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in which the mind speaks through the body, and the ways in which society is inscribed on the expectant canvas of human flesh” (1987, 10). From this perspective, the philosophical problem is not forcing together the mind and the body; it is taking them apart.

And body is the pivotal term here. Juxtaposed to “mind,” “body” takes on materiality; juxtaposed to “object,” “body” takes on subjectivity. The mind/body problem invents itself in its own terminology. The proper contrast is not mind/body but body-as-self/body-as-object. Materialization, like its occasional corollary, disembodiment, are both moves away from the embodied self. The body-as-object is only perverse when it is put forward as the natural order of the body, rather than as the specialized inflection imparted to it by, among other discourses, medicine. Commonly, in medicine, as in everyday life, when we become aware of our own materiality, what we are aware of is not the body as an object but the corporeality of the self. We are precipitated into our own skins, neatly embodied, acutely present in our own flesh.

CODA

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PERSPECTIVES ON
EMBODIMENT

To write the body.
Neither the skin, nor the muscles, nor the bones,
nor the nerves, but the rest: an awkward, fibrous,
shaggy raveled thing, a clown’s coat

—Roland Barthes

The root puzzle in ethnographic writing is how to get access to the Other. But the Other is a category invented by social scientists to create an opposition between us and our objects of analysis. They become inhabitants of another universe of discourse, one we not only observe but also fabricate. Rendered marginal, eccentric, strange, the Other constitutes the “outskirts of the familiar” in terms of which we define our own centrality (Natanson, 1970, 37). The category of the Other is conjured up to provide what Amy Shuman has called “the place for the unknown” (1990, pers. comm.). It is this invention of the category of the Other that makes access the root puzzle.

This marginalization of the Other permits the Bakhtinian gesture by which the marginal is recast as the low. We do not so much look at as look down on the Other. A hierarchy of discourses is instantiated. Sacred or aristocratic discourse is raised symbolically: purified, etherealized, and disembodied. This high discourse becomes the locus of privilege, power, and authority.

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to
persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. (Bakhtin 1985, 342)

By contrast, profane or vulgar discourse is symbolically lowered: degraded, materialized, corporealized. The low discourse becomes a source of ambiguity, contamination and outrage, a discourse Mikhal Bakhtin calls the grotesque.

The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity. (Bakhtin 1984, 21-22)

The relation between these discourses is akin to Hegel’s master/slave paradox (1967, 34–240). On the one hand, the master depends on the slave for the position of mastery. That position is wholly contingent on the existence of the slave. On the other hand, the master holds the slave in the position of slavery by force, foisting on the slave a position the slave neither conceives nor chooses. Hence the high discourse is at once dependent on the low and threatened by insurrection from the low.

The high discourse is a colonial discourse, designed to suppress, subjugate, and overcome the Other. It is a discourse of conquest. When a conquered population is incorporated into the social body of the conqueror, the residue of colonialism can survive not only in the social hierarchy but also in a linguistic one. The status of Latinate words over Anglo-Saxon in English, for instance, is presumably an aftermath of the Norman Conquest. In cultivating a Latinate vocabulary, scholarly language partakes of the authoritativeness of the conquerors.

The Other originally constructed by colonial discourse is the savage, the primitive, the native.¹ The terms transmute with the lineage of explorers, missionaries, anthropologists, and tourists (MacCannell 1990, 18). By virtue of this construction, we ourselves are constituted the civilized, the modern, or the scholar. These constructions make the relationship between the discourses of self and Other hierarchically estranged.

Where antithetical discourses are juxtaposed, the hierarchy can be disturbed. The disturbance consists of an assault by the low on the high, resulting in inversion, reversal, overthrowing, undermining, transgression. The high is brought down, overturned, mocked, abused, inmixed with the low. What Bakhtin calls a carnivalization of discourses occurs (1984, 17). The boundaries between discourses become blurred, fragments migrate across domains, through hierarchies. Words bear traces, carnivalesque encrustations, glimmers of their history (1985, 276).

Indeed, any concrete discourse . . . is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all of this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (Bakhtin 1985, 276)

There is at once a tension and a contagion among words, between words and their objects, and between words and their interpreters. “A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way” (Bakhtin 1985, 279). It takes, as David Richter puts it, the imprint of the Other (1986, 412).

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the border between oneself and the other. The word in language is half some else’s (Bakhtin 1985, 293)

The effort of an authoritative discourse is not only to repudiate the carnivalesque, to strip off the encrustations of words in the interest of a pure discourse, but at the same time to preserve the carnivalesque elsewhere as a lodgement for the category of the Other.

Ethnographic writing is explicitly constructed in order to get access to the Other. There are two difficulties with this construction. One is the estrangement of self from Other, ethnographer from native. The problem of access to the Other is in part an artifact of the invention of the category of the Other. The other difficulty is the resistance of the discourse to this estrangement. Despite its move in academics toward univocality, homoglossia, and monologism, discourse remains obdurately dialogic (Bakhtin 1985, 282). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White investigate “hierarchies of
high and low in the human body, psychic forms, geographical space and the social formation" (1986, 2). These discourses are entangled with each other. The perverse dialogism of words is reflected in the scandalous carnivalization of the body. What dialogism finally challenges is the category of the Other.

The dialogue in question here is between the ethnographer and other personae of the ethnographic text. These persons are constructed narratively, either by disclosing a trajectory that takes a narrative shape or by being enclosed in a trajectory given a narrative shape by the ethnographer. The resulting “self-narratives,” to use Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen’s term (1983, 255), subsume the identities of persons under the aesthetic conventions of narrative (Gergen and Gergen 1986, 3). These narrative selves take shape within forms of life the Gergens also characterize narratively as tragedy, comedy, or romance (1986, 8) or out of a more fundamental disposition Jerome Bruner conceives of as the “narrative mode of thought” (1986, 28). Listening to people tell stories about their lives, Bruner and his colleagues noted, “we discovered that we were listening to people in the act of constructing a longitudinal version of Self” (1990, 120). This supposed narrativity of the self warrants the turn in ethnographic writing toward the use of narrative devices to describe the Other. After all, the Gergens argue, “the fact that people believe they possess identities fundamentally depends on their capacity to relate fragmentary occurrences across temporal boundaries” (1983, 255). In adopting the devices of narrativity, the ethnographic enterprise takes its legitimation from the narrative habits of everyday life.

But the self is not a story, or not just a story. A person’s life may have an identity, and an identity of a narrative kind, but that identity is not the same as the person who has it. Richard Wollheim points out:

Indeed, many philosophers have been so preoccupied that they haven’t always noticed whether they were talking about a person and his identity or about a person’s life and its identity. They reveal this when they take what they have convinced themselves is a perfectly satisfactory unity-relation for a person’s life and re-employ it, without adjustment, as the criterion of identity for a person, and thus finish up with a view of a person as a collection of events spread over time, which cannot be right. (1984, 11)

Persons occur at a nexus of spatial as well as temporal phenomena. They cannot be reduced either to their status as objects extended in space or to their status as narratives extended in time. A person might express a narrative sense of self but the person still inheres at a point of intersection between that narration and the body. As Wollheim puts it, “living is an embodied mental process” (1984, 33). Bodies can be invoked as both source and site of discourses of the self. Stories are corporeal acts; the body gives rise to narratives. And bodies are themselves narrated, discursive, inscribed; stories give rise to the body. “Interrelatedness of event is supplemented by identity of person” (Wollheim 1984, 19).

Narrative presentations of self differ from narrative representations of the ethnographic Other specifically in respect of the body. Telling stories about one’s self expands aspects of a person already present in the flesh. The teller, as Erving Goffman describes it, exudes a second self (1974, 511–537) but one that alludes to or as well as distinguishes itself from its presenter. Writing about the Other, by contrast, constructs the presentation of a person to its narratable aspect. Narrative presentations of self might be held to evidence an impulse toward narrative thinking. Narrative representations of someone else, though, may merely impute narrative conventions to descriptions of persons. Narratives of the self taken out of their context of performance and narratives of the Other by social scientists suffer the same hiatus: an absence of the body. Consider, then, how ethnographic narratives conjure up persons, make bodies, flesh out a self, or body forth the mind of the Other.

Ethnographic writing characteristically presents discursive passages, in which the ethnographer establishes authority in virtue of command over the material, interspersed with scenes, in which the ethnographer guarantees authenticity by attesting to having been there in the flesh (Clifford 1983, 118, 128; Marcus and Cushman 1982, 29). These scenes, consisting of elaborations of settings, descriptions of persons, accounts of events, and passages of dialogue, are held to provide the opening in ethnographic writing for the voice, the presence, of the Other. Here the ethnographer is exscribed, the Other bodied forth.

The claim that such scenes constitute transparencies to another realm rides on the Aristotelian assumption that language imitates reality. But the sense in which language, or any of its parts or arrangements, has parity with reality, or any of its parts or arrangements, is, at the least, mysterious.
(Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 106–107). But there is a possible exception: dialogue. Arguably, written dialogue does mimic spoken dialogue. In it, discursive time elapses with real time so that something on the order of a one-to-one correspondence between text and world can be contrived. Indeed, on the Platonic argument, only dialogue is mimetic. There, the voice of the Other might become audible.

On the theory that scenes represent at least some aspects of realities, ethnographers set into their discursive writings occasional narrative evocations of the realm of the Other. Multiple realities are thereby fitted together like Chinese boxes: writings in a realm of discourse are held to be transparents to a realm of events for readers in a scholarly realm (see Marcus and Cushman 1982, 51). Thus Jean-François Lyotard writes, “an essentially realist epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for a subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it—projects a mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and truth itself” (1984, viii). Such scenes can then serve as keystones for an architecture of realistic description constructed around them (Marcus and Cushman 1982, 40–41). In describing the realm of medicine, the scene of a single medical examination might be played out (but see Marcus and Cushman 1982, 35).

The realm of the Other, however, is not constitutive of ethnographic writing but constituted by it. In the act of writing, I conjure up an alternate reality, one I then display to you as reader. The point of access to both the realm of discourse and the realm of events is writing: relationships between ethnographer and native are textualized as characters in a scene; relationships between writer and reader are textualized as narrator and narratee. A Goffmanesque twist turns up in the relationship between these realms: I-as-writer conjure up a realm which is inhabited by myself-as-character (1974, 512). But the imponderables of the ethnographic enterprise appear primarily in the relationship between the self-as-writer and the Other-as-character and secondarily between the self-as-writer and the Other-as-reader. The power of writer over character raises issues of biases, impressions, distortions, misrepresentations, elisions and elaborations, mistakes and inventions: issues, in respect of the relationship between ethnographer and native, of subjectivity; issues, in respect of the relationship between writer and reader, of fictionalization. Realistic writing is cunningly constructed to deflect imputations of fictionalization. Yet realistic writers appear naïve about the conventions they use to sustain an impression of objectivity.

Consider, then, the uses of narrativity in three scenes, each the examination of a woman's breasts by a male physician. The scenes are taken from transcriptions of audiotape and/or descriptions of observations of medical examinations. They bring together two discourses, a discourse of the self and a discourse of the Other, variously transmuted, interrupted, contaminated and encrusted by each other and by other discursive configurations. All claim access to the Other but each from a different angle.

**Scene 1**

**Realm:** Medicine.

**Scene:** The medical examination.

**Setting:** The doctor's waiting room, connected by a hall to his office and his examining room.

**Characters:** Dr. Silverberg, the internist; Mrs. Gillette, the patient.

((It is late afternoon. Mrs. Gillette sits alone in the waiting room. She is a tiny, slight old woman with a long equine face, crisp grey hair, and gnarled hands, the fingers bent at the tips. There has been some sort of a mix-up in the scheduling and she has been waiting all afternoon to see the doctor. As the scene opens, Dr. Silverberg comes out into the waiting room.))

**Dr. S:** Last but not least.

((With a slight bow, he sweeps open an arm toward the hall to his office. He is a thin middle-aged man with a narrow, dark head and fine features, closely cropped hair, glasses, and a serious look. He wears a white coat over a three-piece suit. On the way down the hall, they talk about Mrs. Gillette's son, Fred, whom the doctor knows. In the office, Dr. Silverberg settles Mrs. Gillette in an armchair across from his desk.))

**Dr. S:** How old are you.

**Mrs. G:** Ninety—

Oh seventy.

((She giggles. A slight air of disorientation attends her remarks.))
Dr. S: What can I do for you.
Mrs. G: My—(huh)
My doctor—
I have a doctor comes to my house every month ( ).
Dr. S: Yeah.
Mrs. G: Fred thinks he don’t come for anything.
Dr. S: O.K.
Mrs. G: And a windy day this was— a real windy day but I—
got severe pains in this chest.
((She describes her pains. As she speaks, Mrs. Gillette leans across the desk toward the doctor, resting one arm along
the arm of her chair and gesturing with the other, touching her body as she speaks of it. She has a fluttering birdlike
way of moving and a quick episodic style of speech. Dr. Silverberg finishes taking her history and then escorts her
down the hall to his examining room. This contains a high narrow examination table across from a medicine cabinet.
Next to the cabinet is a chair and at the head and foot of the examination table, two stools. The doctor directs Mrs.
Gillette to the chair and bands her a folded paper gown
from a drawer under the examination table.))
Dr. S: And I’d like you to take
everything off
and put this gown on so that it opens in the back.
All right?
Mrs. G: Umm.
Dr. S: And I’ll be back in just a minute.
((He leaves, closing the door behind him. When he comes
back, he knocks and opens the door. Mrs. Gillette jumps lightly up onto the examination table, carefully holding her gown closed at the back. Dr. Silverberg comes over to her and picks up her hands, turning them to inspect them.
He takes out an otoscope to check her ears, holding her head with one hand and the instrument with the other.
Then he dismantles the otoscope and mounts an ophthalmoscope on the same stem, touches the top of her head
with his left hand and directs the instrument in turn at her
left and right eyes, resting his right wrist on her left
shoulder. Putting the instrument away, he shifts his hold
to the back of her head and palpates the glands in the front
of her neck with the other. Then he perches up on the
table behind her to listen to her heart, his left hand, fully
open, holding the stethoscope against her back, his right
lightly holding the front of her shoulder. To examine her
chest, he steps down, takes hold of the back of the same
shoulder with his left hand, and has her lie down.))
Dr. S: Let me help you off with this.
((He draws the gown off her shoulders and down her arms
to expose her breasts.))
Mrs. G: (I’m a prude.)
Dr. S: And I’ll just examine carefully your breasts.
((As he leans over to examine her left breast, she jerks away,
curling up her left shoulder.))
Dr. S: Try to relax= I'll be as gentle as I can O.K.?
Mrs. G: O.K.
((He touches her left breast with the tips of his fingers. With
a perceptible effort, she holds her body still, the left
shoulder still curled with tension.))
Mrs. G: I fell on there— no wonder.
On the point of the banister.
((He moves his hands over to examine the unbruised right
breast.))
Mrs. G: Tripped.
((Now she is quite relaxed. A lump the size of a walnut is
visible between the doctor’s fingers under the papery skin
of her other breast.))

OBJECTIVITY

The conventions employed to construct ethnographic descriptions are at
root fictive (Marcus and Cushman 1982, 28–30). I shall investigate two
such conventions, perspective and voice, which Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan
distinguishes as who sees and who speaks (1984, 72). Perspective is the
locus in space from which the perceiver sees the events described and, by extension, the moment in time from which the perceiver unfolds those events. This locus can be external to the realm of events or internal to it and without or within the bodies of characters. Perceptual perspectives imply epistemological, emotional, and ideological ones (Rimmon-Kenan 1984, 71–82).

**Perspective**

Realistic writing tacks from its defining external anchorage to an unanchored perspective internal to the realm of events but external to the bodies of its characters, as if the perceiver had been lowered into the scene from an aerie above. From the external perspective, the realm of events appears as a microcosm of whose parts the perceiver has a simultaneous or panoramic view and of whose processes the perceiver has a transtemporal or atemporal awareness. The realm is seen from another space and time by a perceiver who has unrestricted access to its spaces and times, access not only to what transpires within the realm, but to what has transpired or will transpire beyond its boundaries. This perspective has been called in literary theory the bird’s eye or God’s eye view. The shift to an internal perspective moves the perceiving eye into the realm of events but without the bodies of characters and so that the perceiver floats omnipresently around what transpires there. This perspective restricts spatio-temporal perception to the horizons of the taleworld: spaces appear from a locus within the realm and time unfolds over the course of events.

In the description of the medical examination, the external perspective is initially established by the perceiver’s knowledge of the topography of waiting room, the doctor’s office and examining room, and, by implication, the topography of the hospital, the city, in short, the realm of events. The external temporal perspective is apparent in the perceiver’s knowledge of what has transpired in the afternoon before the scene occurs, of what will transpire in the scene before it does, and, presumably, what did transpire afterward. Knowledge is also external. Not only does it include local knowledge of the names, appearances, and statuses of the characters before they appear on the scene but also transcendent knowledge of the realm of medicine and its status in the realm of events. The perceiver’s emotional detachment from the scene indicates an external emotional perspective. Whatever flushes of feeling the characters experience do not affect the perceiver. Grasping the scene, as it were, from the outside or above grants the perceiver ideological superiority. The realm of medicine, however authoritative in its own right, is presented here as a realm whose ontological conditions can be transcended by its perceiver.

The scene shifts from an external perspective to an internal perspective from without the bodies of characters as it unfolds. The perceiver floats disembodied about the scene. From here, objects appear up close from various angles: the patient’s back, the glands of her neck, the top of her head. Spatial perspective is contained within the boundaries of the scene but is not otherwise restricted. Temporal perspective is characteristically contained by the scene and unfolded over the course of it. Events are represented in the order in which they transpire. Knowledge is acquired as the scene unfolds. Transcendent knowledge, emotional detachment, and ideological superiority are preserved so that the shift to close focus occurs without loss of objectivity. The ethnographer is inserted into the scene but invisible in it. To this extent, the internal perspective from without the bodies of characters can be regarded as an inflection of the external perspective, with a close rather than remote focus.

**Voice**

Voice is the conceptual locus of the narrator who describes the events. The narrator can speak from outside or inside the realm of events, loci distinguished by Gerard Genette as extradiachetic and intradiachetic, and can participate in the events or not, loci distinguished as homodiegetic or heterodiegetic (1983, 227–237). Narrative voice can be perceptible or imperceptible in the text and reliable or unreliable (Rimmon-Kenan 1984, 94–103). The convention in realistic writing is to have an extradiachetic, heterodiegetic narrator whose voice is imperceptible and reliable. The narrator speaks as an outsider of the inside of another realm, as an observer of events in which the Other participates. Speaking so separates self and Other, alienates, specifically, their voices. The objective voice is arrogated to the narrator; the subjective voice attributed to the Other. This strategy enhances the authority of the narrator at the same time that it enhances the authenticity of the native.

Narrative voice is barely perceptible in this text except in the act of
description. It is detectable in assessments of attributes of the scene: the air of disorientation, the quality of the holds, the appearance of tension or relaxation, and the like. Over the course of the scene even this slender narrative voice attenuates as the characters’ voices intensify. Imperceptibility in the text enhances the narrator’s claim to reliability since no intervening intelligence appears to skew description. The internal perspective and intradiegetic voice are embedded in this scene in the external perspective and extradiegetic voice so that omnipresence and detachment serve as the framework for close description.

From this complex of holds, objectivity emerges as a central concern in ethnographic writing. The self is decentered in order to center the Other. Bodily withdrawal from the realm of events or disembodiment in it are the marks of objectivity. Bodily withdrawal leaves behind the spoor of the voyeur: though the body vanishes, its perceptual apparatus, especially the eyes, remains. Ethnographic writing instantiates an invisible perceive in a visible world. The ethnographer sees what transpires between physician and patient, sees even the intimacies of the examination, without being seen, without materializing or appearing. By contrast, characters in the scene are staged figures, minutely and globally visible. The scene itself is opened, tilted, pivoted for inspection. In a visually constituted realm, the thrust of writing is to tell what the ethnographer has seen.

Authority

Perspective and voice are so connected in realistic writing that the external seer speaks in an extradiegetic voice; the extradiegetic speaker sees from an external perspective. The external perspective is understood to lie close to the narrating agent (Rimmon-Kenan 1984, 75). This positioning creates a tacit textual claim to transcendent authority. The characters are contained within a realm the narrator is placed outside of and to which the narrator is, by implication, superior. Privileged access coupled with transcendent knowledge engender a spurious omniscience. The etherealization of the body permits perfect apprehensions: no vagaries of the flesh confound perception. This suppression of the body is accompanied in realistic writing by suppression of the voice. No “marks of enunciation (i.e. the authorial first person)” (Marcus and Cushman 1982, 39) occur in the text. The text purports to become a transparency to the realm of events. Etherealization of the body and transparency of the text tie omniscience to objectivity.

Modalities of Perception

The primacy of vision, to adapt a phrase of James Clifford’s (1983, 125), is an aspect of objectivity: vision permits the most remote apprehensions, those in which the perceiver is least involved. Under the aegis of the visual, the body of the Other appears as an object: solid, impenetrable, worn, and worked on the surface, inflected by intermittent movements. The texture of Mrs. Gillette’s skin is visible, the flutter of her hands, the tuck of her shoulder, but not what animates these, the sensibility that flushes up under her skin and renders her gestures intelligible, making the tuck of her shoulder, for instance, a flinch (see Geertz 1973, 6-7).

The shift to an internal perspective permits a more proximate perception: hearing. Here, disembodiment leaves behind the ghost of the eavesdropper. As the perceiver moves into the realm of events, the voices of the Others become audible. From this perspective it is possible to catch what is said as well as what is seen. The perceiver begins to haunt the scene just in time to catch the physician’s opening line. Fragments of dialogue are suspended between groupings of bodies in space. The presumption of dialogue is that the ethnographer is positioned to overhear the unfolding of meaning between native interpreters. But temporal condensations and expansions occur: skips in the description where something has happened but nothing is textualized; interstices in the description in which something is textualized but nothing has happened. The act of representation becomes an act of interpretation.

The self without the body turns into the narrative voice. That voice can then objectively recount the discourse of the Others. In their discourse, a contrast appears between what Elliot Mishler calls the voice of medicine, used primarily by physicians, and the voice of the lifeworld, used primarily by patients (1984, 63). The contrast is ramifying but it turns on the assumption that the physician takes on an objective discourse whereas the patient retains a subjective involvement in the realm of the ordinary. The difference between voices is clear in this description in the contrast between the patient’s concern about the bruise on her left breast and the physician’s concern about the tumor in her right one. By speaking objec-
The narrative voice makes itself an analogue of the voice of medicine, implicitly heightening the priority of the physician’s perception over the patient’s. In aiming for objectivity, realistic writing can thus veer away from it.

The Primacy of the Visual

The suppression of narrative voice heightens the contrast between the self who sees and the Other who speaks. The realm of the audible is transfixed by the realm of the visible. The perspective of the ethnographer contains the voices of the characters. They themselves display no interiority, no subjectivities to which to connect their remarks, only visible objects from which they issue. So the remarks are stuck on, as it were, the wrong way round, tacked onto the outsides of the characters rather than issuing from within. As a consequence, there is no sense in the scene recounted of the production of meaning, rather of a witnessed mystery. The matrix of understandings which connects bodies to remarks is attenuated. Seen from without, the body of the Other is an opaque object to which subjective utterances are attached. An estrangement is created between the insides and outsides of characters, between mind and matter, self and body. The detachment of informing intentions from expressed remarks is a version of the mind/body problem: the problem of how to connect inner thoughts with outer acts. That problem is in part an artifact of the realistic convention. The convention thus dismantles itself: realistic writing makes it impossible to get access to the Other it purports to capture.

The Category of the Other

The congruence between see and speaker creates a seamless discourse through which the voices of characters erupt. This is the opening of realistic writing toward the Other. But the Other is represented as a character within a realm constituted by the ethnographer as writer. The narrator’s voice remains objective whereas the characters speak in their own voices, subject not only to the constraints of their realm but also to the constitutive disposition of its inscriber. Voices split: the subjective voices of natives become estranged from the objective voice of the narrator. This sequestering of voices is itself a claim to objectivity. Inset dialogues in which the characters speak are enclosed in a scholarly discourse which subsumes them. Native voices become exempli of themselves, displays, disclosures, devices of another agency: witness the reification in the text of assumptions of native subjectivity, narrative objectivity. Discursive grounds for native objectivity are undercut by the realistic convention. Herein lies the flaw in the presumption of dialogue: the unfolding of meaning between interpreters in one realm is itself unfolded by another interpreter in another realm. The characters’ discourse is captive discourse.

Disembodiment

If the subjective voice of the Other issues from an opaque body, the objective voice of the self inheres in a transparent periphrasis. The perceiver’s transparency takes the form of invisibility, inaudibility, and impalpability in the realm of events. Transparency permits bodiless intrusion into the scene. Characters appear to be unaccompanied in locations where the ethnographer was present (Rimmon-Kenan 1984, 95). The intruder is instantiated in the text as the omniscient narrator. The intent of this effacement of self is to eschew subjectivity; its effect is to disembody the ethnographer.

Alignment and Complicity

The evanescence of the ethnographer’s body might be regarded as suspect in realistic writing. A bit of trickery is taking place, a false implication that the ethnographer was not there, not impinging on the scene. But the adumbration of a narrating self out of this absent body is still legitimate. The act of narration can bypass the body and stand apart. The consequent estrangement of the ethnographer from the native permits the ethnographer’s alignment with the reader. “The narratee is, by definition,” Rimmon-Kenan writes, “situated at the same narrative level as the narrator” (1984, 104). Writer and reader are involved together in the production of a discourse. That discourse becomes the discourse of a discipline. The temptations of this alignment for the reader lie in the reader’s entanglement in its putative omniscience. The claims of realistic writing reiterate the claims of scholarly discourse.

The realm of events which contains natives becomes an enclave in schol-
arly discourse. That realm is not inhabited by natives and discovered by ethnographers, it is mutually constituted between native and ethnographer in fieldwork. In writing, the realm of events is not conveyed by writers to readers but again reconstituted between them. The constitution of a realm is always dialogic. As a writer in the realistic tradition, the ethnographer intrudes not only on a dialogue between natives but also on the dialogue among colleagues. The imprint of the Other in the text is as much the imprint of the narrative as it is the imprint of the native.

The disjunction of the perspective and voice of ethnographer and native in realistic writing permits the conjunction of the perspective and voice of writer and reader. This confluence of perspectives and voices blurs the boundaries between personae. The writing self becomes complicit with the reading other. In effect, I make myself you. Complicity aligns us as selves against the native as Other. Our withdrawal from the realm of events fabricates an absence in order to put forward a presence. The absence of the self purports to leave us in the presence of the Other. But the language of objectivity renders the Other an object, the interpreted for which we are interpreters. So what is it I implicate you in? I implicate you in the attempt to bring the Other here, under our eye, as specimen.

**Fictionalization**

The conventions of perspective and voice compose objectivity in ethnographic writing. To expose these conventions as fictive is to render realistic writing suspect, not because its claims are necessarily epistemologically unwarranted but because it partakes of the literary enterprise. In fabricating a scene, however, this hobnobbing with fictive conventions is inevitable: all scenes entail a perceiver-narrator from whose point of view the realm of events is described. In fabricating realistic discourse, the convention banishes the ethnographer from the scene to recur, disembodied, as the invisible perceiver, the omniscient narrator. Exposing this convention lays the discourse open to the specific suspicion that distortion has entered the ethnographic account in the way the writer constructs that account for the reader: the issue of fictionalization.

Two alignments are available to the ethnographer with respect to this discourse: an alignment with oneself-as-character and an alignment with oneself-as-writer. As character, the realm of events is rendered from an anchorage inside it, returning the self to the horizons of its experience of that realm. As writer, the realm is rendered from an anchorage outside it, in the realm of discourse. Both alignments are legitimate, and legitimate in the same way: by virtue of embodiment. The flaw, if there is one, in alignment with oneself-as-writer lies not in the bodily withdrawal or disembodiment of the ethnographer but in the constraints that positioning puts on access to the Other. One alternative is for the ethnographer to take up the other alignment, with oneself-as-character, in order to produce subjective discourse.

Shifting from objective to subjective discourse allays the suspicion of fictionalization by embodying the ethnographer in the realm of events. In subjective discourse, I align with myself-as-character. The warrant for doing so is the same as the warrant for aligning with myself-as-writer: embodiment. Only this alignment is with another body, not the one I inhere in now, here, but the one I inhaled in then, there. Access to that body is still problematic: it is not precisely my body but some permutation, aspect, or incarnation of my body which is lodged in the past.

**SCENE 2**

((The examining room is tiny, barely three times the width of its low narrow cot and twice the length. When Dr. English and I come in, Erica Weber is already sitting on the edge of the cot wearing a short white paper jacket that opens in the front and her trousers and shoes. I sit in a chair near the head of the cot. Dr. English sits in the chair beside it so that he and Ms. Weber are almost knee to knee.

Un ceremoniously, he says, "Let's take a look at it." As she starts to lift the jacket off, he takes hold of the outfolded corner of the shoulder of it with his fingertips, not touching her body. The jacket rustles slightly. Underneath, I see that Ms. Weber is wearing an ace bandage wound around her chest, very pale against her dark skin. She may be pregnant, she hasn't had a period in three months, though she has not yet taken a pregnancy test. I watch as Dr. English unclips the bandage and unwraps it, leaning around her back to gather it up. Her breasts are very dark, heavy and well shaped, set low with large black nipples. Above the right breast is a gauze bandage. Dr. English..."