fast started turning in my mind into a ritual described in the
distanced normalizing mode of a classic ethnography. On
the morning of my departure, while we were eating break-
fast, I revealed my feelings of tender malice by telling my
potential in-laws the “true” ethnography of their family
breakfast: “Every morning the reigning patriarch, as if just
in from the hunt, shouts from the kitchen, ‘How many
people would like a poached egg?’ Women and children take
turns saying yes or no.

“In the meantime, the women talk among themselves
and designate one among them the toast maker. As the eggs
near readiness, the reigning patriarch calls out to the des-
ignated toast maker, ‘The eggs are about ready. Is there
enough toast?’

“Yes,” comes the deferential reply. ‘The last two pieces are
about to pop up.’ The reigning patriarch then proudly enters
bearing a plate of poached eggs before him.

“Throughout the course of the meal, the women and chil-
dren, including the designated toast maker, perform the
obligatory ritual praise song, saying, ‘These sure are great
eggs, Dad.’”

My rendition of a family breakfast in the ethnographic
present transformed a relatively spontaneous event into a
generic cultural form. It became a caricatured analysis of
rituals of dominance and deference organized along lines of
gender and generation.

This microethnography shifted jaggedly between words
ordinarily used by the family (mainly in such direct quotes
as “These sure are great eggs, Dad”) and those never used
by them (such as “reigning patriarch,” “designated toast
maker,” and “obligatory ritual praise song”). The jargon dis-
played a degree of hostility toward my potential father-in-
law (the reigning patriarch) and hesitant sympathy with my
potential sisters-in-law (the designated toast maker and the
singers of the praise song). Far from being a definitive ob-
jective statement, my microethnography turned out to be a
timely intervention that altered mealtime practices without
destroying them. The father approaching retirement and his
daughters already established in their careers were in the process of remodeling their relations with one another. For all its deliberate caricature, my description contained an analysis that offered my potential in-laws a measure of insight into how their family breakfast routines, by then approaching empty ritual, embodied increasingly archaic familial relations of gender and hierarchy. Indeed, subsequent observations have confirmed that the ritual praise songs honoring the poached eggs and their maker have continued to be sung, but with tongue in cheek. To defamiliarize the family breakfast was to transform its taken-for-granted routines.

The reader will probably not be surprised to hear that my potential in-laws laughed and laughed as they listened to the microethnography about (and with which I had interrupted) their family breakfast. Without taking my narrative literally, they said they learned from it because its objectifications made certain patterns of behavior stand out in stark relief—the better to change them. The reception of my tale, as became evident in retrospect, was conditioned by their family practice of taking pleasure in witty teasing banter laced with loving malice.

The experience of having gales of laughter greet my microethnography made me wonder why a manner of speaking that sounds like the literal "truth" when describing distant cultures seems terribly funny as a description of "us." Why does a mode of composition flip between being parodic or serious depending in large measure on whether it is applied to "ourselves" or to "others"? Why does the highly serious classic ethnographic idiom almost inevitably become parodic when used as self-description?

In the previous chapter I argued that during the classic period (roughly 1921–1971), norms of distanced normalizing description gained a monopoly on objectivity. Their authority appeared so self-evident that they became the one and only legitimate form for telling the literal truth about other cultures. Proudly called the ethnographic present, these norms prescribed, among other things, the use of the present tense to depict social life as a set of shared routines and the assumption of a certain distance that purportedly conferred objectivity. All other modes of composition were marginalized or suppressed altogether.

In my view, no mode of composition is a neutral medium, and none should be granted exclusive rights to scientifically legitimate social description. Consider, for a moment longer, my mini-ethnography of the family breakfast. Although classic norms only rarely allowed for variants, mine was not the only possible version of the family meal. One could have told the tale of how this breakfast differed from all others. Such a telling could include specific conversations, the intrusive potential son-in-law, and the moods and rhythms with which the event unfolded. In addition, the narrator could have assumed the father's point of view and described how the "family provider" distributed his gifts to the "starving horde." Or the tone of this account could have been droll, or sincere, or whimsical, or earnest, or angry, or detached, rather than mockingly parodic.

One plausible criterion for assessing the adequacy of social descriptions could be a thought experiment: How valid would we find ethnographic discourse about others if it were used to describe ourselves? The available literature, not to mention the family breakfast episode, indicates that a division between serious conception and laughing reception can separate the author's intentions from the reader's responses. Human subjects have often reacted with bemused puzzlement over the ways they have been depicted in anthropological writings.

The problem of validity in ethnographic discourse has reached crisis proportions in a number of areas over the past fifteen years. In Chicano responses to anthropological depictions of themselves, the most balanced yet most devastating assessment has been put forth by Américo Paredes. He begins rather gently by saying, "I find the Mexicans and Chicanos pictured in the usual ethnographies somewhat unreal." He goes on to suggest that the people studied find ethnographic accounts written about them more parodic.
than telling: "It is not so much a sense of outrage, that
would betray wounded egos, as a feeling of puzzlement, that
this is given as a picture of the communities they have
grown up in. Many of them are more likely to laugh at it all
than feel indignant." His critique of the somewhat unreal
picture put forth in ethnographies about Chicanos continues
with a stunning item-by-item enumeration of such errors
as mistranslations, taking jokes seriously, missing double
meanings, and accepting an apocryphal story as the literal
truth about brutal initiation rites in youth gangs.

Paredes's diagnosis is that most ethnographic writing on
Mexicans and Chicanos has failed to grasp significant vari-
ations in the tone of cultural events. In an ethnography he
sees as representative, Paredes observes that the Chicanos
portrayed "are not only literal-minded, they never crack a
joke." He argues that ethnographers who attempt to inter-
pret Chicano culture should recognize "whether a gathering
is a wake, a beer bust, or a street-corner confabulation." Knowl-
gedge about the cultural framing of events would aid
the ethnographer in distinguishing an earnest speech from
a joking speech. Even when using technical concepts, the
analysis should not lose sight of whether the event was ser-
ious (to be taken literally) or deadpan (to be read as farce).

Lest there be any confusion, I am saying neither that the
native is always right nor that Paredes as native ethno-
grapher could never be wrong. Instead, my claim is that we
should take the criticisms of our subjects in much the same
way that we take those of our colleagues. Not unlike other
ethnographers, so-called natives can be insightful, socio-
logically correct, axe-grinding, self-interested, or mistaken.
They do know their own cultures, and rather than being
ruled out of court, their criticisms should be listened to and
taken into account, to be accepted, rejected, or modified, as
we reformulate our analyses. At issue is not the real truth
versus the ethnographic lie. After all, the pragmatic con-
cerns of everyday life can diverge from those of disciplined
inquiry. A person "falling in love" speaks with quite differ-
ent desires and purposes than the psychiatrist who de-
scribes the "same" phenomenon as "object cathexis." Tech-
nical and everyday vocabularies differ in large measure
because their respective projects are oriented to different
goals. In this case, Paredes has called attention to how the
"objects" of study can find an earnest ethnography about
themselves as parodic as did the participants in the Cana-
dian family breakfast. His incisive critique calls for eth-
nographers to reassess their rhetorical habits.

The difficulties of using ethnographic discourse for self-
description should have long been apparent to anthropolo-
gists, most of whom have read Horace Miner's classic (if
heavy-handed) paper, "Body Ritual among the Nacirema"
(Nacirema spelled backwards, of course, is American.) In
that paper, an ethnographic sketch of Nacirema "mouth-
rites," written in accord with classic norms, was parodic in
t its application to Americans:

The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-
rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about
care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the
uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that
the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into
the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then mov-
ing the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.

His essay thus defamiliarizes both through the narrator's
position as uninitiated stranger and through the distanced
idiom that transforms everyday life practices into more ele-
vated ritual and magical acts.

Clearly there is a gap between the technical idiom of
ethnography and the language of everyday life. Miner's
description employs terms used by a certain group of profes-
sionals rather than the words most of "us" Americans usu-
ally use in talking about brushing "our" teeth. The article
becomes parodic precisely because of the discrepancy be-
tween what we all know about brushing our teeth and the
ethnographer's elevated, distanced, normalizing discourse.
Unlike my account of the family breakfast, jarring discord-
ance here does not become fully explicit in the text (despite
what text positivists may think). Instead, it resides in the
disjunction between Miner's technical jargon and the North
American reader's knowledge that the mouth-rites refer to
brushing one's teeth in the morning.

In retrospect, one wonders why Miner's article was taken
simply as a good-natured joke rather than as a scathing cri-
tique of ethnographic discourse. Who could continue to feel
comfortable describing other people in terms that sound lu-
dicrous when applied to ourselves? What if the detached ob-
server's authoritative objectivity resides more in a manner
of speaking than in apt characterizations of other forms
of life?

Lest it appear that no ethnography has ever been written
in the manner of Miner's Nacirema mouth-rites, one
should probably cite an actual case. Otherwise, the reader
could regard the classic norms as a figment of his imagina-
tion rather than as the discipline's until recently (and, in
many quarters, still) dominant mode of representing other
cultures.

Consider, for example, the description of "weeping rites"
in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's classic ethnography about the An-
daman Islanders, a hunter-gatherer group residing south-
east of India:

When two friends or relatives meet after having been sepa-
rated, the social relation between them that has been inter-
rupted is about to be renewed. This social relation implies or
depends upon the existence of a specific bond of solidarity
between them. The weeping rite (together with the subse-
quent exchange of presents) is the affirmation of this bond. The rite,
which, it must be remembered, is obligatory, compels the two
participants to act as though they felt certain emotions, and
thereby does, to some extent, produce these emotions in them.

The reader should keep in mind that this passage de-
scribes tears of greeting between long-separated old friends.
Nonetheless, the ethnographer manifests skepticism about
whether or not the weepers actually feel anything. Evi-
dently, he regards their tears as mere playacting. To the lim-
ited extent that emotions are present, the ethnographer ex-
plains them as the consequence of having performed the
obligatory weeping rites.

Yet the status of Radcliffe-Brown's term "obligatory" re-
 mains obscure. Does it mean that when he witnessed weep-
ing greeters, they always turned out to be long-lost inti-
mates? How could he have observed greetings without tears
between long-lost intimates? Or did people simply tell the
ethnographer that when long-lost intimates greet one an-
other, they weep? Despite its analytical import, the reader
is left to wonder what Radcliffe-Brown means by the term
obligatory.

Nonetheless, most anthropological readers of Radcliffe-
Brown probably take his account at face value. When, for
example, I told a colleague about my dissatisfaction with
Radcliffe-Brown's depiction of Andaman weeping rites, she
correctly followed the code for ethnographic readers and
replied, "Yes, but for them, unlike for us, the rites are obli-
gatory." Such are the costs of following rarely examined habits
of reading.

The problem resides less in the use of such descriptions
than in an uncritical attachment to them as the sole vehicle
for literal objective truth. Radcliffe-Brown so detached him-
self from his human subjects that his account lends itself to
being read as unwittingly parodic, and even absurd. When
tearful greetings between long-lost intimates are described
as obligatory weeping rites, they become so defamiliarized
as to appear simply bizarre.

The idiom of classic ethnography characteristically de-
scribes specific events as if they were programmed cultural
routines and places the observer at a great distance from the
observed. The systematic effects of classic modes of com-
position were rarely explored because they purportedly held
a monopoly on objectivity. The point, however, is not to dis-
card classic norms but to displace them so that they become
only one among a number of viable forms of social descrip-
tion rather than the one and only mode of writing about other cultures. Radcliffe-Brown's detached, dehumanizing descriptive idiom potentially offers analytical insight not available through concepts more frequently used in everyday life. The Canadian breakfast episode, as I said, suggests that distanced normalizing descriptions can be used with a deliberately satirical intent to jolt people into thinking afresh about their everyday lives.10

Although my description of the family breakfast formally resembles Radcliffe-Brown's, the objectifications differ markedly in their impact. When read in accord with classic norms, Radcliffe-Brown's account appears to be the only objective way of describing social reality. It is the literal truth. My more parodic account stands as one among a number of possible descriptions. Its accuracy matters, but it objectifies more with a view to speeding a process of change than with producing a timeless truth. How social descriptions are read depends not only on their formal linguistic properties but also on their content and their context. Who is speaking to whom, about what, for what purposes, and under what circumstances? The differences between distinct forms of objectification reside in the analyst's position within a field of social interaction rather than in the text regarded as a document with intrinsic meaning.

What follows deliberately objectifies classic canons of objectivity with a view to moving beyond conventions (which, in any case, is impossible) but toward the use of a wider range of rhetorical forms in social description. As a corrective to the literal-mindedness with which classic social descriptions are habitually read, this chapter deliberately defamiliarizes the rhetoric of objectivism (which, arguably, unwittingly defamiliarizes the everyday world) in order to indicate how short the gap is between objective characterization and objectifying caricature. My goal in thus objectifying objectivism is to speed a process of change already underway in the modes of composition for ethnography as a form of social analysis.

Death in North American Culture

In what follows I will discuss anthropological writings on death and mourning, with a view toward exploring the limits of classic norms for social description. In a manner peculiarly at odds with the intense emotions it arouses, the topic of death has proven a particularly fertile area in the production of distanced normalizing accounts. The analytical problems that emerge so clearly with reference to mourning and bereavement also are present in a number of other areas, including passionate love, social improvisations, and spontaneous fun. Death, however, has the virtue of being relatively well represented in the anthropological literature.

The fact that death has proven so vexing for ethnographic analysis probably does not surprise most North American readers. The majority of intensive ethnographic studies have been conducted by relatively young people who have no personal experience of devastating personal losses. Furthermore, such researchers usually come from upper-middle-class Anglo-American professional backgrounds, where (unlike those with higher mortality rates, such as policemen and crop dusters) people often shield themselves by not talking about death and other people's bereavement. Such ethnographers probably have grown up with the notion that it is rude and intrusive to ask the chief mourners about their experience of grieving.

My characterization of bereavement in upper-middle-class Anglo-American culture represents a central tendency, more a statistical probability than a monolithic certainty. Since readers can usually judge the representativeness of anecdotes about their own culture, a brief example from my local newspaper, a familiar source rarely used in academic writing, probably will suffice as an illustration. This story, about how parents react to their children's deaths, claimed that most upper-middle-class people strive to live out the illusion of being in control of their lives. Death, however,
threatens their fiction of being in control. Listen to Pamela Mang, whose daughter Jessica died of cancer: "One of the most profound insights I got out of Jessica's illness was that most of us try to protect ourselves from disasters and difficulties, and that we miss a lot of life because of that. . . . Oh, God, you just want to get it out, to talk about it, because somehow getting it out into the air makes it something of a size that is manageable, that you can handle." Yet most North Americans, especially those without personal experience of loss, find death a subject best avoided. In trying to shield themselves from their own mortality, North Americans often claim that the bereaved don't want to speak about their losses (despite what Pamela Mang says). Although other cultures focus lavish attention on death, most ethnographers would find it extremely difficult to interview chief mourners because, for "us," grief is a private and personal matter. Hence the ethnography of death's striking adherence to classic norms that verbally transform particular losses into general descriptions of what all funeral rituals share.

Classic norms especially shaped Jack Goody's ethnography of death among the West African LoDagaa. The chapter called "The Day of Death: Mourning the Dead," for example, begins with a composite account of patterns of mourning among the close kin of the deceased ("the immediate mourners"): 

While the xylophones are playing, the lineage "wives" and "sisters" of the dead man walk and run about the area in front of the house, crying lamentations and holding their hands behind the nape of the neck in the accepted attitude of grief. . . . From time to time, one of the immediate mourners breaks into a trot, even a run, and a bystander either intercepts or chases after the bereaved and quiets him by seizing his wrist.

The analyst positions himself as a spectator who looks on from the outside. Are the lamentations of the dead man's wives and sisters little more than conventional gestures, as the description suggests? What about the intensely bereaved person who is being restrained?

Goody goes on to discuss, not bereavement, but how people's relations of kinship to the deceased determine the means—tying by hide, tying by fibre, and tying with string around the ankle—by which bystanders restrain them when, in their grief, they attempt to injure or kill themselves. He presents the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAN'S FUNERAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father ................ Tied by hide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother ................ Tied by hide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife ................ Tied by hide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother ................ Tied by fibre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister ................ Tied by fibre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son ................ String tied around the ankle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter .......... String tied around the ankle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Put into words, the table simply says that when the bereaved attempt to injure or kill themselves, bystanders use ties of hide to restrain a dead man's parents and wife, ties of fiber to restrain his siblings, and ties of string around the ankle to restrain his children. (One can only wonder at the objectifying impulse to present such a readily verbalized statement in tabular form.) The ethnographer's position as uninvolved spectator becomes yet more evident when he says, "Before analyzing these categories of bereaved in greater detail, note should be taken of some other ways in which mourners are visually differentiated." The spectacle itself, seen from the outside, is largely visual. The violent upheaval of grief, its wailing and attempts at self-injury and suicide, appear under this description as normal routines.

Most ethnographic descriptions of death stand at a peculiar distance from the obviously intense emotions expressed, and they turn what for the bereaved are unique and devastating losses into routine happenings. In following classic norms, Goody consistently links intense expressions of bereavement to conventional expectations:
A man will be expected to display great grief at the death of a young son.\textsuperscript{18}

Another indication of the same imbalance in the parent-child relationship is to be seen in the occurrence of suicide attempts, which are a \textit{standardized method} of demonstrating grief at the loss of a relative.\textsuperscript{17}

The passages cited above substitute the term \textit{conventional} for Radcliffe-Brown's key term, \textit{obligatory}. Why do ethnographers so often write as if a father losing a son or a bereaved person attempting suicide were doing little more than following convention? Unreflective talk about conceptually expected expressions of grief easily slips into skepticism about the reality of the emotions expressed. It is all too easy to elide the force of conventional forms of life with the merely conventional, as if forceful emotions were mere motions.

Neither one's ability to anticipate appropriately other people's reactions nor the fact that people express their grief in culturally specific ways should be conflated with the notion that the devastatingly bereaved are merely conforming to conventional expectations. Even eyewitness reports cast in the normalizing ethnographic idiom trivialize the events they describe by reducing the force of intense emotions to spectacle. Such accounts visualize people's actions from the outside and fail to provide the participants' reflections on their own experiences. They normalize by presenting generalized recipes for ritual action rather than attempting to grasp the particular content of bereavement.\textsuperscript{19}

Classic norms of ethnographic discourse make it difficult to show how social forms can be both imposed by convention and used spontaneously and expressively. In relying exclusively on such an idiom, ethnographies can represent other lives as if they doubted even the most visible agonies of the bereaved, including, for instance, a father mourning a son or a husband grieving for his wife who died in childbirth.

Theory as the Reification of Classic Norms

Most prominently, Claude Lévi-Strauss has taken the classic norms and dressed them in their most general theoretical garb:

Men do not act, as members of a group, in accordance with what each feels as an individual; each man feels as a function of the way in which he is permitted or obliged to act. Customs are given as external norms before giving rise to internal sentiments, and these non-sentient norms determine the sentiments of individuals as well as the circumstances in which they may, or must, be displayed.\textsuperscript{19}

Lévi-Strauss dismisses not only the explanatory import but the very reality of emotions:

Moreover, if institutions and customs drew their vitality from being continually refreshed and invigorated by individual sentiments, like those in which they originated, they ought to conceal an affective richness, continually replenished, which would be their positive content. We know that this is not the case, and that the constancy which they exhibit usually results from a conventional attitude.\textsuperscript{20}

In his view, institutions and customs appear so emotionally barren that he claims that human beings experience affect only in the violation, not in the performance, of conventional acts: "Emotion is indeed aroused, but when the custom, in itself indifferent, is violated."\textsuperscript{21} If people suffer through their bereavement, it hardly appears objective to represent their experiences as if they were merely conforming with conventions by going through the expected motions. Yet, evidence presented in accord with the classic norms of social description appears to support abstract theoretical statements that are neither humane nor accurate. In attempting to apprehend the complexities of other cultures, disciplined inquiry can ill afford to build its theories on such a questionable foundation.

When classic norms gain exclusive rights to objective
truth, ethnography becomes as likely to reveal where objectivity lies as where it tells the truth. What, then, can supplement normalizing distanced discourse in ethnographic writing? Myriad modes of composition, of course, are possible—moral indignation, satire, critique, and others. Several have been used, even in this chapter. For present illustrative purposes, however, I shall consider how personal narratives offer an alternative mode of representing other forms of life.

Although personal narratives often appear in ethnographies written in the classic mode, they usually have been relegated quite literally to the margins: prefaces, introductions, afterwords, footnotes, and italicized or small-print case histories. In fact, the classic norms usually achieved their authority at the expense of personal narratives and case histories. Yet the latter forms often facilitate the analysis of social processes that have proven difficult even to perceive through distanced normalizing discourse.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, for example, has described the dilemmas that surfaced during an Indonesian funeral on the island of Java. After opening his account with a brief normalizing description ("the men begin to cut wooden grave markers and to dig a grave"), he shifts to the past tense and describes a particular boy’s funeral where one thing after another went wrong. The cutting of wooden grave markers, just cited as recipe, becomes transformed: "After a half hour or so, a few of the abangans began to chip half-heartedly away at pieces of wood to make grave markers and a few women began to construct small flower offerings for want of anything better to do; but it was clear that the ritual was arrested and that no one quite knew what to do next. Tension slowly rose." Always at risk in living through the anguish of loss, routine funerary rites broke down as conflicts erupted between Moslem and Hindu-Buddhist participants. Delving into the particulars of this agonizing event rather than the generalities of a composite construction revealed the severe limits of collapsing mourning with ritual and ritual with routine.

In yet another instance, anthropologist Loring Danforth provides an account that moves from spectacle to rather more intimate biographical portraits of mourners. His account begins in a vivid, though external manner:

Soon the graveyard was alive with activity, and a forest of candles burned at the foot of each grave. About ten women, all dressed in shades of black, brown, or blue, busied themselves lighting lamps and sweeping around the graves. Several women began hauling water in large buckets from the faucet in the church courtyard nearby.

Danforth depicts a visual spectacle the mood of which is one of bucolic calm and routine. Yet as the account proceeds, the analysis shifts so that the reader soon learns the particular histories of the mourners:

The death of Irini’s twenty-year-old daughter Eleni was generally acknowledged to have been the most tragic the village of Potamia had experienced in many years. Eleni died almost five years earlier, in August 1974. She had been a very attractive young woman, tall, with long black hair. . . . One month before she was to begin her first teaching job, Eleni was struck by a car and killed in a hit-and-run accident in the city of Thessaloniki.

The reader then hears verbatim laments, learns how Irini did not leave her house for a full year following her daughter’s death, discovers how a friendship developed between Irini and another bereaved mother, and witnesses the daughter’s exhumation as the participants, by then known in certain biographical particulars, find themselves overcome with emotion. The ethnographer provides a sense of the emotions experienced by the actors through their words, their gestures, and their biographies.

There is no single recipe for representing other cultures. Indeed, my observations on the Canadian family breakfast suggest that the classic norms, used in a deliberately parodic or distorting manner, can at times yield forceful accounts. Normalizing descriptions can both reveal and conceal aspects of social reality. Ethnographies written in accord with classic norms need to be reread, not banished.
from anthropology. Rather than discarding distanced normalizing accounts, the discipline should recover them, but with a difference. They must be cut down to size and relocated, not replaced. No longer enshrined as ethnographic realism, the sole vehicle for speaking the literal truth about other cultures, the classic norms should become one mode of representation among others. Thus, for example, their satirical potential could be explored in cross-cultural studies as well as in reflections on North American society. They could be used alongside other modes of composition in exploring the interplay between routine and improvisation in everyday life.

Certainly, standing current fashion on its head by substituting tales of specific cases for distanced normalizing discourse will not yield a solution to the vexed problem of representing other lives. Instead, an increased disciplinary tolerance for diverse legitimate rhetorical forms will allow for any particular text to be read against other possible versions. Allowing forms of writing that have been marginalized or banned altogether to gain legitimacy could enable the discipline to approximate people’s lives from a number of angles of vision. Such a tactic could enable us better to advance the ethnographic project of apprehending the range of human possibilities in their fullest complexity.

An Oblique Account of Warfare

All anthropologists surely have been moved, if not shaken, by the astute ethnographic observations that their subjects of research have made about North American or European culture. The most dramatic experience of this kind in my fieldwork suggests a dialogic potential, one of critical reflection and reciprocal perceptions, as yet rarely realized in the official rhetoric of anthropology.

When I was residing in the late 1960s as an ethnographer among the Ilongots of northern Luzon, Philippines, I was struggling against a diffusely overwhelming reaction to one of their central cultural practices: headhunting. Despite my indoctrination in cultural relativism, headhunting seemed utterly alien and morally reprehensible. At the time, I wanted simply to bracket my moral perception in order to carry out the ethnographic project of understanding the practice in its own terms.

Early questioning made it appear that headhunting had ended with the last Japanese soldier beheaded in June 1945. These beheadings, Ilongots said, aided the American army. When I asked about more recent headhunting episodes, they indignantly replied, “How could you think such a thing of us? I helped you carry you across a stream. I fed you. I’ve cared for you. How could you think such a thing?” I could not but agree.

After about a year of fieldwork, my Ilongot brother Tukbaw and I were flying in a small plane when he pointed down below and said, “That’s where we raided.” He went on to tell me that he had gone headhunting there more recently than I had dared imagine. Soon everyone began to tell me their headhunting stories. Within a few weeks I realized that every man in the settlement had taken a head. I was shocked and disoriented because my companions had indeed been kind and generous. How could such caring hosts also be brutal killers?

Some months later I was classified 1-A for the draft. My companions immediately told me not to fight in Vietnam, and they offered to conceal me in their homes. Though it corresponded to my sentiments, their offer could not have surprised me more. Unthinkingly, I had supposed that headhunters would see my reluctance to serve in the armed forces as a form of cowardice. Instead, they told me that soldiers are men who sell their bodies. Pointedly they interrogated me, “How can a man do as soldiers do and command his brothers to move into the line of fire?”

This act of ordering one’s own men (one’s “brothers”) to risk their lives was utterly beyond their moral comprehension. That their telling question ignored state authority and hierarchical chains of command mattered little. My own cultural world suddenly appeared grotesque. Yet their earnest
incomprehension significantly narrowed the moral chasm between us, for their ethnographic observation about modern war was both aggressive and caring. They condemned my society’s soldiering at the same time that they urged me not to sell my body.

Through such encounters the possibility for reciprocal critical perceptions opened between the Ilngots and me. This encounter suggests that we ethnographers should be open to asking not only how our descriptions of others would read if applied to ourselves but how we can learn from other people’s descriptions of ourselves. In this case I was repositioned through an Ilngot account of one of my culture’s central institutions. I could no longer speak about headhunting as one of the clean addressing the dirty. My loss of innocence enabled me and the Ilngots to face each other on more nearly equal ground, as members of flawed societies. We both lost positions of purity from which to condemn the other, without at the same time having to condone what we found morally reprehensible in ourselves and in the other. Neither war nor headhunting, in deeply serious ways, has been the same for me since.

I have deliberately cast my story of conflicting perceptions of legitimate social violence as a dialogue between me and the Ilngots. The anecdote’s very narrative form better fits a notion of the cultural borderlands than of cultural patterning. If cultural borderlands explicitly provoke and reflect intense ideological debate, cultural patterning does so tacitly. Whether found in the museum or at the garage sale, culture is always already laced with the politics of conflicting ideologies.

Although most interpretations of culture enter the fields of political conflict that occasion them, I did not expect my anecdote about Ilngot perceptions of modern warfare to make a cameo appearance in the national media’s arena of ideological debate. It all began with an article some years later that included a version of the preceding anecdote. It appeared in the October 10, 1984, issue of Campus Report, Stanford University’s weekly news magazine for faculty and staff. The story was then transmitted on national wire services.

Eleven days later, a brief news item appeared under the headline “Headhunting Tribe Provides a Lesson,” in the Chicago Tribune:

Members of the Ilngot tribe in the Philippines are headhunters because the act of beheading strangers is their way of venting anger and grief when loved ones die, an anthropologist has found. Renato Rosaldo of Stanford University’s anthropology department discovered a markedly different view of violence and life among the Ilngots than is commonly held in the West. While they view headhunting as a ritual that frees a bereaved person of his burden, the Ilngots are shocked at the concept of soldiers and armies fighting wars. The idea of ordering one’s comrades to place their lives in danger was repugnant to the headhunters and they referred to being a soldier as selling one’s body.

This item subsequently appeared in other newspapers under other headlines, such as “War Is Shocking to Headhunters,” from the Indianapolis Star of November 4, 1984. The story succeeded in concisely conveying the jarring shock Ilngot perceptions had given me.

The story about the Ilngot moral conviction that no man has the right to tell another to “sell” his body initially caught my attention during the period of draft resistance against the Vietnam War. Ilngot perceptions of modern warfare partially coincided with those held by members of the antiwar movement. At the same time, they grew out of a significantly different form of life. In their everyday lives, Ilngots were relatively “anarchistic”; they often said that no person has the right to tell another what to do. Transported to the modern nation-state, Ilngot “anarchism” becomes subversive because it threatens “our” notion that certain people can command others, and even order them to risk their lives.

My retelling of the story about Ilngot perceptions of modern warfare took place on the eve of Reagan’s 1984 reelection. In the name of individualism and free enterprise,
the North American regime had dramatically increased state power and promoted the greatest peacetime military buildup in the nation's history. During this era of intense militarization, the radical right felt an enormous sense of empowerment. It eagerly rushed to intimidate and suppress the opposition. In this context, the threat posed by Ilongot perceptions of modern warfare was not lost on editorial writer John Lofton of the *Washington Times*. He phoned to "interview" me in the late afternoon of New Year's Day 1985. After explaining his interest in following up on the *Campus Report* story, he began screaming at me. It did not take too long to realize that this was no interview. It was a verbal mugging designed to intimidate me. My New Year's gift left me quite shaken.

After telling colleagues about this incident, I learned that Reverend Moon's Unification Church owned the *Washington Times*. A few weeks later, I received a clipping of "John Lofton's Journal" with the headline "And This Is How Profs Get Ahead." Lofton retold my story with citations from the *Campus Report* article liberally seasoned with parenthetical remarks about his readers' upset stomachs: "Ponder please, if your stomach lining can take it, the sad plight of one Renato Rosaldo, an associate professor of anthropology at Stanford University . . . (and for this you should be lying down flat or, better yet, be sitting in a tub full of Pepto Bismol)." He went on to tell of our phone conversation, but neglected to mention that he was screaming at me. No doubt about it, he was my enemy.

On May 14, 1985, the story surfaced again in the *National Enquirer*, but this time Ilongot perceptions of modern warfare were omitted. Instead the article stressed the connection Ilongots perceive between the anger in bereavement and headhunting. As often happens, the story's headline—"Headhunter Horror: Just 90 Miles from Big City, Bizarre Tribe Still Beheads Innocent People"—had little to do with its content. In fact, it was not an altogether bad rendition of Ilongot cultural practices. This story, as it happened, sig-

naled the conclusion of Ilongot contributions to a national media debate.

Cultural studies has entered a world where its critical readership, as well as the societies it depicts, no longer can be narrowly circumscribed. Much as Ilongots can comment on modern North American warfare, John Lofton and the *National Enquirer* can listen in on my professional talk, and I on theirs. This does not make our lives more comfortable than before, or writing a book for such diverse potential audiences easier than in the classic period, but it does help make apparent how cultural interpretations are both occasioned by and enter arenas of ideological conflict. Under such circumstances, neither the notion of a neutral language nor that of brute facts can prosper. The next chapter attempts to unmask further the "innocence" of the detached observer.