

CHAPTER 3

Standpoint Epistemologies

The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

—Lorde (1984, p. 112; also quoted in Collins, 1992, p. 79)

Ethnography's sixth moment is defined, in part, by a proliferation of interpretive epistemologies grounded in the lived experiences of previously excluded groups in the global, postmodern world. Working outward from feminist critiques of positivism (Collins, 1991, p. 205), these frameworks have moved in several directions at the same time, producing many different feminisms, including gynocriticism, materialist, standpoint, psychoanalytic, poststructural, African American, empiricist, postmodern, cultural studies, and those defined as postcolonial (see Clough, 1993a, 1994; Collins, 1991; Harding, 1991).

United in their criticisms of "Eurocentric masculinist approaches" (Collins, 1991, p. 205) to reading, writing, and inquiry, these works propose to make women's experiences instead of men's experiences the point of departure (Clough, 1994, p. 62) for interpretive work.¹ Loosely based on the concept of a standpoint epistemology (Clough, 1992, 1994; Collins, 1991; Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Krieger, 1991; Lather, 1991, 1993; Olesen, 1994; Smith, 1992), epistemologies of color building on Afrocentric (Collins, 1991; hooks, 1990), Chicana(os) (Anzaldúa, 1987; Rosaldo, 1989), Native American, Asian (Chow, 1993; Trinh, 1989, 1992),

Third World, postcolonial (Chow, 1993; Clough, 1994; Spivak, 1990) and other minority group experiences now circulate in the ethnographic literature.

More elaborated epistemologies of gender (and class) are also appearing, including various feminist materialist approaches to theory and ethnography (Clough, 1994; Hartsock, 1983; Roman, 1992), and recent queer embodiments of feminist theorizing (Butler, 1990; Fuss, 1989; Krieger, 1991, 1983; Sedgwick, 1990; Seidman, 1994; Terry, 1991; see also Clough, 1994, pp. 142-165).² Members of each of these interpretive communities draw on their marginalized group and individual experiences as the basis for the texts they write as they seek texts that speak to the logic and cultures of these communities.

In this chapter, these new interpretive styles that privilege lived experience and the standpoints that experience brings to the ethnographic text are examined. Taking liberties with the concept of standpoint, I begin with the shared assumptions that organize the standpoint epistemologies.³ Then, the works of three key authors in this tradition, representative texts of Patricia Hill Collins (1991), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989, 1991, 1992), and Gloria Anzaldúa (1981a, 1981b, 1987) are critically examined.⁴

The following arguments organize my reading of these texts. First, although these authors argue against positivism and postpositivism, these writers maintain (in varying degrees) a connection to the ocular, visual epistemology that defines the realist, positivist project. That is, they emphasize sight, vision, and a textual form that, as discussed in Chapter 4, turns the knowing subject into someone who is looked at, made a spectacle of, and the subject of the gazing ethnographer's eye.⁵ Second, the standpoint authors stress lived experience but do not show the reader how the experience of the other is brought into the texts they write. Hence, the connections between texts and lived experience remain unexamined. In many cases, lived experience disappears entirely from the theorist's texts. Third, the writer's place in the text is seldom clarified. The standpoint theorist presumes a privileged but problematic place in her own textuality. Fourth, a romantic, utopian impulse organizes this work: the belief that if lived experience is recovered, somehow something good will happen in the world. A politics of action, or praxis, however, is seldom offered (see Collins, 1992, p. 79; Connell, 1992, p. 87; Smith, 1992, pp. 96-97). Finally, a version of the standpoint

text is required if ethnography is to continue to connect itself to the worlds of everyday life. Such works contain the seeds of a new textuality that leads naturally to the performance texts to be taken up in the next chapter.

Logic of the Standpoint Text

Standpoint texts are organized in terms of the following assumptions. First, the starting point is experience—the experiences of women, persons of color, postcolonial writers, gay and lesbians, and persons who have been excluded from the dominant discourses in the human disciplines (Smith, 1993, p. 184). This argument is foundational. It challenges the very “notion of a single standpoint from which a final overriding version of the world can be written” (Smith, 1989, p. 58; see also Harding, 1991, pp. 119-121). Each of the standpoint epistemologies questions the standpoint from which traditional, patriarchal social science has been constructed (Smith, 1989, p. 57). This masculine standpoint presumed a universal sociological subject, the white male. It presumed a view outside society and argued that society could be written about from the position of an objective observer (Smith, 1989, p. 44). This observer-as-a-social-theorist created a discourse that suspended the presence of a real subject in the world. It made social experience irrelevant to the topic at hand. It created an interpretive structure that said social phenomena should be interpreted as social facts (Smith, 1989, p. 45). It shifted arguments about agency, purpose, meaning, and intention from the subject to the phenomena being studied. It then transformed those phenomena into texts about society, giving the phenomena a presence that rested in the textual description (Smith, 1989, p. 45). Real live people then entered the text as a fragment of discourse in the form of excerpts from field notes, the casual observations of the theorist, or as “ideal types” (Smith, 1989, p. 51).

The feminist standpoint theorists wish to overturn this picture of social science. They begin from the perspective of women's experiences—experiences shaped by a gender-based division of labor that has excluded women from the public sphere. A feminist standpoint is thus constructed, building, as Clough (1994, p. 74) states, on women's iden-

ties in the private sphere (housewife, homemaker mother, and daughter), working outward to her identities in the public sphere (secretary, administrative assistant, Marxist-feminist social scientist, filmmaker, and writer). Not only do women know different than men but women's experiences should be the starting point for a more accurate representation of reality (Clough, 1994, p. 74). This starting point will erase the public and private distinction in everyday life. It will lead to the production of local, gendered knowledge about the workings of the world. It will show how the patriarchal apparatus structures this daily life through the reproduction of text-mediated discourses (Smith, 1993).

Second, a nonessentializing stance toward the categories that classify people is taken. In Harding's (1991, p. 179) words, "race, class, gender, and culture are interlocking" producing concrete situations in which race, class, age, and gender intersect in the actual lives of real people. Trinh (1992) states,

The question of ethnic identity and the question of female identity are one to me . . . as if identity could be separated from oneself . . . with respect to truth, to ethnicity and femininity: I can't take hold of it nor lose it./When I am silent it projects./When I project, it is silent. (p. 240)

Smith (1992) contextualizes the argument,

The categories that identify diversity (race, gender, class, age, and so forth) . . . are categories of . . . discourse. . . . To begin with the categories are to begin in discourse. Experiencing as a woman of color . . . does not break down into experience as a woman and experience as a person of color.⁶ (p. 240)

Dorothy Smith (1993) describes her feminist standpoint epistemology: "There are indeed matters to be spoken and spoken of that discourse does not yet encompass." She elaborates, "we had no language in which our experience could be spoken among women by women" (pp. 183-184). Thus, an insider sociology is sought that uses the "outsider within" status (Collins, 1986, pp. 14-15) of women to create a discourse situated in the "everyday/everynight world of her actual lived experience" (Smith, 1989, p. 34). This sociology will not necessarily reproduce the lived experiences of women; it is only necessary to show how women's actual experiences activate the apparatuses and

relations of ruling in the larger patriarchal social order (Smith, 1987, pp. 154-155). Smith calls this doing institutional ethnography (see discussion below).

Collins (1986) speaks of the Afro-American woman as an outsider to white society,

Afro-American women have long been privy to some of the most intimate secrets of white society . . . but . . . black women knew they could never belong to 'white' families. In spite of their involvement, they remained 'outsiders.' This 'outsider within' status has provided a special standpoint on self, family and society for Afro-American women. (p. 14)

This standpoint means that "African-American women as a group experience a world different from those who are not Black and female. . . . These concrete experiences can stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality" (Collins, 1991, p. 24). Sedgwick (1990, pp. 1-2) argues that the dominant epistemology of experience in the human disciplines has been heterosexual, creating an epistemology of the closet. This framework required an opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality and between secrecy and privacy, private and public, masculine and feminine, and health and illness. This epistemology of the closet presumed a universal sexual subject—the male heterosexual. It created, as with the case of Afro-Americans, subjugated knowledges, knowledges those in power could afford to ignore (Clough, 1994, p. 145).

Spivak (1988) drives the argument even deeper: Disciplinary anthropology has made it impossible for the subaltern subject to even speak, for it has presumed a unified "naturally articulate subject" (p. 289). There is no single standpoint for the subaltern subject who lives a series of hybrid identities on the borderlands between home, America, Mexico, India, China, and elsewhere (Anzaldúa, 1987; Chow, 1993).

Third, this discourse often begins from the painful autobiographical experiences of the writer. Thus, Smith (1989) locates her work within her personal, family, and professional history:

When my children were small I was working at the University of California at Berkeley. I went back and forth between doing the work of mothering in all its particularities and demands, and the sociological-

world-in-texts that I taught . . . It was . . . a search for a consciousness in myself that had been present (in the anxieties, the tensions, the feelings of nausea accompanying my work, departmental meetings, trying to write sociology, and so forth) but impotent. (pp. 36-37)

Patricia Hill Collins (1991, p. 1) begins with her childhood: "When I was five years old, I was chosen to play Spring in my preschool pageant." Sedgwick (1987, p. 111) also returns to her childhood: "When I was a little child the two most rhythmic things that happened to me were spanking and poetry." Anzaldúa (1987, p. 16) speaks of leaving home: "I was the first in six generations to leave the alley, the only one in my family to ever leave home." hooks (1989) is less than sanguine about her childhood:

To me, telling the story of my growing up years was intimately connected with the longing to kill the self. . . . I wanted to be rid of the girl who was always wrong, always punished, always subjected to some humiliation or other, always crying, the girl who was to end up in a mental institution because she could not be anything but crazy or so they told her. (p. 155)

Trinh (1989) resists this pull: "The image is of a mirror capturing only the reflections of other mirrors. . . . I . . . am alluding to . . . the play of mirrors that defers to infinity the real subject and subverts the notion of an original 'I'" (p. 22).

Fourth, from the autobiographical arises a desire (as discussed previously) to recover a self that has been subjugated by the dominant structures of racism, sexism, and colonialism in everyday life. A utopian impulse is at work. If the previously suppressed self can be recovered, liberation, freedom, and dignity will be experienced.⁷ The scientific project is thereby redefined; the personal defines the political, which transforms science into a politics of experience. This means that the standpoint epistemologies move in two directions at the same time. The first direction is toward the discovery of knowledge about the social world as that world works its way into the lives of oppressed people. Second, there is an attempt to recover and bring value to knowledge that has been suppressed by the existing epistemologies in the social sciences. Thus, Collins (1991, p. 208) places great value on the riddles,

proverbs, and stories that are central to the Afro-American woman's family experiences.

Knowing Experience: The Materialist Challenge

Feminist standpoint theorists begin with the subject who knows the "world directly through experience" (Clough, 1994, p. 73), arguing that that experience is the starting point for social change—the site for a politics of empowerment. The link, however, as discussed previously, between experience, text, knowledge, and praxis is problematic. Feminist materialists (Clough, 1994, p. 77) argue that "an individual's knowledge of the world and of self are always constructed in unconscious desire. . . . There is . . . no direct knowledge of the world of experience." There is no "agentic subject who directly knows reality through experience" (Clough, 1994, p. 74). Reality is lived through ideology and through the workings of the subject's unconscious desire (Clough, 1994, p. 75). Therefore, experience is already defined by ideology and unconscious desire and by the apparatuses of the state, culture, the media, and the popular. The subject is constructed by these apparatuses. Reality is the effect of these constructions. There is no direct access to lived experience, and there "is no subject outside of unconscious desire and, therefore, discourse" (Clough, 1994, p. 77).

Smith (1992) disagrees: "Are we really stuck with Althusser's . . . condemnation of the subject to lasting dependency on being interpellated by 'ideological state apparatuses'? . . . from discourse to subjectivity. . . . I want to go another way" (p. 91). Smith's concept of standpoint does not privilege a knower; it begins with the knower located in the world, caught up in a web of invisible social relations that shape her experiences (Smith, 1992, p. 91). This figure of woman is positioned in the social relations of discourse as an active, knowing agent of her own experience (Smith, 1993, p. 185).

Two meanings of discourse are operating. The materialist perspective sees the subject defined in and through discourse at the unconscious level of desire. Smith's position examines the systems of text-mediated discourse that organize the relations between people in the world. Smith reads Clough as saying that there is no subject outside the text, "hence no speaking of or from actual experience" (Smith, 1993, p. 186). Clough (1993b) challenges this interpretation:

Experience is [not] purely an epiphenomenon of discourse. . . . Unconscious desire is productive in the construction of the subject's experience and . . . this understanding is critical for political and social criticism. . . . Discourse and experience. . . are [not] distinct. . . . They are enjoined in unconscious desire. (pp. 193-194)

The issue turns on the status of lived experience and the unconscious and their place in the standpoint epistemologies. The materialist, psychoanalytic model calls for the serious interrogation of those cultural texts that shape and define desire, sexuality, and identity. Lived experience is always mediated by unconscious desire. Smith (1993) examines those discourses that articulate the structures of experience women confront and live at the actual, everyday level. In both models, lived experience disappears from the text.

Grossberg (1988, 1993) partially mediates these two positions; drawing on his reading of Gramsci, he is closer to Smith than to Clough. Experience in any situation is always shaped by the hegemonic cultural practices that individuals use, including the texts they call on. These practices and the texts they interact with produce situated, subjective interpretations based on conflicting meanings and social relationships. At this level, the politics of culture (Grossberg, 1993),

Involves the work of placing particular practices into particular relations or contexts, and of transforming one set of relations, one context into another. The identity and effects of a practice are not given in advance; they are not determined by its origin or by some intrinsic feature of the practice itself. (p. 90)

Here, lived experience disappears into cultural practices. The ethnographer becomes a traveling nomad who writes of the world so as to discover the multiple meanings and effects of diverse cultural practices. Subjectivity dissolves into the signs and road maps that represent the culture to its members.⁸

The Textual and the Empirical Subject

None of these proposals is entirely satisfactory. In each case, the experiences and the point of view of the interacting subject in the world disappear, to reappear in ideology and unconscious desire, in a set of

cultural practices, or in another level of discourse.⁹ This situation can be partially resolved by maintaining a distinction between the textual subject and the empirical subject (see Stacey, 1994, pp. 24-31).¹⁰ The textual subject is the subject created in discourse, a figure in a film, or an ethnographic text. The flesh and blood person is the actual person in the world who lives, feels, and thinks and has social relationships with other flesh and blood people. This person interacts with the texts of the culture, often finding their experiences inscribed in these discourses.

Of course, it is not possible to represent a life as it is actually lived or experienced. Bruner (1986, p. 6) explains, clarifying three terms and noting that the link between experience and its expressions is always problematic: "The critical distinction here is between reality (what is really out there) . . . experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated)." Experiences constitute the flux and flow of consciousness. Experiences are constantly out of reach of language and discourse and on the borderlines of consciousness and awareness. On the other hand, as Bruner (1986, p. 6) notes, it is possible to represent a life (or its meanings) as it is told in a narrative, a proverb, a story, a slice of a conversation, or a folk tale. Spoken, performed, told, and retold in the narrative form, this is the realm of lived experience that is recoverable. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, however, the original meaning of a told experience can never be recovered. There are only retellings—performed texts evocatively re-presented in the ethnographer's text. These, of course, become new expressions of the experience. These tellings, told by the writer, now become the writer's versions of the subject's lived experiences. In this retold form, the subject is understood to be constantly caught up in the webs of discourse Clough and Smith describe.

The performed text opens another window into the world of lived experience. The writer collects and reproduces the texts and stories that circulate in the subject's world. These stories and tales are understood to be repositories of wisdom and knowledge (Collins, 1991, p. 208) that "reflect the standpoint of their creators" (Collins, 1991, p. 201). As such, they enter into the meanings that are brought to experience at the everyday level of existence. They become stand-ins for lived experience.

Critical Theory

Each of the standpoint epistemologies is connected (even if indirectly) to the critical and emancipatory styles of interpretation (see Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). All begin from Marx's notion of the relations of ruling in a capitalist society that has structured the production of knowledge about the world. There are ruling ideas in any society, and these involve ideas about race, class, gender, and nation. These ideas "penetrate social consciousness . . . in ways that deny expression to the actual experience people have in their working relations to their everyday world" (Smith, 1987, p. 55). A fault line is created—a line between the world directly experienced and the ideas about the world embedded in the ideas and images the society constructs and fabricates about itself (Clough, 1994, p. 70; Smith, 1987, p. 55).

All share a critical realist ontology (a world out there) and a dialogic, transformative, ethnographic methodology (Guba, 1990, p. 25).¹¹ This frequently produces a criticism of traditional, naturalistic ethnographies (Roman, 1992, p. 558) and an affinity for neo-Marxist and cultural studies models of the race, class, and gendered structures of contemporary societies (Carspecken & Apple, 1992, pp. 541-542). It may produce, however, an alignment with conventional ethnographic practices. That is, the knower is positioned in an objective relationship to the world studied (Grossberg, 1988; Radway, 1988), even in the institutional ethnographies endorsed by D. E. Smith (1987) and G. W. Smith (1990). An emancipatory principle drives such research, which is committed to engaging oppressed groups in collective, democratic theorizing about "what is common and different in their experiences of oppression and privilege" (Roman, 1992, p. 557). A constant focus is given to the material and cultural practices that create structures of oppression.

A critical standpoint text is judged by its ability to reflexively reveal these structures of oppression as they operate in the worlds of lived experience (Smith, 1990). A critical text thus creates a space for multiple voices to speak or be represented; those who are oppressed are asked to articulate their definitions of their situations. For some, but necessarily the standpoint theorists, critical theory must be testable, falsifiable, dialogical, and collaborative (Carspecken & Apple, 1992, pp. 547-548). Others reject the more positivist features of this formulation (Roman, 1992, p. 558). Dorothy Smith (1992, p. 96), for example, evaluates a text

by its ability to reveal the invisible structures of oppression in women's worlds (see G. Smith, 1990).¹²

Criticisms

A good critical, emancipatory, standpoint text is one that is local, multivocal, collaborative, naturalistically grounded in the worlds of lived experience, and organized by a critical, interpretive theory. Such formulations have been criticized on many grounds, including their tendency to ignore the writer's place in the text while privileging an ocular epistemology; confusing problems of capturing "real" experience with its representation (Ganguly, 1992, pp. 62-63); ignoring the partial, situated nature of feminist knowledge (Haraway, 1988) while pursuing the impossible quest of objectivity, and risking the reinscription of "humanist and masculine myths of power and certitude" (Ganguly, 1992, p. 61; Haraway, 1988); imposing their voices and values on the groups studied (Quantz, 1992, p. 471); pressuring a unified or essentialized subject; arguing from a null point of experience while not being sufficiently self-reflexive (Lemert, 1992, p. 69); not developing local knowledge that could be used for political change (Collins, 1992, p. 77); using the language of those in the inner circle of power (Collins, 1992); producing extralocal abstractions that are not locally grounded (Connell, 1992, p. 83); focusing on the experiences of white women (Connell, 1992, p. 83); not actively engaging the arguments of participatory action research (Connell, 1992); lacking a utopian impulse (Connell, 1992); being too theoretical (top-down theory) and too preoccupied with theory verification (Roman, 1992, p. 571); and not being sufficiently aware of materialist feminist sensibilities concerning the political unconscious, sexual desire, the text, and its social construction (Clough, 1992, p. 137, 1994; see Smith, 1992, 1993). Finally, the terrain of lived experience remains problematic, as the previous discussion indicates.

These critical approaches, with their action criteria, politicize qualitative research. They set the background for the specific standpoint epistemology texts analyzed here. They foreground praxis, yet often leave unclear the methodological side of the interpretive process that is so central to my concerns in this book.

PATRICIA HILL COLLINS
An Afrocentric, Feminist Epistemology

In *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins, 1991) Collins is Gramsci's organic intellectual (Collins, 1991, pp. 14, 18)—the outsider within white society who reclaims the everyday world of the black woman as her topic. The starting place is lived experience and its representations in the voices, images, sayings, songs, fictions, and autobiographies of bloodmothers, othermothers, and sisters. This world of everyday action and experience, the world of the commonplace and the taken for granted, is the place where a self-defined black woman's standpoint is anchored. From this standpoint emerges Collins's Afrocentric feminist epistemology (Collins, 1991, p. 219).

This epistemology challenges positivism and extreme relativism (Collins, 1991, p. 235), stressing, instead, the value of her standpoint as a partial perspective on the "truths" it discovers (Collins, 1991, p. 236). Collins states,

Those ideas that are validated as true by African-American women, African-American men, Latina lesbians, Asian-American women . . . and other groups with distinctive standpoints . . . thus become the most 'objective' truths. Each group speaks from its standpoint and shares its own truth as partial, its knowledge as unfinished. (p. 236)

Collins's (1991) text is grounded in the study in the texts of black women intellectuals, activists, musicians, poets, and fiction writers, including Aretha Franklin, Toni Morrison, Gwendolyn Brooks, Billi Holiday, Alberta Hunter, Zora Neale Hurston, Bessie Jackson, Audre Lorde, Ma Rainey, Nina Simone, Bessie Smith, Sojourner Truth, and Alice Walker. These standpoint texts contain the kernels of her standpoint epistemology.

I read *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins, 1991) as a standpoint, textual ethnography—a study in the representations of lived experience that stand at the core of black women's experiences in late twentieth-century America. As a textual ethnography, the work establishes and achieves its verisimilitude and authority through the use of the voices that Collins quotes and draws on. These voices come from the so-called world of lived experience. Thus, the text, *Black Feminist Thought*, invokes

a world that is never directly present, only heard and seen in the texts that Collins quotes. The authority granted this text turns, then, on the authority granted the observers of the real world who are brought into Collins's argument. These observers, black female blues singers, poets, and novelists, stand in a canonical relationship to African American culture. They have articulated a story and a standpoint about racism and sexism that has been suppressed by positivist and Marxist social scientists (Collins, 1991, p. 235). In using these sources, Collins erases the dividing line between science, literature, and fiction, "drawing without distinction on literature, art [and] music" (Clough, 1994, p. 89) for the claims she makes. This is critical because the writers Collins quotes write fiction, so the fictional world (and its characters) now become stand-ins for that real world real black women inhabit.¹³ How does Collins do this?

The answer lies in her last two chapters, Chapters 10 and 11 ("Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology" and "Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment"). Here, Collins (1991) articulates her Afrocentric feminist epistemology offering four criteria for interpreting the truth and knowledge claims of a social science or cultural text. These criteria focus on the primacy of concrete lived experience, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethic of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability. The works she quotes presumably embody these criteria. They all arise out of the shared experiences of being black and female in American culture, experiences grounded in racism, sexism, sexual violence, economic exploitation, and cultural denigration (Collins, 1991, pp. 22-23).

Experience as a criterion of meaning directs attention to black sisterhood and to the stories, narratives, and Bible principles embodied in black church and community life. Concrete, black feminine wisdom is contrasted to knowledge without wisdom: "A heap see, but a few know" (Collins, 1991, p. 208). Wisdom is experiential, cultural, and shared in the black feminine community. Dialogue, bell hooks (1989) argues, is humanizing speech. Black feminists assess knowledge claims through discourse, storytelling, connected to dialogue in a group context. This emphasis on dialogue is directly translated into the black feminist text. Zora Neale Hurston, for example, located herself inside the folktales she collected and carried on extensive dialogues with them, thus creating a multivocal text (Collins, 1991, p. 214).

Dialogue extends to the ethic of caring, which suggests that "personal expressiveness, emotions and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process" (Collins, 1991, p. 215). A feminist ethic, not unlike the feminist, communitarian moral ethic discussed in the Preface, is presented. Collins's ethical system values the black woman's individual uniqueness, her invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unstated courage (p. 107), the mothering mind (p. 131), love, community, and justice (p. 197), and the expression of emotionality in the text. It seeks writers who can create emotional texts that others can enter into. The ethic of personal accountability makes individuals accountable for their values and the political consequences of their actions.

These four criteria embody a "self-defined Black women's standpoint using an Afrocentric epistemology" (Collins, 1991, p. 219). This epistemology creates the conditions for an existential politics of empowerment that will allow African American women to actively confront racial, gender, and class oppression in their daily lives (p. 237). Collins is faithful to her standpoint, materialist epistemology on this point (p. 26). Material conditions of oppression produce "varying types of [individual] consciousness" (p. 26). By "aggregating and articulating these individual expressions of consciousness, a collective, focused group consciousness becomes possible" (p. 26). The articulation of this consciousness at the group level is "key to Black women's survival" (p. 26). This consciousness then works back into the lives of individual women, creating the conditions for new, empowering self-definitions in which consciousness becomes a "sphere of freedom" (p. 227). Black feminist thinkers like Collins thereby offer "individual African-American women the conceptual tools to resist oppression" (p. 228).

Each author Collins (1991) quotes has this form of group and individual consciousness. These writers embody Collins's Afrocentric feminist epistemology. Their works structure her analysis of the black feminist experience in America. Thus, these works do double duty in her text. They define a previously repressed standpoint, a subjugated knowledge, while embodying the Afrocentric feminist epistemology she puts forth. She is aware of this situation, quoting Alice Walker who observes, "to write the books one wants to read is both to point the direction of vision and at the same time, to follow it (Collins, 1991, p. 17; Walker, 1983, p. 8).

Reclaiming Voice

Recall the earlier quote from Collins (1991): "When I was five years old, I was chosen to play Spring in my preschool pageant" (p. xi). She goes on,

All the grown-ups told me how vital my part was and congratulated me. . . . As my world expanded, I learned that not everyone agreed with them. . . . I tried to disappear into myself in order to deflect the painful, daily assaults designed to teach me that being an African-American, working-class woman made me lesser than those who are not. . . . I became quieter and eventually was virtually silenced. This book reflects one stage in my ongoing struggle to regain my voice. (p. xi)

The voice that Collins (1991) finds is apocalyptically located in that utopian moment, in the beginning, before young African American women and their mothers confronted racism, slavery, and sexism. Spring resides in this space in those "Afrocentric ideas of classical African civilizations" (p. 10)—a loving, black feminist ethic of mothering, love, community, caring, and justice. In this prior moment, black women did not confront racism, sexism, and sexual violence. Therefore, Collins finds her voice in this subjugated black feminist ethic, an ethic that embodies these classical African ideals as they were dialectically shaped by the structures of oppression in American culture (p. 10). Finding her voice (pp. 97-98), Collins thereby creates a voice (and a space) for all of those black women who have come before her and who will follow in her steps.

A paradox operates, however, because the voice she finds, which becomes hers, is already entangled in the very structures of oppression and discrimination she opposes. Thus, this voice is a voice of survival, a voice of self-respect, ground out of the "iron that enters Black women's souls" (Collins, 1991, p. 34). It is not a pure voice; it is a voice that has had to make do with those few resources the culture has made available to its members. Already shaped by what it opposes, there is no spring to which this voice and its speaker can return.

Therefore, not surprisingly, it is primarily the voice of fiction, the voice of the female blues singers that Collins (1991) appropriates. Here,

as a sample of her selections, Lorraine Hansberry describes the African features of black feminine beauty: "Sometimes in this country . . . you will see it—*Beauty* . . . stark and full . . . Africa, simply Africa . . . without negation or apology: A classical people demand a classical art" (Hansberry, 1969, p. 106; quoted in Collins, 1991, p. 88).

Bessie Smith (as quoted in Collins, 1991) gives advice to black women about their men:

*I've had a man for fifteen years, give him his room and his board.
Once he runs like a Cadillac, now he's like an old worn-out Ford.
He never brought me a lousy dime, and put it in my hand.
Oh, there'll be some changes from now on, according to my plan.*
(p. 101)

Aretha Franklin (as quoted in Collins, 1991) sings about respect:

*What you want? Baby I got it.
What you need? You know I got it.
All I'm asking for is a little respect when you come home.*
(p. 108)

Billie Holiday (as quoted in Collins, 1991) on self-reliance and independence:

*The strong gets more, while the weak ones fade,
Empty pockets don't ever make the grade;
Mama may have, Papa may have,
But God bless the child that got his own.*
(p. 109)

Motherhood, and a mother's gift to her daughter, as defined by a traditional blues song (Collins, 1991):

*I ain't good lookin' and ain't got waist-long hair.
I say I ain't good lookin' and I ain't got waist-long hair.
But my mamma gave me something that'll take me anywhere.*
(p. 126)

On mother's love, from Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1974, pp. 67, 69; Collins, 1991, p. 127):

Eva's daughter, Hanna, asks: *Mamma, did you ever love me?*
Eva replies: *What you talkin' bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you.*

These are powerful texts—tales of struggle, survival, oppression, dignity torn out of the tarnished, and the ugly soul of racism. These lyrics, lines, and short stories carry the weight of emotion. Eyes closed, stereo turned up, the listener can literally feel the presence of these female blues singers. These are evocative texts, poetic, direct, personal, and biographical. They are, at the same time, cultural performances. They reinscribe lived experience within a valued cultural tradition—the blues.

These are Collins's (1991) concrete experiences. They are used as her criterion of meaning. Her logic is clear: If a lived experience has been inscribed in a powerful cultural text, then that text applies "to the lived experiences of African-Americans" (p. 210). These texts, selected because they apply to these experiences, now "become symbolic representations of a whole wealth of experience" (p. 210). These texts contain wisdom and truth about experience in which truth now turns on the meaning of the experience as defined by wisdom. Collins states, "Bible tales are often told for the wisdom they express about everyday life, so their interpretation involves no need for scientific historical verification. . . . Concrete experiences are used as a criterion of meaning" (p. 210).

Thus, we learn the wisdom concerning the meaning of a mother's suicide by reading the following lines from June Jordan's (1985) essay on her mother's death:

I am not sure my mother's suicide was something extraordinary. Perhaps most women must deal with a similar inheritance, the legacy of a woman whose death you cannot pinpoint because she died so many, many times and because, even before she became your mother, the life of that woman was taken. (p. 26; quoted in Collins, 1991, p. 210)

Therefore, this black feminist standpoint epistemology never really returns to the site of lived experience. Lived experience serves as a proxy for the theory, an ideological commitment to enter, study, and talk about the real world appears only in the form of a standpoint, however that real world appears only in the form of a standpoint, textual ethnography: a rewriting of the world of lived experience through the canonical black feminist representations of that world—tales from survivors.

Struggles with an Ocular Epistemology

Collins (1991) struggles with the epistemological metaphors that organize her text. Rejecting the visual metaphors (illumination, equating knowing with seeing, and truth with light) that structure realist discourses on epistemology, she calls for a set of epistemological metaphors that emphasize “finding a voice, speaking, and listening” (p. 214). (This call is folded into her discussions concerning the central place of dialogue and sharing in the black feminist community.) Throughout, however, her standpoint epistemology privileges vision, even as it struggles to find an alternative starting point for itself. She repeatedly calls for a new angle of vision (pp. 11, 26, 39, 207) that builds on what black women see from their outsider-within perspective (p. 12), a perspective that has turned them into media spectacles (mammies, matrilarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas [p. 67]), the voyeuristic object of the white man’s sexual gaze (pp. 168, 172).

Understanding that no single group has a monopoly on knowledge, a privileged, “clear angle of vision” (Collins, 1991, p. 234), Collins wishes to transcend the visual and to invoke a form of dialogical textuality that is empathetic (p. 205) and allows one group to enter into (and feel) the experiences of another (p. 236). When this occurs, as in her use of the blues singers, “groups can come to better understand other group’s standpoints, without relinquishing the uniqueness of its own standpoint or suppressing other groups’ partial perspectives” (p. 236). Collins draws on Elsa Barkley Brown (1989, p. 922) for support: “all people can learn to center in another experience, validate it, and

judge it by its own standards without need or comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own” (quoted in Collins, 1991, p. 236).

Three events must occur for this to happen. Members of groups must desire to understand and feel their way into the experiences of another group. This process must be structured by the kind of sharing, loving, communitarian feminist ethic Collins (1991) connects to black feminist thought. Also, texts and experiences must be produced that allow members from one group to vicariously enter into, and then emotionally understand, the experiences of another group. Ideally, members from each group would enter into a common field of shared experience (Denzin, 1984, p. 145). If this does not occur, spurious understanding is produced (Denzin, 1984, pp. 153–156). If these three conditions are not met, there is no assurance that one group will understand or desire to understand the perspectives of another group. This will be case even if members of both groups have experienced repression, exploitation, racism, and sexism.

Collins (1991) does not address these three conditions because they speak to persons who are not part of the interpretive community she has created. Many can only spuriously enter into her discourse, even as they share her ethics. Also, to the extent that this is the case, such readers can only cognitively and spuriously understand the experiences of racism and sexism that black women have experienced in America.

Still, this most powerful of contemporary standpoint epistemologies succeeds because it opens the door for others to follow. It charts an ethical path that challenges others to question their own standpoints and the taken for granted knowledge they use to support their actions in the world, including their actions toward all African Americans. On still another level, Collins (1991) opens the door for the re-entry of lived experiences into the “new” ethnographic text. Her work asks others to articulate the connections between lived experiences and their inscriptions in powerful cultural texts. Also, in calling attention to the performed text, the blues that are sung, and the poems that are read, she suggests that a work’s most powerful effects occur when it is performed in front of an audience because in that moment the evocative text comes alive and creates that necessarily shared space from which understandings can be forged.

**Trinh T. Minh-Ha:
Framer Framed**

In this postmodern society of the male-centered spectacle (Trinh, 1991, p. 104), ethnography has traditionally functioned as that method that allows the writer to "grasp the native's point of view, to realize his vision of the world" (Trinh, 1991, p. 65) and to present that vision to the world of the reader. Such texts, written from the standpoint of the male anthropologist, the anthropologist as bricoleur (Trinh, 1989, pp. 62-63), never question where the anthropologist stands vis-à-vis his interpretive community and the natives he writes about (Trinh, 1991, p. 72). In this certain interpretive, scientific world, experience near and experience distant concepts are married. The anthropologist's objectivity merges with the native's subjective view of the world, producing a text that allows the observer to get inside the other's skin (Trinh, 1991, pp. 67-68). Lived experience is captured and reproduced in the writer's text.

In three major texts, *Woman, Native, Other* (Trinh, 1989), *When the Moon Waxes Red* (Trinh, 1991), and *Framer Framed* (Trinh, 1992) and four films, *Ressamblage* (1982), *Naked Spaces—Loving Is Round* (1985), *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), and *Shoot for the Contents* (1991), Trinh T. Minh-Ha unravels this worldview, contesting the masculine standpoint that organizes mainstream, and postmodern, interpretive anthropology, from Levi-Strauss to Clifford Geertz, George Marcus, and James Clifford (Trinh, 1989, pp. 20, 43-44, 49, 56-63, 67-73, 84, 103; 1991, pp. 44-45, 65-68, 73-75, 113-114; 1992, pp. 116, 229). Trinh challenges the very foundations of this project, where science (anthropological knowledge) becomes institutional gossip, the native's world is never penetrated, and the anthropologist re-enacts a version of the "Pet Negro System" (Trinh, 1991, p. 68-69), bringing his version of the foreign "Other" in front of the reader.¹⁴

Trinh's (1991, p. 157) standpoint is fragile, illusive, and plural. The figure of postcolonial woman always writes from a position of triple jeopardy: "as a writer, as a woman, and as a woman of color" (Trinh, 1989, p. 28). She is always crossing borders, moving through in-between spaces, a hyphen, a hybrid, Asian American woman, African American feminist (Trinh, 1991, p. 157), constantly negotiating "the difference not merely between cultures, between First and Third World, but more

importantly within culture . . . a plural singularity . . . [that problematizes] the insider-outsider position" (Trinh, 1992, p. 144). This space is fluid, infinite, unnamable, and the space of becoming (Trinh, 1991, p. 157): the site of feminist consciousness (Trinh, 1991, p. 112).

This, however, is not a state of consciousness arrived at after a new body of knowledge has been acquired. It is not a personal or group consciousness. It is a process, "a dialectical understanding and practice of identity and difference . . . [where] the ethnic me and the female me [become] political" (Trinh, 1991, p. 113). From this space, culture is rewritten from within, on the borders and silences of the body (p. 129), where women bring their stories to bear on the stories they tell (p. 131), where the metaphysics of presence is challenged (p. 135), and where writing becomes a launching of the self into the world (p. 140).

In this space that is a process, in which silences are heard, she is not the subaltern other, nor can she assume the place of the insider or enter the standpoint of the outsider because these spaces also do not exist, except as processes (Trinh, 1991, p. 74). She is I and not I, different and the same (Trinh, 1991):

She knows she is different while at the same time being Him. Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both the deceptive insider and the deceptive outsider. (p. 74)

Thus, Collins (1991) is undone because there is no outsider within, no firmly defined outside position from which the outsider can view the inside. Invoking bell hooks (1989), Trinh declares that what is needed is a new revisioning, the need to

Examine the self from a new critical standpoint. Such a perspective, while it must insist on the self as the site for politicization, would equally insist that simply describing one's experience of exploitation or oppression is not to become politicized. It is not sufficient to know the personal but to know—to speak in a different way. (p. 107; quoted in Trinh, 1991, pp. 163-164)

Subjectivity and lived experience cannot be reduced to personal expressions of the self (Trinh, 1991, p. 113). These expressions must be con-

nected to the individual's experiences. This must be done in a way that is then linked to the systems of difference and domination (race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, geography, and ethnicity) that seek to impose an essential identity on the person and her experiences (p. 113).

Texts must be produced that allow women to experience and assert their difference in relation to others and to assume the position of active speakers, listeners, readers, writers, and viewers. Such works issue a challenge to the individual (and to their producers) (Trinh, 1991, p. 113). In their textual spaces, the personal is politicized, and the political is personalized. This is an in-between ground where the text "materializes itself and resists its status as mere object of consumption" (p. 113).

More is operating here, however. Trinh (1991) seeks to undo the entire realist ethnographic project that is connected to such terms as lived experience, authenticity, verisimilitude, truth, knowledge, facts, and fictions. She borrows from Barthes (1975): There is no real—reality is something already classified by men, a ready-made code (Trinh, 1991, p. 136). This code allows writers and filmmakers to produce texts that look real because they conform to the rules concerning what the real looks like. Under this regime, authenticity becomes a textual accomplishment, and factual truth becomes the "dominant criterion for evaluation . . . [and] the more the representation leans on verisimilitude, the more it is subject to normative verification" (Trinh, 1991, p. 76). Also, reality always runs away (Trinh, 1991, p. 40).

Truth becomes a realist construct (Trinh, 1991, p. 12): something "produced, induced, and extended according to the regime of power" (p. 30). A statement is true if it accurately accounts for and explains events that occur in the real world. The real world, however, is a construction—a product of a set of images that conform to prior images of what the real looks like (p. 38). Trinh is quite forceful on this point:

The belief that there can exist such a thing as an outside foreign to the inside, an objective, unmediated reality about which one can have knowledge once and for all, has been repeatedly challenged by feminist critics. . . . The fight against 'realism' is . . . not a denial of reality and of meaning, but rather a determination to keep meaning creative, hence to challenge the fixity of realism as a style and an arrested form of representation. . . . Realism as one form of representation defined by a specific attitude toward reality is widely validated to perpetuate the illusion of a stable world. (p. 164)

Therefore, reality is a historical fiction (Trinh, 1991, p. 41), and in this world the criterion of authenticity "no longer proves pertinent. It is like asking an atheist: 'How faithful to the words of God are you?' " (p. 76). Trinh's writer knows that she cannot speak of the other "without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story . . . [and she] also knows that she cannot make a gesture without activating the to-and-fro-movement of life" (p. 76). In this textual world, the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity disappear. These terms, which produce sciences of the subject, no longer operate because subjectivity is always intersubjective, unstable, and embodied in the concrete situations of life (p. 76).

Cinema Meets Ethnography: Ethnography in the Sixth Moment

Trinh is a filmmaker first, and her critique of the ethnographic project is based on her analysis of the cinematic apparatus. Her cinematic texts must be read as postmodern ethnographies—ethnography in the sixth moment. She begins by deconstructing the classic documentary film, the ethnographic film that enters the native's world and brings news from that world to the world of the Western observer. Like ethnography, which separated itself from fiction (Clough, 1992, pp. 26-27), the documentary film defines itself against mainstream, Hollywood cinema. Not tangled up in or complicitous with the star and studio system, documentary (Trinh, 1991)

Takes real people and real problems from the real world and deals with them. It sets a value on intimate observation, and assesses its worth according to how well it succeeds in capturing reality on the run . . . powerful living stories, infinite authentic situations. (p. 33)

Documentary, like ethnography, starts with the real world: It uses an aesthetic of objectivity and a technological apparatus that produces truthful statements (images) about the world (Trinh, 1991, p. 33). The following elements are central to this apparatus (pp. 33-36):

- The relentless pursuit of naturalism, which requires a connection between the moving image and the spoken word, must be incorporated.
- The use of the directional microphone and the portable tape recorder must be incorporated.
- Lip-synchronous sound must be used.
- Authenticity—real people in real situations—must be incorporated.
- Real time is more truthful than film time; hence, the long-take.
- Minimal editing must be made, with no use of montage.
- Few close-ups should be used, with emphasis on wide-angle shots.
- Use of the hand-held, unobtrusive camera to “provoke people into uttering the ‘truth’ that they would not otherwise unveil in ordinary situations” (Trinh, 1991, p. 34) should be incorporated.
- The filmmaker is an observer, not a person who creates what is photographed.
- Only events unaffected by the recording eye should be captured.
- The film must capture objective reality.
- Truth must be dramatized.
- Actual facts should be presented in a credible way, with people telling them.
- The film must convince the spectator that they should have confidence in the truth of what they see.
- There should be a focus on common experience by which the ‘social’ is defined.
- The presence of the filmmaker should be masked, hidden.
- The use of various persuasive techniques, including personal testimony, and the talk of plain folks should be incorporated.
- The film is made for the common, silent people; they are the film’s referent.
- The film is shot with three cameras: the camera in the technical sense; the filmmaker’s mind; and the generic patterns of documentary film. The film’s facts are a product of these three cameras (Trinh, 1991, p. 39).

These aesthetic strategies define the documentary style, allowing the filmmaker to create a text that gives the viewer the illusion of having “unmediated access to reality” (Trinh, 1991, p. 40). Thus naturalized, the documentary style has become part of the larger cinematic apparatus in American culture, including a pervasive presence in TV commercials and news (p. 40).

Trinh (1991) brings a reflexive reading to these features of the documentary film, citing her own texts as examples of documentaries that are aware of their own artifice, sensitive to the flow of fact and fiction, to nuances, and to meanings as political constructions (p. 41). Such texts reflexively understand that reality is never neutral or objective; that it is always socially constructed. Filmmaking thus becomes a question of “framing” reality. Self-reflexivity does not translate into personal style or a preoccupation with method. It rather centers on the reflexive interval that defines representation (Trinh, 1991):

The place in which the play within the textual frame is a play on this very frame, hence on the borderlines of the textual and the extra-textual . . . A work that reflects back on itself offers itself infinitely as nothing else but work . . . and void. (p. 48)

In such works, meaning is not imposed. The film becomes a site for multiple experiences.

A responsible, reflexive text embodies the following characteristics (Trinh, 1991, p. 188):

- It announces its own politics and evidences a political consciousness.
- It interrogates the realities it represents.
- It invokes the teller’s story in the history that is told.
- It makes the audience responsible for interpretation.
- It resists the temptation to become an object of consumption.
- It resists all dichotomies (male-female, etc.).
- It foregrounds difference, not conflict.
- It uses multiple voices, emphasizing language as silence, the grain of the voice, tone, inflection, pauses, silences, and repetitions.
- Silence is presented as a form of resistance.

Reflexive films seek the truth of life’s fictions, the spirit of truth that resides in life experiences, in fables, and in proverbs in which nothing is explained, but everything is evoked (Trinh, 1991, p. 162). This is Collins’s (1991) world, in which “A heap see, but a few know” and knowledge does not equal wisdom. Meaning is not confused with truth.

Trinh's Ocular Epistemology

Trinh (1991) creates the space for a new ocular epistemology, a version of the cinematic apparatus that challenges mainstream film and traditional ethnography.¹⁵ Reflexive film questions the very notion of a stable, unbiased, middle-class gaze (Trinh, 1991, pp. 97-98, 115). It focuses on the pensive image—on representations that do not turn women into versions of the exotic, erotic, feminine ethnic minority other (p. 115). The pensive image “unsettles the male apparatus of the gaze, in which men own, articulate, and create the look of woman as either being looked at . . . [or as one who] holds the [male] look to signify the master’s desire” (p. 115). This look makes the camera’s gaze visible. It destabilizes any sense of verisimilitude that can be brought to this visual world. In so doing, it disrupts the spectator’s gaze, itself a creation of the unnoticed camera—the camera that invokes the image of a perfect, natural world, a world with verisimilitude (p. 115).

This ocular epistemology creates the space for a subversive cinema—a cinema that creates new ways of encountering reality and its representations. Thus, in *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (Trinh, 1989), Trinh deconstructs the interview and its basis in the documentary film. (The film is a study of Vietnamese women whose names change and remain constant depending on whether they marry a foreigner or a Vietnamese.) Trinh (1992, p. 49) has Vietnamese women speak from five places (representing lineage, gender and age status, leadership position, and historical period). This creates a complex picture of Vietnamese culture (Trinh, 1992, p. 144). The film is multireferential, layered with pensive images of women in various situations. Historical moments overlap with age periods (childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age), ritual ceremonies (weddings, funerals, war, the market, and dance), and daily household work (cooking) while interviewees talk to off-screen interviewers. There are two voice-overs in English, and a third voice sings sayings, proverbs, and poetry in Vietnamese (with translations as texts on the screen). There are also interviews with Vietnamese subtitled in English and interviews in English synchronized with the on-screen image (Trinh, 1992, p. 49).

The interviews were originally published in 1983 (Mai, 1983). They are re-enacted in Trinh’s (1992, p. 146) film by Vietnamese women who

are then interviewed at the end of the film—asked about their experiences of being performers in the film. One woman comments on the reactions of her friends when they heard she was going to be in a film: “They all laugh and tease me, saying that I’ll become a movie star and will earn enough money so I can quit my job in the future” (Trinh, 1992, p. 87). Another woman: “Once I worked on my part, I wanted to give my best because I don’t think it is an individual matter but one that concerns a whole community” (Trinh, 1992, p. 86).

In undoing the interview as a form of gathering information about reality, Trinh (1992, p. 145) takes up the question of truth. Whose truth is she presenting: that of the original interviewer (Mai Thu Van), that given in the on-screen interview situation, or that of the women-as-actresses who are interviewed at the end of the film? The film (*Surname Viet Given Name Nam*) allows the practice of doing interviews to enter into the construction of the text itself, thus the true and the false (the actresses are not the women interviewed by Mai Thu Van) and the real and the staged intermingle; indeed, the early sections of the film unfold like a traditional, realist documentary film (p. 145). The viewer does not know these are actresses re-enacting interviews. Nor does the viewer know that the interviews were conducted in the United States, not Vietnam. (This only becomes apparent near the end of the film.)

By using both types of interviews, Trinh examines the politics of interviewing as a mode of gathering information about the other. This is done, in part, by creating a distance between the written and the performed text; the women doing the interviews and the women reflecting on the interviews. In so doing, she creates the space for the viewer to critically appraise the politics of representation that structure the documentary film. This strategy makes the practice of “reading” and interpreting the film a constant process of discovery and re-evaluation (Trinh, 1992, p. 146). At the same time, and at a perhaps even deeper level of understanding, Trinh explodes the notion of a unified Vietnamese feminine subject. The idea of a unified national identity is also challenged because such an identity can only be sustained when one uncritically joins patriarchy, imperialism, and colonialism (Clough, 1994, p. 127).

Writing and the Storytelling Self

Trinh's project turns on the redefinition of three intertwined activities: filmmaking, writing, and the storytelling self. A major portion of *Suriname Viet Given Name Nam* consists of women engaged in storytelling and the telling of proverbs and poetry. There is no equivocation here; these are not fictional materials. They are the materials that contain the cultural truths about women and their lived experiences. They are stories that must be told and retold. The burden of the story truth cannot be escaped; there must be no lies, only the truth (Trinh, 1989, p. 149), even if the truth appears to be a lie or an impossibility.¹⁶ There is always a difference between the truth and the facts, and Trinh's storytellers know this. Truth does not need to make sense; it exceeds meaning (p. 123). Women's stories are told in defiance "of a whole system of white man's lies" (p. 150). Each telling allows the truth to live on.

Thus, Trinh's (1989, p. 119) women enter into the ongoing telling (and retelling) of Grandma's Story, that story passed on from generation to generation, grandmother to granddaughter, mother to daughter, and daughter to her children. It is the story of women's lives and women's stories, not men's histories (p. 119): Zora Neale Hurston's stories about lies and lovin' (p. 129). These are stories that heal, that carry love, solidarity, community, the fire and desire of the feminine soul, and that re-create life (p. 138). They cannot be reduced to structural categories or subsumed under narrative terms and functions (pp. 142-143). They are not just stories; they arouse forces, create their own momentum when set in motion, they circulate, humanize, "they are about what happened and what is happening . . . mother talking-stories" (p. 133). Therefore, *Suriname Viet Given Name Nam* tells these stories.

Trinh's (1989) writing self is caught in several dilemmas at the same time; she seeks to create a new form of writing, a new writing style, and a new but old way of telling women's stories and of hearing (seeing and feeling) the voices of women. Women writers must overcome the "Quilter-Couch" or the "Lady Painter syndrome" (Trinh, 1989, p. 27).¹⁷ Otherwise, they can be accused of producing personal, subjective, narcissistic, neurotic, confessional texts (the Quilter-Couch syndrome) or texts that sound like what a man would write (the Lady Painter syndrome). There are dangers here. Women who write like men may be called "scribblers. . . . [Their] technique is indistinguishable from mas-

culine writing" (Trinh, 1991, p. 124). If they indulge the personal, emphasizing the intimate, and the domestic, focusing only on their own experiences, reflections of themselves (Trinh, 1989, p. 29), and ornate texts, they risk being trapped in the personal and losing sight of the political (Trinh, 1989, p. 35).

Still, although the diary form may be liberating, it is also confining if it is the only means of self-expression available for women (Trinh, 1989, p. 35). This personal form, however, when combined with the autobiographical, may allow the personal to become communal, shared, liberating, and political—a way for a collectivity to make history and rewrite culture (Trinh, 1991, pp. 191-192). Such writing can defy the masculine norms of objectivity and subjectivity, creating new ways of presenting the "subjectivity of a non-1/plural I" (Trinh, 1991, p. 192). In this way, an opening is created, as in *Suriname Viet Given Name Nam* in which many different women speak from many different positions, undermining from within, even as they tell their own stories. This writing style is at once masculine and feminine, writing the woman's body against the masculine norms of objectivity. Recognizing the masculine inside the language she uses, Trinh's writer seeks to become the first female-male reader of her text. She ignores the male eye that gazes over her shoulder (Trinh, 1991, pp. 124-125). The language she writes cannot be gender neutral (Trinh, 1991, p. 125).

African writers and their novels offer suggestions for this writing self (Trinh, 1991, p. 192). These writers produce texts that are to be read out loud. They produce a spoken form of writing (p. 170) that emphasizes repetitions, clichés, stereotypes in dialogue, the sounds of words, the use of proverbs, hollow language, and "hackneyed words which no longer mean much and whose voicing transmits nothing but sound" (p. 172). The writer's text circulates these "truth-sounds" (p. 170), locating them in multiple contexts, giving them to diverse speakers, and showing how their meaning is always contextual in relationship to a "verbal surrounding" (p. 170). This oral style allows the writer to openly address the reader, to make the reader a part of the text, raising the question "who is speaking here?" (pp. 173-174).

Trinh's writer (and filmmaker) writes not to free the masses because who can speak for the other (Trinh, 1989, p. 13). She writes and makes films to create spaces for the retelling of the stories that the science of ethnography has stolen, reduced to history, categorized as fiction and

subaltern literature. In these spaces, she works to create texts that bring out the "plural, sliding relationship between ear and eye and to leave room for the spectators to decide what they want to make out of a statement or a sequence of images" (Trinh, 1991, p. 206). She uses silences, gaps, repetitions, cuts, and holes in the text as vehicles for producing an "ever-changing verbal and visual context" (Trinh, 1991, p. 206) of meaning. She resists those textual strategies (verbalin translations, sound tracks with music, sound effects, and voice-overs) that help spectators (and readers) assimilate a narrative as a realist text (Trinh, 1991, pp. 203-204). She cultivates a form of writing, filmmaking, and storytelling that embodies satori—"that Zen event defined as loss of meaning . . . a speech-void" (Trinh, 1991, p. 209), a sudden awakening, in which new meanings are revealed. In works of this kind, truth and certainty are constantly displaced, deferred, and postponed. The text resists easy classification or location within an interpretive system (Trinh, 1991, p. 218). Criticisms based on verisimilitude are "declared non-pertinent" (Trinh, 1991, p. 218).

Therefore, a new history is being written: A plural, unstable, multicultural history in which borders and boundaries are constantly questioned and crossed (Trinh, 1991, p. 232). A new aesthetics of the text is sought—one that rejects old categories and binary oppositions—a new discourse, a new way of writing, looking, reading, and relating to ourselves and others (p. 232).

Gloria Anzaldua: The Borderlands of the Textual Self

If Trinh's texts fill gaps and exposes holes in Collins' standpoint epistemology, leading to a deconstruction of such terms as reality, realism, lived experience, and the self, Gloria Anzaldua returns to the self, writing from a dark, deep place. For example, the following is an excerpt from her poem, "A Creature of the Dark" (Anzaldua, 1987):

*Three weeks I've wallowed
in this deep place
this underplace*

*this grieving place
getting heavier and heavier
sleeping by day creeping out at night*

*Nothing I can do
nothing I want to do
but stay small and still in the dark . . .*

*Three weeks I rocked . . .
refusing to move
barely daring to breathe
sinking deeper
growing great with mouth
a creature afraid of the dark
a creature at home in the dark
(pp. 186-187)*

A self that seeks its inner depths; a self with *La facultad*, "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities; to see the deep structure below the surface" (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 38). A voice for the dark-skinned woman, the lesbian of color (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 19), the new Mestiza, and the queer (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 85); an accounting of white, Mexican, and Indian cultures, her own feminist architecture (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 22). A writing self that creates itself through its writing, in which the personal is fused with the everyday, and nothing is too trivial to write about because everything relates back to her soul. "24 mayo 80: It is dark and damp and has been raining all day. I love days like this. As I lie in bed and I am able to delve inward. Perhaps today I will write from that deep core" (Anzaldua, 1981a, p. 169); and, "With terror as my companion, I dip into my life and begin work on myself. Where did it begin, the pain, the images that haunt me?" (Anzaldua, 1981b, p. 199). Anzaldua (1981a) states that to

write is to confront one's demons, look them in the face and live to write about them. . . . Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under a triple or quadruple oppression. Yet . . . a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared. (p. 171)

She begins from her unstable location at the intersection of four interconnected borderlands: the actual physical borderland between Texas, the U.S. southwest, and the Mexican border; the psychological borderlands (her inner- and outer-self, a Tejana Chicana poet, and fiction writer); the sexual borderlands (lesbian and feminist); and the spiritual borderlands, which knows no boundaries (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. vii). Anzaldúa writes of her preoccupations with the "inner life of the Self, and with the struggles of that Self (p. vii), a self that knows itself in at least eight languages: standard English, working-class and slang English, standard Spanish, standard Mexican Spanish, North Mexican Spanish dialect, Chicano Spanish, Tex-Mex, and Pachuco (p. 55). This is a new and old language of the borderlands—Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex (p. 59)—a language of sexuality, desire, and struggle.

This is cinematic, visual writing. She writes to return to the beginning, to recover, wrestle with, and live her way through the Coahuila state (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 42).¹⁸ In the Coahuila state, she experiences a crossing over to a new form of consciousness, everything rushes "to a center, a nucleus. "All the lost pieces of myself come flying from the deserts and the mountains and the valleys, magnetized toward that center" (p. 51). In this state, she sees herself seeing herself, being seen through, and the mirror's gaze, that mirror made of volcanic glass, reveals this deep psychic formation to her (p. 42).

Anzaldúa (1987, p. 42) writes and performs her stories and poetry from this moving place, the site of the gaze that allows her to possess the world. She thinks cinematically, a picture language, voices and scenes projected on the inner screen of her mind (pp. 69-70). Eyes closed, she produces her own soundtracks and becomes a participant in the dramas she creates. Inside and outside her own "picture" frame, she is the male and female actor, the film director, screenwriter, and camera operator. She has been making up these stories her entire life: "Nudge a Mexican and she or he will break out with a story" (p. 65). Her stories are performances (p. 67).

The stories all return, somehow, in one form or another, to the beginning: "I see the four of us kids getting off the school bus, changing into our work clothes, walking into the field with Papi and Mami, all six of us bending to the ground. Below our feet lie the watermelon seeds" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 91). The seeds grow into green shoots, and

the family hoes, waters, and harvests them. The vines die and rot and are plowed into the earth (Anzaldúa, 1987):

*Growth, death, decay, birth. . . . A constant changing of forms. . . .
This land was Mexican once
was Indian always
and is.
And will be again. (p. 91)*

Ancient stories.

Standpoints and Traveling Texts X

There are three versions of the standpoint text and its transformations: Collin's outsider within, Trinh's woman in the hyphens who has neither an inside place nor an outside position to occupy, and Anzaldúa's new *Mestiza* and the queer. Shared conceptions of the borderland, all three writers cross and recross borderlands, boundaries, and new and old frontiers. Each engages in textual transgressions, challenging while reaffirming certain and old truths, and validating meanings embedded in oral texts that inscribe and interpret experience—the recovery of subjugated knowledges.

Each locates the writer at the center of her text, the writer who has access to her own lived experiences. Lived experience, however, means something different in each theory. Although Collins uses personal pronouns to join herself with other black feminists, she seldom draws on her own experiences. Trinh understands lived experience to be a fragile site of multiple, unstable meanings. There is no direct access to lived experience. As a textual form, lived experience is a fiction, a realist construction. The writer cannot write from experience itself. Writing (and filmmaking) are built on the representations of experiences.

Anzaldúa will have none of this. She writes her stories and her poems out of her lived history. Lived experience is her subject matter. On this point, she "outs" the heterosexism of the classic white ethnographers of experience. She also undoes (like Trinh) the very framework

that reduces Indian and Mexican thought and experience to so-called primitive, pagan categories and forms of consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 36-37, 94-95). Thus, she joins, at this level, one form of queer theory with her particular version of a standpoint epistemology.

The three writers also differ on the identity of the writer. Trinh challenges any scheme that would fit her into a framework, such as post-colonial, Asian-American feminist. These terms are only given meaning in the spaces that surround the hyphen. Although she will seek to intertwine the masculine and the feminine in a new feminine writing style, she understands that each woman writes from a unique place.

Collins has no trouble identifying her black feminist standpoint theorist, and she only occasionally troubles these categories. Anzaldúa knows who she is, and although she does not take up the language of the hyphen, it is clear her writer is caught in multiple spaces at the same time; hence her emphasis on writing out of her own experiences.

Finally, there are two directions to take, both starting from Marx and the concept of standpoint. Marx provided a wedge, "a way to get to our own versions of standpoint theories" (Haraway, 1988, p. 578). With Marx come many problems, including those discussed earlier: the romantic, utopian text, a visual epistemology, lived experience and its representations, the writer's place in the text, partial, subjugated knowledges, objectivity, relativism, a feminist, successor science, and whose standpoint and whose experiences will be written.

One direction (Collins, Haraway, Smith, and Harding) moves to retain a commitment to some version of science. The "scientific" standpoint epistemologies falter at the moment when they aspire to be successor sciences—subjugated standpoints providing "more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). This stance hopelessly entangles the project in the dominant patriarchal discourse on science, leaving practitioners to always answer how their science can be objective and partial, critical, embodied, and situated at the same time.¹⁹

The other stance, which is in a sense nonstandpoint, turns its back on science (and ethnography). This is the path of Trinh and Anzaldúa: the direction of experimental, reflexive, cinematic texts. For these writers, the science questions no longer operate. Nor is there any break between empirical activity (gathering empirical materials or reading social texts), theorizing, and social criticism.

This is the space the new ethnography will enter. As it does, however, it will encounter criticisms from those who hold to the successor science image of ethnographic work. As this occurs, standpoint epistemologies of race, class, nation, gender, and sexuality will continue to develop. These race, ethnic, and gender-specific interpretive communities will fashion interpretive criteria out of their interactions with the postpositivist, critical theory, and poststructural sensibilities. These criteria will continue to push the personal to the forefront of the political, where the social text becomes the vehicle for the expression of politics.

Underneath the complexities and contradictions that define this field of the standpoint epistemology rest three common commitments. The world of human experience must be studied from the point of view of the historically and culturally situated individual.²⁰ Ethnographers will continue to work outward from their own biographies to the worlds of experience that surround them. Scholars will continue to value and seek to produce works that speak clearly and powerfully about these worlds. Therefore, the stories ethnographers tell one another will change and the criteria for reading stories will also change.

Here, the romantic, utopian impulse is once again confronted. Collins would change the world by creating a new form of group consciousness, forged out of centuries of racial oppression and injustice. Trinh wonders if group consciousness works this way, whereas Anzaldúa writes a text of personal and group liberation, hoping to return home. There is no space of pure innocence to return to, however. Nostalgia will not work. The new ethnographic text can only hope to change that world already marred by the loss of innocence. Utopias founded on mythical constructs are no longer appropriate. In the next chapter, I examine what happens when these stories are turned into performance texts.

Notes

1. Marx hovers in the background as the original standpoint theorist, having written from the standpoint of the proletariat, while asserting that human activity or material life structures human consciousness and arguing that what we do shapes what we know (Harding, 1991, p. 120).

2. A disclaimer is in order. Clough (1994) reads queer theory as challenging the "heterosexism... which is constitutive of the [standpoint] epistemology(ies) of experience... Queer theory refuses to be a standpoint epistemology" (pp. 142, 145). Queer theory argues that the subjugated knowledges uncovered by the standpoint epistemologies reproduces the identity categories contained in heterosexism. Grounding an epistemology in experience reproduces these ideological categories (Clough, 1994, p. 144). Queer theory examines the practices that create these categories in the first place (see Terry, 1991).
3. That is, certain writers explicitly announce a connection to the standpoint perspective (Collins, 1991, p. 201; Harding, 1991; Harstock, 1983; Smith, 1992, pp. 88-89), whereas others do not (see Anzaldúa, 1987; Krueger, 1991; Trinh, 1991). Some (Trinh, 1989, p. 6) even go so far as to suggest that there is no "there" from which a standpoint can be launched (see Clough, 1994, p. 115; Haraway, 1988). Each begins, however, from the experiences of the previously silenced person in the dominant discourses of the human disciplines.
4. I will also briefly discuss the works of Dorothy Smith (1987, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1993). Each of these authors has produced works that have achieved near canonical status in the discourses of white feminist, Marxist standpoint epistemology (Smith), African American feminist standpoint epistemology (Collins), and lesbian, postcolonial, and Third World feminist writings (Anzaldúa and Trinh).
5. Haraway's (1988) call for a subjugated standpoint epistemology, which produces partial, situated knowledges, attempts a subversion of this visual epistemology (pp. 581-589), asking women to take back the male gaze and its apparatuses.
6. Smith (1992, p. 93) elaborates the functions of these text-mediated discourses: "In contemporary societies, the functions of organization and control are increasingly vested in distinct, specialized, (and to some extent) autonomic forms of organization and relations mediated by texts. I've called these the relations of ruling." Power is located in these relations of ruling, which are constituted as texts. These texts exist outside lived time and the actualities that define people's experiences in the real world (p. 93).
7. I will return to this theme, which carries romantic, psychoanalytic overtones (see Clough, 1994, pp. 104-105).
8. Grossberg (1988) distinguishes four ethnographic writing models: the poststructural ethnographer who makes the familiar world strange; the cultural critic who examines the strange, the marginal, and the deviant; the ethnographer as tourist; and the materialist ethnographer who examines the signs and cultural practices of a group. Grossberg's materialist ethnographer is not the same as Clough's materialist, psychoanalytic ethnographer because there is no unconscious in his model.
9. Recall Marx's distinction between two forms of representation: to speak for and to make present (Ganguly, 1992, p. 62). Speaking for the other risks intervening on their behalf (becoming their voice), whereas making the other present encounters all of the problems discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 concerning the creation of a concrete subject in the world and putting ideas in their head.
10. In the emematc context, Stacy fits female spectatorship to the actual movinggoing experience, identifying a gap between textual studies of the spectator and empirical studies of real people watching movies.
11. This produces aversions to both relativism and objectivism (Haraway, 1988, p. 584), a call for a successor science project that rests on an embodied subjectivity that generates situated knowledges (p. 577).
12. Lived experience, however, is not the site of Smith's studies. Although she begins with lived actualities, her concern focuses on how those experience are inscribed in official texts, texts that "produce a formally warranted factual account" (Smith, 1990a, p. 148) of the activity. This textual account reinterprets the experience, connecting it to larger cultural codes and systems of power (see also her analysis of "K. Is Mentally Ill" (Smith, 1990b)).
13. Although Collins (1991, pp. xiv, 17) argues that she inserts herself into her text through the use of the pronouns "I," "we," "us," and "our," only rarely (pp. 97-98, 218) do her lived experiences constitute the materials she draws upon, and when this occurs she announces some discomfort: "I run the risk of being discredited as being too subjective and hence less scholarly. But by being an advocate for my material I validate the epistemological stance that I claim is fundamental for Black feminist thought" (p. 17).
14. This is Zora Neale Hurston's term (Trinh, 1991, pp. 68-69).
15. Here, there are parallels with Haraway's (1988, p. 593) call for a feminist visual epistemology, feminist visualizations of the world.
16. Here, Trinh (1989, pp. 144, 149) discusses the story told by a woman who kills (in her story) the storeman who lied to her grandmother: Charged with this murder (which she did not commit), the woman is given the opportunity to correct herself, which she refuses. Her attorney corrects her story to the judge, stating, "her mind is confused" (p. 149).
17. The Quiller-Couch syndrome refers to masculine and feminine types of writing. The Lady Painter syndrome "refers to a statement by a male painter, who... postulates, 'When she's good, we call her a painter; when she's bad, we call her a lady painter'" (Trinh, 1989, p. 27).
18. The Coatlucue state describes a powerful set of images that pass through her psyche: "a consuming internal whirlwind, the symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche. Coatlicue is the mountain, the Earth Mother... Goddess of birth and death... the incarnation of the comic processes" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 46).
19. Harding (1991, pp. 149-163), after Haraway (1988), wrestles with these issues, rejecting both extreme relativism and the objectivism of positivism. She advocates a strong objectivity and a strong reflexivity that allows the researcher to identify and reflexively engage in causal analyses of the social causes of good and bad beliefs.
20. Where the middle-class, heterosexual, privileged white male stands in all of this remains problematic and will be discussed in Chapter 8.