

the experimental moment and the minimalizing of anthropology (as if it were ethnography and nothing else) have created within some of the discipline's practitioners a failure of confidence.

More specifically, this essay has argued that many of those who, in the 1980s, advocated the application of literary techniques to ethnographic texts did not use the insights of literary criticism in a particularly trenchant way. The references in this essay alone suggest that they narrowed prematurely what literary criticism offered. I have suggested elsewhere (Vincent 1990) that ethnography—or, better, the monograph based on field research—has always been the foremost vehicle of critical challenge to anthropology's dominant paradigms. In undermining ethnography, one undermines theory.

Finally, this essay has attempted to suggest, in a somewhat cursory fashion (but see Vincent 1990 for an extended treatment of the theme), that anthropology has constantly struggled in its productions to resonate with the world in which its practitioners have lived. At one point during our advanced seminar, the human condition he was describing in the American southwest led José Limón to urge us all fully to appreciate that “power exists; power resides; history hurts.” “Allow me my anguish,” was Rolph Trouillot's response to another participant's well-meant effort to intellectualize his argument. In engaging historicism, I would suggest, critical anthropology begins to engage this world. Viewed historically, engaging historicism has become a step towards dismantling historically established oppositions between practice and theory, production and criticism. It has real and practical consequences.

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1. The essay I presented to the seminar bore the title “Beyond Ethnography: Palimpsest for the 1990s.” In response to the suggestions of my seminar colleagues, I have retained only a portion of that essay and expanded more on my conversational interjections at our sessions, arguing the case for both a greater knowledge of the history of anthropology and historicism. I am grateful to Richard Fox for later making the relevant portions of our seminar's taped sessions available to me.

Chapter 4

FOR HIRE:

RESOLUTELY LATE MODERN

Paul Rabinow

BAUDELAIRE'S wonderfully ironic injunction—you have no right to despise the present—is not easy to live up to. It is worth the effort, however, as it helps us to navigate a middle course between retreating into nostalgia and fleeing into fantasy. Baudelaire's injunction carried a double imperative: to observe society and to give aesthetic form to one's observations. Baudelaire's modern artists, however, were not *flâneurs* observing disinterestedly from the outside, but participant observers giving form to the present and thereby transforming its obvious ugliness into a new beauty. “Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it” (Foucault 1984: 41). At the end of the twentieth century, such a project, such a self-formative practice, such a way of standing toward the world and oneself is, albeit with appropriate transformations, still our task. The task is to be resolutely late modern.

In this paper I sketch one set of late modern practices in the hope that after we have a clearer sense of who we are, we will be able to decide who we ought to be. The paper's first section juxtaposes Franz Boas's

program for joining anthropology and modern life—in which anthropology's task was to provide a scientific analysis of society and then lead society forward in an enlightened fashion on the basis of those scientific insights—with Max Weber's diagnosis that modern life has made the hope for such a pedagogic anthropology little more than self-delusion. Using these influential interpretations of modernity as an analytic grid, I offer an ethnographic sketch of the micropractices of hiring in the elite academy as emblematic of contemporary muddling of truth, ethics, and power. Starting with Joan Vincent's distinction between the profession and the discipline (one uncertain, the other flourishing), I argue that especially today, when a generational change is taking place throughout the American university system, reproduction of the profession currently turns too much on the tacit norms not of truth but of "character." I propose that the issue of character is largely taken for granted and unthematized; by bringing it to light it can be analytically distinguished from the relations of truth and power and its importance debated on its own terms.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND MODERN LIFE

DIDACTIC SCIENCE

Franz Boas published *Anthropology and Modern Life* in 1928. It is an important statement for a number of reasons, not least of which is the archaeological strata of scientific, political, and ethical layers it contains. These strata provide us with perspectives on our current situation. Among the most revealing of them is the problem of the unevenness of progress in anthropology. Some dimensions of *Anthropology and Modern Life* simply are dated; Boas's case against racial hierarchies and racial thinking has thoroughly carried the theoretical day. Today his arguments sound timid and far too generous in their serious engagement with his racist opponents. Of course, racism has hardly disappeared, but it no longer is a scientifically credible position. This unambiguous case of scientific progress, however, highlights Boas's typical overvaluation of the socially beneficent power of science.

It seemed self-evident to Boas that the truth of his position would bring with it social enlightenment. "I hope to demonstrate that a clear understanding of the principles of anthropology illuminates the social practices of our times and may show us, if we are ready to listen to its teachings, what to do and what to avoid" (Boas 1928: 11). He was partially wrong. Louis Dumont (1970) has shown that the triumph of an ideology

of egalitarianism and individualism resulted in a naturalization of difference. Despite the best efforts of anthropology, racism remains largely intact, although no longer *dans le vrai*. Still, such naturalization of difference is not the same thing as scientific respectability. The continuation of racism does not put the scientific validity of Boas's anthropology in question; rather it reveals the limits of science's relation to social change. Boas's stance of upright and self-assured didacticism today seems thin. This does not mean that the discipline of anthropology has not created a body of knowledge (it has). It does mean, however, that the relation between anthropology's scientific achievements and their political and ethical consequences is more ambiguous and complex than Boasian humanism allowed.

Boas's understanding of modernity was naive. "Generally valid progress in social forms is intimately associated with advance in knowledge. It is based fundamentally on the recognition of a wider concept of humanity, and with it on the weakening of the conflicts between individual societies" (Boas 1928: 227–28). Woefully wrong as empirical predictions, such pronouncements exemplify a blindness about the imbrication of knowledge in the world. My intent is not to attack Boas. I believe he stands as an exemplary founding figure for American anthropology in its commitment to understanding otherness and defending pluralism as fundamental to the species as well as to modern democracy. My intent is simply, sixty years later, to point to a disaggregation of the scientific from the political and the ethical. My claim is that this disaggregation, this problematization, this detotalization, stands as a challenge to any thinker who wishes to remain within the tradition of the Enlightenment as a modern and not a countermodern.

AN UNBROTHERLY ARISTOCRACY

Max Weber, writing a decade before Boas, offered a more complex interpretation of the relations of truth, politics, and culture. Weber's insights into just how problematic these relations were becoming in the modern world provided him with a more precise and illuminating insight into just what sort of ethical beings we moderns were. His 1915 essay, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," is one of the darkest portraits of the place of Intellectuals, capital I, and Culture, capital C, within Modernity, capital M. In the essay, Weber outlines ideal types of the competing "spheres of value" (and there are more than the three that Jürgen Habermas [1984] has rationally reconstructed) as a contribution to "the sociology and typology of rationalism" (1915: 322). Weber's interpretations

The older group is overwhelmingly white and male; the younger includes a few more women; neither includes many representatives of what are currently designated as ethnic minorities.

Joan Vincent (personal communication, 1989) makes an important distinction between the profession and the discipline. The problems of reproduction of the profession, in its institutional dimension—especially at the larger and more prestigious universities—is my object here. Even at the professional level, of course, the current changes are taking diverse forms. Many smaller (often newer) anthropology departments are flourishing. Some of the older departments planned ahead or have already navigated this transition with some grace. I am speaking from a department that is in the throes of a distinctly less than graceful transition in social and cultural anthropology, and this no doubt situates my view of the matter. Clearly, one danger is to generalize too broadly from local conditions. Another is to conflate the transition pains of the profession with what to my mind is an exciting and diverse moment in the discipline. Again, as Joan Vincent and George Marcus (personal communication, 1989) rightly point out, the control of departments and the formation of new problematics are not the same thing.

This structural and demographic conjuncture forms an important background condition to current debates within the disciplines, but it does not predetermine their content. It seems fair to say that the intellectual programs which the Sputnik generation put on the agenda are now in question. Whether it is cognitive anthropology or symbolic anthropology or some other sort, it seems uncontroversial to say not that they have failed (as much serious work continues to be done in these subspecialties) but only that they have not lived up to the programmatic hopes that corresponded to (and were in part generated by) the myriad new departments, journals, training grants, foundation programs, and so forth, that were handed to those entering into the university system at that time. Messianism (or programmatic optimism) and structural expansion, while hardly reducible one to the other, are obviously not unrelated. Hence, while there is a plurality of research agendas today, none is dominant, none has produced the long-heralded normal science, none seems any longer to hold out the promise that each embraced twenty or thirty years ago for dramatic, sweeping, and sustainable change. This state of affairs clearly troubles some more than others.

I believe that some of the grumpiness, even virulence, observable in the field today is a function of this double conjuncture: the problem facing many of these sixty-year-old white males (and those of whatever gender or biological age who identify with them) is one of generativity. Having had every advantage available during the longest sustained period

of growth and prosperity that institutions of higher education have known, the question is open (both for them and for us) as to how to evaluate their contribution. In Erik Erikson's schema of the seven stages of life, the next-to-the-last stage is adulthood: generativity versus stagnation. Generativity "is the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation." It includes but encompasses productivity and creativity and is embodied in the virtue of care (Erikson 1950: 266–74). The last stage in Erikson's schema is maturity. We are not there yet.

Lest I be accused of "ageism," let me make clear that I believe such a demographic situation only makes probable a conjunctural crisis of generativity in the Eriksonian sense; it does not ensure any particular outcome. Those nearing the end of their careers can as well be mentors, selectively encouraging new trends in their field, as they can be a kind of colonial police, viewing the new trends and their representatives as dangerous and foreign ("barbarian," "irrationalist," "nihilist," "narcissist," etc., terms that are now replacing "idealist," "positivist," "soft," "hard," and the older, cold-war masculinist cluster of boundary-maintaining epithets), nostalgic for the good old days and vigilantly resentful of changing ways. Bruno Latour's maxim, "Irrationality is always an accusation made by someone building a network over someone else who stands in the way," might well be emblazoned above doorways throughout the groves of academe (1988b: 259). I am not talking about psychology here (although there is much to be said on that score). Rather I am simply identifying a disharmonious conjuncture of power relations and cultural form.

The importance of these tacit standards is highlighted when new groups seek entry into the system. The resistance to women in recent decades, to Jews in earlier periods (and in many ways today), and to minorities of all sorts today is in part a function of their simply not sharing the taken-for-granted skills and customs of the game which the old boys (a cultural term, not a biological one) learned in graduate school, conferences, hiring meetings, faculty meetings, football games, suburban homes, bars, and the rest of the environment that constitutes middle-class academic life. It requires a conscious act of self-analysis and will to overcome these dispositions, which one has spent so long inculcating; is it a surprise that so few make the effort?

TABLE MANNERS: MICROPRACTICES OF REPRODUCTION

Among the rites of initiation, sacralization, and socialization that abound in the elite circles of the American academy—all the more important and abundant for their very unselfconsciousness—one of the most crucial is the visit of the short-list candidate. Overdetermined, as are all such

examinations of what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as the dominated faction of the dominating class, the visit is an enactment and examination (in the Foucaultian sense) of “character,” the crucial indicator of eligibility for future collegiality. My aim here is not to present a comprehensive analysis of this set of cultural practices, but merely to bring it from background to foreground and thereby to make it more available for understanding and evaluation. Above all, my aim is *not* to claim that these evaluation procedures are Machiavellian; generally speaking they are rather the opposite: embodied and unselfconscious practices and dispositions that Bourdieu calls *habitus*. It is precisely their dispositional quality that makes them so hard to change. In discussions with colleagues in other fields, it has become clear that the form of the “visit” varies from one academic field to the next in the American academy. More ethnography would not be hard to compile, as we have all engaged in these practices.

Reversing Groucho Marx’s dictum that he would not want to belong to any club that would have him as a member, elite institutions, by definition, seek to hire someone worthy of themselves; and anyone they hire is, post factum, worthy of being a member of the club. It is the best who always choose the best from among the very best, since, in the final analysis, it is they who have the power of nomination in the twin sense of naming and choosing. Because what is at stake is distinction, and because there is a great security in older symbolic wealth, it is no accident that members of established elite institutions are vastly overrepresented on short lists at other older institutions. These obvious mechanisms of reproduction are particularly transparent in periods like ours (twenty-seven of Berkeley’s thirty faculty members are full professors, and all thirty have tenure). A survey of the American Anthropological Association’s *Guide* reveals that of the approximately 140 members of the Chicago, Berkeley, Harvard, Michigan, and Columbia departments, only two have degrees from universities below the top ten ranked departments (and their foreign equivalents)—one from Utah and one from Boston. To anyone familiar with the “pockets of stagnancy” found in these elite departments, any debate about meritocracy would be hard to take seriously except in sociological terms of the analysis of the mechanisms and practices of reproduction.

The situation is complicated by the fact that there is an awareness (sometimes acute, sometimes muted, but rarely a source of voluntary disqualification) that standards have changed during the last thirty years and the quantitative and qualitative demands for entry into the system are immeasurably higher now. Some of the severest critics and upholders of an often imaginary tradition will admit, if pressed, that they would never

make the grade by current rules. Others eagerly assume the mantle of the institution, claiming glory they themselves have neither created nor sustained. While this is always the way elite institutions work, there is a certain friability to these claims today. When intellectual arguments break down (or never begin), there is often an appeal to the institutional investment already made in programs whose scientific worth is no longer defensible—scientifically.

A candidate’s “work” is the ostensible site of the preliminary sorting performed by the search committee. It would be sociologically naive to say that the “work” is the only criterion invoked at this initial stage. Previously established reputation, placement in the contemporary cultural field, and advisers’ power are all practically inseparable from the work. (Three or four hundred candidates are not sorted by blind meritocratic principles that ignore other sources of symbolic capital and distinction; remember the outcry that occurred when the panels for the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association had to be submitted anonymously.) Nonetheless, credentials and production (the latter gains weight, obviously, the higher one is on the career ladder) have the most importance during the triage. Needless to say, when it comes to “work,” the author has not been problematized in anthropology.

The weight of the candidate’s work is downplayed, if not eliminated, in the final competition, exactly to the extent that there is consensus that the search committee has done its job well: by definition, all these candidates meet our standards or they would not be on our short list. Self-satisfying and self-justifying both for the individual department and the discipline as a whole (it would be scandalous for a major university to put a candidate from another major university on its short list who was not, at least post factum, worthy), such preselection, although certainly necessary for elite reproduction, is not sufficient to specify which of the elect will be chosen this time. The small group of candidates at the “senior,” “rising star,” and “entry” level who appear continuously on more than one short list affirms this pattern.

This self-affirming and largely predetermined consensus about eligibility leaves “character” as the definitive criteria to be deployed for the final selection. Confidential phone calls from chairs to chairs, and conversations over drinks at conferences, turn on whether so-and-so is “difficult,” “aggressive,” or “sexist,” three of the hardest labels to shake, particularly when the candidate is never given a chance to defend himself. Michele Lamont, a Québécoise sociologist, has observed that in contrast to the French hiring game, in the United States “being cultivated brings with it no advantages” (1988: 29). Rather, the key to success is the incorporation

of American norms: "initiative, self-confidence, independence, problem-solving activism, adjustment to institutional demands, organization, determination, motivation" (Lamont 1988:29). In correct proportions, a streak of Babbitry can also be an advantage.

When a short list is finally established, all that is left to examine is character (although battles over definition of subfields may well continue if the short list is sufficiently heterogeneous and there is only a thin consensus on the position's definition). A truly dreadful talk will, of course, be harmful to a candidate, but such a bad show can never be taken to indicate a fundamental deficit in the candidate's intellectual abilities—which, after all, have already been established as first rate by the search committee. Other causes are frequently assigned: an accident ("she seems jet-lagged," "the flu is terrible this year," "he's getting complacent"), or the revelation of a more deep-seated (aren't they always?) character flaw. We can see the truth of this hypothesis in the vocabulary available to downplay the cognitive or scientific content of the talk; it is bad form to dictate explicitly what anyone who is already in the charmed circle can say. The "work" has already partially assured that whatever is in the talk is more likely to be judged on other grounds.

What is read in the talk is the candidate's character: Did she choose the right talk to give? Will this person be a "good" colleague? How will she relate to students? (The solicitude displayed for the welfare of students is in remarkable contrast to its rather lower profile in ordinary circumstances.) Is she "difficult"? How will she "fit in" in the broadest sense? These qualities are often judged from the manner in which the candidate responds to questions. The repertory of performative moves would be worth ethnographic explanation. Not answering questions at all ("Gee, I hadn't thought of that") is catastrophic; aggressive comebacks are merely dangerous and can ultimately be advantageous; and flattery is usually safe. Evaluation is often cast in terms of teaching ability, the relevance of which is dubious to the extent that the context is so different in terms of power, stress, and a hundred other variables. But beyond teaching abilities—this is the ethnographic hypothesis—is found the character evaluation.

There is much to be said about the tour of offices. A foreign colleague observed that it was like visiting the State Department—first the China office, then Africa, India, and so forth. The degree of *adoubement*, or ritual respect, required depends on the rank and relative positions of those interviewing and those being interviewed. A delicate game consists of not presenting oneself as too knowledgeable or too critical or too sycophantic or too ignorant of the interviewers' work and status. The extent to which

this art of symbolic navigation is a product of class and status socialization is revealed and highlighted by the entry of newer minorities into the arena, who, while mastering in diverse ways the codes of the academic world, reveal through breakdown (not having been raised in these bodily, linguistic, and paralinguistic practices) how habitual the "docility" in its strict sense really is. This woman is "too aggressive," that ethnic minority is hypocritical in his compliments, the New Yorker is arrogant, and so forth. It is dangerous for the candidate or her supporters to point out these class- and status-based prejudgments to the old boys, who, proclaiming their perfect neutrality, will almost never engage on this ground. Ah, the WASP (membership relatively open to those of good character), as Jim Clifford (personal communication, 1988) points out, the most unmarked and hence most ethnic of ethnic groups.

Apparently not all disciplines engage in the "office visit." This could be perhaps explained by the anthropological disposition to have informants come for interviews and the reluctance of more "humane" disciplines to display their examinations in so direct and bureaucratic a manner; no doubt many other reasons could be given, and it would be worth exploring them. In some cases it is the candidate who sits in an office and is visited, and in others it is the candidate who is mobile and must improvise composure during the interruptions of phone calls and students' poking their heads in. What is this all about?

If the office round is tiring, at least the encounter is dyadic, and a simple enactment of signs of *hommage* usually suffices. In fact, it is the wisest thing to do. Candidates who overplay flattery, especially at the expense of other members of the department, are playing a dangerous game, forgetting that gossip is fueled by the recirculating of such talk. The game is more complicated and less easily mastered with students, whose habitus is less embodied but with whom the power risks are lower—because student power exists only to the extent that it is an element in faculty strategies, however tacit they may be. Student support is a potential plus, but when it is too fervent it is frequently seen as a mark against the candidate, for either it implies that current faculty-student relations are less than ideal, or else it is read as a mask for the tactics of another faction or as a "demagogic" character flaw in the candidate.

However important the "talk" and the office visits may be, the "dinner" (more so than the "lunch," in which drinking is usually controlled, daylight pours in, and other obligations press on hosts and guests alike) is perhaps the trickiest event to manage, as it is the one whose rules are the least explicit for either the candidate or the hosts. The dinner for the most prestigious of candidates must demonstrate the hosts' distinction (often

“the” French restaurant in town) or, in places like Berkeley or New York, with many such establishments, unusual ethnicity (food from a particularly obscure province of Thailand) or local renown or charm. The care taken in the choice must be obvious, or else made known to the candidate. The hosts may well be uncomfortable in such surroundings, given their more-than-frequently strapped budgets and often “militantly petit bourgeois” (the phrase is Leo Lowenthal’s) life-styles.

Having those who sit in judgment feel uncomfortable (perhaps revealing their own insecurities about how they would fare in these circumstances today, should they ever get as far as the interview) is dangerous for the candidate. The hosts’ discomfort can be indicated by nervous joking about the exoticism of the menu, which demonstrates their own “regular guy” status as well as the out-of-the-ordinariness of the event. (The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that “guy” means, among other things, “a person of grotesque appearance, especially with reference to dress.”) It is up to the candidate to manage this discomfort by showing her appreciation of the expense and distinction being displayed, as well as her own comfort and solidarity with the “regular guy” status she will be expected to assume. A candidate “too familiar” with such fare may not be the good colleague, the ordinary guy (in American “the guys” is gender neutral) that the boys are searching for; but too much discomfort or too much familiarity and ease with the hosts’ nervous joking is equally dangerous because it disparages the distinction of the restaurant and the event. Hence what is required is an uneasy deferral to others, indicative of a potential belonging but one that does not signal having already crossed the threshold of acceptance (which is often interpreted as a dangerous presumption and arrogance on the part of the candidate).

Amid the cascading nonsequiturs (discussions of traffic problems are a bad sign for the candidate, as they indicate that he or she has not yet succeeded in making the interviewers feel comfortable), the meal proceeds. Choices are tacitly posed: Should the candidate drink the wine or stick with a beer as some of the younger old boys are doing? Should she notice that a spouse is drinking coffee (the distinctive marker of American dining habits, aside from starting a meal with the salad) during the entire meal? (The Nobel Prize-winning French microbiologist, Francois Jacob [1988], recounts one of his first visits to America, when he was the speaker at a luncheon, and tells of his dismay, discomfort, and, finally, amusement at looking down the table during his talk at his colleagues eating their sandwiches and salads, as he attempted to eat his own food while answering questions from those finishing off dessert.) Then eventually, whether unannounced or staged, with the realization

that this is a serious event, someone shifts the talk to the profession or the person’s research. How to answer not too seriously but not too lightly becomes, often with dessert, the task. Energy flagging by this point: what’s a soul to do?

Simultaneously trivial and encompassing—indeed deriving much of their power from being labeled trivial—these micropractices provide, as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, ethnomethodology, and the new philosophy and sociology of science have demonstrated, a rich terrain to explore. An ethnography of doctoral examinations, tenure meetings, ad hoc committees, and a long list of other such institutionalized practices would, it seems evident, be worth examining in their own turn. The point of such inquiry would not only be to unmask Machiavellian tactics or blatantly partisan strategies, tasks for which we have other analytic tools, but to pose the constructive question of who we want to be. This proposal is not a political program, although it would certainly eventually have impact on power relations. Nor is it a question of positivists versus humanists; ethical questions are transverse to epistemological ones. It merely maintains that if we want ethical considerations to play a central role in the articulation of truth and power—and I think we do—then bringing such considerations into view is the necessary first step towards recognizing who we are today and setting out on the road to a better place. We have, after all, no right to despise the present.