

Time and the Other; How anthropology
makes its object / Jonathan Fabian,
New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2002
(71-104 p)

Chapter Three / Time and Writing About the Other

Even if [an observer] is in communication with other observers, he can only hear what they have seen in their absolute pasts, at times which are also his absolute past. So whether knowledge originates in the experience of a group of people or of a society, it must always be based on what is past and gone, at the moment when it is under consideration.

David Bohm¹

La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure: Nous l'aillons montrer tout à l'heure.

La Fontaine²

SO FAR, EXAMPLES of temporal distancing between the subject and the object of anthropology were invoked to support the argument that the temporal conditions experienced in fieldwork and those expressed in writing (and teaching) usually contradict each other. Productive empirical research, we hold, is possible only when researcher and researched share Time. Only as communicative praxis does ethnography carry the promise of yielding new knowledge about another culture. Yet the discourse that pretends to interpret, analyze, and communicate ethnographic knowledge to the researcher's society is pronounced from a "distance," that is, from a position which denies coevalness to the object of inquiry. Is this contradiction real or only apparent? To make sure that we are not losing our time with a false problem we must name the conditions under which, in our understanding of the term, a real contradiction arises.

Contradiction: Real or Apparent

First, the two activities under examination—field research and the communication of findings in writing and teaching—must in fact be part of a discipline claiming a unified existence. This was certainly not always the case. After all, travelogues and armchair syntheses coexisted side by side during most of the early history of anthropology without being practically united in the same person or institution.³ Even today the degree to which empirical research is emphasized over theoretical and synthetic work varies from country to country and from practitioner to practitioner. But wherever anthropology presently is recognized as an academic discipline (albeit often under different names, or in conjunction with qualifiers indicating specialization within the field) its representatives insist on the necessity of both empirical research and theoretical interpretation of some sort.⁴

Second, for a contradiction to arise between two activities there must be an issue, a problem with regard to which contradictory attitudes or effects can be identified. We found such an issue in the contradictory uses of Time. But there remains a question that will need much further thought and clarification. It could be argued that to accept shared Time in personal fieldwork is a matter of convenience, something that goes with the prevalent lore of our discipline. Denying coevalness need not affect in principle the production of ethnographic knowledge. Or one might posit that because prose narrative is the literary genre of most anthropological writing, devices of temporal sequencing and distancing are simply inevitable aspects of literary expression.

If the first objection holds, our contention that there is a contradictory, indeed schizoid and often hypocritical practice in need of careful analysis and critique would be seriously weakened. Many anthropologists insist that there is nothing to the mystique of fieldwork. All it does, and it matters little how, is to produce *data*. Data may be used, selected, and manipulated to verify the theories formulated in anthropological discourse in any shape and manner the theoretician sees fit. The conditions under which data were

obtained, as long as certain basic rules were followed, neither validate nor invalidate theories. Validity rests on logical criteria of consistency, parsimony, elegance, and so forth. In fact, to be at all admissible as evidence, data are required by some canons of scientific inquiry (those that rule quantitative approaches and certain structural methods) to come in bits and pieces, preferably selected at random and cleansed from possible contamination by lived experience and the personal bias such experience might introduce. Such a view of social scientific inquiry could not possibly admit a contradiction between the temporal conditions of research and writing. The only thing that could contradict the propositions formulated in writing would be contrary evidence. Such counterevidence, however, would not in principle be different from evidence supporting the explanations that would have to be dismissed. It, too, results from the manipulation of data, not from contradictions between insights gained in lived experience and those reached by the operations of a method. If coevalness were recognized by the positivist, he would presumably relegate the problem to psychology or philosophy.

Communicative and dialogic alternatives to positivist and empiricist ethnography have been widely discussed in recent years.⁵ Here I want to concentrate on the argument that the idea of a contradiction between research and writing might raise a spurious problem. Could it be that temporal distancing and denial of coevalness are not faults, but conditions of possibility of anthropological discourse? Anthropologists, like other scientists, are expected to produce a discourse of facts and not of fiction. The *factum* is that which *was* made or done, something that inevitably is "past" in relation to the acts of recording, interpreting, and writing. In view of its obligations to facticity, how could there be any claims on anthropological discourse to heed the demands of coevalness qua copresence of talk and of that which is talked about?

Because these questions bear on the theory of literary production in general they may lead us into an area too vast to be adequately covered in these essays. Yet if we continue to identify (and denounce) denial of coevalness in anthro-

pological discourse we must at some point ask how such denial can be identified on the level of texts. We should be able to adduce semantic, syntactic, and stylistic examples of allochronism. As will be seen presently, it is not difficult to point out the workings of such devices here and there. However, to do this in a systematic fashion one would have to submit the *oeuvre* of a number of representative anthropologists to linguistic and literary analysis, a task of vast proportions and one for which no single critic can claim adequate competence. We must settle here for something more modest and more general. I will first ask to what extent anthropological discourse actually rests on temporalization and whether such temporalization inevitably results in temporal distancing. Following that, I will take up a more specific problem, namely, the inherently autobiographic nature of much anthropological writing. Finally, I will once more confront the claims of "taxonomic" discourse with respect to temporalization.

Temporalization, being an object of inquiry in these essays, cannot be defined axiomatically at the outset. In my understanding, it connotes an activity, a complex praxis of encoding Time. Linguistically, temporalization refers to the various means a language has to express time relations. Semiotically, it designates the constitution of sign relations with temporal referents. Ideologically, temporalization has the effect of putting an object of discourse into a cosmological frame such that the temporal relation becomes central and topical (e.g., over and against spatial relations). Finally, temporalizing, like other instances of speech, may be a deictic function. In that case a temporal "reference" may not be identifiable except in the intention and circumstances of a speech-act.

Temporalization: Means or End?

A rapid review of the most common temporal operators in anthropological prose could follow customary (but somewhat questionable) distinctions between lexical, (morpho-) syntactic, and stylistic levels of discourse. On the level of the

lexicon, anthropological language is of course crowded with expressions which in one way or another signal conceptualization of Time and temporal relations (such as sequence, duration, interval or period, origins, and development). We already commented on some of these terms, as well as on the fact that a term need not be manifestly "temporal" in order to serve as a Time-distancing device. In fact, expressions that have a clear temporal referent (a date, a time span, an indication of past, present, or future) are probably less important, quantitatively as well as qualitatively, than those whose temporalizing function derives from the context in which they are used. With regard to our special interest in the critique of allochronic discourse we would have to concentrate, in semiological parlance, on connotation rather than denotation. The Time-distancing effect may, for instance, be achieved by the moral-political connotations of ostensibly pure temporal terms, or by the temporal connotations of "strictly technical," classificatory terms.

Take a word like *savagery*. As a technical term in evolutionary discourse it denotes a stage in a developmental sequence. But no degree of nominalist technicality can purge the term of its moral, aesthetic, and political connotations. Cumulatively, these result in a semantic function that is everything but purely technical. As an indication of relationship between the subject and the object of anthropological discourse, it clearly expresses temporal distancing: *Savagery* is a marker of the past, and if ethnographic evidence compels the anthropologist to state that savagery exists in contemporary societies then it will be located, by dint of some sort of horizontal stratigraphy, in *their* Time, not ours.

Kinship, on the surface one of the most innocent descriptive terms one could imagine, is fraught with temporal connotations. From the early debates on "classificatory" kinship systems to current studies of its *continued* importance in Western society, *kinship* connoted "primordial" ties and origins, hence the special strength, persistence, and meaning attributed to this type of social relation. Views of kinship relations can easily serve to measure degrees of advancement or modernization. By comparing the relative

importance of kinship bonds in different societies or groups one can construct developmental, i.e., temporal scales. In this context of connotative, symbolic function one would also have to examine the use of metaphors and other tropes.⁶ Lévi-Strauss' distinction between hot and cold societies belongs here (see 1966:232 f) as do observations such as the one where he aligns the synchronic with the diurnal and the diachronic with the nocturnal (see 1968:156).

We need not go into further detail to make the point that counts: An examination of the temporal lexicon inevitably leads critical analysis beyond the lexicon, to higher levels of discourse and to wider contexts. In the words of Roland Barthes: "As for the signified of connotation, its character is at once general, global and diffuse; it is, if you like, a fragment of ideology" (1970:91).

One would come to similar conclusions if one were to examine the syntactic means by which anthropological discourse signifies temporal aspects and relations. Verbal and adverbial temporal markers abound in ethnographic accounts and theoretical syntheses. As we shall see, studies of the use of tense soon converge on such conventions as the "ethnographic present" which, although achieved by syntactic means, is evidently used to stylistic ends. In other words, the "meaning" of the ethnographic present cannot be ascertained simply from the ways in which the present tense expresses conceptions of Time and temporal relations through the construction of sentences. Rather, it must be derived from the intentions and functions of a total discourse of which sentences are parts. In sum, a critique of allochronic discourse needs to be carried out from top to bottom, so to speak, although it may involve constant checks and reflections in the other direction.

There is, for instance, one kind of anthropological discourse which understands itself as-historical. Unless one rejects the legitimacy of such an understanding, it would seem that, in all fairness, one cannot hold the use of temporal devices against it. That some or all of these devices not only indicate, refer to, or measure Time, but also signify temporal distance between the writer and the object, would then be a problem internal to the production of anthropological

discourse and would have no bearing on relationships between anthropologists and their "informants" as moral and political agents.

Such a view would have to be taken if one chooses to approach a given social-scientific discourse as a self-contained sign system. In that case, temporalization would have to be evaluated strictly with respect to its semiotic function.⁷ One assumes that temporal signs, like all signs, are constituted as signifiers and signifieds, keeping in mind that according to semiotic theory the referent (or object) of a discourse is part of a sign relation; it is constituted, so to speak, inside the discourse. Expressions and content are but two aspects of one and the same semiotic system (or semiotic process, depending on which aspect one wishes to stress). Above all, the semioticians tell us, one must avoid confusing "content" with the real world. Accordingly, anthropological discourse about the "primitive" or "savage" is not about peoples in a real world, at least not directly. First and immediately, it is about the primitive as internal referent of a discourse or as a scientifically constituted object of a discipline. The articulation of such a semiotic system with the real world (with its "external referent") is a different matter altogether.

We will ask later whether such a position is tenable. At this point I want to follow the semiotic view and pursue its implications for the problem of temporalization. In his essay about scientific discourse in the social sciences, A. J. Greimas contrasts historical discourse with an "ideological humanistic discourse." The latter projects its referent on an "a-temporal mythical plane of eternal presence" (1976:29). Anthropology, we may extrapolate, differs from such an achronic humanism in that its discourse refers to, speaks about, human culture and society as it exists and develops in Time (and space). In this sense all anthropology is historical (but not to be confused with the discourse of a discipline called *history*). Greimas goes on to state:

Now, historical discourse introduces two new presuppositions in that it, first, replaces the concept of achronicity with that of temporality. At the same time it assumes that the signifier of the text which is

in the present has a signified in the past. Then it reifies its signified semantically and takes it for a referent external to the discourse. (1976:29)

In other words, temporalization is not an incidental property of historical discourse; *temporality* constitutes such a semiotic system by providing its signifiers with a signified. According to Greimas, this works "through the mechanism of *temporal uncoupling*, which mechanism consists of stipulating present statements (*énoncés*) as being situated in the past, thus creating a *temporal illusion*. In its turn, the reification of the signified is recognized as a procedure producing the *referential illusion* (*ibid.*)."

In this sense, Time is used to create an object. The consequence of that "positivist illusion" is a naïve realism expressing the unfounded claim that "the lexemes and phrases of historical texts really represent the objects of the world and their interrelationships." Furthermore, because of this sort of realism the positivist illusion leads to relativism: "The best historical discourse which has as its 'referent' a given society can, through the lexicological interpretation of its sources, only reproduce the 'categorizations of the world' proper to that society as they manifest themselves in the way the society covers its universe with lexemes" (1976:30).⁸

Once again, and in an unsuspected context, we find that relativism in anthropological discourse and temporal distancing are internally connected. Moreover, it is now possible to read that connection in both directions: Historical discourse (of the positivist variety) is incapable of giving more than relativistic reproductions of the societies and cultures that are its referents. Conversely, relativistic discourse (such as structuralism-functionalism or American culturalism, or, for that matter, remote descendants such as "ethnoscience") can always be expected to rest, epistemologically, on temporalizations, even if it professes a lack of interest in history.

How can temporal, positivist illusions be shattered? Interestingly enough, Greimas proposes that this can only be achieved by anthropology (see 1976:30). To understand him

one has to realize that his "anthropological discourse" is identical to French structuralist anthropology. He can therefore postulate that

only a structural comparative method (*comparatisme*) is capable of giving historical science a *taxonomic model* of human societies or, which comes to the same, of providing the methodological tools for a taxonomic enterprise (*faire taxinomique*) which history could employ to construct its semiotic objects, after which it would be free to relegate them to the past. (1976:30)

A truly elegant solution (one that echoes Lévi-Strauss'): *Taxonomy* purifies historical discourse from its illusionary uses of Time. But is the "ideological machine" (Greimas 1976:31) of historical discourse as simple as that? What, apart from the taxonomic satisfaction of having classed away historical discourse, is accomplished by showing that temporalizing is a form of signifying? Greimas himself insists that sign relationships should be considered as processes and action, not only as systems. Even a strictly "linguistic" approach to social scientific discourse cannot ignore its subject, the "producer of discourse," a notion which would seem to anchor a discourse in the real world (even if its referent is merely semiotic). I am not sure, however, that *production* means to Greimas more than an "ensemble of mechanisms by which language is made into discourse" (1976:11). In that case, his "producer" would be but a concept strictly within the system of sign relations, a mere auxiliary notion permitting to speak of process even if the system "proceeds" nowhere in the real world. Be it as it may, to me production signals the necessity to go beyond the confines of established sign systems; it evokes the labor involved in creating knowledge and the elements of a discourse capable of conveying knowledge. From that perspective, semiotic analysis of temporalization can do little more than prepare the ground for a critique of its epistemological and political implications.⁹

Time and Tense: The Ethnographic Present

In conversations about the planning of this book, the "ethnographic present" was often brought up as an example for the uses of Time in anthropological discourse. To my knowledge, there does not exist a well-documented history of this literary convention. If it were to be written, such a study would probably retrace the use of the present to the very first instances of *ethnography*. Herodotus gave his accounts of strange peoples in the present tense. In recent times, however, anthropologists appear to have been troubled by this venerable tradition.¹⁰ The ethnographic present certainly should be an issue of debate as soon as *the act of writing* ethnography is perceived to have temporal implications. Yet neither the exact problem with the use of the present tense in ethnographic accounts nor its bearing on temporalization are easy to define. One needs to take a considerable detour through linguistics and epistemology if one wants to get a grip on the problem.

In simple terms, the ethnographic present is the practice of giving accounts of other cultures and societies in the present tense. A custom, a ritual, even an entire system of exchange or a world view are thus predicated on a group or tribe, or whatever unit the ethnographer happens to choose. Intradisciplinary critique of that practice may aim at two implications, one logical, the other ontological, both bearing on the referential validity of statements in the present tense.

In the sentence 'The *X* are matrilineal,' the present tense copula *are* (especially if taken in conjunction with the definite article *the*) may give rise to doubts concerning the statistical validity of the assertion. To be sure, the present is the proper tense in which to report the results of counts or the value of correlations. But without qualifying or quantifying modifiers ("most *X*," or "70 percent of all *X* questioned"), the present unduly magnifies the *claim* of a statement to general validity. In principle, the same criticism could of course be raised if the statement were in the past tense ("The *X* were matrilineal"). But in that form it appears less offensive to empirically or statistically minded

readers because the stated fact would no longer be subject to direct verification or falsification. It now poses a problem of historical accuracy and would have to be judged by criteria which by their nature are indirect. Historical accuracy is a matter of the "critique of sources." Furthermore, historical accuracy no longer is a strictly referential criterion. It is a quality of metastatements about statements and accounts. Certainly, these few remarks hardly scratch the surface of the logical problems of historical inquiry; but they may help us understand why the present tense in ethnographic accounts is troubling in ways in which the past tense is not.

Another type of objection to the use of the ethnographic present may identify itself as *historical* but in fact it reprimands the ethnographer for ontological reasons. In that case, the statement "the *X* are matrilineal" is taken to imply a static view of society, one that is unattentive to the fact that all cultures are constantly changing. What is objected to is not so much that the *X* may no longer be matrilineal by the time their ethnography is published; rather the charge is one of projecting a categorical view on their society. At the very least, say these critics, the present tense "freezes" a society at the time of observation; at worst, it contains assumptions about the repetitiveness, predictability, and conservatism of primitives.

Both objections, logical-statistical and ontological, are easily met by disclaimers. The ethnographic present may be declared a mere literary device, used to avoid the awkwardness of the past tense and of constant doubling up in the form of numeric or temporal qualifiers; that sort of problem can be dealt with once and for all in a methodological appendix. In this way, intradisciplinary critique of the ethnographic present quickly completes a full circle: something bothers us about a literary practice and we alleviate our doubts by finding out that it is "just" a literary practice.

That will not do for the critique of one of the most pervasive characteristics of anthropological discourse. As we turn to linguistics for illumination we find that matters are much more complicated and also more interesting. In the preceding sections on temporalization in social-scientific discourse we came to an important conclusion: Relations be-

tween a given type of temporal discourse and its referent as well as relations between specific temporal operators and their signifieds are seldom, if ever, plainly referential. What temporalizing discourse and temporal devices have to say about Time and temporal relations must almost always be ascertained in a context that is wider, and on a level that is higher than the one in which uses of Time can first be identified. The term *primitive*, for instance, is not (only) temporalizing qua lexical item. It is the key term of a temporalizing discourse.¹¹

If the devices of temporalizing discourse have little referential value—i.e., say little or nothing about real Time or real temporal relations—this may appear to weaken the case against allochronism in anthropology. Allochronic expressions might “for all practical purposes” be neglected; *practical* being what anthropology “really” does by way of manipulating concepts of Time in setting up relations between Us and Them. The contrary is the case. If any, there is an inverse relationship between referential function and practical importance. The power of language to guide practical-political action seems to increase as its referential function decreases.

Does this also hold true for the use of tense? Following a ground-breaking essay by E. Benveniste (1971 [1956]:205–222) and a thorough study by H. Weinrich (1973[1964]) we may retain these crucial findings before we focus again on the problem of the ethnographic present: Neither semantically (regarding their conceptual “content”) nor syntactically (regarding their function in structuring utterances) can temporal verb forms be adequately understood. Linguistic analysis must concentrate on their role in constituting communicative situations whose objectified products are texts, not words or sentences (see Weinrich 1973:25 f). Temporal forms are one of the ways in which a speaker (writer) communicates with a hearer (reader); they are signals exchanged between the participants in complex situations and “it would be wrong to reduce [temporal forms] to simple informations about Time” (Weinrich 1973:60).

If we examine occurrence of temporal forms in given texts we discover that certain among them are infrequent

(e.g., dates, adverbial expressions) while others occur at a rate of about one per line of written text. The latter are the verb forms. Exactly what kind of verb form is used varies to some extent from language to language but in the texts of any language one may expect that the distribution of temporal verb forms—tense—is not random. Benveniste writing only, and Weinrich mainly, about the French verb found that certain tenses tend to be associated with each other, forming “groups,” and these groups appear to correspond to two fundamental categories of speaking/writing: discourse vs. history (Benveniste), or commentary vs. story (Weinrich). Dominance of a certain tense in a text signals directly the “locutionary attitude” (or the rhetorical intent) of the speaker/author. Tense only has indirect reference to Time in the “real world” outside the communicative situation of the text. Hence, to write ethnography in the present tense despite the fact that it is descriptive of experiences and observations that lie in the author’s past, would be indifferent because tense does not locate the content of an account in Time. All the same, the present tense does signal the writer’s intent (at least in French and related languages) to give a *discourse* or *commentary* on the world. Ethnographic accounts in the past tense would *prima facie* situate a text in the category of *history* or *story*, indicating perhaps a humanistic rather than scientific intent on the part of the writer. That, however, is not a satisfying solution. It could be easily shown that anthropologists of a scientific bent may write ethnography in the past tense while others who profess a humanistic-historical orientation may write in the present.

There remains ambiguity even if one accepts the basic distinctions of locutionary attitude discovered by Benveniste and Weinrich because—as these authors point out—temporal verb forms are *verb* forms. Their temporal significance must not be separated from other types of information carried by, or associated with, verb forms, such as *person*. The occurrence of pronouns and person markers is as *obstinate*, a term Weinrich borrows from music (*ostinato*) to designate both frequency and repetitiveness, as that of verb forms. Person and pronouns may have important temporal

functions. Ideally and typically, the first person singular *I* should co-occur with tenses marking the genre discourse/commentary, e.g., the present. This would reflect the locutionary attitude or communicative situation where a speaker conveys directly and purposefully to a listener what he believes to be the case or what he can report as a fact. In contrast to this, history/story would be

the mode of utterance that excludes every "autobiographical" linguistic form. The historian will never say *je* or *tu* or *maintenant*, because he will never make use of the formal apparatus of discourse [or "commentary,"] which resides primarily in the relationship of the persons *je:tu*. Hence we shall find only the forms of the "third person" in a historical narrative strictly followed. (Benveniste 1971:206 f)

Now if this is so, a good deal of anthropological discourse confronts us with a paradox in the form of an anomalous association of the present tense and the third person: "they are (do, have, etc.);" is the obstinate form of ethnographic accounts.

There are at least two ways to explain such co-occurrence. One is to probe more deeply into the significance of verb person and pronouns; the other is to trace the locutionary function of the present tense in ethnographic accounts beyond the confines of its immediate communicative situation, revealing its roots in certain fundamental assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge.

For the first argument we draw again on Benveniste's observations contained in his essays on relations of person in the verb and on subjectivity in language. Philosophically, his findings are not new but they are of special interest because they are derived from linguistic analyses of the ways of speaking (and writing) rather than from abstract speculation. Keep in mind that our problem is to understand the obstinate use of the third person in a genre which, by the dominance of the present tense, is clearly marked as discourse/commentary pronounced by an *I*, first person singular. As it turns out, the problem may not be one of contradiction but of confusion. The fundamental communicative

situation which encompasses the genres of discourse/commentary is dialogical: An *I* addresses (reports to) a *you*. But only the first and second persons are distinguished along the axis of personness. The grammarian's "third person" is opposed to the first and second person as a nonparticipant in the dialogue. The "third person" is not a 'person'; it is really the verbal form whose function is to express the *non-person*" (Benveniste 1971:198). The connection between the first two and the third persons is a "correlation of personality." First and second person are in a "correlation of subjectivity" (1971:201 f):

What differentiates "I" from "you" is first of all the fact of being, in the case of "I," internal to the statement and external to "you"; but external in a manner that does not suppress the human reality of dialogue. . . . One could thus define "you" as the *non-subjective* person, in contrast to the *subjective* person that "I" represents; and these two "persons" are together opposed to the "non-person" form (= he). (1971:201)

Then what does the obstinate use of the nonperson "third person" in ethnographic accounts whose present tense signals that they are dialogical tell us about the relationship between the subject and object of anthropological discourse? If we go along with Benveniste we must conclude that the use of the third person marks anthropological discourse in terms of the "correlation of personality" (person vs. nonperson). The ethnographer does not address a *you* except, presumably, in the situation of fieldwork when he asks questions or otherwise participates in the life of his subjects. He need not explicitly address his ethnographic account to a *you* because, as discourse/commentary it is already sufficiently placed in a dialogic situation; ethnography addresses a reader. The dialogic Other (second person, the other anthropologist, the scientific community) is marked by the present tense; *pronouns and verb forms in the third person mark an Other outside the dialogue*. He (or she or it) is not spoken to but posited (predicated) as that which contrasts with the personness of the participants in the dialogue.

"Removal from the dialogic situation" is, in my view, another way to describe denial of coevalness, a conclusion which, however, could not be drawn if we were to follow Benveniste's linguistic theory of subjectivity to the end. To declare, as he does, that the dialogic situation is a mere pragmatic consequence of certain fundamental linguistic oppositions (see 1971:224, 225) amounts to making both the participants and the events of communication epiphenomenal to language; personal consciousness and social praxis are reduced to linguistic phenomena. I agree with Benveniste when he rejects the notion that language is only an instrument (see 1971:223 f) but I cannot go along with his blatant idealism, which would have us conclude that the opposition of Self and Other and the preference for a certain tense in anthropological discourse are but general facts of language. On the contrary, these facts of language are but special instances in which self-assertion, imposition, subjugation and other forms of human alienation manifest themselves. Because Benveniste (with de Saussure) is convinced of the "immaterial nature" of language (1971:224) he is incapable of relating a certain discursive practice to political praxis. His (and Weinrich's) detailed and ingenious analyses of the workings of tense and person constantly rebound from the inner walls of language qua system (or of speaking qua locutionary situation).

Much as we can learn from linguistics about the intricate workings of tense, in the end we must leave the confines of linguistic analysis, especially if we take language seriously. The ethnographic present represents a choice of expression which is determined by an epistemological position and cannot be derived from, or explained by, linguistic rules alone. Anticipating an argument to be developed in the next chapter, the following hypothesis may be advanced: The use of the present tense in anthropological discourse not only marks a literary genre (*ethnography*) through the locutionary attitude of discourse/commentary; it also reveals a specific cognitive stance toward its object, the *monde commenté* (Weinrich). It presupposes the givenness of the object of anthropology as something to be *observed*. *The present tense is a signal identifying a discourse as an observer's language.*

Such a language provides glosses on the world as *seen*. It depicts and re-presents another culture; it is its re-production by linguistic (symbolic) means. All this corresponds to a theory of knowledge construed around a visual root metaphor. Historically, anthropology has been linked up with the tradition of "natural history," with its ethos of detached observation and its fervor to make visible the hidden relations between things. It is in that direction that we will have to probe further. To remonstrate that the ethnographic present is an inappropriate temporal form is beside the point. We accept the linguist's verdict that tense in itself has no temporal reference. What must be critically investigated is the peculiar incidence of atemporal modes of expression in a discourse which, on the whole, is clearly temporalizing. Putting it bluntly, we must attempt to discover the deeper connections between a certain type of political cosmology (defining relations with the Other in temporal terms) and a certain type of epistemology (conceiving of knowledge as the reproduction of an observed world).

In My Time: Ethnography and the Autobiographic Past

Anthropological discourse often exhibits (or hides, which is the same) conflict between theoretical-methodological conventions and lived experience. Anthropological writing may be scientific; it is also inherently autobiographic. This is not limited to the trivial observation that ethnographic reports are sometimes cluttered with anecdotes, personal asides, and other devices apt to enliven an otherwise dull prose. In fact, until recently anthropologists were anxious to keep autobiography separate from scientific writing. The strictures of positivism account for this, although they may have been operating indirectly. Somehow the discipline "remembers" that it acquired its scientific and academic status by climbing on the shoulders of adventurers and using their travelogues, which for centuries had been the appropriate literary genre in which to report knowledge of the Other. In many ways this collective memory of a scientifically doubtful past acts as a trauma, blocking serious reflection on the epis-

temological significance of lived experience and its autobiographic expressions. How would such reflection have to proceed?

Once more we begin with the supposition that anthropology is based on ethnography. All anthropological writing must draw on reports resulting from some sort of concrete encounter between individual ethnographers and members of other cultures and societies. The anthropologist who does not draw on his own experience will use accounts by others. Directly or vicariously, anthropological discourse formulates knowledge that is rooted in an author's autobiography. If this is seen together with the convention that fieldwork comes first and analysis later, we begin to realize that the Other as object or content of anthropological knowledge is necessarily part of the knowing subject's past. So we find Time and temporal distance once again linked up with the constitution of the referent of our discourse. Only now temporalization clearly is an aspect of a praxis, not just a mechanism in a system of signification. That praxis includes all the phases of the production of anthropological knowledge; Time is not just a device but a necessary condition for that process to occur. In a general way, the same holds true, of course, for any type of literary production. The writer of a novel uses his or her past experiences as "material" for the literary project. However, the anthropologist makes the peculiar claim that certain experiences or events in his past constitute facts, not fiction. What else could be the sense of invoking ethnographic accounts as "data"?

Our inevitably temporal relation to the Other as object of knowledge is by no means a simple one. In a most basic sense (one that is, I suspect, quite acceptable to the positivist) temporal distance might be a sort of minimal condition for accepting any kind of observation as a fact. A frame for such a view was sketched out in a note on "co-apperception of time" by C. F. von Weizsäcker. His reflection is all the more interesting because it comes from a natural scientist and philosopher venturing to make a contribution to "historical anthropology." Von Weizsäcker states:

That which is past is stored in facts. Facts are the possibilities of the appearance of that which is past.

Possibilities are founded on facts. . . . One could say that the present is the one-ness [*Einheit*] of time. But here the concept of the present does not explain the one-ness of time, rather it is the other way round. Similarly, the concept of past does not explain facticity . . . rather, that which is past is the presently factual (1977:315).

Fact and *past* are not interchangeable, nor is their relationship primarily one that points from the writer's present into the object's past. As I understand him, von Weizsäcker asserts the inverse: The object's present is founded in the writer's past. In that sense, facticity itself, that cornerstone of scientific thought, is autobiographic.¹² This, incidentally, is why in anthropology objectivity can never be defined in opposition to subjectivity, especially if one does not want to abandon the notion of facts.

Against the background of these abstract and difficult thoughts about Time and facticity we may now consider temporal distancing in a more concrete, hermeneutic frame. *Hermeneutic* signals a self-understanding of anthropology as interpretive (rather than naively inductive or rigorously deductive).¹³ No experience can simply be "used" as naked data. All personal experience is produced under historical conditions, in historical contexts; it must be used with critical awareness and with constant attention to its authoritative claims. The hermeneutic stance presupposes a degree of distancing, an objectification of our experiences. That the anthropologist's experienced Other is necessarily part of his past may therefore not be an impediment, but a condition of an interpretive approach.¹⁴ This is true on several levels.

Fieldwork, demanding personal presence and involving several learning processes, has a certain time-economy. The anthropological rule of thumb—one full cycle of seasons—may not be its exact measure but it recognizes at least that a certain passage of time is a necessary prerequisite, not just an annoying expenditure. More time, often much more time, is necessary to analyze and interpret experience recorded in texts. In sum, doing anthropology needs distance, temporal and often also spatial.

At this point, after all the critical remarks we addressed to positive valuation of "distance" in relativist and structur-

alist anthropology, a warning signal should go off. Are we not admitting now, by a detour through hermeneutics, what we found questionable earlier? Not at all. In the first place, the distance just invoked is essentially temporal. It is, so to speak, only supplemented by spatial distance. Moving from one living context to another in the course of anthropological work merely underscores the necessity of objectifying our experiences. However, it is imaginable that an ethnographer *constantly* "on the move" may lose his ability to make worthwhile ethnographic experiences altogether, for the simple reason that the Other would *never have the time* to become part of the ethnographer's past. Time is also needed for the ethnographer to become part of his interlocutor's past. Many anthropologists have noted and reported dramatic changes in the attitudes of their "informants" on second or subsequent visits to the field. Often these are interpreted in psychological or moral terms of increased trust, deepened friendship, or plain getting used to each other. If it is true that ethnography, in order to be productive, must be dialogical and therefore to a certain degree reciprocal, then we begin to appreciate the epistemological significance of Time.

Secondly, hermeneutic distance is called for by the ideal of reflexivity which is always also self-reflexivity. Affirmation of distance is in this case but a way of underlining the importance of subjectivity in the process of knowledge. Hermeneutic distance is an act, not a fact. It has nothing in common with the notion (such as Lévi-Strauss', see above, chapter 2) that distance be somehow the source of more general, hence more "real" knowledge. It may be useful to introduce a convention which distinguishes between *reflexion* qua subjective activity carried out by and revealing, the ethnographer, and *reflection*, as a sort of objective reflex (like the image in a mirror) which hides the observer by axiomatically eliminating subjectivity.

I can think of at least two reasons for advocating a reflexive over a reflective stance. First, attempts to eliminate or hide the subject in anthropological discourse too often result in epistemological hypocrisy. Consider, for instance, the following innocuous looking statement in *The Savage Mind*.

The context is Lévi-Strauss' assertion that primitives, much like ourselves, rely on observation and interpretation of natural phenomena: "The procedure of the American Indian who follows a trail by means of imperceptible clues . . . is no different from our procedure when we drive a car. . . ." (1966:222)

Now, it seems to me, that the qualifier *imperceptible* here has an intriguing function. Upon closer examination it turns out that it cannot possibly be used in a denotative, referential manner; an *imperceptible* clue is a logical impossibility. But perhaps that is being too rigorous. Imperceptible may be a manner of speaking and a reader familiar with the language can be expected to correct *nonperceptible* as *scarcely perceptible*. But that way out is too easy. I would argue that *imperceptible* here functions as an index revealing (or hiding) the fact that not one but two subjects inhabit the semantic space of the statement. One is the Indian who "follows a procedure," the other is the ethnographer to whom the Indian's clues are imperceptible. Such literary sleight-of-hand camouflages the second subject *in order to* mark the observation as objective fact.

The "imperceptible clue" is only one example for the many conventionalized figures and images that pervade ethnographic and popular reports on encounters with Others. When it is said that primitives are *stolid* this translates as "I never got close enough to see them excited, enthusiastic, or perturbed." When we say that "they are born with rhythm" we mean "we never saw them grow, practice, learn." And so on and so forth. All statements about others are paired with the observer's experience. But why would hiding the Self in statements about the Other make ethnography more objective?

There is another reason for preferring reflexion over reflection. Reflexivity asks that we "look back" and thereby let our experiences "come back" to us. Reflexivity is based on memory, i.e., on the fact that the location of experience in our past is not irreversible. We have the ability to present (make present) our past experiences to ourselves. More than that, this reflexive ability enables us to be in the presence of others precisely inasmuch as the Other has become content

of our experience. This brings us to the conditions of possibility of intersubjective knowledge. *Somehow we must be able to share each other's past in order to be knowingly in each other's present.* If our experience of Time were nonreflexive, unidirectional, we would not have anything but tangential knowledge of each other, on the level of interpersonal communication as well as on the collective level of social and political interaction. When much or most of anthropology is indeed perceived as tangential (beside the point, irrelevant) by those who have been its objects, this points to a severe breakdown of "collective reflexivity"; it is yet another symptom of the denial of coevalness.

Needless to say, these thoughts about reflexive distance would not be universally accepted. Some social scientists want to measure the reactions of experimental subjects, or the distribution and frequency of certain kinds of quantifiable behavior. They could in principle work without temporal distance, *as soon as* data are fed into the analytical machine. At any rate, the time which even the most operationally minded social scientist must spend on devising his "instruments" (e.g. questionnaires), on collecting, coding, and counting responses and then often on "cleaning up" his data, is to him a practical nuisance, not an epistemological necessity. More sophisticated techniques and faster computers offer the prospect of cutting down on time to the point where we can conceive research setups (such as used to determine television ratings) where large numbers of subjects are hooked up directly to analytical machinery—the statistician's dream, perhaps, but our nightmare.

In this context one should also examine the temporal implications of data storage, a notion that tempts many anthropologists who seem to be troubled by the burden of accumulated ethnography. Are our data banks simply more sophisticated archives of the kind societies have kept from the beginning of historical times? Is the term *bank* really just an innocent metaphor for a depository? Not at all. Data banks are banks, not only because things of value are stored in them, but because they are institutions which make possible the circulation of information.¹⁵

So far, anthropology has done little more than toy

around with such crude data banks as the *Human Relations Area File* and with low-power statistical operations on doubtful samples. There is no sign that operationalism will determine a significant part of the discipline in the near future. If machine time were, at some point, to replace (not just assist) human time, and if our observations on the role of Time in constituting the object of our discourse are correct, we would expect anthropology to disappear. For the time being, ethnographic objectivity remains bound up with reflexion, an activity which will call for Time as long as it involves human subjects.

To say that reflexive distance is necessary to achieve objectification does not mean that the Other, by virtue of being located in our past, becomes thinglike, or abstract and general. On the contrary, an ethnographic past can become the most vivid part of our present existence. Persons, events, puzzlements, and discoveries encountered during fieldwork may continue to occupy our thoughts and fantasies for many years. This is probably not just because our work in ethnography constantly turns us toward the past; rather it is because our past is present in us as a *project*, hence as our future. In fact, we would not have a present to look back from at our past if it was not for that constant passage of our experience from past to future. Past ethnography is the present of anthropological discourse inasmuch as it is on the way to become its future.

Such are the general outlines of the processes in which anthropological consciousness emerges. In any concrete case, however, consciousness of the ethnographic past may be as deformed and alienated as other types of consciousness. Take, for example, one of the most irritating of our professional habits which I will call the possessive past. There is a trivial and probably harmless form of that affliction. Those who suffer from it show the symptoms of an irrepressible urge to recall, refer to, cite, and recount experiences with "their natives." Sometimes they are just conversational bores; they often resemble former soldiers who are unable to separate their present lives from memories of "their war." For many anthropologists, fieldwork obviously has this effect of an intensified, traumatic period which remains an intellec-

tual and emotional reference point throughout their lives. Whenever experience becomes so much part of an individual's psychological history that a reflexive distance can no longer be generated, neither the person involved nor those to whom he reports his experiences can be sure of the nature and validity of his accounts and insights. To some extent, such psychological ingestion and appropriation (Lévi-Strauss would call it *cannibalism*) of the Other may be a normal and inevitable condition for the production of ethnographic knowledge, but it may verge on the pathological (as there are indeed links between psychopathology and an exaggerated exoticism).

Such 'allophagy' is seldom critically analyzed or even noted because of an institutionalized fear of being accused of unscientific autobiographic divagation. Intellectual dishonesty may then take its revenge in the form of utter confusion when it comes to taking a stand on such disturbing cases as Père Trilles or Carlos Castaneda. I doubt that the experts on American Indian religion who have all but dismantled Castaneda's credibility as an ethnographer realize that he probably parodied and exaggerated (with enviable commercial success) the little disputed privilege of the possessive past which the conventions of anthropological discourse grant to all practitioners.¹⁶ How many are the anthropologists for whom the aura of "empirical research" has served to legitimize as fieldwork varying periods spent on getting over culture shock, fighting loneliness and some humiliating tropical illness, coping with the claims of the local expatriate community, and learning about corruption in the local bureaucracy—all this before finally getting together some meager, secondhand information? Or what about those who quite simply invented or faked their ethnographies, perhaps because that was the only way in which they could live up to the expectations of degree-granting departments and funding agencies to "deliver" within the time allotted for research in the field? One shudders at the thought of what time pressure may have done to the vast body of ethnography produced in the most expansive period of our discipline.

The point of these questions is not to cast vague suspi-

cion on moral integrity. More insidious than individual moral failure is a collective failure to consider the intellectual effects of scientific conventions which, by censoring reflexions on the autobiographic conditions of anthropological knowledge, remove an important part of the knowledge process from the arena of criticism.

To make it clear that moral indignation at the sins of ethnographers is not enough, one only needs to consider another aspect of what we called the possessive past. Figures of speech—the use of possessive pronouns, first person singular or plural, in reports on informants, groups, or tribes—are the signs in anthropological discourse of relations that ultimately belong to political economy, not to psychology or ethics. After all, dogmatic insistence on fieldwork, personal and participative, coincides with the virulent period of colonization. Participant observation, however, was not canonized to promote participation but to improve observation. Personal presence was required for the collecting and recording of data prior to their being deposited and processed in Western institutions of learning. In structure and intent these conventions of our discipline have been analogous to the exploitation of natural resources found in colonized countries. Talk of "geopolitics" and the predominance of *spatial* images such as Western "expansion" cloud the fact that our exploitative relations also had *temporal* aspects. Resources have been transported from the past of their "backward" locations to the present of an industrial, capitalist economy. A temporal conception of movement has always served to legitimize the colonial enterprise on all levels. Temporalizations expressed as passage from savagery to civilization, from peasant to industrial society, have long served an ideology whose ultimate purpose has been to justify the procurement of commodities for our markets. African copper becomes a commodity only when it is taken possession of by removing it from its geological context, placing it into the history of Western commerce and industrial production. Something analogous happens with "primitive art."¹⁷

The idea of a commodification of knowledge owes much of its conceptual clarity to Marx. But the basic insight on

which it rests is by no means a recent one. When Georg Forster, one of the founders of modern anthropology, once contemplated the hustle and bustle of Amsterdam harbor he was moved to the following meditation:

The eagerness of greed was the origin of mathematics, mechanics, physics, astronomy and geography. Reason paid back with interest the effort invested in its formation. It linked faraway continents, brought nations together, accumulated the products of all the different regions—and all the while its wealth of concepts increased. They circulated faster and faster and became more and more refined. New ideas which could not be processed locally went as raw material to neighboring countries. There they were woven into the mass of already existent and applied knowledge, and sooner or later the new product of reason returns to the shores of the Amstel. (1968: [1791] :386)

If analogies (or homologies) between the colonial enterprise and anthropology hold, one would have to admit that ethnography, too, may become a commodity. Its commodification would require a similar temporal passage of data (the goods) from their historical context in societies considered primitive to the present of Western science. In the idiom of our economic philosophies, anthropology is an “industry” with the peculiar trait that anthropologists are both workers who produce commodities, and entrepreneurs who market them, albeit in most cases at the modest profit of academic salaries.¹⁸

This is a disquieting conclusion indeed, one that could hardly be expected from a review of some of the literary conventions of anthropological discourse. If it is correct it would mean that precisely the autobiographic origins of the ethnographer’s possessive past link his praxis to the political economy of Western domination and exploitation. That link is by no means just one of moral complicity, easily disavowed by repenting on the ways of our colonialist predecessors. The connection is ideological and even epistemological; it regards conceptions of the nature of anthropological knowledge, not just of its use. Most impor-

tantly it confirms that temporal manipulations are involved in working out our relationship to the Other.

*Politics of Time: The Temporal Wolf
in Taxonomic Sheep’s Clothing*

We have examined temporalizing in anthropological discourse as it manifests itself in the ethnographic present and the autobiographic past. Now we must face once more the claims of “timeless” structuralism. After all, in his semiotic analysis of social scientific discourse, Greimas promised salvation from the evils of temporalizing in the form of a *faire taxinomique* which is (Lévi-Straussian) anthropology. Any invocation of anthropology as a savior or *deus ex machina* should make us suspicious. It only makes more urgent the task of examining how Time is used in defining relations with the referent of our discourse.

In an attempt to understand what exactly taxonomy does we may begin by considering the following proposition: Whether taxonomy is carried out in the structuralist vein or in more modest varieties (such as in ethnoscience and various structural approaches to folklore) taxonomic description always consists of rewriting our ethnographic notes or texts. At the very least (and leaving aside its technical understanding propagated by N. Chomsky) the project of rewriting rests on two presuppositions, one being a presumption of fact, the other amounting to a kind of judgment. The presumption of fact holds that there *is* a text to be *rewritten*. This is ultimately an ontological statement, one that anchors the taxonomic enterprise in a real world of texts and writers. Even the most abstract logico-mathematical reduction of an ethnographic text is still writing. It remains within the confines of discourse qua activity carried out by a subject. Being produced by a subject (and granting that “production” often is nothing but reproduction of cognitive templates and literary conventions) taxonomic discourse stays linked with other forms of discursive expression. Taxonomic description is therefore not a revolutionary alternative to other forms of anthropological discourse. It is

but a taxon, a class of writings in a taxonomy, a view we encountered earlier as Lévi-Strauss' way of "reconciling" anthropology and history.

However there is, secondly, a suggestion of judgment in the idea of rewriting—as if taxonomic description were to make up for deficiencies in the original text, it being perhaps too confused, too cryptic, too exotic or simply too long to surrender its meaning upon simple inspection. In this respect, "scientific" structuralism is undoubtedly akin to hermeneutic and historical philology which it wishes to surpass and replace. Both are pervaded by an urge to restore, to provide a better reading of, the original text. It makes little difference whether the aim is the philologist's *Urform*, or the structuralist's form *tout court*, both traditions are shaped by an ethos developed in the course of searching for the "authentic" meaning of the sacred texts of our tradition.¹⁹ Lévi-Strauss obviously sensed this. Because he wanted to dissociate himself at all cost from the enterprise of a historical hermeneutic he took his famous escape when he pronounced that anthropological discourse is but a myth upon a myth (1969b:6). He can feel free of the burden of having to justify his own rewriting of myth as a (judgmental) act of liberating the original from its existence in obscurity. Of course, he also leaves unanswered the question why anthropology needs to write *over* its ethnographic texts at all. If the hermeneutic stance is to *extract* meaning from a text, structuralist construction of a myth upon a myth appears to work by *imposition*. Models that map basic and derived relationships are laid upon the native text. Where the hermeneutic approach envisages its task as work, structuralism sees it as play, as a game whose rules are the elegance and parsimony displayed in "matching" text and model.

But this is only part of the story. Taxonomic rewriting never is just a purely contemplative, aesthetic game of reducing messy data to elegant models. It is a drawn-out, serious game in the course of which pieces of ethnography, isolated and displaced from their historical context, are used in a series of moves and countermoves, following certain basic rules (those of binary opposition, for example) until a point is reached where the pieces fall into place. The game

is over when the solitary player, the anthropologist, has exhausted the moves permitted by the rules. Now one may invoke (following Lévi-Strauss' example) the analogy of the game in order to characterize the playfulness of taxonomic description. But one should not forget that behind the mask of the modest, candid, and tentative *bricoleur* hides a player *who is out to win*.

Winning the taxonomic game consists of demonstrating synchronic relations of order beneath the flux and confusion of historical events and the expressions of personal experience. The temporally contingent is made to reveal underlying logical necessity. The Now and Then is absorbed by the Always of the rules of the game. And one must never forget that structuralist discourse accomplishing these feats is not just a discourse which has taxonomies as its referent. It defines itself as a taxonomic *faire*. Far from merely reflecting relations of order, it creates them. The founding classificatory act, the first binary opposition (or in Bateson's famous terms, the difference that makes the difference) is the one between the native text and the taxonomic discourse about that text. Two steps follow: one is to declare the native text itself taxonomic (by opposing its constituent classificatory relationships to real relations, culture vs. nature); the other is to posit the taxonomic, speak scientific, nature of anthropological discourse as being opposed to the humanistic, speak hermeneutic-historical, approach.

The outcome of all this is not at all a structural arrangement of oppositions suspended in an equilibrium, nor is it just a classificatory schema innocently construed in a game of imposing arbitrary models on reality. What we get is a *hierarchy* made up of relationships of order which are sequential and irreversible; hence the seriousness of the taxonomic game. If we take Lévi-Strauss (and for that matter, the cognitive anthropologists) seriously we find that their theory of science is out to integrate anthropology itself at some point in the sequence of "transformations" to be derived from certain basic oppositions such as nature and culture, form and content, sign and reality, and so forth. A way to visualize this in a taxonomic idiom would be figure 3.1.

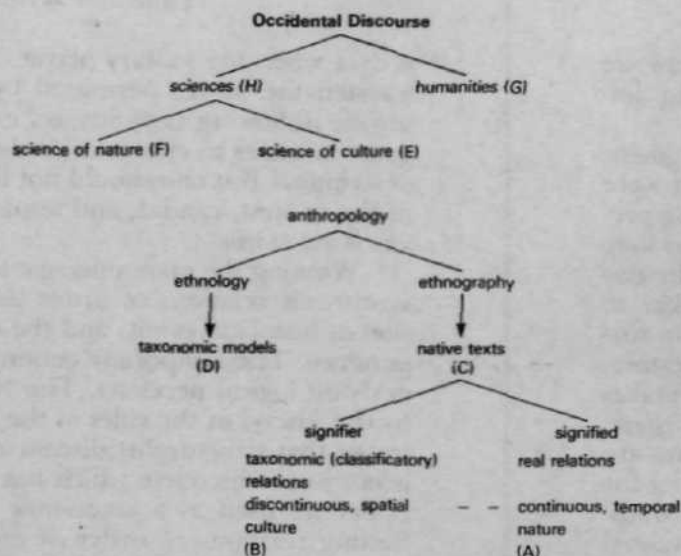


Figure 3.1: The place of anthropology in a taxonomy of relations

Undoubtedly this is not the only way to draw the diagram; another form could include different kinds of science or humanities, kinds of native texts, and even different ways to set up the oppositions on the lowest level. But even in its fragmentary form it illustrates the crucial point; because the nodes are arranged hierarchically, the relationships that constitute taxonomic discourse are sequential and can also be presented as a string of points (steps, stages) on a line or arrow:

→
 x x x x x x x x x x
 A B C D E F G H I

or as two strings emanating from an opposition:

H/G	
E	F
C	D
A	B

Because the arrangement is hierarchical, movement within the parallel/opposed strings is always either ascent or descent. This would seemingly not affect relations of opposition. But that is not really the case as soon as one takes into account the ontological assumptions of taxonomic approaches in anthropology. The "oppositions" *AB*, *CD*, *EF* (and *HG*, for that matter) are expressive of evolutionary development; they are directional, in fact one-way relations: Nature precedes Culture (at least in the minimal sense that it was there before people existed); ethnography precedes ethnology (according to the canons of anthropological praxis); and the humanities precede the sciences (in the history of Western thought). Again, it matters little that any of those assumptions might be debated as soon as a context is specified. The point is that a taxonomic conception of them cannot but present them in chains and, in the words of M. Serres, none of these chains "can be thought without time" (1977:91).²⁰ The logic of these relationships of opposition and inclusion generates the rules of the game which is a *faire taxinomique*. If that game is, according to Greimas and Lévi-Strauss, the "constitution of the semiotic object" then it is clear that such constitution is arrived at in a sequence of temporally ordered steps. Viewed from that angle, taxonomic anthropology is indistinguishable from approaches it dismisses as historical and subjective.

Following Serres (who in turn follows mathematical notions regarding "relations of order") we can now more accurately characterize the nature of relations which taxonomic discourse attempts to establish between the subject and object of its discourse.

The relationships whose concatenation amounts to a taxonomy of anthropological knowledge are *nonreflexive*. None of the members in the chain that makes up the structure represented in our diagram can precede or succeed itself; it is always predecessor or successor of another member in the chain. For example, a discourse having posited that the *lexicon* for a certain cognitive domain consists of arbitrary labels for things, and that the object of taxonomic analysis is the ordered system of relationships between *labels*, will not go back on itself and reexamine the assumption

that the imposition of labels is indeed arbitrary. Similarly, the structural analysis of pieces of ethnography (myths, kinship systems) will proceed by reducing them to models. There it will either come to rest, or it will seek further refinements, or more encompassing models, until it comes to rest. But it will not, at the same time, question the method it employs. Science, as T. S. Kuhn and many others seem to tell us, cannot be done critically, that is, reflexively *when* and *while* it is being done. Critique needs the extraordinary time of crisis—*extraordinary* meaning outside the established relationships of order.

Implied in the chainlike arrangement is also that relationships between any two members *cannot be symmetrical*. If *A* precedes *B*, *B* cannot precede *A*. One might object that this neglects the possibility that, within the two parallel chains, movement may be either ascending or descending. For instance, *ethnological theory* may, depending on circumstances, precede as well as succeed ethnography. Or events in nature such as ecological and demographic changes may precede as well as succeed cultural change. Nevertheless, the rule demands that no two members of the chain can precede and succeed each other at the same time. Therefore it is ruled out that taxonomic discourse could ascend and descend the relations of order in the same act. This does not mean that in taxonomic anthropology ethnography should not be “mixed” with ethnology, or autobiography not with scientific analysis, or structural analysis not with history. Any given instance of taxonomic discourse may contain juxtapositions of all of those “opposed” elements. But the rule of nonsymmetry does carry an injunction against reciprocal and dialectical conceptions, both of which would presuppose that two members of the chain coexist in Time.

Finally, the chain of relationships of order implies that if *A* precedes *B* and *B* precedes *C* then *A* precedes *C*. In other words, the entire structure is *transitive*. If culture masters nature, and if the anthropologists master culture, then science, through anthropology, masters nature. Perhaps it is the other way round; but never both at the same time or, in analogy to the game, never in the same move.

To object that such an interpretation of relations of or-

der confuses logical sequences with temporal sequences is gratuitous unless one deludes oneself into accepting the untenable position that taxonomic discourse is outside the realm of human action. The demonstrable fact that discourse qua spatiotemporal action can be described in purely logical-taxonomic terms in no way justifies the belief that it consists of logical relations. A theory that holds this is guilty of the same confusion of method and substance, means and ends, which Greimas found to be the fallacy of historical discourse unredeemed by taxonomy (1976:30). Marx, whom structuralists now like to claim as their ancestor, saw and avoided the fallacy when he criticized Hegel and Feuerbach: To be able to distill from history the “logic” of the process or to find the “law” that the dominating class will inevitably be overthrown by the oppressed class does not absolve the analyst (as spokesman for “history”) from the necessity to translate logic into revolutionary projects. To take a position on “logical relations” is always also a political act.

Which finally brings us to the moment when the wolf enters the story. In La Fontaine’s fable he comes to a river to drink and accuses the lamb of troubling the water. But the lamb is positioned downstream. In M. Serres’ interpretation of the “game of the wolf,” the wolf is the scientist, in our case the taxonomic anthropologist. In the story, much as in our diagram, he is placed in a chain of relations of order in such a way that he is upstream, up the temporal slope. Yet his posture is to accuse the lamb, that is, to question the “lamb”—the primitive or the native text which he takes as his “problem”—as if the two were engaged in a game allowing moves in both directions. He acts as if there were a give and take; as if what is valid in the time of the lamb (there and then) could be made visible in the time of the wolf (here and now). As it is the avowed aim of taxonomic discourse to establish relations that are always and everywhere valid, the story must end with the wolf absorbing historical time into his time—he will eat the lamb. This fable is an “operational definition of hypocrisy” (Serres 1977:94) because the wolf appears placed in the middle of the chain. The anthropologist proclaims himself to be in the service of

science, to be nothing but an executor of the laws of nature or reason. He uses the taxonomic cover to hide his relentless appetite for the Time of the Other, a Time to be ingested and transformed into his own: "He has taken the place of the wolf, his true place. Western man is the wolf of science' (Serres 1977:104).

What we take the fable to illustrate is an *ideology* of relations, a game that defines its own rules. A crucial strategy in this game is to place the players on a temporal slope. That the time of the lamb is not the time of the wolf is postulated, not demonstrated. An evolutionary view of relations between Us and the Other is the point of departure, not the result of anthropology. A taxonomic approach inserts itself effortlessly into that perspective. Its ostensibly achronic stance turns out to be a flagrant example of allochronic discourse.