

Studies of particular societies, for instance Malinowski (1922) or Chagnon (1968), fall into the macro-substantive category. Micro-formal work consists of studies of more local forms of social organization. Examples would be Goffman on the 'presentation of self' (1959) and 'interaction ritual' (1972); Glaser and Strauss (1971) on 'status passage'; and Sacks on the organization of conversation (Sacks *et al.* 1974). Finally, there is micro-substantive research on particular types of organization or situation: for instance, Strong (1979) on 'doctor-patient interaction' or Piliavin and Briar (1964) on 'police encounters with juveniles'. All these types of theory are worthwhile, but it is important to keep clearly in mind the kind of theory one is dealing with, since each would require the research to be pursued in a different direction. (For a discussion of the development of formal as opposed to substantive theory, see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978.)

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have looked at the process of analysis in ethnography, tracing it from foreshadowed problems and the initial examination of a body of data, through the generation of concepts of various kinds, to the development of typologies and theories. In addition, we examined the relationship between concepts and indicators in ethnographic research, and the testing of theoretical ideas by means of the comparative method. We stressed that there are different sorts of theory and that theories are not the only product of ethnographic work; equally common and important are descriptions and explanations. We must not forget, however, that typically all the various products of ethnographic work, whatever their other differences, take the form of texts: ethnographic analysis is not just a cognitive activity but a form of writing. This has some important implications, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter 9

Writing ethnography

THE DISCIPLINES OF READING AND WRITING

One cannot ignore the work of reading and writing in the construction of ethnographic research. It is now widely recognized that 'the ethnography' is produced as much by how we write as by the processes of data collection and analysis; equally, how we write is linked directly to how we read.

The writing of ethnography – like any writing – demands discipline and work. There is no more damaging myth than the idea that there is a mysterious 'gift', or that writing is a matter of 'inspiration'. As Brodkey (1987) has pointed out, there is a pervasive romantic image of the writer as an essentially solitary figure struggling with a recalcitrant muse. Such views are dangerous and misleading. They inhibit systematic reflection on writing (and reading) as necessary aspects of the disciplinary or craft skills of social scientists. Given the reflexivity of social inquiry, it is vital to recognize that ethnographers construct the accounts of the social world to be found in ethnographic texts, rather than those accounts simply mirroring reality. And those accounts are constructed on the basis of particular purposes and presuppositions. Equally, one must recognize the significance of how those texts are read by social scientists, students, and others.

As more and more scholars have come to realize, then ethnography is inescapably a textual enterprise. It is not just a matter of writing, of course. When Clifford Geertz announces that 'ethnographers write' he offers a revealing half-truth: ethnographers do more than that. But writing is at the heart of the ethnographic enterprise. It is, therefore, important that a

disciplined approach to ethnographic work should incorporate a critical awareness of writing itself. The discipline of writing is not just about the practical demands of getting words on paper; it requires the cultivation of a critical and theoretical orientation to textual practices.

Written language is an analytical tool, not a transparent medium of communication. We can never reduce writing to a simple set of 'skills' or prescriptions. What is needed is a rigorous understanding of texts as the products of readers' and writers' work. It thus calls for a widening of the ethnographer's traditional range of interests. One needs to think about more than 'research methods', as conventionally defined, or the substantive subject-matter. The contemporary ethnographer also needs to take some account of contributions from literary theory, rhetoric, text linguistics, and cognate fields. The aim is not to transform ethnography into yet another branch of 'cultural studies'. Rather, we need to cultivate an awareness of reading and writing as elementary features of ethnographic production.

At the same time, the discipline of writing implies embodied craft knowledge. It cannot be grasped and developed by pure reflection. While informed by reading and textual interpretation, it must be practised. Writing ethnography is intellectual *work*. In the course of that work, the ethnographer will recognize that there is no best way to 'write up' any given project. Indeed, the conventional rhetoric of 'writing up' has connotations that are quite inappropriate to the work of the reflexive ethnographer. There are many versions that can be constructed. There are different emphases, different theories, different audiences. Each way of constructing 'the ethnography' will bring out different emphases, and complementary – even contrasting – analyses. While our texts do not have an arbitrary relationship to 'the field', it is important to recognize as early as possible that there is no single best way to reconstruct and represent the social world.

The world does not arrange itself into chapters and subheadings for our convenience. There are many contrasting arrangements and 'literary' styles that we can impose, more or less legitimately, on the world. The author who fails to reflect on the processes of composition and compilation may find that a version has been constructed without adequate explicit understanding. The unthinking adoption of one or another textual

arrangement is an abdication of control over one's material. Equally, the experience of writing – or at least considering – alternative versions or using different written styles can encourage greater mastery. Principled decisions about *how* to write are far better than drowning in a welter of data, or facing the paralysis of writer's block while waiting for inspiration to strike.

Our understanding of writing is inextricably linked to *reading*. We write in the light of what and how we read. For ethnographers (as for other scholars) the intellectual tradition of the discipline (anthropology, sociology, geography, folklore) 'writes itself' through their work. The individual scholar does not create his or her discipline afresh. The textual conventions of the past cannot be escaped entirely. The scholarly texts and the language, concepts, images, and metaphors of predecessors help to define the discursive space within which each new ethnography is produced and read. Hence it follows that the disciplines of writing are inextricable from the disciplines of reading. Ethnographers write, certainly; but their writing is shaped by what they have read.

The good ethnographer cannot hope to succeed without a habit of wide reading. The ethnographer ideally develops a broad, comparative perspective on the literature. Indeed, in their original formulation of 'grounded theory', Glaser and Strauss (1967) commended the creative use of written sources in the production and elaboration of concepts. It is the hallmark of creative work by interpretative social scientists that they approach 'the literature' in a catholic and creative fashion. One of the most important disciplines for the ethnographer developing craft skills is, therefore, to *read the work of others*. We need to cultivate the capacity to read for the rhetoric and forms of writing employed by others, rather than merely reading for content. That reading need not be confined to the work of other ethnographers, or other social scientists. There are, after all, many genres through which authors explore and express social worlds. The domains of fiction and non-fiction alike provide many sources and models for written representations. There is nothing which totally distinguishes fictional from non-fictional writing. There are differences, of course: non-fictional writing is committed to the accurate representation of some actual events, or the presentation of an abstract model that captures the essential features of the phenomena in question. Fictional writing is

not committed and constrained in those ways. Nevertheless, there is no reason why the aspiring writer of anthropology or sociology should not learn from careful readings of many different genres. An acquaintance with the anatomy of a wide variety of texts will encourage an appreciation of how to make novel and insightful texts of one's own.

Wide and eclectic reading can also encourage the development of 'sensitizing concepts' (Blumer 1954). The creative ethnographer will not wish to wait until the 'writing-up' phase of the research before exploring possible sources and models. Indeed, the disciplines of reading should inform the research from its earliest phases: creative reading should ideally run through the entire process of research. The sources may be drawn from diverse origins. Many of our most successful sociological mentors have drawn on wide and eclectic reading. Erving Goffman's work was a prime example. His most successful studies generated highly original and productive insights on the basis of quite diverse written sources. Careful consideration of one of Goffman's major texts, such as *Asylums* (1961), will help illuminate just how adept he was at drawing together diverse ideas and observations, both 'fictional' and 'factual', 'serious' and 'popular'. For instance, in the essay 'The inmate world', in *Asylums*, Goffman's citations and quotations include: J. Kerkhoff, *How Thin the Veil: A Newspaperman's Story of His Own Mental Crack-Up and Recovery*; Ellie A. Cohen, *Human Behavior in the Concentration Camp*; Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*; Brendan Behan, *Borstal Boy*; Sara Harris, *The Wayward Ones: The Holy Rule of St Benedict*; Herman Melville, *White Jacket*; T.E. Gaddis, *Birdman of Alcatraz*; and a host of sociological, psychological, psychiatric, and other sources. There is no need for anyone to aspire to emulate Goffman's style in order to recognize and learn from his genius for using such resources in the construction of texts at once readerly and scholarly.

The general point was made by Davis (1974), who pointed to a number of thematic parallels between classic works of fiction and sociological classics. Davis noted that, like many other story-tellers, sociologists construct narratives of tragedy, irony, and humour. The important issue in Davis's analysis is to remind us that there is no absolute difference between the way a social scientist writes and the way a more 'literary' author tackles a similar topic. Further, both types of author have only

the same fundamental resources – words on the page. All use the same sorts of recipes and materials in conveying arguments and persuading readers. Their readers bring to texts a common stock of understandings and assumptions. Equally, therefore, when we read *Asylums* and then turn to one of its literary analogues, such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, we can start to recognize how each author uses the possibilities of written language to convey the experiences of inmates. Each author constructs a version of that sort of social world. Each does so under different auspices, for different purposes, and for different audiences. But if we wish to gain control over the resources of 'literary' style, then it will repay us to read critically both works, and others like them. Likewise, the ethnographer interested in everyday life in medical institutions will find plenty of productive themes, parallels, and contrasts within literary sources. It is an excellent intellectual exercise to read the literary and the sociological or anthropological together. That exercise makes one more aware of one's own work as a writer, as well as sharpening awareness of textual possibilities. There is a good deal to be learned from a comparative reading of, say, Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* and Betty MacDonald's *The Plague and I*, together with Julius Roth's ethnography of everyday life in a TB sanatorium (Roth 1963), and perhaps also Sontag (1979) on images of tuberculosis.

The point is not to argue that works of serious or popular fiction are to be read as if they were sources of 'data'. We do not assume that the work of a novelist – even when based on personal testimony or 'research' – is the equivalent of thoroughly researched, explicitly documented, and theoretically developed scholarship. Equally, we do not think that the ethnographer will necessarily wish to reproduce more overtly 'literary' styles of reportage. Rather, the reflective scholar will wish to be acquainted with a range of styles and conventions that are culturally available for the construction of descriptions and arguments. Neither the academic nor the writer of fiction has a monopoly over the relevant resources of written language. There is little point in the academic agonizing over epistemology and methodology, or suffering the slings and arrows of data collection, only to have no disciplined awareness of the means available to report those efforts.

In a similar vein various authors such as Pratt (1986a) have

pointed out the textual parallels between ethnographic description and the conventions of 'travel' or explorers' accounts. The classic anthropological monograph incorporated elements characteristic of other genres that anthropologists would repudiate. The founding scholars of social and cultural anthropology did not just carve out a discipline; they adapted and incorporated literary conventions from other genres to produce a new textual format. The student of academic writing, and the writer of ethnography, can learn much about the ethnographic mode from careful comparisons of anthropology with the texts of travel writers, past and present. One may ask how different authors conjure up the spirit of a place, evoke its inhabitants, and construct the cultural forms. Then too there are various popularized and fictionalized accounts of ethnographic work (for example, Bowen 1954; Donner 1982). A reading of them and their reception by professional anthropologists again illuminates the commonalities and contrasts across the different bodies of writing (Pratt 1986b).

There are many genres and styles of both 'fact' and 'fiction'. The would-be ethnographic author will profitably explore their range and diversity. He or she will not necessarily remain content with following just one established sociological or anthropological exemplar. The sociologist of contemporary society or the 'anthropologist at home' may fruitfully explore the many ways in which modern industrial society has been represented: from realist novels to the 'new journalism' (Agar 1980). The ethnographer of a great city like London or Chicago will find many literary themes and images to explore, as will the student of small towns and rural 'communities'. The point has been made quite explicitly by Cappetti (1993) in relation to Chicago. She starts from the well-known affinities between the sociological representations of Chicago in the early decades of this century and the work of various literary figures. It was not an accident that the same Chicago fostered urban ethnography and realist fiction that often focused on similar subject-matter and shared similar values. There was direct overlap between the sociological and literary circles. James Farrell, author of the Studs Lonigan trilogy, read sociology at Chicago, while Chicago sociologists were encouraged to pay attention to realist fiction (cf. Atkinson 1982). Writing of those mutual influences, Cappetti remarks that

If one cannot properly understand the urban novels of James T. Farrell, Nelson Algren, and Richard Wright apart from the urban sociological studies that preceded and accompanied them, it would be equally a mistake to ignore the literary and, specifically, the novelistic influences that the Chicago sociologists themselves derived from the European and American urban literary tradition.

(Cappetti 1993:20)

An informed understanding of the genres and styles of literary or academic representation, therefore, forms a useful part of the ethnographer's craft knowledge. It is of crucial importance to recognize that crafting the ethnographic text is integral to the work of ethnography. 'Writing up' is not a mechanical exercise that can be performed routinely at the end of the 'real' research. The representation or reconstruction of a social world depends on how we write.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND RHETORIC

Whatever their chosen styles, then ethnographers need to have some awareness of the rhetorical devices that have been used in the production of ethnographic texts. In recent years there has been considerable scholarly interest in what conventions can be identified and how they are deployed in ethnographic writing. The discipline of anthropology has figured most prominently in this scrutiny of the ethnographic text, but this has reflected a much wider scholarly preoccupation with the 'rhetoric of inquiry' in both the natural sciences and the humane disciplines.

The ethnographer necessarily uses various figures of speech (tropes). These are used to construct recognizable and plausible reconstructions of social actors, actions, and settings. They are also used to convey many of the analytic themes as well. Very often, key concepts in sociology and anthropology are, in the broadest sense, metaphorical, in that they draw on imagery, analogy, and other devices. A physical and spatial image – transferred originally from other disciplinary contexts such as geology – is applied to social arrangements, giving the metaphor of 'social stratification', for example. In a similar way 'the market' is a metaphor, in that its usage in contemporary economics and social theory is extended well beyond its original

designation of a 'market' as a local social institution. Indeed, such metaphors become so taken for granted in academic discourse that they lose the appearance of metaphorical usage.

Other well-established metaphors retain their 'as if' character. Goffman's well-known 'dramaturgical' metaphor – treating everyday social action in the guise of theatrical performances – may have lost its initial novelty, but it is still immediately recognized as a borrowing from one domain and an application to another. (This well-worn example also reminds us of the productive value of metaphorical usage. It prompts further analogies: the use of props, contrasts between backstage and front-of-house, the rehearsal of performances, and so on.) Whether overtly metaphorical or taken for granted, however, much of our thinking is organized by the use of metaphors. This is by no means confined to the ethnographic genre. McCloskey (1985) demonstrates the pervasiveness of metaphorical expression in modern economics, for example.

As an author of ethnography one's task is not to try to avoid metaphorical usage (and it is virtually impossible to do so anyway). The scholarly or scientific authenticity of a text is not enhanced by the elimination of analogy and simile. The graphic use of metaphorical descriptions must always be part of the ethnographer's repertoire. But equally this is no recommendation of absolute licence. A recognition of the power of figurative language should lead also to recognition of the need for disciplined and principled usage. If deployed without due reflection, metaphors may prove, like the apprentice sorcerer's accomplices, helpers that get out of hand, running away with and finally overwhelming their hapless originator. The reflective ethnographer, then, will need to try out figures of speech: testing them against the data, searching not just for their power to organize data under a single theme, but also for their extensions and limitations. They may be productive of new, often unanticipated, insights. The writer of ethnography will therefore need to try out and explore the values of various figures of speech, gauging their relevance to the issues at hand, sensing the range of connotations, allusions, and implications. Noblit and Hare (1988) usefully summarize a number of criteria that may be brought to bear on the choice and evaluation of metaphors. They include 'economy', 'cogency', and 'range'. Economy refers to the simplicity with which the concept summarizes; cogency to

the efficiency of the metaphor, without 'redundancy, ambiguity and contradiction'; range refers to the capacity of the metaphor to draw together diverse domains (Noblit and Hare 1988:34).

Some features of the work of metaphor can be seen in Atkinson's work on the ethnography of medical education. In making sense of observations of bedside teaching it was apparent that the clinicians were able to use the hospital patients (whose diagnoses were often well known already) to produce displays of clinical wizardry and acumen⁷ to audiences of medical students. In various intermediate stages of writing and analysis Atkinson tried out various literary and other parallels, and at one point explored the metaphor of the medical teacher as 'thaumaturge', or wonder-worker. The term was chosen to be redolent of magical and religious 'mysteries', for there were connotations of the students being admitted to the mysteries of their craft (and hence of other ceremonials of admission, such as those found in Masonic ritual). Thaumaturgy would therefore capture and evoke potentially more than an unvarnished description of what the teachers and students did. Likewise, the metaphor implied its own extensions: the work of the hospital patient in such encounters could have been compared to that of the 'member of the audience' whose aid is solicited by the stage magician, for instance. In the published accounts this particular metaphor was not pursued, and its more florid connotations were not developed. There was a danger of glib sensationalism that was felt to be inappropriate. Many of the ideas were subsumed within a similar but different set of metaphors (Atkinson 1976 and 1981).

The productive exploration of ethnographic fieldwork and data, therefore, can involve experimentation and reflection on metaphorical usage, though the processes are not necessarily susceptible to conscious and rational control. They are often the products of our 'divergent' rather than 'convergent' thought processes. Nonetheless, the metaphorical can be facilitated. The ethnographic author should be willing to try out a range of possible concepts and analogies. The fruitful search is not for the 'best' set of ideas, but for a diversity of possible organizing themes and tropes. They can be assessed for the extent to which they capture the desired dimensions or categories; the appropriateness of connotations; their value in suggesting new lines of analysis and comparison. There is a direct continuity between

metaphorical thought and the development of 'generic' concepts as advocated by Lofland and Lofland (1984). They link and juxtapose. They help to make the 'familiar' seem 'strange' and vice versa.

The master-trope of the metaphor is complemented by that of synecdoche. It is a form of representation in which the 'part' stands for the 'whole'. It is not, therefore, just a source of allusion; it is an inevitable feature of descriptions. In principle, it is not possible to provide a description of anything that will furnish a listing of every conceivable attribute and detail. In practice most descriptions do not even approximate to an exhaustive listing. Equally, what we treat as 'data' are necessarily synecdochal. We select particular features and instances, identify them as somehow characteristic or representative of places, persons, or events. We endow particular fragments of observed or reported life with significance, precisely in the way we choose and present them as 'examples', 'illustrations', 'cases', or 'vignettes'.

The criteria that may be brought to bear are varied. Aesthetic criteria undoubtedly interact with more logical issues. The principled use of synecdoche will almost certainly be regulated by craft judgments rather than by rigid formulae. Issues of economy and redundancy will always arise. The question of economy reflects the fact that we cannot include every detail and every scrap of knowledge. Not only are time and space at a premium in the production of any written account, so too is the reader's attention. Descriptions and exemplifications that are too dense, too detailed, or too protracted will not normally lead to a usable text. Comprehensiveness and comprehensibility compete to some extent. For the most part there is a trade-off between the two, and the ethnographer needs to construct accounts through partial, selective reporting. The relationship between the 'part' and the 'whole' needs to be a valid one, of course. The choice of exemplification or illustration must reflect adequate analysis of the data, in terms of concepts and indicators. The synecdoche is, therefore, the complement of the metaphor. Both use natural language to produce 'telling' accounts. The metaphor transforms and illuminates while the synecdoche describes and exemplifies. Each contrasts again with 'metonymy', the third of what are often referred to as the 'master-tropes'.

The metonymic in language exploits the dimensions of contiguity, causality, and sequence. The ethnographer uses metonymic language to organize the 'realist' descriptions of places and accounts of social action. Metonymy is the dominant mode through which ethnography narrates. The narrative is by no means the only style of ethnographic reportage, but it is of fundamental importance. Indeed, many scholarly accounts – not just ethnographies – tell 'stories'. Sometimes they are the 'grand narratives' of modern social theory (such as those of Marx) or of natural history (Darwin). Sometimes they are parables, such as the hypothetical morality tales propounded by economists (McCloskey 1985).

Richardson (1990a and b) and others have pointed out that the narrative mode is crucial to the organization of everyday life (in the form of mundane stories and accounts of personal experience) and of the organization of the ethnography itself. The ethnographer draws on and elicits narratives as 'data' and recasts them in the sociological or anthropological narratives of scholarly writing. The narrative mode is especially pertinent to the subject-matter of ethnographic inquiry. It furnishes meaning and reason to the reported events through contextual and processual presentations:

Given the unavoidability of narrative within the social sciences, and given how human values, sensibilities, and ambiguities continuously reassert themselves in plain writing, we are propelled into taking seriously the relevance of narrative to the sociological enterprise. Narrative cannot be suppressed within the human sciences because it is ineluctably tied to the human experience; trying to suppress it undermines the very foundation of the human sciences.

(Richardson 1990a:21)

Narrative creates particular kinds of order. It constructs accounts of intentions, and of unintended consequences. It reflects the fundamental importance of the temporal ordering of human experience (Adam 1990). In narrating events, we show how people act and react in particular social circumstances. In doing so we reveal and reconstruct those social actors as 'characters' or social 'types'. Equally, we can display the patterning of action and interaction, its predictable routines, and the unpre-

dictable surprises or crises. We can 'show' the reader both the mundane and the exotic.

Further, the overall 'significance' of the ethnographic monograph may be conveyed through its narrative structures:

Beyond the fragmentary narratives of persons and circumstances are the metanarratives that shape the ethnography overall. The ethnographic monograph, for instance, may be ordered in terms of large-scale narratives. It may take the form of a story of thwarted intentions; a display of order in chaos; or disorder in a rational organization. It can set up a reader's expectations only to deny them. It can transform the reported events of everyday life into the grand mythologies of human tragedy or triumph. The ethnography itself can become a morality tale; a high drama; a picaresque tale of low-life characters; a comedy of manners; a rural idyll. It may draw explicitly on literary parallels and archetypes.

(Atkinson 1992b:13)

The transformation of 'the field' into 'the text' is partly achieved by means of the narrative construction of everyday life. The ethnographer needs to recognize the crafts of storytelling and learn to develop them critically. As Richardson argues, the narrative mode is to be valued as a basic tool in the ethnographer's craft:

If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science, or if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we *should* value the narrative.

(Richardson 1990b:133-4)

The point for the practising ethnographic author is, therefore, the need to recognize the analytic power of the narrative: to recognize and use narrative reconstructions in a disciplined manner.

The last of the master-tropes, irony, has been employed a great deal by social scientists – ethnographers among them – and it has been commented on quite widely. An ironic tone is highly characteristic of the social scientist's stance, and is most clearly marked when a perspectival, relativist point of view is

adopted. The interpretative cultural scientist frequently trades in implicit or explicit contrasts. Ironic contrasts are frequently drawn on in the development of sociological or anthropological analyses. We trade in the complex and sometimes difficult contrasts between the 'familiar' and the 'strange', between the 'taken for granted' and the explicitly theorized, between intentions and 'unintended consequences' of social action. The ethnographer's insights are often produced out of the contrasts between competing frames of reference or rationality. Conventional morality may be contrasted with the situated moralities of particular cultures and subcultures. The constant dialectic between the Ethnographer, the Reader, and the Others (who are represented in the text) is replete with possibilities for irony.

The four 'master-tropes' we have just discussed are all intertwined within any given ethnographic monograph or similar text. We do not stop to decide to use one particular trope now, and turn to another later. We construct more or less successful accounts as we link large narrative themes with smaller narratives of instances. Those in turn stand in relationships of 'part-for-whole' for the general features of our chosen research settings and the social actors there. Likewise those general features and their analytic significance are often captured through our use of metaphoric figures.

Duneier's ethnography illustrates the deployment of the tropes of ethnographic composition in a highly readable and persuasive account (Duneier 1992). His is an ethnography based on a small number of black men in one particular neighbourhood of Chicago – a setting that is, of course, redolent of many earlier classics of ethnographic urban research. Duneier provides a number of vivid, graphically written accounts of his men and some social settings – most notably the restaurant that provides the concrete setting of much of the reported action, and that gives the monograph its title (*Slim's Table*). Embedded within his account are various narratives that are used to capture significant kinds of social interaction and that establish the various main characters who populate the ethnography. Likewise, the specific locale and the men who inhabit it, by the figure of synecdoche, stand for wider social types and processes. Duneier uses his own local ethnography to comment on broader social phenomena and to illustrate wider issues of sociological analysis. In particular, the men at Slim's Table display generic themes

of 'race' and 'respectability' that Duneier claims have been poorly represented in previous research. In doing so he also draws ironic contrasts with sociological accounts and more popular stereotypes of the culture of black inhabitants of depressed inner-city neighbourhoods.

Before leaving this brief consideration of the rhetoric or poetics of ethnographic writing, we should note the place of *topoi* in ethnographic and other scholarly accounts. The *topos* in classical rhetoric may be translated as a 'commonplace'. It is a rhetorical device whereby the hearer's or reader's agreement or affiliation is solicited through the use of widely shared opinion or well-known instances. In scholarly writing the work of the *topos* is often accomplished by means of the 'taken-for-granted reference'. Such citations to the literature are part of the stock-in-trade of the academic author. They are not necessarily used to establish or falsify a specific finding or point of detail. Rather, they are used to establish standard reference-points. Indeed, they are sometimes recycled repeatedly in order to support a conventional assertion rather than for the specific content of the original work cited. They are used to endorse 'what everyone knows' in the discipline and become part of the encoding of scholarly credit. Ethnographic writing has many classic references that are used for such purposes. They are often cited by authors of ethnography: for instance, Geer (1964) on first days in the field, Becker (1967a) or Gouldner (1968) on partisanship, or Mills (1940) on vocabularies of motive.

The ethnographer may, of course, use the *topos* of the standard reference in order to demonstrate the comparative, generic and intertextual nature of the work. This helps construct the archetype. It keys the particular ethnographic text to a background of shared knowledge. It can create the appearance of universal frames of reference that transcend the local particularities of the ethnographic field. The *topoi* of the ethnographic genre must be treated with great care, however. The taken-for-granted reference may reproduce errors from text to text, from scholarly generation to generation. Secondly, an uncritical appeal to 'commonplace' wisdom (whether social-scientific or lay) may rob the ethnography of analytic cutting-edge and novelty. One should not resort to common sense and common knowledge as mere reflex. There needs to be a constant tension between novel insight and received wisdom. It is part of the ethnographic

author's literary or rhetorical repertory. And like all the other resources, it is to be used in a disciplined manner.

WRITING AND AUTHORITY

The ways in which we write our ethnographies are, as we have seen, profoundly implicated in how we reconstruct the social worlds we report. The analysis of social life cannot be divorced from how we write about it. Equally, our construction of written texts is a value-relevant activity. In the construction of ethnographic texts we display implications of ethics and ideology. We display our implicit claims to authority. The recognition of the complex relationships between 'authority' and 'authorship' has given rise to some of the liveliest debate about the status and values of ethnographic work – most notably among cultural anthropologists.

In common with other cultural critics, some anthropologists have examined ethnographic texts for their ethical and moral implications. Here they parallel, for instance, the work of Said (1978) in his account of 'Orientalism' in European culture. It is argued that the ethnography has classically inscribed a radical distinction between the Observer and the Observed, who become the Author and the Other. Despite the overt commitments of ethnographers to cultural relativism and pluralism, it has been argued, the ethnographic monograph itself typically rests on quite other principles. Some critics – sometimes overstating the case, we believe – argue that, in its classic types in British, North American and continental European disciplines, the ethnography has presented 'a society' or 'a culture' from a single point of view. The author/ethnographer has implicitly claimed a position of omniscience and the authority to speak unequivocally of and for the people in question. Whatever the give-and-take of fieldwork itself, the ethnography has imposed a single, dominant and infallible format. As Boon (1983) has suggested, the standard contents of anthropological monographs functioned to subsume the variety of human societies under the rubric of a single analytic paradigm. Likewise, the characteristic style of the 'realist' sociological ethnography (van Maanen 1988) may reproduce a single, dominant 'voice' of the academic ethnographer. In the process, critics argue, the voices of the 'Others' become silenced: the researched exist only as the muted objects

of the ethnographer's scrutiny. The ethnographic author thus reproduces the authority of the ethnographer as a dominating form of surveillance and reportage.

Similar arguments have also been entered by feminist critics of 'malestream' writing in the social sciences. As Devault (1990) and Stanley and Wise (1983) have argued, the feminist standpoint may subvert and transgress time-honoured modes of writing and representation that implicitly reproduce dominant modes of thought and discourse. As Devault summarizes the feminist problematic:

Rhetorical processes – like all social interactions – are deeply gendered. Speakers and listeners produce and respond to statements on the basis of deep but usually unnoticed understandings of gender. In general, women's right to speak (or write) authoritatively is attenuated and circumscribed. For a woman to do scholarly work means speaking in the manner of the disciplinary tradition. They learn that, if they are to be heard, their texts must enter a discourse whose contours reflect male perceptions and concerns. The readers whose judgments are influential – the teachers, editors, reviewers, and colleagues who will incorporate and perhaps extend their work – have, in the past at least, mostly been men.

(Devault 1990:98)

Devault herself discusses Krieger's 'stream-of-consciousness' ethnographic text on a women's community (Krieger 1983) as an example of a sociological work that self-consciously challenges some of the dominant conventions of ethnographic realist writing.

Such transgressions of conventional realism in ethnographic texts have been advocated by a number of authors in the pursuit of 'postmodern' aesthetics and ethics in ethnographic representation. The postmodern turn attempts to celebrate the paradoxes and complexities of field research and social life. Rather than subordinating the social world and social actors to the single narrative viewpoint of the realist text, the self-consciously postmodern abandons the single narrative and the dominant voice of the authoritative ethnographer (cf. Tyler 1986). Various postmodern ethnographies have been produced (for example, Dorst 1989; Rose 1989) that employ a striking variety of textual devices in a highly self-conscious way. Such avant-garde approaches

need cautious appraisal. We certainly do not advocate gratuitous textual experimentation. Nevertheless, the contemporary ethnographer needs to be aware of such innovations, and to be able to evaluate their potential contributions to the genre.

WRITING AND RESPONSIBILITY

It is clear that the contemporary ethnographer, whatever his or her main discipline, cannot remain innocent about the conventions of ethnographic reporting. There is sufficient guidance available – of value to the novice and the old hand alike – to help in making principled decisions and choices (for example, Richardson 1990a; Wolcott 1990). A thorough awareness of the possibilities of writing is now an indispensable part of the ethnographer's methodological understanding. One cannot 'write up' an ethnography as if it were a mechanical exercise, or as if the written text were a transparently neutral medium of communication. *How* we write about the social world is of fundamental importance to our own and others' interpretations of it. To a considerable extent, the 'interpretations' of interpretative social science are couched in the poetics of ethnography itself. It is by no means novel, but illuminating nonetheless, to note that the very term 'ethnography' itself is used to describe the research process on the one hand, and its textual product on the other.

The well-informed ethnographer needs to recognize the reflexive relationship between the text and its subject-matter. A grasp of the rhetoric, or the 'poetics', of ethnographic writing is of fundamental importance. It would, however, be quite wrong to conclude that problems of rhetoric are the only issues involved. The relationship between the ethnographic text and its subject-matter may not be entirely straightforward. But it is not totally arbitrary. A recognition of the conventionality of writing does not entitle us to adopt a radically 'textual' approach. There are social actors and social life outside the text, and there are referential relationships between them. The ethnographer who engages in the arduous work of field research, data analysis, and scholarly writing will not be persuaded that the texts that constitute his or her 'data' and the texts of monographs, dissertations, papers, and the like are not referential. Indeed, it is a naive response to equate the recog-

dition that our texts are conventional with the view that they are arbitrary.

Hammersley (1991a and 1993) suggests that the contemporary emphasis on rhetoric should not blind us to the more familiar preoccupations with scientific adequacy. We should certainly not privilege the rhetorical over the rational. There is no doubt that many ethnographies are successful (in terms of readers' critical response) by virtue of their style and persuasive use of rhetoric. On the other hand, persuasion is not the whole story. The critical reader of ethnography – as of any genre of scholarly writing – needs to be alert to the quality of the sociological or anthropological argument and the appropriate use of evidence in its support. In essence, therefore, Hammersley proposes that we should not, as readers, be unduly swayed or seduced by the readability of the ethnographic text. It is not enough that it prove 'evocative' or 'rich' in its descriptive detail, nor that it engage our sympathetic affiliation with the main characters, nor yet that it arouse our emotional responses to the reported scenes. It is equally important that the ethnography should display and demonstrate the adequacy of its methodological and empirical claims. It is important that the ethnography sustain its authoritative status as a work of scholarly research.

Although there is a complex relationship between rhetoric and science, the author of the ethnography cannot rely purely on the readability and plausibility of his or her writing. It is necessary to maintain a proper regard for the canons of evidence. The claims (for generalizability, for the robustness of the findings, etc.) need to be entered by the ethnography in a manner sufficiently explicit for the reader to be able to evaluate those claims. Indeed, prior to that, it is a requirement that the reader should be able to establish what claims are being made by the author in the first place. Moreover, the ethnography needs to establish what claims are being entered as to the originality of its findings; what analytical ideas are being developed; what the ethnographer treats as adequate support for his or her ideas; equally, what evidence would be treated as sufficient to falsify or at least modify those ideas.

In other words, we need to be able to recognize and evaluate the complex relationships between the various explicit and implicit messages that go into the whole ethnographic text. Some of these were identified by Lofland (1974) in his discussion

of journal referees' criteria in evaluating qualitative research papers. First there is the criterion of the use of 'generic' conceptual frameworks. This reflects the extent to which the particular subject-matter of the ethnography is located in wider conceptual frameworks. It is not enough to report particular stories or events. The scholarly claim of the ethnography calls for a general analytic framework. Lofland's referees looked for the successful interweaving of the local and the general. Equally, there is the criterion of novelty. It is not necessary that the conceptual framework of the ethnography be totally new. Many are not. It is, however, important that the successful text demonstrate how existing ideas are being developed, tested, modified, or extended. Equally, the reader looks for how the evidence cited in the ethnography bears on such conceptual development. As Lofland suggests, the ethnographic text will not be evaluated positively if it achieves no more than a chronicle of events in a particular setting, and brings no new analytic framework to bear on it. It follows, therefore, that the analytic frame and the empirical evidence should be brought together in appropriate ways. In other words, as Lofland's discussion indicates, a successful textual arrangement should be adequately 'elaborated'. That is, it should be couched in a text that 'specifies constituent elements of the frame, draws out implications, shows major variations, and uses all these as the means by which the qualitative data are organized and presented'; further it should be 'eventful': endowed with 'concrete interactional events, incidents, occurrences, episodes, anecdotes, scenes and happenings someplace in the real world' (Lofland 1974:106,107). The analytic claims need to be 'grounded' or anchored in the particularities of observed social life. On the other hand, it should not be overburdened with the repetitious rehearsal of incidents and illustrations. Otherwise, it may topple over into the failing of being 'hyper-eventful'. Finally, Lofland suggests that critical readers wish to find the analytic frame and the illustrative data 'interpenetrated'. In other words, there should be a constant interplay between the concrete and the analytic, the empirical and the theoretical. It is part of the ethnographer's craft skill to try to strike a balance between the two, and that of the reader to evaluate the adequacy of the textual presentation. It is, however, the successful presentation of the local and the generic,

the empirical and the abstract, that allows the reader to evaluate the ethnography's status and its claims.

There are no right and wrong ways of writing ethnography. The increasingly wide recognition of textual conventions will also encourage greater experimentation with textual forms. More and more anthropologists and sociologists will wish to use alternative modes of representation. The 'realist' text is not the only model that is available. It is important to recognize the value of such textual experimentation. Even if the ethnographer is not going to attempt the more extravagant exercises of some 'post-modern' authors, it is important to cultivate a critical awareness of the 'literary' conventions of scholarly writing, and to incorporate them as part of the craft or 'artisanal' knowledge of ethnography. It remains important to encourage novice and experienced ethnographers to understand their writing as part of their more general methodological expertise. We cannot continue to regard the 'writing up' of ethnographic work as innocent. On the contrary, a thorough recognition of the essential reflexivity of ethnographic work extends to the work of reading and writing as well. We must take responsibility for how we choose to represent ourselves and others in the texts we write.

AUDIENCES, STYLES, AND GENRES

A reflexive awareness of ethnographic writing should take account of the potential audiences for the finished textual products. Ethnographers are, after all, enjoined to pay close attention to the social contexts in which actors construct their everyday accounts. We note whether accounts are solicited or volunteered, to whom they are made, with what effect (intended or unintended), and so on. Ethnographers have not, however, always carried over such an attitude towards their own published accounts. There are potentially many audiences for social research: fellow research workers, hosts, students, and teachers in the social sciences; professionals and policy-makers; publishers, journal editors, and referees. There is too that amorphous audience the 'general public'. Audiences may expect and appreciate different forms and styles of writing: an academic monograph, a learned journal article, a popular magazine article, a polemical essay or pamphlet, a methodological or theoretical

paper, or an autobiographical account of the research experience (see Schatzman and Strauss 1973).

Audiences differ in the background assumptions, knowledge, and expectations they bring to the ethnographic text. Some will be well versed in the particulars of the setting and may have particular interests deriving from that. Others will be more thoroughly conversant with sociological or anthropological perspectives, but have little or no knowledge of the field. Some readers will draw on theoretical and methodological perspectives that are in sympathy with the ethnography; some will start from a position of incomprehension or hostility, and may need to be won over by the author. Some readers address themselves directly to practical and evaluative considerations. Some will prove impatient with the details of 'the story', while others will read precisely for the details and the vignettes, skipping over the explicitly theoretical or methodological discussions.

We can never tailor our ethnographies to match the interests of all our potential audiences simultaneously. No single text can accomplish all things for all readers. A sense of audience and a sense of style or genre will guide the author towards multiple spoken and written accounts. And indeed such awareness may itself lead to new analytic insights. As Schatzman and Strauss put it:

In preparing for any telling or writing, and in imagining the perspective of his specific audience, the researcher is apt to see his data in new ways: finding new analytic possibilities, or implications he has never before sensed. This process of late discovery is full of surprises, sometimes even major ones, which lead to serious reflection on what one has 'really' discovered. Thus, it is not simply a matter of the researcher writing down what is in his notes or in his head; writing or telling as activities exhibit their own properties which provide conditions for discovery.

(Schatzman and Strauss 1973:132)

Just as the ethnographer has grappled with problems of strangeness, familiarity, and discovery 'in the field', so a consideration of audience and style can lead to parallel insights.

Richardson (1990a) provides an excellent account of audience and style for ethnographic work. She describes how a major piece of research she had conducted led to the production of

various different versions, each aimed at a different kind of audience, and couched in a different style. Her work as an author included publications for academic sociologists on the one hand, and a popular book, aimed at the 'trade' market, on the other. Her spoken accounts of the research included appearances on chat-shows as a consequence of her popular writing. Each text implies a different version of the social phenomena it describes. In writing for different audiences, and in different styles, we are not simply describing 'the same thing' in different ways; we are subtly changing what we describe as well as how we do so. Wolf (1992) also describes and exemplifies alternative textual strategies in the production of her own research. She contrasts three different texts that she produced on the basis of her fieldwork in Taiwan. They had different styles, implied different readers, and took a different authorial point of view.

The majority of ethnographers will be thoroughly familiar with one dimension of stylistic contrast (usually aimed at the same sort of audience): that is, the contrast between 'realist' and 'confessional' accounts of the same project (van Maanen 1988). As van Maanen points out, it has been quite common for ethnographers to publish 'the ethnography' as a relatively impersonal, authoritative account, and then to produce one or more accounts of 'how I did it'. These latter autobiographical confessions are usually published 'elsewhere', separate from the realist account, either in collections of such essays, or safely tucked away in an appendix to the main monograph.

These are not the only issues of style and genre, however. The genre of, say, urban 'street' ethnography has tended to be different in style and tone from ethnographies of complex organizations. The 'classic' ethnographies of social or cultural anthropology differ from many of their contemporary counterparts. Moreover, anthropology has developed genres that reflect the intellectual traditions associated with a particular geographical region (Fardon 1990). Van Maanen also goes on to identify a third variety of ethnographic writing (besides realist and confessional tales) – the 'impressionist' tale, in which the ethnographer employs more overtly literary devices in the evocation of scenes and actions.

The point is not to try to produce a definitive map of ethnographic styles, nor to suggest that each ethnography should be

located within one or other genre. It is, however, important to recognize that how we write reflects directly on *what* we write about. The ethnographic text is part of the general process of reflexivity, in that it helps to construct the social world(s) it accounts for. It is, therefore, of profound importance that the ethnographer should recognize and understand what textual conventions he or she is using, and what receptions they invite on the part of readers.

Consideration of audience must also take account of the fact that our monographs, papers, and more popular texts may be read by our hosts or informants themselves. Neither the sociologist nor the anthropologist can assume that 'they' will never see the results of the research. If that was true of the non-literate cultures studied by many anthropologists once, it can no longer be assumed. One recent collection of autobiographical accounts by North American anthropologists (Brettell 1993) contains reflections on precisely that point. They document from geographically and socially diverse research settings the politics of readers' receptions, when they are themselves the 'subjects' of the research. As one of the authors describes, for instance, an awareness that her work would certainly be read by her elite intellectual informants in Ireland was present in the course of the fieldwork itself (Sheehan 1993):

Inevitably, local suspicion of my discipline and research motives, combined with the fact of my informants' notoriety and influence, affected many of the decisions I made about how to write up my data, what information to include and to leave out, and how to connect the public lives and opinions of those I studied with the more private information about them I inevitably gained access to.

(Sheehan 1993:77)

That sense of the 'audience' has been a recurrent theme in Sheehan's research, heightened by the knowledge that 'those I wrote about would also be, in some instances, the same people authorized to critique the publications resulting from my research' (1993:76). The response of key informants, such as 'Doc', to Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1981), together with the politicized response when minority groups respond to their representation in ethnographic texts (Rosaldo 1986), sharpens our

awareness of the complex relations of reading and writing that echo and amplify the social relations of 'fieldwork' itself.

Our actual or potential relations with readers of the ethnography are a particular case of a more general set of issues. The relationships of social research always have ethical implications, and the conduct of ethnographic work normally raises questions of research ethics. In the next chapter therefore we turn to a consideration of such issues.

Chapter 10

Ethics

In Chapter 1 we argued that, contrary to the views of some recent writers on qualitative research, the goal of ethnography should be the production of knowledge – not, say, the improvement of professional practice or the pursuit of political goals. In this sense for us social research is not necessarily, and should not be, political, though there are various other senses in which it could reasonably be described as such (see Hammersley 1994). Another way of putting this is to say that the only value which is central to research is truth: the aim should be to produce true accounts of social phenomena. And, indeed, that is our position. However, this does not mean that all other values can be ignored in the course of doing research. Clearly, there are ways of pursuing inquiry that are unacceptable. To say that the goal of research is the production of knowledge, then, is not to say that this goal should be pursued at all costs. There are ethical issues surrounding social research, just as there are with any other form of human activity. In this chapter we will look at these as they arise in ethnography, and at the variety of arguments deployed in relation to them. We will concentrate primarily on issues to do with the behaviour of the researcher and its consequences for the people studied, and for others belonging to the same or similar groups and organizations. (There are, of course, additional and equally important ethical matters, concerning relations with funding agencies – Willmott 1980; Pettigrew 1993 – and relationships within teams of researchers or between supervisors and research students – Bell 1977 – etc. For discussions of a wide range of ethical issues relating to social research generally, see Beals 1969; Diener and Crandall 1978; Barnes 1979; Punch 1986; Homan 1991.)