various different sorts of gestures and overtures people make toward each other can be understood in a unified way (1984, 237). Finally, the interpretive perspective is appealing because it comports with the common intuition that there are always different valid interpretations of what it is people are doing. Was Menelaus trying to win back his wife or was he out to pillage the wealth of Troy? Is a Kula gift an expression of friendship or an attempt to get a more costly gift in return? An approach that allows for the possibility of many different valid interpretations seems to be quite reasonable.

1.3. Postmodern Radicalization

To many, then, humanistic perspectives seem to overcome a number of the limitations seen in traditional naturalistic approaches to

social science theorizing. In recent years this move toward the humanities has been extended from a position that's merely *skeptical* of scientific methods to one that's much more radical and self-consciously romantic. In art, Romanticism has been defined as "a sweeping revolt against reason, science, authority, and tradition, and order and discipline" (Booth 1979, 654). This is also a fairly apt description of the "postmodernist" stance that became popular in the social sciences and elsewhere during the eighties. Where Kuhn had written about the lack of *objectivity* in science, due to scientists' clinging tenaciously to the terminology of a preexisting paradigm, many social scientists began worrying about an inherent *oppressiveness* in viewing people through the guiding frame of a particular totalizing paradigm. The worry was that ethnographers, even interpretive ethnographers, tended to employ descriptions that artificially forced the natives studied into a narrow box created by the ethnographer. One reviewer of a recent postmodern ethnography wrote that,

> Taussig is highly critical of totalizing theoretical orientations or modes of presentation. They are hegemonic, tending to "fascism." His important point is that they are restrictive. They distort the world, perpetrate a violence on it and, similar to the Putamayo experience, dismember and mutilate it so that the world is made to conform to totalizing categories. (Kampferer 1989, 91)

These postmodernists, wrote Friedman, worried that " 'portraying in the categories of another' may annihilate that which is portrayed" (1989, 101). The Somoans as portrayed by Margaret Mead or the Tikopians as described by Raymond Firth, wrote James Clifford, were in many ways as much the fictional creations of those who wrote about them as the characters of Dickens and Flaubert novels (1986, 13). As in the literary criticism that came to be ascendant at the time, many humanistic social scientists also began worrying about the political ideologies and the general background beliefs of the writer that came to be smuggled in but "masked" in the ethnographic descriptions they gave. Among the suggested remedies for this was to be tremendously confessional and self-reflective about how one came to write the ethnography one did. Titles like "Point of View in Anthropological Discourse: The Ethnographer as Gilgamesh" (Richardson 1991) began abounding in the literature. Systematic organizing and categorization schemes of any sort began to be mistrusted. Many cited with approval the views of literary critic Jacques Derrida, who saw even the basic metaphysics underlying our obser-

vations as, "the white mythology which re-assembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of what he must still wish to call Reason. Which does not go uncontested" (1982, 213).

To avoid "annihilating the other," the focus, for many ethnographers, began to be on finding ways *not* to represent the people studied. Writes postmodern anthropologist Stephen Tyler, "for the point of discourse is not how to make a better representation, but how to avoid representation" (1986, 128). The result was the creation of numerous "experimental ethnographies" aimed at finding a style which did not mask the "other" in an artificially unifying description. In Tyler's view the best ethnographies would be ones in which "We better understand the ethnographic context as one of cooperative story making that, in one of its ideal forms, would result in a polyphonic text, none of whose participants would have the final word in the form of a framing story or encompassing synthesis—a discourse on the discourse" (1986, 128).

So while many social scientists moved away from scientific and toward humanities-oriented models for understanding human behavior, some moved toward a radical stance which focused as much on avoiding representations as creating them. From this position, the old guiding assumption that the social sciences should be like the natural sciences seemed very far away indeed. There remain large numbers of social scientists, however, for whom the types of analysis generated by such perspectives engender little more than dismay. In the section that follows, I will try to articulate why it is that numerous people find interpretive perspectives so objectionable.

2. WORRIES ABOUT INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

People who object to interpretive approaches do so for many reasons. The most important and most fundamental, however, is that interpretivists are widely seen as being unable to deliver what they promised. Many inside and outside of the social sciences look at the bold claims that interpretivists have made about the people they've studied and are deeply skeptical about their accuracy and veracity. They find no good reasons to believe that the methods used here have really enabled us to understand what interpretive perspectives claim

to be able to do—to enable us to glimpse at the world from what Geertz (1973) terms "the native's point of view."

It is my contention that this skepticism is justified. The relaxing of traditional standards of claim justification associated with science has led interpretivists to often make bold assertions on the basis of very scant evidence. In place of traditional scientific methodology, reasoning, and standards of proof, interpretivists have moved to using standards of evidence associated most commonly with literary criticism. However well these methods work for enabling people to understand literature, there's little reason to believe these methods really give us good trustworthy pictures of the native point of view.

When interpretivists examine some aspect of a peoples' culture, they try to produce an interesting elaborate description of, as Geertz puts it, "what the devil these people are up to" (1973). Interpretive descriptions, whether of literature or the social realm, usually differ from other types of descriptions in that the focus is on showing that *something else* is going on besides what seems to be happening on the surface. Interpretivist writings often aim to show that the items and actions viewed have a deep *symbolic* meaning which is not immediately apparent. They also focus on the "something else" that is happening by looking at how numerous different apparently inchoate and unconnected events are all *tied together* by some central unifying themes.

Looking at nonsurface meanings is certainly important and worthwhile. Unfortunately, using techniques appropriate for interpreting literature to investigate human action often tends to produce interpretive descriptions of the people studied that are highly problematic. In almost any realm, a good description needs to produce accurate, useful beliefs about what it is describing. A good interpretive description of human activity should produce accurate, useful beliefs about the people being described. Given this, there are numerous ways that interpretive descriptions of cultural activities could be inadequate. To begin with, they could be worded so that they tend to produce beliefs about people that are *morally* wrong to hold (e.g., that the people described are stupid or inferior to ourselves). An interpretive description could also lack various *epistemic* virtues we ordinarily demand of decent descriptions. The central argument of this article is that the techniques commonly used by interpretivists make it likely that interpretive descriptions often lack important epistemic virtues that we require of adequate descriptions. I believe that interpretivists use such weak standards for what can count as a good interpretation that the

resulting descriptions are easily often untrue. Even if one doesn't accept truth as a fundamental virtue, we still look for claims to be grounded, or nonarbitrary, with a certain amount of evidence before we'll give them our trust. We also usually demand that adequate descriptions be informative and tell us something of what to expect from the people and things being described. I will argue that on any of these simple commonsensical notions of what's required of an adequate description, interpretive methods are comparatively impoverished at producing them.

To show how interpretivists' watered-down standards allow inadequate descriptions to filter through, I will focus most primarily on the work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Tempting as it is to point out the inadequacies of interpretivism by attacking examples of outlandish and silly interpretive analyses, a far stronger case can ultimately be made by pointing out problems in Geertz's work, which is widely considered to be the best example of its genre in social science (see testaments by Narayan 1993; Walters 1980; Veesing 1988; Shankman 1984). Geertz's work is an excellent example of using literary criticism as a model for how to best do social research. Geertz writes, "Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherences, suspicious emendations and tendentious commentaries, but written, not in conventionalized graphs of sound, but in transient examples of shaped behavior" (1973, 10). In what follows, I will show that the interpretive methods of Geertz and others yield arbitrary and uninformative descriptions and are unable to separate truth from falsity.

2.1. Interpretive Techniques

In his book, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz (1973) examines an array of cultural activity using methods used by literary critics and interpretivists of nearly every stripe. His quite reasonable starting assumption is that in any cultural scenario, more is going on than what appears to be going on at the surface. In literature, when we are faced with this situation, there are a variety of techniques we use to constrain and create a "reading" of the inscriptions we see on the surface. We start off with an understanding of the conventions that give certain signs and expressions a conventional associated meaning (see Hjort 1992). Meanings are also constrained by our beliefs about the nature of the world being described (Davidson 1984; Dasenbrook

1993). We then begin looking beyond the surface at deeper symbolic meanings associated with events being described (see Eagleton 1983). Our "readings" are further constrained by a requirement that the interpretations we give to various parts of a poem or story be consistent with our interpretations of *other* parts (see Juhl 1980) and by an attempt to ensure that the various parts all *cohere* together with an overarching general theme, which gives meaning to the various parts, and is itself constituted by these parts, in a hermeneutic circle (Stegmuller 1977).

We can see nearly all of these methods at work in Geertz's most celebrated piece of cultural exposition, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (1973). Like literary critics, Geertz's first order of business is to provide a clear portrayal of the *surface* scenarios that are happening, before seeing what deeper meanings lie behind them. In literature, this is easier when we are studying works from our own culture in our own language, as the meanings of the symbols on the page are understood on the basis of known conventions of our language. We also understand the nature of the *actions* described in literature by only brief inscriptions, because we fill in the rest of the details based on a rich background knowledge of how the world works. When trying to "read" the actions of those in another culture, we often don't know the significance that norms, rules, and conventions bestow on a particular action. We lack important background knowledge of how the world works there. Geertz fills in these gaps for us by richly describing numerous aspects of Balinese society throughout his description of the cockfight. Unfamiliar rules and conventions are explained to us: for example, waving fingers in front of one's face is a signal that the person wants to bet on the "underdog" cock in a cockfight at odds the same as the number of fingers he's holding up; one must hold a cockfight before major temple festivals as a form of blood sacrifice to appease malevolent demons. Numerous bits of background factual information are also disclosed to us, giving us a context for understanding various other actions Geertz describes: for example, cockfighting is illegal in Bali; Balinese men spend a great deal of time in the care and feeding of their cocks.

As in literature, however, the really interesting part comes when Geertz does a "close reading" to try to uncover the deeper meanings that lie beneath the surface scenarios. He begins doing what fellow interpretivist Victor Turner does—which Colby, Fernandez, and Kronenfeld (1981) point out is just what Freud does:

> The three-step method employed by Turner (1967) for discovering themes in Ndembu ritual symbolism—identification of principal symbolic elements present in a ritual scenario, discovery of the amplified complex of properties associated with (condensed in) these elements, synthesis of the set of abstract themes implicit in these associated properties—is almost precisely that of Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. (P. 432)

Like nearly all interpretivists, Geertz looks for deeper meaning by selecting central features of the cockfight and speculating about what they symbolize. The method for this is somewhat crude. One item is considered a candidate for being a symbol of something else if it is associated with it by convention, resemblance, or spaciotemporal contiguity. Cocks, for example, are read to be phallic symbols because of their vague resemblances to penises, their tendencies to be held by men between their thighs and stroked, their tendencies to be cared for and fussed over exclusively by men, and so on. Balinese national identity is shown to be symbolized by the cock by discussing a famous legend in which the island of Bali was separated from Java by a Javanese prince trying to escape from a heroic cockfighter. The cockfight is shown to symbolize social solidarity by discussing how groups of kinsmen pool their money to make large bets in favor of an underdog cock. Geertz goes through a fascinating litany of links and associations that various parts of the cockfight have with various real and mythological aspects of Balinese society to show us the various remindings they can produce for the Balinese.[1]

Geertz's next major task is to take these various symbolic meanings of various aspects of the cockfight and try to fit them together into one or several coherent "themes." Posited meanings of various features are scrutinized to see how well they "fit" with the meanings ascribed to other features (e.g., how does the fervent boisterous betting fit with the placidity of the rest of Balinese culture?). As with putting together an interpretation of a literary text, posited meanings that fit well together are retained while others are dropped or reinterpreted. One or several overall unifying analyses begin to take shape, and the originally ascribed meanings are reexamined to see how well they fit this overall structure (see Geertz 1979 for a description of this "tacking" hermeneutic procedure). The interpretation or analysis that is ultimately presented to us is that one that emerges from this process (as are the descriptions of the various parts).

For Geertz, the cockfight is somewhat polysemic, embodying a number of themes. But when all is said and done, the central picture that seems to emerge for him when all the symbols are coordinated is this: The cockfight is a safe arena where the Balinese can view the raw naked essence of who they really are. In most parts of their overtly observable lives, the Balinese are hyper-polite and deferential. "The Balinese are shy to the point of obsessiveness of open conflict," writes Geertz. "Oblique, cautious, subdued, controlled, masters of indirection and dissimulation—what they call *alus*, 'polished,' 'smooth'— they rarely face what they can turn away from, rarely resist what they can evade" (1973, 446). Hierarchical status is always an unspoken assumed background feature of any transaction. It is never something that is overtly sought after. Elegance and grace are highly prized, and anything that hints of animality is found repulsive. Children's teeth are even filed at puberty so they will not look like animal fangs.

But deep down the Balinese know that conflict, chaos, and instability are everywhere. The Balinese, Geertz writes, see their world as one surrounded by "animalistic demons that threaten constantly to invade the small cleared-off space in which the Balinese have so carefully built their lives and devour its inhabitants" (1973, 420). This is all transparent in the cockfight where one's carefully reared cock (along with a considerable sum of money) can be suddenly lost in a violent attack of kicking and pecking. People are also not really as deferential and impervious as they seem. The grace and elegance are a facade. Deep down the Balinese are as filled with aggression and anger as people anywhere, perhaps more so, as there is less chance for overt outlet. In the fury of the cockfight, such anger and aggression can be given full expression. "In identifying with his cock," writes Geertz, "the Balinese man is identifying not just with his ideal self, or even his penis, but also, and at the same time with what he most fears, hates, and ambivalence being what it is, is fascinated by—'The Powers of Darkness' " (1973, 420). Most important, however, in the transparent world of the cockfight, the Balinese make clear that status hierarchies, among men and among kin groups, are truly serious business, something that blood will be shed for, something that people are willing to put substantial amounts of money on the line for. Ironically, it's only in a "game" that the Balinese really allow themselves to say that status, my group's superiority (something that ordinarily cannot be overtly striven for), is for real.

2.2. Arbitrariness/Ill-Groundedness

Geertz's interpretive analysis of the Balinese cockfight is fascinating and ingenious. It makes marvelous reading. It is also entirely arbitrary. A commonsensical definition of arbitrariness will suffice here. We call a description arbitrary when the characteristics of what we are describing are equally or more consistent with other alternative descriptions, yet we persist in advocating or privileging a particular one. Imagine that Bob Smith's daughter comes rushing in, telling her father that she saw some animal with a long tail scurrying over the wall of their suburban yard. If Bob later told his neighbors that his daughter had seen a monkey in their yard, we would consider this an entirely arbitrary interpretation, as the features he heard about where just as compatible with the creature being a cat, a rat, or a raccoon. Indeed, in this case, Bob doesn't have much good evidence at all that a monkey had been there, much less *better* evidence for there being a monkey rather than a raccoon. A central problem with interpretive analyses like Geertz's is that the interpretations ultimately arrived at are seldom more well grounded than numerous alternative descriptions that are also compatible with what's been observed in that society.

Let me try to illustrate this by coming up with some other interpretations of what is central in the Balinese cockfight. Each of the following is consistent with all of the observations and factual information Geertz relates, and coherently fits together various associated meanings in the standard ways that literary critics come up with "readings":

1. The Balinese cockfight is a political protest. As Geertz notes, cockfights have been outlawed by the political authorities centered in the neighboring island of Java. Javanese Indonesian authorities worry about what tourists or various heads of state will think about their country if they know that such barbaric violent pastimes are being engaged in. The central meaning of each cockfight staging for the Balinese can thus be seen as a political protest against Javanese authority. Nearly all the policemen (at the time of Geertz's work) in Bali were Javanese. So it is Javanese authorities who will be directly provoked and angered by this display. Moreover, it has always been the cockfight that symbolized Balinese autonomy. As mentioned before, Bali was mythologically separated so a Javanese prince would be spared the wrath of a cockfighting hero. "Even the island itself is perceived from its shape as a small, proud cock," writes Geertz,

"poised, neck extended, back taught, tail raised, in eternal challenge to the large feckless shapeless Java" (1973, 418).

It is significant that the myth mentioned above is a Hindu myth. Bali remains a Hindu-Buddhist outpost in one of the world's most populous Moslem countries. Where Javanese authorities want Indonesia to be an austere artless Islamic country, the pageantry of dressed-up cocks fighting serves to remind people of their proud shadow puppet tradition where battles between Hindu gods and monsters are depicted. There are also myths where fighting cocks turn into rescuing garuda birds, central to Hindu mythology. The cockfight itself is seen as a reminder of this rich Hindu heritage that Javanese authorities want to sweep out of Indonesian life. The main story told by the cockfight is one of Balinese joining arms and flying a forbidden flag—sending Java the message that they prefer their colorful barbarian pleasures to bleak visions of modern statehood.

2. The Balinese cockfight is thinly disguised homoeroticism. Cocks are clearly phallic symbols to the Balinese. This is evident from the first time that one hears *sabung* (cock) as the standard slang for penis. The degree to which cocks and cockfights are symbolic of a very deep male bonding can be seen everywhere. Wherever you see a group of men gathered, sitting in a circle, many of them will be holding a cock, between his thighs, stroking it. This is the symbolic equivalent of the "circle jerks" common among American adolescents. What's more, "Now and then, to get the feel for another bird, a man will fiddle this way with someone else's cock for a while, but usually by moving around to squat in place behind it" (Geertz 1973, 419). Such symbolic homoerotic behavior surrounds the cockfight everywhere. Geertz reports that red peppers are often stuffed up the cocks' anuses "to give them spirit" (p. 420). When a cock is losing a match, his owner "blows in its mouth, putting the whole chicken head into his own mouth and sucking and blowing, fluffs it . . ." (p. 423). Cruising-like behavior is displayed when, in between every match, men flutter in to the center ring, looking for partners to bet with (in a process even Geertz refers to as "wooing"). Women are carefully excluded from any of this, as cockfighting is an all male affair. Indeed, women are not even allowed to look at the spikes that men affix to the legs of their cocks before battle. During the cockfight, Balinese can retreat from their hyperpolite world and become symbolic Greco-Romanish warriors, passionately interested in battle and the eroticized comradery of their fellow men.

Given the outlandish interpretations commonly seen in anthropological journals today (some of which even Geertz calls "farfetched enough to make even a psychoanalyst blush" [1973, 355]), these interpretations are fairly tame. But most interpretivists claim that something can be a symbol of something else, not merely by being mentally associated with it in some way, but just by being associated with *something else* that is. Hence, one can construct an elaborate chain of associations to show something can be a symbol of all manner of things. Anthropologist David Sapir does this in his discussion of the symbolic association of lepers with hyenas in the burial practices of the Kujamaat Diola. Lepers, in Sapir's account, are thought to be being burned by a magic fire associated with ironworking forges. Leprosy is associated with the forge because the way that leprosy acts on the body is seen to be isomorphic to the way that forge fire works on iron. The forge is thought to send leprosy when someone attacks something that the forge, a source of spiritual power, is thought to protect (primarily, cattle or children). If a cow is killed through witchcraft, it is thought likely to have been done by the person in the form of a were-hyena. "Hence," writes Sapir, "if you had leprosy, you were caught stealing something protected by the forge; and if you were stealing, you might have been stealing in the guise of a hyena" (1981, 533). With such ways of "reading" the meanings of symbols being standard interpretivist practice, there is nothing stopping one from using this sort of chaining to uncover numerous other meanings in the cockfight. The cockfight, for example, could be thought of as a depiction of the anxieties one feels in trying to bring up children. The animal cocks can be thought of as symbolizing the still unsocialized animal-like children. As the winning cock's owner is paid his gambling winnings in silver rupia, the silver reminds him of shiny dagger blades or the shiny, mysterious ocean over which many unknown countries lie, harboring hidden unknown dangers for one's children. Having worked through all these dangers symbolically in numerous cockfights, however, Balinese men are able to face domestic life, hardened to its burdens, and able to face its challenges.

These and countless other interpretive "readings" can all be produced using the same techniques that Geertz uses, on the very same observations of Balinese life. If these various different readings are based on the same observations, using the same set of interpretive techniques, then Geertz is arbitrarily favoring the interpretation he's come up with, without there being any special legitimation of that one.

I believe that the interpretive techniques Geertz uses produce a host of various alternative interpretations for straightforward reasons. It is just *too easy* to use social science data to come up with descriptions that qualify as a decent interpretation using the standards humanities scholars use to evaluate literature. In literary scholarship, it is standard procedure to uncover a "meaning" of a symbol by showing that a train of associations can enable some icon to bring a certain idea to mind. In such scholarship, very little counts as an *un*acceptable interpretation of the work as a whole unless it can be shown that parts of work are blatantly inconsistent with that interpretation.[2] Even in the humanities, these tools and standards are weak enough that hundreds of competing interpretations can continually ensue for a given work, each seeming to have used standard meaning-probing techniques adequately and met consistency requirements. Such humanistic techniques and standards are similarly too lax to constrain the number of plausible interpretations of social phenomena.[3] Advocating any particular one of the many interpretations of an event that fits these standards amounts to unreasonably endorsing it arbitrarily.

As P. D. Juhl very effectively points out, even most literary scholars are not comfortable with the idea of a number of different alternative interpretations of a work being acceptable. ("In particular," he points out, "they deny as a rule that readings incompatible with their own are also [separately] acceptable" [1980, 210].) The standard way literary critics try to show that one's own interpretation is better than another's is to collect and display further bits of information which are inconsistent with the other person's interpretation. Indeed, John Ellis (1973) and Paisley Livingstone (1988) have both argued that the main thrust of *most* articles by literary theorists might be summarized as saying something like: "Looking at additional evidence shows that my account is more comprehensive and coherent than previous ones." One response, then, to the problem of arbitrary interpretations, would be to argue that the problem disappears when additional evidence is looked at and one interpretation is shown to be superior to others. Defenders of Geertz, then, could argue that his interpretation is superior to numerous others because his interpretation accommodates lots of other aspects of Balinese society that other interpretations don't.

Solving arbitrariness problems this way is certainly a possibility. But I'm extremely skeptical that such a solution could work very often in social science cases. No matter how many additional observations

are garnered about an event, each observed *part* can be seen as potentially symbolic of thousands of different things, since, as memory researchers Anderson and Bower have demonstrated, virtually anything can be associated with anything else (1973).

Making sure they all fit together into a kind of thematic whole puts some constraints on the interpretation, but because there are so many ways to "read" the parts as symbols in this manner, no matter how many more parts you add, there is still an endless number of possible ways to fit different readings of these parts into *some* unifying whole or another. Colby, Fernandez, and Kronenfeld (1981) write:

> Interpretability represents a weak enough constraint on a solution to leave a number of degrees of freedom in which chance or analytical creativity can operate. The validity problem grows even larger when one realizes: (a) that most "pregnant" symbols offer considerably more than seven potential meanings and (b) that the contrast between "major" and "minor" symbols does not inhere in the data in any obvious way, which leaves the analyst considerable freedom in the selection of symbols around which to build the analysis. (P. 433)

Further observations and data will rarely be enough to narrow down the number of acceptable interpretations in the face of such permissive open-ended techniques and standards borrowed from humanities scholarship.

I also believe that the best solution to this problem in the humanities is not available to social scientists. I believe a powerful case can be made (though I will not try to make it here) for the idea that multiple interpretations should be perfectly acceptable in the humanities. Works of art should try to expand our horizons and increase the number of ways we can conceptualize various things. Critics should encourage us to look for multiple chains of association in art and literature so that we have expanded visions of what *can be* in fictional and real worlds. If what we want to do in the social sciences is to uncover the native point of view, however, it is not enough to show that various associated meanings *can be* found for an event. Uncovering *the native's* view of a symbol set requires that we show certain associations not only *can be*, but actually *are* made by the natives. Showing this, however, requires far more evidence than can be gained using impressionistic humanities-style techniques. Without additional evidence concerning what the natives *do* see—evidence stemming from fields like perceptual psychology and memory research, as well as more traditional studies of what the natives are

systematically exposed to—interpretations of the meanings of sym-
bols to the natives will tend to be ill grounded, as well as arbitrary.
Looking at further features of surrounding events, while continuing
to use humanities-inspired associative meaning probing, then, is
unlikely to give us better-grounded, less arbitrary depictions of the
native point of view.

A second major response that interpretivists can and often do give
to arbitrariness and ill-groundedness problems is just to assume
(usually without much argument) that this state of affairs is not
problematic.[4] Geertz himself seems to sport this sort of casual uncon-
cern about defending a particular interpretation. "You either grasp an
interpretation," writes Geertz, "or you do not, see the point of it or
you do not, accept it or you do not. Imprisoned in its own detail, it is
presented as self-validating, or worse, as validated by the supposedly
developed sensitivities of the person who presents it" (1973, 24). In
another place, he writes, "This raises some serious problems of veri-
fication, all right—or if 'verification' is too strong a word for so soft a
science (I, myself, would prefer the word 'appraisal') of how you can
tell a better account from a worse one. But that is precisely the virtue
of it" (1973, 16).

If one is interested in understanding other peoples' worldviews, it
is hard to see where the virtue Geertz speaks of is. I find this lack of
concern about providing firm evidence that some interpretive de-
scriptions of people are better than others alarming and insensitive.
Imagine that a reader of Geertz's book reads him as attempting to
send the underlying message that the Indonesian people are violent
through and through and naturally prone to massacring each other
the way they did in the mid-sixties. (This is not a far-fetched example.
Indeed, Pecora [1989] comes close to claiming that Geertz implies
this.) Geertz doubtlessly would protest this interpretation as a gross
distortion of what he wrote. He could ask how that reader could
possibly justify or ground such a reading. I doubt very much that
Geertz would be satisfied by being told "I'm not concerned with
showing that this reading is right or wrong—You either grasp an
interpretation or you do not; accept it or you do not." We often don't
accept others' accusations that we are thinking, feeling, or behaving
a certain way without firm evidence. It is very unsettling when
anthropologists seem not to grant the people they study the same
courtesy. If we want to uncover the natives' point of view, it will not
do to settle on any old arbitrarily chosen picture of this that anyone
can conceivably come up with. By his casual lack of concern with

validating some interpretations over others, Geertz can't help but encourage arbitrariness in creating and selecting interpretive descriptions of the natives' point of view.

I believe that respect for others requires that we refrain from making pronouncements about them, unless such pronouncements are suggested by clear evidence. The standards and techniques borrowed from literary criticism are loose, weak, and vague enough to legitimize all manner of interpretive descriptions of "what the devil these people are up to." These interpretive descriptions are based on lightly constrained free-association, not strong evidence. People lose trust in those who seem to give arbitrary or ill-grounded descriptions of people and things. I believe that public mistrust engendered by the rise of this sort of scholarship is one of the reasons why humanistic social scientists are increasingly ignored when public policy makers seek information about various peoples and social structures. This brings me to my next criticism of interpretivism.

2.3. Informativeness

A primary purpose of most descriptions is to give listeners information about what's being described. Unfortunately, humanities-style interpretive descriptions of cultural activity are often among the most uninformative descriptions in social science. Good descriptions of anything often tell us what to expect from something, upon closer inspection. They can tell us what kind of past history something is likely to have had, or what it might do in various contexts. When someone describes his grandfather as being a "real Rush Limbaugh type," we have a good idea of what he's likely to say and think about various political issues that come up.

A brief look at the sorts of interpretive descriptions commonly encountered in the interpretivist literature, however, reveals that such descriptions are often unable to give answers to any of these sorts of questions. Consider the claim described at the beginning of this article:

> The monkey and the outcast are the small eyes in yin and yang. For this reason, I think, even amidst the laughter at the monkey performance the audience is reminded, albeit vaguely, of their darker side, as represented by the monkey and the outcast trainer. (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984, 301-4)

What does this tell us about what either the performers or the audience will *do* at a monkey performance? Indeed, what does it even tell us they will *think*? What does being vaguely reminded of your dark side entail? What features are present in their conscious or unconscious minds at this time? This description gives us almost no information whatsoever about what to expect about the people described this way.[5] Vincent Crapanzo finds similar vacuity in Geertz's assertions about the Balinese cockfight. To begin with, when Geertz attributes various sentiments to "the Balinese," it's never clear who he is talking about. "We must ask: on what grounds does he attribute 'social embarrassment,' 'moral satisfaction,' 'aesthetic disgust' (whatever that means), and 'cannibal joy' to the Balinese? to all Balinese men? to any Balinese man in particular?" (1986, 72)

One of the ideas driving social scientists to interpretivism in the first place was the vacuity of traditional social science generalizations, such as "all cultures have religion." But interpretivists often refuse to apply this quite cogent criticism to themselves. From Ruth Benedict's early descriptions of some cultures as "Dionysian" or "Apollonian" (1934), to Taussig's postmodern ruminations about the Putumayo being "but a figure for a global stage of development of the commodity fetish" (1987, 128), interpretive social scientific descriptions often tend to be strikingly uninformative. Reading that the sixties' counterculture movement was all about "a return to traditionalism and a repudiation of utilitarian materialism" (Bellah 1979) might be fascinating to students of recent U.S. history, but it tells later generations next to nothing about what further features they might expect to find among flower children or would-be revolutionaries. Looking at numerous interpretive social science descriptions, it is startling to see how few answers come to mind when one asks, "What further do we now know about what we can expect of these people after reading this?"

Why are interpretive descriptions so uninformative? I suspect that it stems from the aversion interpretivists have to trafficking in laws, causal statements, and generalizations. Knowing something is some sort of X can give you lots of information *if* you combine this notion with general principles that say that something's being an X means that L, M, and N features will also be found, under conditions A, B, and C. Without explicit or implicit generalizations of this sort assumed in the background, the amount of information a description can give you is minimal. Traditional naturalistic social science tries to give behavior descriptions which *specifically highlight* that activity's

place in a network of causal or structural generalizations. As part of an explicit lawlike network, such descriptions automatically entail certain things that can be further expected. In his theory of market economies, for example, Harrison White (1981) claims that, contrary to prevailing economic assumptions, producers do not tend to compete with each other to take shares of the market, but instead they will try to differentiate their products from each other in order to occupy their own unique niches. Such a theory tells us something we can generally expect of people whose economic role is described as a "producer."[6]

By contrast, in some formulations of interpretivism (e.g., the Wittgensteinian view discussed above), formulating descriptions that function as part of causal laws is explicitly thought to be *forbidden* by the very nature of proper social inquiry. Our understanding of social phenomena, like in our understanding of geometry, or chess, should not focus on causal laws—but on definitional rules which give things the status and meaning that they have in that society. In other formulations, the possibility of causal knowledge in the social sciences is not ruled out a priori. Yet their descriptions will still be uninformative because the sorts of entities they are focusing on, namely, *underlying meanings*, are not the sort of well-behaved entities for which we have many reliable generalizations. First, consider the sort of meaning interpretivists seek to uncover when they want to find the sort of thinking, beliefs, and associations that are happening below the surface as the natives look at some icon or event or perform some action. Let's assume (implausibly, I suspect) that we not only could uncover a *possible* chain of underlying thoughts and associations, but an actual one, and that we can claim that this chain or its end point was the meaning of the event for the people involved. Such a claim still won't tell us *anything* further about how the people involved will think or act unless we also know a great deal more about how such "meanings" interact with the host of other *surrounding* beliefs, thoughts, desires, and other associations. Systematic generalizations about how some mental states interact with others and lead to certain behaviors, however, are just the sort of thing most interpretivists eschew as being far too scientistic.[7] Furthermore, as so many *different* sorts of other beliefs, desires, associations, and so on might surround a given "meaning" arrived at, it's very difficult to say what an individual or group will do when they are reminded of the particular meaning, unless one is speaking of *very* broad general tendencies. (What do the Japanese do [or think] when reminded of their dark sides?)

Another sort of "meaning below the surface" that interpretivists seek to uncover—the underlying thematic connection between different surface events—also tends to be fairly uninformative when found. The problem is that knowing an overall theme will not tell you any of the *particulars* which construct it—as the same "theme" can be embodied in thousands of ways. Knowing that one of the central organizing themes of Huck Finn is the evils of racism tells you nothing about any of the events in the story. Similarly, knowing that the cockfight is about demonstrating the importance of status tells you little about what one will find at any particular cockfight. This state of affairs is much less a problem for literary scholarship. One of the central things we want from criticism is for the critic to help us find a condensed unifying central moral or epistemic message to help us understand the story or to edify us more generally. Interpretivist social scientists who use humanistic methods to help us understand sequences of events may also enlighten and edify us this way. But we also look to social science to help us see what people will think and do when, and why. A social science that can locate unifying "themes" but cannot tell us what we can expect from people is far less satisfying than one that could.

2.4. Producing False Beliefs About the Natives

One central constraint on any good description is that it does not tend to lead people to have false beliefs about the things described. Basic respect for people should lead anthropologists of any stripe to avoid descriptions that can easily lead readers to have false beliefs about the people described. It is currently quite fashionable for many academics to profess not to believe in truth and falsity. For them, the previously discussed problems should loom largest.[8] For most of the reading public who looks to social scientists to learn what others are like, however, having true and avoiding false beliefs about others is terribly important. I believe that one of the main reasons interpretivism leads to grave difficulties is because such methods do not weed out descriptions that lead to false beliefs about the peoples studied.

As we have been discussing, one of the central types of claims made by interpretivists are those concerning how people (often unconsciously) *see* the surface icons and events that transpire. The great difficulty with all claims of this sort is that, because one cannot directly observe unconscious states, it is comparatively easy for people to be

wrong in their pronouncements of what is going on there—without any direct visible signs that one is wrong.

A large source of difficulty with these sorts of claims comes from the type of evidence interpretivists use to indicate that the natives see things in a certain way. Because interpretivists can't directly see how the natives see the world, they often rely heavily on the next best thing— what the natives *say* about their world. Unfortunately, even in the best of circumstances, what people say about their world is often not a good indicator of what they think about it. (See Jones [forthcoming] for a detailed argument to this effect.) For anthropologists, however, this problem is greatly compounded by the fact that they are rarely native speakers of the language of the people they study. Indeed, prior to fieldwork, most have rarely studied the language of the people studied for more than a year.[9] At best, many subtleties of people's thinking are lost; at worst, the anthropologist translates what the native says completely erroneously, giving people false beliefs about what the natives think.

In a courageous article, Keesing (1989) cogently discusses how he came to realize, over the years, just how wrong anthropologists, himself included, often get it. R. Guideri, for example, writes that the Fatalika of the Solomon island believe and say that during a certain ritual, "the truth becomes an illusion." Keesing (1989) counters:

> According to my Fatalika informants, the sentence (which should be written fa'a -burru-sia; na akalo rao-a: mammana-a nia sakatafa) means (in the context of sacrifice) something like "become possessed (lit., [cause-be blurred /confuse /forgotten]-ize); the ancestor produces it; empowerment becomes manifest." Guideri's rendering of the final clause is crucial (because he makes so much of it) and simply wrong. In other contexts, sakatafa is "emerge, come into view"; in this context it is (metaphorically) "become manifest." It certainly has nothing to do (my informants insist) with the truth's being an illusion. . . . "What faith are we to have in philosophical explorations of the mystical depths of the Fataleka mind when they rest on linguistic misinterpretations and errors of transcription and translation? (P. 462)

Another difficulty of translating words and thoughts across cultures is a lack of familiarity with what, in that culture, is a comparatively literal phrasing, and what is more metaphorical. In everyday English, for example, we often use words that seem to imply we believe that luck was a person determining the outcome of games of chance (Keesing 1985) or that we make decisions with our stomachs (see also Lakoff and Johnson 1980). "These conventional ways of talk

imply, however, no corresponding beliefs about the world, and individual speakers of the language apparently hold widely varying folk models of cause and chance," writes Keesing. "We have no reason to assume either that other peoples' schemes of conventional metaphor are more deeply expressive of cosmological schemes than our own or that their 'cultural models' are more uniform than ours. . . . The danger of our constructing nonexistent metaphysical schemes that seem to be implied by conventional metaphors but would be meaningless or absurd to native speakers if they could read what we write about them raises ethnographic nightmares for me."

The basic underlying problem, however, is that it is plain easy to construct completely made-up *fictional* attributions of the natives' point of view that can pass the easy-to-meet literary standards of being a decent interpretation of what is going on in native minds, as I did above. If it is easy for fictional ascriptions of mental states to be produced while scrupulously following techniques borrowed from the humanities, how are we to know whether Geertz's or Ohnuki-Tierny's pronouncements about how the people studied think aren't just as completely fictional?

I have been arguing that when techniques used for studying literature are used for studying culture, the results are inadequate social science. Note that I am not simply making the point that interpretive descriptions fail to meet the cannons of acceptable science (a point made, for example, by Shankman [1984]). I am claiming that the descriptions of people produced by interpretive social science tend to be poor descriptions according to our *basic commonsensical* ideas about what it takes for something to be a good description. However good the open-ended methods used in literary criticism are for enabling us to better understand literature, they produce social scientific descriptions which are ill grounded and arbitrary, uninformative, and easily false.

It should be noted that for some, postmodernism, interpretivism's radical extension, provides a way of avoiding such problems. Colby, Fernandez, and Kronenfeld (1981) had once written that interpretivist writings reminded them of a Rorschach inkblot test where people were encouraged to project all kinds of images onto a meaningless set of squiggles (p. 433). Postmodernists could respond to the criticism that such interpretations are arbitrary by saying that this sort of projection is all we *can* have. They counsel people to *avoid* debates about which are correct interpretations. For postmodernists, all interpretations are subjective perceptions, shaped by the interpreter's

ideology. There need be no problem of groundedness, for there is nothing to ground. The aim of postmodern anthropology is to paint explicitly varied portraits of a people and to make people skeptical of the very idea that there is a single "correct" picture of what is going on below the surface. Similarly, postmodernists do not worry about producing false beliefs about the people studied because they do not aim at producing "true" ones. Postmodern anthropologists also often avoid claims about how the natives see the world, in favor of discussing the subjective impressions of *the anthropologists* studying them. Friedman mockingly refers to this as "the awesome fascination with the experience of oneself in the field" (1991, 96). Postmodernist Roy Wagner argues that "the poetic anthropologist wants only to be the shaman or provoker of this contingency of producing an authentic, realistic, and meaningful portrayal of what is felt and known through internal self-perception" (Brady 1991, 34).

But postmodern social science is still highly inadequate when it comes to informativeness. Postmodernists are even more reluctant to use causal generalizations than their interpretivist cousins. Indeed, their aim is often to get people to avoid thinking about others in the sorts of clear conceptual categories that tell us what to expect of them. Rather than producing generalizations about what various groups of people tend to do, what you often see in postmodern anthropological writings are passages like this:

> Why not rid ourselves of the fetishisms of space whose only teachings are separation, displacement and alienation? When men shall roll up space as if it were a piece of paper, then there will be an end to evil, and we shall know the magician who creates the illusion of the universe. And the Great Noun, the thing called language, the maya of the gram, that placate creature of the grammarian and grammatologist—let all speak of it as the unspeakable plexiform illusion it is, and turn to discourse without the metaphors of space and light, of potentia and actus. Discourse is being time without the end, honey without the honeycomb or the bee. And this might be the postmodernism whose coming has been foretold and whose arrival is still awaited.
>
> Beneath the glimmering boreal light, mirrored polar ice groans and heaves, the flame flickers feebly on the altar hearth in the alter heart into the holy, breathing darkness of the antipodal night. (Tyler 1986, 59)

Or, to look at a more specifically ethnographic example, consider this:

> By contrast the white colonist undergoes his transformative experience by means of the image of the shaman as devil. He dies at that point, ascending to the godhead of redemption. This process of death and

> rebirth swings on the pivot of wildness, as invested in the storming
> hurricane, light and shade, wild pigs, snakes coming into and out of
> oneself, and finally the metamorphosing trinity of tiger-shaman-devil.
> (Taussig 1987, 327)

Such passages are extremely evocative and interesting, but they do not give us much useful information about what we can expect of people. If the central purpose of the postmodern ethnography is to "avoid representation" or to "disrupt the text," it is clear that this is not the place to look if one wants to know what the natives will do in various circumstances or to even dimly glimpse "the native point of view." Postmodern social scientists, I fear, successfully avoid giving biased hegemonic views about the people they study at a cost of not giving us much information at all. "For all their claims to give the 'practical and sometimes political' view of interpretation, these contextualists do not get us much beyond skeptical doubts about interpretive validity," writes Bohman (1991, 152). I believe that spending a great deal of time and money studying a people in order *not* to represent what they are like is a grave waste of resources. It does not allow us to understand them, or converse with them. Postmodernism, a natural outgrowth of the romantic antiscientism that spawned interpretivism, is like interpretivism in that they both often tell us far less about other cultures than do the scientistic approaches that these humanistic ones sought to replace.

3. WHENCE FROM HERE?

The preceding discussion makes it clear why the skepticism that often greets interpretivist analyses is quite justified. Techniques that may be useful for understanding literature tend to produce arbitrary and uninformative descriptions of real social scenarios. What we saw earlier in the article, however, was that numerous considerations pointed to limitations in many traditional approaches and suggested that interpretive approaches, by contrast, were highly desirable, or even necessary. The task remaining for us is to look at where we should go from here, in light of the criticisms of both interpretivism and traditional naturalistic perspectives.

3.1. Must Social Science Aim at
Interpretive and Not Causal Explanation?

A central criticism of traditional social science approaches was that there was little attention paid to such things as the meaning of monkey performances for Japanese audiences. The desire to examine such phenomena led many to interpretivism. Some even went as far as to argue that social phenomenon, by its very nature, *had to be* understood with an interpretive perspective rather than with perspectives that looked for causes. I want to suggest, however, that those a priori philosophical arguments by no means establish that the types of analyses typically undertaken by interpretivists are the *only* ones we want from social science. They also do not establish that one cannot look for meanings scientifically. The arguments that the social sciences must, by necessity, be interpretive were based on the idea that the nature of any particular social phenomena, like the nature of an element in a game, is determined by satisfying socially held logical-meaningful criteria. While it might be true to say that *what makes* something a touchdown or a time-out is a set of socially agreed upon rules, that doesn't mean that, in addition to learning the logical structure of such entities, we don't *also* want to have some knowledge of what particular teams are likely to do in various circumstances. Indeed, the desirability of this additional knowledge accounts for the fact that people can make large sums of money stealing and selling team playbooks from time to time. Analogously, even if we believe it is very important to know what the rules constituting something's *being* a peacemaking ceremony are, we may still also want knowledge that will help us to see the conditions under which one party *will initiate* a peacemaking ceremony, knowledge that might be gained by systematically looking for the causes of certain social regularities.

It is even more important to note, however, that there is no reason to think that rules, conventions, and meanings can't themselves be studied in a more systematic scientific manner. As critics of traditional approaches rightly maintained, we certainly understand social behavior better if we understand how the people are conceptualizing their world, rather than just looking at their behavior. The problem with examining social meanings with literary approaches, as we've seen, however, is that far too many meanings can be read into any social scenario with these methods; and once a meaning is assigned,

that tells us far too little about what else that entails. What we clearly need are theories and methods that help carefully narrow down which associations and perceptions people are actually likely to have in a situation, and tell us what else this is likely to make people think and do. More systematic and constrained theories of exactly these topics *are* routinely explored in the rapidly developing field of cognitive science.

For decades, for example, cognitive scientists have been exploring the fine details of associative memory (e.g., Anderson and Bower 1973; McClelland and Rumelhart 1986). One would think that their discoveries would be extremely helpful to those in the numerous fields in which investigations into the meaning of a symbol begin by looking at what features are mentally associated with the features of a perceived icon or event. Cognitive scientists have also systematically investigated how people categorize things, and the mental representations of concepts (e.g., Medin and Smith 1985). They've looked at what things tend to be remembered first and what things tend to be forgotten. They've even explicitly looked at the internal structure of "rules" for how to perform various actions (Colby 1975; Schank and Abelson 1977). For scholars interested in how items and events are seen by cultural natives, and in people's rules and recipes for how to act in various situations (in short, all of the things interpretivists profess to be interested in), cognitive science writings would seem to contain a gold mine of information. In my view, many cognitive scientists have long been pursuing the same information that interpretivists hope to uncover, but in a more constrained, systematic, and informative manner. If we want to know about the conventions and connections people utilize in making social actions meaningful, I believe it is by borrowing methods from cognitive science, not literary theory, that will truly give us our most useful and accurate pictures of "the native point of view."

3.2. "The Native's Point of View" and the Scientific Study of Social Cognition

The notion that ideas about cognition could illuminate our understanding of cultural behavior is certainly not a new one. In one corner of anthropology itself, work along these lines has been developing since the late fifties. For a while there was even a full-scale movement known as "The New Ethnography." It was organized around the idea, to use Ward Goodenough's terms, that culture consisted in everything

one needed to know to be a native. This cognitive tradition in anthropology has continued, in numerous incarnations, up to the present. Notable contributors to this tradition include D'Andrade (1965, 1989), D'Andrade and Strauss (1992), Frake (1964, 1977), Holland (1985), Holland and Quinn (1987), Dougherty (1985), Quinn (1985), and Strauss and Quinn (1994).

The cognitive tradition in anthropology has certainly had a mixed record of success. In the early days of the "New Ethnography," people like Geertz were skeptical because meaning seemed to them to be much more of a public phenomenon, rather than an internal private one. Other critics took the New Ethnographers to task for their unrealistic necessary-and-sufficient condition based views of concepts (Randall 1976; Dougherty and Keller 1985) and their commitment to rigid rules of cultural conduct which seemed to be routinely broken by members of a particular culture (Haviland 1977; Harris 1979).

But these worries and difficulties with early cognitive-oriented studies of culture need not doom later more sophisticated attempts. First, I think that worries such as Geertz's need not be as troubling as they seem. It may be true that our commonsense conception of what meaning *is* is public and nonmentalistic. This does not mean, however, that our most sophisticated way of *studying* how people conceptualize their world, and how this contributes to cultural behavior, needs to follow the contours of our commonsense concept of meaning. Examining how mental processes shape how ideas are formed, remembered, and used may turn out to be a more productive way of understanding cultural thinking and behavior than focusing on an amorphous ill-defined "public meaning."

Furthermore, our understanding of cognition has improved dramatically since the days of the "New Ethnography." Contemporary theorists see concepts as far less rigid and hierarchical than earlier theorists saw them. Newer cognitive models (including connectionist ones) depict concepts as far more flexible context-dependent entities. Earlier notions of "rules" for behavior (Kay 1964; Colby 1975) have been replaced by more variable higher-level entities that emerge from dynamically different subcomponents (Langacker 1987; Lakoff 1987; McClelland and Rumelhart 1986). These contemporary ideas about how thinking works could form a much stronger basis for determining how the natives are conceptualizing the world than using unconstrained techniques borrowed from literary studies. Using such cognitive-oriented ideas and techniques to understand what is hap-

pening in native minds also certainly offers us a better understanding of cultural activity than past scientistic focusing on surface behavior.

The cognitive approach to the study of cultural institutions that I am briefly mentioning here is, of course, not the only interesting approach one might take to study such culture. But it is one that I believe has the potential to successfully address the areas many interpretivists and others consider very important. And there is no reason not to call it scientific.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In recent years, many scholars turned away from traditional naturalistic social scientific perspectives for understanding human culture in favor of interpretive ones. Believing that a proper understanding of human cultural behavior had to pay attention to how the natives conceptualized the world around them, they began to look at social phenomena using techniques borrowed from the humanities. In my view, such thinkers had the wrong culprit, and their "cure" was worse than the disease. Believing that "scientism" was responsible for many of the inadequacies of social science, they began using nonscientific techniques that resulted in claims and descriptions that lacked many of the virtues of scientific claims. Science tries to describe things in terms of their place in a lawlike nexus. Interpretivists, by contrast, tend to give vague descriptions that give you comparatively little information about what else to expect from the entities and events described. In good science, one is careful to gather sufficient evidence to show that one's claims are likely true. In interpretivism, there is little to stop one from advancing any arbitrary claim on the basis of fragmentary evidence.

The problems with more traditional social scientific approaches, in my view, was not their allegiance to scientific virtues, but their adhering stubbornly to a narrow outmoded *empiricist* conception of science which focuses on surface observations. But as Chomsky (1957) had pointed out to Skinner in the late fifties, sophisticated science does not focus on generalizations about surface observations. It focuses on deeper unobservable theoretical entities postulated to be responsible for a variety of our observations. Interpretivists were rightly interested in the nonsurface, conceptual categorization schemes that gave events the significance they had for natives and helped determine how they would behave. However, I see no way that techniques

borrowed from the study of literature can give us anything but vague, arbitrary guesses about the native point of view.

The inadequacy of the literary perspective, however, need not mean we must return to traditional empiricism. The proper remedy for incomplete science does not lie in an alternative to science, but in *better* science. Developments in linguistics, artificial intelligence, and psychology in the last several decades have made it possible to pursue much more sophisticated studies of how natives conceptualize the world as they do, on the basis of constraints on the way humans associate, reason, remember, and make decisions. I believe a constrained, well-grounded, scientific approach using such information holds much more promise for giving us accurate pictures of what Japanese audience members tend to be thinking as they watch performing monkeys. Humanities-oriented interpretivist approaches may tell us interesting things about the thinking of the authors of books and articles, but there's no reason to trust they're telling us much about the worldviews of the natives. As interpretivists know well, that is too important to miss.

NOTES

1. Exactly who the meanings are meanings *for* and what "medium" a meaning inheres in is often left vague by Geertz and other interpretivists, just as it is by many literary critics. Different theories of meaning range from those who see them as internal to individuals (Fodor), to those who see them as inhering in social practices (Mead), to those who see them as held by large historical groups (Gadamer, Hegel). In "The Interpretation of Cultures" Geertz seems to embrace a wide range of philosophical interpretations of meaning, quoting everyone from proponents of macro-social structural entities, like Talcott Parsons, to radical behaviorist psychologists like Galanter. At the same time, he also continually uses the familiar mentalistic terminology we commonly use to talk about the way individuals think about and perceive their world within their own heads. For the purposes of this article, then, I will be analyzing interpretivists' attempts to tease out meanings without trying to attribute any particular clear view of meaning to them.

2. In some literary theories (e.g., deconstructionism), even this requirement is waived. Geertz also sometimes downplays the importance of coherence and consistency for interpretation (1973, 17). As this requirement is usually the strongest constraint there is on interpretation—and is itself not very strong—without it, the number of possible interpretations one can come up with is mind bogglingly unlimited.

3. Sometimes interpretivists add other constraints, by interpreting what is happening in light of their favorite theory of the unconscious, or their favorite theory of collective behavior. A Freudian theory, for example, will put some constraints on what a symbol is a symbol of in light of its posits about which types of thought are the ones most commonly brought to mind. There are at least three major problems, however,

that keep these extra constraints from being much help. First, there are literally dozens of competing theories about what sorts of unconscious beliefs and desires lie behind behavior, and how they come to be there. Within the psychoanalytic tradition alone, there are Freudian theories, Jungian, Adlerian, Horneyite, Sullivanian, Frommian, Reichian, and Eriksonian theories. There are also numerous competing theories about collective social meaning (e.g., Marxist, Structural Marxist, Symbolic Interactionist). The lack of consensus about the nature of the unconscious ought to make one pause before using one of these theories as the basis for ascribing particular unconscious beliefs to collections of people. Second, it is very dubious that many of the most commonly used theories of the unconscious are accurate. Advocates of these theories usually eschew making systematic attempts to provide evidence for them (see Harris 1979; Grunbaum 1984). Worse, when attempts by independent researchers have been made to test two of the most prominent theories, Freudian and Levi-Straussian, the results have consistently been stunning failures for both (see Harris 1979; Erwin 1993). Third, and most damaging, however, is that even if one of our current theories of the unconscious or collective meaning were well established, few of them provide enough constraints to keep dozens and dozens of different thoughts and associations as counting as "the meaning of the symbol," even within the constraints of the theory. In an article on discussing the Rodney King beating, for example, anthropologist Andrew Feldman suggests officer Stacy Koon saw King as a wild bear that needed to be culturalized by submitting to state authority (1994). That's possible. So is the idea that King was seen as a symbol of a Black revolutionary movement, one that threatened the American government and way of life. Perhaps Koon saw King as a symbolic snake and believed that it is proper for snakes to be lying on the ground. Maybe, in trying to put King down, Koon remembered a tree that he chopped and chopped at but couldn't fell as a child, and King became the symbol of Koon's continually straining and failing. What's important is that *none* of our current theories of the unconscious is incompatible with projecting *any* of these different unconscious beliefs to Koon in these circumstances. The additional constraints that interpretivists usually use are just not that helpful for narrowing down the number of possible interpretations that can be given to a symbol.

4. As far as I can see, the two best ways of arguing that this arbitrariness is unproblematic will not work. If many different interpretations are all legitimated by one's interpretive method, one might try to resolve this by (1) claiming that there is nothing lost in arbitrarily or randomly picking and using *one* of these, or (2) accepting them all simultaneously.

These moves will severely limit how much information an interpretive description can give you. Solution 2 leads to cacophony. An interpretative description, like any other description, seeks to give information about what else one might expect of the item described, on closer inspections. Different interpretive descriptions yield very different expectations. Accepting them all, one doesn't know what to expect. If a Balinese rooster is said to be a symbol of one's penis, one's children, one's parents, one's country, and the United States, there is absolutely no telling how one will think and behave toward it, and the various interpretations have yielded more confusion than information.

There are also problems with arbitrarily accepting one of a number of interpretations legitimated by one's methods. If other interpretive descriptions seem apt, ignoring these others will keep one from having important information about these people that these other interpretations contain. Worse, accepting a single interpretation, when others are apt as well, will give one distorted information. This is most easily seen by

example. Imagine that these three interpretations of George Foreman's boxing come-back are consistent with all our observations: (a) he did it for the money, (b) he did it to impress his kids, (c) he did it to prove to himself he's not over the hill. If we arbitrarily pick the money interpretation when the others also seem apt, we're going to get a distorted picture of the importance of money to George and have erroneous expecta-tions about him.

Now it should be pointed out that in many sciences, numerous descriptions can often be given of the same entities. Why then, should this be a problem here? The answer is that in other sciences, the particular set of features that a description is *supposed to* cover is much clearer, so that differing descriptions will not lead to conflicting expec-tations. To adopt Paisley Livingstone's (1988) analogy, a topological map, a road map, and a county map of Denmark will not lead to conflicting expectations. Three different artistic "pictures of Denmark," however, might yield such confusion. Because "mean-ing" is not a very clearly delimited domain, it's never clear what a single partial interpretive description is and isn't meant to cover.

5. This is not to say that interpretivists don't ever provide us with good information about the people they study. Quite the contrary, interpretivists' accounts are usually filled with reams of interesting information. What's interesting, however, is that their descriptions tend to be their most informative when they are *not* attempting to give sophisticated literary criticism style "readings," but are, instead, giving straightforward commonsensical descriptions of what the people studied are doing. It is when inter-pretivists qua interpretivists strive to give an interesting reading of the "deeper" meaning that they give descriptions that convey little information in the way I'm describing. This is especially true for the postmodernists.

6. If my analysis is correct, being informative in this way requires that we have a correct knowledge of the applicable generalizations and a correct knowledge of the particular conditions involved. These, no doubt, can be difficult to get, but I see no reason to believe it's impossible. We all carry around hundreds of explicit and implicit generalizations about social behavior in our minds—otherwise we would continually be surprised by the behavior of our compatriots. Social science begins by systematizing and simplifying these. When critics of scientific social science began criticizing attempts to find laws, what really prompted their dismay, in my view, were not lawlike state-ments, in and of themselves, but the *particular inaccurate*, rigid, and vacuous ones that many social scientists were proposing.

7. As mentioned in note 3, sometimes interpretivists will make use of various theories of the unconscious. Such theories presumably could be used to say what people in various mental states would tend to think and do. The problem with the theories interpretivists most often make use of, however (Psychoanalytic and Structuralist), have already been discussed. These theories tell us about very general vague parame-ters of the dynamics of thoughts (e.g., people will think in terms of binary oppositions) which are consistent with scores of different particular internal workings. So even if these theories were right, they wouldn't tell you much about what thoughts tend to ensue when. There are also all of the aforementioned problems with assuming that any of the commonly used ones *are* correct theories.

8. While disdain for the notion of "truth" is prevalent among interpretivists, their print justifications for this disdain are usually so shallow and ill informed by the contemporary philosophical literature on the topic that they can only be described as embarrassing. Most seem to be unaware that there are numerous different sophisticated conceptions of what "truth" entails. My suspicion is that if they familiarized themselves

with the literature, most scholars would find themselves in agreement with *some* theory of truth or other. (See Kirkham [1992] for an overview of the various contemporary theories of truth.)

9. My own experiences as a graduate student in anthropology, as well as discussions with others, make it clear that the problems Keesing discusses aren't isolated incidents. How poorly anthropologists often understand the language of the people they study might be termed the discipline's "dirty little secret."

REFERENCES

Anderson, J., and G. Bower. 1973. *Human associative memory*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bellah, R. N. 1979. The new religious consciousness and the crisis in modernity. In *Interpretive social science: A reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow and W. Sullivan, 341-64. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Benedict, R. 1934. *Patterns of culture*. New York: New American Library.

Bohman, J. 1991. *New philosophy of social science*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Booth, W. 1979. Romanticism. *Encyclopedia Brittanica*. 15th ed.

Brady, I. 1991. Harmony and argument: Bringing forth an artful science. In *Anthropological poetics*, edited by I. Brady, 3-37. Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Chomsky, N. 1957. Review of *Verbal Behavior* by B. F. Skinner. *Language* 35:26-58.

Clifford, J. 1986. Introduction: Partial truths. In *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography: A school of American research advanced seminar*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 1-26. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Colby, B. 1975. Cultural grammars. *Science* 187:913-16.

Colby, B., David Fernandez, and David Kronenfeld. 1981. Toward a convergence of cognitive and symbolic anthropology. *American Ethnologist* 8 (3): 422-50.

Crapanzano, V. 1986. Hermes's Dilemma: The masking of subversion in ethnographic description. In *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography: A school of American research advanced seminar*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 51-76. Berkeley: University of California Press.

D'Andrade, R. G. 1965. Trait psychology and componential analysis. *American Anthropologist* 67:215-28.

———. 1989. Cultural cognition. In *Foundations of cognitive science*, edited by Michael I. Posner, 795-830. Cambridge: MIT Press.

D'Andrade, R. G., and C. Strauss. 1992. *Human motives and cultural models*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Damata, H. 1984. On carnival, informality, and music, a point of view from Brazil. In *Text, play, and story*, edited by E. Bruner, 230-46. Washington, DC: American Ethnological Society of Washington.

Dasenbrook, R. 1993. *Literary theory after Davidson*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Davidson, D. 1984. *Inquiries into truth and interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Derrida, J. 1982. *The margins of philosophy*. Brighton: Harvester.

Dougherty, J., and C. Keller. 1985. Taskonomy: A practical approach to knowledge structures. In *Directions in cognitive anthropology*, edited by J. Dougherty, 161-76. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Dougherty, J. W. 1985. *Directions in cognitive anthropology*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Eagleton, T. 1983. *Literary theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ellis, J. 1993. The theory of literary criticism: Dialogical analysis. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Erwin, E. 1993. Philosophers on Freudianism. In *Philosophical problems of the internal and external words: Essays on the philosophy of Adolf Grunbaum*, edited by J. Earman et al., 409-59. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Feldman, A. 1994. On cultural anesthesia: From Desert Storm to Rodney King. *American Ethnologist* 21 (2): 404-18.

Frake, C. O. 1964. Notes on queries in ethnography. *American Anthropologist* 66:132-45.

———. 1977. Plying frames can be dangerous: Some reflections on methodology in cognitive anthropology. *Quarterly Newsletter of the Institute for Comparative Human Development* 1:1-7.

Friedman, J. 1993. Further notes of the adventures of phallus in blunderland. In *Texts of identity*, edited by K. Gergen and J. Shotter, 95-114. London: Sage.

Geertz, C. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

———. 1979. *Negara; The theater state in nineteenth century Bali*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

———. 1983. *Local knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.

Grunbaum, A. 1984. *The foundations of psychoanalysis; A philosophical critique*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Harris, M. 1979. *Cultural materialism*. New York: Random House.

Haviland, J. 1977. Gossip, reputation, and knowledge in Zinacaton. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hjort, M. 1992. *Rules and conventions*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Holland, D. 1985. From situation to impression: How Americans get to know themselves and one another. In *Directions in cognitive anthropology*, edited by Janet Dougherty, 389-412. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Holland, D., and N. Quinn. 1987. *Cultural models of language and thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jones, T. Forthcoming. *Ethnography and epistemological barriers*.

Juhl, P. D. 1980. *Interpretation. An essay in the philosophy of literary criticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kampferer, B. 1989. The anthropologist as hero. Three exponents of post-modern anthropology. *Critique of Anthropology* 8:77-104.

Kay, P. 1964. Cultural grammar. *Bucknell Review* 35.

Keesing, R. 1985. Conventional metaphors and anthropological metaphysics: The problematic of cultural translation. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 41 (2): 201-17.

———. 1989. Exotic readings of cultural texts. *Current Anthropology* 30 (4): 459-79.

Kirkham, R. 1992. *Theories of truth*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Kuhn, T. S. 1962. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G. 1987. *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G., and M. Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Langacker, R. 1987 *Foundations of cognitive grammar*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Livingstone, P. 1988. *Literary knowledge; humanistic inquiry and the philosophy of science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

MacIntyre, A. 1981. *After virtue. A study in moral theory.* London: Gerald Duckwork.

McClelland, J. L., and D. Rumelhart. 1986. *Parallel distributed processing: Explorations in the microstructures of cognition.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Medin, D., and E. Smith. 1985. *Categories and concepts.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Merton, Robert 1968. *Social theory and social structure.* Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Narayan, N. 1993. On nose cutters, gurus, and storytellers. In *Creativity/anthropology,* edited by S. Lavie, K. Narayan, and R. Rosaldo, 30-53. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Ohnuki-Tierney, E. 1984. Monkey performances: A multiple structure of meaning and reflexivity in Japanese culture. In *Text, play, and story,* edited by Edward Bruner. Washington, DC: American Ethnological Society.

Pecora, V. 1989. The limits of local knowledge. In *The new historicism,* edited by Aram Veeser, 243-77. New York: Routledge.

Quinn, N. 1985. "Commitment" in American marriage: A cultural analysis. Taskonony. In *Directions in cognitive anthropology,* edited by J. Dougherty, 291-320. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Randall, R. 1976. How tall is a taxonoic tree? Some evidence for dwarfism. *American Ethnologist* 3:543-53.

Richardson, M. 1991. Point of view in anthropological discourse: The ethnographer as Gilgamesh. In *Anthropological poetics,* edited by I. Brady, 207-18. Savage, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Sapir, David. 1981. Leper, hyena, and blacksmith in Kujamaat Diola thought. *American Ethnologist* 8 (3): 526-43.

Schank, R., and R. Abelson. 1977. *Scripts, plans, goals and understanding.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Shankman, P. 1984. The thick and thin: On the interpretive theoretical program of Clifford Geertz. *Current Anthropology* 25 (3): 261-79.

Stegmuller, W. 1977. *Collected papers.* Vol. 2. Dordrecht: Reidel.

Strauss, C., and N. Quinn. 1994. A cognitive/cultural anthropology. In *Assessing cultural anthropology,* edited by Robert Borofsky. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Taussig, M. 1987. *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tyler, S. 1986. Post-modern ethnography: From document of the occult to occult document. In *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography: A school of American research advanced seminar,* edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 122-40. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Turner, V. 1967. *The forest of symbols.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Veesing, A. 1988. *The new historicism.* New York: Routlege.

von Wright, G. H. 1971. *Explanation and understanding.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Walters, Ronald. 1980. Sign of the times: Clifford Geertz and the historians. *Social Research* 47:537-56.

White, H. 1981. Where do markets come from? *American Journal of Sociology* 87:517-47.

Todd Jones is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He has a graduate degree in anthropology and has long been interested in the epistemology of social science. He is currently writing a book on ascribing beliefs to groups rather than individuals.