LIFEWORLDS

ESSAYS IN EXISTENTIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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To Francine, with love

[Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs*] endowed the lowly social material of the proverb with an aesthetic, formal grandeur signaling its lofty philosophical importance, while the painting's vivid descriptions retained a representational grip on the proverb's common, comic types and situations. . . . His proverbs thus took on visually the quality of "natural law" so important in his art more generally. . . . On this universal level, the peasant works as an Everyman, as the figure of natural mankind whose folly pervades all social classes and groups. ROBERT BALDWIN, *LANGUAGE AND POWER IN BRUEGEL'S "NETHERLANDISH PROVERBS"*

There is a delicate form of empiricism that enters into such a close relationship with its object that it thereby becomes theory. The general and the particular converge: the particular is the general, made manifest under different conditions. JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE, "THOUGHTS ABOUT ART, ETHICS AND NATURE IN THE SPIRIT OF THE TRAVELERS," IN *WILHELM MEISTER'S JOURNEY-MAN YEARS, 1829*

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Preface

Life is in the transitions as much as in the terms connected. . . . We live prospectively as well as retrospectively.   WILLIAM JAMES, *ESSAYS IN RADICAL EMPIRICISM*[1]

In the mid-1980s, ethnography was under siege. The Writing Culture school had cast doubt on the empirical possibility of understanding others in their own terms, arguing that our supposedly transparent representations of other lifeworlds were largely artifacts of Western writing conventions and projections of Western worldviews.[2]

My personal life had also reached a critical juncture. Widowed and unemployed, I had nevertheless found unexpected fulfillment in my misfortune. My writing routine remained intact, I drew great satisfaction from my daughter's well-being, and every day I would go for a long run to a nearby mountain where I would rest among lichen-covered rocks and watch the winter sun sink into the distant Brindabellas. Strange to say that at this nadir of my life, my sense of life itself had never been sharper, more charged with hope. In *The Myth of Sisyphus,* Camus observes that happiness and the absurd are sons of the same earth. I now understood what he meant, for the gritty surface of the stone Sisyphus shoved uphill each day (only to have it tumble back to the foot of the hill each night) imparted to the toiler a sense of living his own life, of life being literally in his own hands. "His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. . . . Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world."[3] But while this acceptance of my circumstances was liberating, I hoped for a break from my intellectual solitude and penury. This came in 1987, in

the form of an invitation to attend a Symposium on African Folk Models and Their Application at Uppsala University in Sweden and to remain in Uppsala for ten days after the conference to give seminars and lectures. My Uppsala sojourn was a turning point for me and marked the beginning of my close relationship with Uppsala University and Scandinavian anthropology. Moreover, for the first time in my life I met and became friends with other Africanists, including René Devisch, Ivan Karp, Susan Reynolds Whyte, Paul Riesman, and Anita Jacobson-Widding, who, until then, had only been names to me.

At Uppsala I taught a class on William James's method of radical empiricism, arguing that the scope of anthropology could be enlarged not by compromising empirical method but by radicalizing it. Rather than perpetuate antinomies between self and other, observer and observed, body and mind, writing and world, reality and the imagination, or reason and emotion, we needed to explore the dialectic in human consciousness between the kinds of experiences such terms roughly designated. In this endeavor, however, we had to resist the allure of language, particularly our tendency to assume that the forms of our thought mirrored the constitution of the world. This emphasis on the relational and the transitive rather than substantives and intransitives underpinned the essays I had been publishing from the early 1970s—on embodiment, divination, myth and mortality, storytelling, metaphor, shape-shifting and witchcraft—essays that I now decided to bring together under the title *Paths toward a Clearing*. The deeper thematic of these essays reflected my experiences among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, where speech and action are understood as intersubjective rather than merely subjective modes of being, and agency is identified with one's capacity to generate, perpetuate, and celebrate life *as well as one's ability to stoically endure its hardships*. These themes are also articulated in Husserl's later work, where his concepts of "generative phenomenology" and "lifeworld" underscore the fact that we live *in* a world of intersubjective relationships, "directly conscious" and "plainly certain" of this experience before anything "is established scientifically, whether in physiology, psychology, or sociology" concerning its nature.[4] In adopting Husserl's concept of lifeworld, however, I did not want to fall into the trap of dividing naïve or natural attitudes from theorized worldviews but of exploring the indeterminate relationship between them.

The course of one's life, like the itinerary of one's thought, is marked by lucky breaks as well as tragic setbacks, by fortuitous encounters as well as missed opportunities. During my years of unemployment in Canberra, Australia, I had met Michael Herzfeld, who invited me to spend a few

days at Indiana University, Bloomington, on my way back to Australia from Sweden. Though I was oblivious to this at the time, Michael felt grateful for my friendship and support during the months he had spent in Canberra in 1985 as a visiting research fellow, and on his return to the United States he had begun exploring possibilities of bringing me to Indiana. In Bloomington, I gave a poetry reading and delivered the same talks I had given in Uppsala, unaware that I was being considered for a professorship. *Paths* was published in 1989, the same year I moved to Indiana and began the painfully slow process of readjusting to academia after years on the margins.

That my work reflects an unresolved tension between worldly and academic preoccupations is not simply because my professional career has been punctuated by periods away from academia; the tension was present during my undergraduate years as I moved from lecture halls and libraries to work on the waterfront or in factories, not only out of economic necessity but because of the deep discomfort I felt about the separation of the *vita contemplativa* from the *vita activa*.

The profession and practice of ethnography answered a personal need, providing a rhythm between absorption in the world of books and engagement in the world. Ethnography also opened my eyes to the many paths one may take in life to find a clearing, and brought me to an understanding that, for every cleared space, there are many false trails and dead ends. Heidegger's notion of clearing (*lichtung*) speaks to that which is continually being brought forth, given presence, revealed, or made apparent in the speech and actions of our everyday lives. For the Kuranko of northeast Sierra Leone, a forest clearing defines a space of sociality and moral personhood in the wilderness of the world. But many paths peter out or become blocked, and my work would become increasingly preoccupied by the crises and impasses in life—those gaps that the Greeks called *aporiai*, because there appears no way through the no-man's-land in which we sometimes find ourselves lost, no way of reconciling our impulse to grasp the world (cognitively, practically, or ritually) with our sense that the world is largely beyond our comprehension and control.[5] What I sought was a way of marrying philosophical skepticism and social hope—avoiding, on the one hand, the hubris that awaits us when we go beyond the limits of what we may know or the limits of what we may usefully do for the good of others, yet achieving, on the other hand, ways of thinking, writing, and acting that may make some positive difference to one *and* all.

Crucial to this search is learning to strike a balance between one's involvement in two kinds of lifeworld—the first intimate and immediate,

the second more abstract and remote. These two lifeworlds correspond roughly to what ancient Greek and Chinese thought distinguished as microcosm and macrocosm. The question as to how relations between these realms are to be managed conceptually, ethically, politically, and practically is also a pressing question for anthropology, which still struggles to integrate the highly particularistic, localized perspectives of ethnography (*ethnos*) with the generalizing ambition implied by the all-encompassing notion of humankind (*anthropos*).[6]

When I went to Central Australia to do fieldwork among the Warlpiri, this dialectic between the particular and the general was immediately brought to mind.

One thing that struck me time and time again during our early days in the desert, before my wife Francine and I fell in with Warlpiri and no longer had much time to ourselves, was how quickly the neutral and anonymous space of the world gets transformed into a place you think of as your own. You turn off a desert track, drive across spinifex, bumping over the rough ground toward a desert oak, stop the vehicle, get out, build a fire, boil a billy, lay out your swags, and within half an hour an area that had no prior or particularly personal associations begins to take on meanings that are uniquely yours. Everything you do and say and feel in that place intensifies this almost proprietal sense that you and the place are now inextricably linked. This transformation, whereby something we think of as impersonal and other—as an "it"—becomes something we experience as personal—as "ours"—is one of the miracles of human life. Millions of human beings share the same language, yet each and every individual will, at any given moment, be creating, within the parameters of a strict syntax, combinations and permutations of time-worn words that capture and communicate the phenomenological quiddity of things as he or she experiences them. The same is true of stories. The narrative forms known to humanity are finite and ubiquitous. Yet in the ways we adopt and engage with these master narratives, we communicate experiences that we feel are singularly our own. As for other human beings, we see them simply as faces in a crowd, as an anonymous mass, until we enter into dialogue with them. Forthwith a stranger suddenly possesses a voice, a history, a name—and what transpires between us may change our lives forever.

But what relevance did these ruminations have for understanding how Warlpiri experienced their world?

Where we might speak of human existence as a relationship between diametrically opposite domains—being and nothingness, order and chaos, self and other, or culture and nature—Warlpiri speak of an inter-

play between patency (*palka*) and latency (*lawa*). This is somewhat like the interplay in Maori thought between *tupu* (the unfolding or growing potentiality of every living thing) and *mate* (the process of weakening, sickening, or diminishing). Nothing is static or fixed in these lifeworlds; everything is waxing or waning, and as one life comes into being, another fades away. Identity thus emerges and lapses in accordance with a person's changing relationships with others and with the ancestral earth.

This interplay of *palka* and *lawa* in Warlpiri thought inspired new directions in my own thinking.

Palka means embodied in present time (*jalanguju palkalku*). *Lawa* means just the opposite. The words apply equally to the perpetual coming and going in Warlpiri social life and to the flux of things. Anything that has "body" is *palka*—a rock hole or river with water in it, the trunk of a tree, a person whose belly is full, country where game is plentiful, a person who is present. But if a rock hole is dry, a stomach is empty, tracks erased, or a person faints, falls asleep, goes away, or dies, then there is *lawa*, absence. *Palka* is that which is existent, the wherewithal of life, including people and possessions. By contrast, *lawa* connotes the loss of the persons and things that sustain one's life. Just as persons disperse then gradually come together again (*pina yani*), so ceremony can bring the ancestral order back into being, fleshing it out in the painting, song, and mimetic dance of the living. Giving birth to a child, singing up the country, or dancing the Dreaming into life are all modes of "bringing forth being" (*palka jarrimi*). And the passage from absence to presence is like the passage from night to day.

That which has been, however, always leaves a trace. And these traces are sometimes ancestral, sometimes personal, though these two domains flow imperceptibly and inevitably into one another. Thus, while the body of the land carries the imprint (*yirdi*) of ancestral journeys and epochal events, it also bears traces of the living as they move about upon it in the course of their lives. By the same token, every individual's body is the site of a similar merging of mythical and personal time. A man may reincarnate traits of a Dreaming ancestor, and his body will come to bear scars (*murru*), such as initiatory weals on the chest and "sorry" marks on the thighs that are manifestations of the Law. Yet everybody also carries idiosyncratic scars—from broken limbs, burns, fights, and aging—that recollect irregular and singular events. It is the same with names. A nickname commemorating some incident in one's life will complement the Dreaming name one inherits from an ancestor.

Warlpiri attitudes toward footprints nicely capture the ways in which the ancestral and the personal coalesce. After a death, the footprints of the

deceased are systematically erased from the earth. Groups of kinswomen, their foreheads, cheeks, upper arms, and breasts caked with wood ash and kaolin, move through the settlement trailing wilted branches of eucalypt, "clearing" away the footprints of the deceased, rubbing out every trace of his or her presence. In this way, the dead lose their singular identity and enter ancestral time as spirits.

Footprints are also crucial to respecting the Law in everyday life. "I could not go to my brother's camp," Jerry Jangala reminisced, "because his wife might be there. If I wanted to see my brother, we would have to meet somewhere else. I wasn't even allowed to cross my brother's wife's tracks, first I would have to wipe them out with my foot and only then I could go on. And if my brother would see his wife's tracks and mine going in the same direction, there would be a big fight, I would not be able to convince him I hadn't even seen his wife."[7]

Finally, footprints are studied for the insights they give into events that have taken place in one's absence. Michael Terry describes this nicely, if Eurocentrically (for Aboriginals are less interested in identifying a person from his or her prints than with gleaning information about the actions and events in which that person was involved): "An old Aboriginal recently saw some human footprints on a patch of sand near the Alice Springs railway station. He looked at the tracks intently, scratched his head and said, 'Michael Terry's in town.' There would have been nothing remarkable about that but for one thing: the Aboriginal had not seen my tracks for twenty-five years."[8]

Michael Terry goes on to describe the idiosyncratic character of his footprints—the result of a habit of dragging his left foot slightly, which left a thin trail in the sand on the outside of the heel. Men's prints differ from women's in similarly subtle ways. Men's toes lie flat and are extended; women's toes are gathered more, and women leave an inswept imprint behind the ball of the foot as a result of carrying loads and having, as a result, flattened arches. Old men have flatter and more even prints; younger men are more sprightly and step more on the toes.

Aboriginal people also track the imprint of tires on dusty desert roads as assiduously as they track human footprints, pointing out that although all tires appear alike to the unobservant eye, each has an idiosyncratic tread and unique pattern of wear and tear that make it readily identifiable as belonging to a particular vehicle, a particular person.

Observations and experiences like these have reinforced my view that anthropology must deploy a double perspective that encompasses particular situations—local, familial, and personal—*and* general conditions—global, national, cosmopolitan, historical, and human. The chapters in

this book are attempts to realize this vision, as well as to chronicle one person's ethnographic journeys and the reflections these inspired. For without my intellectual forebears, my family, the people that received me, a stranger, into their lifeworlds, and the friendships formed in fieldwork, these transient testimonies would never have existed, and though they, like other human testimonies, will inevitably disappear, the life against which their worth may be measured and to which they pay homage will remain for others, who, in their turn, will seek their own paths toward a clearing.

Lifeworlds

The Scope of Existential Anthropology

You should not try to find whether an idea is just or correct. You should look for a completely different idea, elsewhere, in another area, so that something passes between the two which is neither one nor the other.

GILLES DELEUZE, *DIALOGUES*[1]

Like other human sciences, anthropology has drawn inspiration from many disciplines and sought to build its identity through association with them. But the positivism that anthropology hoped to derive from the natural sciences proved to be as elusive as the authenticity it sought from the humanities. Moreover, though lip service was paid to the models and methods of biology, ecology, psychology, fluid mechanics, structural linguistics, topology, quantum mechanics, mathematics, economics, and general systems theory, anthropologists seldom deployed these *analytically or systematically*. Rather, they were adopted as images and metaphors.[2] Thus, society was said to function like a living organism, regulate energy like a machine, to be structured like language, organized like a corporation, comparable to a person, or open to interpretation like a text.

   Anthropology also sought definition in delimitation. In the same way that societies protect their identities and territories by excluding persons and proclivities that are perceived as threats, so discursive regimes seek definition by discounting experiences that allegedly lie outside their purview. In the establishment of anthropology as a science of the social or the cultural, entire domains of human experience were

occluded or assigned to other disciplines, most notably the lived body, the life of the senses, ethics and the imagination, the emotions, materiality and technology. Subjectivity was conflated with roles, rules, routines, and rituals. Individual variations were seen as deviations from the norm. Contingency was played down. Collective representations determined the real. Experience was deduced from creeds, charters, and cosmologies. And just as the natural sciences created the appearance of objectivity through specialized, analytical language, so the social sciences cultivated an image of objectivity by reducing persons to functions and identities: individuals filled roles, fulfilled obligations, followed rules, performed rituals, and internalized beliefs. As such, persons were depicted one-dimensionally, their lives little more than allegories and instantiations of political, historical, or social processes. To all intents and purposes, society alone defined the good, and human beings were slaves to this transcendent ideality.

That these sociological reductions could gain currency undoubtedly reflected a Western tradition of the scholar as hierophant or seer—someone possessing extraordinary powers of understanding, an expert able to solve problems and explain mysteries by reference to factors or forces beyond our ordinary or vernacular grasp. Invoking the supposedly higher powers of reason and logic, the intellectual saw his or her task as the discovery of hidden causes, motives, and meanings. Paul Ricoeur characterizes this tradition as a "school of suspicion." In the work of the three great "masters of suspicion"—Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—consciousness is mostly false consciousness. By implication, the truth about our thoughts, feelings, and actions is inaccessible to the conscious mind and can only be brought to light by experts in interpretation and deciphering.[3] Although Henry Ellenberger traces this "unmasking trend" back to the seventeenth-century French moralists, it finds ubiquitous expression in the suspicion that "true reality is never the most obvious, and that the nature of truth is already indicated by the care it takes to remain elusive."[4]

To what extent, however, was this quest for analytical coherence, narrative closure, or systematic knowledge a reflection of the intellectual's anxiety at the mysteries, confusions, and contingencies of life, or the need to acquire a professional facade with which to advance a career? Could language and thought ever fully capture, cover, or contain the wealth of human experience, or hope to mirror the thing-in-itself? Curiously enough, the critique of this alienated view of human existence came not from within the social sciences but from philosophy. In the pragmatism of William James and John Dewey, the critical theory of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, the existenz philosophies of Martin

Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and Hannah Arendt, the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson, and the existential-phenomenological thought of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—to mention only those thinkers in relation to whom I developed my own lebensphilosophie—five themes prevail. First, the relational character of human existence that Heidegger called being-in-the-world (*Dasein*). As the hyphens suggest, our own world (*eigenwelt*) is inextricably tied up with the world of others (*mitwelt*) and the physical environment of which we are also vitally a part (*umwelt*). Husserl used the term "intersubjectivity" to capture the sense in which we, as individual subjects, live intentionally or in tension with others as well as with a world that comprises techniques, traditions, ideas, and nonhuman things. By implication, our relationships with the world of others and the world around are relations of inter-est, that is, they are modes of inter-existence, informed by a struggle for the wherewithal for life. We are, therefore, not stable or set pieces, with established and immutable essences, destinies, or identities; we are constantly changing, formed and reformed, in the course of our relationships with others and our struggle for whatever helps us sustain and find fulfillment in life. That these relationships are dynamic and problematic is self-evident: life resources—whether wealth or water, food or finery—are scarce, and what enriches one may cause the impoverishment of another, and what gives life to one may spell the death of another.

The term "intersubjectivity"—or what Hannah Arendt calls "the subjective in-between"—shifts our emphasis away from notions of *the* person, *the* self, or *the* subject as having a stable character and abiding essence, and invites us to explore the subtle negotiations and alterations of subjective experience as we interact with one another, intervocally or dialogically (in conversation or confrontation), intercorporeally (in dancing, moving, fighting, or competing), and introceptively (in getting what we call a sense of the other's intentions, frame of mind, or worldview). But several important provisos must be made. First, intersubjectivity is not a synonym for empathy or fellow feeling, since it covers relations that are harmonious and disharmonious, peaceable and violent. Second, intersubjectivity may be used of relations between persons *and* things, since things are often imagined to be social actors, with minds of their own, and persons are often treated as though they were mere things. Third, intersubjectivity implies both fixed and fluid aspects, which is to say that one's sense of participation in the lives of others never completely eclipses a sense of oneself as an autonomous subject. In William James's terms, consciousness constantly oscillates between intransitive and transitive extremes, like a bird that is sometimes perched or nesting,

and sometimes on the wing.[5] A theory of consciousness that singled out the intransitive and downplayed the transitive—or vice versa—would be as absurd as a theory of birds that emphasized perching or nesting and failed to mention flight. Fourth, the intersubjective must be considered in relation to the intrapsychic, since we cannot fully understand the nature of social interactions without understanding what is going on in an actor's mind—that is to say, intrapsychically. If we are to have a science of relationality, we therefore need to complement a sociological perspective with a psychological one. We need to consider the co-presence of a sense of ourselves as singular and a sense of ourselves as social, of ourselves as having an enduring form and as being susceptible to transformation.

A second major theme in existential anthropology concerns the ambiguity of the term "subject," since the notion of an individual subject—self or other—entails a more abstract, discursive notion of subject, as in the phrases, "My subject is anthropology" or "I am a New Zealand subject." To cite Adorno, "Neither one can exist without the other, the particular only as determined and thus universal, the universal only as the determination of a particular and thus itself particular. Both of them are and are not. This is one of the strongest motives of a nonidealist dialectics."[6] Accordingly, any social microcosm (e.g., a circle of friends, a family, a small community) has to be understood in relation to the cultural, linguistic, historical, geopolitical, or global macrocosm in which it is embedded.[7] But neither the personal nor the political, the particular or the abstract, senses of "subjectivity" can be postulated as prior. They are mutually arising; each is the condition of the possibility of the other—which is why international relations, like abstract relations in philosophy, not only have recourse to metaphors of interpersonal life but are actually conducted in intersubjective terms, while interpersonal life is reciprocally shaped by the transpersonal and impersonal structures of the polis.

Third, our humanity is at once shared and singular. This paradox of plurality means that we both identify with others and differentiate ourselves from them. Although "the expression 'particular person' requires the concept of species simply in order to be meaningful,"[8] the particular person cannot be "disappeared" into a discursive category without violence. Identity connotes both *idem* (being identical or the same) and *ipse* (being self in contrast to other).[9] Accordingly, human beings seek individuation and autonomy as much as they seek union and connection with others. As Otto Rank observed, we possess both a will to separate and a will to unite. Consequently, we continually find ourselves on the cusp of the impossible: "Man . . . wants to lose his isolation and keep it at the same time. He can't stand the sense of separateness, and yet he

can't allow the complete suffocation of his vitality. He wants to expand by merging with the powerful beyond that transcends him, yet he wants while merging with it to remain individual and aloof."[10]

A fourth theme is that the meaning of any human life cannot be reduced to the conceptual language with which we render it intelligible or manageable. Against the grain of much European philosophy, being and thought are *not* assumed to be identical. As Dewey put it, "What is really 'in' experience extends much further than that which at any time is *known*."[11] Adorno's negative dialectics echo the same idea: "Represented in the inmost cell of thought is that which is unlike thought."[12] If I prefer the term "lifeworld" to "culture" or "society," it is because I want to capture this sense of a social field as a force field (*kraftfeld*), a constellation of both ideas and passions, moral norms and ethical dilemmas, the tried and true as well as the unprecedented, a field charged with vitality and animated by struggle.[13] Even more urgently, Adorno's concept of nonidentity helps liberate anthropology from one of its most persistent fallacies, namely, the tendency to presuppose an isomorphic relation between words and world, or between experience and episteme. Even with the best will in the world, human beings seldom speak their minds or say exactly what is in their hearts. Rather, we express what is in our best *interests*, both personal and interpersonal. German critical theory and psychoanalysis caution us not to infer subjective experience directly from verbal accounts, collective representations, or conventional wisdom. Yet anthropologists often claim that a peoples' shared symbols and vernacular images are windows onto their inner experience, so that the claim that persons share their humanity with animal familiars or doubles, or that stones are animate, may be taken literally. But no one in his or her right mind experiences the extrahuman world as permanently human or intrinsically animate. It would be impossible to apply oneself to the everyday tasks of cooking food, raising children, or making a farm if one confused self and other, or experienced one's being as diffused into the being of the world at large. Among the Ojibwa, for example, there is an implicit category distinction in the language between animate and inanimate. Although stone, thunder, and objects such as kettles and pipes are grammatically animate and Ojibwa sometimes speak of stones as if they were persons, this does not mean that Ojibwa are animists "in the sense that they *dogmatically* attribute living souls to inanimate objects such as stone"; rather they recognize "potentialities for animation in certain classes of objects under certain circumstances. The Ojibwa do not perceives stones, in general, as animate, any more than we do."[14] Among the Kuranko, it is axiomatic that will and consciousness are not limited to

human beings, but distributed beyond the world of persons, and potentially found in totemic animals, fetishes, and even plants. The attributes of moral personhood (*morgoye*) may indeed be exemplified in the behavior of totemic animals, divinities, and the dead, while antisocial people may lose their personhood entirely, becoming like broken vessels or ruined houses. In other words, being is not necessarily limited to human being.[15] But this is a *human* projection, a *human* understanding. And it is a potential state of affairs, not an actual or inevitable one. Thus, in chapter 5 I describe an ambitious but disappointed individual who invokes the power of his clan totem, the elephant, to imagine himself transformed into a person of real presence and power. This experiential transformation is episodic, illusory, and by no means common—despite its logical possibility, since Kuranko posit permeable boundaries between human and animal, town and bush, subject and object. But even Kuranko do not conflate epistemologies (that which is spelled out in knowledge claims about the nature of the world) and ontologies (ways in which people actually experience their being-in-the-world). As a Kuranko adage succinctly puts it, the word "fire" cannot burn down a house.

Fifth, human existence involves a *dynamic relationship between* how we are constituted and how we constitute ourselves, between what is already *there* in the world into which we are born and what emerges in the course of our lives within that world. That both anthropology and psychology are sciences of human relationships—intrapsychic as well as intersubjective—undermines the positivist claims sometimes made for them, since the meanings and experiences that emerge in the course of any human interaction, conversation, or life history go beyond the *relata* involved. Although we may identify such *relata* as individual persons, named groups, or specific events and consider them stable over time, our knowledge of them always reflects our changing relation to them. Werner Heisenberg called this the uncertainty principle. What we know of the world depends on how we interact with it. Our methods and personalities alter and partially constitute the nature of what we observe. "We can no longer speak of the behavior of the particle independently of the process of observation. As a final consequence, the natural laws formulated mathematically in quantum theory no longer deal with the elementary particles themselves *but with our knowledge of them*."[16] Since what transpires in the transitional space *between* persons is always, in some sense, unpredictable and new, one can never reduce the meaning of a human life to the conditions of its possibility *or* to the retrospective account of that life that a person or group of persons may render as story, analysis or commentary. To echo Sartre, a person always makes some-

thing of what he or she is made. And this defines our freedom: "the small movement which makes a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what his conditioning has given him."[17] Although we may identify certain factors in our history, our genes, our class, or our culture that determine the limits of our human potentiality, there are always turning points, fortuitous encounters, epigenetic factors, and fateful events that just as forcefully impact upon the ways in which latent possibilities are or are not realized.

Given these considerations, the focus of existential anthropology is the paradox of plurality and the ambiguity of intersubjective life. Although we exist as both singular beings and participants in wider fields of being that encompass other people, material things, and abstractions, our relations with ourselves and with others are uncertain, constantly changing, and subject to endless negotiation. Accordingly, calls for sinking our differences and fostering universal equality are utopian ideals. As Adorno notes, the realization of universality as a permanent and unitary state can only be accomplished through the violent ironing out of differences. By contrast, an emancipated society is one that achieves coexistence in difference.[18]

Ethnographic Method and the Philosophical Turn

While philosophy continues to address Kant's question about what it means to be human, ethnography provides one of the most edifying methods for exploring Kant's preoccupation with the relation between what is given (a priori) and what is chosen in human life—what is predetermined by nature or nurture, what emerges from experience, and what lies within our power to decide, to know, to do, or to be.[19] What separates us from Kant's anthropology, however, is a commitment to explore *empirically* the lived experience of actual people in everyday situations before venturing suggestions as to what human beings may have in common, irrespective of their personal, cultural, or religious circumstances. As Veena Das puts it, our goal is "not some kind of ascent into the transcendent but a descent into everyday life" that implies a refusal to place ourselves above others through the repression of their voices or views and the privileging of our own.[20]

The history of anthropology's engagement with philosophy from the eighteenth century is yet to be written. But as Robert Orsi observes, in religious scholarship and intellectual history alike, "people's lives are always there, in one way or another. This is true even when the matters we

are thinking about are huge and abstract. . . . *There are always lives within our ideas.*"[21]

Let me explore this proposition autobiographically, indicating why I turned to philosophy in my determination to do justice to my fieldwork experiences in Sierra Leone and Aboriginal Australia over a forty-year period.

Rendering an account of one's own intellectual history is fraught with difficulties. One is seldom in a position to comprehend the meaning of one's work any more than one is able to sum up the meaning of one's life. One's current work is too close to examine with much critical clarity, and one's early work is so distant that one is a stranger to it. But of one thing I am certain: for reasons I cannot fully fathom I embraced from an early age the view captured in Terence's famous dictum, *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto* (I am a man, I consider nothing that is human alien to me). Moreover, I felt I could not make this dictum my own unless I was prepared to test it in the real world. In George Devereux's psycho-analytic anthropology I would subsequently find scientific arguments for the psychic unity of humankind—the assumption that if anthropologists were to "draw up a complete list of all types of cultural behavior, this list would overlap, point by point, with a similarly complete list of impulses, wishes, fantasies, etc., obtained by psychoanalysts in a clinical setting," implying that "each person is a complete specimen of Man and each society a complete specimen of Society."[22]

That I was drawn to ethnography was because it licensed the kind of controlled experimentation on myself that might enlarge my under-standing of what it means to be human. Ethnography throws one into a world where one cannot be entirely oneself, where one is estranged from the ways of acting and thinking that sustain one's accustomed sense of identity. This emotional, intellectual, social, and sensory displacement can be so destabilizing that one has to fight the impulse to run for cover, to retrieve the sense of groundedness one has lost. But it can also be a window of opportunity, a way of understanding oneself from the stand-point of another, or from elsewhere.

This is not to imply that one can enter completely into the lifeworld of others, standing in their shoes, as we say. Nor does it imply the possibility of ever understanding *the* human, since that would require a compre-hensive knowledge of how the world has appeared to everyone who lives and has ever lived. Ethnographic understanding simply means that one may glimpse oneself as one might be or might have been *under other cir-cumstances*, and come to the realization that knowledge and identity are emergent properties of the unstable relationship between self and other,

here and there, now and then, and not fixed and final truths that one has been privileged to possess by virtue of living in one particular society at one particular moment in history.

Although I agree with Kenelm Burridge's definition of the goal of ethnography as metanoia—"an on-going series of transformations each one of which alters the predicates of being"[23]—few people are likely to ponder their own worldview as it appears from the standpoint of another unless circumstances compel them to. In reality, understanding is usually a result of *enforced* displacement, of crises that wrench a person out of his or her habitual routines of thought and behavior, rather than a product of philosophical choice or idle curiosity. Understanding others requires more than an intellectual movement from one's own position to theirs; it involves physical upheaval, psychological turmoil, and moral confusion. This is why suffering is an inescapable concomitant of understanding—the loss of the illusion that one's own particular worldview holds true for everyone, the pain of seeing in the face and gestures of a stranger the invalidation of oneself. And it is precisely because such hazards and symbolic deaths are the cost of going beyond the borders of the local world that we complacently regard as the measure of *the* world that most human beings resist seeking to know others as they know themselves. By this same token, we find the most striking examples of how human beings suffer and struggle with the project of enlarging their understanding in those parts of the world where deterritorialization has become an unavoidable condition of existence. It is here, in what Jaspers called border situations (*grenzsituationen*), rather than in European salons and seminar rooms, that we may recognize and be reconciled to the painful truth that the human world constitutes our common ground, our shared heritage, *not as a place of comfortably consistent unity but as a site of contingency, difference, and struggle.*

What, then, is the value of exchanging comfort for hardship, of trying to see the world from the vantage point of others? Hermes, the patron of thieves, traders, travelers, and heralds, is also an obvious candidate for patron saint of ethnography, since he stands on the border or at the crossroads between quite different countries of the mind.[24] But what message is born of his transgression and trickery? First, that oracular wisdom requires unsettling and questioning what we customarily take for granted or consider true. As a corollary, cultivating an ironic distance from our own conventional wisdom helps prevent the arrogance of seeing all contrary views as false and all dissenters as threats. Second, is the value of doubt, for it is through the loss of firm belief that one stands to gain a sense of belonging to a pluralistic world whose horizons are open—a world in

which no one has the right to exercise power in the name of what he or she considers to be true and good, a world in which differences are no longer seen as obstacles to overcome but aporias to be accepted.

First Fieldwork

As I try to recall my frame of mind as I embarked on my first fieldwork in northern Sierra Leone in 1969, I think of Michel Foucault's comments about the kinds of experience required of us if we are to know ourselves and the world from a novel vantage point rather than simply legitimate what is already known.[25] Such experiences entail both the disinterested inquiry (*l'enquête*) of Enlightenment science and the painful initiation (*l'épreuve*) of traditional education.[26] But this juxtaposition of intellectual detachment and psycho-physical turmoil not only characterizes the ethnographic method of participant observation; it is found in the life-worlds in which we do our fieldwork. In the opening pages of my Ph.D. thesis, I describe my frustrations with the structural-functional models that dominated British social anthropology at the time I was writing.[27] During a year's fieldwork in northern Sierra Leone, I had spent hundreds of hours attending storytelling sessions in Kuranko villages and been astonished by the ways in which these Rabelaisian tales confounded and critiqued normative Kuranko conceptions of gender relations, rank order, and power hierarchies. I had observed what Max Gluckman called "the license in ritual"[28]—women donning male attire during female initiation ceremonies, imitating male roles, and channeling "male" powers. I had listened with both fascination and exasperation to the interminable gossip and palaver that characterized everyday life in a Kuranko village, when some trivial dispute or conflict of interests is made a pretext for vehement debate, allowing people to act as if the world were not a closed book but open to interpretation. I had recorded the ritualized banter between joking partners and been arrested by the scatological and irreverent character of these exchanges. I had seen passions overrule better judgment, in illicit love affairs, unresolved grievances, and violent fantasies. I had witnessed the tensions between secular rulers and the masters of cults who, drawing on the wild powers of bush spirits rather than genealogical legitimacy, could challenge their chiefs. In witchcraft confessions and dreams I had glimpsed the wilder shores of the social imagination. By participating in divinatory séances as well as observing diviners at work, I had seen how the domain of the uncanny, of the penumbral, mediated new understandings of the mundane and helped

people act on situations that had brought them to the limits of their comprehension and control. And by sitting for hours at moots and court hearings I saw how disputes were resolved and impasses overcome, not through some slavish application of ancestral law but through subtle negotiations that respected age-old protocols as well as the unique circumstances of each case. Finally, I saw that kinship and marriage—a social field that anthropologists had studied systematically as a rule-governed domain—could not be reduced to either phylogeny or ontogeny but required an existential approach that took into account the ambivalence in primary bonds, the negotiability of kinship relations, and affinities and enmities that could not be explained by nature or nurture. That kinship ties were dependent on a phylogenetic capacity for attachment *and* on moral, legal, or political conceptualizations that were socially constructed was more or less obvious. Less apparent, however, was the course of a relationship over time. For this meant tracing complex influences and adventitious events over several generations, as well as knowing the myriad details that make up a single human life—something that no anthropologist could hope to do. It was nevertheless clear to me that bonds were shaped and changed in the course of coexistence—raising children; producing, preparing, and sharing food; working with others for a common goal or common cause; or simply suffering and enduring life together. And just as certain circumstances resulted in a sense of solidarity, others—such as a scarcity of food or disaffection, competition over limited goods, separation and migration—imperiled even the closest ties.

These experiences of the negotiability and mutability of social relations turned my attention from groups, polities, and categories—whether conceptual or sociocultural—to the ritualized dynamics and micropolitics of interpersonal relations in everyday life. An anthropology that focused on the social order, and how it was constructed, reproduced, and reinforced by beliefs and rituals, could not do justice to the strategic, idiosyncratic, and variable phenomena I had observed. Nor could it explain the antinomian impulse to create disorder, flout routine, transgress boundaries, and tap into the forces of the wild as if these were actually necessary, not inimical to, the viability and integrity of an individual life or a moral community.

Although some anthropologists had broached the antinomian as an issue to be explained,[29] I disagreed with the assumption that antistructure was necessarily contributory to structure. Moreover, while social phenomenologists like Alfred Schutz, Thomas Luckmann, and Peter Berger ("Society . . . has no being, no reality, apart from . . . acting human

beings")[30] explored the dialectics of internalization–externalization, I failed to find in their work a satisfactory explanation for the *indeterminate* relationship between the world that ostensibly shapes us and the persons we actually become. In short, I was beginning to see that a strictly sociological perspective had to be complemented with an existential perspective that encompassed the role of contingency, playfulness, unpredictability, mystery, and emotion in human life as well as acknowledging that human beings are motivated not only by a desire to construct social worlds in which they can find a sense of security, solidarity, belonging, recognition, and love but by a desire to possess a sense of themselves as actors and initiators. Indeed, without this sense of oneself as an agent, the social world could not exist.[31]

My first question was whether West African thought provided any evidence of this double perspective, this tension between what is given by ancestral decree and what is chosen by the living in their struggle to make their own lives personally and collectively viable.

Central to Mande thought is the image of a penumbral domain between the relatively ordered moral space of the town and the antinomian, amoral space of the bush. This contrast between human and extrahuman domains is also associated with the contrast between day and night, the visible and the invisible, surface and depth. The viability of the social world depends on the ability of the living, both individually and collectively, to bring these disparate domains into a life-generating relationship.

Among the Dogon of Mali, the figure of Yourougou—personified as the jackal—is associated with extravagance, disorder, and oracular truth, while its opposite, Nommo, represents reason and social order.[32] For the neighboring Bambara, a similar contrast is posited between Nyalé—who was created first and signifies "swarming life," exuberance, and uncontrolled power—and Faro, or Ndomadyiri, who was created next and signifies equilibrium and restraint.[33] For the Kuranko, the contrast between bush and town signifies the same extremes. Because the bush is a source of vital and regenerative energy, the village must open itself up perennially to it. Hunters venture into the bush at night, braving real and imagined dangers in their search for meat. Farmers clear-cut the forest in order to grow the upland rice that is the staple of life. And initiation rites take place in the bush and have as their ostensible goal the disciplining and channeling of the unruly energies of children, so that after a symbolic death they are brought back to life as moral adults.

Whenever the boundary between town and bush (or their symbolic analogues—day/night, domestic/wild) is crossed, disorder and confusion

momentarily reign. Walking through the forest at night, one does not speak for fear that a djinn might steal one's name and use it for bedevilment. During initiations, people fall prey to similar anxieties and consult diviners to see how they may safeguard themselves from witches, who, it is said, can leave their bodies and go forth in the shape of night animals. At such times, parents often send their children to the homes of medicine masters so they will be protected from the nefarious powers that are abroad, while others redouble the protection of their bodies and houses with magical medicines. But such boundary crossing, though dangerous, is imperative to the life of the town, which must be perpetually reinvigorated by tapping into the wild energies of the bush that has become, nowadays, a symbol of extraterritoriality and globalization.

Divination provides a compelling example of this interplay between domestic and wild space, for in divination one gains second sight or insight into the normally invisible forces that surround one's mundane lifeworld. Among the Kuranko the diviner draws his or her inspiration from bush spirit allies that enable the diviner to see what dangers await a client about to embark on a journey or has found himself or herself in some difficult situation—unable to bear a child, unable to find work, unable to endure an unhappy marriage or resolve a family problem. Among the Dogon, it is the antinomian figure of the jackal that is called upon to decide such questions. A sand diagram is made at dusk on the edge of the village, in which stones and markings in the sand signify the issue at stake. Groundnuts scattered around the diagram attract the night-prowling jackal, whose paw prints across the diagram are interpreted in the morning to provide an answer to the client's dilemma.

All these reflections and readings—and the research I subsequently did on storytelling, agonistic play, and the imagination—helped me define one of the central concerns of my ethnographic work, namely, the way in which human beings, faced with nonnegotiable, overwhelming, or degrading situations, attempt to salvage some semblance of comprehension and control such that in some measure they govern their own lives, are complicit in their own fate, and not simply insignificant and impotent creatures of circumstance.

The Kuranko board game of *warri*, variations of which are found in societies throughout Africa and the Middle East, provides a compelling example of this subtle interplay between givenness and choice. A typical *warri* board is adzed from a single block of wood and consists of two parallel rows of four cups, each containing five pebbles. *Warri* is a count and capture game, but during my weeks in the village of Kamadugu Sukurela, where my host, Bundo Mansaray, instructed me in its rules and

subtleties, I learned that a player needs quick reflexes, a canny sense of his opponent, and more than just an ability to calculate odds. Before play commences, each player is allowed to redistribute his pebbles in ways that will give him an advantage when formal play begins. It was this art of rapid redistribution that defeated me. And it was the one technique that Bundo could not explain. It was a matter of experience, he would tell me. And as if confirming what Pierre Bourdieu would write about the importance of being "born into the game" or having a "feel for the game,"[34] Bundo urged me to persevere until I had acquired the skill of intuitively judging how to seize an advantage during the first few unruly seconds of the game.

Play theory is essential to understanding this existential imperative to strike a balance between obeying rules already laid down for us and deciding how we will distribute our time and energy in determining our own life courses. Unfortunately, many play theorists stress either the adaptive value of play in the evolution of culture or the problem-solving value of play in social learning. By contrast, my interest was in the work of writers such as Nietzsche and Bataille, who argued that human beings are driven not only by a rational desire to adapt to, improve upon, or consolidate their situations in life but by a transgressive drive to throw caution to the winds, expend surplus energy, interrupt routine, and experiment with consciousness, even at the risk of losing their reason or their lives.[35] According to this perspective, play has both life-affirming and life-destroying potentialities, which is why it is regarded ambivalently. Our capacity for "mastery play" enables us to overcome a sense of being existentially diminished by circumstances that defy our understanding or thwart our efforts, but mastery can also be a dangerous illusion, conjuring visions of absolute power and knowledge. Moreover, while play enables us to transform our *experience* of reality, it is never simply "magical" or artificial since altered forms of consciousness may have real effects.

A paradigmatic example of mastery play is Freud's description of how a one-and-a-half-year-old child would manipulate objects that came to hand in order to exert "mastery" over his mother's going away and returning. Throwing a toy out of his cot and declaring it gone (*fort*), then reeling it back in with an exultant "there" (*da*), the child successfully objectified his emotional distress. In Freud's words, the game "was related to the child's great cultural achievement—. . . the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction . . . which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach."[36] The *existential* point is, however, as Freud himself suggests, that

the child accomplished through his improvised game a transition from a passive situation (in which he was overpowered by the experience) to an active role in "mastering it."

In *La pensée sauvage*, Lévi-Strauss offers a similar insight into the power of play. Speaking of works of art, Lévi-Strauss asks, "What is the virtue of reduction either of scale or in the number of properties?" He then notes that this tendency, evident in all art, magic, and ritual, to miniaturize, simplify, and rearrange is driven by a desire to render the real object less formidable and so bring it under control. "By being quantitatively diminished, it seems to us qualitatively simplified. More exactly, this quantitative transposition extends and diversifies our power over a homologue of the thing, and by means of it the latter can be grasped, assessed and apprehended at a glance." Not only does Lévi-Strauss appreciate the connection between play and magic; he illuminates the way in which existential control involves a reduction of the scale of the *mitwelt* (the world around) to the scale of the *eigenwelt* (the world at hand). The universal is rendered as a particular that lies within the ambit and grasp of the individual: "A child's doll is no longer an enemy, a rival, or even an interlocutor. In it and through it a person is made into a subject."[37]

In play, intersubjective relationships are not only miniaturized; they are remodeled as subject-object relations. We play with and relate to objects that stand for persons or represent aspects of subjectivity. D. W. Winnicott refers to such objects as "transitional" objects because they enable us to distance ourselves from interpersonal relationships that have become perplexing or anxiety provoking. As "objective correlatives" of these relationships, they provide us with simulacra that we can manipulate in order to recover some measure of autonomy. Freud's anecdote of the child reeling a toy back into his cot echoes Winnicott's clinical account of a boy preoccupied with string.[38] In both cases the string symbolized the child's attachment and communication with the mother; playing with the string was a vicarious stratagem for regaining control over a relationship that had become fraught and confusing.

By emphasizing the ways in which play (*tolon*, in Kuranko) effectively alters our experience of being-in-the-world, we are able to understand the existential import of the contrasted images of bush and town in African thought, for apart from the *social* struggle to integrate the free energies of the bush with the bound energies of the town there is an *existential* struggle within each person to balance the impulse to belong to a field of being wider than himself or herself with an impulse to experience his or her own being as vitally necessary to the working of that wider world and as significant within it. This existential imperative may be compared

with Norman O. Brown's notion of the Oedipal project[39]—the struggle of each generation to come into its own, availing itself of what it receives from the parents and the past while asserting its own independence. As Marx so eloquently put it, "Man muss diese vertseinerten Verhältnisse dadurch zum Tanzen zwingen, dass man ihnen ihre eigene Melodie vorsingt" ("One must force the frozen circumstances to dance by singing to them their own melody").[40]

Two existential theses emerged from my attempts to complement a sociological with an existential perspective. First, our being-in-the-world consists in a dual sense of sharing an identity with others (*communis sententia*) and standing out from others (*ekstasis*) as singular if not solitary persons. It is in one's singularity that one experiences the world as if for the first time. Everything appears startlingly new. Yet we are also aware that there is nothing new under the sun, and that others, at other times, have experienced much the same emotions as we have known and had the same thoughts. The sense that one's own life is necessary comes up against the equally overwhelming sense that one's existence is contingent,[41] filled with echoes and repetitions as well as radically new departures and discoveries.

The second thesis also took the form of an apparent contradiction, for one becomes aware of oneself through relations with others.[42] A sense of one's own uniqueness and autonomy emerges, therefore, not from within oneself but from within contexts of intersubjective relations. In Kuranko initiation, one becomes an autonomous adult at the same time as one forms lifelong bonds with others undergoing the same experience, and it is on the strength of these bonds that age-sets are formed. The difficult task I set myself was to acknowledge the full force of *appearances*—that the sun appears to rise and set, that my own experiences are incomparable, that I am responsible for my own fate—while arguing that *despite appearances*, the sun does not rise and set, no one is unique, and our lives are more governed by contingency than we care to admit. Most important, I wanted to describe how life is made livable both through acting upon the world *and* submitting to it, engaging with others *and* holding oneself back from them, accepting reality *and* imaginatively denying it. In the apparently petty or perverse palaver that often exasperated me in the Kuranko villages where I lived and worked, I began to see beyond the substance of what was discussed to the existential imperatives that underlay the discussion—the need to make the world one's own, even as one reconciled oneself to one's marginal, transitory, or appointed place in the scheme of things—to orient oneself to that world in such a way that it became a marketplace, open to negotiation,[43] and in which one

was not simply a puppet or piano key. At the same time, my fieldwork made me aware of the value Kuranko attach to the stoic acceptance of what cannot be changed and the virtue of forebearance in the face of adversity. There are times when one may reasonably aspire to be an active subject—exercising will in relation to the world. But there are also times when one must endure the actions of others, bend to their will, meet their demands, suffer in silence, and exercise patience. This is not to imply that one's fate is wholly predetermined by the world into which one is born or thrown; it simply means that subjection must be placed on a par with agency as a human coping strategy.[44]

I would find in Sartre's existential Marxism echoes of this West African train of thought. The crux of Sartre's argument is that while our lives are shaped by conditions we do not entirely determine and can never entirely grasp, we nonetheless struggle within these limits to make our lives our own. The sense that the world I inhabit is mine or ours, and that my existence matters and makes a difference to others, may be illusory, but without this "illusion" I am nothing. For Sartre, we really *do* go beyond the situations in which we are thrown, both in practice and in our imaginations, so that any human life must be understood from the double perspective of what makes us and what we make of what we are made. We are, as it were, both creatures and creators of our circumstances. A mystery remains, however, of deciding whether the manifestly unpredictable and surprising ways in which a life unfolds is evidence of conscious decisions or mere contingency (retrospectively glossed as motivated, willed or intended). Perhaps this is a false antinomy. For we seldom stand at some metaphorical crossroads, contemplating which direction to take, rationally appraising the situation, making a choice, and acting on it. Equally rarely are we blindly and haplessly moved through life by forces utterly outside our ken and control, mere puppets or playthings of fate. Fatalistic submission, the influence or advice of others, and careful calculation all enter, to some degree and in constantly varying ways, into our responses to critical situations. But however we construe these moments in retrospect, recounting stories in which we were victims or heroes, passive or active, we are always strategists in a game in which winning is judged according to how successfully we find ways of responding to the situations we encounter and enduring them. Sartre's notion of praxis as a purposeful surpassing of what is given does not mean embracing the Enlightenment myth of the rational actor or possessive individualist such as Robinson Crusoe, who, from his own resources, creates a world from scratch. Nor does it imply a romantic view of human agency and responsibility, exercised in a world no longer governed by gods, fates,

or furies, since acceptance, anonymity, and abnegation are no less life choices than heroic projects of self-making or revolt. To speak of an existential imperative that transcends specific cultural values or worldviews is simply to testify to the extent to which being is never simply given or guaranteed, in genetic or cultural codes, by democracy or tyranny, by poverty or wealth, but must be struggled for and salvaged continually. And though the source of our well-being may be variously said to lie in the hands of God, depend on capital accumulation, or reside in physical, intellectual, or spiritual talents, it remains a potential that can only be realized through activity, through praxis. This is why, as Sartre notes, our analytic method must be progressive-regressive—fully recognizing that while every event, every experience, is in one sense a new departure, a rebirth, it conserves the ancient, inert, and inescapable conditions that make each one of us a being who carries within "the project of all possible being."[45]

Toward an Ethnographically Grounded Philosophical Anthropology

From its inception as a science, anthropology has found it difficult to sustain a bipolar vision of the human as comprising particular *and* universal aspects. The problem is reminiscent of the group of blind people (or people in the dark), in the often-cited Indian fable, who approach an elephant in order to know what it is like. Each person touches a different part, such as the tail, the trunk, or the tusk. On comparing notes they discover that they are in disagreement as to the nature of the beast. Although *all* their reports are *partly* true, the whole is not reducible to any one part. But if the whole is *more* than the sum of all the parts, how can it be determined on the basis of the knowledge of individuals who are never in a position to see the whole? The history of philosophical anthropology echoes this Indian fable. In order to know what makes us human we have to reconcile a desire to do justice to the multiplicity of human viewpoints, representations, strategies, and experiences with a desire to grasp what all human beings may have in common. Given that we are incapable of omniscience, what conception of the universal remains open to us?

My own view is that we abandon the substantive idea of the universal that informs, say, the discourse on human rights, and focus on the universalizing *impulse* that inspires us to transgress parochial boundaries, push ourselves to the limit, and open ourselves up to new horizons

through strategies that take us beyond ourselves. In this sense, universalization may be construed not as a search for truths that hold good for all humankind but as a desire to make oneself at home in the world, an impulse that is consummated in the kinds of elective affinities and common interests that inform friendships made across cultural, gender, and age lines. What is ethnography if it is not an experiment in working out ways in which we can relate to others whose situations, worldviews, and life strategies are very different from our own?[46]

Let us review the methods open to us for entering more completely into the lives of others.

First, ethnographic fieldwork. Rather than rely solely on reason or speculation, as philosophers have traditionally tended to do, the anthropologist ventures to live among foreign or unfamiliar peoples *on their terms*. That this is at all possible not only suggests that we possess a potentiality to live outside our comfort zones; it throws serious doubt on customary assumptions about the ontological discontinuities that are assumed to exist between polities and peoples, cultural regions, and religious traditions.

In fact, ethnography shows that while many people identify themselves with a bounded culture, faith, or history whose character is considered unique, the boundaries between cultures have constantly been transgressed, blurred, and redrawn in the course of history, so that the idea of separating entire populations on the basis of singular and unvarying traits is at best a fiction and at worst an invitation to violence. In fact, the differences and disagreements *within* any population are as great as the differences *between* populations, and unique traits never cluster in such numbers as to warrant the ascription of significant discontinuities to the relations between individuals, nations, or cultures (by this reckoning, race is a complete misnomer). Moreover, there is probably no society on earth whose worldview is so insular that it does not contain at least the germ of the notion of a universal humanity. Despite differences based on language, heritage, and interests, there exists the potentiality for strangers to be accommodated, for enmities to be overcome, and cultural barriers to be transcended.

Yet we persist, in both popular and academic thought, in emphasizing what divides us, not what we have in common. All too readily we fall into the trap of assuming that the category words with which we discursively differentiate ourselves from others are more than consoling illusions that provide us with a sense of stable identity in an unstable and multiplex world; they are markers and reminders of real and ineradicable differences that are historically, divinely, or culturally given. We

are nowadays so accustomed to speaking of the world as deeply divided—nations, cities, houses, and even personalities divided within and among themselves—that we seldom stop to reflect on the implications of such glib distinctions as modern versus premodern, north versus south, Christendom versus Islam, first versus third world, haves versus have-nots. So habitual are these ways of reducing lifeworlds to worldviews and life to language that we are blind to the ways in which they reinforce the inequalities they are meant to bring to our attention. For in assuming that science, rationality, and democracy are necessary conditions for economic growth, human freedom, and greater equality, and that superstition, tradition, illiteracy, and autocracy are inimical to progress, we perpetuate a view of ourselves as morally as well as materially superior to "them," describing "them" mostly in terms of what they want or need or lack, as if their lifeways were not only an impediment to progress but a curse, like the mark of Cain. From this it is a short step to assuming that "their" historic failure to become as successful as we are is a sign of some social or intellectual deficiency that can only be made good by our enlightened interventions—helping them develop our preferred model of government, introducing them to our notion of human rights, teaching them our scientific techniques of healing, and bringing to them our systems of schooling. Entrapped by the very terms with which we have come to characterize "our" relations with "them," we perpetuate the idea of the civilizing mission that was the pretext for colonialism.

Following Adorno, I want to challenge this kind of identity thinking, not simply on the grounds that it is politically dangerous or ethically flawed, but on the *empirical* grounds that it does not represent the way in which human beings actually live their everyday lives. Indeed, if the way we thought determined the way we live, we would be lost, for our lives would be locked into the verbal cages to which we consign ourselves and others according to the precept "to each his own." Thankfully, life confounds and overflows the definitions we impose upon it in the name of reason or administrative control, and it is this excess of meaning, this tendency of life to deny our attempts to bind it with words and ideas, that redeems us.

Clearly, the philosophical anthropology I am outlining here implies a radical critique of the hegemonic and hypostasized role that socio-cultural anthropology has accorded its pivotal concepts of the cultural and the social. This critique goes further than contesting the image of bounded human groupings, whether these are conceived to be ethnic, racial, religious, or social; it calls into question the analytical usefulness of identity thinking and demands a new vocabulary—built on such terms as

lifeworld, relatedness, intersubjectivity, coexistence, negotiation, multiplicity, potentiality, transitivity, event, paradox, ambiguity, margin, and limit.

Second, critical reflection. Critique is predicated on our capacity to see beyond or see through entrenched ideas about the nature of the world. Critical theory and psychoanalysis bring to light factors and forces that are excluded from public scrutiny on the grounds that they are inimical to the public good, or repressed in individual consciousness because they jeopardize normality and sanity. Similar exclusions characterized classical empiricism. Because the emotions and prejudices of the observer were deemed to be incompatible with disinterested inquiry, they were left out of analytical accounts as if their invisibility implied their nonexistence. By including the subjectivity of the observer, radical empiricism switches our focus to relations between observer and observed, making knowledge effectively conditional upon the nature of this relationship. Adorno puts this nicely: "To think philosophically means as much as to think intermittently, to be interrupted by that which is not the thought itself."[47]

Critique also implies a preparedness to subject one's provisional knowledge to continual retesting in the real world. The implications of locating thought within human lifeworlds, rather than regarding it as a means of transcendence, are spelled out by John Dewey's empirical naturalism.[48] First, thought figures in our lives as a cognitive supplement to our ability to accomplish our goals practically and physically, which may explain why so many metaphors for thinking are drawn from bodily processes—grasping, understanding, seeing, comprehending, and knowing.[49] Accordingly, it is typically when practical and physical modes of acting fail us that thought comes into its own. As Dewey puts it: "the origin of thinking is some perplexity, confusion, or doubt. Thinking is not a case of spontaneous combustion; it does not occur just on 'general principles.' There is something specific which occasions and evokes it. General appeals to a child (or to a grown-up) to think, irrespective of the existence in his own experience of some difficulty that troubles him and disturbs his equilibrium, are as futile as advice to lift himself by his boot-straps."[50]

Dewey's second point is both practical and moral. Just as human beings periodically rethink their lives in the light of new experiences that unsettle what they once took for granted or regarded as tried and true, so empirical method in science is simply the systematic implementation of this familiar mode of testing what we think we know against what we don't. For Dewey, philosophy should be understood in the same way—testing a hypothesis against experience in a controlled environment, in

order to arrive at a provisional conclusion *that demands further testing*. It follows that the good of philosophy is a matter of its ability to do justice to life. And so Dewey asks: "Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in 'reality' even the significance they had previously seemed to have? Does it yield the enrichment and increase of power of ordinary things which the results of physical science afford when applied in every-day affairs?"[51]

Third, interdisciplinarity. Here, I am specifically interested in anthropology's engagement with philosophy and psychology—two fields that help establish a science of human relations that is not grounded in reified notions of culture, society, history, religion, or biology. As a methodological first principle we focus not on *relata*—whether individuals *or* societies—but on what Hannah Arendt called "the subjective in-between,"[52] and on that which comes into being in this intermediate space of human inter-est and inter-action. Bypassing both the individual subject and culture as sui generis phenomena, we seek to explore the space of appearances—where that which is *in potentia* becomes *in presentia*—disclosed, drawn out, brought forth, given presence, or embodied.

Object-relations theory is particularly helpful in pursuing this mode of inquiry. Culture, writes D. W. Winnicott, is "in fact neither a matter of inner psychic reality nor a matter of external reality." Comparing culture with transitional phenomena and play, Winnicott goes on to argue that culture is a "common pool . . . into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find*."[53] This means, for Winnicott, that culture is not some kind of ready-made, omnipresent composite of habits, meanings, and practices that are located *in* the individual or *in* the environment, but a *potentiality* that is realized and experienced variously in the course of our interactions with others, as well as our relationships to the everyday environments and events in which we find ourselves. It therefore bears a family resemblance to James Gibson's notion of "affordances" and Sartre's notion of "exigences." According to Sartre—and his view was shared by Merleau-Ponty[54]—most human action is unreflective, which is to say we do not necessarily form any conscious idea of our intentions before we act. But this absence of conceptualization does not imply that we are at the mercy of blind *habits*, or that our actions are ruled by *unconscious* drives. Rather, it is as though the world variously "offered itself," "ap-

peared," or "closed itself off" to us as a field of instrumental possibilities.[55] Conceptualization, reflection, and representation tend to follow *from* our actions; they are seldom scripts or scores that precede it. Beliefs and ideas are thus, more often than not, outcomes of an activity, or retrospective abridgements of it, that help us come to terms with what has already taken place. They haunt but do not govern lived events. Accordingly, theories and stories alike may be seen as selective, imaginative, *post festum* reworkings of reality that make it appear less contingent, and ourselves less insignificant. A theory, as Michael Oakeshott reminds us, is like a recipe. It is not "an independently generated beginning from which cooking can spring; it is nothing more than an abstract of somebody's knowledge of how to cook; it is the stepchild, not the parent of the activity."[56]

Fourth, comparison. George Peter Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas* provides an example of how comparative analysis was once approached in anthropology. Reified characterizations and synthetic categories—patrilineal/matrilineal, literate/preliterate, urban/rural, pastoral/agricultural—provided the data sets for cross-cultural research and the discovery of general laws. Not only were these category distinctions overdrawn; they obscured the indeterminacy, strategic variability, and experiential variety that existed within any given lifeworld. An existential anthropology, by contrast, juxtaposes perspicacious examples not in order to attain systematic understanding but to throw into relief certain "family resemblances" among the ways human beings struggle for well-being,[57] particularly under unstable and uncertain conditions. Gregory Bateson used analogy in precisely this way to loosen his thinking and to see things in a new light. He thus compared the difference between Iatmul and Western patterns of social organization to the difference between radically symmetrical animals (jellyfish, sea anemones) and animals with transverse segmentation (earthworms, lobsters, human beings), not because there was any organic *homology* between the elements compared but because the comparison had heuristic value.[58]

Comparison may also be seen as a mode of analogical thought that arises within the intersubjective space of human existence. Every engagement with another alters one's sense of oneself. Accordingly, comparative method in anthropology is only secondarily a matter of comparing and contrasting different *societies* or *discursive regimes*, for it has its origins in the differences, uncertainties, and dissonances we experience in our encounters with others. Comparison is always constrained, therefore, by the threshold of one person's capacity to be open to another, and by the absence of any stable object to compare. As Donald Davidson puts it, comparative method implies a paradox. "Different points of view make

sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability. What we need . . . is some idea of the considerations that set the limits to conceptual contrast."[59] My argument is that whenever considerations of identity and difference arise in human life we must refuse to make one prior to or more fundamental than the other; both identity *and* difference "go all the way down." Moreover, we must construe the limits of comparison not in terms of how far we can go in acquiring verifiable *knowledge* of others—their languages, worldviews, or personalities—but on how far we can go in our *interactions* with others. Comparison is predicated less on our intellectual acuity—our ability to read the minds of others or see the world from their point of view—than on our capacity for practical engagement with them. It is a way in which we test the limits that conventionally determine lines of discontinuity between self and other. It is a method of suspending our efforts to know the other in order to transform our customary ways of understanding and enlarging our repertoire of *practical* techniques for *living* with them.

We are concerned here with what Bernard Stiegler calls technics—the models, constructs, codes, ritual practices, and instruments that human beings invent and use in creating viable forms of both personal and collective existence.[60] By exploring modes of thought in critical contexts, so-called traditional and modern technics are no longer seen as intrinsically different, or as defining different kinds of society, but rather as alternative ways of addressing recurring universal questions of existential viability—how to integrate one's own needs with the needs of others, how to prevent marital problems from jeopardizing the welfare of children, how to survive loss and deal with adversity, or how to make a living in a world of growing scarcity and inequality. According to this perspective, anthropologists may be criticized for their reluctance to place the views of those they study on a par with the views they invoke in pursuing their study. To construe one's own view as theory, as if theory subsumed practice, is not only to deny that theory itself is a technics but to elevate oneself above those whose so-called folk models or conventional wisdom are assumed to have negligible critical or intellectual value.

Husserl argued that the questions of science and the questions of existence arise from the same "intuitive surrounding world of life, pregiven as existing for all in common."[61] This implies a critique of both inductive and deductive methods. The problem with induction is that it supposes a break between the process of experience and inferences that arise when we reflect on that experience, the assumption being that the rational analysis of sensible experience can disclose hitherto invisible

or underlying causes, motives, rules, or ordering principles that make raw experience explicable. It also implies that the world can impress its hidden meanings on an open mind, and that the observer can achieve such a state of neutrality and passivity, projecting none of his or her pre-formed ideas onto the phenomena under observation. The problem with deduction is that the concepts imported from elsewhere to shed light on a particular empirical phenomenon are not necessarily compatible with that phenomenon. For instance, Julian Steward, in his cultural ecology, applies the Darwinian concept of adaptation as if natural environments and human lifeworlds were governed by identical processes, whereas Claude Lévi-Strauss borrows from structural linguistics to lay bare the elementary structures of kinship and myth, albeit admitting that "structural linguistics aims at discovering *general laws*, whether by induction or 'logical deduction.' "[62] It may be the case that we sometimes experience ourselves as disinterested beings to whom life simply happens, or feel that the world impresses itself upon our consciousness, disclosing hitherto invisible or underlying causes, motives, rules, or ordering principles. It may also be the case that we sometimes experience ourselves as viewing our lives from afar, as if our very existence had become an object of contemplation. But neither of these modes of experience *necessarily* entails scientific methods or philosophical truths. They are simply alternating forms of consciousness, both of which may provide a fleeting and consoling sense that we may comprehend our relationship to the world. They echo a distinction that precedes the development of modern science and is recognized in all human societies—that we are creatures who suffer an existence we have not chosen, fated to exercise patience in the hope that we may in the fullness of time or by the grace of God be indemnified for our pains, *and* that we are creators of our own lives, responsible for our actions, and capable of knowing and controlling with increasingly higher degrees of certainty the world in which we move.

If I was drawn to pragmatism and existentialism, it was partly because Maori, Kuranko, and Warlpiri worldviews echoed the orientation of philosophers such as James, Dewey, and Sartre. What these perspectives shared was a concern for the human capacity to enlarge and enhance the lives of individuals and their communities, real or imagined. Rather than view practice as following from moral principles or cosmological assumptions, or seek to analyze systems of knowledge or belief without reference to the situations in which people interacted, strategized, struggled, judged, and reasoned, I wanted to place thought and practice on a par—as techniques whereby people sought, individually and together, in good times and bad, with whatever resources they could muster, from

within themselves, their traditions, or the world in which they found themselves, viable forms of coexistence and well-being.

I have never thought of my research among the Kuranko as elucidating a unique lifeworld or foreign worldview. Rather, this was the laboratory in which I happened to explore the *human* condition with focus and discipline. A cynic might say that what I found in Sierra Leone was little more than a projection of myself, but Sierra Leone transformed me, shaping the person I now am and the anthropology I now do. At the same time, ethnography confirmed for me that opening up new horizons of understanding places enormous demands not only on one's intellectual abilities but on one's physical, psychological, and moral resources. It has also reinforced my conviction that both individuals and societies are best seen as variations on universal themes, and that the human sciences may be regarded in the same light—as different languages for apprehending the same reality. It is my hope that the essays in this book demonstrate the value of these comparative and existential perspectives.

My essay on Kuranko divination,[1] written in 1976 and first published in 1978, was a defining moment in my attempts to outline an existential anthropology that avoided the idealist bias of French structuralism and the Oxbridge preoccupation with social form and social continuity. Crucial to this work was my meeting with George Devereux in 1974. Reading his book *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* gave impetus to my explorations of Kuranko strategies for coping with critical events and dealing with uncertainty in their everyday lives. Devereux also convinced me of the value of using one's own fieldwork experiences as ways of gaining insights into the lives of those among whom one lived and worked. One implication of this method was that explanatory models—whether deployed by African ritual specialists or university-trained anthropologists—could be placed on a par, as ways of alleviating anxiety through the construction of models of reality that restored one's sense of being an actor even in the face of inexplicable and unmanageable events. Rather than a logocentric hermeneutics that emphasized the human quest for a coherent worldview, or an intellectualist focus on the rationality and credibility of belief, I sought a more pragmatic understanding of how people act, alone and in concert, to make their lives more existentially viable through techniques that enable them to grasp that which has eluded their grasp, and counteract the forces acting upon them.

How to Do Things
with Stones

The world is inherently fragmented: there is no foundation, there are no over-
arching sets of guidelines, laws, or principles. There are only actions, and it is
up to humans to ritualize some of those actions and thereby . . . develop more
productive ways of connecting with other people and with the larger world.

MICHAEL PUETT, "INNOVATION AS RITUALIZATION"[2]

Most human beings find the uncertain character of exis-
tence hard to accept. Uncertainty is met with anxiety and
construed as a problem. It is a problem for both thought
and action because most people seem to need the consola-
tion of a world that is in essence as rationally ordered as
their thoughts about it can be, and they seem to be able to
act in the world only when they are confident their actions
will have a reasonable chance of achieving certain ends. Al-
though many people accept, and even cultivate and enjoy,
indeterminacy (as in games of chance and risky ventures),
there is a threshold of tolerance beyond which chance
ceases to be a matter of risks willingly taken and becomes
an external tyranny to be desperately avoided.

   This chapter is an exploration of what might be called the
problem of the aleatory. I approach this problem through
a detailed ethnographic account of divinatory practices
among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone. Rather than consider
Kuranko divination solely from the point of view of an
outside observer, however, I extrapolate from and discuss
my own experiences of consulting Kuranko diviners, thus

complementing observation and native exegesis with insights gained as a participant.

Observation and participation have conventionally been conflated in social anthropology, and the oxymoronic nature of the so-called participant observation methodology overlooked. In practice one can observe and participate successively but not simultaneously.

Moreover, because observation and participation yield different kinds of data, conventionally labeled objective and subjective, our research methodology in social anthropology itself brings us face to face with the problem of indeterminacy. Meaning is constituted through an interplay of procedures pretending to be inductive and a welter of interpretive preferences and prejudices.[3] Pure objectivity has, therefore, no "objective" status; it is as much a preformed, socially constituted attitude as the notion of pure subjectivity.[4]

As Werner Heisenberg has noted, this indeterminacy principle implies that "science alters and refashions the object of investigation. In other words, method and object can no longer be separated."[5] The hermeneutical uncertainty we encounter in anthropological research can thus be linked in one direction to the problem of knowledge in quantum mechanics and, in another, to the problem of prediction in divination. When Einstein declared against the new physics, saying that God does not play dice with the universe,[6] he was in a sense admitting the same intolerance of the aleatory that, in a Kuranko village, leads a person to seek consolation in the predictive and systematizing powers of a diviner.

In divination, as in science, we seek to reduce ambiguity, to arrive at provisional certitudes that will offer us "something to go on" and help us cope with and act in an unpredictable world. My purpose in this chapter, then, is to argue an approach to Kuranko divination that does not pretend any epistemologically privileged or objective claims to knowledge. Accordingly, I hazard a view of Kuranko divination that draws on existential and pragmatist philosophies, places Kuranko divinatory techniques on a par with our own anthropological methods, and, by stressing the experiential grounds on which both are constituted, argues that any attempt to distinguish the former as superstition and the latter as science is misconceived.

Inductive Methods

The general Kuranko term for a diviner is *bolomafelne* (literally, "hand-on-looker"). Although palmistry may have once been a divinatory tech-

nique among the Kuranko, the term probably refers to the fact that a diviner manipulates and "lays down" various objects (pebbles, cowries, kola nuts) in order to "see" what kind of sacrifice his client should offer. The commonest divinatory technique involves laying out river pebbles on the ground; thus an alternative term for a diviner is *beresigile* (one who sets down pebbles).[7] Less common divinatory techniques are sand drawing and the casting of kola nuts or cowrie shells. Muslim diviners (called *morenu* or, in Krio, *moris* or *alphas*) are reputedly able to predict a person's fortune or intervene in a person's destiny through such techniques as mirror gazing, water gazing, astrology, and oneiromancy. Consulting the Qur'an, however, is the main means of Muslim divination.

Apart from pebble divining, most techniques for bringing hidden things into the open are allegedly inductive, that is, they presuppose a "determinative procedure, apparently free from mundane control, yielding unambiguous decisions or predictions"; they employ "nonhuman phenomena, either artificial or natural, as signs that can be unambiguously read. The prime condition is that the signs appear to be genuine, not manipulated."[8] These techniques, familiar to us in positivist social science, are often used by persons who are not professed diviners, but only on specific social occasions. For example, after a man's death and burial, his widows are confined to the house for forty days (known as *labinane*, forty [days] lying down). At the end of this period the widows are led to the village streamside by the son of the sister of the deceased man; there, elderly women (not kinswomen) bathe and ritually purify them. As part of this purification rite, a kola nut is split in half and the two cotyledons are thrown onto the ground. If the cotyledons fall facing in the same direction, this signifies invariably that the husband's spirit harbors no grievance against any of his widows. If the cotyledons fall facing in opposite directions, this signifies that the widow nurses a hidden grudge against her late husband or offended him while he was alive. The grudge or offense (*son yuguye*, bad behavior) must be confessed promptly; if no confession is made it is said that the woman will fall ill and die. Another example of unambiguous divination is the gun-firing rite performed by the prospective husband of the female neophyte on the occasion of the latter's initiation.[9] If the gun fails to fire, this signifies that something is amiss with the forthcoming marriage; the girl may have a lover or be intending to elope. A diviner is consulted by the man's parents to find out what impediment there may be to the marriage.

Divination through ordeal is unknown among the Kuranko, though the "swear" (*gborle*) is sometimes used in court cases. If a witness is a Muslim, he or she may be required to swear on the Qur'an. Alternatively

a calabash or basin containing gold, kola, salt, and water is brought. The witness swears in public that lying will lead the gold, kola, and salt to "cut" the liar's liver. Then he or she chews the kola and drinks the water.

Auguries have no more or less significance than they have in our society; the interpretations of many trivial events are so standardized and commonplace that diviners are seldom consulted about them. For example, if a person about to embark on some enterprise stubs his left foot against a stone, this may be regarded as inauspicious; if he stubs his right foot, this may be regarded as auspicious. The extent to which people take seriously or even notice such auguries is variable, however, often reflecting the degree of anxiety in their everyday life. This is also the case with dreams, although dream interpretation is taken more seriously than augury, and a diviner is usually consulted.[10]

Interpretive Divination

In larger Kuranko villages there are several diviners, each employing his own technique. In the village of Kamadugu Sukurela (population about 550) there are five diviners: one is a *mori*, one uses cowrie shells, three use river pebbles. As we shall see, the choice of method reflects the particular manner in which the diviner first acquired his skills; people often remark, "It is in himself how he does it." Because the profession of divination is usually neither hereditary nor acquired through an apprenticeship, it is worthwhile noting some biographical details of individual diviners.

Kumba Wulan Bala Sise of Kamadugu Sukurela is a *mori* diviner. He studied the Qur'an under a *karamorgo* (Muslim teacher) in Guinea for seven years, then returned to his home village where, six years later, he became a practicing diviner.

In 1972, when I first met Kumba Wulan, he had been in practice for four years. His faith in the Qur'an and the truth of its prophecies give him confidence in his ability to divine. He continues to study the Qur'an and to deepen his understanding of it. It is his ultimate authority. When I asked him what he thought and how he reacted when one of his prognostications proved incorrect, he replied: "That concerns me and does not concern me: the Qur'an does not lie; whatever it says will come to pass unless I happen to misinterpret it." This reasoning is comparable to the way in which nonliterate Kuranko speak of books in general. Conversing once about our knowledge of the origins of life, one man told me:

Altala [God] gave life, no one knows when or how. You only know what is told to you or is in books. I cannot read or write so I only know what has been told to me, and no one has ever told me where life comes from; it is only through Altala that it is. You only know what is before you or in books. I was not there when Altala made life so I do not know. It might be in the books but I cannot read or write; in any case, books do not lie although the people who write them may lie.

It is characteristic of Kuranko diviners that any incorrect prognosis is not regarded as a challenge to the veracity of the system; the fault is found with the diviner himself. Although diviners sometimes grudgingly or obliquely admitted to me their own fallibility, a consulter who is convinced that a certain diviner is a liar or inept will be careful not to make public his attitude. Scandal or a libel suit could follow. Thus, the Kuranko seldom admit that a diviner or the divinatory system could be fallible. By contrast, in other African societies such as the Azande, doubt and skepticism are both common and openly expressed.[11]

We should also note here that Kumba Wulan has both Muslim and pagan clients. Moreover, he does not scorn other techniques or compete with other diviners to attract a larger clientele. In his own words, "They also tell the truth; they know their own way of doing it; God [Allah] instructs us all." Clearly, clients are more interested (than many anthropologists) in the pragmatic efficacy of their techniques than in the epistemological veracity of the beliefs they espouse. In this, they echo William James's notion that truth is what "happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process."[12]

Other pagan diviners do not always receive their immediate inspiration and authority from God. Lai Mara, also of Kamadugu Sukurela, divines with river pebbles. Although born in Morfindugu (Mongo chiefdom), he has lived in Kamadugu Sukurela all his life. An elderly man, perhaps sixty-five years old, Lai did not become a diviner until about 1968. That year he fell ill with a serious stomach sickness, and one night, in a dream, a pale-complexioned female bush spirit appeared to him and gave him the notion of divining with river pebbles. The following morning he collected some river pebbles, and they "told" him who could cure him of his sickness. He summoned this person, a kinsman, and was subsequently cured. Since then he has practiced divination. Lai vowed he had never made an incorrect prognostication, saying, "If I were a liar then people would not come to me." As if to substantiate this claim he mentioned two cases, both of which concerned friends of mine in the village. He drew my attention to the fine embroidered shirt he was wearing and said that

someone had given it to him as a token of gratitude when something he had foretold for him "came true." The person was Bundo Mansaray in whose house I lodged. Bundo had consulted Lai when he was about to leave the village some years previously to work in the diamond districts. Lai had divined that Bundo would make his fortune. Bundo went away and later returned a wealthy man by local standards. On another occasion Morowa's sister had asked Lai to tell her why she was unable to conceive a child. Lai told her not to worry, that she would have a child in the near future. Morowa's sister did in fact conceive soon afterward. Whether an incorrect prognosis would cause a consulter to go back and challenge the diviner or make him prefer thereafter to consult another diviner is a question to which I turn later. Lai's avowal that he was never wrong in his predictions, however, may have been intended as a way of impressing me, or it may mean that he never receives evidence of his errors.

Both Kumba Wulan and Lai insisted that it would be wrong for a diviner to make public his prognosis or diagnosis. The consultation is always private, and Kuranko diviners consider it wrong to discuss a client's affairs with others; such indiscretion, it is said, would lead people to lose trust and confidence in them.

Bokari Wulare lives in Yataia, a small village with a mixed population of Limba, Mandinka, and Sankaran-Kuranko peoples situated in the Wara Wara hills behind Kabala. When he was a young man (he is now in his forties) he had a dream in which someone "gave him" the divining pebbles and told him to pick certain leaves and "wash" his face and eyes with them. In the morning he recollected the dream instructions and picked the leaves as directed, washing his face and eyes in a decoction of them. From that time he has been able to "see" messages in the stones. Bokari claims that God gave him the original dream instructions and that it is God's voice that speaks to him when he is divining. "I speak for God" was the phrase he used.

These three cases indicate that divinatory skills are acquired through ecstatic encounters and episodes. Lai's initiation is typical of other African societies, such as the Ndembu and Ngoni,[13] where illness followed by a visionary dream is the approved way of becoming a diviner. Bokari's case is reminiscent of the Jukun, whose diviners "have their eyes treated with a lotion of certain leaves in order to confer on them the necessary second sight."[14] The idea that diviners possess extraordinary powers of insight (they are said to have "four eyes") is common among the Kuranko. This second sight transcends ordinary vision. Often, while divining, a

Kuranko diviner will close his eyes in order to "see" the message. In other African societies the figure of the blind seer (Tiresias is the great classical exemplar) is more completely elaborated. Among the Dinka, the word *coor* (blind) is cognate with the word *car* (to divine), and blind people are often said to possess special powers of insight.[15]

The Kuranko diviner clearly comes to regard himself as a humble transmitter of messages from a divinity to human individuals. Lienhardt describes this attitude nicely, writing of a Dinka diviner: "he seems to see in that which has affected him the self-determining subject of activity and himself the object of it. People do not choose their divinities, they are chosen by them."[16] This traditional African attitude toward *auctoritas* also obtains in the case of storytelling, where individual authors disclaim their own roles in the creation of a story, attributing it to some external source of inspiration: divinity, fate, tradition, and so forth. It is my view that this mode of attribution is consistent with and entailed by an ethos that emphasizes community over individuality and assumes that the dynamic life of Being realizes itself in fields of relationship (involving persons, spirits, animals, ancestors, divinities, and even inanimate objects) rather than restricting itself to individual human beings in the form of fixed, intrinsic properties. Storytellers and diviners alike ceremonially disengage their praxis from subjectivity to give recognition to this wider field of *inter*subjectivity in which the individual practitioner plays a part as mediator rather than maker. Positivist social science utilizes, in its arcane vocabularies and depersonalized style, comparable ceremonial forms of denying knowledge-constitutive subjectivity. It is also noteworthy that the arbitrary and fortuitous events that lead a man to become a diviner are regarded by the diviners themselves as determined. In the same way, they regard what they "see" in the random layout of the pebbles as determined. The diviner is allegedly passive and receptive, the technique allegedly objective, the procedure allegedly impersonal. Extrasocial powers, especially God, are said to determine and authorize the divinatory procedures; much as in positivist social science, subjective "interference," introjection, and projection are denied.

When Kuranko divination is compared with such sophisticated African systems as the Ifa divination of the Yoruba, it appears to be remarkably unsystematic. Even when compared with other divinatory systems in Sierra Leone, such as the *an-bere* of the Temne, Kuranko divination displays a lack of general consensus about the significance of particular pebble patterns and a paucity of interpretive rules or codes. When I brought this apparently idiosyncratic aspect to the attention of Bokari Wulare,

he pointed out that different objects, techniques, and interpretations are used "because every person has a different destiny." He commented further that the individual stones signify nothing; it is only the pattern or arrangement of them that is meaningful. But this "structuralist" tenet was propounded in association with another idea: that when he utters the verses (*hayenu*) which include the name of the consulter, he receives a divine message. He could not himself explain what happened: "It is just a God-given thing." But clearly this divine inspiration enabled him to "see" a meaning in the stones; without this inspiration the pattern of the pebbles could not be read. As for teaching his technique to others, Bokari remarked that he could only pass on his gift by having a pupil "wash" in the leaves as he had done; indeed, two of his sons have taken up divining in this way. Finally, like other diviners with whom I spoke on the matter, Bokari denied that diviners are ever charlatans: "None pretend; it is not like that." I know of no cases of deliberate fraudulence or malpractice from my Kuranko studies, but then the Kuranko are not preoccupied by questions of error and chicanery. As Lienhardt has pointed out with reference to the Dinka, "the experience of one false diviner, far from calling into doubt the abilities of all, reminded them of many others who really had the insight."[17]

This was brought home to me in early 1979 when a friend, Abdulai Sano, consulted diviners at a time of material hardship and failing confidence. Although nominally a Muslim, Abdulai was in the habit of consulting both Qur'anic and pagan diviners. On this particular occasion his Muslim diviner saw in a dream that Abdulai should sacrifice a sheep; his pagan pebble-diviner directed the same sacrifice as a precondition for improving his fortunes. The following is excerpted from the conversation I had with Abdulai the evening following the sacrifice.

"Have you ever gone to a diviner who told you something that did not eventuate?"

"Yes. Once I went to a diviner [*bolomafelne*] when my child was ill. I asked him whether the child would live or die. The diviner told me the child would live, but the child died."

"Whose error was that?"

"The diviner used cowrie shells and threw them on a mat. He told me the child would live, yet it died. The child died through the will of Allah. But the diviner told me a lie [*funye*]."

"Why should he lie?"

"I went to a pebble diviner [*beresigile*] about the same matter. He said that, though miracles happen, my child would die. Therefore he is superior to the other diviner, and I have consulted with him and taken his advice since that time."

A Consultation

To illustrate the characteristic method of pebble divining, I describe a consultation in which I asked Lai Mara to comment on a troubling dream I had had the previous night. As is customary, we repaired to a quiet room and closed the door so that we would not be disturbed. Lai spread his mat on the floor, sat down, and took out his bag of divining stones. I paid him the usual consultation fee of twenty cents. Lai then gave me four pebbles and told me to think about whatever it was I wished to know. I did so, then returned the pebbles to him. He proceeded to chant his verses in a low voice, including my first name.

Typically, the verses tend to be garbled, idiosyncratic, and meaningless to an outsider; this may be a dramatic device intended to impress the consulter or, more likely, a dissociative technique for the diviner himself. As he murmured his verses he gently and repeatedly knocked the back of his hand, in which he held some of the pebbles, against the floor. Many diviners put the coins of the fee with the pebbles. Having completed the verses after about thirty seconds, Lai began to lay out the pebbles on the floor, one by one. He did this four times. As in other séances I attended, dialogue between the diviner and the consulter was minimal.

With the first pattern, I am enjoined not to worry about my dream; I am well and have a prosperous future. The dream signifies good fortune. Upon concluding my work in Kamadugu Sukurela I will enjoy great happiness.

Lai then asks the pebbles: "Is there anything to be sacrificed?"

With the second pattern I am instructed to prepare a sacrifice of white kola nuts and, after consecrating them, to give them to a pale-complexioned girl (connotation: a virgin). This kind of sacrifice is characteristic of sacrifices meant to confirm a good prognosis. The symbols of whiteness and purity are regarded as means of "keeping the path open" or of clearing a person's relationship with his ancestors. This image of social relations as paths that can become blocked or darkened, but may be ritually cleared, pervades divinatory discourse.

With the third pattern Lai comments: "We are safe; we are being protected/enclosed by God; there is no trouble pending." Two pebbles are moved in after the others have been laid out. Lai explains that the pebble clusters to the left of the layout are "gates" or "barriers." Lai repeats the good prognosis: "Your dream is a sign of prosperity, you need not be afraid; for as long as you remain in the village there will be no trouble."

Lai reiterates instructions for the sacrifice I must offer. Indeed, it is typical for diviners to cast the stones two or more times to confirm the prognosis and finalize details of the sacrifice.

At this point I decide to interrogate Lai about his methods. The consultation becomes more relaxed, and I recount the dream which brought me to him. Lai lays out the pebbles once more in the fourth pattern and concludes: "This is the sacrifice I have shown you; it signifies that your family are pleased with what you are doing and often speak well of you. I have seen that and therefore I have told you to give the sacrifice to an innocent girl so that when you return home your family will be pleased with you."

Lai later asserted that neither the pebbles nor the patterns had any intrinsic meaning. But, as he put it, "they speak"; he simply repeated or transmitted the message that "came from" the pebbles. He also disavowed being influenced by or taking into account his knowledge of people and events in the community. If this is entirely true, then the Kuranko diviner is quite unlike the Zande witchdoctor whose "revelations and prophecies are based on a knowledge of local scandal" or the Ndembu diviner who uses his knowledge of divisions, rivalries, and personalities in the community in order to arrive at an appropriate diagnosis.[18] Certainly the Kuranko diviner does not interrogate the consulter very much; rather, he "interrogates" the stones. In the case of the consultation recorded previously, however, there is evidence that Lai's personal understanding of my research goals and my likely anxieties as a stranger in the village influenced his remarks. That he should not be aware of his own introjections is simply a consequence of his conviction that he is merely a vehicle for passing on messages from divinity to man. Furthermore, if divination is not regarded as an aspect of subjectivity and consciousness, then dialogue between the diviner and the consulter is unnecessary. The absence of any extended dialogue during a consultation may also be explained in terms of the fact that Kuranko divination tends to be concerned with prospective rather than prior conditions. The Kuranko diviner is less interested in the cause and diagnosis of a consulter's condition than in discovering what course of action is required to reassure a troubled mind, avoid some misfortune, secure prosperity, clarify some confusion. The diviner characteristically defines his task as one of "seeing a sacrifice"; this does not involve a searching analysis of the individual and social situation in which the consulter finds himself. There is no "social analysis" such as Turner lucidly describes in his studies of Ndembu divination. For the Kuranko consulter the emphasis is thus upon anticipatory knowledge that facilitates activity: making a sacrifice

according to the precise instructions given by the diviner. This activity enables an abreaction of anxiety. More generally, the future, which Kuranko associate with uncertainty and anxiety, is "annulled"; it becomes like the past, which is the source of knowledge and the domain of certitude.

For both diviner and consulter it would seem that it is only when the prognosis is associated with objective and external elements (i.e., is disengaged from subjectivity) that activity is facilitated. If external powers and agencies such as God and the bush spirits have any functional importance in Kuranko society, it is therefore in the manner in which they enable individuals actively to determine their own situation or behave as if they could do so. Such divine categories do not constitute a rationale for the abnegation of the will or for collective acquiescence in a belief in external causation. The paradox here (and one that is implied wherever we find a cultural commitment to beliefs in categories of external causation) is that a "belief" in external independent agencies or powers seems often to be a necessary precondition for people to assume responsibility for their own situations and destinies.

The process of distancing or disengaging from subjectivity no matter how illusory may constitute, for our purposes, an adequate definition of magic.[19] Objects or words are invested with emotions that cannot in their raw state be intellectual grasped or brought under control.

Divination entails a commitment by both diviner and consulter to the particular magical devices that allow externalization, objectification, and systematization. The outcome of the consultation is a negotiated synthesis of the diviner's and the consulter's perceptions and persuasions. The implicit collusion here makes it possible for the individual consulter to do something about his particular situation (make a sacrifice as directed), and it also makes it possible for others to act with him (in making the sacrifice), since his particular problem has been defined in terms of collectively recognized and legitimated categories. The latter process is similar to what Park calls the establishment of "effective consensus."[20] The process of externalization, however, involves two parallel transitions: the consulter surpasses the chaotic and inchoate state in which he finds himself and, through social action, is enabled to assume responsibility for and determine his own situation, while the consulter's *situation* is classified according to collective dogmas of causation and, as a consequence, the group (family, subclan, or village) is enabled to act decisively and systematically to redefine and reconstitute itself. The diviner's role can thus be understood as one that ritualizes the transition from inertia to activity, a transition on which both individual and group existence

depends. Some of the psychological and existential implications of this shift from passivity to activity are now considered.

Questions of Verification

Many anthropologists have sought to explain how it is possible for diviners to maintain credibility and protect the authority of the system when there is such a great deal of inevitable error in prognoses and diagnoses.[21] Indeed, the study of purely formal properties and problems of belief systems has, to some extent, eclipsed the study of how beliefs are used and manipulated in actual situations. Before taking up the crucial issue of praxis, however, let me summarize the many ways in which anthropologists have shown how the credibility of divinatory systems is protected.

Sometimes, as among the Ndembu, the oracular element is absent from the system: "Diviners disclose what has happened, and do not foretell events."[22] Frequently, prognostications are imprecise, impersonal, or conditional and thus difficult to challenge confidently in retrospect.[23] And a diviner's pronouncements are usually held to be inspired by divine agencies; the veracity of the divine word is not called into question, only the mediatory skills of the diviner. Some exceptions to this rule are known. Among the Limba, "if a prediction or diagnosis turns out to be false, then this is interpreted as being because the spirit on that occasion told him (the diviner) a lie; it is not the man that is to blame."[24] Meek reports that among the Jukun, "a limit is set to the power of the divining apparatus by the belief that deities and ancestral spirits may use the apparatus in order to give lying messages for their own purposes."[25]

A diviner usually directs a sacrifice and specifies exact rules and procedures that the consulter must follow if the sacrifice is to be efficacious. This increases the likelihood or probability of an error being made by the consulter. Should the sacrifice not lead to the expected advantages, then blame may be attributed to the consulter rather than the diviner. Alternatively, intrusive countermagic may be found to be the cause of the failure. The Kuranko sometimes account for the ineffectiveness of a sacrifice by claiming that witches interfered with it or by suggesting that some of the men attending the sacrifice and receiving meat from it had been involved in love affairs with each other's wives. Such blanket rationalizations cannot, of course, be substantiated. It also happens that some consulters derive sufficient comfort from a diviner's advice to neglect making a confirmatory sacrifice. This is often the case when a prognosis is positive; if it is bad, a person will be less inclined to risk neglecting the sacrifice that

will avert the anticipated disaster. I know this to be sometimes the case with the Kuranko, and the neglect of sacrifices, particularly those directed by a diviner, is often cited as a cause of a person's misfortune.

"Converging sequence" theory may provide a defense mechanism for the system. Here several possible causes may be referred to in explaining any single effect. An initial diagnosis may indicate one cause (ancestors, bush spirits, God), but other factors may come to light that also bear on the consulter's situation. The system itself is thus never subject to doubt.[26] Trickery and deliberate deception may be employed by the diviner, as among the Azande.[27] In some cases the consulter may unconsciously fulfill a certain prophecy or fabricate evidence that corroborates a diagnosis. And, of course, many diagnoses are correct, and many prognostications prove to be true. Only corroborative evidence is noticed, since it is "easy to obtain confirmations, or verifications, for nearly every theory if we look for confirmations."[28] Or we could say that there is no interest shown in the falsification or refutation of the system (something for which only one counterexample is required).

The reason for this lack of interest in discrediting the diviner or challenging the truth of the divinatory system may be explained by the following discussion, which returns us to the problem of the aleatory. A person goes to a diviner when he or she is troubled and confused, unable to make a definite decision, or choose between alternative courses of action. The following dilemmas are those most often mentioned by the Kuranko as reasons for seeking the advice of a diviner. In each instance, a liminal or limit situation presents itself, characterized by choices that cannot easily be made and open to adventitious influences.

A woman cannot conceive a child. This situation admits two kinds of explanation: either the husband is infertile—a possibility that is usually rationalized away—or the wife is barren. The uncertainty of the situation arises from the difficulty of knowing whether the woman will ever conceive a child (temporary barrenness is not uncommon).

A woman has a long and difficult labor. A diviner may be consulted to find out whether the cause is a bush spirit or not. If a bush spirit is involved, the woman will be taken to another house for the delivery.

A man is about to marry. A diviner may be consulted to find out whether the wife will bear him children or not, whether or not the marriage will bring blessedness and good fortune, and so forth.

A man is about to brush his farm. A diviner may be consulted to find out whether or not there are bush spirits in the vicinity so that propitiatory sacrifices can be made to them.

A person is about to embark upon a journey. A diviner may be consulted to find out whether or not the traveler will return safely or accomplish the mission.

A person is troubled by a dream. A diviner will be able to say whether or not it is auspicious.

A kinsman is ill. A diviner may be consulted to find out whether the sickness is "natural" (*altala kiraiye*, sickness caused by God) or "human" (*morgo kiraiye*, sickness caused by human agency—witchcraft or sorcery).

A sickness or disease does not respond to treatment suggested by a *besetigi* (medicine master). Unlike the Mende diviners, who are sometimes healing doctors,[29] the Kuranko *besetigi* is never a diviner, and a diviner never practices therapeutic medicine. Medical knowledge is acquired through a long apprenticeship, not through revelation or vision.

A kinsman (particularly a child) dies suddenly. Witchcraft may be suspected in such cases, and the men's witch-detecting cult, Gbangbe, will be called out. An ordinary diviner is usually consulted first, however.

A man is about to have his son or daughter initiated. A diviner's analysis of the child's situation will enable him to direct appropriate sacrifices to maximize the neophyte's chances of success. Often, a father will be advised to keep the company of a pale-complexioned virgin girl.

A man is about to build a house. The diviner will direct appropriate sacrifices for the house site (usually a white flag is hung from a pole on the site); he will also judge whether or not the site is "clear" of the influences of the spirits of previous settlers.

In all of these situations, divination works, in Meyer Fortes's words, as "a ritual means of making a choice."[30] The diviner makes an unequivocal decision concerning his client; quite simply, a diagnosis or prognosis is given that is either auspicious or inauspicious. The diviner then concentrates on "seeing" a sacrifice and instructing his client in the precise procedures for making it. Almost every sacrifice includes at least one directive peculiar to it. Sacrifices are generally of two kinds: piacular, to avert disaster or ward off evil; or confirmatory, to assist the realization of an auspicious forecast. Failure to offer the sacrifice or to follow the exact instructions given for it increases one's chances of being struck down by ill fortune. Such a failure could also be used as a ready explanation if and when misfortune fell.

Kuranko divination has, to use Parsonian terms, an expressive and an instrumental aspect. Yet, by being instrumental in assisting a person get back into a decisive relation with his or her situation, divination signifies a universal human need to act upon the forces acting on one, thus converting givenness into choice. The diviner's analysis transforms

uncertainty into a provisional certainty, and his instructions for an appropriate sacrifice enable the consulter to move from inertia to purposeful activity (praxis). Quite simply, one regains one's autonomy; one acts upon the conditions that are acting upon one. And this autonomy precludes anxiety.

My own consultations with Kuranko diviners were prompted by anxieties about my work, about troubling dreams, about my wife's health during her pregnancy. On every occasion, despite the fact that I did not accept *intellectually* the assumptions underlying Kuranko divination, the consultations helped alleviate anxiety, and I diligently made the sacrifices I was told were necessary. It is on the strength of such firsthand experiences of Kuranko divination that I argue that the psychological and existential changes effected by consulting a diviner are so immediate and positive that the ultimate outcome of any prognostication or sacrifice does not necessarily inspire retrospective interest in the truth or falsity of the diviner's ontological assumptions.

This implies, of course, that studies of divination that are intellectualistic in their bias and focus on the problem of the credibility of the system reflect an objectivist methodology that plays down subjective experience. By relying on participatory experiences rather than disinterested observations, I hope to have shown that one's methodology constitutes both the object under study and one's interpretation of it. Extrapolating from my own experience of Kuranko divination leads naturally to an emphasis on issues of uncertainty and crisis. It leads indeed to a pragmatist viewpoint, which does not reduce Kuranko divination to an object of intellectual knowledge but sees it rather in a wider frame of experience as an object of use. Unlike the intellectualistic viewpoint, the pragmatist viewpoint has the merit of being consistent with the Kuranko ethos itself. This point can be briefly elaborated by comparing Kuranko divinatory and storytelling arts.

Although divination addresses adventitious uncertainties and stories actually create uncertainties and dilemmas, the resolution of ambiguity is crucial in both cases: randomness is maximized before it is shown to be a kind of disguised order. In both the divinatory rite and the storytelling session, people actively manipulate simulacra of the real world in order to grasp it more clearly and transform their experience of it. The pebbles in the diviner's hands are like the figures and images (*gestalten*) with which the narrator creates new interpretations, and both the diviner and the narrator make possible a transition from confusion to clarity, and an adjustment of individual freedom to its limiting conditions.[31]

In these transformations, the "objective" consistency or truth of narrative events and divinatory techniques is not an issue. What is important to the Kuranko is whether the storytelling sessions and divinatory consultations enable worthwhile things to happen and help people act decisively and responsibly in their everyday social existence.

Aspects of Belief and Method

It is now possible to consider in greater depth the probable status of the beliefs associated with Kuranko divination.

The most significant beliefs are phrased as unquestioned assumptions: the art of divining is acquired from extrasocial sources through some ecstatic episode; God communicates messages to the diviner via the river pebbles; ancestors influence the destinies and fortunes of people, but people can influence the ancestors through sacrifices addressed to them.

One must remember, however, that such doctrinaire ways of phrasing beliefs are usually an artifact of the anthropological *interview*; in the context of practical activity, a more provisional and opportunistic picture emerges. Partly on the basis of my own participation in rites of divination and sacrifice, partly on the basis of discussions with diviners and other informants, I have advanced the view that beliefs are best regarded as tokens that are manipulated inventively in critical situations to achieve personal and collective goals simultaneously. The assertion that beliefs are absolute and objectively given is rhetorically significant rather than empirically realized.

In support of this view, the following points can be made. First, as we have seen, Kuranko diviners admit there is a variety of techniques or sources of inspiration, all of which may mediate true understanding. This is consistent with a more general anthropological observation: there is always a great variety of reasons or motives (conscious and unconscious) for espousing a particular belief, and no two individuals—whether from the same culture or from different cultures—will subscribe to the same belief for identical reasons. As Devereux observes, citing a Latin adage: *Si bis faciunt idem, non est idem.*[32] That is why I could use Kuranko divination *as if it were true*, calling upon it as an "extra truth,"[33] an idea that one stores in one's mind as potentially useful in a life crisis that has not yet occurred. Once it has served its purpose, the idea is set aside, its truth again quiescent.[34] I maintain that Kuranko beliefs in divination are of the same order: quiescent most of the time, activated in crisis, but having no

stable or intrinsic truth values that can be defined outside of contexts of use. Second, beliefs are in most cultures often simulated or feigned, and the strength of commitment is highly variable, yet this does not necessarily undermine the potential utility and efficacy of the beliefs. In other words, the relationship between the espoused or manifest belief (dogma) and individual experience is indeterminate. We cannot infer the experience from the belief or vice versa with complete certainty. Third, to investigate beliefs or "belief systems" apart from actual human activity is absurd.

When anthropologists write as if beliefs were fixed, external facts that determine experience and activity, this is tantamount to saying that the "believers" are mad. Consider the following remarks of Sylvana Arieti on the experience of the schizophrenic:

If we ask severely ill schizophrenics to explain why they believe their strange ideas in spite of all the evidence, they do not attempt to demonstrate the validity of the ideas. . . . Almost invariably they give this answer: "I know," meaning, "I know that it is so." The patient's belief is more than a strong conviction; it is a certitude . . . the patient is unable to lie about his delusions. . . . The delusions are absolute reality for him, and he cannot deny them.[35]

It is not uncommon for anthropologists to write about people in other cultures in just this way: as if they were unable to distinguish words and things, as if the beliefs mastered and manipulated them (like projective delusions), as if, in a word, they were autistic. It is of course true that Kuranko diviners never openly question the ultimate authority of God. Nor do they consciously lie or cheat. Among ordinary people, the authority of the "words of the ancestors" never seems to be challenged, and the "way the ancestors did things" sanctifies and justifies all of the customs inherited from them. But the lack of evidence on the rhetorical plane of a skeptical attitude does not justify a priori assumptions that the Kuranko are incapable of suspending disbelief or experiencing what George Steiner calls "alternity."[36] Verbal responses are poor indices of inner states, and beliefs are more like metaphors than many dare imagine.

The Kuranko verb for "to know" is *a lon* (thence "knowledge," *lonei*). "Known" things are said to be things learned. The noun *lanaiye* may be translated as "belief," its connotations being "confidence" or "trust" in another person or "conviction" about some idea. Thus the phrases *i la ra la*? (do you believe?) and *i la ra wo la*? (do you not believe that?) carry the connotation "do you have a firm conviction that such and such is true?"

I have never known a Kuranko to express doubt or uncertainty about divinatory methods, but, as we have seen, individuals will have greater confidence or "belief" in one diviner than in another.

That the Kuranko regard the beliefs which sustain the divinatory process as externally factitious, independent of human subjectivity, and immune to human interference or governance should not lead us to conclude either that the beliefs have ontological corollaries or that they are never subject to manipulation, open to change, or held with variable conviction and for a variety of reasons. Working to grasp the native's point of view does not entail sharing his false consciousness. Nevertheless, trying to understand empathically the native's view of the world by using a participatory methodology, as I have done, implies an interest in dissolving the boundary that in anthropological discourse contrasts them and us in terms of a distinction between magic and science. It also implies an eagerness to put our anthropological texts on a par with the "texts" we collect in the field, critically examining in both cases the pretensions of those who author the "texts" to an intellectually or morally privileged position from which the other can be judged or a "true" understanding of him presumed.

In this chapter I have tried to work in terms of an existential issue—the problem of the aleatory—that is of concern to all human beings. When we examine the great variety of ways in which science and divination alike introduce a semblance of order and system into an uncertain universe, it begins to look as if establishing the "truth" of science or of divination in terms of some notion that the systems correspond to external reality is not necessary in order for these systems to help us cope with life and make it meaningful. The lesson I take from my experience of consulting Kuranko diviners is that one does not have to believe in the truth claims of the system for it to work in a practical and psychological sense. Crucial to this notion of work is the transformation of experience from something private and amorphous into something that is sharable and substantial. This "objectification" of subjective life may be mediated in a variety of ways—through divination, myth, storytelling, or science. But in every case, what matters existentially is that we are enabled to grasp experiences that confound us, react to events that overwhelm us, and become creators rather than mere creatures of circumstance.

I began practicing Hatha Yoga under Iyengar-trained teachers in 1973. Not only was my well-being improved by this regime of diet, physical disciplines, breath control, and meditation; my sharpened focus on bodily subjectivity took my anthropological work in new directions. Apart from Pierre Bourdieu's work on habitus and body praxis (1972) and John Blacking's *The Anthropology of the Body* (1977), few anthropologists had explored the full implications of what Marcel Mauss referred to in his celebrated 1934 essay as techniques of the body.[1] My own research on embodiment was initially oriented toward phenomenological and therapeutic aspects of body use and influenced by my reading of Merleau-Ponty and by my Kuranko fieldwork. As a result of conversations with Russell Keat and Paul Connerton at the Humanities Research Center (Australian National University) in 1982, my focus shifted to a phenomenological critique of the anthropological concept of culture and of symbolic analysis. "Knowledge of the Body" was presented as a seminar paper at the ANU in early 1982 and published the following year.[2]

Knowledge of the Body

But empiricism has always harbored other secrets.

GILLES DELEUZE, PURE IMMANENCE: ESSAYS ON A LIFE[3]

There is always a risk in anthropology of treating the people we study as objects, mere means of advancing our intellectual goals. There is a similar discursive bias in our customary attitudes to our own bodies: the Cartesian division between subject and object also tends to assimilate the body to the same ontological category as the objects of physical science. Against this view, Merleau-Ponty argued that the human body is itself a subject, and this "subject" is necessarily, not just contingently, embodied.[4] Moreover, if human beings differ from other organic and inorganic beings, this is due not to their having some distinctive, nonbodily features, but rather to the distinctive character of their bodies.

One of the most arresting facts of embodied subjectivity is its habitual character. By contrast with the mind, which we readily imagine to be free to entertain new ideas and revise old opinions, the body appears less malleable, especially as we grow older. Engrained attitudes and inflexible dispositions are, however, traits of minds and bodies alike, which is why techniques, such as yoga, for transforming a person's way of life, focus on physical as well as mental habits. But dystonic habits of body use cannot be changed simply by desiring to act in different ways. The mind is not separate from the body, and it is pure superstition to think that one can "straighten oneself out" by some kind of "psychical manipulation without reference to the distortions of sensation and perception which are due to bad bodily sets."

Habits cannot be changed at will because we are the habits; "in any intelligible sense of the word will, they are will."[5] To change a body of habits, physical or cultural, can never be a matter of wishful thinking and trying; it depends on learning and practicing what Foucault and Sennett refer to as "technologies of the self."[6]

Culture

If there is any one word that defines the common ground of the social sciences and humanities it is the word *culture*. But *culture* may be understood not only as an abstract noun but in a verbal sense as well. And it not only covers a domain of intellectual life; it also demarcates a field of practical activity.

In its original usage, *culture* (from the Latin *colo*) meant to inhabit a town or district, to cultivate, tend, or till the land, to keep and breed animals, and generally to look after one's livelihood "especially in its material aspects," such as clothing and adorning the body, caring for and attending to friends and family, minding the gods, and upholding custom through the cultivation of correct moral and intellectual disciplines.[7]

In tracing out the semantic history of culture we are, however, led further and further away from these grounded notions of bodily activity in a social and material environment. Throughout the late Middle Ages, culture was used increasingly to refer to moral perfection and intellectual or artistic accomplishment, and from the mid-eighteenth century, when German writers began to apply the term to human societies and history, culture almost invariably designated the refined mental and spiritual faculties which members of the European bourgeoisie imagined set them apart from the allegedly brutish worlds of manual workers, peasants, and savages.

As Herbert Marcuse has shown, this kind of social demarcation inevitably gave rise to an epistemological division whereby the spiritual world was "lifted out of its social context, making culture a (false) collective noun" as in the idea of "Germanic culture" or "Greek classical culture." In this way, culture was made to denote a realm of authentic spiritual values, realized through "the idealist cult of inwardness," and radically opposed to the world of social utility and material means.[8] The individual soul was set off from and against the body, and sensuality was spiritualized in notions of romantic love and religious adoration. No longer pricked by conscience about the ways in which their enjoyment of so-called higher values depended upon the menial toil of the "lower

orders," the bourgeoisie denied both the sensual body and the material conditions on which its privilege rested. Exclusion of the body from discourse went along with the exclusion of the masses from political life.[9]

In 1871 the English anthropologist Edward Tylor published his pioneering work, *Primitive Culture*, borrowing the term *culture* from the German tradition but defining it, after Gustav Klemm, in an apparently neutral way as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[10] Although culture was held to be a distinctive attribute of *all* humankind, varying only in degree, the pejorative and historical connotations of the word *culture* remained in vogue, and Tylor, like Klemm and Herder before him, applied himself to the task of tracing out the progressive stages of social development in terms of the advance of scientific rationality and technological control over nature.

Taken up by American anthropologists as early as the 1880s, the term *culture* gradually lost its nineteenth-century glosses, and between 1920 and 1950 a new demarcation function was assigned to it: *culture* defined the emergent properties of mind and language that separated humans from animals. This view was already implied in Kroeber's seminal 1917 paper, "The Superorganic," and is echoed in Kroeber and Kluckholn's 1952 review of the concept, where they define culture as "a set of attributes and products of human societies, and therewith of mankind, which are extrasomatic and transmissible by mechanisms other than biological heredity, and are as essentially lacking in subhuman species as they are characteristic of the human species as it is aggregated in its societies."[11]

In recent years the paradigm has shifted again, partly through the impact of sociobiology, and although culture is still defined as exogenetic it is not regarded as exosomatic or considered apart from phylogeny. As John Tyler Bonner defines it in *The Evolution of Culture in Animals,* culture is "the transfer of information by behavioral means, most particularly by the process of teaching and learning."[12] Culture is, in this sense, a property of many living organisms apart from humans, and while cultural evolution can be contrasted with genetic evolution, culture has a biogenetic base. In the words of E. O. Wilson, "Aside from its involvement with language, which is truly unique, [culture] differs from animal tradition only in degree."[13]

Whether we consider the idealist traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which "etherealized" the body, or anthropological definitions of culture which play up the conceptual and linguistic characteristics of human social existence to the exclusion of somatic and biological processes, we find that post-Enlightenment science has been

pervaded by a popular bourgeois conception of culture as something "superorganic," a self-contained world of unique qualities and manners divorced from the world of materiality and biology. Culture has thus served as a token to demarcate, separate, exclude, and deny,[14] and although at different epochs the excluded "natural" category shifts about among peasants, barbarians, workers, primitive people, women, children, animals, and material objects, a persistent theme is the denial of the somatic, a scotomacizing of the physical aspects of being where our sense of separateness and distinction is most readily blurred. It is unfortunate that anthropology should have helped perpetuate the bourgeois myth of the superorganic; yet, when one considers that anthropology itself belongs to a privileged domain of activity—academe—and evolved as a by-product of European colonialism, it is not hard to see how the exclusion of the body from anthropological discourse is at the same time a defense against the unsettling knowledge that the very data on which that discourse depends are extracted from agrarian peoples for whom knowledge is nothing if not practical. To write prefaces to our monographs, acknowledging the generosity of informants or the support of a devoted spouse, is thus to gesture vacuously in the direction of a material truth that the work itself usually denies because of its abstract style, the disembodied view of culture it contains, and the privileged world to which it is addressed and in which it has value.

Thus, to bring back the body into discourse is inevitably related to questions about the use value of anthropology and the problem of finding some way of making our discourse consonant with the practices and interests of the peoples we study. Throughout the 1970s, studies of body movement and body meaning appeared in increasing numbers, but analysis tended to be either overly symbolic and semantic or, in the case of ethological studies, heavily mechanistic. Since the semantic model has dominated anthropological studies of the body, it is this mode of analysis that I focus on here. My main contention is that the "anthropology of the body" has been vitiated by a tendency to interpret embodied experience in terms of cognitive and linguistic models of meaning.

The Language of Representation

The first problem arises from the intellectualist tendency to regard body praxis as secondary to verbal praxis. For example, Mary Douglas, while critical of the "logocentric bias in many studies of nonverbal communication" whereby "speech has been overemphasized as the privileged

means of human communication, and the body neglected," still asserts that "normally the physical channel supports and agrees with the spoken one."[15] This subjugation of the bodily to the semantic is empirically untenable. In the first place, from both phylogenetic and ontogenetic points of view, thinking and communicating through the body precede and to a great extent always remain beyond speech.[16] This may be recognized in the way our earliest memories are usually sensations or direct impressions rather than words or ideas and refer to situated yet not spoken events. It is, moreover, often the case that gestures and bodily habits belie what we put into words and give away our unconscious dispositions, betraying character traits that our verbal and conceptual habits keep us in ignorance of.[17] In therapies that focus on the embodied personality and the bodily unconscious, such as hypnotherapy and Reichian bioenergetic analysis, the "somatic mind" mediates understandings and changes in which verbal consciousness plays little part. In the second place, as Binswanger and Merleau-Ponty have argued, meaning should not be reduced to a sign that lies on a separate plane outside the immediate domain of an act. For instance, when our familiar environment is suddenly disrupted we feel uprooted, we lose our footing, we are thrown, we collapse, we fall. But such falling, Binswanger says, is not "something metaphorical derived from physical falling," a mere manner of speaking; it is a shock and disorientation which occurs simultaneously in body and mind, and refers to a basic ontological structure of our being-in-the-world.[18] In this sense, uprightness of posture may be said to define a psychophysical relationship with the world, so that to lose this position, this "standing," is simultaneously a bodily and intellectual loss of balance, a disturbance at the very center and ground of our being.[19] Metaphors of falling and disequilibrium disclose this integral connection of the psychic and the physical; they do not express a concept in terms of a bodily image.

Another way of showing that the meaning of body praxis is not always reducible to cognitive and semantic operations is to note that body movements often make sense without being intentional in the linguistic sense: as communicating, codifying, symbolizing, signifying thoughts or things that lie outside or anterior to speech. Thus, an understanding of a body movement does not invariably depend on an elucidation of what the movement "stands for." As David Best puts it, "Human movement does not symbolize reality, it is reality."[20] To treat body praxis as necessarily being an effect of semantic causes is to treat the body as a diminished version of itself.[21]

The second problem in the anthropology of the body is a corollary of the first. Insofar as the body tends to be defined as a medium of expression

or communication, it is not only reduced to the status of a sign; it is also made into an object of purely mental operations, a "thing" onto which social patterns are projected. Thus, Douglas speaks of the body as an "it" and examines how "in its role as an image of society, the body's main scope is to express the relation of the individual to the group."[22] As a result, a Cartesian split is made that detaches the knowing and speaking subject from the unknowing inert body. At the same time, through a reification of the knowing subject, which is made synonymous with "society" or "the social body," society is made to assume the active role of governing, utilizing, and charging with significance the physical bodies of individuals.[23] In this view the human body is simply an object of understanding or an instrument of the rational mind, a kind of vehicle for the expression of a reified social rationality. This view is fallacious on epistemological grounds; it also contradicts our experience of the lived body, wherein no sense of the mind as causally prior can be sustained and any notion of the body as an instrument of mind or of society is absurd. Dewey dismisses this kind of dualism by drawing attention to the "natural medium" in which bodies and minds exist equally:

In ultimate analysis the mystery that mind should use a body, or that a body should have a mind, is like the mystery that a man cultivating plants should use the soil; or that the soil which grows plants at all should grow those adapted to its own physico-chemical properties. . . .

Every "mind" that we are empirically acquainted with is found in connection with some organized body. Every such body exists in a natural medium to which it sustains some adaptive connection: plants to air, water, sun, and animals to these things and also to plants. Without such connections, animals die; the "purest" mind would not continue without them.[24]

A third problem arises from the dualistic and reified views on which I have just commented. In many anthropological studies of the body, the body is regarded as inert, passive, and static. Either the body is shown to be a neutral and ideographic means of embodying ideas or it is dismembered so that the symbolic value of its various parts in indigenous discourse can be enumerated. There seems to be a dearth of studies of what Merleau-Ponty called the "body subject," studies of interactions and exchanges occurring within the field of bodily existence rather than resulting from mechanical rules or innate preprogramming.

My aim in the following pages is to outline a phenomenological approach to body praxis. I hope to avoid naïve subjectivism by showing

how human experience is grounded in bodily movement within a social and material environment and by examining at the level of event the interplay of habitual patterns of body use and conventional ideas about the world.

Initiations and Imitations

In the dry season of 1970 in northern Sierra Leone, not long after I had begun fieldwork in the Kuranko village of Firawa, I was fortunate to see the public festivities associated with girls' initiation rites (*dimusu biriye*). Each night from the veranda of the house where I was staying I would watch the girls performing the graceful and energetic *yatuiye* and *yamayili* dances that presaged the end of their childhood. With their hair specially braided and adorned with snail-shell toggles, and wearing brightly colored beaded headbands, groups of girls passed from house to house around the village, dancing, clapping, and singing that their girlhood days were almost over. The daylight hours were also crowded with activities. Visitors poured into the village, diviners were consulted to see what dangers might lie in store for the girls during the operations, sacrifices were made to avert such dangers, gifts were given to help defray expenses for those families whose daughters were being initiated that year, and all the while the neophytes continued to circulate around the village in the company of indefatigable drummers. Then, at dusk on the day before the operations, the girls were led down to the river by older women to be washed and dressed in long white gowns. That night they were sequestered in a special house, and we did not see them. Nor in the morning, for they were ushered away into the bush at first light by the women, to be made ready for the operations. They remained in the bush, lodged in a makeshift house, for three weeks, all the time receiving instruction from older women in domestic, sexual, and moral matters and waiting for the clitoridectomy scars to heal.

On the day the girls left the village, I sat about with the other men, talking and being entertained by groups of performers, mostly women and young girls, who came by the house just as the neophytes had done in the days before. These performers fascinated me. A young girl, her body daubed with red and white ochers and charcoal, stood before us with an immobile face. Another, wearing a man's hat and gown and carrying a cutlass hilt down, held a pad of cloth clamped over her mouth. When she and her companions moved on, another group took their place:

small boys who pranced around in mimicry of a comical figure trussed in grass, a "chimpanzee" which fell to the ground from time to time to be " revived" by his friends' urgent drumming. Then women performers danced before us too. One was dressed in men's clothes with a wild fruit hung from a cord across her forehead. She imitated the maladroit dance movements of men, her face expressionless, while other women surrounded her, clapping, singing, and laughing. Other women had daubed their bodies with red and white clay and charcoal, and painted symmetrical black lines under their eyes. They too danced awkwardly with deadpan faces, some holding red flowers clenched between tight lips.

Three weeks passed and the girls returned to the village. More dancing took place, and the mimicry of men was a recurring motif. Several young women marched up and down shouldering old rifles, others had donned the coarse cloth leggings and tasseled caps of hunters, while others pretended to be the praise singers of the hunters and plucked the imaginary strings of a piece of stick signifying a harp.

For as long as the festivities lasted I plied my field assistant with endless questions, always being given the same answers: that the performers were simply contributing to the enjoyment of the occasion and doing what was customary during initiations. Although different performers had names such as *tatatie, komantere* (scapegrace), *kamban soiya* (*kamban* soldiery), *forubandi binye* (the name of the mossy grass in which the chimpanzee boy was trussed), and *sewulan* (*wulan*, red), the names yielded me no clues to the meaning of the performances. Similarly, the sung refrains that sometimes accompanied the dances were little more to me than banal and obvious commentaries on the events. In my notebooks, among detailed descriptions of what I saw, I listed searching questions that could not be phrased in Kuranko, let alone answered, and the following self-interrogations, culled from my field notes of that time, now remind me of the fervor with which I sought clues to hidden meanings:

These mask-like expressions—are they a way in which these girls strive to sympathetically induce in their older sisters some measure of self-control? Is this impassivity a way in which they seek magically to countermand or neutralize the emotional turmoil in the hearts of the neophytes? These songs the women sing, assuaging fear and urging calm—are they ways in which the village tries to cool "the bush"? These girls in men's clothes—do they want to assimilate something of men's fortitude and fearlessness, or is this muddling of quotidian roles simply an expression of the confusion surrounding this moment of mid-passage? And the chimpanzee boy, falling to the ground and lying there utterly still before being roused by the drumming and resuming his dance—is this an image of death and rebirth?

Some years later, when I published an account of the initiations, I tried to answer these questions by making inordinate use of the slight exegesis that informants had given me, decoding the ritual activities as if they were symbolic representations of unconscious concerns. Determined, however, to be faithful to at least one aspect of the ritual form—its non-linear, mosaic-like character—I borrowed my interpretative model from the structural study of myth, claiming that the initiations could be seen as "a myth staged rather than spoken, acted out rather than voiced."[25]

Noting that "ritual meanings are not often verbalized and perhaps cannot be because they surpass and confound language," I nevertheless applied a method of analysis that reduces "acts to words and gives objects a specific vocabulary." And while admitting that "ritual often makes language redundant" and makes questions superfluous, I proceeded to paraphrase the ritual movements and translate its actions into words.[26]

With hindsight, I now realize the absurdity of this analytical procedure. As Bourdieu observes: "Rites, more than any other type of practice, serve to underline the mistake of enclosing in concepts a logic made to dispense with concepts; of treating movements of the body and practical manipulations as purely logical operations; of speaking of analogies and homologies (as one sometimes has to, in order to understand and to convey that understanding) when all that is involved is the practical transference of incorporated, quasi-postural schemes."[27]

In the first place I failed to take Kuranko comments at their face value and accept that the performances I witnessed were "just for entertainment," or, as my field assistant put it, "for no other reason but to have everyone take part." In the second place I failed to accept that human beings do not necessarily act from opinions or employ epistemological criteria in finding meaning for their actions. In *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, Wittgenstein argues that Frazer was not warranted in assuming that primitive rituals are informed by erroneous conceptions about the world, since "What makes the character of ritual action is not any view or opinion, either right or wrong," though opinions and beliefs may of course "belong to a rite."[28] Inasmuch as Kuranko ritual actions make sense to them at the level of immediate experience and do not purport to be true in terms of some systematic theory of knowledge, who are we to deny their emphasis on use value and ask impertinent questions about veracity? It is probably the separateness of the observer from the ritual acts that makes him think that the acts refer to or require justification in a domain beyond their actual compass.

For these reasons it is imperative to explore further what Wittgenstein called "the environment of a way of acting" and accept that

understanding may be gained through seeing and drawing attention to connections or "intermediary links" within such an environment, rather than by explaining acts in terms of preceding events, projected aims, unconscious concerns, or precepts and rules.[29] After all, I never thought to ask Kuranko farmers why they hoed the earth or broadcast grain; neither did I interrogate women about the meaning of lighting a fire or the significance of cooking or raising children. In my approach to initiation I was clearly applying a distinction that the Kuranko themselves did not recognize: between pragmatic "work" and "ritual" activity. Or rather, I regarded the lucid elements in the ritual performances as exactly comparable to theatrical and stage performances in my own society, where actions are scripted, deliberately directed, and variously interpreted. My bourgeois conception of culture as something "superorganic," something separable from the quotidian world of bodily movements and practical tasks, had led me to seek the script, the director, and the interpretation in a rite that had none. This quest for semantic truths also explained my inability to participate in the spirit of the performances and why I spent my time asking people to tell me what was going on, what it all meant, as if the painted bodies and mimetic dances were only the insipid remnants of what had perhaps once been a symbolically coherent structure of myths and masks. Our longing for meaning frequently assumes the form of nostalgia for the traditional.

But to hold that every act signifies something is an extravagant form of abstraction, so long as this implies that the action stands for something other than itself, beyond the here and now. In anthropology this "something other" is usually a reified category designated by such verbal tokens as "social solidarity," "functional equilibrium," "adaptive integration," or "unconscious structure."

Many of these notions enter into the customary explanations that anthropologists have given for the kinds of imitative practices I saw during the Kuranko initiations. Max Gluckman's account of ritualized role reversals in the Zulu first fruits ceremony (*umkhosi wokweshwama*) and Nomkhulbulwana (Heavenly Princess) cult stresses how these "protests" and "rebellions" by normally subordinated women "gave expression, in a reversed form, to the normal rightness of a particular kind of social order."[30] Although Gluckman is wary of psychologistic explanations, it is suggested that the periodic catharsis afforded by the Zulu "rituals of rebellion" helps maintain social solidarity and functional equilibrium. Edmund Leach emphasizes the relationship between role reversals and the ambiguous, liminal period during calendrical rites when, so to speak, time stands still and behavior is not constrained by any conventional

structure.[31] Giving less emphasis to cathartic and saturnalian aspects of sex-role reversal, Peter Rigby has shown that among the Ugogo of Tanzania, such calamities as drought, barrenness in women, crop failure, and cattle disease are considered to be reversals in fortune that can be mitigated by the manipulation of gender categories. Thus, women dress as men, mimic male demeanor, and perform male tasks in order to induce a re-reversal in correlative domains of natural ecology.[32]

These studies convey invaluable insights, and in writing my original account of role reversals in Kuranko initiation I felt I had enough support from native exegesis to advance an interpretation along similar lines. But I retained serious misgivings about the way this sort of interpretation tends to exclude—because of its focus on oblique aims, semantic meanings, and abstract functions—those very particularities of body use that are the most conspicuous elements of the rites, and refer not to a domain of discourse or belief but to an environment of practical activity. What I now propose to do is work from an account of *how* these mimetic performances arise toward an account of *what* they mean and *why* they occur, without any a priori references to precepts, rules, or symbols.

The Environment of a Way of Acting

Let us first take up a problem posed by Franziska Boas in 1944: "What is the relationship between the movements characteristic of a given dance, and the typical gestures and postures in daily life of the very people who perform it?"[33]

In the case of the mimetic performances I have described, every bodily element can be seen in other fields of Kuranko social life as well. Thus, the women's uncanny imitations of male comportment are mingled with elements that are conspicuous "borrowings" from mortuary ritual, for example, the miming, the deadpan faces, and the cutlass held hilt down. Still other elements refer us to the bush: the boy's imitation of the chimpanzee, the young men who pierce their cheeks with porcupine quills, the music of the praise singer of the hunters (*serewayili*), the women's mimicry of hunters, the bush ochers daubed on the body, and the wild fruit worn by the Sewulan. The following transpositions can therefore be recognized: from male domain to female domain; from mortuary rites to initiation rites; from bush to village.

The second crucial observation is that mimetic performers are women not immediately related to the neophytes. In this way they are like the women who, with flat and doleful faces, perform at a man's funeral and

mimic the way he walked, danced, spoke, and moved. Often wives of the dead man's sons, these women simulate grief and repining on behalf of the immediate bereaved, who play no part at all in the public rites. We cannot, therefore, explain the mimetic performances at initiations or funerals in terms of individual interest or affect. Indeed, when I suggested to Kuranko women that acting as men might be a way of venting their resentment at men's power over them in everyday life, the women were bemused. "Was the 'crazy *Kamban*' [*Kamban Yuwe*] really insane (*yuwe*) just because she behaved in a crazy way?" I was asked, in reference to another woman performer, who, with distracted gestures, deadpan face, and male attire, joined the Sewulan in the final stages of the ritual.

The patterns of body use with which I am concerned are thus in a sense neutral and are transposable from one domain to another. Moreover, the regular or conventional character of these bodily practices is not necessarily the result of obedience to rules or conscious intentions but rather a consequence of ways peoples' bodies are informed by habits instilled within a shared environment and articulated as movements that are, to use Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, "collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor."[34]

These "transposable dispositions" arise in an environment of everyday practical activities that Bourdieu calls the habitus. As Marcel Mauss and John Dewey have also stressed, habits are interactional and tied to an environment of objects and others.[35] Forms of body use (*techniques du corps*) are conditioned by our relationships with others, such as the way bodily dispositions that we come to regard as intrinsically "masculine" or "feminine" are encouraged and reinforced in us as mutually exclusive patterns by our parents and peers. Or, patterns of body use are ingrained through our interactions with objects, such as the way that working at a desk or with a machine imposes and reinforces postural sets that we come to regard as belonging to sedentary white-collar workers and factory workers, respectively. According to this view, collective representations such as those of gender and class are always correlated with patterns of body use generated within the habitus. Moreover, stereotypical ideas and bodily habits tend to reinforce each other in ways that remain "set" so long as the environment in which these attitudes are grounded remains stable.

Nevertheless, the habitual or "set" relations between ideas, experiences, and body practices may be broken. Thus, altered patterns of body use may induce new experiences and provoke new ideas, as when a regulation and steadying of the breath induces tranquility of mind or a balanced pose bodies forth a sense of equanimity. Likewise, emotional and mental turmoil may induce corresponding changes in bodily attitude,

as when depression registers in a slumped posture or grief is manifest in an absolute loss of muscle tonus. But it is the disruption of the environment that mainly concerns me here, and the way such disruption triggers changes in bodily and mental disposition.

Kuranko initiation is first and foremost a disruption in the habitus, and it is this, rather than any precept, rule, or stage management, that sets in train the social and personal alterations whose visible bodily aspect is role reversal. My argument is that this disruption in the habitus, wherein women enjoy a free run of the village and men must fend for themselves (even cooking their own meals) or stay indoors like cowered women (when the women's cult object is paraded through the village), lays people open to possibilities of behavior that they embody as potentialities but ordinarily are not inclined to express. Furthermore, I believe that it is on the strength of these extraordinary possibilities that people control and re-create their world, their habitus. What then are these embodied yet latent possibilities that are realized during initiations? Some, such as the grieving behaviors, are phylogenetically given. Others, such as the entranced and dissociated rocking of the mimetic dancers, suggest a hypnotic element, the basis of which is a conditioned reflex whose origins are probably intrauterine.[36] As for the basis of the sexual mimeticism, it is important to point out that Kuranko children enjoy free run of house and village space, unconfined by the conventional rules that strictly separate male and female domains. At the level of bodily knowledge, manifest in sexually amorphous modes of comportment, hairstyle, and dress, prepubescent children are, as the Kuranko themselves say, sexually indeterminate and "dirty." The transformed habitus during initiation simply reactivates these modes of comportment and opposite-sex patterns deeply instilled in the somatic unconscious.

Now to the question of why these particular possibilities are *socially* implemented and *publicly* played out. Let us first consider the transposition of bodily practices from domain to domain: male to female, funeral to initiation, bush to village. Here we find a parallel with those remarkable transpositions in nature whereby various organisms assume or mimic features of other organisms in the same habitat. Just as this natural mimicry has survival value for a species, so it may be supposed that the survival of Kuranko society depends on the creation of responsible adults through initiatory ordeals every bit as much as it depends upon the physical birth of children. To create adults requires a concerted application of information from *throughout the environment*; it requires tapping the vital energies of the natural world, "capturing" such "male" virtues as fortitude and bravery, and imitating the chimpanzee mother's

alleged rejection of her offspring or the feigned indifference of public mourners at a funeral, both of which remind women of how they must endure their daughters' separation in order for the girls to become independent women themselves.[37] We can therefore postulate that initiation ritual maximizes the information available in the total environment in order to ensure the accomplishment of its vital task: creating adults and thereby re-creating the social order. This process does not necessarily involve verbal or conceptual knowledge; rather, we might say that people are informed by and give form to a habitus that only an uninformed outside observer would take to be an object of knowledge. Kuranko intentionality is thus less of a conceptual willing than a bodily intension, a stretching out, a habitual disposition toward the world. Initiation rites involve a "practical mimesis" in which are bodied forth and recombined elements from several domains,[38] yet without script, sayings, promptings, conscious purposes, or even emotions. No notion of "copying" can explain the naturalness with which the mimetic features appear. Women performers do not observe men's behavior in piecemeal fashion and then self-consciously put these observations together in an "act"; rather, this behavior is generated by an innate and embodied principle that only requires an altered environment to "catch on" and come into play. This innate principle is, of course, the mimetic faculty itself, though, as we have seen, it is always an environment of cultural practices that endows it with its specific expression.

The way in which initiation opens up and allows the enactment of possibilities that would not normally be entertained has also to be seen from an existential viewpoint since, as Harvey Sarles notes, it is through attunement "and interaction with other bodies [that] one gains a sense of oneself and the external world.[39] Although everybody is informed by common predispositions, it is the individual alone who bodies forth these predispositions as mimetic plays. Insofar as they permit each individual to play an active part in a project which effectively re-creates the world, initiation rites maximize participation as well as information, allowing each person to discover in his or her own personality a way of producing, out of the momentary chaos, something that will contribute to a renewal of the social order. In this process, each person makes the world out of elements that ordinarily are not considered appropriate for his or her use, for example, women wearing the clothes and carrying the weapons of men. Yet, curiously enough, the principle of sexual complementarity in Kuranko society can be viable only if Kuranko men and women periodically re-cognize the other in themselves and see themselves in the other. Mimeticism, which is based on a bodily awareness of the other in oneself,

thus assists in bringing into relief a reciprocity of viewpoints.[40] As to why it is the same social order that is created over and over again, we must remember that the Kuranko habitus constrains behavior, and that when the bodily unconscious is addressed openly it answers with forms and features that reflect a closed social universe. Thus the creative freedom and interpretative license in mimetic play are always circumscribed by the habitus in which people have been raised. Freedom must therefore be seen as a matter of realizing and experiencing one's potential within this given universe, not above or beyond it.

Let us now turn to a second kind of transposition, in which patterns of body use engender mental images and instill moral qualities. Most of us are familiar with the way decontraction of muscular "sets" and the freeing of energies bound up in habitual deformations of posture or movement produce an altered sense of self, in particular, dissolution of those conceptual "sets" such as role, gender, and status which customarily define our social identity. My argument is that the distinctive modes of body use during initiation tend to throw up images in the mind whose form is most immediately determined by the pattern of body use. This is not to say that all mental forms should be reduced to bodily practices but rather that, within the unitary field of body-mind habitus, it is possible to intervene and effect changes from any one of these points. By approaching cognition in this manner, we are able to enter the domain of words and symbols through the back door and show that what the Kuranko themselves say about initiation can be correlated at every turn with what is done with the body.

Apart from the examples already mentioned in which facial impassivity is correlated with such moral qualities as the control of emotion and the acceptance of separation, other instances can be cited of body praxis inducing or suggesting ethical ideas. Thus, the value of moderation is inculcated through taboos on calling for food or referring to food while in the initiation lodge, the *fafei*. The interdiction on the neophytes' speaking out of turn, moving, or crying out during the operations is directly connected to the virtues of keeping secrets, promises, and oaths, and of forbearance and circumspection. Similarly, the importance placed on listening to elders during the period of sequestration in the bush is correlated with the virtue of respecting elders whose counsels guarantee social as well as physical life, a correlation pointed up by such adages as *sie tole l to* (long life comes from attending) and *si ban tol sa* (short life ear has not). Again, the sleepless night (*kinyale*) that initiates must endure in a smoke-filled house on the eve of their return from the bush after initiation is a way of instilling in them the virtues of withstanding hardship and being

alert, while the enforced confinement is connected to the value placed on self-restraint and self-containment. Other senses are developed too, so that keenness of smell is correlated with the quality of discrimination (newly initiated boys often quite literally "turn up their noses" at the sight of uninitiated kids, remarking on their crude smell), and control of the eyes is connected with sexual proprieties, most notably mindfulness of those domains and secret objects associated with the other sex, which one may not see except on pain of death. Finally, the donning of new clothes suggests in the initiate's mind the assumption of a new status, while the women's imitations of men are sometimes explained similarly as a way women take on "male" virtues of fortitude and bravery that they feel they sorely lack.[41]

These examples indicate how, in Kuranko initiation, what is done with the body is the ground of what is thought and said. From an existential point of view we could say that the bodily practices mediate a personal realization of social values, an immediate grasp of general precepts as sensible truths. Such a view is consistent with the African tendency to effect understanding through bodily techniques, to proceed through bodily awareness to verbal skills and ethical views. Bodily self-mastery is thus everywhere the basis for social and intellectual mastery. The primacy given to embodied over verbal understanding is readily seen in a conversation I had with the Kuranko elder Saran Salia Sano about male initiation.

"Even when they are cutting the foreskin you must not flinch," Saran Salia said. "You have to stand stock still. You must not make a sound from the mouth. Better to die than to wince or blink or cry out!"

"But what kind of instruction is given?"

"To respect your elders, not to be arrogant, that is all. Disrespectful boys are beaten. A pliable stick is flicked against the side of your face or ear if you begin to doze. In the *fafei* you get tamed properly."

It is not surprising to find such an emphasis on body praxis in a preliterate society where most practical learning is a matter of direct observation and "prestigious imitation."[42] This emphasis on embodied knowledge and kinesthetic learning may explain why failures to uphold ethical expectations are usually seen by the Kuranko in bodily terms: as leading to physical weakening, disease, or death. Furthermore, it is because body praxis in initiation imparts knowledge directly that the Kuranko do not need to formulate the meaning of the rite in terms of abstract verbal elaborations or moral concepts. The fact is that knowledge is directly linked to the production of food and community, and the re-

lationship between thought, language, and activity is intrinsically closer in a preliterate subsistence society than in a modem literate society where knowledge is often abstracted and held aloof from the domains of bodily skills and material processes of production. When the Kuranko do supply verbal exegesis, it tends to center on root metaphors that refer to bodily and practical activity in the habitus. Thus, initiation is said to be a process of taming (unruly emotions and bodies), of molding (clay), of making dry or cool (as in cooking, smoking, and curing), of ripening (as of grain and fruit), of strengthening (the heart), hardening or straightening (the body), of getting "new sense" (*hankili kura*), or mature social intelligence. These allusions to domestic and agricultural life are not mere figures of speech, for they disclose real connections between personal maturity and the ability to provide food for and give support to others. Bodily and moral domains are fused, and, as the Kuranko say, maturity is a matter of common sense, which is achieved when inner thoughts are consistent with spoken words and external actions.

Let us now take up the question of why ritual action should accord such primacy to bodily techniques. In the first place, bodily movements can sometimes do more than words can say. In this sense techniques of the body may be compared with musical techniques, since both transport us from the quotidian world of verbal distinctions and categorical separations into a world where boundaries are blurred and experience transformed. Dance and music move us to participate in a world beyond our accustomed roles and to recognize ourselves as members of a community, a common body. This is not to say that music and bodily practices are never means of making social distinctions, only that, within the context of communal rites, music and movement often take the form of oppositional practices that eclipse speech and nullify the divisions that dominate everyday life. The Kuranko say that music and dance are "sweet"; they loosen and lighten, by contrast with normal behavior that is contractual, binding, and constrained. In this way, movement and music promote a sense of levity and openness in both body and mind and make possible an empathic understanding of others, a fellow feeling, which verbal and cognitive forms ordinarily inhibit. But such reciprocity of viewpoints is often experienced bodily before it is apprehended in the mind, as in the case of mimetic practices in which one literally adopts the position or dons the clothing of another. Merleau-Ponty puts it this way:

The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions

discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his. . . . There is a mutual confirmation between myself and others. . . . The act by which I lend myself to the spectacle must be recognized as irreducible to anything else. I join it in a kind of blind recognition which precedes the intellectual working out and clarification of the meaning.[43]

In Kuranko initiation, the women's imitations of men presumably promote a sense of what it is to be man. Yet, inasmuch as these body practices are not preceded by any verbal definition of intention, they are ambiguous. The imitations are therefore open to interpretation, and the meaning they may assume for either performer or observer is indeterminate. This indeterminacy is of the essence, and it is perfectly possible that the imitations will be experienced or seen variously as a way of "borrowing" male virtue, a kind of mockery of men, an inept copying that only goes to show that women could never really occupy the roles of men, a rebellious expropriation of male privileges, or even as a marker that men are temporarily socially dead. This ambiguity, and the fact that the interpretations that do arise tend to confound everyday proprieties of gender and role, may account for Kuranko women's silence on the question of meaning: the imitations mean everything and nothing. By the same token, the anthropologist who seeks to reduce body praxis to the terms of verbal discourse runs the risk of falsifying both. Practical understanding can do without concepts, and as Bourdieu points out, "the language of the body . . . is incomparably more ambiguous and overdetermined than the most overdetermined uses of ordinary language. Words, however charged with connotation, limit the range of choices and render difficult or impossible, and in any case explicit and therefore 'falsifiable,' the relations which the language of the body suggests."[44]

It is because actions speak louder and more ambiguously than words that they are more likely to lead us to common truths. Not semantic truths, established by others at other times, but experiential truths, which seem to issue from within our own being when we break the momentum of the discursive mind or throw ourselves into some collective activity in which we each find our own meaning yet at the same time sustain the impression of having a common cause and giving common consent.

Lighting a Fire

My main argument has been against undue abstraction in ethnographic analysis. Against the tendencies to explain human behavior in terms of

linguistic models, patterns of social organization, institutions or roles, structures of the mind, or symbolic meaning, I have endeavored to advance a grounded view that begins with interactions and movements of people in an organized environment and considers in detail the patterns of body praxis that arise therein. My focus on the embodied character of lived experience in the habitus also reflects a conviction that anthropological analysis should be consonant with indigenous understandings, which, in preliterate societies, are frequently embedded in practices (doings) rather than spelled out in abstract ideas (sayings). Although such a consonance is, for me, a fundamental measure of adequacy in ethnographic interpretation, I do not think that interpretation necessarily consists in finding agreement between our verbal reactions to observed practices and the exegesis that may be provided by the practitioners. Inasmuch as body praxis cannot be reduced to semantics, bodily practices are always open to interpretations; they are not in themselves interpretations of anything.

If we construe anthropological understanding as principally a language game in which semiotic values are assigned to bodily practices, then we can be sure that in the measure that the people we study make nothing of their practices outside of a living, we will make anything of them within reason. But if we take anthropological understanding to be first and foremost a way of acquiring social and practical skills without any a priori assumptions about their significance or function, then a different kind of knowledge follows. By avoiding the solipsism and ethnocentrism that pervade much symbolic analysis, an *empathic* understanding may be bodied forth. Let me elaborate by considering the relationship between theoretical knowledge and fieldwork practices.

When I first lived in a Kuranko village I used to light my own fire to boil water for drinking or bathing. But I regarded such a mundane chore as having little bearing on my research work, and my way of building a fire was careless and wasteful of wood. It was a task to get done quickly so that I could get on with what I took to be more important things. Villagers joked about my fire lighting but did not criticize or censure me, which was remarkable considering the scarcity of firewood and the time consumed in gathering it. Then one day, for no reason at all, I observed how Kuranko women kindled a fire and tended it, and I began to imitate their technique, which involved careful placement of the firestones, never using more than three lengths of split wood at one time, laying each piece carefully between the firestones, and gently pushing them into the fire as the ends burned away. When I took pains to make a fire in this way I found myself suddenly aware of the intelligence of the technique, which

maximized the scarce firewood (which women have to split and tote from up to a mile and a half away), produced exactly the amount of heat required for cooking, and enabled instant control of the flame. This practical mimesis afforded me insight into how people economized both fuel and human energy; it made me see the close kinship between economy of effort and grace of movement; it made me realize the common sense that informs even the most elementary tasks in a Kuranko village.

Many of my most valued insights into Kuranko social life have followed from comparable cultivation and imitation of practical skills: hoeing on a farm, dancing (as one body), lighting a kerosene lantern properly, weaving a mat, consulting a diviner. To break the habit of using a linear communicational model for understanding body praxis, one must adopt a methodological strategy of joining in without ulterior motive and literally putting oneself in the place of other persons: inhabiting their world. Participation thus becomes an end in itself rather than a means of gathering closely observed data that will be subject to interpretation elsewhere after the event.

George Devereux has shown that one's personality inevitably colors the character of one's observations and that the "royal road to an authentic, rather than fictitious, objectivity" is perforce the way of *informed* subjectivity.[45] In my view, subjective determinations are as much somatic as psychological in character. Thus, to stand aside from the action, take up a point of view, and ask endless questions as I did during the female initiations led only to a spurious understanding and *increased* the phenomenological problem of how I could know the experience of the other. By contrast, to participate bodily in everyday practical tasks was a creative technique that often helped me grasp the sense of an activity by using my body as others did. This technique also helped me break my habit of seeking truth at the level of disembodied concepts and decontextualized sayings. To recognize the embodied character of our being-in-the-world is to discover a common ground where self and other are one, for by using one's body in the same way as others in the same environment, one finds oneself informed by an understanding that may then be interpreted according to one's own custom or bent, yet which remains grounded in a field of practical activity and thereby remains consonant with the experience of those among whom one has lived.

While words and concepts distinguish and divide, bodiliness unites and forms the grounds of an empathic, even a universal, understanding. That may be why the body so often takes the place of speech and eclipses thought in rituals, such as Kuranko initiation, whose point is the creation of community. The practical and embodied nature of Kuranko thought

is thus to be seen as an ethical preference, not a mark of primitiveness or speculative failure.

Symbols

Much of what I have said in this chapter implies a critique of the intellectualist approach to symbolism. A symbol was originally a token of identity, "a half coin carried away by each of the two parties to an agreement as a pledge of their good faith."[46] To bring the two halves of the token back together, to make them "tally," confirmed a person's identity as part of a social relationship. The meaning of a symbol thus implied a presence and an absence; something always had to be brought from elsewhere to make the symbol complete, to round out its significance

For Freud, the absent element was a past event or unresolved trauma. A symbol was essentially and by definition an effect of some hidden or repressed psychic cause. For many symbolic anthropologists, the same reductionist notion of a symbol obtains, except that the determining reality is social rather than intrapsychic. In both cases, the meaning of a symbol is taken to reside in some predetermined essence rather than in the contexts and consequences of its use. Moreover, the complete understanding of the symbol does not reside in what the people who use it say or do; it depends on an expert's bringing meaning to it or revealing the meaning behind it.

My objection to this way of thinking about symbols is that it departs radically from the original sense of symbol, which implied contemporaneity and equivalence between an object or event and the idea associated with it. It ranks the idea over the event or object, while privileging the expert who deciphers the idea even though he or she may be quite unable to use the object or participate in the "symbolic" event. In short, I object to the notion that one aspect of a symbol is prior to or foundational to the other.

In particular, my argument is against speaking of bodily behavior as symbolizing ideas conceived independently of it. In my view, utterances and body movements betoken the continuity of body-mind, and it is misleading to see the body as simply a representation of a prior idea or implicit cultural pattern. Persons actively body forth the world; their bodies are not passively shaped by or made to fit the world's purposes. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can.'"[47]

Written in 1982 during my fellowship year at the Humanities Research Center (Australian National University), this essay on the fabulous reincarnations of Alexander in Africa marks a turning point in my intellectual life. Exasperated by writing conventions that often rendered academic work abstruse and unreadable, I had been looking for an opportunity to move my anthropological work in a new direction. Taking advantage of the fact that I was among critical theorists, literary theorists, and philosophers, I decided to write in a vein that brought together my literary, philosophical, and ethnographic interests. While this essay reflects a fascination with hermeneutics, my most immediate inspiration was Jorge Luis Borges's *Ficciones*, a work in which literary inventiveness, linguistic mastery, arcane scholarship, and an inimical voice combine to produce a work that excites the imagination, challenges the mind, and is a sheer pleasure to read.

The Migration of a Name: Alexander in Africa

The allegorization of myth is hampered by the assumption that the explanation "is" what the myth "means." A myth being a centripetal structure of meaning, it can be made to mean an indefinite number of things, and it is more fruitful to study what in fact myths have been made to mean.

NORTHROP FRYE, ANATOMY OF CRITICISM[1]

In 1970 my wife and I were living in Kabala, a small town in northern Sierra Leone. We had come to live there partly because of its intriguing name, and even though Kabala proved to have no etymological connection with the Hebrew *qabbalah* and its esoteric traditions of cosmic union and interpretation (it means, simply, "Kabba's place"), its fascination for us was not diminished. Kabala had been a watering place on one of the great caravan routes from Upper Guinea to the Atlantic Coast. During the colonial epoch it became an administrative headquarters for the Northern Province, and today it is a crossroads where people from five ethnic groups and three religious traditions mix, market, and sometimes intermarry.

Installed in our house on the outskirts of Kabala we would sit out on the veranda in the evening and watch the sun melt into the shoulder of the huge granite inselberg that overshadowed the town, a labyrinth of dirt lanes, a vista of battered, rusty iron roofs, and mango and cotton trees, half lost in a haze of dust and smoke. At dusk we would hear the muezzin's call to prayer, then the contradictory patter of pagan drums, and perhaps an ailing vehicle spluttering

along a potholed road, before night fell with the sounds of frogs and cicadas.

We had also chosen Kabala as a place to live because it was on the edge of Kuranko country, where I had decided to do anthropological fieldwork. From Kabala I began making regular treks with my Kuranko field assistant, Noah Marah, to Noah's natal village of Firawa (literally, "place in the bush"), the main town of Barawa chiefdom in the heart of Kuranko. There were no roads to Firawa, and it was a good day's journey to get there, filing along tortuous paths across laterite plateaus covered with savanna and scrub, crossing turbid streams and swamps, passing through hamlets whose houses had conical thatched roofs and were arrayed around circular courtyards. Marking the way to Firawa was always the great tor of Senekonke, "gold mountain," in the east, where the Barawa rulers once offered sacrifices for the protection and well-being of the land.

Beyond Firawa, the path wound on into the dense forested foothills of the northwest Guinea Highlands, just visible from Firawa in the dry season as a blue smudge on the horizon. It is in that direction, still within Kuranko country, that the river Niger has its source.

During those first few months in Firawa, everything was strange and had to be interpreted for me.[2] I was like a child who could take nothing for granted and was completely dependent on Noah for my bearings. "What is the word for water?" "Why do men weave and women spin?" "What is the meaning of that scrap of white cloth and small brass bell hanging from the lintel of our neighbor's house?" "When do the rituals of initiation begin?" Fortunately, Noah's patience was not overtaxed by my incessant questioning. Living in Kabala on the edge of Kuranko country, with his wives hailing from other ethnic groups, his children speaking Krio, and his living earned by teaching English in a primary school, Noah was in some ways also an outsider, struggling to reconcile the disparate traditions of Europe and Africa.

Noah belonged to the ruling house of Barawa, a chiefdom founded in the early seventeenth century by a clan calling itself Marah (from the verb *ka mara*, to subjugate, conquer, place under one's command). Its members were staunch pagans and renowned warriors who may have migrated from the plains of the Upper Niger to escape Islamic jihads.

The Barawa succession includes twenty-one rulers from the time of settlement,[3] but the praise-singers and genealogists trace the lineage of the Marah chiefs back to rulers of Mande, the medieval kingdom of the West Sudan from whence numerous peoples of Guinea, Liberia, Mali, and Ivory Coast still confidently trace their origins. The greatest ancestor of the Marah was said to be a warlord called Yilkanani, whom the praise-

singers described as "the first father," "the first ancestor," and as Wasiru Mansa Yilkanani "because in his chieftaincy he was proud without being arrogant."

The name Yilkanani captured my imagination just as Kabala had, and I was intrigued to know more about this legendary figure who had formidable gifts, fabulous wealth, numberless progeny, and outstanding virtue. I would ask old men to tell me what they knew about Yilkanani, hoping to augment the piecemeal knowledge I had gathered listening to praise-singers or overhearing anecdotes about a heroic ancestor who lived in Mande, ruled from where the wind rises to where the wind dies down, and had horns made of coins and gold. But all these informants insisted that only the praise-singers and genealogists would be able to tell me what I wanted to know.

Unfortunately, these masters of traditions are elusive and difficult men. In the first place, *jelibas* and *finabas* are the sole custodians of oral history. They are the memory of rulers, proud and jealous of their vast knowledge and well aware that chiefs depend on this knowledge to confirm their legitimacy. *Jelibas* and *finabas* are amply paid for their services in cattle, coin, kola, salt, and rice and will sometimes flatter a man of a ruling house simply to cajole a gift from him. In the second place, these bards and orators have great rhetorical skill. They will demean their own forefathers, calling them "mere slaves," and exaggerate the illustriousness of a past ruler in order to inspire a chief to worthy deeds. Accompanying their flatteries with the stirring music of xylophones, they encourage chiefs to heroic acts when wiser counsels should prevail, and chiefs frequently lament that all the reckless deeds in the past, the failure of campaigns, and the ruin of countries can be blamed on passions aroused in rulers by cunning praise-singers. The power of praise-singers thus sits uneasily between knowledge that bolsters the status of a ruler and interpretive license which serves self-interest, and it is often hard to read the direction in which a *jeliba*'s flattery is going. The ambivalence felt by rulers toward their praise-singers springs from the ambiguous social position of these bards, who form an inferior hereditary group into which members of a ruling clan may not marry yet who possess the knowledge on which chieftaincy depends, and who intercede between a chief and his ancestors as well as between a chief and his subjects. As with the classical figure of Hermes, the problem of the messenger is always one of discerning the difference between dutiful transmission and interested translation.

It wasn't until my second period of fieldwork in 1972 that I was able to find a genealogist who would agree to talk to me about Yilkanani without first demanding an exorbitant fee. Faraba Demba was the

genealogist of Noah's elder brother, Sewa. Sewa had been a member of Parliament in the first post-independence government of Sierra Leone, and it was through my friendship with him that I was able to persuade Faraba Demba to give me a taped interview. But even after agreement had been reached, it took me several weeks to run Faraba Demba to earth. I would catch sight of him near the Kabala market—a tall man in a stone-blue djellaba and skullcap, a leather sachet containing suras from the Qur'an dangling around his neck, his white heelless Arabian shoes scuffing the red dust in the main street as he vanished, like the white rabbit, down a narrow lane. When I did accost him he demanded more time and a gift, and when we finally did sit down together, with Noah interpreting, on the shabby porch of his Kabala house, I suspected that Faraba Demba's consent might have been merely to rid himself of a nuisance.

These are sections of the narrative I recorded:

Allah gave Lord Yilkanani immeasurable wealth. So wealthy did Lord Yilkanani become that Wali Ibrahim Braima said to him, "Lord Yilkanani, your wealth is too great." Lord Yilkanani replied, "Then I will go and bathe in the Lake of Poverty that my wealth will be reduced." But when he went to the Lake of Poverty and threw water across his right shoulder, a horn of gold appeared on his head, and when he threw water across his left shoulder, a horn of coins appeared on his head. He turned to Wali Ibrahim Braima and swore him to silence, saying, "If you tell anyone about his I will cut off your head." On that day a black headband appeared on Lord Yilkanani's forehead.

After they had returned to the town, Wali Ibrahim Braima found his secret unbearable, and his belly began to swell. When Lord Yilkanani sent for Wali Ibrahim Braima, the messenger came back and said that Wali Ibrahim Braima's belly was swollen and he could not come. Then Lord Yilkanani said, "Go and tell Wali Ibrahim Braima to put his mouth to the ground and confess what is in his belly." When Wali Ibrahim Braima put his mouth to the ground and confessed he had seen the horns of gold and coin appear on Lord Yilkanani's head when he bathed in the Lake of Poverty, the ground split open.

Wherever in the world today you find the earth rent by chasms, it is because of Wali Ibrahim's confession. . . .

It then happened that Allah spoke to his messenger, Muhammad, saying, "Muhammad, *namu*."[4] Muhammad replied, "*Namu.*" Allah told Muhammad that he should find a mentor,[5] but Muhammad answered, "Oh, Allah, thou hast created the seven levels of the earth and the seven heavens; why should I place my trust in anyone but thee?" But Allah said, "You must find a mentor among men." So Muhammad declared, "I will make Yilkanani my mentor. . . ."

Allah withheld nothing from Yilkanani; the riches and powers he did not possess are not to be found in this world. . . . Second to Yilkanani in power and wealth was Muluku

Sulaiman. His power was in the wind. If he sat in one place and thought of another place, then the wind would instantly spirit him there. But Yilkanani and Muluku Sulaiman did not rule at the same time. Nor is our epoch continuous with the epoch of their rule. In their epoch there were no clans. The clans began in Mande, and it is the Marah who are the descendants of Yilkanani to whom Allah gave chieftaincy and wealth, and whom Muhammad made his mentor.

After Faraba Demba, there were other informants who told me about Yilkanani, but their narratives often referred to quite different periods and places, and the identity of the central figure was never quite the same. For example, from an itinerant trader from Upper Guinea I learned that the Mandingo there claim a certain Djurukaraneni as an ancestor.

Djurukaraneni's father was a wealthy trader in Kankan, called Alpha Kabbane, who married a student of a renowned Qur'anic scholar and teacher, known as Mariama the Pure, at Mariama's behest. When Mariama died, Alpha Kabbane inherited her property and students. When Alpha Kabbane died, his son Djurukaraneni went to Sigasso. These are sections of the narrative I recorded:

Djurukaraneni's father was a wealthy trader from Kankan, called Alpha Kabbane, who married a student of a renowned Qur'anic scholar and teacher known as Mariama-the-Pure, at Mariama's behest. When Mariama died, Alpha Kabbane inherited her property and students. When Alpha Kabbane died, his son Djurukaraneni went to Sigasso in Segu to seek the advice of Fili, a warlord, on whether he should share his father's inheritance among the slaves, students, and others who claimed a part for having helped create the fortune in the first place. Fili advised Djurukaraneni to leave off his studies and become a warrior. Djurukaraneni took Fili's advice and seven years later returned to Kankan, where he refused to share the inheritance among the claimants. A war immediately broke out, which Djurukaraneni won with the help of warriors from Fili's army, and refugees fled Kankan to as far as what is today northern Sierra Leone, where they became Kuranko. The following year, Fili demanded the return of his warriors, but Djurukaraneni refused to let them go. In the ensuing battle against Fili outside Kankan, Djurukaraneni was the loser, and when he surrendered to Fili he declared he had been wrong to wage war against his master. Fili accepted this apology; he divided his army and gave a moiety to Djurukaraneni, proclaiming him thenceforth Lord Djurukaraneni of Kankan.

In 1972, with the coming of the rains, when roads in northern Sierra Leone become impassable and the demands of farm work leave villagers no time for talking to an anthropologist, I returned to England. In Cambridge, I found further references to Djurukaraneni in published oral traditions from West Sudan. In a book that appeared in 1929, the French

colonial administrator Charles Monteil mentions Djurukaraneni as a chief of Ouagadou between 1200 and 1218,[6] and in an essay published two years earlier, an Englishman in Sierra Leone, E. F. Sayers, refers to an ancestor of the Marah called Yurukhernani who inherited vast wealth and had "innumerable progeny." His son, Saramba, "came down" from Mande and occupied the westerly regions of the Guinea Highlands, apportioning fiefdoms among his fifteen sons.[7]

What struck me in these accounts as well as in the oral traditions I had collected were recurring references to wealth and pride. Yet these motifs were glossed differently in different chronicles. For instance, a renowned *jeliba* from Firawa told me that Yilkanani's nickname, Wasiru Mansa Yilkanani, signified that Yilkanani was neither arrogant nor tyrannical; in this respect he epitomized the Kuranko ideal of a ruler. Yet, according to the Kuranko informant whom Sayers interviewed in the mid-1920s, it was Yurukhernani's "overweening pride" that brought about his downfall and left him destitute, though not before Allah had warned him by sending down an angel who posed the cabalistic question "Daraman?" to which Yurukhernani gave no answer. When Allah sent another angel with the message "Maraman," signifying that Yurukhernani would lose his wealth if he remained arrogant, Yurukhernani took no notice and thus lost everything he owned.[8]

Concerning Yilkanani's fabulous wealth, there was slightly more agreement among traditions. In both Faraba Demba's narrative and in the Mandingo tradition summarized earlier, Yilkanani is loath to lose, reveal, or share his great riches. This motif is possibly an improvisation by bards and praise-singers, who, by impugning the generosity of one ruler, hope to encourage favors from another or, by recalling the magnanimity of an ancestral figure, oblige a contemporary chief to give in the same measure.[9] Another possibility is that the motif encapsulates a collective memory of epochs in which rulers exacted tithes from subject people but gave back little in protection or sustenance. Anecdotes about exploitative rulers often find their way into Kuranko folk traditions, and in this regard it is ironic that Kankan, where, according to one narrative, Djurukaraneni was overlord, is also the Kuranko word for theft. My aim in this chapter, however, is not exegetical but hermeneutical, so rather than digress further into contextual analysis I resume the story of my own search for Yilkanani.

The next stage in this search was a discovery that a more astute scholar would have made much earlier: that the names Yilkanani, Yurukhernani, and Djurukaraneni are Mande deformations of the Arabic Dhul-Quarnein, a figure whose name means "the two horned,"[10] and who is

referred to in the cave sura in the Qur'an (18.83–112) as a mighty ruler and prophet who built a rampart against Gog and Magog, enemies of the divine kingdom.

Dhul-Quarnein is Alexander the Great,[11] and the allusion to the two horns takes us back to 332 BC, when Alexander journeyed into the Libyan Desert and consulted the famous oracle of Ammon, the ram-headed god whose principal shrine was at Siwa oasis. This Libyan oracle apparently spoke for the Greek god Zeus, to whom Alexander, like Perseus and Heracles, referred his origins. Although Alexander never revealed the questions he put to the Siwa oracle, what he heard (according to Arrian, writing in the mid-second century) "was agreeable to his wishes"; thereafter he was publicly acknowledged to be a begotten son of Zeus, and he took Zeus Ammon to heart for the rest of his life.[12] When he died in 323 BC, Alexander passed into legend, adorned with the curling ram's horns of Ammon.

In the book of Daniel Alexander appears as a he-goat who attacks and breaks the horn of a ram, presumably signifying Darius.[13] In the Qur'an he is the two-horned prophet sent by Allah to punish the impure. In Roman times, emperors represented themselves as successors of Alexander, adopting his titles and promoting him as an exemplar. In Persia he becomes Sikander Dhulkarnein, whose miraculous feats are celebrated in epic poems and whose name is adopted by a sixteenth-century shah.[14] In Arabian romances he is an ally of Muhammad, and in Indian legend he makes a pilgrimage to the holy sites of India and is a friend of the Buddha. In China he fights alongside Chinese heroes against monstrous beasts and discourses with Chinese sages under the Tree of Wisdom. In medieval European romances he is a pious and chivalrous Christian, a soldier of God. In Badakshan, Marco Polo meets a king who claims descent from Alexander, and even today, in Hunza, an isolated valley beyond the Himalayas noted for the health and longevity of its people, there rules a raja who traces his descent to Alexander.[15]

That Alexander still lives is attested by the fact that the fishermen of Lesbos in the Aegean still shout to the wild sea with the question "Where is Alexander the Great?" and answer with the cry "Alexander the Great lives and is king," so that the sea will become calm.[16] And only ninety years ago, on the coast of Makran, an English telegraph official was murdered by Karwan tribesmen because they had heard that fellow Muslims, the Turks, had defeated the Greek nation of Iskandar Zulkarnain, a nation to which all European countries were thought to be attached.[17]

At this point we come full circle: the Macedonian world-conqueror who referred his origins to a North African god figures centuries later as

an ancestor of a ruling lineage in a remote West African society. Ironically, this transmigration of Alexander's name has taken place as a result of Islam, a faith that the Marah rulers steadfastly repudiated for centuries, and a faith that did not even exist in Alexander's time.

Where then is the real Alexander, amid all these versions in which ancient events have become metamorphosed according to the preoccupations of different societies and different epochs?[18]

The quest for the historical Alexander has been compared to the quest for the historical Jesus, and many scholars would assent to the view of C. B. Welles, that "there have been many Alexanders. Probably there will never be a definitive Alexander."[19] Not only have different societies assimilated Alexander to their own preoccupations and values, but the very personality of the historian inevitably plays its part in the shaping and reshaping of the image. In the end, there seems no metamorphosis, base or noble, that we cannot reasonably entertain. As Hamlet observed to Horatio (act 5, scene I):

To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble
    dust of Alexander till 'a find it stopping a bung-hole?
Horatio: Twere to consider too curiously to consider so.
Hamlet: No faith, not a jot; but to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likeli-
    hood to lead it, as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth
    into dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam whereto
    he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?

These conversions of which Hamlet speaks involve historical, cultural, and biographical imperatives, each of which helps shape the versions of a myth that are, accordingly, only moments in an eternal narrative.

Here is one version, one moment: a poem I wrote in 1974 called "Yilkanani."[20]

Yilkanani, whom we approve,
sacked a country
and burned a stranger's camp;
when told that one of his victims
was his sister, drank a gourd
of palm wine and drowned himself
in the Black River
from where he sings now
with the voice of palm birds.

What I now want to do is use my poem as an occasion for talking about interpretation. In particular I want to demonstrate what Sartre calls the progressive-regressive method in which interpretation involves both a creative forward movement by which one grasps and articulates one's *possibilities* of being and a reflexive analytical movement that takes one back on a journey of exploration among the objects, people, places, and events that constituted the grounds of those possibilities of being.[21] The human project is thus a bringing into being that discloses and conserves the prior conditions of our individual lives, yet at the same time realizes and surpasses those conditions by addressing them as a field of instrumental possibilities. It is within this irreducible relation between what one has been made and what one makes of what one is made—embracing unconscious, conscious, and embodied dimensions of being—that this relationship must be explored, though, as Sartre notes, lived experience may be "comprehended" but never entirely "known" by the person who exists it.[22] In other words, the part can never know the whole without distortion so long as it is apart. Therefore, interpretation is, in my view, not a matter of trying to do away with the distortion but rather trying to disclose it and use it creatively.

With this proviso let me hazard an interpretation of my poem. It begins with a motif found in countless Alexander romances: the hero is a world conqueror whose conquests gain him immense material wealth and great renown yet also bring him to the verge of moral ruin. The poem develops this motif in an unusual way. While sacking a stranger's camp, the great warlord inadvertently slays his sister. We may presume she had been given in marriage to a man of the ruling lineage in this other country and that her brother had forgotten about the erstwhile alliance. Upon hearing of what he has done, Yilkanani suffers terrible remorse and drinks himself into near oblivion before drowning himself in the Black River. Today we hear his voice in the twittering of palm birds—voices of banality, void of sense.

My initial interpretation of the poem proceeded like the interpretation of a dream. First there were residues and allusions of an ethnographic and personal kind: a reminder of the great respect that Kuranko men pay their sisters, and of the sister's power and right to curse a brother if he denies her this respect; a reference to the Rivière Noire in the Bas-Congo, where, in 1964, I used to picnic with Swiss friends who, like myself, worked for the United Nations; and an image from a Kuranko narrative about an adulterer whose lover was the wife of a jealous chief. The chief slew, dismembered, and burned the adulterer and had his ashes thrown into the

river. For years the disconsolate lover wandered along the river, singing for the dead man, until at last the spirits of the stream, the fish, and the palm birds decided to answer her song and give the dead man voice. They miraculously reassembled the man, who was reunited with his lover and returned with her to their village, where he killed the chief and took his place.[23]

Then, deeper preoccupations began to come to light. After reading Ernest Becker I saw that the hero might be understood as a "reflex of the terror of death," an image of our search for immortality, for a triumph of the spirit over the flesh, of will over matter, of words over the flux of events.[24] My own fieldwork among the Kuranko had reflected a profound dilemma. On the one hand I found myself striving for a wealth of data that I could convert into a book, a durable object that might make my name. But on the other hand I felt my ego threatened by a world of opaque languages, bizarre customs, and oppressive living conditions. Running counter to this will to amass knowledge was a profound desire to give up and let go, to allow my consciousness to be flooded by the African ambiance. In the poem, this regressive undercurrent becomes visible in images of drinking, drowning, and infantile babbling.

The killing of the sister is one expression of this ambivalence and brings together ethnographic and personal themes. I am the second-born in a family of five children. My elder sister is a successful academic who for many years I sought to emulate and outshine. The willful striving after knowledge that drove me to accomplish an ambitious research task in Sierra Leone in 1969–70 may have been associated in my mind with this sibling rivalry. But while my striving became expressed obliquely as a desire to usurp my sister's position, the countermanding desire to relinquish this striving found expression in an unconscious fantasy of killing my sister—the model, for me, of positivist social science and academic ambition. The poem finally registers atonement for this "act" in a forfeiture of the position and properties gained as a result of it. As for the desire to regress beyond all ego-striving, the hero fulfills this desire but at the cost of speech and intelligibility.

The figure of Yilkanani thus precipitated in me a kind of inadvertent self-disclosure. The Kuranko hero served me as an objective correlative of my subjective prepossessions, enabling me to voice them, albeit in the dark and distorting mirror of a poem, and later study them as they distanced themselves in this poem, which seemed only partly to be of my own making.

What this study brings to the surface, however, is not mere biography but also cultural and historical processes embedded in biography. The

imagery of the poem is not free-floating but bound. I want to consider this binding in two ways, first by taking up Shelley's idea (ca.1824) that all the poems ever written or that ever will be written are but episodes of a single infinite poem whose complete form always eludes us, and second by showing how every poem expresses historical and cultural preoccupations of which the individual poet is seldom aware.

Leaving aside the biographical reasons already outlined, the question arises of why "my" Yilkanani should have a sister. An answer may be hazarded in a brief reference to a Greek folktale in which Alexander the Great has a sister. According to this tale, Alexander's sister spilled the water of immortality, which her brother had asked her to safeguard. Stricken with remorse, the girl threw herself into the sea and became transformed into a Gorgon. Until this day she searches the seas, asking boatmen if her brother is still alive. If the captain wisely answers, "He is alive, and rules, and is master of the world," she is appeased and calm weather prevails. But if the captain answers thoughtlessly that her brother died long ago, the Gorgon becomes frenzied and raises a storm to sink his boat.[25]

Not only does this tale bear an uncanny resemblance to the Kuranko story in which a disconsolate woman searches up and down a river for years, hoping to be reunited with her dead lover; it also presents in inverted form the principal elements of my poem. Whereas in the poem the brother wrongs his sister and drowns himself in a river, his voice becoming the voice of ineffectual palm birds, in the Greek tale the sister offends her brother and drowns herself in the sea, her voice becoming the minatory voice of storms.

Every poem, like every myth, may therefore be seen as a variation of a finite set of universal elements, and, as Lévi-Strauss has shown, structural analysis simply reveals the interminable combinations and permutations of these elements, which go on in the minds of men and women without their being aware of it.[26]

As to the second question, concerning the cultural and historical forms whose shadows fall across the poem, let us consider the darkest of these: colonialism. The anthropologist who spends time in another society, extracting raw data to bring home and process for intellectual profit, is working within the determination of a particular social formation whose more insidious expressions are political domination and economic exploitation. Nevertheless, his conditioned reflex to subjugate the world through the exercise of willful rationality is often mellowed by a critical awareness of another mode of consciousness in which conviviality and communication figure more prominently than self-aggrandizement and competitiveness. Since these other values are usually those emphasized

by the people among whom anthropologists do their fieldwork, they find themselves split between two projects, one of which will absorb them further into the community, the other of which will estrange them. In my own case, I would, for example, excuse myself from joining in a Kuranko communal dance because I wanted to be free to take notes from the sidelines, and I would give priority to recording a narrative through an interpreter rather than take time to learn the language properly so that I myself could enter into a direct social relationship with the narrator. In my view, the two movements—becoming a part of another community and gaining repute in the academic world—are, in practice though not necessarily in theory, mutually exclusive.

The opposition between these two sets of values, sociability and profitability, is as much an aspect of my particular biography as it is a part of our cultural heritage. But this opposition is also problematic for Kuranko, and it is at this point that my own biographical concerns rejoin the ethnographic context of Kuranko social life.

Many Kuranko oral narratives are centered on the problem of the hero.[27] Somewhat as the anthropologist ventures into the unknown in quest of knowledge, the protagonist in numerous Kuranko narratives risks his life in a journey out of his community into the wilderness in quest of some magical object—an initiation drum, a xylophone, a fetish that gives power over life and death to its owner. Like the data gleaned by the ethnographer when he journeys into a remote corner of the world, the things gained by the Kuranko hero during his wanderings in the wilderness are ethically ambiguous: they can be used for private advantage or made to serve the common weal. In Kuranko narratives this problem of reconciling self-interest and social duty is often dramatized as a struggle between a good and a bad ruler. According to the Kuranko ideal, the respect accorded a ruler deserves to be reciprocated by the protection a ruler gives his subjects. The privilege of power can only be justified by responsibility and magnanimity in its use. It is a paternalistic notion of authority. A bad ruler, like a bad father, uses his position of power to take advantage of those dependent on him, even descending to theft of food, alienation of property, and criminal neglect. Kuranko anecdotes about Yilkanani reveal this ethical ambiguity of authority: the subtle differences between dignity and vanity, pride and arrogance, and moral and material wealth.

It is fascinating to find this same ambiguity in the European Alexander romances. Although the ancients were often divided over whether Alexander's liberality was a form of cunning and vanity or a benign and noble quality,[28] from Seneca and Cicero right through into the medieval

romances, as well as in the poems of Chaucer, Lydgate, Gower and, later, Dryden, the same themes recur: of a world conqueror conquered by his own emotional weakness, of reason corrupted by passion, of learning ruined by moral ignorance. And time and time again, it is Alexander's visit to the oracle of Ammon and his subsequent elevation to the status of a god that is referred to as the point at which the hero's moral deterioration begins.[29]

This hubris assumes its more modern form in a story by Rudyard Kipling, "The Man Who Would Be King" (1888), in which two English adventurers, Daniel Dravot and Peachey Carnehan, stumble into a remote valley in northeast Afghanistan (Kafiristan) where a priesthood keeps alive the memory of Alexander the Great. Through bluff and cunning Dravot has himself accepted as the son of Alexander and enthroned as king, but contrary to the wishes of the priests he decides to take to wife a village girl, declaring that "A God can do anything." His arrogance finally costs him his crown and his life, and Peachey struggles back to India, where he recounts the tragedy to Kipling. This allegory of imperialism, in which Dravot figures as a kind of Cecil Rhodes,[30] reminds us that the themes of corrupt power and colonialism are inextricably linked and that Alexander the world conqueror is still an embodiment of these themes. Shortly before he came to power in Ghana as leader of the first postcolonial nation of modem Africa, Kwame Nkrumah wrote that the blight of European expansionism had its precedent in "the idea of Alexander the Great and his Graeco-Asiatic Empire."[31] Ironically, only a few years passed before Nkrumah himself was deposed for corruption and self-aggrandizement.

What I have hoped to show in these diverse refractions of a historical figure is that certain abiding moral dilemmas find expression in a narrative that knows no cultural boundaries and recognizes no individual author. My poem participates in this narrative, as does this chapter. One is reminded of Borges's claim that the dream that drove a thirteenth-century Mongolian emperor to build "a stately pleasure dome" in Xanadu and the dream that inspired an English poet on a summer's day in 1797 were one and the same dream.[32]

I do not wish to make Borges's conjecture serve as an aesthetic justification for a particular style of interpretation, however, for my intention here is to show that interpretation has to be justified practically, as a form of disclosure that works back through autobiography to discover the points at which individuality loses itself in the trans-subjective processes of history, culture, and ultimately nature. But this recognition of one's historicity should not entail a reductionist explanation, for whether we

admit it or not, every act of cool analysis is also a creative act initiated within our particular personality and explicable in terms of our biography. In my view, true objectivity in interpretation does not consist in repressing, masking, or setting aside this biographical field of choice and intention but in revealing it clearly as it interacts with history, producing new syntheses in the shape of a poem, an essay, or even a revolutionary act. This therapeutic aspect of the hermeneutic process is shown by my discovery that a poem I seemed to write unconsciously was in fact a logjam of images to keep me from reading the real preoccupations of my unconscious: unresolved moral dilemmas over the exercise of power, the value of ambition, and the profitability of knowledge. If the poem was written in bad faith—fetishized as an object that I did not have in making—then the interpretive reading of the poem is a kind of redemption. The so-called object is brought back into subjectivity only to be made over again to the world of objectivity, but this time as something that expresses rather than represses the author's effective history.

In this dialectic, self-reflection and scholarly study, creativity and interpretation, arise together and are united. For me, this process of reintegrating aspects of our being that are habitually separated is a form of making whole, of healing.[33] And I have sought a form of writing that unites the poet and the ethnographer in one script, that merges the poetic and the ethnographic in a single style, and that follows the hermeneutical example of Gadamer: "to see through the dogmatism of asserting an opposition and separation between the ongoing natural 'tradition' and the reflective appropriation of it."[34] It is in this sense that my quest for Yilkanani, which began in a town in northern Sierra Leone in 1969, was eclipsed by a wider search for Alexander and became finally a journey into that region where history and biography converge.

An anthropology that so forthrightly reflects on the interplay of biography and tradition and makes the personality of the anthropologist a primary datum entails a different notion of truth than that to which a scientistic anthropology aspires. It is a notion of truth based less on epistemological certainties than on moral, aesthetic, and political values. It is, indeed, a pragmatist conception of truth in which, rather than reduce experience to abstract categories by a process of systematic totalization, we seek to disclose the complex and open-ended character of experience and the role interpretation plays in the process of self making.[35] It is a conception of the anthropological project that leads us directly to a concern with the way we say things, for we become less interested in announcing definitive explanations than in opening up new possibilities for thinking about experience. Richard Rorty uses the term *edification* for

this process "of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking." While edification "may consist in the hermeneutic activity of making connections between our culture and some exotic culture or historical period, or between our own discipline and another discipline," Rorty notes that "it may instead consist in the 'poetic' activity of thinking up such new aims, new words, or new disciplines, followed by, so to speak, the inverse of hermeneutics: the attempt to interpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions." Edifying discourse is "supposed to be abnormal, to take us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings."[36]

For more than a decade now it has been clear that cultural anthropology is developing as much through the innovation of new styles of discourse as through continuing empirical research. We are nowadays more confident about speaking of anthropology as a kind of philosophizing or writing and no longer need the trappings of the natural sciences to bestow legitimacy on what we do. Unlike many other social sciences, anthropologists are fortunate in having a wealth of exotic images, worldviews, and metaphors at their disposal. Rather than assimilate these elements to our own familiar metaphors (where kinship is a "web" or "network" and groups undergo "fission" and "fusion"), it is often proving more edifying to use and extend indigenous metaphors in novel ways, participating in rather than subverting the discursive idioms to which our researches introduce us.

Moreover, we are now more keenly aware that the texts generated by the discursive practices of cultural anthropology are embedded in a wider cultural and historical milieu and that our essays in explanation are in this sense on a par with the ritual and mythological "texts" we collect in the field. We no longer assume that our texts have some kind of intrinsic epistemological superiority over theirs. All are, in the final consideration, metaphors, more or less masked, for an existential quest for a fulfilling and viable life, and anthropology, like philosophy, is, in Nietzsche's famous phrase, "a species of involuntary and unconscious autobiography."[37]

This Nietzschean perspective also pervades the work of Michel Foucault, who regards all discourses as available perspectives: "if one has more value than another that is not because of its intrinsic properties as 'truth,' or because we call it 'science,' but because of an extra-epistemological ground, the role the discourse plays in constituting practices."[38]

Not only do I find this view congenial on temperamental grounds; it commends itself as coming very close to articulating the Kuranko view

that the practical, social, and moral consequences of discourse define its truth-value, not abstract epistemological rules. Perhaps this pragmatist point can best be made by considering the character of Kuranko narrative.

Although the anecdotes and legends about Yilkanani belong to an allegedly "true" discursive tradition that Kuranko call *kuma kore*, "ancestral words," there is another genre of Kuranko narrative that falls halfway between truth and make believe. These narratives, which we might call folktales, are told on moonlit nights in Kuranko villages by skilled performers before a random audience of men, women, and children. Many of these narratives pose a moral dilemma which everyone present will try to solve, and these intervals of casuistry are half the fun of a storytelling session.[39]

What impressed me about Kuranko storytelling was the way in which old and young alike participated actively in a search for moral meaning. Seldom were these meanings self-evident, for the art of Kuranko narrative is to mask or nullify the orthodox rules that people use in forming moral judgments. Accordingly, each individual must arrive at his or her own solution to the quandary and refer to his or her own experience in doing so. Although the unanimity reached by the end of an evening belies the variability of opinions brought forward, the most important point is that consensus is reached through participation rather than imposed by convention. In other words, the truth finally agreed upon reflects less an interest in making truth accord with individual experience than in making it a vehicle for communal action. The therapeutic character of Kuranko storytelling does not, therefore, stem from the self-reflection that narratives may inspire but from the convivial occasion they create. For the Kuranko, interpretive activity is a "tool for conviviality"—a means of communication—and as such it is not evaluated primarily in terms of literal or logical standards.[40]

In this chapter I have not eschewed these standards, but I have tried to show that ethical, aesthetic, and practical standards are of no less importance in interpretation. I hope also to have told a story whose unfolding reflects fortuitous encounters and happy coincidences, yet is still only half told and open to further possibilities of interpretation.

This essay on Kuranko shape-shifting, a product of my fascination with embodied experience and political marginality, is based on fieldwork in northern Sierra Leone in 1985—an attempt to integrate the biography of a struggling middle-aged man with an account of the social and political world in which he sought, against all odds, to augment his self-esteem, improve his chances, and gain a sense of presence and power. In the mid-1980s, Sierra Leone had fallen on hard times, largely as a result of the profligacy of President Siaka Stevens, who had borrowed heavily from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to fund the Organization of African Unity conference in Freetown in 1980. Newspaper editorials and popular slogans attested to the deep discontent ("OAU today, IOU tomorrow"), and daily newspapers conveyed a sense of impending catastrophe. Real or imagined enemies of the state were thrown out of work or into prison, political corruption was rife, rice had become unaffordable for the urban poor, and public hospitals lacked even the most basic medicines. With hindsight, one can glimpse in this essay some of the resentment and anger that would culminate five years later in the civil war that devastated the country and cost tens of thousands of people their lives and livelihoods.

This essay also explores the relationship between our received ideas about the nature of the world and the ways we actually *experience* that world, personally, sensibly, emotionally, and conceptually. That conventional ideas or beliefs are embraced with very different degrees of intensity, and

interpreted in very different ways by different people in different situations, suggests that an important task of ethnography is to analyze the interplay of individual biographies and cultural pre-understandings, tracing out the dialectic whereby abstract possibilities are realized as sensible and embodied truths, the word made flesh.

The Man Who Could Turn into an Elephant

Any idea upon which we can ride that will carry us prosperously from any part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor, is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally. WILLIAM JAMES, *PRAGMATISM*[1]

From the very first months of my fieldwork among the Kuranko I was enthralled by anecdotes and reports of human beings who were able to transform themselves into animals. Such persons are known as *yelamafentiginu* (change-thing-masters) and regarded with awe and ambivalence because in the form of predatory or dangerous animals they can destroy the crops and kill the livestock of anyone they begrudge or dislike. Shape-shifting is a form of witchcraft. It suggests faculties outside the domain of secular activity and control. It conjures up images of the dark, trackless forests beyond human clearings and settlements—the domain of animality, the antithesis of social order. But while shape-shifting is sometimes likened to witchcraft, shape-shifters are not witches (*suwagenu*). Witches are usually women, the *yelamafentiginu* invariably men. While witches can transform themselves into animals associated with darkness and menace in order to pursue their nefarious ends, shape-shifters seem more often than not to transform themselves into the totemic animal of their clan: respected creatures and metaphorical kinsmen. And while witches are clandestine and abominated, shape-shifters sometimes vaunt their powers and draw grudging admiration from those who know of them.

For a long time my image of shape-shifters, like my image of witches, was conditioned by what Kuranko told me and by what I imagined, remembering nights alone in the dark forests of my native New Zealand when the inexplicable crack of a dead branch, the soughing of the wind, or an ominous shadow at the edge of a clearing would make my heart race and bring to mind childhood tales of hobgoblins and genies. The forests and grasslands of northern Sierra Leone exercised the same hold on my imagination, for was I not also an intruder there, prey to secret misgivings, and alone? I saw how easy it would be, startled by the glimpse of a solitary figure in the elephant grass or thorn scrub in crepuscular light, to imagine one had seen someone in the process of changing from human to animal form. Steeped in ideas about shape-shifting from early childhood, one would be prone to interpret such ambiguous images in this way. The idea of shape-shifting was born and bolstered, I assumed, in such moments of panic and by such tricks of the light, much like UFOs in our own popular imagination. The problem was, however, that this conjecture left unexplained the absence of any skeptical attitude toward shape-shifting among the Kuranko with whom I discussed it. Furthermore, it became clear to me that beliefs about shape-shifting were not reducible to fugitive images and haphazard observations; they were conditioned by a complex of shared assumptions and ideas that required careful ethnographic elucidation.

Kuranko conventional wisdom on the subject of shape-shifting can be readily summarized. First, the ability to change from human to animal form is an inborn or God-given endowment. It is not a skill that can be learned or a gift that can be acquired. Second, shape-shifters can undergo metamorphosis only when alone in the bush. Third, serious perils are associated with shape-shifting. If one sees a man in the process of transformation one should not spread word of it around or even admit what one has seen. One must suppress or deny the evidence of one's own eyes—and the shape-shifter will implore a witness to do so—because public exposure brings precipitous or premature death to the *yelamafentiginu*. Another danger comes from the possibility of being wounded or killed by a hunter while in animal form. If a shape-shifter in animal guise *is* mortally wounded, he will always return to a village or settlement in human form and die there.[2] Grave risks also attend a shape-shifter who boasts of his powers. In the event of animals marauding livestock or damaging crops, the self-confessed shape-shifter may be taken to court and accused of sorcery.

A skeptic might regard these beliefs as self-protective rationalizations. If a shape-shifter cannot change in the presence of others who are not

themselves shape-shifters, then no independent evidence of the phenomenon can be adduced. If witnesses must forget or deny their accidental sightings lest they endanger the life of the shape-shifter, then little direct evidence of the phenomenon will be available. And if a mortally wounded shape-shifter cannot die half man, half animal, then no physical evidence of the process of transformation will ever be seen.

Rather than pursue the problem of how these beliefs may be justified from our point of view, I examine the grounds on which Kuranko accept them as true.

First, one is confirmed in the beliefs about shape-shifting because one's elders hold them to be true. The beliefs have the authority of custom (*namui*); they are a legacy of the ancestors, given in the words of the first people (*fol' morgan' kumenu*) and of the first people's making (*fol' morgonnu ko dane*). Second, shape-shifting occurs in myths concerning ancestral journeys and clan origins, and such myths, known as *bimba kumenu* (ancestral words) or *kuma kore* (venerable speech), are held to be true. Third, the Kuranko often cite hearsay evidence in support of the beliefs.

For example, in Firawa some years ago a man trapped a leopard that had been marauding his sheep and goats. One night, however, the leopard broke out of its cage and escaped, though not before wounding itself on the splintered bars. The following day the face and arms of the man's half brother were seen to be badly lacerated. Since bad blood existed between the half brothers (*fadennu*), it was assumed that the wounded man had been guilty of transforming himself into a leopard—the totemic animal of the clan—and killing the other man's livestock.

Another example of shape-shifting was given to me by a young Kuranko man, John Sisay, remembering an incident from his childhood when he had accompanied an American missionary on a hunting trip near Yifin. The missionary and the boy had been negotiating the banks of a river when the missionary's dog was seized by a crocodile and dragged down into a deep hole. According to John, the missionary then entered the water and disappeared beneath the surface, reappearing two hours later some distance upstream. That same day the missionary went to the Yifin chief, who, it was rumored, could transform himself into a crocodile, and told him he had seen a populous town beneath the river and had retrieved his dog there. The missionary then told the chief that he intended shooting crocodiles in the area and warned local shape-shifters that they risked their lives loitering at the ford and attacking the livestock of traders crossing there. Although I argued that John could have been confused by what he saw at the river and been conned by the missionary,

who had simply been exploiting indigenous beliefs to assert his authority over the local ruler, John dismissed any possibility of illusion or lying. The beliefs did not rest upon his opinion or his particular experience; they were common knowledge, and others would just as readily attest to their truth.

A fourth mode of indigenous evidence for shape-shifting is far from common knowledge. It is derived from the apprenticeship of a *besetigi* or medicine master, a specialist in healing medicine as well as lethal medicine and its antidotes. Such specialist skills and knowledge are not usually divulged, and it was not until my third field trip, ten years after first beginning research among the Kuranko, that the elderly medicine master and close friend Saran Salia Sano agreed to impart some of these skills and this knowledge to me.

As an initiatory test during Saran Salia's three-year apprenticeship in Guinea as a young man, his teacher had taken him to a remote stretch of a river. There the teacher had gone ahead of Salia and transformed himself into a snake. The snake had then swum back downstream and wrapped itself around Saran Salia's leg, striking fear into his heart, a fear he had to master. Then the snake had changed back into his teacher. Like John Sisay, Saran Salia was adamant that what he had seen had not been a figment of his imagination.

A fifth mode of evidence that the Kuranko adduce for shape-shifting is as rare and privileged as the fourth: direct accounts by actual shape-shifters. For reasons I have already given, shape-shifters seldom voice or confide their secrets, and it was more a matter of luck than ethnographic diligence that gave me the insights I now review.

A Shape-Shifter's Story

It was my fourth field trip to Sierra Leone, in October 1979, and my encounter with the self-styled shape-shifter took place, ironically, in the middle of Sierra Leone's largest city and at a time when I was more interested in relaxing after the rigors of the field than in pursuing ethnographic research.

I was staying with a Kuranko friend who was minister of energy and power. Sewa had entered Parliament two years before, in 1977, standing as an independent candidate in Koinadugu South constituency and defeating the official All People's Congress candidate, who was minister of mines and a close friend of the nation's president.

During his campaign, Sewa had attracted several devoted followers and acolytes, among them a luckless and restive diamond miner named Mohammed Fofona. Mohammed lived in Koidu in the Kono diamond district but had come to Freetown to settle some kind of account with the tax department. Like me, he was enjoying the hospitality of Sewa's house during his stay in Freetown. He was fifty-four, thickset, stalwart, and amenable. People called him Fofona Bigbelly to his face, a nickname he took no exception to. He knew about me long before we actually met. A book of mine, *The Kuranko*, had been bought up in large quantities and used in the campaign to get Sewa elected to Parliament; it was known as the *ferensola* book, *ferensola* being the catchword at that time for Kuranko identity. Mohammed regarded my anthropological research as significant and useful, and he was keen to figure in any further publications I might produce.

Mohammed and I spent a lot of time together. He gave me a detailed account of Sewa's political campaign, told me his own life story, railed against corruption in national politics, and helped me cross-check details of ruling genealogies from his natal chiefdom of Mongo Bendugu. One day I happened to ask him what the totem of the Fofona clan was.

"Kamei, the elephant," he said. "To eat elephant meat would make one's skin disfigured." Then he told me, "Some Fofona men can change into elephants," and added that he himself possessed that gift.

Given Mohammed's rather elephantine build, his claim amused as much as intrigued me. I asked him to tell me more. Would it be possible for me to accompany him to an isolated place in the bush and observe him undergoing the change? When he changed, did he feel enlarged and powerful like an elephant, a change in the way he experienced his own body rather than an actual physical metamorphosis? His replies were disheartening. The change would not be possible in my presence, but yes he did actually undergo a physical metamorphosis. The power was something he had been born with; he had possessed it even as a child. It was, he said, an inborn gift, *i saran ta la i bole* (you born it in your possession), an inner faculty, *bu' ro koe* (belly in thing), a private matter, *morgo konta koe* (person inner understanding). It could only be discussed among and comprehended by others having the same bent.

Although I acknowledged the reality of Mohammed's experience of changing into an elephant, I could not accept his ontologizing of the experience. Sincerity or depth of experience are not proofs that the phenomenon experienced actually exists. I argued with Mohammed that his experiences were open to other interpretations, by which, on reflection,

I guess I meant that they could be interpreted my way. Such skepticism has its place in academic discourse; among the Kuranko its social value is minima1. In effect, I was denying Mohammed's experience and casting doubt on the Kuranko belief in shape-shifting. Not surprisingly, Mohammed and I soon dropped the subject from our conversation, though not before he gave me a general account of shape-shifting, which replicated nicely the Kuranko conventional wisdom with which I was already familiar.

I left Sierra Leone a few weeks later, notebooks filled with tantalizing notes and images, interpretive conjectures, but nothing conclusive. When I wrote about shape-shifting during the next couple of years it was imaginatively and poetically, not analytically.[3] Mindful that I had called Mohammed's experience and belief into question, my fictional and empathic accounts of changing from human to animal form perhaps constituted a kind of apology for the rude and subversive idioms of anthropological discourse. But poems and fictions did not resolve the interpretive issues that bothered me.

Then Foucault's work suggested a way out of the impasse. Rather than think about shape-shifting in terms of such antinomies as true/false, real/illusory, objective/subjective, rational/irrational, I began to explore the grounds for the possibility of the belief, the conditions under which the notion of shape-shifting could be entertained as reasonable, made intelligible, and, most important, *realized*, as in Mohammed's case, *as a sensible truth*.

This entailed going beyond the justifications that the Kuranko themselves provided for the belief and examining aspects of Kuranko "subsidiary awareness" lying outside the field of "focal awareness" already considered.[4] In particular, it meant examining Kuranko ontology in relation to Mohammed's biography.

Ontology of Shape-Shifting

In the Kuranko worldview it is axiomatic that persons exist only in relation to one another. The concept of *morgoye*, personhood, reflects the ontological priority of social relationships over individual identity. Although the word *morgo* denotes the living person, the empirical subject of speech, thought, will, and action that is recognized in all societies, the concept *morgoye* is at once more abstract and more far reaching. *Morgoye* (moral personhood) connotes ideal qualities of proper social relationships, and the word can be variously translated as mindfulness of oth-

ers, generosity of spirit, magnanimity, and altruism. Unlike the English word *personality*, however, *morgoye* does not suggest notions of personal identity, distinctive individual character, or autonomous moral being. *Morgoye* is a quality of being realized in social praxis rather than in personal style or appearance.

Another fundamental assumption in the Kuranko worldview is that being is not necessarily limited to human being. Thus, *morgoye*, though a quality of social being, is not necessarily or merely found in relationships between persons. Put another way, the field of social relationship may include ancestors, fetishes, bush spirits, a divine creator, and totemic animals as well as persons. *Morgoye*, the quality of moral being, may therefore be found in relations between people and ancestors, people and Allah, people and bush spirits, people and totemic animals, and so on. Indeed, in Kuranko clan myths it is the totemic animal's relationship with the clan ancestor that expresses in exemplary form the moral ideal of personhood.

Here are three such myths.

Kuyate clan—monitor lizard (*kana* or *kurumgbe*). We Kuyate do not eat the monitor lizard. Our ancestor went to a faraway place. There was no water there. He became thirsty and was near death. He found a huge tree. In the bole of the tree was some water left from the rains. The monitor lizard was also there. Our ancestor sat under the tree. Then the monitor lizard climbed into the tree bole and out again and shook its tail. The water splashed over our ancestor. He realized there was water there. He got up and drank. He said, "Ah, the monitor lizard has saved my life!" When he returned to town he told his clanspeople about the incident. He said, "You see me here now because of the monitor lizard." Since that time the monitor lizard has been our totem. If any Kuyate eats it his body will become marked and disfigured like the body of the lizard. His clan joking partners (*sanakuie*) will have to find medicines to cure him.

Wulare clan—leopard (*kuli*). As our ancestor was leaving Mande he had to cross a large river that was in flood. A leopard put our ancestor on his back and took him across the river. Our ancestor said, "Henceforth no Wulare should injure or eat the leopard."

Togole and Tegere clans—bush fowl (*wolei*). The ancestors of the Togole and Tegere were warriors. During the wars, times were so bad that they both went into hiding to evade their enemies. One morning they were almost discovered and captured. They had left their hiding place because their enemies were approaching. Their enemies saw their footprints in the dewy grass. But just then a bush fowl came along the path. As the enemies approached the hidden warriors the bush fowl jumped out in front of them. The enemies said, "Heh, no one has passed this way; these are just bush fowl

tracks." They went away. The two hidden warriors heard every word that had been spoken. They vowed never to eat bush fowl again and to instruct their descendants never to eat it. They placed a curse on the meat of the bush fowl. You will not die if you eat it but—because of that curse—your skin will become disfigured if you do so.

The qualities of moral personhood thus shift about within the Kuranko world; sometimes they are attributed to persons, sometimes to animals, bush spirits, plants, and even stones. Because personhood is distributed into the natural world and not fixed within the margins of the village, it is plausible that a grass fetish speaks with moral discernment, a bush spirit acts as an ally, a human being degenerates—as in the case of a witch—into mere animality, and an animal is regarded as an ancestor and kinsman. Such metamorphoses, familiar enough in the make-believe world of Kuranko folktales, assume special significance in the clan myths. Here the bond of kinship (*nakelinyorgoye*) said to exist between clansperson and clan totem becomes more than a metaphor, a rhetorical image; it implies a real moral and physical identification. If one eats the meat of one's totemic animal, one's body takes on the superficial features of the animal. Eating one's totem is tantamount to "eating oneself." And, in the view of some Kuranko, the prohibition against killing or eating one's totem is prompted by the perennial possibility that the animal one eats may be an actual kinsman in animal form, that is, a shape-shifter from one's own clan.

From an intellectualistic point of view we would say that the totem is a symbol of the clan, but if we do justice to the more holistic reasoning of the Kuranko we would have to acknowledge that the totem, at least potentially, *is* the clan. Mind and body are one. The *moral* bond between clansperson and clan totem is thus construed as an actual physical identification *and may be experienced as such.*

So far we have seen how the belief in shape-shifting is grounded in Kuranko ontology and worldview and does not derive its plausibility solely or directly from firsthand experience or hearsay accounts. Kuranko children grow up with folktales in which shape-shifting is common and accept as true clan myths in which metamorphosis occurs. Such grounding influences perception, makes hearsay reports of shape-shifting seem reasonable, and disposes a person to interpret certain altered states of consciousness in terms of shape-shifting.

Nevertheless, while all Kuranko share common ontological assumptions and are conditioned by the same conventional wisdom, we cannot conclude that individual experience is entirely explicable in such terms.

Lived experience is irreducible; no matter how fervently and uncritically Kuranko espouse their conventional beliefs in shape- shifting, it is evident that different individuals experience and construe the beliefs in different ways.

Let us return to the case of Mohammed Fofona and ask why he, unlike others grounded in the same worldview, came to actually embody the idea of shape-shifting and realize it as an immediate, personal, and sensible experience. At this point the sociology of knowledge exhausts its usefulness, and we must turn to biography for our answers.

A Shape-Shifter's Story Continued

Mohammed was born in 1925 in Tumania (Mongo Bendugu chiefdom, Koinadugu district) in northwest Sierra Leone. In 1942, when he was seventeen, he enlisted in the army and saw active service in the Middle East and Europe. In 1950 he was demobilized and returned to Tumania.

Like other Kuranko men of his generation, Mohammed regarded military service as a kind of initiatory ordeal, a way to manhood directly comparable to the traditional rites of initiation that were already on the wane. As he put it, "The army gave discipline, made you a man, made you a real force. In those days a soldier was like a white man in the villages; he commanded great respect." Like many other ex-soldiers, however, Mohammed found it hard to settle back into the routines of village life. Neither his wartime experience nor the respect he was momentarily accorded on account of it compensated for the tedium of Tumania. Lacking any traditional position of authority and any status in the British administration, Mohammed drifted south into the diamond districts where the prospect of material wealth offered the possibility of power and renewed prestige.

From Lebanese diamond dealers in Kono, Mohammed hired the basic tools of the prospector—pick, shovel, and sieve—and tried his luck. In the years that followed he enjoyed sporadic success and built a mud brick iron-roofed house in Koidu and married. More often than not, however, he found himself struggling against poverty and ill fortune, adversities not wholly attributable to his own failings or the disapproval of the ancestors. Observing the nepotism and corruption that governed the diamond business, Mohammed came to share the blighted view of many Kuranko men, that their lack of personal prosperity was a consequence of their political marginality. Even in 1979 Mohammed returned time and

again in our conversations to the problem of corruption, of bribery and bias, exploitation and cronyism, and stressed the need in Sierra Leone for radical political change.

In 1977, when Sewa Bokari Marah bowed to popular Kuranko demand and stood for election in Koinadugu South, Mohammed at once saw the possibility of an improvement in Kuranko political fortunes and in his own luck. He enlisted in Sewa's cause—the cause of *ferensola*—and actively campaigned for Sewa's election.

Sewa's electoral success came about through ironic and tragic circumstances. Criticisms of corruption had been leveled against the sitting member of Parliament Kawusu Konteh for some time, but when he was implicated in the murder of several Kuranko villagers in Kurubonla and in the sacking of the village, the president was obliged to demand the withdrawal of his candidature and call an official inquiry. Sewa was elected unopposed. Two years later, Mohammed spoke to me of Kawusu Konteh with undisguised contempt, remembering how the minister had once tried to buy Mohammed's loyalty, kneeling before him, grasping his ankles, begging him to sell Sewa out with an offer of Le 5,000. "The money," Mohammed said, "would have soiled me. I refused it."

Even this scant knowledge of Mohammed suggested to me in 1979 that there might be some connection between his boast of being able to transform himself into a powerful animal and his vaunted identification with a powerful political figure. Mohammed admitted that shapeshifting gave him a sense of clandestine power over others, and I could not resist relating this to his luckless, marginal situation in life. Had he called upon familiar Kuranko beliefs in metamorphosis to make sense of an unfamiliar and unpredictable world, to express an existential longing to regain control over his own destiny, to change his luck, to gain stature through associating with a successful and charismatic peer? As a young man he had found fulfillment in the army; did he now find the same vicarious satisfaction in the theater of national politics?

Six years passed—years in which I lost contact with Mohammed yet continued to ponder these questions and plan further research. When I finally returned to Sierra Leone in October 1985 I made a trip to Koidu, where Mohammed was still living.

I passed the best part of a day, enervated by the heat, trying to find him. Each time I returned to the squalid quarter of mud-brick houses and rain-eroded laterite lanes where Mohammed lived, I would ask for him by name in Krio. "Oh dat fat pa, e don komot," I would be told, or someone would yell into the gloomy interior of a house and ask, "Fofona Bigbelly, e dae?" only to be told again that he had gone out. I left messages—could

he be told I was looking for him?—and I described the house across town where I was staying.

That evening he turned up. He was a changed man, taciturn, wary, and visibly older. He showed little enthusiasm for seeing me. Perhaps I too had changed, haunted by memories of my late wife and happier times, dispirited by news of the deaths of Kuranko friends, oppressed by the poverty around me, and suffering from a loss of faith in the authenticity of anthropological understanding. Yet I was determined to ask the questions that had weighed on my mind for so long.

I offered Mohammed a Coke, and we sat opposite each other in the parlor, our faces shadowy in the penumbra of a hurricane lamp. At first we talked of the political and economic crisis in the country. A petrol tanker had delivered 420 gallons of petrol to Koidu that afternoon, and hundreds of people had mobbed the Mobil pumps, fighting to get a share of petrol only to find that through bribes, obligations, and black-market deals most of the supply had been committed. Mohammed voiced a widespread pessimism: unless the president stepped down and elections were called, the country would collapse into anarchy.

After a while I asked him if he remembered confiding in me six years earlier that he could change into an elephant. He seemed suspicious and slightly embarrassed, and disclaimed any such ability. I reminded him of our conversation about shape-shifting and asked why he had advertised a gift that other men would have kept secret. Grudgingly he accepted what he had once said, then added, "We know ourselves, we recognize only our own kind, we speak of these matters only among those of like mind." Shut out of experiences I had presumed to understand empathically, I suddenly realized my presumptuousness. Six years was a long time, and we were strangers.

In the event I pursued my questions anyway, and Mohammed answered them, guardedly and always in general terms, avoiding personal anecdote as if he had a canny grasp of the conventions of anthropological discourse.

Did he change by first conjuring up an image of an elephant in his mind? "No," he said, "that is not necessary. But you must have a purpose, such as destroying someone's crops. If someone offends you and you cannot take your revenge by any ordinary means, you'll walk ahead of that person in the bush, change, then fall on him as he passes on his way back to his village."

"Do people change into animals to get a sense of power?" I asked.

"Yes."

"How long does the metamorphosis last?"

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"That depends—but usually no more than twelve hours."

"Is it difficult to remain an elephant all that time?"

"No."

I then asked Mohammed if he retained full consciousness during metamorphosis. "Yes," he said, "because you must know to change back to human form." He reflected a moment. "But you must be alone in the bush to do it."

Our conversation petered out. I was tired. I felt I was encroaching on Mohammed's privacy, pressing him on matters he was reluctant to discuss but too polite to dismiss out of hand. I had wanted to take up his allusions to sorcery, to know whether his own shape-shifting was motivated by vengefulness, but it would have been churlish to do so. I went along with his decision to couch personal experiences in general terms, and in so doing was brought back to the impersonal idioms and generalizing conventions of anthropology. Mohammed had become, so to speak, like any average informant whose transitory, alienated relationship with the anthropologist can only generate pat answers and stereotypical views.

What had changed between October 1979 when Mohammed confided in me as an ally and October 1985 when he talked to me as a mildly bored stranger? The simple answer is that in 1979 Mohammed wished to impress me. Six years later, in quite another situation, he felt no such need. Nor was it only Mohammed who had changed. My weariness and remoteness must have influenced the course of our conversation as much as his sense of my strangeness and skepticism.

The manner in which understanding is constituted intersubjectively can be studied ethnographically by observing indigenous social interaction, but it can also be studied reflexively by focusing on the ethnographic encounter itself. In this context the limits of understanding are often set by the human limitations of the ethnographer and defined as much by his or her social relationships in the field or within the anthropological profession as by the methodology used and the theory espoused. Indigenous understanding is no less tied to context, and just as my personality and cultural bias and the exigencies of fieldwork ground my ethnographic knowledge, so too is Kuranko knowledge grounded in certain cultural assumptions and personal interests, as the case of Mohammed shows.

The variety of ways in which shared beliefs are used, experienced, and espoused makes it futile to try to elucidate their essence under the rubric of such antinomies as rational versus irrational, true versus false, good

versus bad. Rather, we need to elucidate the place of beliefs in the context of actual existence—how they are experienced and employed, not what they may be said to register or represent. Such a pragmatist perspective demands that we consider Kuranko shape-shifting in critical, historical, psychological, and cross-cultural terms.

The Critical Context of Belief

Under ordinary circumstances Kuranko appear to acquiesce in traditional stereotypes of shape-shifting, treating them matter-of-factly, espousing them without particular interest or fervor.[5] Mohammed was an exception. In his case the beliefs were embraced actively and enthusiastically; they were realized as lived, bodily experience.

It is as though Kuranko beliefs in shape-shifting were ordinarily held in cold storage, a stock of what William James dubbed "extra truths"—ideas salted away in memory awaiting practical implementation during some crisis.[6] Mohammed gave vitality to beliefs that others held loosely, passively, and halfheartedly, realizing them with his whole being.

Such a shift from merely entertaining an idea to actually embodying it is usually precipitated by some social or personal crisis that disrupts normal habits and disconcerts normal awareness. Mohammed has suffered recurrent existential crises in his life, resulting in an erosion of his sense of self-mastery and social worth that he has tried to make good by calling upon beliefs in shape-shifting. As an elephant he is in his element, empowered by a sense of amplitude and control. But as with alcohol and drug use in our society, Mohammed's clandestine gains are at the cost of social integration. His vicarious mastery of the world entails, ironically, a separation from it, a marginality whose ambivalent images are those of solitude, sorcery, and the bush. Like a neophyte who does not return to his village after initiation in the bush, Mohammed's manhood fails to be realized socially. His power to shape-shift thus condemns him to the very marginality he struggles to escape.

The situation brings to mind the Kuranko women who confess to being witches during serious illness, calling upon the stereotypes of witchcraft to comprehend and cope with a crisis that erodes self-control and subverts identity.[7] As in the case of shape-shifters, the confession is socially useful, affirming the veracity of witchcraft beliefs, but self-defeating, for unless she dies of natural causes the self-confessed witch may be ritually killed.

The Historical Context of Belief

Let us reconsider a remark of Mohammed's concerning the purpose of shape-shifting: "If someone offends you and you cannot take your revenge by ordinary means you'll walk ahead of that person in the bush, change, then fall on him as he passes on his way to his village." Might not the sense of powerlessness and vengefulness that makes a man seek to augment his strength or regain self-mastery through shape-shifting arise from historical as well as personal crises?

In southern Sierra Leone between the 1860s and the early 1900s the government of the Colony of Sierra Leone endeavored through legislation to put an end to killings by so-called human leopard societies.[8] The societies were secret, ritually focused on powerful medicines; members gave the illusion of being leopards by hacking a victim to death with an iron claw, leaving fake leopard prints on the ground, wearing leopard garb. But details of recruitment, how victims were selected, the internal structure and practices of the societies, and their relationship to secular authority or "official" secret societies like Poro are difficult to clarify.[9]

Thanks to the painstaking scholarship of Birger Lindskog, we know that similar cults were widespread in Africa, though concentrated in the West African coastal area and northeast Congo.[10] Explanations of the cults have invoked notions of savage mentality, cannibalistic appetites, totemic fixations, vengefulness and criminal conspiracy, and mindless obedience to cult leaders—essentialistic notions that, by reducing the cults to the status of savage otherness, deny the violent *situation* in which those who voice such opinions conspire, and deny the indigenous person recognition as a subject and maker of his own history. Although colonial statutes and records insist that the leopard societies of Sierra Leone were "formed for the purpose of murder and cannibalism and existed simply to gratify the depraved tastes of [their] members" it is, in my view, more edifying to see the cults as a response to sociopolitical deprivation, a form of defiance, negation, inversion, and revenge.[11] Although forms of ritualized rebellion such as sorcery, witchcraft, and cult activity were aspects of everyday life in traditional Sierra Leonean societies, the colonial encounter seems to have given these activities new impetus and purpose.

The sworn secrecy of leopard men and the fact that our knowledge of human leopard societies comes from the records of administrators dedicated to the extirpation of the phenomenon make it difficult to grasp the indigenous point of view. But, as Ranajit Guha observes in his work on peasant insurgency in colonial India, "the difficulty is perhaps less

insurmountable than it seems to be at first sight": "It is of course true that the reports, dispatches, minutes, judgments, laws, letters, etc. in which policemen, soldiers, bureaucrats, landlords, usurers and others hostile to insurgency register their sentiments, amount to a representation of their will. But these documents do not get their content from that will alone, for the latter is predicated on another will—that of the insurgent. It should be possible therefore to read the presence of a rebel consciousness as a necessary and pervasive element within that body of evidence."[12]

This indeed proves to be the case with documents on counterinsurgency from Sierra Leone. In 1915, Tombo, a self-confessed member of a baboon society, on trial for murder, observed that the object of the society was "to be wealthy and influential." A similar point was made by Gbanna ("The object of the Society is to be rich and to gain a big name and respect over every other person"), while a third defendant, Lebbi, stated that "the object of the Society [was] to supply human flesh to the Chiefs and to increase their influence and continue the chieftaincy in their line." In another case heard in 1908–9, Lamina told a court that he had joined the leopard society "in order to get riches." The medicine used by the cult would make a "man strong and successful."[13] Writing on "The Sierra Leone Cannibals" in 1912, Berry noted that the objects of the leopard society were "always material" and, according to native informants, a matter of getting "one word [unanimous support?] for the chief of the country," or getting "some blood to make the country cold, so that bad luck be taken away from the country, and they would all get plenty of money."[14] The medicine of the society was thought to grant "supremacy over the white man,[15] in the white man not being able to find out what was being done, and that the eating of human flesh would give power over the white man. For, say they, the white men have more power than the black men; but in this cannibalism you get some power so that when you do wrong you will not be found out by the white man."[16]

As Lindskog notes in summary, the medicine of the leopard society, *bofima*, was "the dominant factor in measures directed against neighboring chiefdoms and, in more modern times, even in securing allegiance to resistance, passive or otherwise, against the British government. Thus, the ritual sometimes served political and xenophobic purposes."[17]

A more detailed account of the relationship between leopard societies and the sociopolitical situation in southern Sierra Leone in the late nineteenth century lends weight to the argument that the cults were forms of insurgency and rebellion. Earliest reports of leopard societies date from the period of the British annexation of the independent Sherbro country after a dubious treaty was signed with some local chiefs, inducing

cession of Sherbro to the British Crown.[18] At the time, Sherbro Island and its hinterland were already politically troubled areas. Tensions between the Sherbro and the dominant Mende, incursions of war refugees—many from the hut tax rebellions in Mendeland—and of immigrants from the interior seeking work, a high incidence of plundering and theft, recurrent wars between coastal and hinterland chiefs for control of new trading enterprises, and discontent among domestic slaves all contributed to this internal strife.[19] Throughout the 1870s and 1880s there was increasing resistance to the arbitrary powers of chiefs involved in the slave trade, as well as resistance by chiefs to government laws banning slave trading.[20] Native resentment of mission meddling in their religious practices, of tax impositions, and of Creole traders whose land purchases and interference in local politics often had military backing further deepened the crisis.[21]

Given this anomic situation it is impossible not to interpret the phenomenon of human leopard societies in sociopolitical terms. A concatenation of personal grievances, political resentments, and economic frustrations found expression in peripheral cults and practices that were already part of the traditional culture: Poro, crocodile, and leopard miracle plays, shape-shifting, sorcery, and so on. Recruitment to the cults soon reflected social pressures and blackmail as much as individual interest. But while social and political forces underlay the growth of the cults, they were in the end socially and politically disastrous. The victims of the leopard men were seldom the Creole traders, the whites, and the exploitative chiefs who oppressed the common people; they were scapegoats from within the village world itself—children, young women, and members of the leopard men's own families.[22] The human leopards took out their grievances on their own social body. The power they exercised came from the magical manipulation of consciousness, not from any program of political action.[23] Vilified by traders and administrators as "bush people," the leopard men sought control over their own situation by realizing the wildest imaginings and worst prejudices of their oppressors, but in the end they were victims of their own rituals and of their own involuted and clandestine strategies.

Psychological and Cross-Cultural Contexts of Belief

A crisis or rupture in Mohammed's being-in-the-world throws him (like the Sherbro leopard men of a hundred years ago) into a marginal situ-

ation. Calling upon images of liminal life from his own cultural background, he tries to make good his loss of mastery and control. He changes into an elephant, augmenting his flagging power and replenishing his strength. As he realizes in his imagination an ancestral totemic bond, however, he falls back upon primordial attachments to the clan as family, as womb, and forfeits his social identifications in the here and now. The stratagem he uses to regain self-mastery is self-defeating. This is why the Kuranko regard shape-shifting so ambivalently. As a solitary and clandestine activity it calls the entire ontology of the group into question. It is, Kuranko say, a kind of witchcraft, a pathology. But insofar as an individual shape-shifter embodies and bears out many assumptions on which the Kuranko ethos is founded, he is a kind of hero. His very existence demonstrates the distributive theory of being, proves the power of men to tap the powers of the wild, and affirms the moral bond between clanspeople and their totemic animals.

All this rests on a blurring of the distinction we would tend to make between subjectivity and objectivity, a habit of interpreting interior states as signs of external events. Thus, while I was inclined to see Mohammed's shape-shifting as an altered state of consciousness, an intrapsychic event, Kuranko tend to ontologize the experience and see it as a change in objective reality. They speak of it not as an inward change but as an exterior movement from the moral space of the town to the solitude of the bush. In other words, the idiomatic Kuranko distinction between village and bush corresponds to our cultural distinction between ordinary and extraordinary frames of awareness. This tendency to exteriorize events that we would assign to interiority explains why the Kuranko interpret memory not as a mental trace of a past event but as a registration in the mind of an event happening somewhere else. It also explains why they interpret conscience (*hake*) as residing in social relationships, not in the individual psyche, and regard the unconscious not as some profound level of the mind but as a kind of penumbra in social space, the shadowy domain beyond the perimeter of one's village. It may be because Kuranko so often interpret changes in experience as evidence of changes in the external world that many informants, Mohammed among them, were as dismissive of my questions as to whether shape-shifters really changed or only thought they did. Perhaps the Kuranko are more pragmatic than most anthropologists: if illusions have real and useful consequences then they are truths.

This account of Kuranko animism might easily give the impression that Kuranko thought, in its concrete metamorphicality and pragmatism,

is utterly foreign to our own. But metamorphosis is a part of our cultural tradition too—a recurring metaphor from Ovid to Ionesco of radical moral transformation. It is, moreover, a metaphor that finds imaginative and bodily realization in the experiences of actual individuals. For instance, the split in Mohammed's life between social and "wild" identifications is echoed in Kafka's story of Gregor Samsa, who "woke up one morning from unsettling dreams" and "found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin [*ungeheueres Ungeziefer*]."[24]

Kafka deliberately chose to literalize the metaphor of Gregor as a bug, to allow it to be lived as an immediate, bodily reality in order to make us experience the troubled relationship between Gregor's human consciousness and his buglike body, a relationship that suggests Kafka's own estrangement from his family, his struggle against the alienating effect of figurative language, his ambivalent feelings about intimate relations, and his precarious existence as a Jewish writer outside what he called "the house of life."[25] Adorno's "Notes on Kafka" could apply to Mohammed: the "individual and his social character are split. . . . The self lives solely through transformation into otherness. . . . The boundary between what is human and the world of things becomes blurred."[26]

It is as if
Men turning into things, as comedy,
Stood, dressed in antic symbols, to display

The truth about themselves, having lost, as things,
That power to conceal they had as men . . . [27]

Like Mohammed's split, Gregor's creative withdrawal has an awful social cost. In the end, reduced to the status of a thing, trapped inside his carapace and neglected by his family, Gregor dies, and Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, putting their anomalous son from their minds, begin to look forward to their daughter's marriage—a social act, "the confirmation of their new dreams."

It is not, however, metamorphoses into animals that pervade the popular imagination of people in urban industrial societies but metamorphoses into machines, the most thinglike objects of all. Just as images of were-animals are conditioned by the ubiquitous dialectic of village and bush in preindustrial societies, so images of bionic people, androids, and robots reflect the human/machine dialectic that shapes both mental and bodily consciousness in industrial societies. This connection between animal and machine images was borne home to me in 1979 in the course

of a conversation with John Sisay, who, as a boy, had seen an American missionary change into a crocodile near Yifin.

At the time my response to John's story was skeptical. I told him that I knew of no Europeans who had the ability to shape-shift. His reply was categorical: "But Europeans can transform themselves into airplanes!"

I was suddenly reminded of an article by Bruno Bettelheim that appeared in *Scientific American* in 1959, an account of an autistic boy called Joey who converted himself into a machine. Trapped in this image of himself, he could not see himself or act except in terms of it; he functioned as if by remote control. Joey's machinelike behavior was so devastatingly convincing that even his therapists found it difficult to respond to him as a human being. Joey lived the mechanistic image as a literal and embodied truth:

During Joey's first weeks with us we would watch absorbedly as this at once fragile-looking and imperious nine-year-old went about his mechanical existence. Entering the dining room, for example, he would string an imaginary wire from his "energy source"—an imaginary electric outlet—to the table. There he "insulated" himself with paper napkins and finally plugged himself in. Only then could Joey eat, for he firmly believed that the "current" ran his ingestive apparatus. So skillful was the pantomime that one had to look twice to be sure there was neither wire nor outlet nor plug. Children and members of our staff spontaneously avoided stepping on the "wires" for fear of interrupting what seemed the source of his very life.[28]

It might be argued that Mohammed, like Joey, escapes into a delusional world, shaped through bricolage "from bits and pieces of the world at hand."[29] In Joey's case it is a world of mechanical devices; in Mohammed's case, one of totemic identifications. Whether elephant or machine, however, these other selves, these borrowed bodies, these second skins, assist a sense of adequacy, amplitude, and solidity in a painfully unstable world. Mohammed speaks of the power he gains through shape-shifting. Joey too: "Machines are better than the body," he once told his teacher. "They don't break."[30]

There are, however, important differences between Mohammed, Gregor, and Joey that bear upon our interpretation of metamorphosis. First, the crises Joey suffered in early life were far more devastating than those Mohammed complained of. According to Bettelheim, Joey was rejected by his parents even before he was born. "I never knew I was pregnant," his mother said. Joey's birth "did not make any difference . . . I did not want to see or nurse him . . . I had no feeling of actual dislike—I simply didn't want to take care of him."[31]

In the second place, Joey's sense of himself as a machine was absolute and inescapable, unlike Mohammed's sense of himself as an elephant, which was occasional and controlled. While Mohammed cultivated and embodied the Kuranko idea of shape-shifting, it did not rule his life to the exclusion of everything else. As the contrast between my conversations with him in 1979 and 1985 makes clear, Mohammed was not stuck with his belief. He embraced it opportunistically. His attraction to shape-shifting was no more delusional than our desire for cars, yachts, and houses—material envelopes that compensate us for our human frailty and mutability in an intimidating world.

Finally, while Joey was clinically labeled "autistic" and "schizophrenic," signifying his complete alienation from social reality, Mohammed's shape-shifting was, in his society, grudgingly accepted. Although it is in the Kuranko view a form of witchcraft, it is also seen as a confirmation of basic moral assumptions, particularly those enshrined in clan myths.

For these reasons we cannot label Mohammed—or Gregor Samsa—as mad and deluded. Existentially, Mohammed remains, like most of us, more or less in control of his own life, even if, like the leopard men of yore, his stratagems are socially limited and politically ineffectual. The different modalities of Kuranko shape-shifting reveal a search for autonomy, meaning, and control in a world that often appears unpredictable and ungraspable. It is a search we can readily identify with, despite the seemingly bizarre idioms of the Kuranko dialectic. Like human beings everywhere, we often claim that what is true is that which corresponds to what is proven, given, or real, but in our quotidian lives we tend to act as pragmatists. In crisis we make do with whatever is available in order to cope, and we judge the truth of whatever beliefs we take up in terms of what they accomplish for us, how they improve our lives.

The civil war in Sierra Leone took my work in radically new directions. Although I had done extensive research on critical events and "rituals of affliction" among the Kuranko for many years, the violence that confronted the world in the 1980s and 1990s, whether in the so-called small wars of West Africa, the civil war in Sri Lanka, or the campaigns of ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and Bosnia, shocked many anthropologists, myself included, to address and explore these tragic terrains of trauma and grief, of refugee flight and the search for asylum, of violence and social suffering.

Custom and Conflict in Sierra Leone: An Essay on Anarchy

Time does not always flow according to a line . . . nor according to a plan but, rather, according to an extraordinary complex mixture, as though it reflected stopping points, ruptures, deep wells, chimneys or thunderous acceleration, rendings, gaps—all sown at random, at least in a visible disorder. Thus the development of history truly resembles what chaos theory describes.

MICHEL SERRES, *CONVERSATIONS ON SCIENCE, CULTURE, AND TIME*[1]

Anthropological studies of the recent war in Sierra Leone have tended to focus on the causes or preconditions of the conflict. While some emphasize long-standing, local-level patterns of structural violence, exclusion, secrecy, struggle, and suspicion that periodically erupt into open conflict, even in "times of peace," others place less emphasis on indigenous culture as such and see the war as a "product of [a] protracted, post-colonial crisis of patrimonialism," triggered by global politico-economic changes in the 1980s that sharply reduced resources available for redistribution.[2] While not denying the value of these perspectives, I find my own interest is less in tracing the specific origins of the conflict than in exploring some of the ways in which a constellation of elements—historical, politico-economic, socio-cultural, symbolic, and imaginary—was variously combined and permuted in the lived experience of Sierra Leoneans over several generations, and found expression, in the early 1990s, in internecine war. Rather than explain the war in

terms of determinate trajectories or objective conditions—cultural, historical, economic, or political—my aim is to disclose what was at play, what was at stake, in the lifeworlds of those who actually experienced this war as combatants or as victims. At the same time, I explore the ways in which this war, like any other, outstripped the sociocultural conditions under which it emerged and the political rationale with which it began, running its course like a storm or a fever. As Allen Feldman notes, chronic violence characteristically "detaches itself from initial contexts and becomes the condition of its own reproduction,"[3] which is why changes in the conditions that produce violence do not necessarily end it. While the rebellion in Sierra Leone refers us back to the lifeworlds in which it was, as it were, prepared, it clearly took on a life and logic of its own. There is, however, another reason for not reducing the meaning of the war to antecedent conditions. That the lives of countless Sierra Leoneans have been terribly and irreversibly changed by this war is itself an argument against reducing effects to causes or, for that matter, against the disinterested language of orthodox social science.

I begin this chapter with a young Kuranko man's account of "his" war. On the basis of Sewa's insights and observations, I proceed to explore the politics of the body and the nature of anarchy, focusing on some of the symbolic forms common to both ritualized and armed rebellion. Finally, I consider the critical interplay of expectation and disappointment, inequality and *ressentiment*, which have been recurring motifs in colonial and postcolonial Sierra Leone.

Sewa's Story

In January 2002, just before the war was declared officially over, I returned to Sierra Leone after more than ten years away, and traveled to Koinadugu district, where I had carried out fieldwork intermittently between 1969 and 1986. During my time in Kabala, a young Kuranko man, Sewa Magba Koroma, recounted his harrowing experiences in November 1994 when a brigade of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) overran the town. After the success of the Tamaboros in repelling the RUF from Kono and forcing them back to their base in Kailahun,[4] the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) became uneasy, for their sole justification for staying in power lay in their own ability to destroy the RUF. They accordingly dissolved the Tamaboro, which they now described as a "rogue army," and sent its leader Komba Kambo back to Koinadugu. It is likely that when the RUF sacked Kabala in November 1994, it did so in

complicity with the Sierra Leone military. Traveling over mountainous terrain and avoiding roads, an RUF force of about seventy youths walked 110 miles in seven days, from Kalmaro, northeast of Magburaka, and entered Kabala with some of the government troops that locals had seen pass through the town in uniform only three days before. One of the objectives of this raid was to punish the town that had given birth to the Tamaboros, which explains why certain houses were targeted for destruction and why Dembaso Samura, one of the Tamaboro "field marshals," was stabbed and beaten to death. The town was subsequently invaded several more times, and many houses pillaged and burned.

I saw the destruction through Sewa's eyes, as we sauntered along dusty lanes that had once been thoroughfares, past rows of derelict houses, and through unfamiliar neighborhoods. So many refugees had poured into Kabala during the war that the town had expanded almost beyond recognition. But we were soon trudging up the rutted road toward the roundabout, and then past the mosque into the main street. Opposite the market there was a poster advertising a Nigerian movie, *Okuzu Massacre: The Robbers' Revenge.* "On the 19th of July my entire family and twenty-two others were killed. Who is responsible? The Governor, the Igwe, the Robbers, or the Gods?"

"What do you think?" I asked Sewa.

"You can rent a video if you want," he said. And sure enough, a few doors away we found the Kaku Video Centre, with *Evil Forest—The Lord Vindicates* for hire. And *Jungle Rats*. "A war of betrayal and deceit. The fight to the finish."

"I would have thought," I said, "that people were sick and tired of this kind of violence."

"Sometimes you have to remember," Sewa said. And as we headed along the road toward the Catholic school, he told me his story.

He had come to Kabala from Freetown to spend some time with his mother, Tina, and his father, Sheku Magba Koroma II, who was the paramount chief of Diang. I had known Chief Magba well and had done fieldwork in Kondembaia, the main town of the chiefdom. Both Tina and her husband had taken refuge in Kabala in 1994, though they were not staying in the same house. "At about four in the afternoon of November 7, 1994," Sewa said, "we heard gunfire. People were running about in a panic, saying that the rebels had entered the town. I was with my cousin Sheku. We went to my dad and said, 'People are saying that the rebels are here.' My father said, 'No, it is the Tamaboros.' But the rebels had entered the town on foot, without vehicles, using cross-country paths rather than roads. By nightfall, many houses were on fire, and my father was asking

us, 'What shall we do, what shall we do?' Sheku and I wanted to get away from the house, but there were rebels moving down the street, so we stayed inside and locked the door. About eight o'clock the rebels banged on the door. They shouted, 'If you don't open up we'll set fire to the house and you'll burn.' I quickly threw my father's staff (of chieftaincy) under the bed. Then they smashed the door. The rebels saw my father's briefcase. It was filled with money and gold dust.[5] They shouted, 'Whose is this?' I said I didn't know who it belonged to. I told them that we had taken shelter in the house when the shooting began. The rebels said, 'If you had nothing to hide, why did you run away?'"

As the rebels moved on down the street, Sewa and Sheku found themselves face to face with two young men their own age, armed with AK-47s. The one who gave orders was called Kujé. His sidekick was called Abu. "Fortunately," Sewa said, "they believed my story, and did not suspect that the old Pa was my father, let alone a paramount chief. Had they known the truth they would have killed him. But I think they were afraid of us. Only two of them against the two of us. They were thinking we might overpower them and take their weapons.

"Kujé said, 'Now we'll kill you,' and he shot Sheku in the stomach. As Sheku died, I pleaded with them. 'Don't kill me,' I said. 'I'm going to come with you. I want to come with you.'

"They ordered me to pack a bag, and to make up a headload of food. Then we headed off the way the rebels had come, along the path to Kamadugu Sukurela. We spent that night in Kamadugu Sukurela, which the rebels had already burned and looted on their way to Kabala. I was one of many captives. One of the girls was Fanta Konté, who was Miss Koinadugu. Next day we went on to Singbian. We arrived there at nightfall. The town crier was in the process of announcing that the RUF had entered Kabala. He was blind. He did not realize that these same rebels had just entered his village. 'So you're telling everyone that we are evil?' the rebels asked. And they shot him dead. Next morning we left for Dalako, near Lake Sonfon. We reached there at about four in the afternoon.

"When the rebels said they wanted food, I told them that there was a cassava garden behind the house, and that I would prepare cassava for them. They trusted me now. I had been helping them talk to the other captives, especially the girls, who were afraid for their lives. So they let me go to the garden alone. It was then that I made my escape. I had dreamed about it the night before. And because I believe that dreams presage real events, I had already decided to escape that day.[6] I made my way to Yara, where I met the town chief and some hunters. They were very happy to

see me and to hear that my father was alive. One of the hunters then escorted me back to Kondembaia.

"Three years passed," Sewa said, "before the captured girls emerged from the bush. They told me that the rebels claimed to have shot me when I tried to escape. Everyone believed I was dead, like my cousin Sheku."

One remark of Sewa's about the RUF—among whom there were undoubtedly many renegade soldiers—particularly intrigued me. The rebels, he had said, were all young men. Many were only boys. They smoked a lot of cannabis, which made them "wild." And their leader, whose name was Mohammed, and hailed from Makeni, wore a red beret, and a red bandana around his neck. His companions praised him constantly. He did not carry a gun, only a knife, and was at all times surrounded by his bodyguard.

What interested me was this odd mix of bravado and vulnerability. Surely Sewa was right when he suggested that the rebels shot Sheku because they felt threatened by the pair of them, that they killed Sheku in order to break Sewa's spirit and to reduce the danger of taking two friends prisoner together. Perhaps, too, I thought, they felt vulnerable—so far from their homes (they had come from Kailahun in the south), afraid of the Tamaboros, who possessed magical medicines to ward off bullets or kill their enemies, and the powers of shape-shifting and witchcraft—*their* way of dealing with their terror.

Unless one has been caught up in a war and experienced the terror that comes of knowing that hundreds of heavily armed individuals are bent on one's annihilation, it is hard to realize that most violence is not primarily motivated by evil, greed, lust, ideology, or aggression. Strange as it may seem, most violence is defensive. As William James observed, fear "is a reaction aroused by the same objects that arouse ferocity," which is why we "both fear, and wish to kill, anything that may kill us."[7] This is why violence is so often motivated by the fear that if one does not kill, one will be killed. Either by the enemy or by one's own superiors. Against this constant anxiety, and the acute sense of fear and vulnerability that accompanies it, one conjures an illusion of power—torching buildings, shooting unarmed civilians, firing rocket grenades, smoking cannabis, shouting orders, chanting slogans, seeing oneself as Rambo, taunting and abusing the individuals one has taken captive. But all this display of might—this weaponry,[8] these medicines and amulets, this noise, these incantations, both political and magical, these Hollywood images, these drug-induced fugues, these rituals of brotherhood and solidarity—simply reveal the depth of one's own impotence and fear. This is Hannah Arendt's

great insight—that while military power consolidates itself in numbers, and in coordinated, automatic forms of mass movement, terrorism seeks power in implements and is driven not by might but its absence.[9] So in the auto-da-fé, with explosions and bomb blasts, fire, noise and mayhem, the terrorist, like a child, finds his apotheosis, achieving the recognition, presence, voice, and potency he has been denied in the real world.

Like any other animal, human beings will fight to the death when threatened or cornered, but as a species we are perhaps alone in imagining that our survival depends on such elusive properties as recognition, love, identity, national honor, prestige, freedom, and wealth. Only we will feel that our very existence is endangered when our name is taken in vain, our pride is hurt, our freedom is threatened, our reputation impugned, our voice ignored, our loyalty betrayed. No other animal will fight tooth and nail not only to see that such symbolic losses are made good, but that those who have allegedly taken these things from us are themselves subject to all the torment, degradation, and loss that we have suffered at their hands. This is why violators seldom admit to guilt. For they believe they were fully justified in their excesses; they were only taking back what was rightfully theirs, preserving their civilization, defending their rights, upholding their honor, regaining their freedom, and of course, obeying orders from above.

It is never easy—seeing images of bewildered refugees on a Kosovo road; looking at an old photograph of a column of men, women, and children, some with hands held above their hands, others clutching small suitcases, herded along a smoke-darkened Warsaw street to oblivion; or interviewing villagers in Sierra Leone who have had their limbs amputated by machetes—to believe that in the eyes of their tormentors they were part of a single, monstrous entity bent on their annihilation. When I asked Leba Keita, a young man I met in Kabala, why the RUF mutilated and killed so many innocent people, he thought for a moment and said: "They used to say the government was not paying any attention to them." When I asked Patrick Koroma, whose father was a famed storyteller with whom I had worked in the past, the same question, he recalled one man from Kondembaia who had had both his hands cut off. The rebels wrote a note to the president, saying, "We rebels did this," and they stuffed the note in the man's shirt pocket and told him to go to the president. "You used those hands to vote for him," they said. "Now he is bringing in all these ECOMOG soldiers to fight against us. Encouraging the CDF to kill us. Go to the president and ask him to give you another hand."

The Politics of the Body

Although warfare may be justified in terms of political ideology and waged on the basis of military strategy, it is clearly *lived* in more immediate terms, as a visceral, emotional, and chaotic reality that often defies thought.[10] Analytically, this discrepancy between what is thought and what is lived outside of thought poses something of a dilemma, for how do we evaluate, let alone integrate, such diverse approaches to the phenomenon of war? More precisely, how are we to understand the relationship between the logic underlying the Clausewitzian notion of war as "the continuation of policy by other means" and the logic that governs the lived experience of violence?

Generally speaking, both logics reflect the imperatives of reciprocity. Breakdowns of reciprocity, either real or imagined, tend to be experienced as reversals in the life-affirming order of social life. Against this movement toward entropy and death, ritualized re-reversals of the order of things occur or are contrived. Thus, violence generally takes the form of retribution or payback, driven by the need to reclaim something one imagines to have been wrongfully taken and that is now owed. One's very existence is felt to depend on making good this loss—a legacy stolen, a promise broken, a loved one murdered, a dream betrayed, one's honor impugned.[11] In the politics of peace, indemnification is sought according to a strict calculation—political, legal, and ethical—of what has been taken and what is owed in return. In the politics of war, however, the existential damages are felt to be so deep and degrading that material indemnification is seldom considered adequate. The injured party demands satisfaction, and this, as Nietzsche observed, commonly involves punishment inflicted on the debtor's body—by branding, amputation, rape, and mutilation. The logic of this kind of exchange, Nietzsche goes on to say, rests on the fact that "instead of a direct compensation for the damage done (i.e. instead of money, land, possessions of whatever sort), a sort of pleasure is conceded to the creditor as a form of repayment and recompense—the pleasure of being able to vent his power without a second thought on someone who is powerless, the enjoyment '*de faire le mal pour le plaisir de le faire*,' the pleasure of violation."[12] Sadly, one has little difficulty finding evidence for Nietzsche's unusual insight, whether in the medicalized brutalities to which the Nazi doctors submitted the inmates of the death camps, in the stylized processes of dehumanization, disfigurement, and dismemberment during the genocide in Rwanda, or in the RUF practice

in Sierra Leone of cutting off people's hands because they had, allegedly, voted the wrong way.

I hope I have made it clear that the wartime atmosphere of fear and peril (doubtless exacerbated among the RUF by their knowledge that the local Tamaboros—who possessed powerful protective medicines and techniques of sorcery—might counterattack at any moment) as well as the escalating acts of vengeance that increasingly characterized the conflict *were self-generating phenomena* that largely eclipsed the grievances and ideologies that originally precipitated armed rebellion in Sierra Leone. Indeed, by the mid-1990s political motives had paled into insignificance, despite the RUF leadership's insistence that the sole reason for waging war was to liberate the country from oppression and corruption. When I asked Sewa if he had seen any evidence of political ideology when the RUF invaded Kabala, he referred to a certain Mr. Lawrence, a high school graduate and slightly older man, who was second in command. But none of the other rebels explained their actions in political terms, he said. My former field assistant, Noah Marah, made the same observation. When he was abducted by rebels at Lunsar in 1996, he asked his captors what they were fighting for. They said, "Pappy [Foday Sankoh] has money for us." They had been promised money if they won the war. "However," Noah said, "they had no political agenda, no political motives." Noah's son Kaima said the same thing. The ones he knew who joined the RUF saw it as a way of getting money. They went to Kono, where the RUF controlled the diamond mining. Others, Kaima added, had grievances, and he mentioned young men who had been cut out of their father's inheritance and had a bone to pick with their older brothers. Another young man named Unisa Mansaray, a young electronic-media journalist recently returned from a BBC training course in London, made a similar point. When the rebels and their junta allies fought their way into Freetown on January 6, 1999, some came to Unisa's parents' house where he was staying. They were kids that Unisa had known at school, with old scores to settle—imagined slights, trivial grievances, or pretexts really, Unisa said, for the deeper grudge they bore against a government that had betrayed their dreams. When they shouted his name, ordering him to come out of the house, Unisa leaped from the second floor balcony and fled. But his grandparents and parents, trapped inside the house, were shot and killed.

Although long-standing grievances played a part in the killings, they may, of course, have been rationalizations rather than motives. The same question hangs over the recurring reason the rebels gave in the late 1990s for the atrocities they committed, namely, that they were avenging

themselves against the government that had funded and encouraged the militias to destroy them. If I place these rationales in brackets, it is not because they lack explanatory value but because they blind us, to some extent, to the ways in which barbaric acts are products of neither reason nor unreason, but of disorder itself.

The Nature of Anarchy

In his study of peasant insurgency in colonial India, Ranajit Guha notes that ritualized modalities of resisting or defying politically constituted authority often have precedents in everyday social life,[13] and he cites as an example the calendrical rituals of rebellion and role reversal that anthropologists have studied in great detail, in India, Africa, and elsewhere. These simulated and temporary inversions of the social order—such as the Medieval Feast of Fools and the Lord of Misrule, the Shrove Tuesday carnival, the Nomkubulwana ceremonies of the Zulu, the Teyyam festival in Malabar, and the celebration of Holi rite—may, Guha observes, become models for the permanent violation of social hierarchies, a "real turning of things upside down."[14] A similar observation was made by Max Gluckman in one of his talks on the BBC's *Third Programme* in 1955: "The rebellion principle I have outlined for Africa does seem to pull together rules of succession, the law of treason, and other customs, *and to explain to some extent the results of civil wars*."[15]

One of the first people with whom I spoke about the war was a young baggage handler at Lungi airport, whom I met within minutes of my arrival in the country. When I asked Isa how the war had affected his life, he told me that his brother had been abducted by rebels while traveling from Kenema to visit their father in 1996. Though he managed to escape, he came home with a bullet in his knee, which now caused him great pain and prevented him from working. "During the war, everyone was alone," Isa said. "Everyone had to fend for himself. There was no order."

This lack of order was, nonetheless, not wholly chaotic. Rather, it seemed in many ways to be a carnivalesque reversal or inversion of the normal order of things.

Sewa's comments on this phenomenon serve as a starting point for elucidating the cultural precedents for this "grotesque realism" in which life is "turned inside out."[16] I asked Sewa why the rebels sometimes wore comic-book masks, women's underwear, or wigs, carried children's toys, and adopted nicknames such as Black Jesus and Captain Blood. "When I

was taken captive in Kabala," Sewa answered, "there was one rebel who called himself Born Naked and went about without a stitch of clothing. Another was called Arab. He dressed in a djellaba and keffiyeh, like a sheikh. And then there was Albila'u, which means 'dangerous thing' in Mandingo, and Kill-Man-No-Law, because there was no law in existence that could prevent the RUF from doing whatever they liked to you. They dressed up," Sewa added, "because no laws or rules applied to them; it was to show that they could do anything." This echoes a telling remark by an ex-SLA combatant who participated in the 1994 Kabala attack: "I liked the army," he said, "because we could do anything we liked to do. When some civilian had something I liked, I just took it without him doing anything to me. We used to rape women. Anything I wanted to do [I did]. I was free."[17]

In all human societies, order and disorder are mutually entailed. Image creates counterimage, in the same way that figure becomes ground, and ground becomes figure in those ambiguous and illusory images from first-year psychology textbooks. As Bakhtin has argued, carnival is an apposite word for this "working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, [of] a 'new mode of interrelationship between individuals,' counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life."[18]

Among the Dogon of Mali, the figure of Yourougou is associated with extravagance, disorder, and oracular truth, while its opposite, Nommo, represents reason and social order.[19] For the neighboring Bambara, a similar contrast is posited between Nyalé—who was created first and signifies "swarming life," exuberance, and uncontrolled power—and Faro, or Ndomadyiri, who was created next and signifies equilibrium and restraint.[20] For the Kuranko, the contrast between bush and town signifies the same extremes. Because the bush is a source of vital and regenerative energy, the village must open itself up perennially to it. Hunters venture into the bush at night, braving real and imagined dangers in their search for meat. Farmers clear-cut the forest in order to grow the upland rice that is the staple of life. And initiation rites—which take place in the bush, and have as their ostensible goal the disciplining and channeling of the unruly energies of children so that after a symbolic death they are brought back to life as moral adults—simultaneously open up the possibility of intense individuation because they encourage each initiate to live the "found" world as though it were of his or her own making. Accordingly, although all these transgressions in space and breaks with routine are necessary for the renewal of life, they also imperil the collectivity.

Whenever the boundary between town and bush (or their symbolic analogues—day/night, domestic/wild) is crossed, disorder and confusion momentarily reign. Walking through the forest at night, one does not speak for fear that a djinn might steal one's name and use it for bedevilment. During initiations, people fall prey to similar anxieties, and consult diviners to see how they may safeguard themselves from witches, who, it is said, can leave their bodies and go forth in the shape of night animals. At such times, parents often send their children to the homes of medicine masters so that they will be protected from the nefarious powers that are abroad, while others redouble the protection of their bodies and houses with magical medicines. Day in and day out, role reversals and masquerades give outward expression to this inner disquiet and uncertainty—a consequence, informants would tell me, of the normal order of things being momentarily in abeyance.

I used to devote a lot of thought to this relationship between ourselves and our environments, trying to understand why our consciousness, composure, and self-control are so easily disturbed when the routines and rhythms of ordinary space-time are suspended. I became particularly interested in how we cope with such disconcerting experiences by literally taking upon ourselves—incorporating, internalizing—the disorder that lies about us, before playing it back to the surrounding world, as it were, in the form of feigned madness, possession, abusive speech, role reversal, and ritual inversion.[21] In doing this, we do more than mimic the chaos that has besieged us; we master it, for it is no longer something that has befallen us from without but something we have decided from within. So, during Kuranko initiations, women don the clothing of hunters, act aggressively toward men, or pretend to be soldiers, marching up and down with fake rifles, while one woman, known as the mad Kamban or Sewulan, dressed in a man's clothes, dances clumsily with distracted gestures and deadpan expression, occasionally chasing away men and children with the switch she holds in her hand.[22]

Disorder is probably the wrong word for what is occurring here. More accurately, we should speak topologically—of the reordering and recombination of roles, images, behaviors, language, and routines, and of what Bourdieu calls "the practical transference of incorporated, quasi-postural schemes."[23] Thus, in initiation the passage of human life from birth to death is played in reverse. When neophytes are symbolically killed and reborn, a natural course of events gives way to a culturally contrived sequence, creating the impression that men have mastery over life and death. This entire process—in which the older generation tames the raw and unruly energies of the young, and so brings into being a new, vital,

but tractable generation of adults—is played out as a journey into the bush, where the power of the wild is tapped and domesticated before being brought back to the village.

Metaphors that compare initiation to death and rebirth, combat to hunting, social subservience to slavery,[24] or armed rebellion to initiation, simply disclose these transfers of imagery and behavior that are spontaneously and continually occurring within a social field (*metapherein*, "to transfer"). Thus, armed rebellion and revolution spring from the same imperative of rebirth that underlies such rites of passage as birth, initiation, and death. But these correspondences may be *consciously* seized upon, as when the RUF leadership invoked initiation rites to justify its revolutionary method of preparing young boys in bush camps for the violent, but necessary, cleansing of corrupt towns, under such code names as Operation Pay Yourself and Operation No Living Thing.[25] For many of the kids who went to the bush and joined the RUF, this desire for initiatory rebirth as men of power (purified of the taint of childhood) may have been stronger than their commitment to the RUF cause. Certainly, their sense of impunity, of which Sewa spoke, was reminiscent of the license enjoyed by neophytes. And the abduction of children by the RUF, and their adoption by rebel leaders—who were regarded as fathers, and called Pappy or Pa—recalls the initiatory seizure of children, whose ties with their parents are symbolically severed so that they can be reborn, in the bush, as men. This idea that war—like initiation, or play, or an adventure—is a moment out of time, spatially separated from the moral world, may also help explain why many combatants today anticipate a remorse-free return to civilian life. But the analogy between rebellion and initiation can be pushed too far. For in initiation, as in play, the ritualized disordering of the mundane world, with its dramatic negation of hierarchy and distinction, is but a profane prelude to its symbolic reintegration—a reaffirming of the bonds that make a community viable. Initiation is a drama of restoration, not radical change—which is why rebirth is its central metaphor. In war, by contrast, disorder breeds disorder, and death is the dominant image.[26] War is playing with fire, or "playing for keeps"—a phrase we used as children, when playing marbles, to declare that gains and losses would henceforth be irreversible. In playing for keeps, one's honor, one's pride, one's possessions, one's manhood, one's life are on the line. One stakes everything. Winner takes all. That is why coping with terror, bolstering one's courage, and surviving to fight another day consume one's waking hours and pervade one's dreams, and why any attempt to drop out of the game, or escape, is to invite immediate punishment, which in the RUF meant mutilation or death.

What Is at Stake

So many factors were in play, or at stake, in the Sierra Leone war that it would be foolhardy to try and identify a hierarchy either of goals or of motives. It would be equally impossible to ascertain the relative importance of indigenous cultural factors, of history, and of national or global politics in determining the character and course of the war. This indeterminacy is of the essence, and in what follows I explore the histories and lifeworlds in which the war was a violent and transitory variation on a theme that had been part and parcel of Sierra Leonean life since the advent of colonialism. I am speaking here of the question as to what constitutes viable existence—social, moral, as well as personal—and how the wherewithal for this existential viability can be accessed and controlled.

Typically, the existential values on which human beings set greatest store—freedom, dignity, respect, honor—defy definition. They are, as Mauss put it, "values which are emotional as well as material."[27] This implies that two incommensurable notions of value are always at play in any human encounter—the first involving a strict calculation of determinate values, the second involving elusive moral values (Mauss's "spiritual matter") such as rightness, fair play, and justice.[28] Another way of making this point is to say that all exchange involves a continual struggle to give, claim, or redistribute some scarce and elusive *existential* good—such as recognition, love, humanity, happiness, voice, power, presence, honor, or dignity—*whose value is incalculable*.

Consider, for example, the Kuranko notions of luck (*hariya*) and blessings (*duwe*). The distribution of *duwe*, which connotes both charismatic and material power, seldom conforms to an individual's estimation of what is his or her rightful due.[29] Accordingly, it is the subject of perplexed deliberation—though much of this deliberation takes place within the individual imagination—as a kind of intense soul searching and as fantasies of reversed fortunes and revenge. These inner monologues are, of course, difficult for an ethnographer to access, and difficult also to discuss. Facts of experience though they are, they exist in the space between people, or comprise a penumbral domain lying elusively beyond the field of visible social practices. Much as Kuranko seek such things as *baraka* (blessedness), *miran* (charisma), *yugi* (temperament), and *fisa mantiye* (status), these phenomena overflow the boundaries of what can be said, measured, or objectified. In many ways, we are speaking here of what Bourdieu calls the *illusio*—all those things in which we place our hope, or discover a sense of purpose, or consummate our sense of

well-being—all those "well-founded illusions" without which we feel our lives to be unjustly diminished,[30] and for which we will give our lives or take the lives of others.

Concepts like *duwe* are well-nigh universal, and though they often resist exact definition and may be dismissed as illusory, they can rule our lives. Thus, *duwe* bears a family resemblance to the Rom notion of *baxt* (luck/destiny), the Melanesian concept of *kago* (cargo), the migrant's vision of pastures of plenty or of a gold mountain, the adventurer's dream of El Dorado or Shangri-La, the exile's longing for the promised land, and oppressed peoples' yearning for freedom or independence. It goes without saying that all such existential values promise more than they can deliver. Yet their very scarcity increases our desire for them and strengthens their hold on our imaginations. People will often harbor resentments against those who seem to possess more than their fair share of luck, willingly risk everything to gain more of it, and readily fall prey to thinking that their own ill fortune can be attributed to their own moral failing or to the machinations of others. Among the Kuranko, these emotions are nowhere more intense than among children who share the same father but have different mothers. Known as *fadenye*, sibling rivalry has its genesis in the qualitatively different relationships between co-wives and their husband.[31] If the child of one wife prospers while the child of another suffers, recriminations and envy often follow. But the notion of *fadenye* has wider connotations, for in a country like Sierra Leone, oppressed by acute scarcity and entrenched inequalities, fantasies of improving one's fortunes through supernatural means are as common as anxieties about losing them through witchcraft.

When I lived in northern Sierra Leone, I often heard rumors of a fabulous town somewhere in the hazy savannah regions to the northeast, known as Musudugu—town or place of women. No men lived there, and the women of the town were famed for their skills in divination, medicine, and sorcery. Traders and travelers told of great wealth bestowed on men who had found favor with the women of the town, though none could confirm whether this place was identical with the town of Mousadougou, which lies in the Konyor country at the edge of the forests that border Ivory Coast and Liberia.

If these myths of Musudugu taught me anything, it was that the imagined wellsprings of a person's fate and fortune easily elude his or her grasp. This is the penumbral domain of what William James calls "appreciations," since these elusive goods "form an ambiguous sphere of being, belonging with emotion on the one hand, and having an objective 'value' on the other, yet seeming not quite inner nor quite outer." "These

fields of experience," he observes, "have no more definite boundaries than have our fields of view. Both are fringed forever by a more that continuously develops, and that continuously supercedes them as life proceeds."[32] Yet for all its mercurial, distant, and indefinable character, this field of vital being obsesses us.

As long ago as 1824, when the first white man entered Kuranko country, people's desire for things from the outside world was so great that Major Alexander Gordon Laing reported on it in detail. The female praise-singers (*jelimusu*) "sang of the white man," he wrote, "who had come to their town; of the houseful of money which he had; such cloth, such beads, such fine things had never been seen in Kooranko before; if their husbands were men, and wished to see their wives well dressed, they ought to take some of the money from the white men."[33] Echoing the praise-singer's words, the Barawa chief Marin Tamba, alias Sewa—who incidentally would be the first of his lineage to embrace Islam, presumably because it also promised access to the bounty of the outside world—sang of Freetown, which he called Saralon, and of houses a mile in length filled with much more money than Laing possessed, money they might receive if they left Laing unmolested, for "whoever wants to see a snake's tail must not strike it on the head." In Sengbe, people sang the same refrain. Chief Balansama declared the road from his country open, so that Kuranko and Sankaran men with gold, ivory, camwood, and kola might travel to the saltwater with the white man. In token of his earnestness, Balansama ordered his brother, as well as his son Denka, to go with Laing to the coast.[34]

Though there is no suggestion, in Laing's account, of a link between wealth and knowledge, Kuranko were undoubtedly aware of it.

One rainy afternoon, many years ago, in the course of an aimless conversation with a group of Kuranko elders, I was asked if I thought of them as my kinsmen. Assuming they meant this literally, I said no. The old men reproached me, asking was I not aware that Africans and Europeans had the same ancestral parents, and that our forefathers were brothers. Adama and Hawa had three sons, they said. The eldest became the ancestor of the whites, the second the ancestor of the Arabs, the third the ancestor of the blacks. The first two sons inherited literacy and the knowledge of books, while the last-born son, the ancestor of the blacks, inherited nothing. When I asked why this should be so, one of the elders said, "If you uproot a groundnut and inspect the root, isn't it always the case that some of the nuts are bad and some good?"

The myth, I would later discover, was widespread and very old. Winwood Reade heard a version of it in northern Sierra Leone in the early

1870s.[35] When God made the world, he created a black man and a white man. He offered to the black man his choice of two things: gold or a covered calabash. The black man took the gold, and the white man got the calabash, in which a book was contained; this book has made white men powerful and wise, and the lords of the earth.[36]

This mystique of literacy was the subject of my initial Kuranko fieldwork. What struck me, talking to Kabala secondary school students, or reading their responses to my questionnaires and TATs (thematic apperception tests), was the poignantly impossible gulf between their dreams and their reality. Though most were the children of farmers, they showed their disdain for farming in the zeal with which they laundered their uniforms, washed their bodies, manicured their fingernails, and at one time, wore white gloves on their hands. Thirty years have passed, but as I leaf through the tattered stacks of paper that I have lugged around the world for so long in the vague hope that I might one day find a use for them, I read of ambitions to become a doctor, a teacher, an engineer, "to help my people," "to help my parents," "to help my country," and wonder what became of these dreamers when they left school and found their hopes dashed. Sixteen-year-old Marie Kandeh, for example, wrote: "As we all know that education today is the key of life, anyone who does not try to be educated will just be like a slave." Or twelve-year-old Daimba Koroma: "I want to be a doctor to free people from death." Another thing that arrested me as I read through my old notes was the clandestine care with which many students used magical medicines, either to tie the hands of a superior student or to protect themselves from such attack.[37] It brought to mind a story that my friend Rose Marah once confided to me. Her brother was the top student of his year. The day after sitting his Cambridge entrance exams in 1956, he attended a celebration party at which he fell desperately ill. He died the following day. One day later, his best friend also died. Autopsies revealed that both boys had been killed with a traditional poison, and though suspicion immediately fell on a fellow student who had made no bones about his dislike of Rose's brother, nothing was ever proved. Rose's parents died four years after the death of their son. "They never got over it," Rose said. "They died of broken hearts."

Expectations and Reality

Almost invariably, acts of violence are prepared over a long period of time, often in the subconscious, as an aggrieved individual licks his

wounds, composes his self-justifying story, and contemplates revenge for the injury he feels he has suffered. Though violence appears to be an eruption of irrational or primitive impulses, a bolt from the blue, its rationale and its necessity have usually been long contemplated. This is why it is impossible to assign any one cause to an episode of violence, though defining moments there may be, last straws as we say, which are invoked in retrospect to justify the recourse to action.

At some time or another, we all find ourselves struggling to reconcile the gap between expectation and reality—to explain the sense of disappointment and unfairness that oppresses us whenever wishful thinking comes up against limited opportunity. Sometimes we say the fault lies in the nature of things; it is fate, and we must accept it. Sometimes we blame ourselves. Much of the time, however, we blame others. According to a Kuranko adage, the *lenke* tree—a species of acacia whose pods explode in the heat, scattering seeds far and wide—does not benefit the ground directly beneath it. I have heard the adage used when a person is complaining of the way an older brother or Big Man has given favors to friends and strangers, rather than look after the welfare of his immediate kin. In a country like Sierra Leone, where popular expectations continue to be raised by the global media, despite diminishing local resources and opportunities, men of means and influence are the focus of both adulation and resentment. Indeed, as Rosalind Shaw has so persuasively argued, fantasies of having one's essence drained, stolen, or "eaten," and access to symbolic capital blocked by men of power are endemic in Sierra Leone, where inequality is often explained as a result of "economic witchcraft."[38]

Perhaps it was different in the past. An older generation sought only to conserve the social order, not to transform it. One's horizons of expectation were delimited by what one knew from past experience, not what one imagined the future might hold. Colonialism changed all this, so that nowadays young men, looking beyond the village, face confusion—a nation in name only, summarily carved out of the continent by colonial powers, a place whose center had never held and whose infrastructure is as fragmented as it is surreal—a modern highway that runs eighty miles through the middle of nowhere, a fleet of unused ambulances rusting away in a city yard, a school without teachers, a clinic without pharmaceuticals, a petrol station with no petrol. Young men drift into opportunism and fantasy as orphans sometimes do, hoping for some fantastic change of fortune, a second chance in a another country, or a powerful benefactor or political leader who will guide them out of the wilderness.

There is no one word for what these young men crave. Perhaps power comes closest, if we allow that the word covers a vast array of imperatives, any one of which an individual may consider vital to his very existence—manhood, wealth, work, education, status, strength, renown—though it eludes his grasp.

But what of the village? Was this not also a source of power?

In the villages, life is a matter of reciprocity—the expectation that what you give in the course of your life will somehow be given back, and that whatever you receive will be shared. You respect your elders, parents, and rulers; in return they protect you and see to your welfare. To the lineage from which you take a wife, you give bridewealth in return. And you offer guests food and lodging on the understanding that they will do you no harm.

Lapses in these everyday protocols of give and take are the concern of Kuranko stories, in which, like stories everywhere, all problems are happily resolved in the end. An exploitative chief is overthrown, a jealous co-wife punished, a duplicitous guest unmasked, a liar hoist by his own petard, a recalcitrant bride reconciled with her lot. Everyone gets his due, or his just desserts. For many young men, however, there is no natural justice. For them, the time-honored roles of gender and of age, together with hereditary chieftaincy, cult associations, and labor collectives, are no longer binding or viable. The dreams of the village are no longer their dreams.

As for the new sources of power that preoccupy them—diamonds, commerce, education, Islam, and the military—these seem to belong to a world apart, where justice is subject to no known laws.

Even if you landed a job, you were often paid sporadically or not at all, and then, like everyone else, you would have to fend for yourself, or be driven into desperate schemes. My old friend Noah spent a lot of his time playing draughts. Sometimes I thought of that board of painted squares, with bottle-top counters, as an image of his world. The tried and tested moves, the gambles one might take. A person could have, as we say, more than his share of good luck, just as another could suffer unfair setbacks—as though singled out by some cosmic power for Jobian punishment. "Haven't we endured enough?" people would say. "Don't we deserve a break?"

In the villages I used to meet young men who had returned from the diamond districts of Kono. Having heard so many stories of sudden riches, they were baffled as to why luck should desert them while smiling on others. Mohammed Fofona—"the man who could turn into an elephant"—had joined the army as a young man.[39] He saw it as a kind of

initiation. "The army gave you discipline, made you a man, made you feel a real force," he said. "In those days, a soldier was like a white man in the villages; he commanded great respect." After a few years in the military, Mohammed drifted south into the diamond districts. But things did not pan out, and as he became more and more dissatisfied with his lot, he lambasted the bribery, bias, exploitation, and cronyism he saw in the government and began to dream of radical political change.

Others imagined that Islam might provide the answer to their prayers. In the dry season of 1979 one of my nearest neighbors was a young man called Abdulai Sisay. After many fruitless months digging and panning for diamonds in the alluvial fields of Kono, he returned home bewildered and disappointed. "My hands are empty," he told me. Some years before, he had consulted a Qur'anic diviner who had given him good advice. He had then gone to Kono and made enough money to fund his elder brother's pilgrimage to Mecca. Now the same diviner told him that his run of bad luck was about to end, and advised that he sacrifice a sheep to Allah and share the meat among his neighbors. But even after dutifully taking the diviner's advice, Abdulai was nagged by doubts and desperate for further insights into the cause of his fluctuating fortunes.

For years I observed these anxieties of powerlessness and marginalization: villagers working through an entire dry season to build a road through the bush, or a bridge across a river, in the expectation that their collective fortunes would improve, only to find that nothing changed; young men, like Abdulai, back from the diamond fields, with little to show for their efforts; others back from the cities, where they had hoped for a windfall but found none; students unable to find the money to finish their schooling, or thrown out of college for protesting against the government; men frustrated in their attempts to ally themselves with a powerful mentor and patron. At the same time, I was witness to the fantastic avenues to self-esteem and empowerment that had begun to fill this existential vacuum, particularly among young men: an alliance forged with a powerful bush spirit; the acquisition of powerful medicines, or the ability to transform oneself at will into a powerful animal; or the hope that Islam and the spiritual authority of the alhajis—those who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca—would usher in a new age. And then, as corrupt governments and coups destroyed the civil state in Sierra Leone, and the economy collapsed, these thwarted dreams had assumed an increasingly violent and vengeful shape, mixing indigenous fantasies of magico-phallic power with images from kung fu movies, fixations on invincible trickster heroes like Rambo, and the possession of lethal weaponry.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have eschewed explanatory models that trace out lines or trajectories of determination, explaining social crises in terms of cause and effect. Whether one considers the play of emotions, the snatches of thought, and the strategic shifts that Sewa experienced during the rebel invasion of Kabala, or the "grotesque realism" that characterized the comportment and attire of some of the rebels, or, for that matter, the complex constellations of the *illusio* that have figured in the consciousness of Sierra Leonean youth in the modern era, one is struck by the kaleidoscopic combinations and recombinations of a finite set of social factors (gender, estate, and age-status distinctions) and key symbols (education, wealth, power), as well by the metaphor-like transfers of behaviors, images, and ideas from one field of social life to another. This field of stochastic chaos or turbulence, though not consciously created, culturally scripted, geographically closed, or historically determined, may be compared to the field of myth, in which, as Lévi-Strauss has shown, a finite set of elements are endlessly combined and permuted, as well as transferred from one region to another, or undergo sudden disappearance and reappearance at different moments in time. Though neither intention nor purpose govern this play of forces, and determinate beginnings and narrative-like closure simply do not exist, this chaos is not devoid of order, for our own human interests—our needs, our grievances, our expectations, our mindsets—are constantly playing upon and entering into this flux, giving it a semblance of meaning. Thus, human beings, "in degrees beyond all other creatures . . . consciously participate—albeit meagerly—in the selective mutations and accelerations" of their own cultural history,[40] much as one wakes to one's dreams and bestows order upon them. War is simply one transitory crystallization of processes that are at once phylogenetic, cultural, and biographical—one expression, as it were, of a play of forces that, at other times, crystallizes in the form we call "peace." But though war and peace are both products of the same force field, and may be construed as variations on the theme of renewal, war rapidly becomes entropic—transforming social distinction into radical otherness, taking life rather than creating it, and losing the ludic vitality that gives myth and ritual their regenerative power. To invoke the Bambara metaphor, fire gives birth not to fire but to ashes—which is to say that the social ceases to reproduce itself and produces the antisocial.[41] Yet, say the Bambara, just as ash often conceals fire, so someone who has become lost to his or her society may be returned to it, and ashes then give birth to fire.

I got to know Sewa's father (Sheku Magba Koroma II) in 1969–70 when he was Diang chief, and I spent many days in idle conversation on the porch of his house in Kondembaia, a stone's throw from the great cotton trees that still stand there, though slowly dying, as if they have witnessed too much violence and change. If a diviner had told me, all those years ago, that I would become close friends with one of Chief Magba's sons, yet to be born, I would have found it impossible to conceive of this span of time and space, or find such connectedness and continuity credible. Sewa, now living in London, has built a house in Kondembaia, hard by the ruins of his father's house, which was burned to the ground by rebels during the civil war. And I have renewed and continued, through the sons of friends and contemporaries who have passed away, my Kuranko research. Yet in my imagination I sometimes return to the villages I knew forty years ago, my memory of hard times softened by the nostalgic and lachrymose gaze of the exile. And that world that I cannot really revisit because it is past is not unlike the world that Sewa's generation cannot return to because war and new imperatives have swept them so far from it. This essay explores how our physical migrations run parallel to our journeys in the imagination, and touches on the gains and losses we sustain in our utopian quests for a better life.

Migrant Imaginaries: With Sewa Koroma in Southeast London

All his life, I forgot to mention, Max has been fighting to be en règle.   MAX, IN
HENRY MILLER, *THE COSMOLOGICAL EYE*[1]

Whenever I travel to Sierra Leone and exchange my dollars for leones, receiving what always seems an astronomical sum in the local currency, I am mindful of the bounty this country has given me and of how little, by contrast, it affords its own citizens. How many times during the past thirty-five years have I walked the laterite path from the Seli River to Firawa, returning to the village that has inspired so much of my writing, only to pass young men heading in the other direction, hoping to make their fortune in the diamond fields of Kono or Kamakwie, or improve their lot in Freetown by finding a job or benefactor. They risk everything, these young men, only to come home, often as not, with empty hands, and seek the advice of a diviner, or contemplate further forays into a world whose doors are closed to them and whose ways are as fickle as they are unfathomable. As for me, I risk little: a bout of malaria, a few days of boredom and lassitude, weeks of unappetizing food and separation from my family—no hardship at all considering what I stand to gain. And then I leave the country, notebooks filled, plans for yet another book forming in my mind, climbing aboard an aircraft in the hot, clammy African night with dozens of young Sierra Leoneans, some anxious, some excited, some

nonplussed, as they begin their journey to Europe in the expectation that they will find there what they could not find at home.

In July 2005, I went to Britain to look up several Sierra Leonean friends who had found refuge there during the war. I had known many of these young men and women from when they were children; their parents had been close friends. But I would spend most of my time with a young man I had gotten to know in Freetown only three and a half years ago when I was researching my biography of S. B. Marah. "Small S.B.," as Sewa was known at that time, was S.B.'s sister's son and was working as his uncle's chauffeur and general factotum—work he regarded as menial and ignominious. For many years, it had been his dream to become an automotive engineer, and he was hopeful that sooner rather than later his uncle would provide him with the means to embark on his chosen career. In May 2003, with his air ticket paid by S.B., Sewa came to London on a student visa to study accountancy—the only subject that the British High Commission in Freetown would approve—and co-rented a room in his sister Aisha's council flat in Peckham, the predominantly African area of southeast London that is also the heartland of the Sierra Leonean diaspora in Britain.

I arrived at Waterloo Station from Paris on July 20, thirteen days after the July 7 terrorist bombings in London and at almost exactly the same moment that four unexploded bombs were found in rucksacks abandoned by would-be suicide bombers on three tube trains and a bus. The city was in turmoil: railway stations were being evacuated, police cars with sirens wailing were speeding through the streets, and rumors were spreading like wildfire. That evening, the papers and TV news were full of talk about the identity of the bombers, as if there was a causal link between the cultural vacuum these second-generation Muslim youths experienced growing up in Britain and the allure of militant sects with their fanatical sense of certainty, their withdrawal from the world, and their fantasies of miraculous and vengeful rebirth. It put one in mind of the Hitler Youth that so successfully harnessed the energy of youthful rebelliousness, replacing filial bonds with blood brotherhood and loyalty to an absolute leader—an abstracted form of belonging, focused on symbols like the flag, the folk, and the nation, that brooked neither dissent nor diversity, and united young people in a cause that made them feel they mattered. Was this not also what happened in Sierra Leone when the Revolutionary United Front licensed disaffected youth to seize what they felt was owed them and take their revenge on those they believed had done them wrong?

I had not seen Sewa for two years and was anxious that I might not recognize him in the crowds in and around Paddington Station where we had agreed to meet. But then I saw him coming toward me, his familiar jaunty walk and inimitable smile, and as we shook hands and declared how bizarre it was to be meeting up in London of all places, I found myself again astonished at the kinship we shared despite the differences in our age, backgrounds, and circumstances. After exchanging customary greetings in Kuranko, I plied him with questions about his family. Was his mother Tina still in Freetown? Was she well? Was Dondo (her twin sister) also there? Was she well? And what of his brother Sheku in Kondembaia? Was he still chief? And how was he faring?

In Edgware Road I suggested we repair to a Lebanese coffee bar so that we could talk without distraction. There, I pressed Sewa for news of the Kuranko villages where I had worked and lived before the war, including his own hometown of Kondembaia. According to Sewa, nothing had changed in the three and a half years since the end of the war. The villages were practically deserted. No one had the money to buy cement or roofing iron to rebuild their houses, and few could find the time and labor anyway. Most people were still living on their farms.

"What of Kabala?" I asked.

"Everyone is there," Sewa said.

Sewa had been taken captive during an RUF raid on Kabala in November 1994. Though he eventually eluded his captors and made his way back home to Kondembaia, his cousin Sheku was killed in front of him by a rebel soldier called Kujé.

"What of the boys that shot Sheku?" I asked. "What happened to them?"

"Kujé was killed in the war. Abu disappeared without a trace."

Sewa couldn't care less for these individuals. But hardly a day passed, he said, that he did not remember his cousin or think how easily it could have been his life that was lost on that fateful day.

"What of the rebels that survived?" I asked. "What kind of reception do they get when they return to their villages?"

"Well, some go back. Most do not. They go to the other end of the country and get new names, find wives and settle down. Now the country is all mixed up, Mende living in Kuranko, Temne living in Kono . . ."

"And you living here, in London!" I said.

After finishing our coffee we walked south, passing Marble Arch and moving on to Victoria, then turning east past Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, where throngs of tourists were snapping

pictures and being lectured on the sights. Sewa had brought a camera with him, and once or twice he asked if we could stop so I could take his photo in front of one of these famous landmarks. He wanted to send the photos home to his mother. He also interrupted our conversation from time to time to call his girlfriend Ade on his mobile phone, telling her where we were and what we were doing and assuring her we would meet her at the Angel in a couple of hours' time.

Halfway across Westminster Bridge we stopped to take in the view. Tourist boats were moving up and down the river whose muddy banks had been exposed by the ebbing tide. Ahead of us lay Country Hall, where I had been interviewed for a job as welfare worker with the homeless in the winter of 1963. A lifetime ago, it seemed, before the London Eye, the Gherkin, and the Millennium bridges were built, before Sewa had been born.

Then, as if he was also struggling with similar distances and incongruities, Sewa exclaimed, "You know, Mr. Mike, I am thinking that right now my brothers and cousins are all working on their farms back home in Kondembaia, working hard, but I am here in London, walking these streets, living this life here, this different life."

"Which is harder, life in Kondembaia or London?"

"I have to be grateful to God, tell God thanks for what he's done for me. Because I couldn't imagine me now on the farm doing that hard hard hard labor. It's a blessing for me to find myself here, even though it's hard. It's better, you know."

"Why is it better here? What makes it better?"

"Well, here, as long as you're hardworking, the job is there. You just have to go out and look for it. But back home the jobs are not there. "

"What's wrong with farming?"

"Well, you know farming. Overseas, the richest people are the farmers. But back home things are different; the poorest people are the farmers. They don't have the equipment, the things to do the farming; they make their farms with their bare hands, no machines, nothing. So that's like life and death. It's really hard back home."

Though I pressed Sewa to spell out the differences more clearly between the hardships of village life and the hardships of being a migrant, he could not. Was farming really more arduous than the menial and minimally paid jobs he had been doing in London as a security guard, a cleaner, a night watchman, a factory worker, or did the difference lie in the fact that farming condemned one to the repetition of time-old patterns, whereas London offered a sense of possibility and new departures? One thing was sure, and this was true to a greater or lesser extent with all

the Sierra Leoneans I spoke to in London: although one might rail against many things about life back home—the endemic corruption, the lack of jobs, the electricity outages and food shortages—one missed other things with a passion that could not be assuaged.

Sewa was often "seized" by homesickness. It "took hold" of him and would not let him go. He would become preoccupied by tensions within the family—between S.B.'s sons and sisters' sons over the division of the estate, or the lack of "communication" among his cousins. This was why he phoned them all on his mobile every day. Moreover, he was anxious not to lose touch with Sierra Leone or with his family, and was determined to return home as soon as he had completed his studies, to work as a motor mechanic (he preferred the term "automotive engineer") and pursue a career in politics. His father, the late Paramount Chief Sheku Magba II, was his role model. As a small boy, Sewa had been nicknamed "walking stick" because of the way he followed his father everywhere, dogging his heels, head down, concentrating on placing his feet exactly where his father placed his, literally walking in his father's footsteps. This was the "kingly way of walking" that his uncle S.B. had often upbraided him for, thinking it impertinent that a small boy should comport himself like a chief. But Sewa had inherited more than his father's way of walking; he had the right to rule and wanted to emulate the political even-handedness and incorruptibility for which his father was known during forty years as paramount chief of Diang. By contrast, the present incumbent, Sewa's brother Sheku, was at odds with the older section and town chiefs, and increasingly embattled and unpopular. "If Sheku gave up the chieftaincy," Sewa told me, "and I was called upon to go home tomorrow and contest, I would do so, even though I am only twenty-nine."

That Sewa was sustained emotionally in exile by the "belief" he had inherited from his father (by which he meant both Islam and a sense of what in Kuranko is known as *bimba che*, ancestral legacy or birthright) was made clear in the way he responded to my question, "Do you think of yourself as a Muslim?"

"I am a Muslim. I was raised in a Muslim home. My father was a Muslim, just as I told you, and my mother too. And I believe in the Muslim religion because . . ." Sewa hesitated, as if searching for the right word, " . . . a lot of the time I get bad dreams. The only thing that saves me when I get those bad dreams, every month or two weeks, the thing that comes up straight in my mind is 'La ilaha il Allah. Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, God is great, God is great.' Then I am relieved of that bad dream. Because sometimes I am struggling in my dream, fighting in my dream, not able

to shake it off. But that is the first thing that comes into my mind. 'La il Allah.' I say it for a minute or so, and my fear goes and I am fine."

"What kind of dreams are these?"

"Mostly they are fighting dreams, people trying to stab me."

"In England here?"

"Back home. Most of the dreams I get, I find myself back home. Someone is trying to give me food, you know. Some bad dreams like that. But the one that bothers me the most is I'm fighting with people, you know. It might be like someone I know, maybe one of my brothers or cousins or friends will always appear in my dreams fighting me. That really bothers me, pains me."

I was moved by Sewa's confession and found it difficult to reconcile these dark images with the cavalier optimism he usually projected.

"How are they fighting you?" I asked.

"Physically, sometimes, with a knife. Trying to stab me. I have to fight, you know."

"Are you afraid that when you go back to Sierra Leone people will try to stop you becoming chief?"

My question was off the mark, and Sewa laughed. But he knew what I was driving at, and how it related to what he had been saying moments before about the troubled chieftaincy in Diang. So he addressed the issue, even though it had no bearing on his dreams, assuring me that he would never let the malice or machinations of competitors shake the "belief" he inherited from his father or prevent him returning home to claim his birthright.

"Your brothers fighting you, is this fadenye?" I asked, alluding to the vexed relationship between half siblings in Mande societies that is particularly acrimonious when wealth or high office is at stake.

"Well, of course," Sewa said patiently. "Fadenye is there. When you're from a ruling house everyone dreams of becoming chief, so . . . but no one has shown that to me yet. Because of the way I was raised, I don't think that fadenye thing is a threat to me. It's not. It doesn't bother me."

"Then why are your brothers attacking you in your dream?"

"That's what I don't understand. The last time I phoned my mother I told her about the dreams I always get; I explained everything to her. I also phoned my blood brother Abu, told him about my dreams, the dreams about my step-brothers, my friends, or different people fighting me. They said, 'All you need to do is pray,' so I am doing that prayer, you know."[2]

We had now reached the London Eye, and I was finding it more and more difficult to absorb or jot down everything Sewa was telling me. So

after Sewa had persuaded a tourist to take a photo of us standing under the great wheel on Millennium Pier, I suggested we find a bench further along the Embankment and that I record some of his story on tape. I particularly wanted to understand the guilt that seemed to inform his dreams. Did Sewa, like so many migrants, feel uneasy about the fact that he had been lucky enough to find his way to England while his peers, no less deserving, were obliged to farm or languished in Freetown with no hope of employment and no real future? Was this distress compounded by his guilt at not having been able to return home for his uncle's funeral, and even the terrible arbitrariness of the war that he had survived and his cousin and companion Sheku had not? And then there were all the debts he had incurred in London and would never be able to repay.

The tide was turning, the Thames riding high on a brown flood tide, and as Sewa spoke into the microphone of my tape recorder I could not help but recall my own hardships during the winter of 1963, when I worked across the river in the London County Council Office for the Homeless under Hungerford Bridge (the old footbridge now replaced by the Golden Jubilee Bridge, with no trace remaining of the Nissan Hut where I interviewed so many lost souls). Like Sewa, I endured penury and homesickness. But while I led a much more solitary existence, I never experienced the extreme cultural disorientation that Sewa was at that very moment beginning to describe. Some of his recollections made us both laugh. Like the new routines of courtship and seduction he had had to learn. "You got to make friends with the girls before you sleep with them," Sewa said, implying a comparison with Sierra Leone, where gifts often secure sexual favors. By the time he met Ade he had changed his ways. He was working as a security guard at Pound Stretcher in Kentish Town, where Ade was a regular customer. "So I remember one day she walked into the shop and I said hello to her and she said 'Hi' [Sewa mimicked Ade's guarded tone of voice], you know. I asked her if she lived around there. I said, 'Do you live locally?' She said, 'No, I live at Angel.' But she worked in Kentish Town [where she was a welfare worker in a seniors' home]. I said, 'Oh, that's good.' You know, I tried to 'friend her' [Sewa laughed at the memory of self-consciously following local custom]. I said, 'I'm Sewa, but I call myself S.B.' She said, 'S.B., what does that mean?' I tried to trick her. I said, 'S.B. means so many things. S.B. means Sweet Boy!' Heh, heh, heh! She said, 'Are you sure?' I said, 'That's what it means—Sweet Boy. The S is for sweet or sugar, the B is for boy.' So I tried to smooth her, to get her attention, you know. She was smiling. So I was quick to try to get her number. She said, 'Oh sorry, I don't give out my number.' I said, 'That's fair enough; I'll give you my number.' She said

'No, I don't want your number. I'm not going to phone you. What's the point of me getting your number?' I said, 'Well, fair enough, no problem.' So I said, 'All right, if you don't want to give me your number, that's fine, that's fair enough.' She said, 'But I'll be seeing you; I come to this shop all the time.' Then she said, 'I'm going on holiday in a week's time.' I said, 'How long are you going for?' She said she was going for a month or so. I said, 'All right.' So she went for the holiday for one month, two months, and during that time I was sent to another shop, then back to the one in Kentish Town. When she came back from her holiday, I said 'Oh, welcome, how was your holiday?' You know, I tried to give her some nice smooth talk, you know. 'Did your holiday go well?' She said, 'Yes, it was all right.' So I asked her for her number again. She said to me, I remember, she asked me, 'How old are you?' I said to her, 'I am twenty- eight.' She said, 'Oh, a young boy!' I said, 'Why?' She said, "I'm two or three years older than you.' I said, 'Two or three?' She said, 'Three, I'm three years older than you.' So I joked with her. I said, 'No matter how big a truck or train, the driver will always drive it.' We have a saying in Krio, you know. However cow big nar soup. You know what that means? No matter how big the cow, it'll fit into the pot [Sewa laughed]. Because they will chop it up and boil it down [laughter again]! So I said, 'That's no problem, age is just a number, you know.' So she gave me her telephone number. Heh, heh, heh!"

Sewa went on to describe how he would phone Ade, chatting with her every day, wooing her with sweet words culled from some book on dating that he had picked up. "She didn't know I had this book. I was sending her these sweet words, these nice sweet texts, some lovely lovely words, you know, and she kept asking me 'Where are you getting all those words?'" One day, Ade invited Sewa to her apartment. He arrived at the door, only to be reprimanded by Ade for having come empty-handed. "That's their culture," Sewa explained. "You have to bring wine or something to drink. But I did not know. Back home, we don't have this system, the woman inviting you to her place. It was my first visit, so I was a bit quiet. She said, 'I can't believe that with all the texts and sweet talk you say over the phone, now you have nothing to say!' So I said, 'It's not like I'm quiet; it's my first time, you know.'"

I knew of Sewa's reputation as a philanderer, so I was not surprised that he had found his bearings in London by relying on his good looks, his gift of the gab, and his winning ways with women. But though Ade was both a source of security and a guide on whom he could rely to steer a course through a bewildering world, Sewa's future seemed to me very uncertain.

After finishing our recording, we caught a bus to the Angel, met up with Ade and her sister Sarah, and walked to Ade's apartment, where Sewa had been living for several months. As Sewa prepared a meal of rice with okra, chilies, and sardines, he told me he was teaching Ade how to cook African food. Though Ade's parents were from Nigeria, she had never visited Africa, and she harbored many typically European prejudices and misconceptions about African life. Sewa was determined to strike some sort of compromise. While willing to do "woman's work" in Britain, he did not want to take his wife back home and suffer the indignity of having to cook and wait on her in front of his family. Or have her eat with her left hand, or appear too forward and outspoken in the company of Big Men. "When in Rome," I said with a laugh, and told Ade that such adjustments were something every anthropologist had to make if he or she was to find acceptance as a stranger in an African society. "You have to become a silent listener rather than an active participant," I said, "until you get your bearings."

"I have a mind of my own," Ade said decisively. "I have no intention of living in the shadow of my husband."

As for Sewa, he had no intention of becoming British. And as the day went on, it became clear to me that he was determined to return to Sierra Leone as soon as he could and that Ade would go with him. In the meantime he would do what he had to do to survive in Britain. But the country remained alien to him, by turns baffling, irksome, and sinister.

As Sewa and I left Ade's house after lunch, I noticed Ade's English neighbor and his son leaning on their gate and observing us intently. No words were exchanged, and it was only when we were out of earshot that Sewa asked irritably, "Why do they stare at us like that? Back home, I would confront them, I would tell them to stop. If they did not stop I would beat them. But here, you're in another man's land; they just stare at you like that and you can do nothing about it."

Sewa was alluding to a Kuranko form of witchcraft called *ya yugo mé* (lit., "evil eye"). To stare at a pregnant woman will cause her pain in childbirth or prolong her labor. And it was widely thought that staring could destroy a person's prosperity.

Later that day, as I strolled back to my hotel, I found myself comparing Sewa's comments on the unflinching and minatory gaze of Ade's white neighbors with the intense preoccupation among the peoples of the Upper Guinea Coast with what Mariane Ferme has called "the underneath of things" and "a hermeneutic of suspicion"—the hidden evil in the world around you that finds dramatic expression in the clandestine activities of witches and the conspiracies of enemies, as well as oneiric images of black

hearts behind white teeth, impenetrable forests and swamps, blocked paths and murky waters.[3] And I remembered how I felt when I first went to live in Firawa, with little grasp of the language and ignorant of local protocols—the disorientation that made me so wary and anxious, not knowing what people were saying about me or when some slight misjudgment on my part would jeopardize my already tenuous situation in the village or oblige me to leave. Is it always true that when we feel powerless and vulnerable we tend to take everything personally, as if others had nothing else on their minds but our foibles and failings?

The following morning I walked from my hotel near Paddington to Speakers' Corner and into Hyde Park. Rain had cleared the air, and I sat for a while under some plane trees writing up notes from the day before and listening to the muted roar of traffic along Park Lane, crows quarreling on the grass, and cyclists ticking by on their way to the West End. But my thoughts were of Sewa's precarious situation. Whenever I had spoken to him on the phone from Copenhagen, he would say how hard it was making ends meet in London, but he never suggested that I might help him financially or admitted to feeling beleaguered or lost. Rather, he would enthusiastically look forward to seeing me and telling me his stories. But I had not bargained for the kind of story he had had in mind.

After meeting Sewa at the Victoria bus station, we boarded a bus to Peckham and immediately resumed the conversation we had begun the day before. It was almost like being back in Kondembaia, listening to a Kuranko storyteller, the same narrative verve and ludic skill, the same stoic bemusement in the face of life's adversity.

"When I was in Sierra Leone," Sewa began, "I was just thinking when you get to Europe or overseas that's it!" and he laughed at the absurdity of his assumption that everything would be easy, everything would fall into place. "I had completely the wrong idea. To get my visa back home, that was one step. But when you get into the place you really understand what it is, you know. When I went to the British High Commission in Freetown for my interview, I met this consul called John. He says to me, 'Mr. Koroma, you'll get your visa, but make sure that after six months you go and renew the visa.' I said 'All right' and traveled to London, where I had to enroll at the London College of Accountancy. I had wanted to study automotive engineering, but accountancy was the only thing they would give me a visa for. So I went there, and that's when my troubles began. They said to me, 'Mr. Koroma, before you start your course you have to pay another £900.' Do you know what £900 means?—what it means to raise £900? I went to my sister Aminatta. She found the money for me. I will never be able to pay my sister back. Only God will bless her.

Up to now I feel guilty that I have not been able to help my sister. I feel bad about it. I know how hard it was for her to raise that £900. So I paid that money and started classes."

Sewa found work cleaning toilets in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Knightsbridge for £4 an hour. But his Nigerian supervisor exploited the newcomer's powerlessness and inexperience, ordering him to do extra work that included cleaning the supervisor's own room. Mystified by the fastidious and, to Sewa, obsessive standards of cleanliness demanded by the Mandarin Oriental, as well as confused as to whose orders he should follow, he soon found himself doing the wrong job at the wrong time (polishing the brass nameplate outside the hotel) and was sacked. He then found work as a security guard at Tesco in Kennington, exchanging a "dirty" job for a "boring" one. But whatever employment he found, there was a limit set by the Home Office as to how much a migrant with a student visa could earn, and Sewa was desperately short of money. That December, six months after arriving in Britain, he had to apply to the Home Office for an extension to his visa. The cost was £250. Moreover, he had to pay half of his college fees (another £500) and come up with £200 for the rent of the shared room in his sister's flat. Once again he borrowed from friends, including his girlfriend at the time, Stephanie. But money was only part of his worries. His uncle and sponsor, S.B. Marah, had died a few weeks before. "Doubt was in my mind," Sewa said. "I wasn't able to see my uncle. I wasn't able to go to the burial [in Freetown]. Sad, you know. I was having all these problems in my head."

Without a letter and bank statement from a sponsor, he could not hope to get an extension on his visa. "I had to go out, find people, go out, beg people, beg people. I was lucky to meet C.D., my cousin Aisetta's boy-friend. He gave me his bank statement. So I took this to the Home Office with all my documents, my results from college, the letter from my college, receipts, everything. I went to the counter and this West Indian man called Fidel Castro [Sewa laughed as he remembered the nickname he had given the official], he's called Fidel . . . so I hand over my papers, you know, and then the man looks at my sponsorship letter, the bank statement . . . the balance is £20. The man looks at me. He says, 'Mr. Koroma, did you check all your documents before you came to this place?' I said 'Yes.' He said, 'Are you sure?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'Mr. Koroma, are you sure? I'm sorry, but I don't think so.' And he brings out this statement. He says the minimum they will accept is £2,000. 'If your sponsor has a balance of £10, how could that man support you and support himself?' I was in tears. I said to the man, I said, 'Really, this man is only trying to help me. My sponsor was my uncle, but he passed away a month ago. I

used his bank statement when I got my visa, but now he has passed away I could not get his bank statement.' The man said, 'OK, your excuse is valid.' So they extended my visa. But I tell you, Mr. Michael, it was hard, it was really hard. Living in London without having the correct stay papers, you're in trouble. This is what makes England hard, overseas hard, this paperwork. That's why I'm working hard, doing my studies, doing the right thing, trying to sort myself out. I don't want to get into trouble, because I am thinking all the time, if you're living here illegally, as an illegal immigrant, and your mum or a relative passes away there's no way you can travel. They don't check you when you're going out, no one checks you then, no one cares. The only thing is your ticket, not your passport. But here, living here as an illegal immigrant you are living in fear, fear of no life. These are the things that make this place really hard for people, I mean people living underground."

What struck me was that although Sewa had a valid visa, he experienced himself as someone whose validity was constantly in question, constantly under suspicion. He could never take his residency for granted. He seemed to live in imminent danger of being found out, of making some inadvertent yet irreversible mistake, of being picked up by the police and deported. There was something dreadfully nonnegotiable about his situation. In Sierra Leone one's destiny was determined by a network of face-to-face relationships with people to whom you were obliged or who were under obligation to you, people whom in local parlance you could "beg" or from whom you could borrow money, expect a meal or a roof over your head. But in London, Sewa discovered that he had passed from a patrimonial to a bureaucratic regime in which power seemed to reside less in people to whom one could appeal than in an impersonal force field that found expression in a stranger's stare, a policeman's orders, a supervisor's demands, or the letter of the law. In this inscrutable and Kafkaesque world of bureaucratic protocols, indecipherable documents, abstract rules, and official forms of validation, Sewa came up against what Michael Herzfeld has called a politics of indifference.[4] The "living spirit" of community had given ground to the "dead letter" of a system that recognized no one because it was nobody.[5]

Even Sewa's relationship with Ade became entangled in red tape and Home Office regulations. On Ade's initiative, they had approached the Home Office to find out what was required if Ade, a British citizen, was to marry a foreigner. "They asked where the foreigner was from," Sewa said. She told them, 'Sierra Leone.' 'What kind of visa does he have?' She told them, 'A student visa.' They said, 'We'll send you the form.' We filled it out. I had to have a visa that was valid for at least six months. I was lucky;

I had nine months left on my visa. So we put the form and the fee of £150 in an envelope and posted it to the Home Office. They told us that if they did not approve the marriage, the money would not be refunded. I said, 'All right.' Three weeks later—no, one week—they wrote to say they had received our form. They had to do some cross checking; in three weeks' time they would get back to us. So in three weeks they wrote to say that they had approved the marriage, but the marriage would have to take place before a certain date. But how can they choose the date you get married? They just gave us a date; we had to be married within that time or else it would not be valid. They gave us one month and two weeks to get married. So when we received the form, I had already proposed to Ade, got the rings, the wedding ring, the engagement ring. And, you, Mr. Michael, are the one who is going to do this *namfule* thing for us now." (I had agreed to pay the bridewealth that a young man's father would traditionally pay the bride's family to seal the marriage.)

Perhaps the worst fate that can befall any human being is to be stripped of the power to play any part in deciding the course of his or life, to be rendered passive before impersonal forces he or she cannot comprehend and with which he or she cannot negotiate. Under such circumstances, some people fight desperately to regain some sense of being in control, while others submit fatalistically to the situation that has overwhelmed them—having recourse to flight, camouflage, or avoidance. Whatever one's response—action or inaction, confrontation or avoidance—one's experience of one's situation will tend to be intensified and exaggerated. To put it simply, one becomes in one's own eyes a hero or victim. As Sewa and I traveled across London, I was struck by the heroic imagery in the press. Londoners would not be intimidated by terrorists. As it was in the Blitz, so it was now: people would not allow the bombers to bring their city to a standstill. But this defiance and "stubborn resilience" was easy for those who had not suffered or lost loved ones in the terrorist attacks, and I could not help but observe that Sewa, who knew only too well the terror of war, showed no bravado but only a desire to avoid and appease.

By now, the police hunt for the would-be suicide bombers was being described in the papers as "the greatest operational challenge" in the history of Scotland Yard. Six thousand officers, half of them armed with MP5 submachine guns and Glock 17 pistols were patrolling tube and railway stations and city squares. All of this only intensified Sewa's anxieties. "It makes me remember the war," he said. He then told me about the only occasion he had gone to the cinema. An action movie was playing, and his girlfriend at the time insisted they see it. But Sewa could not stand the

noise of explosions, gunfire, and car crashes and had to leave the cinema. As for the police presence on the streets, it rattled him rather than made him feel secure. As our bus slowly made its way south, Sewa pointed out a red police car to me. "That's the city police," he said, "they really lay on you, no mercy." And as another police car worked its way through the stalled traffic, its siren wail sounding to my ears like We You We You We You, Sewa informed me that in southeast London Sierra Leoneans interpret the siren sound as Where dem? Where dem? Where dem? since the police are constantly on the lookout for illegal immigrants. The police also went by a variety of names, Sewa explained. They were known as "Routine Check" for a while, but as soon as the police got wise to this nickname, it was replaced by the Yoruba word *Orobo*. "You have to avoid them," Sewa said, though it was not always possible to avoid eye contact. "Sometimes you don't know where to look. You look at them, they'll get angry and do a routine check on you; you look away and try to move away from them, they'll think you've got something to hide, that you're running away, and they'll make you stand there while they run a check on you again."

I did not know what Sewa had to be afraid of. After all, he had a valid student visa and took great pains to stay on the right side of the law. "Why," I asked, "do the police make you so nervous?"

It was not always possible to remain within the law and earn enough money to survive, Sewa explained, and he described one of his most harrowing run-ins with the Metropolitan Police. He was in a car with his half brother Junisa and his cousin Ibrahim. Junisa was driving, even though his license had been suspended after three speeding offences and for using an illegal speed camera detector. They were stopped by police. A routine check. Junisa lost no time in leaping into the back seat with Ibrahim and Sewa, Sewa having taken Junisa's infant daughter onto his knee to make more room. When the police officers approached and asked them to identify the driver and owner of the vehicle, Junisa told them that the driver had run off. The police then demanded to know their names and dates of birth. Sewa was by now perspiring and trembling with fear. In his pocket was a payroll stub showing that he had worked for more than the legally permitted twenty hours that week. The police searched his bag. On finding his security guard uniform in the bag, one of the police officers informed Sewa that it was illegal to work on a student visa. Sewa explained that he was permitted to work up to twenty hours a week, to which the police officer replied, "We will check with your college and the Home Office." At the police station, Sewa and the others were obliged to watch CCTV footage that showed no evidence of a driver leaving the

car and fleeing the scene. Junisa was subsequently convicted and sent to prison. Ibrahim was fined for obstructing justice. Sewa got off with a reprimand, but felt he was lucky not to have been deported.

"You seem to be able to elude the police, just like you eluded the RUF," I said.

"They call me Slippery," Sewa said, and laughed before telling me a story to prove his point. He had been working at a Pound Saver store at the time. One morning he was folding clothes on a display table when two policemen approached and asked if he worked there. Fearing complications if he said yes, he told them they should ask at Reception, giving the impression he was just an innocent customer.

We had now reached Camberwell Green, and as I followed Sewa off the bus and through the crowd, Sewa was telling me that the "bendy buses" only operated on routes into the largely black neighborhoods of the southeast, the reason being that the relative openness of these buses allowed people to enter or exit the rear doors without a valid ticket. The police checked these buses frequently on the pretext that they were looking for fare-dodgers. But they were really looking for illegal immigrants, Sewa said; the "bendy buses" were "traps to catch illegals," and he mentioned two Sierra Leoneans who had been caught the previous week and sent home.

Our immediate destination was Bockarie's shop on Camberwell Road. Bockarie was my late friend S.B.'s half brother, and he sold African music, clothing, books, and magazines, as well as Internet access and services. When we entered the shop the only customers were a couple of Sierra Leonean girls using one of the PCs. Bockarie's son Junisa was behind the counter, doing some paperwork, and after Sewa had introduced us Junisa showed me the copies of some of my Sierra Leonean books that were for sale in the shop. I signed a couple of copies of *Barawa* at Junisa's request, and he asked me if it was easy to write a book and get it published. He had a diploma in business management but was keen to write about the reckless life he had led as a teenager, hoping this would be an example to younger people of what not to do. After exchanging e-mail addresses, I asked Junisa if he had any recent music from Freetown; Sewa had been telling me about a couple of bands, and I would like to hear them.

It turned out that Junisa did not have these particular CDs in stock, but Elvis could take us to a place where we could buy them. "Elvis" was the sobriquet of a man in his late forties or early fifties who had, moments before, appeared from the back of the shop. His trousers were frayed, his teeth broken, and his breath stank of rum. His real name was Mohammed. He had fetched up in London fifteen years ago and had no intention of

returning home. As he led Sewa and me along Camberwell Road, he poured scorn on his homeland and excoriated Britain with equal contempt.

We soon came to a block of council flats, where Elvis took us to a locked grill door. "Sisay!" he shouted. A man wearing a white singlet came to the door and peered at us suspiciously. "What do you want?" he asked.

Elvis explained our business, but Cedric was not satisfied, and it took a lot more explaining from Elvis before Cedric unlocked the door and ushered us into a narrow corridor, where we edged past a large Sierra Leonean woman sitting on a bag of rice before arriving at Cedric's room. The room was filled from floor to ceiling with shelves of CDs and all manner of electronic gear—video and DCD players, fax machines, copiers, microphones, CD burners, and boxes of imported CDs from various West African countries. It was now obvious why Cedric had been so cagey about admitting us; he produced pirated copies of videos and CDs for sale to African immigrants in London.

After Cedric had brought cold Pepsis for Sewa and me and a can of Guinness for Elvis, I explained what I was looking for—copies of some of the latest reggae, rap, and hi-life music from Freetown. It turned out that Cedric had several selections. I could buy three for ten pounds. And he immediately began playing me some tracks, his face beaming with pleasure and his gold teeth glinting as he turned up the volume. Indeed, he was so stirred by the beat that he kept rising from his dilapidated office chair and dancing on the floor space that was not covered with half-opened cartons and recording equipment. When I'd chosen three CDs, Cedric inserted the first in his burner and started the copying process. With the music switched off, I asked him to tell me how long he had been in London. It was a sad story that corroborated some of the things Sewa had been telling me about the difficulty of living within the law when work was so hard to find and racial prejudice endemic in every workplace.

"Never ask Africans what job they do," Cedric began. "It is too embarrassing for them to say what kind of work they do. You just don't ask. People say, 'I di go work now,' but they don't mention what kind of work they're going to. We do all the dirty work. The work no one else wants to do. It's a waste of time looking for anything better. If you go try, they look at your visa, they look at your black face, they hear your accent, and they turn you away. You know, we have that saying in Krio? 'You eyes don take load.' You know what that means? Your eyes don't carry a load, but they can see if a load is too heavy to carry. So if you're from

Africa, you quickly see what you can do here and what you can't do. Let me show you."

Cedric rummaged in one of his desk drawers and brought out a sheaf of papers, among them several diplomas from various courses in maintenance and engineering that he had successfully completed. "At first, they would say I had to have qualifications. Now they say I am overqualified or too old."

As I examined Cedric's impressive resume, he recounted how he was attacked by shoplifters several years ago and his back broken. This made it additionally difficult for him to find work. "I am not prejudiced, but I will tell you a story. I was working at Tesco as a security guard. The alarm broke down. Three times it broke down, and three times a specialist electrician was called to fix it. The fourth time I told the electrician what he should do to get it working again. Because I had a diploma, I knew electrics. So the electrician took my advice and left. Said nothing. No thanks. Nothing. You see. It makes you angry. It makes you upset. But you can do nothing about it. You just have to keep trying." Cedric showed me a printed e-mail he had received that morning. It gave the time and address where he should go for an interview tomorrow morning. "I will go," Cedric said. "But as soon as the employer sees that I am not only black but an African, with an African accent, he will tell me I am overqualified and too old for the job."

"Would you have any prospects if you went back home?" I asked.

Cedric laughed. "What is there there?"

Later, after we left Cedric's flat and said good-bye to Elvis, Sewa said he did not want to risk ever winding up like these two men. "You have to get out of here," he said, "or else you will die. You will be just like Mohammed. They don't go back. They don't keep in touch. But one day, when he's no good, even as Bockarie's errand boy or Cedric's errand boy, they'll put him on a plane and send him home. He'll have nothing. No one will know him. He'll go crazy. That's what lies ahead of you if you stay here, if you never get out."

At the end of the day, after writing up my scribbled notes and recollections in the quiet of my hotel room, I struggled to find the right words for Sewa's sense of unease, uncertainty, and wariness. Some of his anxieties seemed to relate to his war experiences, as if the unreal and labyrinthine city through which he moved was like the nightmarish landscapes through which he had traveled after his capture by the rebels. "You're in another man's land," he had explained to me. "You never know when they [the police] are going to grab you. They'll offer

you a free ticket home. You're gone. Just like that." In this city of pitfalls, ambushes, and hidden dangers there was, however, one place where you could let your guard down and find some sense of security and homeliness. Of Peckham, with its money transfer shops, stores where you could rent African videos, greengrocers where you could buy palm oil and cassava leaf, and speak Krio on the street, Sewa had said, "This place full na we; we govern this place." Sierra Leoneans referred to Peckham as Kru Town Road after an old quarter of Freetown, and a well-known night spot was called Pardi's, after Paddy's Beach Bar in Freetown's Aberdeen Road.[6] "That's our ground," Sewa said. "That's the place we not scared. The southeast is our stronghold." But outside this neighborhood one had to be vigilant. Just as Sierra Leoneans had evolved their own argot, referring to a Sierra Leonean passport as "potato leaf" (because it is dark green in color), and a residence permit or "stay" as "leather" (because it is harder to get and more valuable than a passport), so they disguised their appearance to avoid becoming targets of local gangs or the police. In Freetown, young men wore American-style basketball trainers; in London they prefer the "normal trainers," hooded jackets and baggy trousers that young black Londoners wear. "You have to be in the system or else," Sewa told me, explaining that local black gangs often pick on newcomers from West Africa, aggressively demanding "Wot ya got on ya?" and expecting immediate payment.[7] Sewa's tactic was to mimic the cockney "Wot?" and use it repeatedly in response to the locals, hoping they would be fooled into thinking he was one of them and leave him alone.

No doubt many of these tactics of changing one's appearance, hiding one's identity, keeping a low profile, and using a secret language with those one knows and trusts are defense ruses that have a phylogenetic basis. But this tells us little about the experiential context in which they are deployed—what it feels like to be constantly on the defensive, or how real external dangers become translated into imagined fears. Anyone who has moved from a familiar lifeworld and gone to live in a place where he or she is a complete stranger, linguistically inept, economically insecure, and socially stigmatized will immediately identify with Sewa's intense self-consciousness—the suspicion that people were staring at him, that he was under surveillance, that he was somehow in the wrong, without rights or any legitimate identity—though not everyone would share his preoccupation with the power of the police to send him back to his country of origin with no possibility of return, so ending once and for all his dream of improving his lot in life. It was not that Sewa was seeking validation; rather he was doing everything in his power to avoid the

people, situations, and incidents that made him feel as though he was a worthless nobody. In a recent book I have argued that human existence plays out as a constant struggle to maximize one's inner resources or capacities on the one hand and to avail oneself of the external affordances of one's environment on the other.[8] What I admired about Sewa was his capacity for making the most of an environment that not only offered limited opportunities but constantly crossed and humiliated him. That his inner strength had been derived from his mother and father was very clear to him. They were, as put it, his very life (*ni le wola*). To speak of someone as "being my life," or "being the world to me," is to imply that your own destiny is never simply in your own hands; it is determined by your relationships with significant others and by the ways in which they reflect and care for you, even after they have passed away. In sending his mother photos of himself against the backdrop of the Houses of Parliament, Sewa hoped to inspire in her a validating response, in the same way that enunciating Qur'anic suras, learned from his father, would end his nightmares and assuage his fears.

At such moments, I was mindful of René Devisch's powerful ethnographic accounts of the Yaka (southwest Congo) conceptions of health (*-kola*) and well-being (*-syaamuna*) as flowing from a person's vital relationship with a web of forces (*mooyi*) that includes kinship and community, as well as the ancestral realm. Though this realm is largely beyond ordinary understanding, Yaka aver that the source of life is ultimately maternal, and that the most critical relationships in any person's life are with uterine kin. Blockages and disruptions in this flow of forces cause sickness and insanity. So does displacement—and as Devisch shows, maternal images figure as points of anchorage and consolation for migrant youth in the disorienting world of the city, offering them the hope of spiritual connectedness and renewal.[9]

In many ways, Sewa's situation resembled the situation of these young Yaka men in Kinshasa, for whom matrixial images and sexual attachments were imagined as ways out of the wilderness in which they found themselves adrift. Among strangers, who Sewa simply called "those people" ("dem people"), one could expect nothing but indifference, disparagement, or outright menace. "They shame me" (*An ya na moliya*), Sewa would say. "They make me feel small" (*An ya na dogoye*). Thus, constant exposure to a negative social environment will easily lead one to feel under attack, fearful of ostracism or deportation, and prey to a nagging guilt that the price of one's own improved chances in life is the loss of one's homeland, one's kith and kin, and one's heritage. At the same time, the impossibility of being accepted into the society in which one has sought

asylum translates into a sense that one is worthless, that one is good for nothing, that one is doomed.

Sewa's experiences made him unusually sensitive to the plight of other migrants. One day on Oxford Street, for example, he observed a young African girl appealing, with obvious desperation, to passersby for help. Repeating the one word "phone," she could not make herself understood, and people were ignoring or avoiding her. Sewa asked her what she wanted. Quickly realizing that she could not speak English, he tried every other language he knew, including Mandingo. Unbelievably, the girl was a Mandingo from Guinea. Incredulous and overjoyed, she explained that she and her sister had student visas but were penniless and knew no English. Sewa phoned his sister Aisha, arranged for the Guineans to stay there for a while, and helped them find the kind of cleaning jobs he had done a year before. Another time, when working as a security guard at a Wandsworth department store, he noticed that a certain man came to the store every day and spent some time browsing and trying on clothing before leaving without making a purchase. His suspicions aroused, Sewa carefully monitored the CCTV and observed that the man appeared to have gained a great deal of weight since entering the store. Sewa confronted him at the checkout counter and asked the guy, who was from the Congo, why he was sweating profusely when the day was so cold. With the skill of a Kuranko storyteller, Sewa exploited the comic possibilities of the situation. "You are really sweating. But the heating is off, and it is really cold in here. Are you well? You are the only person sweating in the whole store. Maybe you are sick. Do you need a doctor? Do you need medicines?" Realizing that he was trapped, the man was perspiring not only because of the extra layers of garments he was wearing—five pullovers and two overcoats—but from fear. The Nigerian store manager arrived on the scene, and Sewa explained how he had observed this customer gain an extraordinary amount of weight since entering the store. As the store manager prepared to call the police, the shoplifter fell to his knees and started to cry. He implored Sewa not to turn him in. He was an illegal immigrant. He would be deported. It would be the end of him; it would be a death sentence. Sewa told the man to stand up and stop crying. He then walked to the store manager's office, explained the shoplifter's plight, and prevailed upon the store manager not to call the police. The call was not made, and the Congolese guy was allowed to leave the store, still wearing the stolen clothes, vowing he would never return, not even to Wandsworth.

If sympathy for others in a situation similar to one's own is one consequence of hardship, preoccupation with one's own plight is, paradoxi-

cally, another. Suffering, like physical pain, narrows the scope of what one can take in, what one can deal with. One sees the world solely from the standpoint of one's own struggles. Accordingly, one identifies readily with those who share one's own hardships, while tending to see others as aliens if not adversaries—hence the dependency, gratitude, and idealization that is focused on those who offer support, salvation, and sympathy, and the vilification of those who vex and humiliate you. "Dem people."

Within days of leaving London I was on my way to the United States and a new job at Harvard. Inevitably, I experienced something of the disorientation and despair that Sewa had described to me so vividly, though, in retrospect, I would remember it as ludicrous and absurd. Minutes after arriving in Boston, I was told in no uncertain terms by an Immigration officer that my old green card should have been turned in to the U.S. authorities when it expired seven years ago; my failure to do this constituted "a problem, a serious problem." I protested that I had relinquished my card in Copenhagen, when I interviewed for my new green card. Why then, had I not signed a document to this effect, so that Immigration in the United States could see that I had indeed given up the old card? As my wife and children watched with growing concern and bewilderment, I was instructed to follow the officer downstairs to Passport Control, where, after a long wait, I was interviewed by another officer, even more officious than the first, who lectured me on the importance of rules and regulations, and how they were there for a reason. Irregularities simply could not be ignored. I was then grilled on why I insisted on saying that I had not signed any document in Copenhagen when I turned in my expired card, and was asked repeatedly if and when I had visited the United States during the last eight years and for what reason. Finally, I was told I would be "let off with a caution" and "given a year." "So in a year's time I reapply for my green card?" I asked fecklessly, hoping to give the impression of complete respect for, and abject dependency on, the officer's greater knowledge. It was uncanny, I thought, as I rejoined my family, how instinctively one seeks to appease the powers-that-be, avoiding any remark or action that might appear to question their authority or challenge their power. And I thought of Sewa's tactics for avoiding the police and slipping invisibly through the net that, in his eyes, was ceaselessly trawling for those who were not en règle.

I also found myself pondering the difference between what Charles Bukowski calls "ordinary madness"—those myriad miseries and mystifications of existence that vex but do not destroy us—and those experiences that so overwhelm us that we completely lose our hold upon life.

It is, of course, misguided to assert that certain experiences of separation and loss are in their very nature more unbearable than others. Much depends upon an individual's inner resources or on what his or her external environment offers by way of support and care. Much also depends on a person's previous experience of loss, and the values that have been instilled in him or her. In Sierra Leone, suffering is seen as an unavoidable part of life. Though one imagines a better life, a fairer lot, one is taught to stoically accept the inevitability of hardship. What matters most is how one endures it. Sewa possessed this kind of fortitude and patience, and he had known loss. But he was totally unprepared for the bureaucratization of everyday life in Europe, the impersonality of its cities, the nonnegotiability of one's relationship with the law, and the very different ethos governing relationships between men and women. This was what exasperated him and fed his paranoia, for it is generally true that when the world refuses our efforts to interact with it on social and reciprocal terms, it becomes, in our imaginations, a locus of minatory power. During Kuranko initiations, for example, the heightened fear of witchcraft undoubtedly arises from people's loss of control over the fate of their children, and anxieties over whether or not their sons or daughters will successfully survive the grueling ordeals to which they must submit. Something similar occurs with migrants and refugees. One readily falls prey to fears that forces, named or unknown, are conspiring against one, when in reality it is simply one's powerlessness and estrangement that produces this erosion of self-confidence, this pervasive sense of shame, persecution, and smallness. The foci of Sewa's anxieties were, of course, the police and "black" English gangs. As in comparable situations, the paranoid preoccupation itself generates the effects that are attributed to external agents.[10] Thus, the greater the amount of intellectual labor expended on the minatory object, the more vulnerable, trapped, worthless, and unreal one feels oneself to be. This process is directly analogous to Marx's concept of alienation (*entäusserung*):

The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the greater is the worker's lack of objects. Whatever the product of his labour is, he is not. Therefore the greater this product, the less is he himself. The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.[11]

What is the threshold of tolerance, the breaking point, for any individual, beyond which adversity comes to be experienced as unbearable, hope is abandoned, and he or she can no longer seize the day. This point would seem to be determined, first, by the sheer weight of the world—its unresponsiveness to one's presence or one's voice, and its obdurate refusal to acknowledge one's needs, let alone one's aspirations. Second, it is determined by the extent to which an individual falls prey to the thoughts, imaginings, and self-fulfilling prophecies that are born of his or her frustrated efforts to speak or act. Such, it would seem, was the fate of Mohammed, who, at least in Sewa's eyes, had not only lost touch with his homeland and given up on the possibility of making a life for himself in Britain, but had allowed himself to fall into decay, losing his dignity as a man, seeking refuge in cheap booze, a victim of his own cynicism. Yet Cedric, despite the rejection and prejudice he had encountered, persevered in his search for legitimate employment and clearly felt ashamed at having to resort to underground work in order to survive. So it was neither complete success nor complete failure that characterized the lives of the Sierra Leoneans I met in London, but rather compromise—a balance struck between the gains one hoped to make for oneself and one's children and the losses one would sustain in doing so.

My old friend S.B.'s daughter Isata and her family lived in a newly built townhouse in Lee. During the afternoon I spent with her and her two young children, Munah and Kalil, we talked about the difficulty of keeping alive the dream of returning home to live while meeting the demands of the life one has chosen to live abroad. Isata had a well-paying position in one of London's most prestigious private banking houses and commuted to the city every weekday, leaving her children in the care of a live-in help, Fodiya, who also hailed from Freetown. Despite success in her job (she was one of the first black women to be employed in the bank), Isata spoke of the emptiness of the lives of many of her colleagues, most of whom were single and spent their earnings in restaurants and bars, or on holidays abroad. She missed the social vitality of Freetown, the daily encounters with family and friends, the ebullient greetings, the humor and eventfulness of everyday life. But then, she said, there is the poverty of Freetown, the lack of any infrastructure, the corruption in government, and the fact that things seem to be getting worse, not better. Late that afternoon, Fodiya's brother-in-law dropped in on a quick visit. He listened closely as Isata continued to talk about the life she missed in Sierra Leone, and the bungalow she and her husband were building at Hill Station. "I don't want to be here in ten years' time," she said. "I want

to be back in Freetown. And it's not because I want to go back and make a difference; it's because my heart is there. I'm Sierra Leonean. When I come home from work I change into Sierra Leonean clothes, prepare Sierra Leonean food. At home we speak Krio. I'm not British, and I don't want to be. They would never accept me here anyway."

Fodiya's brother-in-law seemed unimpressed by Isata's nostalgia and declared that he had no intention of ever returning home to live. His arguments were pragmatic. Here in Britain he was making good money; back home he would be out of work. Even if he was gainfully employed, his family and friends would burden him with their demands. In Sierra Leone, moreover, he would have no pension against his old age, no health care, nothing. And he chided Isata for her sentimentality, which, he argued, would not last a day if she was living in Freetown in penury. But Isata was no idealist, and she explained that when, some years ago, her father persuaded the Bank of Sierra Leone to offer her a senior position, she turned it down, telling the bank she simply could not support herself and her family on the salary. The bank pointed out that she would make ten times the official salary by doing favors and receiving kickbacks. Her response: she could not live that way; she could neither accept nor bring herself to participate in underhanded practices.

When I met S.B.'s sons, Abu and Chelmanseh, both of whom had married English girls, I heard similar stories. Though they had made lives for themselves in Britain and had good-paying jobs, they missed Sierra Leone. This was where they felt at home and had every right to be. This was the place that had nourished and shaped them; this was irrevocably the place that defined who they really were.

On Belonging

Traveling back to my hotel one night on the tube, I got to thinking how, in a cold and inhospitable social environment, one not only withdraws into oneself but seeks the company of one's own kind. The first-generation migrant lives a life apart, a ghettoized existence, avoiding the risk of humiliation among strangers, falling back on the familiar world of fellow expatriates. Only gradually does one expand one's circle, and then only to those whose situation is similar. But even as one's world becomes cosmopolitan, it remains marginal to the mainstream culture.

My train of thought was interrupted by a drunken Yorkshireman who was loudly lecturing a European tourist on English football teams, telling him which one he should follow and citing all manner of slurred

statistics on the past performances of competing clubs. I was reminded of the previous summer in Zurich, when I had watched, with a group of students from the C. R. Jung Institute, some of the final games in the UEFA European Football Championship (Euro 2004)—Holland versus Latvia, and Germany versus the Czech Republic. These games had followed Italy's loss to Bulgaria the day before, a loss that had inspired bitter recriminations in the Italian press and even rumors of game fixing. An Italian-Canadian guy in our group confessed to being "deeply distressed" and said he had been on medication all day. At first I thought he was joking, but as others arrived in the TV room—a Swede, a German, a Swiss, a French woman, an American woman—and everyone began to banter about who he or she was "going for" and whose nation had been beaten, I became increasingly fascinated by the passionate nationalism that in the course of the night would find expression on the faces of thousands of German fans, stunned, pale, tearful, and open-mouthed, not knowing where to look or what to do, as their defeated side wandered solemnly from the field. Two months later, when China lost to Japan in Beijing's Workers' Stadium, it was as though the traumatic events of the 1930s and 1940s were being replayed, and again my thoughts turned to this powerful and magical confluence of subjectivities—the first individual, the second national—that will bring people to life one minute, chanting, singing, shouting in unison, and the next render them bereft, ashamed, and inconsolable. People need extensions of themselves, borrowing a second self or second skin from a cause, a club, a national symbol like a flag, or enlarging their sense of self with beer, belligerence, and being in a crowd. The human imagination is, to use Freud's phrase, polymorphous perverse. It is a migrant form of consciousness that is constantly seeking some object that will give the isolated ego a sense of greater power and presence. One will feel good about oneself on the strength of the clothes or cosmetics one puts on, the car one drives, the house one owns, the club or congregation to which one belongs, the body one builds, the food or drink one consumes, the things, families, or friends one has. If the migrant appears to put an inordinate effort into acquiring and displaying what he perceives to be the crucial symbolic capital of the culture he enters, or seems to cling to the customs of the culture he has left behind, it is because he confronts every day the experience of being drained and diminished, cut down, made to feel small, reduced to a state of what Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life."[12] Perhaps this was the key to Sewa's nightmares. The image of his brothers' fighting him was in fact an image of the struggle within him, between two incompatible modalities of being, the first seen as retrograde and unfulfilling, the second as

filled with uncertain possibilities. But this is not to say that migrants are the only ones engaged in the struggle to sustain or augment their being-in-the-world. Long before migration and education became the preferred way of enlarging one's horizons, Kuranko social imaginaries embraced, especially among the powerless, all manner of ideas as to how one might gain the wherewithal denied them in their everyday existence. Although the dutiful performance of one's assigned role, the acceptance of one's lot, and the authority of the past have always been valorized, a tension nonetheless exists between what is given and what is desired. A young wife, harassed by her senior co-wife or spurned by her husband; an orphan child feeling unfairly treated by his "stepparents"; a young man denigrated by his father or elder brother—these are, if Kuranko folktales are any measure of the fantasy life of the hard done by, the typical situations in which the imagination seizes upon the possibilities of the bush—a domain lying beyond the village, where demonic "distributors of being," such as djinn, tricksters, and supernatural agents, may transform the fortunes of those in despair and produce a fairer distribution of that which makes life worthwhile—recognition, status, fine clothes, wealth, or simply love.

There has been a gradual shift in the Kuranko social imaginary from the early twentieth century, when people began to entertain transformations that involved journeys beyond one's own parochial borders and an openness to a future that compromised the past. Traditional societies are so-called because they "deny history" (the phrase is Mircea Eliade's); it is the ancestral past that defines what is of value, and it is an ethic of duty that decrees that each person faithfully respect time-honored protocols. To depart from these is to take one's life into one's own hands. But as Sewa observed, though not in so many words, farming is a dead-end job; there is no future in it. The life of the farmer implies a reversion to and a repetition of time past; one reproduces life but produces nothing new. Behind Sewa's prejudice against farming was a preoccupation with creating a life that did not follow the precepts and precedents of the past, in which time was claimed for oneself, and one's own lifetime was considered apart from the life of one's society. Such an openness to the future was both exhilarating and terrifying.

The Imagination in the Struggle for Being

Marx observed that regardless of historical circumstances and independent of its location in the private or public realm, labor power (*ar-*

beitskraft) "possesses a 'productivity' of its own, no matter how futile and non-durable its products may be."[13] This productivity, comments Hannah Arendt, "does not lie in any of labor's products but in the human 'power,' whose strength is not exhausted when it has produced the means of its own subsistence and survival but is capable of producing a 'surplus,' that is, more than is necessary for its own 'reproduction.'"[14] It is this critical relationship between labor action and the existential will-to-be that I explore here.

The struggle for being first makes its appearance as nebulous yearnings, vague imaginings, and wishful thinking that fasten on to no specific object or, rather, move restlessly from one object to another, much as an infant is curious about everything and anything it can touch, or put in its mouth. This is the prototypical expression of what we call the imagination; it is consciousness in its most opportunistic, promiscuous, and migratory mode, or, to invoke the language of Husserl, it is intentionality in its most primordial and preconceptual form. This is the "uncertain, shadowy" existence we sometimes speak of as the private realm, that has not yet been transformed "into a shape fit for public appearance."[15] This is also the domain of "intellectually diffuse" experiences or "hazy and unelaborated attitudes" that, as Lévi-Strauss points out, are "emotionally intolerable unless they are objectified and integrated in ways that enable us to act and in forms that can be shared."[16]

There is a close affinity here with Sartre's theory of the imagination. Sartre sees human intentionality as a vital if "undifferentiated" disposition of consciousness toward an external world that always remains to some degree separate from the objects at which it "aims," the persons with whom it forms attachments, or the cultural projects whereby it strives to "realise itself."[17] It is because the relationship between the thinking subject and the object of the subject's thoughts is restive, indeterminate, and unstable that we find ourselves craving things even when satisfied with what we have, conjuring objects that do not strictly speaking exist, desiring to do things that are not socially acceptable, while denying the reality of certain objects and experiencing the reality of others in many different ways. The space of religion may be thought of as similar to the space of dreams, a penumbral domain where consciousness is loosed from the objects, routines, and environs to which it is conventionally tied and freed to entertain or succumb to other modes of objectification. It is a space as haunted by established models and extant memories as it is filled with the aura of imaginary possibilities.

In the West we typically theorize this transfiguring will-to-be in terms of deep intrapsychic impulses such as instincts, needs, and desires. In

tribal societies, however, the relationship between inner and exterior worlds is not ruled solely by human subjectivity, which means that inert objects, including the dead, can exert influence over the living to the same extent that living subjects exert influence over them. Moreover, the relation between psyche and world is far more likely to be understood as an intersubjective relationship between self and other, and social and extrasocial space. Among the Yaka of southwest Congo, sociality is conceived as a complex interweaving that connects agnatic and uterine kin, the living and the dead, human beings and water spirits, and men and nature. "Paradoxically," writes René Devisch, "the person's center of gravity is not based in the individual and his innermost being, but essentially in the exercise of exchange and 'interanimation.' . . . More graphically, an individual's center of gravity and social identity as a person is situated at the level of the skin, with its capacities of sensorial and sexual contact, that is, at the interface (luutu) with others and the world."[18] Where Westerners search their souls or memories and rack their brains in an effort to know who they are, many Africans deploy images of searching and hunting in a much more literal way. Of the social imaginary among the Yaka, René Devisch describes a fabulous and "nebulous zone" of "floating forces or energies . . . fantasies, compulsions and desire where unbridled aggression, exploitation, chance and abuse have free reign."[19] He refers to this as the "imaginative unconscious" because, while everyday consciousness is associated with the domestic space-time of the village, the imagination is associated with night and the forest, and finds expression in the figure of a vagrant hunter or enchanted sorcerer-wanderer who "roams the depths of the forest in search of unknown and untamed forms of being and forces belonging to an extraordinary realm far beyond the domestic order."[20]

A recurring ethical quandary in traditional Africa is thus to bring the "wild" energies and potentially destructive forces that belong to the bush safely into the space of the village, since the power to combat witchcraft is itself a kind of witchcraft, the power to ward off sorcery is acquired through training as a sorcerer, the initiation of children into adulthood requires sojourns in the bush, and the vitality and viability of the village depends on making farms in the bush where capricious spirits must be appeased and the dangers of the unknown must be negotiated.

Since human sociality emerges at the intersection of free and bound energies, or wild and domesticated powers, it is useful to think of the social as "potential space"[21]—a space in which human intentions, desires, or dispositions are realized in relation to many possible others, objects, and goals. What we call culture is simply the sum total of the approved

forms and images onto which our will-to-be may fasten or cathect, or, to use Husserl's term, fill itself in or fulfill itself (*erfülling*). But cultural patterns and artifacts never entirely govern, delimit, or "capture" the existential imperative that often attaches only temporarily to certain objects, and remains mercurial, dissatisfied, and unbound. There is always a "more" and "otherwise" to consciousness than is suggested by the particular names, objects, and persons on which it happens to fasten. As Lévi-Strauss puts it, "the mind always has more meanings available than there are objects to which to relate them," so creating a gap between the signifying and the signified.[22] Thus sexual desire may find momentary expression in a fantasy built up around a particular person only for this attachment to be "betrayed" by another fixation. Or the frustrated desire for status in his village may lead a man to fantasize and form alliances with bush spirits or totemic animals, or to migrate across tribal and international borders in pursuit of wealth, occult powers, magical medicines, or Islamic learning. And self-styled witches may confess to an ability to assume spirit forms, transporting themselves from place to place by willpower alone, and even flying to London and back within an hour.[23] As Sartre puts it, our desire "posits an object; but this object exists only as the correlate of a certain affective consciousness: it is neither drink, nor sleep, nor anything real and all effort to define it is by nature doomed to failure. In a word the desire is a blind effort to possess on the representative plane what is already given to me on the affective plane."[24]

We imagine, as we live, beyond our means. And it is this gap between the objects on which we fasten in our ongoing search for satisfaction, for the consummation of our being in the world, and the undifferentiated yearnings that are the precondition of existence itself, that marks the terrain I have attempted to explore through Sewa's story—neither reducing the meaning of his life to the external situation that bears upon him nor his own subjective yearnings, but on the tension between these fields. Moreover, I have avoided speaking of him as an exemplar of the search to be part of global modernity precisely because, as I have argued, his struggle for being is not reducible to history but is an expression of the human condition that everywhere entails a perplexing indeterminacy between our confused longings, imaginings, and desires on the one hand and the external world on the other, that affords us ways and means of realizing these longings and integrating them with the longings of others.

In 1998 I returned to my homeland, New Zealand, to embark on research among third world refugees. During a fellowship year at the Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, I began writing *The Politics of Storytelling*, a book grounded in my fieldwork as well as deeply influenced by reports of the war that had engulfed Sierra Leone. My monograph, published in Copenhagen in 2002, comprised a set of variations on a theme by Hannah Arendt: "Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead to an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. The most current of such transformations occurs in storytelling."[1] Yet, even as I repudiated the bourgeois view that writing must measure up to some *inward* standard of sincerity or authenticity, I wanted to avoid the trap of seeking to "do justice" to life or "bear witness" to injustice by a form of writing that occludes the immediate, the particular, and the biographical in its fervor to deliver moral judgments, lay claim to immutable truth, and transform the world. Adorno's "Meditations on Metaphysics" were never far from my thoughts: "If negative dialectics calls for the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true—if it is to be true today, in any case—it must also be a thinking against itself.

If thought is not measured by the extremity that eludes the concept, it is from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims."[2]

The Stories That Shadow Us

No more fiendish punishment could be devised . . . than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met "cut us dead," and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruellest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all.   WILLIAM JAMES, *PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOLOGY*[3]

My aim in this chapter is to explore the relationship between violence and storytelling, and to examine the ways in which stories help people cope with the consequences of violence.

Because violence, like storytelling, occurs in the contested space of intersubjectivity, its most devastating effects are not on individuals per se but on the fields of interrelationship that constitute their lifeworlds. This is why violent threats against those one loves, or the loss of family and homeland, can be more damaging than any assault against oneself, and why a person's powerlessness to speak or act against such events is so terrible; for in violence one can act only under the threat of pain, of degradation, or of death—and speak only to debase or incriminate oneself, or assent to the other's will. In such situations, recovering one's freedom to speak and act becomes a matter of life and death, for, as Hannah Arendt puts it, a "life without speech and without action . . . is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men."[4]

To argue that storytelling is crucial to this process of reempowerment does not mean, however, that stories themselves have power; rather, it implies that by enabling dialogues that encompass different points of view, the act of sharing stories helps us create a world that is more than the sum of its individual parts. While it is true that stories may sanction inequality and division, my interest here is in the ways in which storytelling involves not the assertion of power *over* others, but the vital capacity of people to work together to create, share, affirm, and celebrate something that is held in common. In this sense, storytelling is like any other speech act in which the force of language derives not from its own internal essence or logic, but from the social and institutional context in which it is deployed and authorized.[5] For example, when C Company of the 28 Maori Battalion in Aotearoa/New Zealand set up a trust (Nga Taonga o Nga Tama Toa) in 1998 to create an archive of soldiers' oral stories, photographs, and memorabilia, this event depended on the discovery of a letter written around the time of the Second World War by the famous Ngati Porou leader, Sir Apirana Ngata, in which Ngata suggested that such an archive would be an important postwar project. In other words it was Ngata's blessing and authorization that allowed these unvoiced stories to be told and gave legitimacy to the conversion of private memories into a public (tribal) record. This process may be likened to confession, or to the "talking cure" in psychoanalysis: there is no automatic or magical efficacy in speaking one's mind unless the institutional framework of a community, a profession, or religion, contextualizes and recognizes the act. But in all such cases of confession, we are dealing not simply with the human need for recognition, but with a deeper need for some integration and balance between one's personal world and the wider world of others, such that one's voice carries and one's actions have repercussions in the state, nation, or community with which one identifies.

When, as is the case with the stories of suffering I discuss in this chapter, state or institutional recognition is withheld, stories are not only not told; they are salted away in subjectivity and silence, often becoming marks of insignificance and of shame. That is to say, when storytelling loses its dialogical dimensions, it becomes not only self-referential and solipsistic but pathological. As Hannah Arendt puts it, when stories fail to effect a transposition of the self-centered (*idion*) to the shared (*koinon*), they "greatly intensify and enrich the whole scale of subjective emotions and private feelings" but at the expense of our social existence, for it is "the presence of others who see and hear what we hear" that "assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves."[6]

Violence as Reciprocity

When Marcel Mauss invoked the Maori spirit (*hau*) of the gift to elucidate the threefold character of reciprocity,[7] he glossed over the fact that the Maori word for reciprocity—appropriately a palindrome, *utu*—refers both to the gift giving that sustains social solidarity and to the violent acts of seizure, revenge, and repossession that are provoked when one party denies or diminishes the integrity (*mana*) of another.

Analytically speaking, violence is not an expression of animal or pathological forces that lie "outside" our humanity; it is an aspect of our humanity itself. Rather than dismiss it as antisocial behavior, as the bourgeois imagination tends to do, we must approach it as a social phenomenon whose conditions of possibility inhere in the "three obligations of reciprocity—giving, receiving, repaying."[8]

The logic of reciprocity governs relations with those one loves as well as those one hates, and provides a rationale for both the giving and taking of life. Thus, while gift giving is an interminable process, compelled by the felt inequality of the social capital given and received in any single exchange, violence is similarly cyclical, sustained by the impossibility of both parties ever deciding unambiguously when a score has been settled, when wrongs have been righted, when debts have been paid and losses made good.[9]

Although reciprocity frequently invokes notions of quantity ("I owe you one"; "I am in your debt"; "Now we are even"), it also rests on qualitative notions that cannot be easily substantivized ("You have saved my life; how can I ever repay you?" "Nothing you do will ever make up for the suffering you have caused me"). Because, as Mauss put it, "things have values which are emotional as well as material,"[10] two incommensurable notions of value are always at play in any exchange—the first involving the strict calculation of determinate values, the second involving elusive moral values (Mauss's "spiritual matter") such as rightness, fair play, and justice. Another way of making this point is to say that all exchange involves a continual struggle to give, claim, or redistribute some scarce and elusive *existential* good—such as recognition,[11] love, humanity, happiness, voice, power, presence, honor, or dignity—*whose value is incalculable.*

The two frames of reference are often symbolically coalesced, to be sure, which is why a verbal apology or an expression of sympathy may be given and received as a gift, but such metaphorical fusions mask the perennial difficulty of bridging the gap between the way we measure the

world and the way we experience it. It is this ambiguity that makes fairness, justice, and equity so difficult to attain. One man's gift is always another man's poison, and one person's gain is inevitably construed by another as a loss.

From an existential point of view, "balanced reciprocity" implies any interplay of intentions and actions in which a sense of justice as fairness is at work redressing the imbalance of the "goods" that each party deems necessary for its very being.[12] On either side of this median, however, lie two extreme positions that I characterize as all-giving (Sahlins's "generalized reciprocity")—wherein that which is given may not necessarily be returned—and all-taking (Sahlins's "negative reciprocity")—though it is rare that a violator sees himself as simply taking; rather *he* is the aggrieved party, he is righting a wrong, he is only taking back what is owed.[13] In the case of generalized reciprocity, the line between self and other is so blurred by empathy, codependency, and physical intimacy that one could not conceive of life without the other. The trust between mother and child exemplifies this modality, as may the bond between a patriot and the motherland or fatherland. At the other extreme, self and other are so sundered and polarized that the very condition of the being of one is the annihilation of the other. The absolute antipathy, paranoid fantasies, and ethnic divisions that underwrite genocidal violence provide an obvious example.

These modalities of intersubjectivity imply modalities of power, but power not reduced to the possession of a position or of things, but understood existentially—as the possession of being. While metaphors of unimpeded movement and free speech characterize situations of balanced reciprocity, the ontological metaphors that surface in situations of radical victimage tend to express loss or limitation in one's freedom of movement (being bound, cornered, trapped, cut off, imprisoned, petrified, paralyzed, exposed, alone, stuck, crushed, oppressed, undermined, thrown) or severe restrictions on one's freedom of speech (being gagged, silenced, stifled, speechless, dumbstruck, unheeded).[14] These are the recurring metaphors in stories of rape, refugee flight, child abuse, separation trauma, political persecution, and warfare, in which one finds oneself powerless in the face of some external force or Other who is deaf and indifferent to one's very existence. But victimage and violation are never simple functions of *physical* subjugation or speechlessness; they encompass the deeply engrained, disguised, and habitual forms of "structural violence" that systematically negate the will and deny agency to vast numbers of people in modern societies simply because they are poor,

"colored," infirm, elderly, vagrant, or migrant. Bourdieu uses the term "symbolic violence" to describe such "disguised" and "euphemized" patterns of domination that produce the malaise he calls "la misère du monde," while Kleinman has coined the phrase "social violence" to describe the pervasive indifference, endemic oppression, and sense of abjection that can make a person feel as though he or she is a mere object, nameless, of no account, ground down, in a world where agency seems to be entirely in the hands of others.[15] Among Arthur Kleinman's many examples is the totalitarian state, where regulations on movement, suppression of free speech, and the contradiction between state propaganda and lived reality lead to a "deep reservoir of rancor, bitter resentment, fantasies of revenge" that the Chinese refer to as "eating bitterness." "You are 'deaf and dumb,' you 'can't speak out,' you 'eat the seeds of the bitter melon.'"[16] One may also cite stories of military personnel seeking compensation for irreparable damage to their health, suffered in the course of state-sponsored wars of dubious political value, or stories of hemophilia patients in France and North America routinely exposed to infected blood products in the early years of the AIDS epidemic, or stories of men and women whose lives have been compromised after having being used unwittingly as guinea pigs in the testing of nuclear devices. All such circumstances have entailed social death—a disempowering descent into passivity and privacy, solitude and silence—circumstances in which, as W. H. Auden notes in *The Shield of Achilles*, men die as men before their bodies die.[17]

These instances of social violence confirm that violence arises not in aberrant *subjective* impulses or desires but in intersubjectivity. Thus, those who are prone to violence have generally been themselves victims of violence. Harangued, demeaned, degraded, scorned, oppressed, they harbor fantasies and plan strategies for turning the tables, getting even, and reclaiming the being that has been "taken" or "stolen" from them. Underlying this pattern of extreme reversals are the conceptual distortions that stem from splitting, distancing, and lack of dialogue, each person tending to reduce the other to the status of a thing, cipher, nonentity, or species,[18] while arrogating will, voice, and truth entirely to himself or herself. Though violence may or may not entail physical harm, we may conclude that a person's humanity is violated whenever his or her status as a subject is reduced *against his or her will* to mere objectivity, for this implies that he or she no longer exists in any active social relationship to others, but solely in a passive relationship to himself or herself (Sartre's *en-soi*), on the margins of the public realm. For this reason, it may not

matter whether a person is made an object of compassion, of abuse, of attack, or of care and concern; all such modalities of relationship imply the nullification of the being of the other as one whose words and actions have no place in the life of the collectivity.

Silent Casualties

The deeply disabling and disempowering experience of soldiers during wartime, which has been variously labeled "reactionary psychosis," "shell shock," "battle fatigue," "war neurosis," and most recently "posttraumatic stress disorder," has been the subject of extensive study. My focus here, however, is on the "silent casualties" among New Zealand's veterans of the Second World War; my goal is neither to document a clinical condition nor to explore a literary trope, but to describe a modality of extreme experience that will help elucidate the conditions under which sociality and storytelling become possible or impossible. My analysis is informed by the existential assumption that the difference between traumatic and nontraumatic experience consists in the degree to which individuals are able to "manage" and "master" experiences that have suddenly and overwhelmingly taken them out of their depth—beyond the limits of any previous experience and understanding. Trauma may thus be likened to extreme physical pain, at once the most private and unshareable of all experiences.[19] In pain, trauma, and such clinical conditions as depression and schizophrenia, subjectivity may be said to collapse in upon itself. Language becomes involuted or fantastic, and memory distorted—victims often imagining that *they* are responsible for their own pain. In such situations of social death, storytelling all but ceases.

I became interested in the invisible wounds of war in the course of my 1998 research on refugee trauma and was fortunate in having Alison Parr's documentation (1995) of soldiers' stories to work with, as well as being able to interview and discuss my work with Les Cleveland, a close personal friend, who had served as an infantryman with the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force in World War II and whose book *Dark Laughter*, published in 1994, elucidates the role of song in war and popular culture.

As with many Vietnam vets, the New Zealand soldiers interviewed by Alison Parr confessed that since the end of the war in 1945, they had suffered in silence and isolation, prey to recurring nightmares, debilitating depression, hyperirritability and anger, while generally overwhelmed by an appalling sense of failure and helplessness. In every case, Parr notes,

fear and the fear of fear were at the heart of their suffering.[20] But the word "fear" is too abstract and needs to be deconstructed into the raw, vernacular metaphors that veterans themselves use when recounting their experience of battle.

John Watson was among Allied soldiers driven from Greece, then Crete, by the rapid German advance. "He just completely routed us. We just did not have the equipment to defend ourselves with. It was terrible. We were running away all the time. We were on the run, and that's awful. From the very first day, we were defeated. . . . Completely and utterly beaten." Another soldier, Jim Cusack, taken prisoner in North Africa, described watching a fellow prisoner being beaten. "We saw it happening, yeah. And you daren't do anything about it, well you couldn't do anything about it because there was all barbed wire between us. . . . [It] was terrible when you knew you couldn't do anything. We did yell out, you know. 'Oi, hey,' and all this sort of stuff, but they never took any notice." Pat Sheehan was a dispatch rider and mine lifter with the Engineers. "What I disliked about being in the Engineers, I used to get everything thrown at me. The shells thrown at me, the mortars thrown at me, the bloody machine-guns firing at you, everything going on at you. It was frustrating and we were vulnerable. . . . With Engineers you can't drop everything and fire a gun. You can't hit back. . . . That's the thing, if you can't retaliate you get all this tension built up inside and that gets you upset. . . . If you were in the Infantry, the more you got thrown at you, the more wild you became and you'd charge in and get you own back. It's a bit like if someone hits you, it helps if you can hit back, even if you don't win." Tom May was a tank driver. Here is how he describes the powerlessness he felt in battle. "You're a sitting duck . . . especially in daylight when you were going into an attack and you knew the German 88-mm gun was there. I don't mind admitting I was very frightened, till the guns, our guns, started firing and then you felt a bit better, for some unknown reason. I suppose you felt you were doing something." Reargunner Jack Marshall echoes this view. "It was the sitting there that was the worst part. . . . Naked is the way to describe it. . . . Just waiting for the end, waiting for it."[21]

In every one of these stories, terror consists not only in a crushing sense of being powerless to act or make the slightest impact on one's external situation;[22] it arises out of one's immediate subjective inability to control one's body (paralyzed or shaking with fear) and one's inner emotions.

For many soldiers, the imbalance of power on the battlefield could be redressed off the battlefield in fantasy, in language, and in symbolic

action. Many soldiers dreamed of escape—of extricating themselves from engulfing mud or darkness, of breaking out, of escaping to some safe haven. Many recorded their thoughts and fears in private diaries, or wrote letters home, often daily, as they struggled to reclaim ties to a sustaining homeland. In a taped interview in March 1999, Les Cleveland told me: "the enormous amount of letter writing that went on is perhaps an attempt to see yourself as still part of a family, part of a village, or connected to the homeland in some way that means you can see yourself as a kind of tourist, or temporary traveler, but always reaching out and touching the homeland and the people there." At the same time, many soldiers recovered a sense of social solidarity in subversive stories, ribald songs, wild escapades, and drinking bouts that ritualistically resisted for a moment the soul-destroying effects of mechanical routine and violent battle.[23] "Military folklore," Les Cleveland observes, is "an expression of resistance to the idea of powerlessness." It provides strategies for trying to get one's "experiences into some manageable framework, something that will make sense of it. Otherwise, I think you'd have to admit that it was chaos and you were being blown about in it like a leaf in a storm."

For the traumatized soldier, this image is definitive, and his total inability to bring himself or his situation under control is subsequently converted into a sense of personal impotence, inadequacy, and failure—a flaw that war has revealed in his character, a stigma that he must thenceforth bear. This is why, after the war, many wished they had been physically annihilated rather than survive to endure the nightmares and shame of neither being able to control their inner thoughts and feelings nor confidently to return to public life.

For traumatized New Zealand veterans, the inhibition against recounting their experiences came from without and within. A psychology of denial had its counterpart in a social conspiracy of silence. "I'm a private person," declared one veteran. "I don't talk to people about private things." The comment reflects a characteristic Anglo–New Zealand ethos of reticence and self-control, but, more pointedly, reveals a reluctance to burden loved ones with stories of humiliation and of extreme experience. As Les Cleveland put it, "How the hell can you explain to them what's bugging you? They are in a state of innocence. It's quite difficult, I think, to expound terror and one's admission of fear to people who have not experienced any of those aspects of the world. It seems monstrous to attempt such a thing . . . so you shut up about it." Though old anxieties—of being too afraid to fight, of being a POW unable to find enough

food—"burst out in dreams and in odd behavior," the code of the warrior keeps one's lips sealed. "It's a deficiency to be showing a weakness. A warrior doesn't behave unheroically, he grits his teeth and puts up with various dangerous and murderous activities like Germans trying to kill him all the time. He somehow manages to control himself and keep a stern face on things."

At the same time that one's family is too innocent to hear one's story, the nation is intolerant of any narrative that calls its charter myths—focused in New Zealand and Australia on the Anzac debacle at Gallipoli in 1915—into question. Consequently, the chronicles of war were, for many years, confined to official histories (commissioned by the New Zealand government) that were so bereft of personal experience that it was as though a censor had edited them. Gradually, however, these "paradigmatic narratives" [24] were displaced by stories recounted by individual soldiers, in which fear is admitted and what Les Cleveland calls the "curious mixture of boredom, hazard and chaos that typifies twentieth-century warfare" made public for the first time.

The disemia evident here between official and unofficial stories is a function of a set of incompatibilities: the gulf between the experiences of individual soldiers and loved ones who have had no direct knowledge of war; the gulf between state-sponsored and individually authored stories;[25] the gulf between codes of military conduct and actual patterns of human behavior under fire; and the gulf between the face one turns toward the world and the face reflected within. To close these gaps between private and public domains requires, on the one hand, that the state recognize and validate soldiers' stories, and, on the other hand, that soldiers themselves make their stories public. In fact, few soldiers had enough education to be able to write and publish accounts of their war experiences. As for the state, it usually requires a generation, and another war, for the truth about the old war to be admitted to the public record—and then only if it does not seriously contradict current official and military myths of national identity and belonging. But even when a nation declares that it is open to the truth, and soldiers are willing and able to tell it, there may be no one alive who is both knowledgeable and neutral enough to bear witness to that truth. Such, writes Dori Laub, was the case with the Holocaust, which destroyed all those who would have understood the survivors' stories, who would have recognized them as subjects and confirmed what they had to say. The reality of the Holocaust "extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, of or turning to, another."[26]

Stolen Children

For comparative purposes, I turn now to another body of violent stories that chronicle the fallout from the erstwhile assimilationist policies of Australia that saw more than 100,000 part-Aboriginal children taken from their parents under federal and state laws during the post–World War II period and placed in state institutions, or adopted and fostered in white families.[27] In practice, these policies and laws spelled social death for Aboriginal children of mixed descent, whose names, parentage, histories, and home places ceased to have legitimacy in the eyes of the state, and thereby became, for a while, for these children, marks of shame.

Hannah Arendt observed that the worst thing about being a pariah is not the maltreatment one suffers at the hands of the state. The "greatest injury which society can and does inflict is to make [the pariah] doubt the reality and validity of his own existence, to reduce him in his own eyes to the status of a nonentity."[28] In stories told by Aboriginal people in the course of their submissions to the *Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* in 1997, incidents of physical and sexual abuse, forced labor, rape, and public humiliation are commonplace. Such torments, however, did not in themselves destroy a person's humanity, as the stories make clear. As with soldiers, violence consisted in being reduced to the status of an isolated and insignificant object. Trapped in impersonal, institutional milieux, bound by physical constraints and enforced rules, yet all the while desperately fantasizing and needing to belong to an intimate, interpersonal world, many children ran away from home.

At fifteen, Sherry Atkinson left a note for her foster parents: "Thank you for everything you've done, I'm sorry I'm not the perfect daughter that you want me to be but I have to find out who my mother is and my family is and where I come from. Don't come looking for me because it won't change anything."[29] Rick McLeod describes how running away from home at fifteen gave him a temporary sense of independence. "It was good. I was on my own, doing my own thing."[30] Despite these desperate bids for freedom, however, you felt illegitimate and anomalous in a rule-governed world where no one affirmed you, no one would listen to your story, no one would tell you the truth. What these children would remember were the continual invalidations of their being. John remembers entering the Kinchela Boys' Home when he was ten. Up until this time he had been told he was white. "This is where we learned that we weren't white. First of all they took you in through these iron gates and

took our little ports off us. Stick it in the fire with your little bible inside. They took us around to a room and shaved our hair off. . . . They gave you your clothes and stamped a number on them. . . . They never called you by your name; they called you by your number. That number was stamped on everything."[31] Paul recalls the same traumatic experience of being reduced to a cipher: "For eighteen years the State of Victoria referred to me as State Ward No 54321."[32] He then goes on to describe how, growing up in a white foster family, his color was alternatively denied and derided. "I had no identity. I always knew I was different. During my schooling years, I was forever asked what nationality I was, and I'd reply, 'I don't know.' I used to be laughed at, and was the object of jokes. I would constantly withdraw; my shadow was my best friend."[33] Millicent's story is similar and typical. In the Home where she lived, aboriginality was disparaged as a sign of primitiveness, degeneracy, and ignorance. "They told me that my family didn't care or want me and I had to forget them. They said it was very degrading to belong to an Aboriginal family and that I should be ashamed of myself, I was inferior to whitefellas. They tried to make us act like white kids but at the same time we had to give up our seat for a whitefella because an Aboriginal never sits down when a white person is present."[34]

Not only was it impossible to establish one's true identity, but *any* attachment, interaction, or continuity with one's Aboriginal past was denied. Siblings were systematically separated and dispersed, and contact with mothers cut off. As Peggy observed, you passed from the control of your mother into the "care and control of the Government,"[35] and your whole life became regimented, restricted, rostered, reformed, and routinized according to state protocols. Children were also frequently moved from one foster home or institution to another. Consider William's comments. "Then we were all taken away again to a new home, to another place. We were shunted from place to place, still trying to catch up with schooling, trying to find friends. I had no-one. I just couldn't find anybody. And when I did have a friend I was shunted off somewhere else, to some other place. Wanting my mother, crying for my mother every night, day after day, knowing that she'd never come home or come and get me. Nobody told me my mother died. Nobody."[36]

As with soldiers who incriminate themselves for their failure to be invincible, many of these Aboriginal children grew up feeling *they* were responsible for their own misfortunes. And this self-stigmatizing, self-denigrating tendency to experience the violence against yourself as a sign of your own failings—a punitive response to your own intrinsic moral inadequacy—was abetted by mission doctrines that made Aboriginality

a metaphor for fallenness. Pauline McLeod puts this powerfully in her poem "Never More."

Separated
Fretting, sad.
Given into other hands.

Parents, sister, brothers gone.
Wondering what did
I do wrong!?!

Institution big and cold
All this happen
when one year old

Confused and lost
I didn't know
That the Government decreed it so.

Different places
till five year old
Then to a family
as I was told.

(Going once . . . Going twice!
Sold!
To that lovely couple
Who's not too old . . .)[37]

The sense of shame that condemns one to remain silent about experiences that cry out to be told is a function of the impossibility of converting what is felt to be private into a story that has public legitimacy or social currency. Shame, in other words, is an affective measure of the socially constructed and uncrossable line between private and public space. This sense of shame that accompanies traumatic memory explains why many of the Aboriginal people who told their stories to the National Inquiry could not bring themselves to use their real names or give their consent to publication of their photos.

As with any "recovered" memory of trauma, the stories of the stolen generation broach, for many, questions of authenticity and objectivity. But it is important to remind oneself that authenticity does not neces-

sarily consist in an exact and objective recollection of a moment in the past that is frozen, as in a photograph, for all time. Rather, the "truth" of any remembered trauma is both selective and practiced—a product of a succession of intersubjective relationships between the "victim" and the situations and interlocutors with which he or she has had to contend. As such, every story told blends a desire to do justice to experience and a calculated interest in producing effects that will improve the storyteller's lot.

What is most important about the stories told to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission is not that they speak "truth to the past" but that they speak "truth to power."[38] That is, most important are the ways in which the stories of the stolen generation challenge the core assumptions of the "cosmologies of the powerful," which displace the root causes of suffering from the state onto the victim; the same process that in wartime leads to the diagnosis of traumatized soldiers as neurasthenic; that, after the Bhopal disaster in India, saw the medical and judicial establishment blame the victims' poor health and panicked reactions for their suffering; that, in totalitarian states, punishes dissidents as criminals or lunatics; and that, in the poverty-stricken regions of northeast Brazil, sees medical workers handle hunger as a nervous condition treatable with drugs rather than a result of entrenched structures of political inequality.[39]

Though it will always be debatable whether or not Australia's assimilationist policies amounted to genocide, one may readily understand the symbolic truth of the term for Aboriginal people, who now use it to describe the sense that they were at the mercy of a concerted attempt by the Australian state to erase and nullify them as individuals, and to separate them forever from their history and their roots.

"Why me; why was I taken? It's like a hole in your heart that can never heal." "Actually what you see in a lot of us is a shell." "I just feel like I've really been cheated, cheated bad of my life."[40]

Recovering Narrative

In the wards of Salpêtrière Hospital, Paris, a hundred years ago, the pioneering psychiatrist Pierre Janet observed that the inability of a person to consciously recollect or manage traumatic memories is to some extent a function of his or her inability to recount disturbing experiences *in narrative form.* While ordinary or narrative memory implies an ability to integrate new experiences with already engrained understandings, either

idiosyncratic or shared, traumatic memory resembles Proust's *mémoire involontaire*; it is entirely private, and allows little or no two-way traffic between the mind of the individual rememberer and the social world in which he or she lives. In his clinical accounts of his patient Irène, a twenty-three-year-old woman traumatized by her mother's death from tuberculosis, Janet noted that Irène's accounts of her mother's demise were not addressed to anyone in particular, took no one else's experience into account, and required no social context to be told. As with most amnesiac reenactments, the "story" was essentially a solitary, asocial activity—compulsive, long-winded, and incomprehensible. For the patient to be cured, a change from passivity to activity would have to occur. For Janet, this transformation would involve the patient actively taking charge of his or her own memories, a process entailing the recovery of narrative memory—"the action of telling a story."[41]

If we consider specific cases of this "action of telling a story," we can see how critical it is that the story receive recognition from outside the immediate world of the individual—ideally, even if symbolically, from the very social field—often the state—that is held accountable for having "stolen" or "cheated" the victim out of her humanity in the first place.[42] If, however, the modern bureaucratic state is, in Arendt's words, ruled, like Kafka's Castle, by Nobody—with "nobody left with whom one could argue" or "to whom one could present one's grievances,"[43] how is it possible for the state to listen and apologize to those it has harmed, let alone compensate them for what it has taken from them? And given that the bureaucratic state, as Weber noted, "does not establish a relationship with a person . . . but rather is devoted to impersonal and functional purposes,"[44] how can its utterances be anything but the rhetoric of bad faith?

That the state *is* addressed under these circumstances may, I suggest, have less to do with the hope of material compensation than with the need to be recognized by some ultimate authority. In an age in which many individuals feel that they are drawn into, diminished, and damaged by global force fields that they cannot completely control or comprehend, recognition of their plight, their experiences, and their needs becomes increasingly desperate. Oprah Winfrey–style shows and truth and reconciliation commissions alike indicate the force with which this search for a national stage on which to share one's stories with others and be recognized is now felt. In this search, some symbolic closing of the gap between one's own small world and the inscrutable worlds of the bureaucratic state or multinational corporations is critical. For if the individual is to regain some sense of power, the state or corporation must

symbolically forfeit some of its power. Hence the need for a public apology in which the powerful acknowledge *the truth of the experience* of the powerless.

Recounting one's story to a sympathetic listener or powerful authority figure, however, does not necessarily heal the harm that has been done. As increasing numbers of Aboriginal people relate hitherto untold stories, voice long-standing grievances, and recount communal histories *on the national stage* during the course of land claim hearings and various national inquiries—notably the *National Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* and the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*—some admit to finding "the act" of telling their stories personally therapeutic,[45] while others feel as though salt has been rubbed into their wounds. William was repeatedly raped in the orphanage where he was placed. Today he says, "I still suffer. I can't go to sleep at night. It's been on for years. I just feel that pain. . . . I've had my secret all my life. I tried to tell but I couldn't. I can't even talk to my own brothers. I can't even talk to my sister. I fear people. I fear 'em all the time. I don't go out. I stay at home. It's rarely I've got friends."[46]

Similarly mixed results have followed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa in 1996–97. Speaking specifically of Mozambique, Alcinda Honwana makes the point that many people believe that giving voice to the evils of the past risks visiting those evils upon oneself again.[47] On another note, referring to Alexandra township, Belinda Bozzoli notes that many testimonies remained private and unforgiving,[48] while several witnesses do not accept the point of recounting their stories without the guarantee of reparation, though in other cases, storytelling has had real effects. In one particularly compelling case, a man called Lucas Baba Sikwepere recounted how he had been shot in the face by police after questioning their right to disperse a small community meeting near the township of Crossroads. The shooting left him permanently blinded. When Baba Sikwepere had finished telling his story, one of the commissioners asked him how he felt now that he had had an opportunity to tell the commission what had happened the day he had been shot. Baba replied, "I feel what—what has brought my sight back, my eyesight back is to come back here and tell the story. But I feel what has been making me sick all the time is the fact that I couldn't tell my story. But now I—it feels like I got my sight back by coming here and telling you the story."[49]

Comparable stories are told by war veterans. When Pat Sheehan was granted a War Disablement Pension on account of his war-related agoraphobia, he felt he had reclaimed his dignity. "Being recognized by the

authorities, that was very important. Recognition that the military authorities, indirectly or directly, have been taking notice, that this is just as much an illness as a loss of a limb. That was very important. See, when you go to a doctor, and you say, 'look I've got a sore leg,' it's you that has got to say which leg it is, he can't tell by looking at it, because that's aching inside. Same as agoraphobia. It's aching inside. You just can't say where it is. But you go through all the symptoms. It's an incredible thing."[50]

Speaking of atrocity and trauma, Lawrence Langer argues that the release or consolation provided by relating the story of one's suffering may all too often mean that terrible events get swept under the rug of history and forgotten.[51] But should those who suffer bear, together with their pain, the burden of our collective memory? Isn't it imperative that we acknowledge that in sharing stories, we affirm life in the face of death, rejoining the dead to the living, and ourselves to one another? To say that storytelling may have the power to heal is not, therefore, to say that stories repress memory or deny history, but to point out that in bridging the gap between private and public realms, storytelling enables the regeneration and celebration of social existence, without which we are nothing. Re-presenting traumatic events as a story is a kind of redemption, both because one subverts the power of the original events to determine one's experience of them, and because one moves beyond the self into what Buber calls an essential-we relationship, so opening oneself up to the stories of others and thereby seeing that one is not alone in one's pain. In comparing notes, exchanging views, and sharing stories, the sufferer is no longer condemned to singularity and silence, and the burden of shame or guilt that was the intrapsychic price paid for one's isolation is lifted.

Consider, for example, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, whose mindless act of shooting an albatross brings about immediate ostracism. Not only does this deed condemn him to absolute aloneness; it effectively brings time to a standstill—a ship stuck in an endless ocean, hallucinating silence, unbroken drought, and the nightmarish reliving of the original sin.

Alone, alone, all, all alone
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

For life to be brought back to this frozen world, the mariner must tell his story—but not as a repetition of the events as they occurred (for this would only perpetuate the terrible stasis) but as a story that breaks free

of the past into a new understanding. This new understanding must, however, take the mariner beyond himself and involve a common bond with others—"To walk together to the kirk / With a goodly company." The shriving of the mariner entails, therefore, crossing the gulf that divided his world from the world of others, a conjoining of that which has been put asunder—hence the force of the metaphor of marriage—the background against which the Ancient Mariner unburdens himself of his "ghastly tale."

The Ancient Mariner

In the West, when we explain the liberation that follows the telling of a long-suppressed story of guilt and suffering, we all too often have recourse to notions of catharsis and confession. People need to get things "off their chests" or "out of their systems," we say, in order "to move on," to be forgiven or absolved. Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a paradigmatic case.

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

It is interesting to compare Coleridge with another great English poet, Ted Hughes. In 1999 Ted Hughes was posthumously awarded the Whitbread Book of the Year prize for *Birthday Letters*, a volume of poems about his relationship with his first wife, the poet Sylvia Plath. In a letter to a friend shortly after the book was published in 1998, Ted Hughes wrote:

I think those letters release the story that everything I have written since the early 1960s has been evading. It was a kind of desperation that I finally did publish them—I had always thought them unpublishably raw and unguarded, simply too vulnerable. But then I just could not endure being blocked any longer. How strange that we have to make these public declarations of our secrets. But we do. If only I had done the equivalent 30 years ago, I might have had a more fruitful career—certainly a freer psychological

life. Even now, the sensation of inner liberation—a huge, sudden possibility of new inner experience.[52]

In her book on Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, however, Janet Malcolm comments on Ted Hughes's sustained and exasperating silence over his marriage to Sylvia Plath and her suicide in 1963. "Hughes has never been able to drive the stake through Plath's heart and free himself from her hold."[53] But the emphasis here on unburdening or expressing some painful experience that has been "bottled up" too long within the individual's psyche (festering, poisoning, consuming him) reflects a very Eurocentric, ego-centered way of understanding the motives that lie behind the telling of life stories. If confession were all that were needed to be released of a burden of shame or guilt, to be absolved and able to begin anew, one would feel no compulsion to repeat one's story over and over again to whoever will listen or pretend to listen to it, as in the case of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner. To be efficacious, confession must involve a symbolic return to the person or place or sphere of life that is felt to be the source of one's misfortune. In the soldiers' stories and the stories of the stolen generation that I considered earlier, this entails closing the gap between one's own subjective life and the life of the state, since it is the state—imagined as an alienating "system" or a monstrously anonymous, minatory, and oppressive collectivity—that is held accountable for one's suffering, and that is believed to have "stolen" or "cheated" one out of one's life. Given the tendency of human beings to conflate their experience with their identity, the act of getting public recognition for one's story implies recognition of oneself, a symbolic acceptance back into the body politic of a soul that has been ostracized from it. But transformations effected in art do not always imply rebirth for the artist. Ironically, while Coleridge's Ancient Mariner is at last shrived of his sin, and awakened to a vision of a metaphysical bond and universal love that unites "all things both great and small," Coleridge himself never overcame the guilt that oppressed him as a result of unassuaged feelings of grief and complicity in his father's death and his brother Frank's suicide. Though the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was "an unconscious attempt at repairing his haunting loss by bringing Frank back from the dead,"[54] Coleridge never fully addressed the Cain and Abel complex of which he was half aware, and survivor guilt condemned him throughout his life to aloneness in a wide sargasso sea of solitude, to compulsive replayings of primal events, to self-lacerating guilt, and to opium-induced escapes into the imagination.

There is, of course, never any guarantee that telling one's story will

bridge the gap between solitariness and sociality, the singular and the shared, and this may be particularly true of cultures that exalt and privilege selfhood as *the* authentic mode of being. In the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, Archbishop Desmond Tutu invoked the "African" concept of *ubuntu* to argue that reconciliation required a movement from "I" to "we," and the psychologist Nomfundo Walaza made a similar point, excoriating the self-indulgent privatizing of feelings (include feelings of guilt) that he associated with capitalism and exhorting people to act together as members of one family, one community, and one nation.[55] It is not that individual praxis counts for nothing, for all social activity, including storytelling, is initially individual action, but rather that the focus of agency is on each person's relationship to others rather than on his relationship with himself or his personal salvation. Though stories emanate from personal experience, it is not the imprimatur of individual identity that gives a story value but the imprimatur of a community. The ghastly stories of the Apartheid era have value, therefore, not in absolving individual guilt but in healing a damaged nation through a "piacular ritual," that, as Belinda Bozzoli notes, replaces "individual representations" with "collective beliefs" and recasts personal stories in ways that make them "emblematic" of all who suffered.[56] In helping stories and lives "carry meanings beyond the personal," the Truth and Reconciliation Commission worked to reconcile different people to one another as members of a single commonwealth of humanity. Although the question remains to be answered whether any modern state—at once so complex, impersonal, and gigantic—can recapture and copy the responsive intimacy of traditional communities, this "African" emphasis on the "we group" has some analytical value in taking us from a concern with the possible correspondence or concordance between stories and personal truth to a pragmatic interest in the compatibility of stories with collective goals. Such a view implies that social viability rests on effective strategies for bridging the gap between subjective dispositions and social structures. Storytelling is one such strategy. By relating our stories to others in ways and in contexts that enable them to play a part in determining the narrative and ethical shape that will be given to our particular experience, we avoid fetishizing this experience as something inward and unique. Though most experience—but especially extreme experience—often seems to us singularly our own, storytelling discloses that which is held in common.

There is, however, a paradox here, of which Hannah Arendt was acutely aware, for in the translation of experience from privacy to publicity, vital elements are inevitably lost or betrayed. Indeed, what Norman Finkelstein has recently called "the Holocaust industry" is a compelling

example of how lived experience may become fetishized, made grist for an ideological mill, converted into schlock for mass consumption, made into public spectacle, and exploited for political and economic gain.[57]

Fortunately, though, the transformation of the personal into the social is never completely consummated, experientially or practically. In the cases of traumatic experience that I have explored in this chapter, no narrative does more than create a necessary illusion of fusion or balance between personal lifeworlds and the transpersonal world we define by such abstractions as society or the state. This is partly because such collectivities, though imagined to possess the will and agency of persons, communities, and families, are in fact virtual and "bloblike" subjectivities that can,[58] at most, only symbolically "hear" the cries of those who plead to be given back the lives stolen from them. At the same time the real groups that lurk, ghostlike, behind such imaginary collectivities as society and the state often no longer exist to answer the individual's cries for justice and restitution. Every person's story remains, therefore, irreducibly his or her own, imperfectly incorporated into the collective realm. Yet it is precisely because personal experience remains on the margins of state discourse and ideology that it may become, in any society, a critical force that perennially unsettles received wisdom and challenges the status quo. Contrary to the naïve view that stories and lives are isomorphic, it is this indeterminate, noniconic relationship between stories and experience that makes it possible for storytelling to bring us back and bear witness to the reality of how we really live. Hannah Arendt often lamented the indifference, passivity, and callousness that comes over us when reduced to a mass, obedient to the will and authority of others, mere faces in a crowd. Paradoxically, however, she seems never to have connected her view that our humanity is best preserved by individuals who remain apart from the crowd with her view that storytelling redeems us not only through its power to convert private experience into general knowledge but through its power to confront, confound, and critique all received opinions by referring them back to lived experience and personal testimony. Thus, soldiers' tales perennially undermine the politically cavalier view that warfare can resolve international differences. Refugee stories challenge the complacency of a culture that assumes that victims of violence in other lands should gratefully and unobtrusively assimilate themselves to the cultural norms of the society of asylum. And the stories of the stolen generation are chilling testimony to the concealed complicity between the project of nation building and the logic of extermination.[59]

My earliest research (1965–67) concerned the social and psychological impact of new technologies of communication.[1] During my years in Copenhagen (1999–2005), my interest in human responses to new technologies was revived by media coverage of public reactions to genetic engineering and by submissions by Maori to the New Zealand Royal Commission on Genetic Modification, established in May–June 2000. I was struck by the ways that contemporary ambivalence toward biogenetics echoed the human anxieties that have always emerged with new technologies—anxieties that express deep misgivings about our human ability to comprehend and control new phenomena. In the case of gene technologies, the manifest lack of consistent and confident institutional or governmental control only exacerbates this crisis of agency. One simply does not know enough about the new technology to be able to feel that one can manage or predict its repercussions.

That these polar responses to new technology have been with us for some time is dramatically depicted in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Raised and educated by parents who were radical intellectuals, Mary Shelley was especially sensitive to the ethical issue of how far the new scientific possibilities in the late eighteenth century—which she saw as symbolic of a masculinist desire to dominate and exploit nature—should be allowed to go. The idea for Frankenstein came to Mary Shelley in 1816 during a summer vacation with her husband and some friends in a villa near Lake Geneva. One evening Lord Byron announced that everyone should compose a ghost story and that each should tell his

or her story on successive nights. Inspiration did not come easy to Mary, until one night, after reading an account of Erasmus Darwin's experiments with "galvanism," she conceived her story about the "frightful" effects of "any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanisms of the Creator of the world."[2] In this germ of what would become the story of Frankenstein is a dramatic encapsulation of our modern ethical ambivalence toward the scientist-hero as Promethean creator of life, and about technology itself. Indeed, this vexed question concerning the extent to which technologies are "natural" extensions of ourselves, or entail dangerous and unnatural interference in a divinely appointed or naturally evolved order, is written into the word itself—the root, *tuché*, suggesting chance, fate, and things beyond human control, but the derivative term *techné* connoting chance assimilated to human designs and subjugated to human will. Which sense of the word one emphasizes will, I think, depend far less on one's cultural background than on the extent to which one feels ontologically secure and in command of one's own life.

Familiar and Foreign Bodies: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Human-Technology Interface

Human–machine relations are existential relations in which our fate and destiny are implicated, but which are subject to the very ambiguity found in all existential relations.   DON IHDE, *TECHNICS AND PRAXIS*³

Most current debates about new technologies attempt to decide whether the innovations are good or bad, or how they may be regulated. That is to say, the discourse is either ethical or governmental. But in focusing on how the effects of new technologies may be evaluated and managed, these debates often leave unexplored the more immediately empirical issue as to how we actually experience and interact with technologies, and how our attitudes toward them are linked to perennial human anxieties about the strange, the new, and the other. My thesis in this chapter is an existential one. I take it as axiomatic that all human beings need to have a hand in choosing their lives and to be recognized as having an active part to play in the shaping of their social worlds. As a corollary, I approach the meaning of what people say and do in terms of the degree to which they accomplish a balance between controlling their own fate, collective or otherwise, and accepting that which cannot be decided by human will or subject to human

designs. To define meanings without reference to this intersubjective dynamic is, in my view, practically meaningless. Thus, an anthropology of "human-machine interaction" is unedifying while it insists that human intersubjectivity is reducible to cognitive schemata and communicative "rationality." [4]

Over the last twenty years, several scholars have demonstrated that technology and society are intimately interconnected. Inspired by Heidegger's famous 1954 lecture on technology, Don Ihde, in his seminal *Technics and Praxis*, argued that "human–machine relations are existential relations in which our fate and destiny are implicated, but which are subject to the very ambiguity found in all existential relations."[5] Although Ihde sees these existential relations as rooted in the lifeworld, he does not, however, explore the specifically social character of these relations. In anthropology, Tim Ingold echoes Ihde's repudiation of the split between technology and society, arguing that "technical relations are embedded in social relations, and can only be understood within this relational matrix, as one aspect of human sociality," though he says little about how this embeddedness is experienced, while Pierre Lemonnier, in his work on the "social representation" of technologies, tends to reduce the *experience* of technology to cognitive, formal, and informational *models*.[6] Bryan Pfaffenberger makes a powerful case against the "standard view" of technology—as a body of techniques and material objects that answer human needs yet remain separate from ourselves—by describing the intimate and complex interactions that bind technology, human labor, and social relationships into a "sociotechnical system."[7] Recently, Gary Lee Downey has explored the blurred boundaries between technology and society by focusing on how such boundaries are variously "drawn and lived in everyday experiences."[8] And anthropological studies of "biographical objects" and "the social life of things"—all of which trace their genealogy to Marx's insights into the experience of labor—have made us more acutely aware of the complex ways in which objects become personalized and persons become objectified in the course of social life.[9]

In this chapter I pick up the existential-phenomenological threads in this body of work and seek to demonstrate how this perspective may be more systematically explored. Methodologically, this entails bracketing out, or setting aside, questions concerning the large-scale social impact of new technologies in order to explore the intersubjective dynamics of the human encounter with technology.

Technology and Intersubjectivity

In his 1954 lecture on technology, Heidegger noted that technology (*techné*) should not to be confused with techniques and so reduced to mere instrumentality. Technology is an aspect of our human existence, "a mode of knowing," that brings forth and makes apparent the very essence of our being.[10]

For anthropologists, being is quintessentially social. We are social before we are anything else. Observes Merleau-Ponty: "The social is already there when we come to know or judge it . . . it exists obscurely and as a summons."[11]

What is it, then, that technology reveals to us about this field of social being?

I begin by noting that the social is *lived* as a network of reciprocal relationships among subjects, that is to say, intersubjectively. This implies, first, that human beings everywhere tend to conceive of subjectivity not only as encompassing others *but* as extending into the extrahuman world, with the result that objects, words, and ideas tend to become imbued with consciousness and will.[12] Although human worldviews tend to enshrine hard and fast distinctions between humans and animals, or living and nonliving things, these distinctions tend to be transgressed in practice and in the imagination, so that in explaining events retrospectively people will have recourse to sophistry as well as technical aids in deciding whether impersonal and transpersonal *forces* were at work (ancestors, gods, or natural, cultural, historical, and biogenetic preconditions, for instance) or personal *intentions* (love, witchcraft, ill will, goodwill, for instance), as well as how these may have combined to produce certain effects. This is what Zande refers to as deciding between the "first spear" and the "second spear,"[13] and suggests that in all societies people wrestle with the question of deciding the relationship between those things for which persons may be held accountable and those things for which they cannot.

While the tendency to act as if the object world were obedient to the ground rules of interpersonal life helps us cope with what George Devereux calls "the trauma of the unresponsiveness of matter," it remains largely illusory and variable.[14] As with alien others, the world of the extrahuman contradicts our anthropomorphic assumptions and proves refractory to our intersubjective strategies of constructive engagement and control. It may be comforting to believe that we can negotiate reciprocal agreements with enemies, appease the unruly elements with sacrificial

gifts, or strike bargains with the gods, but in reality the extrahuman world impacts upon us in unpredictable and ungovernable ways.

This brings me to a second point about intersubjective relations. They are characterized by struggle. To some extent we may see this as a struggle against alienation, though alienation understood as more than just the estrangement of a worker from his or her production. Thus, although Marx's main focus was on how a person loses himself in the object on which he labors, an object which then "confronts him as something hostile and alien," he also noted that a person may lose himself in alienating relationships with others—including the gods. "The estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man stands to himself, is first realised and expressed in the relationship in which a man stands to other men."[15] Intersubjective struggle also bears some resemblance to Darwin's struggle for survival, but the will-to-be cannot be reduced to the satisfaction of physical needs, the perpetuation of one's own species-being, or even the continuity of one's own society, for the scarce goods we compete for, lay claim to, or exchange on the grounds that they are essential to our existence are frequently elusive, indeterminate, and unstable qualities such as health, wealth, power, position, recognition, knowledge, dignity, happiness, and love. Though our very existence is felt to depend on the possession of such "symbolic goods," accessing and controlling them is difficult to achieve and almost impossible to fix. We are thus susceptible to feeling that being itself—in the form of everything from a sense of hope, a sense of purpose, a fulfilling job, a compliment, an improvement in our lot or time to ourselves—is something that must be constantly striven for. But to emphasize that this struggle for being occurs between people and not just vaguely, in relation to the world, is also to emphasize that in all human relationships the other is potentially a source of fulfillment *and* frustration, of being *and* nonbeing. And this ambiguity inheres in our relationships with both human and extrahuman "others," since in various contexts persons, animals, gods, spirits, material objects, and technologies all hold the potential to sustain our lives or end them.

Psychoanalysis traces this ambiguity back to the period of primary intersubjectivity, when an infant's dependence on the mother entails both affirmation and negation. As Devereux puts it, "the prototype of all panic caused by a lack of response is the reaction of the infant to the absence, or temporary unresponsiveness, of its mother."[16] Although we should be careful not to reduce all forms of sociality to the mother–infant bond, it is generally the case that human beings have great difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that others are seldom straightforward extensions of

themselves, and that distant others are not governed by the same ground rules that govern interaction with those we like to call our own. It is in this unstable relationship between self and other—and by extension, between human and extrahuman worlds—that our ambivalent attitudes to technology arise. Rather like the body in Cartesian thought, technologies are sometimes seen as extensions of ourselves—and as such, subject to our will. But at other times they are felt to be alien, invasive forms of nonbeing that subjugate us, undermining our very notion of who and what we are. Nowadays it is often argued that developments in cybertechnology and gene technology have all but abolished the boundary between nature and culture, automaton and autonomy, humans and things. And it is already a cliché that information technology has brought all humanity together in a single global village. Such views, however, do not reflect universal experience. Confidently objectivist in tone,[17] these arguments seldom take into account the numerous contexts in which doubt, anxiety, or powerlessness tend to make people dread such erasures of the line between themselves and others, or themselves and machines. In this respect the discourse on technology and the discourse on migrants and marginalized others run together, for both raise critical questions concerning not only our capacity to conceptualize the supposedly extrahuman as human but our ability to actually incorporate and control it.

The hypotheses I explore in the following pages are, first, that our human ambivalence toward new technologies must be understood against the background of our ambivalence toward others, and second, that the ways in which we experience our relationships with both persons and machines will depend upon the degree to which we feel in control of these relationships, as well as the degree to which these relationship are felt to augment rather than diminish our own sense of well-being.

Encountering New Technologies

My nine-year-old son Joshua is playing a "hard version" of a game on his Gameboy. The game is not going well for him. He flings down the machine and walks away, tears of frustration in his eyes. "It's not fair!" he exclaims. "What's not fair?" I ask. "It isn't fair. If you miss just one thing the game ends. It should give you another chance to get something. But it keeps on making me lose." It is not uncommon to hear people speak of their relations with machines in much the same way as they speak of their relations with people. When the relationship "works," differences between self and other are experienced as complementary rather than

antagonistic: everything is under control, reciprocity is balanced, self and other seem to be as one. But when the machine does not conform to human expectations of reciprocity or fair play, we get distressed and angry, much as we would if a person behaved unfairly toward us or failed to acknowledge a gift.

Consider, for example, human relations with computers. In his ethnographic fieldwork in a computer lab, Gary Lee Downey observed numerous instances of "boundary blurring activities." When he asked students directly if they "ever felt themselves merged with the machine," most responded defensively; they did not want to appear as "geeks" who were more comfortable with machines than persons and did not want to seem irrational or animistic (though one student admitted, "I'd probably say that I'm one with the computer").[18] Despite the students' reluctance to admit to any kinship with a machine, however, Downey's empirical observations led him to conclude that their experience of the boundary between themselves and their machines was continually shifting along a continuum: at times the students experienced agency as if it were located within them, sometimes as if it were located within the machine, sometimes somewhere in between.[19]

Although from an objective point of view a person and a machine are manifestly different entities, an experiential point of view reveals the extent to which our sense of being either essentially different from or symbiotically merged with a machine is a function of how we interact with it—specifically, how much we feel we understand it and how much control we feel we have over it. When this knowledge/control is lost, as Downey observed, people often feel vulnerable, frustrated, and outraged, as if the machine had somehow invaded them or taken something from them.[20]

Let us consider in more detail the kinds of things that happen when our relationships with machines "do not work" or "break down."

Some of the most sophisticated innovations in contemporary medical technology have been in the field of radiology. New imaging technologies, however, such as CT scanners, pose problems of adaptation and understanding for radiologists and problems of organization for the departments in which they work. In a study of four community hospitals in Massachusetts, Stephen Barley observed several strategies staff used to deal with the anxieties and difficulties they experienced with the new technology. Some of these were "ritual" strategies that created the impression that there was no problem, such as rebooting or downloading the computer when problems arose, and so making the problem "disappear." Others involved attributing technical problems to mechanical failures,

as if recourse to the language of the old technology could alleviate one's anxieties in dealing with the new. Still others were "magical" in character and involved addressing the computer as if it were a person. Barley's comments on this anthropomorphism are worth quoting at length:

As used by the techs, "THE COMPUTER" implied a mysterious force which, if not malevolent, was surely fickle.

. . . THE COMPUTER was said to be capricious; it had, in the techs' own words, "a mind of its own." THE COMPUTER was a sentient entity that "liked" or "did not like" commands, that acted "crazy," and that beeped when it wanted to say, "I'm hot." In the throes of a persistent problem, technologists beseeched THE COMPUTER to do as they desired, and the bold among them even insulted THE COMPUTER with word and gesture.

Most important, however, when events went irretrievably wrong, it was THE COMPUTER that was said to have caused the problem. Although THE COMPUTER always lurked in the background, the techs usually kept it at bay with their mechanical metaphors, their confirmatory strategy of problem solving, and the ritual solutions and superstitions that the confirmatory strategy engendered. It was only when these practical tools failed that techs resorted to anthropomorphic talk. To say THE COMPUTER was a cause was, in effect, to admit that one didn't know what was wrong.[21]

Two insights are provided here into what I shall call the intersubjective imaginary. First, the computer is addressed not as if it were an alien object but as something with which a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship is possible. As a corollary of this, the technicians' failures to understand or control the computer led them to behave toward it as they would behave toward a perverse or obdurate person—either ignoring it or trying to force it into a more responsive relationship with them. Generally, however, it is when relationships with a machine (or person) suffer "irreparable damage" that people begin to construct the other in terms of radical otherness—as an enemy, an alien, a threat. In this sense, the "breakdown" of relations with a machine, or within a marriage, or between two nations all tend to entail similar compensatory strategies and counterstrategies, whereby individuals seek to recover their own lost or compromised being.

Sartre's phenomenology of the emotions offers useful insights into these compensatory strategies, though I share Pfaffenberger's view that we would do well to bracket out questions as to whether "a given activity 'works' (i.e., is 'technical') or 'doesn't work' (i.e., is 'magico-religious')."[22]

Sartre's argument centers on the strong *emotions* that are stirred in us when we feel that machines have ceased to do our bidding or started to

behave in incomprehensible ways. This emotionality may be considered in two ways. First, strong emotions spontaneously arise when we are frustrated in our attempts to comprehend and control others or objects. But second, and most importantly, we work on and play up these emotions, making them the means whereby we "magically" recover our sense of lost power over others or objects. Nursing ill will toward an enemy, cursing an errant computer, kicking a flat tire, or pitying oneself for one's inability to stand up to a tyrant will not necessarily effect any change in the behavior of the object or other, but it may reverse one's experience *of one's relationship with it.* One becomes, imaginatively and retrospectively, the determining subject of the events that reduced one to the status of an object.

Clearly, when we are blocked from acting, emotionality is only one strategy for recovering our existential footing. We also focus on words, thoughts, and on our own bodies. Thus, in cursing a machine we cannot understand or manipulate, or in recounting a story about some humiliating event, or in inflicting injuries upon our own bodyself, we displace the role of the other and recapture a sense of our own subjectivity—of ourselves as actors rather than acted upon, as authors of meaning rather than victims of circumstance.

The problem is that this process involves splitting self from other—a split that may become entrenched and habitual, as in Luddite views of technology, chauvinist views of asylum seekers, and racist views of foreign bodies.

In turning now to the field of allotransplantation, I probe more deeply the existential conditions and the limits under which human beings can encompass radical otherness.

Between Self and Other: A Phenomenology of Allotransplantation

Although organ transplants (allotransplants) are often spoken of as "gifts of life," these gifts are ambiguous. This is not simply because a death is the precondition for the bestowal of this gift. It is because the giving of the gift is not grounded in any immediate social relationship between recipient and donor. As such the gift is asocial and resembles an alienated object, a commodity. This otherness of the donated organ creates feelings of deep ambivalence, disorientation, and anxiety in recipients. "Sometimes I feel born again," noted one individual; "sometimes I am very depressed." This emotional confusion often precipitates an identity crisis:

"Who am I? Where do I come from? I was completely dizzy. It was like the familiar me but the safety I had felt was no longer there. Instead there was a new person."[23] These crises reflect not simply the "foreignness" of the organ but the anomalous *relationship* of recipient and donor—the incorporation into the bodyself of a vital organ that belonged to a complete stranger, that is, so to speak, quintessentially not-self. This problem is undoubtedly exacerbated in cases of xenotransplantation (cross-species transplantation), when the organ is from an animal, and in xenophobic societies, where there may be strong resistance to receiving organs from foreign, "soul-less" sources.[24] Yet in every case, the struggle to incorporate or assimilate that which is construed as "other" is directly comparable to the struggle that, for example, characterizes the incorporation of in-marrying wives in societies with patrilocal residence, or the accommodation of immigrants, refugees, and outsiders in countries of asylum. What kind of reciprocity will exist between us and them?

Before detailing some of the intersubjective strategies typically used to imagine or negotiate some kind of identification with the "other," let us look at a case of transplantation where this struggle between familiar and foreign was absent, for it helps us see the extent to which the trauma of transplantation is a function of the experiential distance that exists between recipient and donor.

Valerie and Andrew Milne first met in 1993 through a lonely hearts column and married two years later. In March 1999, Andrew, forty-six, was diagnosed with an acute kidney infection. Valerie, forty, proved to be a perfect donor match, and the transplantation took place a year later.

Andrew comments: "The transplant made us feel more at one than we were before. We were pretty close then, but we have an extra-special relationship now. I've got a part of her inside me now. It's strange, Valerie is a chocoholic. Before the operation, I never ate chocolate, but afterward, I craved it. It seemed her kidney had transferred her addiction to me."[25]

What is compelling here is the image of union—of one incorporated in another, as in a love-match or marriage. Valerie comments: "When I found out that I had the same blood type as Andy, I had an overpowering feeling that I wanted to donate him one of my kidneys. It was the same type of feeling I had when I first met him and I knew we were meant to be together."[26]

This sense of intersubjective mergence—variously expressed in images of entwined destinies, spiritual affinity, marriage, friendship, or kinship—is not uncommon in cases of organ donation, *but in almost every case it has to be contrived and created*. Not surprisingly, it is the logic of balanced reciprocity that governs the creation of this intersubjective

imaginary. Sometimes this takes the form of donors demanding reciprocity for the gift of life by seeking to establish "long-term social relationships with recipients,"[27] or of transplant recipients trying to establish a social relationship with the donor's surviving kin. Sometimes an intersubjective relationship between self and donor is cultivated symbolically. Consider, for example, the case of Sandy, who received a cadaveric kidney from a woman who was killed in an automobile accident. When her body began to reject the transplanted organ, Sandy focused her "mind" on making her body accept the kidney. "And the only words I can put on it are just, it was sort of like, you know, 'Welcome' to this new kidney. You know, 'Welcome, kidney, this is your body. This is your home.' I've never been so focused on anything, ever."[28] In the case of Lena, for whom "all living things are part of a flow, a system of constant give and take," it was easy to be reconciled to receiving the organ of a "stranger." Likewise for Sylvia, who argued that "there are invisible links between people" that are reinforced by the ability of donor cells to remember their origins.[29]

For individuals who see the world as more deeply divided into mutually incompatible domains (animals/humans, humans/machines) the work of reconciliation is more arduous. Some individuals are fearful they will incorporate unwanted traits of the donor's personality, while others anxiously seek assurances that the organ is clinically sterile—cleansed of its association with the symbolically "dirty" world of not-self.[30] Often, as with Sandy, recipients personalize the organ they have received. In one case, the recipient baptized the liver she had received and gave it a name. "In the beginning it was something unfamiliar which was left to me to take care, I walked around holding it like when I was pregnant. I was surrounding the liver with my hands the way you hold your stomach during pregnancy. As time went on it was more like a gift which ought to be treasured."[31] Typically, too, recipients feel concern, regret, sorrow, and guilt that someone should die in order for them to live,[32] as if they had received a gift at another person's expense. To redress this imagined imbalance and reciprocate the gift of life, patients often conjure strong emotions of gratitude toward the donor, and the same compelling logic of reciprocity often gives rise to the kind of binding relationship, physical identification, and indebtedness between recipient and donor that we associate with balanced reciprocity and direct exchange. Because the gift *cannot* be fully reciprocated, however, there is often an emotional contradiction between the assumption of affinity and the practical problem of reciprocating the gift. Fox and Swazey speak of this as "the tyranny of the gift."[33] At the same time, because official medical discourse dismisses anthropomorphism as irrational, these stratagems of the imaginary are

often at odds with the objectivist, commoditizing, depersonalized language preferred by surgeons and other transplant professionals.[34]

In sum, it is difficult for human beings to entertain or tolerate an intimate, intercorporeal relationship with the world they think of as not-self. Yet when one's life depends on entering into such a relationship and receiving the gift of life from someone who is radically other, people have recourse to the strategies of reciprocity in order to make the relationship viable.

Anthropomorphism

The implicit argument of this chapter has been for seeing the classic antinomies of reason and emotion, body and mind, self and other, nature and culture, subject and object not as competing ontologies but as terms we deploy, variously and often interchangeably, to capture different modalities or moments of intersubjective experience—the sense that we are at times actors, in control of our situations, and at other times at the mercy of circumstances, and acted upon. In exploring how identity terms such as self and other are largely determined by the ways we interact with one another, I have suggested that the ways we think, act, and reason are grounded in the forms and experiences of sociality—specifically of reciprocity—and that these are universal.

Yet we still persist in seeing some societies as collectively governed by anthropomorphism, and others by scientific rationality—or some by the logic gifts, and others by the commodified logic of the marketplace. It is the same kind of division that led to the classic anthropological division between hi-tech and low-tech societies.

In Kroeber's seminal 1917 essay "The Superorganic," culture is etherealized; it is not only "extrasomatic" but excludes material culture and most of what we would classify as technology.[35] This idealist split between culture and technology is central to Plato and implicates other discursive divisions between theory and practice, and mind and body.[36]And this bias against technology, embodiment, and practice in philosophy presages the same bias in anthropology. In both cases, the world is divided into a world of subjects and a world of objects (the body often being assimilated, along Cartesian lines, to the object world as mere instrumentality, as *res extensa*). Phenomenologically, however, subject and object are not stable entities but simply words we give to two extreme modalities of human interaction—being an actor and being acted upon, being a "who" and being a "what." To speak of intersubjectivity is to recognize that

objects appear sometimes to be animated by human consciousness and will, and human subjects appear sometimes to be like objects, treated as if they were mere things. It is also to abandon attempts to draw a hard and fast ontological distinction between subjective and objective domains, for experience is continually switching between quite various senses of self and other, depending on the context and character of the interaction. As Downey's ethnography makes clear, even "human" agency is not a fixed attribute of persons; it will be *experienced* as oscillating between self and machine, depending on how well the person–machine relationship is working.[37]

Historically, the subject-object split, like the body-mind dichotomy, may be understood as a discursive strategy for drawing a line between ourselves and animals, and ourselves and things. Once this split is made, it is all too easy to associate anthropomorphic or animistic thinking with primitives, children, or the insane, and reason made definitive of one's own privileged preserve. Empirically, however, this distinction is neither substantial nor stable. It is not even that we project human consciousness and will onto machines, or try to imagine machines as persons, for intersubjectivity so shapes our experience from early infancy that it constitutes a "natural attitude" toward the world into which we find ourselves thrown—a world that includes persons, machines, words, ideas, and other creatures. It is thus no mystery that human beings should speculate over whether computers "think," or ask whether machines will "save" us or pose a "threat" to our existence; the questions are grounded in the habits of sociality well before they find expression in ethical or governmental debates, and reflect the ambiguity of all intersubjective life—the question as to whether the other, with whom I have yet formed no primary bond, is with or against me, friend or foe.

My principal concern, however, is neither the history of ideas nor epistemology, but the pragmatics of coping in everyday life. In trauma, the splits I've alluded to between body and mind, and person and machine, figure among the strategies people use when trying to make good an existential loss, or regain a sense of comprehension and control. As a general principle, people tend to turn from or flee the source of their distress and take refuge in some surrogate object that they feel more comfortable with, that they feel they "know" and can "deal with." If body is imagined to be split from mind, then body is made an object on which subjectivity can go to work, but from a safe distance. "You feel betrayed," said one individual after liver transplantation. "You can't trust your own body. In spite of all it hasn't become part of me."[38] In her research among infertile couples, Tjørnhøj-Thomsen observed that infertility can make a person

feel guilty about, or betrayed by, her body, though this loss of control over the "object body" is made good by various imaginative strategies of displacement and blaming. Thus one woman reasoned, "Maybe it is because I led a wild life in my young days; maybe my infertility is caused by some drugs my mother took during pregnancy." Said another: "It is good to know that it is not me, but something chemical in my body."[39]

A similar process of splitting separates words from world, enabling one to make use of language—particularly in the form of storytelling—as a way of obliquely and surreptitiously regaining a sense of mastery over events one has suffered passively or in silence.[40] In the face of anxieties provoked by new gene technologies, many people seek to reinscribe the blurred boundaries between nature and culture, or the human and the divine, in the belief that if nature and the divine are separate domains, they may become places of refuge. The same principle may apply to the splitting of machines and men, as shown in the poignant case of Joey—"a mechanical boy," reported by Bruno Bettelheim. Joey sought refuge in machines where others might find refuge in the world of other human beings. Unloved and rejected by his parents and starved of all human contact, Joey repudiated the human world altogether and came to imagine himself as a machine—ruled by mechanical routines and needs, and bereft of feeling. Though Joey was stuck with his belief, such fantasies are typical of the ways human beings invest in things that give them security when other objects of their will, affection, or desire thwart and negate them.[41]

Within the field of intersubjectivity, then, the object of our focus is continually shifting. What governs these shifts is the degree to which we feel existentially fulfilled. When a person experiences a radical diminution of his or her being in relation to another person or an object, he or she will seek to compensate for this loss by focusing on or identifying with a person or object where he or she feels recognized, complemented, or affirmed. Thus, in his study of software hackers and phone phreakers, Bryan Pfaffenberger notes that many of these marginalized individuals were seeking recognition, approval, prestige, and a greater sense of self-worth from a "central authority," in much the same way a neglected child might seek to capture the attention and love of a negligent parent by misbehaving in a clever and audacious way, regaining "entry to a world that has denied them."[42]

The problem with these compensatory strategies is that they are Manichean. That is, by affirming one object, one other, or one world, the antithetical pole becomes an essentialized and scapegoated symbol of absolute negativity. Thus men, anxious about their control of the social

world, conjure the image of the witch as the embodiment of chaos. Or nationalists engage in xenophobic rhetoric and conjure images of the minatory other in order to bolster their own sense of being. Or Luddites destroy all technology in their desperation to restore their sense of being in step with history.

Can we avoid these Manichean excesses? To what extent can we *live* with boundary blurring?

Critique of the Nature-Culture Opposition

Several recent writers have observed that the new gene technologies render the opposition between nature and culture obsolete. Because we can now manipulate genetic processes, the boundary between natural selection and cultural selection is blurred, and "the 'natural' and the 'social' are no longer to be seen as ontologically different."[43] Paul Rabinow calls this hybridized condition "biosociality," for nature becomes "modeled on culture understood as practice," with the consequences that "culture becomes natural" and nature becomes "artificial."[44] There are three problems with this sort of pronouncement. The first is ethnographic. Although technologies such as xenotransplantation (gene transfers between humans and other species) and transgenesis (humans receiving human organs) are new, there is abundant evidence that ritual and intellectual techniques for crossing the boundaries between animal and human domains (shape-shifting, totemism), or between nature and culture (fetishism, anthropomorphism), occur in all societies and at all times. Indeed, "primitives" possibly have no more or less investment in the separation of nature and culture than "we" do. The second point is political. If indigenous people insist on the strict separation of the human sphere on the one hand, and the sphere of divine or natural life on the other, it is often not primarily a statement of belief (cognitive commitment) but a strategic defense of local interests and rights against new technologies over which they feel they have little control or comprehension. Thus, in a submission to the (New Zealand) Royal Commission on Genetic Modification, the Maori Congress declared that "the Maori genome is a cultural resource " and that "Maori have the right to control their resources as their own . . . according to specific cultural preferences." But the political agenda behind this assertion is revealed in the ensuing clause: "Most of the previous 160 years has been characterized by Pakeha indifference to Maori cultural and spiritual values associated so intimately with their lands and their natural biodiversity."[45]

My third criticism is phenomenological and brings me back to a recurring theme of this book—that lived reality cannot be reliably inferred from the way reality is discursively constructed and cognitively represented. Although we may ontologize, essentialize, reify, or actively deny the symbolic contrast between culture and nature, or self and other, it is important to see these contrasts as part of the rhetorical strategies we deploy in struggling to strike a balance between our familiar, local worlds, in which we feel we have the right to command our own destinies, and a world of otherness, governed variously by global forces, by the gods, by contingency or elemental powers, in which we feel far less in command, and of which we have much less understanding.

To seek absolute separation between these domains is but one way of managing relations between them—hence the Maori Congress's decision to keep biotechnology out of the Maori lifeworld as a way of defending "effective *rangatiratanga*" (Maori autonomy). Such declarations do not, however, preclude the possibility of seeking rapprochement between opposing domains; indeed, Maori have done just this vigorously on economic, political, educational, and cultural fronts from the first years of contact and colonization. What decides the difference between building walls and building bridges is, as in any intersubjective encounter, the degree to which a person or group feels ontologically secure. The less one's sense of comprehension and control, the more one is likely to split self from other and construct the other as alien, minatory, dirty, or dangerous. To rephrase the famous Marxian formulation, we could say that when we do not feel existentially threatened by things, relations between things assume the form of relations between persons, but when we feel existentially threatened by other people, relations between people assume the form of relations between things.

This chapter had its beginnings in my conversations and encounters with refugees in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in the wake of that country's decade-long civil war. My subject is suffering—how it is borne and how it is explained by people in very different circumstances. The question of suffering is central to all religions and has, in recent years, become increasingly focal for anthropologists living and working among people enduring the effects of war, poverty, natural disasters, and epidemic illness. It is difficult to do justice to what people suffered in the Sierra Leone conflict, but one may venture to describe how people responded to their suffering. Here I emphasize something that struck me years ago, living and working in Kuranko villages—the way people are taught to accept adversity and endure it. It is the overriding lesson of initiation, when pain is inflicted on neophytes so that they may acquire the virtues of fortitude and imperturbability. Pain is an unavoidable part of life—it can neither be abolished nor explained away; what matters most is how one suffers and withstands it. According to this view, life is a struggle between one's inner resources and external conditions. To express this idea in a more existential vein, one might say that human existence is a struggle to strike some kind of balance between being an actor and being acted upon. At the heart of this chapter is a case history in which this balance between being an actor and being acted upon was catastrophically lost.

The Prose of Suffering

And I realized then the unmitigable chasm between all life and all print—that those who can, do, those who cannot and suffer enough because they can't, write about it. WILLIAM FAULKNER, *THE UNVANQUISHED*[1]

When I returned to Sierra Leone at the end of the war in January 2002, signs of the new dispensation were everywhere. At the airport, a placard in the old hangar that served as an Arrivals Hall read "Under Rehabilitation," reassuring visitors that this noisy, dismal shed was only a momentary inconvenience. "Welcome to Sierra Leone," said the billboard outside: "If you cannot help us, please do not corrupt us." At every city roundabout were banners announcing "Di Wor Don Don, Now Wi Di Pwel Di Gun Dem" (The war is over, now we will destroy the weapons), and downtown, in the crowded streets, there were poda-podas (local minivan taxis) called "Better Days Are Coming," "Human Right," and "O Life at Last." A fishing boat on Lumley beach had been named *Democracy*. Young men were wearing T-shirts saying "Forgive and Reconcile for National Development." And everywhere there were vehicles and offices belonging to NGOs and UN agencies, with "Reconstruction," "Rehabilitation," "Reconciliation," and "Resettlement" the recurring words. One could not help but be affected by this ostensible spirit of renewal. But how realistic was it? The foreign aid. The disarmament process one read about in the daily papers. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was beginning its work. Was this language of reconciliation not unlike the language of human rights, at once too abstract and too Eurocentric? A moral order imposed by the north upon

the south, and as such, simply a new variation of the old self-extolling theme of the white man's burden?

A couple of days after arriving back in Freetown I was stuck in traffic. Ahead of me a large truck, attempting to pass between the lines of parked and gridlocked cars, had scraped against the side of a poda-poda and come to a standstill. Verbal abuse was shouted. Passengers from the poda-poda joined the palaver. And the truck drivers pitched in for all they were worth. An unremarkable incident, except that the most vociferous participant in this slanging match was, I observed, a young man standing on the tailgate of the truck and wearing the ubiquitous "Forgive and Reconcile for National Development" T-shirt.

In the following pages I explore the lived reality behind the rhetoric of reconciliation and human rights, and examine the relation of notions of truth and justice to power. I am particularly interested in the contrast between what Veena Das calls "cosmologies of the powerful" and "cosmologies of the powerless"[2]—the ways in which explanations of violence, as well as strategies for enduring it, reflect people's differential command of social power. My point of departure is the war experience of a young Kuranko woman. Though I heard and recorded many stories in the course of my few weeks' sojourn in Sierra Leone, Fina Kamara's story is not untypical. And though I present it here as a single case, I think it illuminates something of what is at stake for many Sierra Leoneans in the postwar period, and sets the scene for a consideration of what Luc Boltanski has called suffering at a distance—the kind of suffering we liberal Westerners are wont to experience when confronted by the pain, distress, and misery of others, and find ourselves at a loss to do anything about it. Finally, I return to my Sierra Leonean story, and the way people there address the suffering of the war, to offer a critique of the way suffering is commonly construed in the affluent West.

Fina Kamara's Story

The day I went to see Fina Kamara in the amputee camp at Murray Town, the question uppermost in my mind had less to do with the trauma of war than how a person addresses the losses she has suffered, the injustices she has endured. How, when lives are shattered, can life be renewed?

Three years before I had read a story in the *Guardian Weekly* that concerned a rebel attack on the Kuranko village of Kondembaia in April 1998.[3]

Its focus was the ordeal of a young Kuranko woman and her six-year-old daughter. I had lived and worked in Kondembaia and was shocked by what I read, and so I visited the amputees' camp where Fina Kamara was staying.

Fina Kamara's husband was my field assistant's maternal uncle, and so Sewa and I had little difficulty locating her. After parking the Toyota 4-Runner and asking some kids if they knew where the people from Kondembaia were living, Sewa led the way through a labyrinth of alleys to the center of the camp. Though many of the refugees were living in makeshift dwellings, made of white-and-blue-striped UN plastic tarps pulled over lashed poles, Fina occupied a room in a disused barracks.

I recognized her at once from the photo that had appeared in the *Guardian*, and after Sewa had introduced me, I told Fina of the fieldwork I used to do in Kondembaia and the recordings I had made of Keti Ferenke Koroma's stories. I then showed her the clipping from the *Guardian* that I had bought with me. She looked at it without emotion or interest before passing it on to the other refugees, who, out of curiosity, had now joined us. No one commented.

When I asked Fina if she would mind if I tape-recorded her story, she raised no objection but wanted to know if she should speak in Krio or Kuranko. I suggested she speak in Kuranko.

"We were hiding in the bush for three months," she began. "We were afraid the RUF might come at any time and attack the town.[4] But then we received messages from Freetown and from ECOMOG to come out of the bush and return to town.[5] So we came out of the bush.

"One day we went to our farm to plant groundnuts. We returned to town that afternoon. Suddenly, we heard gunshots. Because there were ECOMOG soldiers in Kondembaia, we were used to hearing gunfire, but this time we were confused.

"The RUF came suddenly. They shot many people. They stacked the bodies under the cotton tree. Then they grabbed us. Their leader said they were going to kill us too. But then they sent their boys to bring a knife. My daughter Damba was six. They took her from me and cut off her hand. After that they cut off all our hands. One man died because of the bleeding. We ran. We fell to the ground. After some time we got up. Damba said, "Mummy, I am thirsty." By now all the houses were on fire. We went behind one of the houses. One of the RUF boys came and said, "What are you doing there?" I said, "I want to give water to my daughter." I gave Damba some water. Then I sat down and tied her on my back. We began running again, but they stopped us in the backyard of one

of the houses. One RUF girl said, "You move one step and I will shoot you." I had to go back. But there was a place behind the houses. We went down there. After a while I felt hungry. I found a mango but could not eat because my blood was all over it. A little while later I overheard the RUF saying it was time for them to leave. When they had gone, I found my son, and tied Damba on my back again and went to the bush. From there I came out on the road and sat down. I met my husband and uncle there. Everyone was crying. I told them to stop crying. We went to our farm, and in the morning we set off for Kabala. We did not reach Kabala that day because of the pain. It took us two days. People in Kabala said we were lucky; the Red Cross was there. After treating us they brought us by helicopter to Freetown here. We were taken to Connaught Hospital. They treated us there. Then we were taken to Waterloo. When the RUF invaded Freetown, we had to flee from Waterloo. We fled to the stadium. From there we were brought to this camp. If you ask me, this is all I know. We were ordinary people, we were farmers, we had nothing to do with the government. Whenever I think about this, and about the time they cut off my hand, and my daughter's hand, only six years of age, I feel so bad. Our children are here now. They are not going to school. Every morning we are given bulgur. Not enough for us. We are really suffering here. We only hope this war will come to an end and that we will be taken back to our own places. If we go back home, we have our own people there who will help us."

Three and a half years had passed since Fina Kamara's world fell apart, and she was still struggling to grasp how this could have happened. The rebels came and went within an hour. In this short time they murdered fifty people and mutilated another ten or fifteen. They also set fire to every building in Kondembaia, save the mosque, which they used as a kitchen, the school, the church, and a house where they stashed their belongings. Though Fina had spoken of the RUF, many of the rebels were in fact young junta soldiers, avenging their ouster from power a few weeks earlier when the Nigerian-led ECOMOG reinstated the elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Unable to defeat the ECOMOG soldiers or the Civil Defence militias, they took their revenge on the defenseless people who had allegedly voted for the government, or sheltered and supported the CDF. Of all this, Fina Kamara knew nothing. "We are ordinary people," she had told me. "All we do is go to our farms."

When I had asked her, "Do you think you will ever learn to live with what has happened?" she said, "I will never forget."

"Would it make any difference to you, if the people who did these dreadful things were punished?"

"I no longer waste my anger on them. But I will never forget what they did. When they burned my house, how can I forget that? When I look at my hand, how can I ever forget? I feel the pain constantly. Even now, talking to you, I feel it. At times, I can feel my fingers, even though they are not there."

When I saw my old friend Noah the following day, I told him of my visit to the amputee camp, and of Fina Kamara's description of the phantom pain she felt in her hand. The embodied memory of all she had suffered. But I was perplexed, I told Noah, by the way that Fina had explained her feelings toward those who had visited this suffering upon her, and upon her village.

Noah was ready for this conversation. He had come to see me at the home of his brother, Sewa Bockarie Marah (S.B.) the day before, only to be turned away at the gate. The soldiers and security guards had refused him entry, though they knew he was S.B.'s younger brother. Even now, the humiliation and insult rankled. "You see," he said, "how I am shut out. How I have no one inside who can help me. How I have to look outside for help."

I told Noah that when I had asked Fina Kamara what she might do to redress the damage that had been done to her and her daughter she said, "There is nothing I can do." And when I asked her what she thought about reconciliation, she used the phrase *m'bara hake to an ye*,[6] which Sewa translated as "I can forgive, but I cannot forget." What exactly did she mean by this?

"It's what you might say," Noah said, "when someone offends or hurts you, and you are powerless to retaliate. If, for instance, someone takes something from you without justification. Or insults and humiliates you for no good reason. Say a hawk came out of the blue and seized one of your chickens. What can you do? You can't get it back. The hawk has flown away. You have no means of hunting it down, or killing it. All you can do is accept, and go on with your life. But you don't really forgive, you don't really forget. You simply accept that there's nothing you can do to change what has happened. Look at me. I have no way of taking revenge on the rebels who took away my livelihood, but at least I can rid myself of them. I can shut them out of my mind. I can expel them from my life."

Noah's words were reminiscent of a passage in Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*.[7] Forgiveness implies neither loving those who hate you, nor absolving them from their crime, nor even understanding them ("they know not what they do"); rather, it is a form of redemption in which one reclaims one's own life, tearing it free from the oppressor's

grasp, and releasing oneself from those thoughts of revenge and those memories of one's loss that might otherwise keep one in thrall to one's persecutor forever.

"If I say *i hake a to nye*," Noah continued, "I am freeing myself of the effects of your hatred. I am refusing to hate back. But this doesn't mean that justice will not be done. Most of us here feel that God sees everything and that God will mete out punishment in his own good time. That's why we say, *Alatala si n'hake bo a ro*, God will take out my anger on him. So I might say, *m'bara n'te to Al'ma*, I have left it up to God. Same as they say in Krio, *I don lef mi yon to God*. I think this is what Fina Kamara meant. She was not saying that she forgives the RUF but that she is leaving it up to God to see that justice is done. Because how can you ever be reconciled to someone who has killed your father or cut off your hand? Reconciliation, forgiveness, forgetting . . . these are all relative terms. In Sierra Leone right now we are letting sleeping dogs lie. You understand? We are fed up with the war. Fed up with atrocities. If we talk about the war, it is not because we are plotting revenge or want to prolong the suffering. We simply do not want it to happen again."

Though Fina Kamara and Noah had found it expedient to give up all thought of payback, this did not mean they rejected the possibility of retaliation or the principle of *lex talionis*. Indeed payback is an open and vexed question in Sierra Leone. For who will see that justice is done? How can apologies atone for the material and social losses people have suffered. Who will pay for reparations? And will the trial of war criminals in special courts set up at both national and village levels simply rub salt into old wounds, arouse bitter memories, cause resentment and enmity, and set in train another cycle of violence?[8]

The people I spoke to were realists, acutely aware of what they could and could not do. Consider, for instance, the comments of Noah's brother, S. B. Marah, who was a prominent Sierra Leonean politician and leader of the House in Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's government. If S.B. was less forgiving when he spoke of the RUF, it was not because his anger was stronger but because he was in a stronger position. Justice was thus conditional on one's power to see that justice is done. Or, as Noah put it, "If you are in a position of power, you'll seek revenge, saying 'May my hake fall on those who have destroyed the country.'" S.B. echoed this point of view. When I asked for his opinion of the truth and reconciliation process, he said, "I come from a warrior family. My ancestors went to war. So with this war now, I wanted to fight to the finish. I wanted the fight to go on to the end, until the RUF were defeated. The president knows my views. He knows I was against the Loma Peace Accord. This was a useless war. The

perpetrators must be brought to justice and not forgiven. They destroyed us. In fact everything I worked for over thirty years they destroyed. So I do not forgive or forget."

S. B.'s attitude toward his thirteen-month-long detention in 1974, was, however, very different. When, in the course of researching his life story, I had asked him what he felt as he recounted his experiences in Pademba Road prison, and the judicial murder of his peers, he said, "It is painful, but it has happened, it has happened. But that is the price one has to pay if you go into politics." The RUF atrocities were something else. Something beyond the pale, something outside the bounds of what was human, and could not be forgiven.

Although S.B., Fina Kamara, and Noah were as different as any human beings could be, I was struck by their sober sense of what, in any given situation, was possible and what was impossible—of where the limits of their freedom lay. Westerners often speak of truth and freedom in abstract terms, and we are encouraged in the belief that there is nothing we cannot do if we put our minds to it. That there is no corner of the universe that is intrinsically beyond our understanding and control. No limit to our power to manipulate genes, to prolong life, to alleviate suffering, to mete out justice, and to find personal fulfillment.

What also struck me forcibly about Fina Kamara's story was not only her awareness of her own powerlessness but the absence of any dwelling on the self. There are, I think, two reasons why this was so. First is the Kuranko habit of recounting one's experience not as a singular, *personal* story, based on "autobiographical memory," but as a series of shared events, involving crucial *social* relations.[9] Thus, Fina and others who suffered in the war were well aware that the violence was arbitrary. If they were victims, it was because the rebels classified everyone who was not for them as being against them, and because they simply happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was not that they were singled out on account of their specific identity. This is vividly conveyed in the way Fina relates her story. It is only at the moment when her arm is severed, or when she tries to eat the bloody mango, that her narrative consciousness is fully on herself. At other times she is a part of the village, one among many, and she recounts events as they happened to "us."[10]

As a corollary of this emphasis on "we" rather than "I," Kuranko tend to construct experience as intersubjective rather than intrapsychic, though from an empirical point of view each obviously entails the other.[11] Although people suffered humiliation, bereavement, mutilation, and grievous loss in the war, no one spoke of unhinged minds, of broken spirits, or of troubled souls. Healing was sought not through words but

deeds. Not through therapy but through things. Fees to send children to school. Cement and roofing iron to rebuild houses. Grain. Microcredit. Food. Medicines. It may well be that a diagnostic label such as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) is empirically justified, but it is imperative that we acknowledge that intrapsychic wounds are not the burning issue for Sierra Leoneans but rather the material means needed to sustain life and ensure a future for one's children.[12]

This was vividly brought to home to me when Noah spoke about his son and daughter who had been abducted by the RUF. His son managed to escape during a battle to dislodge the Sierra Leone army from the town of Makeni, and returned home to Freetown and his family. Noah told him that he did not want to hear anything of what had happened. It made him feel bad. As for the boy, apart from saying he hated the RUF and would never forgive them for what they put him through, he craved only that his ignominy not become public knowledge. During the disarmament period, Noah urged him to go and find his weapon and hand it in to the authorities, but his son said "No, I want no record of the fact that I carried arms; I will not do it, even if I am paid millions of leones." As for the daughter, she was sexually abused and traumatized (Noah's word). When she finally came home, she refused to return to school. Like her brother, she was deeply ashamed of what had befallen her. Noah had to "talk and talk and talk to her" before she enrolled in a vocational school in Freetown and did a dressmaking course for a year. Noah told her, "You are not the only one this happened to. It happened to thousands. So you should return to school." "Now," he told me, "she is doing well at school and going on with her life."

Driving back to my hotel through the thronged, polluted streets of the east end, I kept thinking of how these people were no less imprisoned than my friend S.B. Marah had been in Pademba Road jail, when a smuggled message, a piece of meat, or a memory of his children's voices was enough to sustain him for several days.[13] In such dire situations we do not hope for much. We scarcely dream. Words fail us, conveying little of what we really feel. Or they are the wrong words, alien to our experience. In these circumstances, it takes all our will simply to endure. Explaining, judging, blaming are luxuries we cannot afford. And theodicy is not an issue, because, as Odo Marquard writes, a mouthful of bread, a breathing space, a slight alleviation, a moment of sleep are all more important than the accusation and defense of God.[14]

Around the time I was visiting refugees in the Freetown camps, I was reading W. G. Sebald's great novel, *Austerlitz* (2001). At one point in the novel, Sebald's main character recounts the history of the area around

London's Liverpool Street Station, in particular of a priory that, until the seventeenth century, had stood on the site of today's main station concourse, and was connected to the hospital for the insane and other destitute persons at Bishopsgate, which we remember as Bedlam. Austerlitz recalls how, on his many visits to Liverpool Street Station, he would obsessively try to imagine the location of the rooms where the asylum inmates were confined, wondering "whether the pain and suffering accumulated on this site over the centuries had ever really ebbed away, or whether they might not still, as I sometimes thought when I felt a cold breath of air on my forehead, be sensed as we pass through them on our way through the station halls and up and down the flights of steps."[15] This image of suffering seeping into the earth, and still haunting the place where it occurred so long ago, is, of course, suggestive of the way that suffering seeps into us, whose historical or social distance from it gives us little immunity from its ghostly influence.

Arthur Kleinman observes that the spectacle of suffering has become such "a master subject of our mediatized times" that the suffering of humankind now impinges on our consciousness to a degree that we find difficult to manage.[16] But though "compassion fatigue" may diminish our concern, and the commoditization of suffering dilutes and distorts our experience of human grief, calls for revolutionary change, relief, and reform go hand in hand with stratagems to distance or insulate ourselves—socially, psychologically, and politically—from this overwhelming exposure to otherness in the form of what Pierre Bourdieu calls *la misère du monde*.[17]

In what follows I explore the ways in which we address the suffering around us—we who feel we can do so little about it yet cannot dismiss it from our minds. Inevitably, this involves an evaluation of the burgeoning anthropological literature on violence and suffering.

Suffering at a Distance

When Bertrand Russell speaks of his "unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind," or Richard Rorty defines liberals as those for whom cruelty is the worst thing that people can do, or the anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes observes of suffering that "not to look, not to touch, not to record can be a hostile act, an act of indifference, and of turning away,"[18] we glimpse what has been at stake for conscientious intellectuals since the late eighteenth century, when the modern engagement with human inequality and suffering was first scripted. Until this time,

and despite lip service to Christian precepts of mercy and compassion, it was by no means natural or inevitable that people would be moved to pity by the spectacle of human misery. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, Rousseau's "innate repugnance at seeing a fellow creature suffer" had become commonplace in certain strata of European society, and the cry to end what John Adams called "the passion for distinction" was critical to both the French and American revolutions.[19] But men like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Tom Paine, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Owen, and John Adams, though exposed to the spectacle of mass suffering, did not themselves suffer the hardships, pain, and deprivations that moved them so deeply.

What was it, then, that drove these men to want to alleviate the suffering of "the people," en masse, and to create a world in which equal rights included the right to well-being and happiness, as well as the right to decide how one was governed? For the Americans, "the abject and degrading misery" of slavery and African-American labor "was present everywhere."[20] For European intellectuals, urban poverty and misery were equally ubiquitous and unavoidable, and it is possible that their revolutionary thinking was driven as much by the sheer awfulness of coexisting with such large numbers of distressed human beings as by enlightenment and compassion. This situation reflected the changes that had taken place in Europe as a result of industrialization. By the eighteenth century, the dense concentrations of people in cities, and the intensification of urban misery, meant that the effects of poverty, disease, overcrowding, and pollution could not be ignored. This was not just a question of how one related to the poor but of how one related to others who were strangers—of radically rethinking the grounds of *civilitas* and community in an urban setting. As Richard Sennett notes, the tradition of theater provided one strategy for reducing social ambiguity, and from the Reformation on people had recourse to a rich variety of wigs, cosmetics, and costuming to mark status and rank.[21] But marking oneself off *socially* from others did not alter the fact that one was *physically* unable to avoid them, and the poor became the subject of increasing concern and debate.

In 1818, the English poet John Keats visited the city of Belfast in northern Ireland. The scenes that met his eye are pretty much the same that a traveler encounters in many third world cities today, crowded with youngsters from rural areas seeking their fortune or people displaced by war. Since the turn of the century, rural poverty and the effects of the Industrial Revolution had "sucked so many people into Belfast that its population had expanded by 50 per cent." Keats, traveling with a close friend,

Charles Brown, was deeply troubled by the suffering he saw. "What a tremendous difficulty," he wrote his brother Tom, "is the improvement of the condition of such people—I cannot conceive how a mind 'with child' of Philosophy could gra[s]p at possibility—with me it is absolute despair." But Keats's despair at how this suffering might be alleviated gives way to an acceptance of life's unavoidable hardships and a fascination with how one might "convert the brutal facts of life into *perceptions* which might 'do the world some good.'" Subtly, the desire to reform a barbarous social system is tempered by a more fervent desire to transmute the suffering around him into a form that improves his own soul. "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?" he wrote to his brother George in 1819, observing that this "system of salvation" was very different from Christianity and did not "affront our reason and humanity."[22]

This turn to inwardness is, of course, characteristic of romanticism. But it is a turn that is born of a frustration to change the world *politically*. Faced with entrenched inequality and the impossibility of social change, the romantic falls back on his own emotions, his own thoughts, his own suffering—what Coleridge called "inner goings-on," Luc Boltanski calls a "metaphysics of interiority," and Sartre calls "magical action."[23] That is to say, when action on the world around us proves impossible, we have recourse to action on our own emotions and thoughts, thereby transforming the way we *experience* the world. Unable to flee an assailant, a person may faint. Unable to win an argument, a person may resort to verbally abusing his opponent. Unable to do anything about an impending crisis, a person may worry himself sick about it, as if this increase in anxiety will make some real difference. Unable to stop thinking about a traumatic event, a person may refuse to speak of it, as if silence will make the event go away—a view contained in the English saying "least said, soonest mended." These are not "games," Sartre insists, because we commit ourselves to magical activity as though our lives depended on it. Nor is it reflective; it is a mode of action that arises unselfconsciously, whenever our words fall on deaf ears, our actions prove inefficacious, our intentions are misconstrued, and our desires frustrated.

Let me quickly review some of the ways in which we create the illusion of acting to change the world by acting on ourselves—on the emotions and thoughts we conjure, and in the words we use.

One option is to magic the problem away by merging oneself with it—identifying so completely with the misery around oneself that the boundary between oneself and the object of one's concern is effectively dissolved. Van Gogh provides a poignant example of this empathic

identification. Writing to his brother Theo in the winter of 1880, Vincent confesses that his "only anxiety is: how can I be of use in the world?"[24] At this time he is preparing himself to be an evangelist among the coal miners of the Borinage region, west of Mons. In order to commit himself body and soul to the poor, he feels he must cut himself off from his family, to "cease to exist" for them. He neglects his appearance, goes hungry and cold, and gives the little he has to peasants and workers. But who is helped by this self-abasing sympathy? What good can come of this identification with the oppressed? Vincent feels imprisoned and melancholic. Frustrated in his efforts to alleviate the misery of humankind, he ends up seeking to annihilate his anguish by steeping himself in the suffering around him. But nothing is really changed. In his act of martyrdom, the martyr has simply made his own troubled conscience disappear by a sleight of hand, donning the sackcloth of those he had set out to save.

Another option takes the form of what Foucault calls "pastoral power."[25] By throwing oneself into the tasks and routines of administration, the suffering of others is no longer a spectacle to behold but a technical or logistical problem to be solved. In this exercise of administrative rationality, the suffering are metonymically transformed into an abstraction, a statistic, a "problem," a stereotype. Writing research reports, recommendations, and proposals, or participating in endless meetings in which the issue is discussed has the effect of both distancing oneself from the sites of suffering and sustaining a sense that one is engaged in a worthy task.

A third response to suffering is to intensify one's engagement with an individual sufferer, thereby reducing the overwhelming *general* problem to manageable proportions. John Berger's account of a country doctor in England provides an apt illustration. "Sassall meets anguished patients on his rounds—the close relatives of the dying, those who are ill and want to die, the immobilized who are made desperate by a kind of claustrophobic fear of their own bodies, the insanely jealous, the lonely who try to kill themselves, the hysterics." Sometimes Sassall is able to help these people, often he cannot, and becomes increasingly susceptible to their suffering. "To deny this," Berger writes, "he tries to compete with the intensity of suffering" by working as hard as his patients suffer. "His attitude to his work becomes obsessional."[26]

A more self-centered version of this heightened concern for an individual sufferer is to focus less on what one might do to alleviate the suffering than on one's own sympathetic reaction to it. By cultivating emotions of righteous indignation, anguish, outrage, or sorrow, one may fall into believing that one's own passionate intensity will make some

real difference to the sufferer. Slavoj Zizek calls this transmutation of pity into self-pity a function of a libidinal economy in which the feverish activity of the obsessional is predicated on the magical assumption that if he were to stop his anguishing, the dire situation that is the object of his concern would become invisible or worse.[27]

A fourth option consists in intellectualizing violence. Here, the lived experience of the sufferer is translated into a purely discursive reality—a problem not so much for administration as for analysis. This use of intellectual techniques for prioritizing signification over what Zizek calls "the senseless actuality" of the world suggests that theoretical meaning may be just one of many consoling illusions for making our relationship with suffering bearable and endurable—taming and domesticating it with words in order to make it seem safe.[28] But this option has real dangers, for, as Veena Das reminds us, in reconstituting suffering as something verbal, we may deny the reality of suffering as effectively as censorship and repression, since discourse all too readily dissolves "the concrete and existential reality of the suffering victim."[29] Though, in the words of Lawrence Langer, we may call for "a new kind of discourse to disturb our collective consciousness and stir it into practical action that moves beyond mere pity,"[30] it may be more realistic to admit that suffering brings us to limits of language.

A fifth option is to speak truth to power. Nancy Scheper-Hughes exemplifies this approach in her call for anthropology to become "politically committed and morally engaged" rather than a project of passively and indifferently chronicling life as lived, and she envisions a "new cadre of "barefoot anthropologists"—"alarmists and shock troopers" producing "politically complicated and morally demanding texts and images capable of sinking through the layers of acceptance, complicity, and bad faith that allow the suffering and the deaths to continue without even the pained cry of recognition of Conrad's [1910] evil protagonist, Kurtz: 'The horror! The horror!'"[31] Though this stance echoes the views of critical thinkers like Foucault, Sartre, Said, and Adorno (who wrote that "the premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again"),[32] a commitment to witnessing as a tactic for preventing violence and suffering may actually be compromised by its militant demands. As Adorno argues in his essay on resignation, "the uncompromisingly critical thinker, who neither signs over his consciousness nor lets himself be terrorized into action, is in truth the one who does not give in."[33]

What it means not to "give in" is very much at the heart of ethnography. It means coexisting with the subject of one's concern, sustaining an engagement over time, in his or her place, on his or her terms, and trying

not to escape into consoling intellectualizations, sympathetic identifications, or political actions that reduce the other to a means for advancing an academic career, or demonstrating what a compassionate person one is, or changing the world. It is a form of sustained communion. And though, as Michael Oakeshott famously put it, its analogue is conversation, words are not essential to this dialectic. Moreover, its aim is not to take it upon ourselves to redress the injustices of the world but to do justice to the way others experience the world, and whatever is at stake for them. As I see it, this necessitates placing oneself in the situation of the other—a sustained intimate, and often silent, involvement in his or her everyday lifeworld that inevitably transforms one's own worldview, and may involve the other seeing his or her situation from a new perspective. In this sense, the ethnographic method seeks not some form of abstract knowledge, but through a mix of osmosis and dialogue understands the other as oneself *in other circumstances*, and sees both self and other from the unsettling and unsettled space of the "subjective in-between."[34]

However, training "one's imagination to go visiting," as Hannah Arendt called this method of intellectual displacement,[35] is by no means straightforward.

Consider Arthur Kleinman's view that we do violence to others not only in the ways we act toward them but in the ways we speak and write about them. Kleinman argues that by subjecting the experience of human suffering to anthropological theorization, we violate that experience in much the same way as medicalization delegitimates the existential reality of illness. These "professional transformations" turn "an "experience-rich and near human subject into a dehumanized object, a caricature of experience." Kleinman goes on to urge that ethnographers of suffering resist categorization and stereotyping. The suffering should not be seen as patients or victims, nor the violated "romanticized or cynically deconstructed." Our task is to describe "what is at stake for particular participants in particular situations." [36] But the trouble with making "lived experience" and "what is at stake" into measures of interpretive adequacy or authenticity is that these terms are as abstract and general as any other. *Whose* experience is to be prioritized—the sufferers or ours? And do we privilege what is at stake for the liberal spectator or what is at stake for the sufferer—for the issues are seldom the same? With the best will in the world, it is as difficult to distance oneself from one's own assumptions as it is to embrace the experience of the other.

Consider, for instance, the seven and a half hours of conversation in August 1970 between James Baldwin and Margaret Mead that were transcribed and published as *A Rap on Race*.[37] While Mead approached race

academically, as a nonracist social scientist looking for answers, Baldwin was "bent on revealing pain and a larger 'truth' than facts can provide," and he privately rejected Mead's detached historical point of view because, as he put it later, "history was all very well but me and mine are being murdered . . . in time."[38] "History is the *present*, the *present*."[39] The communication difficulties here between someone who suffers racism as a traumatic everyday reality and someone who suffers racism at a distance imply the perennial difficulty of translating pain into a "shape fit for public appearance," for, as Hannah Arendt observes, "pain is at the same time the most private and least communicable" of all experiences.[40] But can the intellectual succeed in accomplishing what the sufferer cannot? Or are our attempts to communicate or publicize the pain of others little more than stratagems for helping us deal with the effects this pain has had upon us?

In a world in which human misery is increasing as the divide between haves and have-nots widens, and wars are waged for control over scarce resources, liberal-minded anthropologists may have no other options than those that have been invoked and deployed by European liberals for the past two hundred years. We all fall back on time-worn liberal assumptions that improved knowledge—in this case, ethnographic knowledge of people's lives in marginal environments—will somehow facilitate real, practical interventions, or that exposing the self-serving interests that lie behind the discourses of dominant states and corporations will somehow embarrass the rich and powerful into making life less burdensome and miserable for the powerless, or that describing the intolerable conditions under which the poor live and die will "speak truth to power" and somehow alter the way power is wielded, or we show that suffering is somehow redeemed by the creativity with which people rebuild and reimagine their lives, the patience and stoicism with which they go on. But these arguments are often forms of wishful thinking—ways of salving our consciences rather than saving the world—and make anthropology, in Boltanski's terms, a "politics of pity" rather than a "politics of justice."[41]

Boltanski's distinction builds on Hannah Arendt's observation that whereas compassion involves sympathy and solidarity with individual sufferers, pity is a "perversion of compassion" that creates a sentimental distance from those who suffer by lumping them together into aggregates—the refugees, the poor, the suffering masses. Compassion is thus unlike love, for it "abolishes the distance, the in-between which always exists in human intercourse."[42] There is thus an uncanny similarity between our anthropological strategies of suffering at a distance and the strategies of laughter and stereotyping. As Henri Bergson showed, the

difference between tragedy and comedy lies not in the essence or nature of the event itself but in the degree of distance we create between ourselves and the event. In comedy, the human condition is reviewed disinterestedly from a general rather than exclusively personal standpoint.[43] It thus involves *an absence of feeling.* But if laughing at people less fortunate than ourselves is the apotheosis of this transmutation of the singular into the categorical, as Bergson argues, so too is indifference, for as Michael Herzfeld points out, bureaucratic and administrative control over the complex and unruly reality of human life is accomplished by the very same techniques of stereotyping and generalizing that underlie the politics of pity.[44]

Hannah Arendt also notes that while pity is loquacious, compassion has difficulty with words. "Closely connected with this inability to generalize is the curious muteness or, at least, awkwardness with words that, in contrast to the eloquence of virtue, is the sign of goodness, as it is the sign of compassion in contrast to the loquacity of pity."[45] Though the anthropology of suffering does not always fall into this error of overgeneralizing, it rarely escapes the trap of excessive verbalizing—something that is, as Steven Sampson points out, symptomatic of our Western preoccupation with talk and with talking things through, and achieving reconciliation through dialogue and conversation.[46] This may reflect a belief that the intensity of our verbal response to suffering will somehow do justice to the intensity of the suffering itself. It may also be a misplaced attempt to compensate in words for the sheer banality of suffering—the fact that though it is so devastating to the sufferer, there is little that he or she can say about it, except recount the kind of matter-of-fact summaries of events that I heard from people in the refugee camps in Freetown. Violence is a form of excess, writes E. Valentine Daniel.[47] But loquacity too is a form of excess, one that risks doing violence to the very experiences it struggles to make sense of. This is why our language must be measured and tempered, rather than used to fill silences, or speak that which the sufferer cannot speak. And this is why we should learn the value of silence, seeing it not as a sign of indifference or resignation, but of respect. This is not shocked silence—as when one is struck dumb by events that beggar belief, or cannot be narrated—but silence as a deliberate choice. For there are certain events and experiences of which we choose not to speak. Not because they hold us in thrall, freezing the tongue. Nor because we fear they might reveal our flaws or frailty. Still less because we feel our words can never do them justice. Silence is sometimes the only way we can honor the ineffability and privacy of certain experiences.

This, said Miriam Cendrars, was why her father could never write his book on the life of Mary Magdalene, *La carissima*.[48]

In *L'homme foudroyé*, the French writer Blaise Cendrars refers to this work as his "secret book" on which he had been working for a year.[49] Titled *La carissima*, it was a fictional life of Mary Magdalene, "the lover of Jesus Christ, the only woman who made our savior weep." Though the book was never written, Cendrars described it as "the most beautiful love story and the greatest love that have ever been lived on earth."[50] The same experiences that compelled Cendrars to write this book also demanded silence. "His silence was its truth," writes Miriam Cendrars. "Had he written it, it would have been, for him, a negation of this truth. Its truth is preserved in his silence."[51] One thinks of Wittgenstein, who fought in the same war as Cendrars, though on the other side: "Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent."

Such silence may be, as in Africa, a way of healing and reconciliation, and not a way of evading or repressing an issue. Indeed, it may be a consummate form of coexistence. To sit with a neighbor or friend, saying nothing, may seem like a negation of intersubjectivity, but among the Kuranko it is a form of exchange, an expression of solidarity. And if one's friend has experienced loss, it is to acknowledge that loss, and what cannot be changed, at the same time as one affirms and demonstrates that the sufferer is not alone. Little is said, apart from the phrase *in toro*—you suffer—but in silence the social world is restored. Speech disperses the world, say the Bambara; silence reassembles it. Speech burns the mouth; silence heals it. The secret belongs to he who keeps quiet.[52]

I do not mean to make a prima facie case against acting to alleviate suffering or against speaking out against injustice. My argument is against judging human actions, including responses to suffering, in categorical terms, and for understanding each situation on its own terms. Consider, for example, the Hippocratic Oath that we do no harm. Sometimes it is very clear what is harmful and what is helpful; at other times, active intervention in saving a person's life may prove misguided and harmful. Similarly, while silence can often have harmful consequences, as when we assent, by our silence, to atrocious acts, silence is sometimes a way of healing, as in Cambodia, where many people have had recourse to spirit possession cults rather than storytelling in dealing with the traumas of the Pol Pot years.[53] For these reasons, one cannot be formulaic—arguing on a priori grounds for a particular course of action, or claiming that anthropology should be concerned with either ethical truth or scientific objectivity. Every human situation must be thought through anew, in

terms of what is at stake and what might follow from a particular course of action. There is, as the "liberal ironist" Richard Rorty puts it, no "final vocabulary" for doing justice to experience, changing the world, or speaking truth to power.[54]

Where, then, does our moral responsibility lie? My view is that we must have recourse to the phenomenologist's *epoché* and endeavor to examine each situation *as if* there were no universal measure against which to judge it, only various points of view that must be taken into account in exploring it. This means restoring to the notion of responsibility a sense of what it means to be responsive.

In the modern world, we have become so used to the idea that science can save us from an untimely death, and that the state can protect us from threats of invasion—chemical, military, or viral—that we expect, almost as a constitutional right, a painless life that is free from the kinds of adversity that afflicts the third world. But suffering is not only an inevitable and unavoidable part of life; it will always have to be endured with resources that science and the state cannot provide—resources we find in ourselves, and in our fellowship with others.

It is here that we may learn a little from the stoicism and powers of endurance I saw among the people I spoke to in the refugee camps in Sierra Leone. If we yield to *our* anguish over *their* anguish, we may all too readily rush to judgment, imposing our solutions on their situations, and dismissing the ways in which they deal with their adversity as something that would become unnecessary if they could share a life like ours. Perhaps, however, in our preoccupation with controlling the forces of life and death and insulating ourselves against baleful influences, we have lost our capacity to be open to the world and depleted our resources to cope with unpredictable hardship. In which case, the situation of the other may be seen not simply as one we want to save them from, making them more like us, but as one we might learn from, even if this means greater acceptance of the suffering in this world, less bellicose or concerned talk about how we may set the world to rights, and a place for silence.

My interest in phenomenological anthropology was born of an aversion to the view that lived experience could be readily deduced from the rationalizations, conceptualizations, and idealizations that comprise the dominant discourse of any given society. It seemed to me that our lives unfold in an ambiguous zone *between* received or given views of reality and our encounters with the ever-changing and often unpredictable exigencies of our life situations. Our experiences tend to carry us beyond what we have experienced before, confounding the stories we have told ourselves or been told by others, as well as the rationales we have devised and the worldviews we have embraced in making our lives manageable and meaningful. The knowledge claims we make on the basis of our experience or, for that matter, the experience of others—despite the gratifying sense they may give us of having firmly grasped the truth of things—are without foundation, however. It is to Kant that we owe this argument against what he called "the paralogisms of pure reason," in particular the mistake of moving from a necessary feature of our *representations* of the world to a conclusion about the world's essential *nature*. We may have a strong sense of being substantial selves that remain consistent over time, or we may have had an overwhelming experience of satori (disappearance of the ego, union with the One), but in neither case can we draw ontological conclusions about the nature of the experiencing person or the nature of the cosmos. The importance of Kant's argument for anthropology is that it undermines some of the classical ontological distinctions we have inherited (tradition versus modernity,

communitarianism versus individualism, irrational versus rational, structure versus agency, etc.) and urges that we turn our attention to the specific conditions and particular interests that govern the ways in which people choose to interpret and represent their experiences to themselves and to others. This essay, based on fieldwork among the Warlpiri of Central Australia in 1990–91, offers an empirical illustration of the variability and multiplicity of human experience. By implication, hard and fast distinctions between Warlpiri and Western cultures *or* natures are unwarranted. Beyond this conclusion, however, lies my hope that anthropology will recover a balance between its focus on particular societies or social fields and its fascination with what is common to people everywhere, despite idiosyncratic, religious, or cultural differences.

On Autonomy: An Ethnographic and Existential Critique

Critics have claimed that the liberal conception of the person, reflected in standard models of autonomy, under-emphasizes the deep identity-constituting connections we have with gender, race, culture, and religion, among other things.
JOHN CHRISTMAN, "AUTONOMY IN MORAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY"[1]

At the heart of Kant's moral philosophy was a conviction that human beings are capable of rational judgment and autonomous action. Kant's assumption that moral beings can think for themselves and act on the basis of their independent judgments is echoed in the anthropological concept of agency, for just as autonomy implies that individuated being can transcend socialized being, so agency implies a resistance to structure. These romantic conceptions of a person rising above his or her circumstances, determining his or her own destiny, and standing out from the crowd never entirely escape the implication that collective existence is an inferior form of life and that those who supposedly live in such lifeworlds are inferior sorts of human beings. Even those thinkers whose focus is the human anguish of struggling for a sense of separate identity without losing a sense of union and solidarity with others do not always overcome their ambivalence toward the social. Although Hannah Arendt argued that private experiences "lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a

shape to fit them for public appearance," she insisted that many private experiences, such as love, are degraded by being made public and that the public sphere may all too readily assume the bloblike, totalitarian, and alienating form, such as Heidegger described as *Das Man*.[2]

Otto Rank argued against this conflation of autonomy with an individuated "I" by emphasizing the anxious *relationship between* the will to separate and the will to unite.[3] Deeply influenced by Rank's thinking, Ernest Becker spoke of the existential impossibility of ever reconciling these competing imperatives. "Man wants . . . to lose his isolation and keep it at the same time. He can't stand the sense of separateness, and yet he can't allow the complete suffocation of his vitality. He wants to expand by merging with the powerful beyond that transcends him, yet he wants while merging with it to remain individual and aloof."[4]

Although many social scientists have reified "I" and "we" modalities of consciousness in false antinomies between individualistic and communitarian societies, I argue that in all human societies a tension exists between two different senses of moral personhood and autonomy. Whereas the first reflects a consciousness of being different from others, the second reflects an awareness of what one shares with others—a *common* identity as a family, community, social class, ethnicity, or nation.[5] Autonomy may thus refer to self-governance, in which a person is true to his or her own moral code, *and* to collective autonomy,[6] in which a group seeks to determine its destiny according to its own laws, customs, and values. But these two notions of a subject as an individual person and as an assemblage are mutually entailed.[7] Individuals tend to identify themselves as members of abstract or collective categories, just as political relations between states have recourse to metaphors of interpersonal life as amicable, antagonistic, tolerant, or intolerant.

Rather than assume that autonomy exists—either in the Kantian sense of self-governance or the political sense of self-determination—I explore, through a series of critical events that occurred during my fieldwork among the Warlpiri of Central Australia in 1990–91, the pragmatic advantages of making strategic shifts between particular and general modalities of autonomy, as well as throw light on what is at stake for Aboriginal people in their claims for autonomy within the Australian nation-state.

Tanami Desert, June 1990

In the course of a long day's journey, I had left the road to explore a soakage and campsite that Nugget Jangala, a Warlpiri man in his sixties,

had known in his youth. With the Toyota Land Cruiser bumping and lurching over the broken ground, bashing through scrub and porcupine spinifex, I steered according to subtle movements of Nugget's hand—the same movements, made in silence, that men use when hunting. Behind me, an elderly woman, Nora Nungarrayi, was sharing with my wife Francine her own memories of this country. From time to time, she would ask Francine to get me to stop the vehicle so that she, together with her daughter and granddaughters, and the old men who were also traveling with us, could get out of the vehicle and walk around. While the men inspected the ground for the spoor of animals, the women and kids combed the scrub for bush tomatoes and bush raisins. Nora appeared rejuvenated. As her daughter Wanda and the kids blundered after her, yelling for Francine to bring plastic bags that they could fill with bush tucker, Nora dragged Francine through the spinifex, regaling her with stories of how she used to walk through this country in her youth. When she stumbled and fell, she picked herself up laughing and went on pointing out places on the horizon that had figured significantly in her life, and where, as a young woman, she had hunted. Eventually we resumed our journey. Wanda, who grudgingly translated some of her mother's reminiscences, seemed to get more and more morose. She kept telling Francine about a place where "Japaljarri passed away, where Japaljarri turned into a tree." Half an hour later we stopped near the place Wanda had been talking about. I was shocked to see that Nora was in tears. The men said nothing. But Wanda jumped out of the vehicle and led Francine and I across sparsely grassed ridges of red sand to a desert walnut tree. One branch of the tree had been snapped off in a desert tornado. It lay on the ground, surrounded by withered foliage. This tree, Wanda explained, was Nora's father. Nora was walking about with her face streaked with tears. "She's crying!" Wanda exclaimed, as though this might amuse us. Japaljarri was indeed Nora's father. One summer he had gone north to meet up with other countrymen and perform ritual at Kunalarunyu. When the ritual was finished he set out for home. But the dancing had tired him. He fell asleep where the tree now stands and died there in the morning. "So he was your grandfather?" I asked Wanda. "He true bloke," Wanda assured me. "He bin pass away here, turn into this tree." She pointed with her lips at the fallen branch. "He goin' to lose his other arm now, my grandfather, poor bugger." Nora was still crying, wandering away into the spinifex and inspecting the ground for traces of the past. Pincher Jampijinpa, Nora's son, came up behind me. "Her father's *pirlirrpa* is here," he said, "his *kuruwarri*." Both words mean roughly "vital essence," the first residing within the body of a person, the second within the body of the earth. Pincher

then told me that his mother's brother used to get drunk and come to this place. "He used to sit under the tree and cry too, like my mother is crying. Crying for their father."

Tanami Desert, July 1991

Heavy rain had fallen in the desert, and a gasoline tanker headed to a remote gold mine had become bogged on the Tanami road. After radio calls for help, the mining company dispatched a grader to haul the tanker out of the mire and create a detour. In the process, a desert walnut tree was knocked over and destroyed—the very tree at which we had stopped and looked around thirteen months before. It marked a site on an important Warlpiri Dreaming track (*ngarrka*, "initiated man") where, according to mythological accounts, an ancestor-hero, Yunkuyirrarnu, and other initiated men had camped with their wives and several uninitiated boys during an epochal journey from the north. Since I had firsthand ethnographic knowledge of this locality, I was contracted by an Aboriginal organization to investigate the mishap and find out if the "owners" of the site wanted to seek compensation for damages in a court of law.

Once word got around that I was investigating the destruction of the site, I had only to mention "that *watiya*" (that tree) and faces would darken with sorrow and anger. Billy Japaljarri, an eccentric individual at the best of times, looked at me as if I were *warungka* (socially inept) and should not need to ask. "We all sad for that watiya," he said. "Everyone is full of anger and sorrow, specially the *kirda* and *kurdungurlu*"—those who were patrilineally and matrilineally related to it. "The tree was *tarruku* [sacred]," Wilson Japangardi said. It was not really a tree, but the life essence—the *pirlirrpa*—of a person. The tree was the *yuwirnngi*, or Dreaming spirit, of Yunkuyirrarnu. "Everyone was grieving for that old man," Wilson said. Later, I talked to Clancy Japaljarri, who bore the same name as the Dreaming hero. "If you spoil a Dreaming place," Clancy explained, "you destroy the people that belong to that Dreaming place." His argument was that the loss of the life (*pirlirrpa*) of the tree entailed a corresponding loss of life among those who called the tree "father." Both the tree and those who held this patrimony in trust shared the same Dreaming essence. This was why the "fathers" of the damaged site were so worried. They felt that someone would sicken and die now that the tree was dead. Their anxiety was compounded by a suspicion that perhaps they had not done everything in their power to safeguard the site.

The words they used conveyed emotions of feeling sick in the stomach and filled with a sense of inner worthlessness. The remorse went so deep that there had been talk of people singing themselves to death.

Clancy kept using the word *wajawaja-mani*, which suggested not only the loss of the tree but the loss of a link to the past. "We feel the same way when a person passes away," Clancy said dolefully. "We pity that person, we feel great sadness for them." Clancy touched his abdomen to show me where these emotions were most deeply felt. He paused for a moment, then added: "I'm sad now. I can't show my children that tree. My father told me that Dreaming, but I can't show it to my son."

Old Lumi Jupurrurla spoke of the Yunkuyirrarnu site as *mukanypa nyayirni*—"really sacred." It was something "money can't buy." "That proper dear one," he told me, "'im dear one." It was exactly the same way one spoke of a person who was near and dear. But this value does not consist solely in the sedimented meanings of the past at a place one thinks of as sacred; it depends on the generative activity of people in the here and now. We owe to Marx and Engels the insight that labor and begetting are both reproductive activities. In the metaphor of birth, Warlpiri recognize the same connection. Hunting and gathering, food sharing, initiation and marriage, bearing and rearing children are all expressions of a mode of activity that is at once social and visceral—the activity of bringing life into being and sustaining it. The Warlpiri metaphor for this sustaining activity is "growing up." To "grow up" (*wiri jarrimi*) implies a process of nourishing and strengthening. The metaphor holds good for rituals of increase, the activity of making boys into men, raising children, and upholding the Law.

The sacred is synonymous with this generative power. For Warlpiri, the value of any site is given to it cumulatively through the vital and concentrated activity of those who hold that place in their care. This implies social value, since caring for a site or performing a ceremony at the site involves creating and affirming relationships among those who call the site "father" (those patrilineally related it), those who have "drunk the breast milk of that place" (those matrilineally related to it), and contemporaries and countrymen on whom have been bestowed honorary rights of ritual affiliation. A site thus assumes an ethical and economic value proportional to the social value placed on the networks of people who perennially perform the ritual work of reembodying and reanimating—in stories, songs, paintings, and dancing—the potential vitality of the place. In the absence of this activity, a site does not cease to possess value; rather, its value becomes latent. If the site is rarely visited and

ceremony never performed there, this latency and silence may take on negative connotations. The site may be seen almost solely as the haunt of ghosts, an object of sorrow and loss, a subject of fear. In other words, the intersubjective relation between people and country loses its vitality in the same way that a body wastes away through lack of activity, or the bonds of kinship fall into abeyance when people lose touch with one another, or the deceased become dangerous shades.

Perhaps the most compelling insights Warlpiri informants gave me, however, concerned the effect of their feelings for the destroyed site. Displays of grief over the destroyed site were a way of bringing home to me not only the *social* value invested in the site but the existential loss people had suffered in having their voices ignored, their land trampled on, their views unrecognized, and their pleas dismissed.

Clearly, two senses of autonomy were implicated here. The first reflected the individual's rights and responsibilities in relation to the sacred rite, reckoned in terms of relations of kinship (*jukurrpa warlalja*), affinity (*jurdalja*), and ritual association (*walya warlalja*).[8] The second reflected a collective sense of having rights to land, language, and law *as Warlpiri*. In making a case for indemnification, however, Warlpiri articulated personal grievances as collective outrage, undoubtedly because a common complaint or class action suit would carry greater weight than individual claims. Pragmatic considerations therefore determined both the rhetoric chosen and the actions demanded.

Clancy mimed the stabbing action of a spear and made as if to eviscerate himself. Just as the belly (*miyalu*) was the seat of a person's life force, so a sacred site was the *miyalu* of the land where the life force of a people was concentrated. The whitefella who had disemboweled the sacred site should suffer in kind, paying for his error with his own life. That was the Law.

More realistically, Old Jangala said, "We got to hurt those whitefellas, so they're more careful in future. We got to make them pay."

"We say money is the whitefella Dreaming," Clancy explained. "They make a lot of money, they want a lot of money, so if they have to fork out money, that teaches them a lesson."

"How much are you asking them to pay?" I asked.

Clancy named a sum. Given everything that he had told me, it seemed a paltry amount.

Neither blood vengeance nor financial compensation was the real issue, however, which became clear when I spoke to the older men at an initiation camp a few days after they had performed ceremony at the site in the presence of the white miners, showing them rarely seen sacred

objects in an attempt to impress upon them the seriousness of what had happened.

Interrupting the card game that was going on, I asked if the miners had understood what was revealed to them.

"Those *kardiya* alonga Granites, don't understand *yapa* side," Joe Jangala said.

"Those miners have to go through *yapa* first," Frank said. "Sometimes they don't ask no one alongside them. When whites get the OK to come on, they think they are free to do what they like."

The anger cut deep. Japanangka turned from his cards. He was wearing a T-shirt in Aboriginal colors. His curly white hair was dirtied to rust and the stubble on his chin was like mica. He too had taken part in the ceremony. "Did they catch that man who knocked that tree over?" he wanted to know. "Did they get 'im? What they goin' to do to him? They bin punish 'im yet?"

Pepper Jupurrurla saved me from having to come up with an answer. Tossing in his cards and struggling to catch his breath, he embarked on one of his long-winded explanations of the Law. "In the old days you signaled with fire smoke if you wanted to cross other people's country. You waited until you were asked. Same if you shared in other people's ceremony. You got to be invited, you got to be asked. But in those days we couldn't stop those whitefellas. We had to be friendly, to get tobacco, matches, and tucker, so we tried to work along together. But they too strong for we."

"We got to put a stop somewhere," Joe broke in. "We know we bin robbed. Whitefellas have to wake up to themselves, to Aboriginal people. They got to work with Aboriginal people and try to make a deal with us when they're going through Aboriginal lands. Whitefellas have to go through Aboriginal people first."

Frank Jungarrayi tilted the Stetson back on his forehead. His voice was harsh and deliberate. "We gotta push 'im properly. We worry for that business all the time. We worry too much because they bin knock down sacred trees for us. Really worry. They got to pay up. We want that money now!"

Frank's vehemence triggered an angry chorus. The card game was over. Even Zack was awake and listening.

"This isn't bullshit," Joe rejoined. "We not just making this up."

"White people cheating us for money," Japanangka said. "Rubbish money. They gotta pay us properly."

Under this barrage, the last thing I wanted to do was play devil's advocate. But I needed to know what the men thought about the miner's

mitigating plea that the destruction of the tree had been a regrettable accident.

The men listened as I stated the non-Aboriginal case. Their expressions were obdurate and unimpressed. When I had finished, Frank was first to speak. No longer belligerent, he now seemed at pains to help me grasp something that was obvious to any Warlpiri. If a sacred tree simply grows old and dies, that is all right, Frank said. But if a person damages or cuts down such a tree, that person must pay with his or her own life.

"But what if that person did not know the tree was sacred?" I asked.

"Everyone knows!" Frank said. He reminded me that boys were taken on long initiatory journeys across the country and shown sacred places, instilled with knowledge of the Dreaming and their responsibility for the land.

"But what of whites?"

"Those whitefellas knew about the tree," Frank said.

For Frank and the other men, knowledge was something you lived. It wasn't something you bore in mind but never acted upon, something to which you simply paid lip service. And it certainly wasn't something abstract, which you wrote down on a piece of paper, filed away, and then forgot. That was why there was no excuse, no extenuating circumstance, for what had been done. Indeed, the destruction of the tree suggested not ignorance of its significance but negligence, calculated indifference, and possibly malice.

How could the situation be redressed?

Archie rolled a cigarette and lit it. There would have to be payback, he said. "That tree held ceremony."

Wilson explained that people had been shamed by what had happened. *Kurnta* connotes both respect and shame.[9] Only by taking action to exact retribution could a person lift the burden of shame from himself. That was why people were demanding compensation. The whites had acted without any regard for Warlpiri values. Warlpiri had been demeaned. By paying compensation, whitefellas would demonstrate respect, and everything would be "level," "resolved," "square and square."

In the ultimate scale of things, the destruction of the tree was transitory. Damage to the bedrock had not been done. Already saplings were springing up from the ground at the site—a sign of the vital ancestral essence embedded there.

Wheezing and struggling for breath, Pepper spelled out his idea of making the whitefellas tote water to the despoiled site, where several small desert walnut trees were already springing up.

"We bin tell 'im really, we all worry for that watiya. That's not really a tree, that's the spirit of an old man. Those kardiya got to grow 'im up again, water 'im every time. If they carry water, grow that little one, look after 'im, all right, we'll be happy for that."

I asked if the new trees sprang from the same kuruwarri as the tree that had been destroyed.

"That walya is still there," Wilson explained. "The tree got knocked down, but the kuruwarri is still in the ground." Wilson drew an analogy with a tree whose trunk is sawn through above ground: though felled, its roots remain intact, enabling the tree to grow up again.

Even the insult and injury people had suffered would be forgotten once compensation had been paid and whites acknowledged their mistakes. So ran the Warlpiri reasoning. But could one reconcile this reasoning with the scientific rationality invoked by politicians when justifying the nation's pursuit of what they called "the general good" or "the national interest"—a rationality they assumed to be a part of a Western cultural essence and therefore lacking in Aborigines?

Despite successful land claims to traditional land and national apologies to Aboriginal people whose birthrights were stolen and undermined by assimilationist doctrines, or well-intentioned but paternalistic whites, Aboriginal people still struggle to have their rights recognized as "bosses for ourselves." As the Warlpiri scholar and educator Steve Jampijinpa recently explained, six vital and interconnected life principles are implicated here: *ngurra* (home), *walya* (land), *kuruwarri* (law), *purlapa* (ceremony), *jaru* (language), and *warlalja* (family). If one of these life principles is not strong, others will be weakened and not work. Both personal health and collective survival depend on the integration and strength of these core values.[10] And these cannot be achieved while the Australian state denies Aboriginal autonomy and non-Aboriginal Australians regard Aboriginal values as primitive and irrational obstacles to the integration of indigenous people into the nation-state. In Yuendumu I once asked Sam Brown Jakamarra what people meant when they spoke of a strong community. "Did they mean strong leadership?"

Sam replied, "No, not really. It means being independent of government control." He explained how the community had recently solved the problem of petrol sniffing among local kids. The kids had been shamed in front of the community—held across forty-gallon drums and publicly thrashed. Those responsible for the delinquent kids had had to promise that they would take proper care of them. Petrol sniffing ceased to be a problem. "But you don't see that on TV," Sam said ruefully. "You only

see Aboriginal kids sniffing petrol and getting into trouble. Aboriginal people are always made out to be problems that only white people know how to remedy."[11]

Like the Warlpiri, claims to autonomy among the Mardu of the Western Desert also invoke the incompatibility of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal law. It is not that the Mardu repudiate policing "for protection" or turn their backs on outside resources such as cash, schools, stores, and health services; rather that they seek to determine for themselves the ways in which they will combine indigenous and imported resources. As Robert Tonkinson observes, for Mardu "autonomy spells not only freedom from paternalistic and authoritarian strictures but also avoidance of the hard yakka that Whites used to demand, and continue to expect, as the means to Mardu advancement."[12]

Still, one cannot fully understand why Aboriginal people should want to keep their distance from whites unless one knows something of their experience of the whitefellas' world. The Aboriginal desire for separateness is not simply because their values are incompatible with white values; it is because of bruising personal experiences of entering non-Aboriginal social space—schools, hospitals, shops, restaurants, prisons, suburbs, and streets. More corrosive than the explicit intolerance, condescension, and racism one sometimes encounters among whites are the myriad ways in which one feels inept, uncomfortable, and diminished in a habitus that is not one's own and in which one has no recognized place. Public spaces confront one as an adversary might—foreign, forbidding, and minatory—and people complain, "I don't feel comfortable going there. It's not our place. We don't belong." Moreover, the space of the other is like the gaze of someone who has greater power than oneself; it fills one with a diffuse sense of shame. As Sartre puts it, such "shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being an object; that is, of *recognising myself* in this degraded, fixed, and dependent being which I am for the other."[13]

In June 1990, my wife and I were returning to Lajamanu after spending several days at an Aboriginal festival at Barunga. After picking up the various people who had come from Lajamanu with us, we headed toward the town of Katherine. It was late in the day, and everyone agreed that we should camp overnight in Katherine rather than drive the remaining three hundred kilometers in the dark. Warlpiri people usually camped in a truck depot near the center of town, but we found the gates locked. As for the cheap hostels where Aboriginals often stayed, there were either no vacancies, or there were too many drunks, or no one had money for a room. After driving around for half an hour, I noticed signs indicating

a caravan park and suggested we camp there. In Aboriginal Australia, such directness is considered socially crass, and most communication is circumlocutory, using conditional phrases, studied silences, pregnant pauses, and indirect speech in order to avoid giving the impression that any one person is determining the course of events for others. But I was weary, and when no one demurred, I followed the signs for about seven kilometers and came to what resembled an immense park or golf course, with eucalyptus saplings everywhere, well-watered turf, and a breeze-block reception building. I paid sixty-five dollars and drove to a place well away from the parked caravans and the astonished, curious, though not reproving gaze of the white campers sitting on their folding chairs, at their folding tables, eating dinner in the dusk.

A few days before, when we arrived at Barunga, we had located the Lajamanu "mob" near the creek beyond the softball oval. After we had lit fires, spread out our bedding, and brewed tea, we wandered toward the sound stage ,where an Aboriginal band was playing pounding, driving, rock music and singing of freedom and pride in Aboriginal culture. Now, by contrast, as I parked the Toyota in the camping ground, everyone was silent, solemn, and hesitant. No one made a move to spread out the swags, collect firewood, or light a fire. Old Japanangka sat on the ground with his boomerangs. The Nakamarra sisters—Beryl and Pompidiya—sat apart and began playing cards. Japanangka's wife looked sheepishly at the ground. It was suddenly very clear to me that this camping ground was, for these people, a camp in name only. It wasn't just because there were no shade trees and no firewood; it was because this was, as Liddy said a little later as we drove away, a "*kardiya* [whitefellas] place."

That night we finally found a camping spot at a place called Morrow's Farm—owned by retired missionaries—where Aboriginal people were welcomed and made to feel at home. As we laid out our swags there, built our fire, and cooked food, people said how good it was to have gotten away from the drunken fighting at Barunga and "that *kardiya* place." Clearly *kardiya*, in this context, had less to do with whites per se than with places one felt one did not belong. It was then that I recalled all the rubbish dumps, truck depots, riverbanks, riverbeds, "city outbacks,"[14] and patches of wasteland where Aboriginals camped in "white" Australia—the only places they could make their own, and then only because they were, for white Australians, safely out of sight and out of mind. That night, as Japanangka sang himself to sleep with songs of the emu dreaming, I tried to ignore the whining outback singer at the nearby Historic Springvale Homestead, singing "Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport," as part of an advertised "Aussie Dinner and Show Including Aboriginal

Corroboree." The irony was compounded next day as we drove away, and I read the sign on a lamp post announcing "1988 Territory Tidy Town Winner. Best Tourist Facility."

Another anecdote from the same fieldwork period also has to do with place.

I had been camping near the Granites goldmine with Zack Jakamarra—a senior custodian of the site, well versed in the *watijarra* (two men) and *janganpa* (possum) Dreamings there. I had punctured three Toyota tires on mulga stakes, and Zack insisted we had the right to ask the mining company to repair them for us. Driving along the fence line that separated the "sacred site" of Purrkiji from the area being mined, I observed several signs that read "Aboriginal Sacred Site. Keep Out." When we came to a padlocked gate, Zack climbed down from the Toyota and opened it "*yapa* [Aboriginal] way" by unbolting it and lifting it bodily from its hinges. "This our country," he declared, after I had driven through the gap, and he had replaced the gate and got back in the vehicle. "We boss here."

As we drove into the mine complex itself, however, past rows of modular offices and living quarters, with eucalypts planted around them, and here and there rusted relics from the old days—the skeletal chassis and cab of a truck, bits of machinery—Zack became withdrawn and hardly spoke. Yet he was still adamant that we could get our tires repaired at the mine workshop. First, however, we had to locate the mine office.

Zack went in ahead of me. He was clearly nervous but eager to tell the mine manager who he was and explain our business at the Granites. The office was air-conditioned. In his bare feet, frayed bell-bottoms, and grubby windcheater, Zack looked as incongruous as I felt. It was hard to guess what the manager made of us, but he took pains to show us the greatest courtesy. As for Zack, his manner was an odd mixture of bravado and deference. After forthrightly announcing that he was a traditional owner of the Granites, he stood cap in hand, so to speak, waiting for the mine manager to respond.

The manager asked Zack if he remembered Gordon Chapman, the son of Colin Chapman, who had headed the company that owned the Granites' leases in the 1930s when Zack had worked there. Apparently Gordon Chapman was dying of cancer in Darwin.

Zack seemed not to understand. He was looking increasingly nervous. He shifted his feet, before suddenly declaring, "Right. We going now!"

Although the manager had been polite and had ordered a clerk to accompany us to the workshop and get our tires repaired, Zack's confidence seemed to have evaporated in the few minutes we had been in the mine office, and it only returned when he guided me back to the fenced-off area

that he called "proper Purrkiji." We parked the Toyota and went ahead on foot. Zack was again animated and voluble, pointing out the stacked boulders where the *watijarra*—dreamtime heroes who had traveled from Manjamanja on the Lander River, hunting bush turkey (*jipardu*)—had climbed up and looked about for their quarry one last time before flying home. He then led me around the base of an immense heap of rust-red boulders to where a snake had come from Kunajarrayi (Mt. Nicker), far to the south, in the Dreaming and camped some distance away, eyeing the local women. He showed me the rock it had plunged under and the soakage where it had emerged on the other side, and the spot where a local *janganpa* (possum) snake had fought and killed it. Zack pointed out the main *janangpa* camp, not far away—the main hill of Purrkiji. He then drew my attention to the women's camp (*jilimi*)—marked now by a pile of boulders to the south—and the men's camp, a similar pile to the north. Finally, scrambling down into the cool, shaded waterhole where the snake had descended, Zack gleefully picked some of the wild tobacco growing there and filled our billy with fresh water. "Proper Purrkiji water, this one," he said, his old self again.

Objectively speaking, a limit is a line one cannot readily cross—a physical barrier like a river or a mountain range, an international frontier, a traffic regulation, the law of the land. Seen phenomenologically, however, a limit suggests a limit to what I can endure without losing my sense of who I am, without compromising my humanity. A limit is thus a threshold, comparable with the threshold of a person's tolerance for pain. One may speak of this threshold in objective terms ("I don't think I could live in New Zealand, so remote from Europe"; "I am uncomfortable unless the thermostat is set at seventy degrees Fahrenheit"), but in truth it can never be exactly determined, since so many subjective factors enter into its definition from moment to moment, or context to context. What remains constant, however, is a sense of existential risk—a Rubicon that separates situations in which one feels relatively confident and in control, and situations in which one feels ignorant, out of place, lost for words, and unable to cope. It is not, therefore, primarily a risk of physical harm or of breaking the law that keeps one from crossing the threshold from familiar to unfamiliar circumstances, but a dread of losing one's basic ontological security, one's existential footing, and of finding oneself ill equipped to deal with, or even comprehend, the new situation. This loss of what it means to be "at home in the world" is suggested by the anecdotes I have just recounted and was vividly illustrated the day my wife and I drove Ringer Japanangka to Katherine Hospital, where he had to spend several days while medical tests were carried out.

A few days before, I had been sitting under a bough shade at Lajamanu with Ringer and some other men when Ringer suddenly lost consciousness and toppled over. The men immediately moved as one, helping Ringer sit up, holding him steady. Everyone laid their hands on Ringer's body or head, containing the life-spirit that had, for a moment, gone out of him. It was a compelling insight into how a person's autonomy, like his or her very being, was not a stable state but something that could be lost and recovered, strengthened or weakened. But could Ringer's struggle to regain his strength and autonomy be helped or hindered by submitting himself to treatment in a whitefella's hospital?

When we left Ringer at Katherine Hospital, he looked forlorn and lost. Garbed in a green hospital gown, he sat cross-legged on the bed as if sitting on the ground back home, clutching his two boomerangs, wondering where to stash them. I helped him slip them under the mattress where he could easily find them, while his wife filled a pitcher of water and placed it on his bedside table. I could only guess what thoughts were going through his mind, but I knew enough about how disoriented and fearful Aboriginal people felt in hospitals—foreign spaces where bizarre, life-threatening things occurred, and where one was separated from kith and kin—to imagine what Ringer felt.

Perhaps one should draw a distinction between *being* ostracized and *feeling* ostracized. The habitus of the hospital, or the Katherine campground, or the Granites mining complex made Aboriginal people uncomfortable not because anyone was unkind or unaccommodating, but because the habitus was foreign to them. Because the white habitus is the dominant habitus in contemporary Australia, Aboriginal people find themselves on the defensive, aware that they cannot enter this world on their own terms, and deeply ambivalent about their ability to compete or cope in it, despite the prevailing pluralist ethos to which most Australians pay lip service.

Whose Autonomy?

While Aboriginal people tend to speak of autonomy as a synonym for self-determination based on Aboriginal law, non-Aboriginal people tend to conflate autonomy with a neoliberal model of possessive individualism and personal productivity that many Aboriginals in Australia's remote communities find alien, especially when this model is deployed as a critique of their allegedly welfare-dependent, unproductive, undeveloped, and anomic lifeways.

This cultural dissonance was exacerbated when, in mid-June 2007, the prime minister of Australia, John Howard, announced "a hard line approach" to the problems of alcohol and drug abuse, pornography, and the sexual abuse of children, as documented in the Northern Territory report *Little Children Are Sacred*, published on June 15.[15] Given that Australian newspapers every day carry stories of child abuse, a stranger to Australia might have reasonably concluded that this report, and the prime minister's comments, addressed a pressing *national* issue. According to John Howard, however, these "problems" were not problems of the Australian middle class but of *Aboriginal* communities, comprising a mere 3 percent of the population. And whereas Aboriginal communities were labeled "dysfunctional," non-Aboriginal communities were, by implication "functional."

Just imagine if it was Dickson, or Brunswick or Marrickville [middle-class suburbs of Canberra, Melbourne, and Sydney, respectively] or whatever. It's just intolerable and you've got to do something about it. . . . That, in a way, is what this is about. The communities are completely dysfunctional and in order to offer them any long-term hope you have got to intervene in a root-and-branch way, you've got to grab control of the communities, you've got to pursue the perpetrators, you've got to provide medical help for the children, you've got to staunch the flow of alcohol and you've got to instil responsibility in the dispersal of welfare payments.[16]

As the title of the report implied, and as John Howard declared, "functional" non-Aboriginal people had a paternalistic duty to save these "dysfunctional" communities from themselves. These blanket generalizations, these images of rooting out a minatory force, this talk of containment and control hark back to the early years of settlement when Aboriginal people were seen as a historically redundant obstacle to colonization. One could also read these atavistic fears in the way that Howard deftly replaced the jargon of sacred sites and Aboriginal autonomy, which had characterized the land rights movement from the mid-1970s, with a rhetoric of protecting the "sacred" rights of children from predatory and drunken Aboriginal men whose invocation of *traditional* rights put them at odds with *human* rights. As Howard told a *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter, "I haven't set out to overthrow something. I've set out to fix a problem. If this means sweeping aside decades of attitudes well, so what? There's nothing sacrosanct about them. They're not sacred."[17]

What struck me, as the so-called Intervention got under way,[18] was the endorsement Howard received from several Aboriginal activists and political leaders who had been, for many years, antagonistic to the

Howard government's Aboriginal policies. Marcia Langton claimed that it was no longer possible to think of Aboriginal communities as "autonomous, living on their own terms."[19] Arguing that desperate times required desperate measures, she cited figures showing that children under the age of fourteen now represented 38 percent of the indigenous population, which meant that there were simply not enough older people to parent or take care of the young.[20] Some kind of state intervention was necessary to make good this deficit, even though the tragic history of Aboriginal people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was marked by the destructive effects of draconian government policies and decrees, including the forced removal of mixed race children from their Aboriginal parents. Aboriginal activist Noel Pearson was uncompromising about the need for immediate action, paternalistic or not: "Ask the terrified kid huddling in the corner when there is a binge drinking party going on down the hall if they want a bit of paternalism."[21] In the Geyulkan Aboriginal camp in Katherine, the local mayor found, on a visit in June, "no one sober enough to string together more than a sentence."[22] One man, however, said all that needed to be said. Pounding his breast, Geoffrey Barnes exclaimed, "I'm hurting in here."

But how could these impassioned calls for Aboriginal people to "take responsibility" for themselves and break engrained habits of "passive welfare dependency" be implemented? And how could strategies of state intervention bring about the changes that Aboriginal people had to make for themselves *if they were to retain any sense of autonomy and dignity*?

By the end of the first year of the Intervention, troubling evidence emerged of the unforeseen consequences of the increased police presence and outside interference in remote Aboriginal communities.[23]

In January 2008, a white woman police officer stationed at Lajamanu violated a male initiates' camp. Martin Japanangka spoke of the anger and sorrow experienced by all members of the community, "mothers, aunties, grandmothers, sisters, fathers, uncles, grandfathers, everybody," and echoed the same outrage I had heard from a previous generation of senior men. "The whole community was very upset because the police just went ahead and did what they wanted. Canberra is a sacred place for government people to meet, people with authority. And we respect that. Why can't the police department, police women and men, respect our sacred sites, our law?" Japanangka asked. Jerry Jangala underscored Japanangka's point. "We want to keep our kuruwarri here . . . what is called law in English. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have different laws. Both need to recognize each other's laws."[24]

In the Warlpiri settlement of Yuendumu, 236 people signed a petition in a twenty-four-hour period, again underlining the need for autonomy:

We don't want this intervention! Children are worse off under this legislation. . . . This is our land. We want the Government to give it back to us. We want the Government to stop blackmailing us. We want houses, but we will not sign any leases over our land,[25] because we want to keep control of our country, our houses, and our property. Everything is coming from the outside, from the top down. The government is abusing us with this intervention. We want to be re-empowered to make our own decisions and control our own affairs. We want self-determination. We want support, funding and resources for things coming from our community, from the inside.[26]

Drawing on firsthand experience in Yuendumu, anthropologist Yasmine Musharbash noted that the Intervention had led to an escalation of mistrust and fear of whites, and a reversion to problems such as petrol sniffing that had been brought largely under control.[27] Rumors circulated of whites dousing Aboriginals with petrol and setting them on fire as they slept in the Todd riverbed at Alice Springs.[28] To avoid contact with the "Intervention mob," Warlpiri often used a back road to and from their settlement, and at the first Northern Territory Emergency Response consultation meeting at Yuendumu in 2009, "people unanimously expressed the wish . . . to have *their own* alcohol restrictions enforced and *their programs* supported and strengthened (something for which they had campaigned *before the Intervention was declared*)."[29]

Whether the Intervention will accomplish its goals—preventing alcohol abuse and child rape or improving diets—the fact remains that it undermines Aboriginal autonomy, raising the specter of a reversion to "the old days, the ration days, the dog tag days, and the mission days"[30]—paternalistic eras during which Aboriginal people were wards of the state, with neither civil rights or land rights, forcibly moved into designated settlements under mission control, working for no pay, and liable to have their children taken from them.

I have no more reservations about Aboriginal claims for autonomy than I have about the claims of African people for independence sixty years ago, or contemporary struggles of indigenous people everywhere for autonomy within nation-states or neocolonial regimes. But the question recurs: under what circumstances do people forfeit the right to autonomy, or lack the power to govern themselves, individually or collectively? And when do those who ostensibly possess autonomy have

the right to intervene in the lives of those whose autonomy has allegedly been compromised or lost, deciding for them, acting in loco parentis "for their own good?"

Kant's idealism led him to place so much emphasis on the morally autonomous individual that he offers few clues as to how we should respond to human beings who cannot govern or care for themselves, or who find themselves at the mercy of forces that preclude the possibility of free agency. In totalitarian regimes, during famines or natural disasters, or in madness, people not only lose the power to act; they may pray to be acted upon benignly by some supernatural helper or outside agent whose autonomy is still intact. And in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities alike,[31] episodes of rape, child abuse, and domestic violence persuade us that "something must be done" to protect the innocent and deny to perpetrators the excuse that they were acting in accordance with custom and had the right under their law to act as they did, or that the "victim" gave her assent. But even when asked to intervene, fools often rush in where angels fear to tread.

The question is pressing because those in power always claim that the powerless cannot govern themselves (or that, in their ungovernability and mindlessness, they pose a threat to civilization) and use this argument as a pretext for asserting control over them. The civilizing mission that provided the moral rationale for colonialism, the religious zealotry that encourages assaults on the lives of infidels and heathens, and the industry of foreign aid and development all find their justification in assumptions about the other—as peoples without history, as failed states, as prey to irrational beliefs and practices, and as corrupt, barbaric, and culture-bound. The same assumptions inform Western media and academic depictions of the non-Western other, regardless of whether they are terrorists who endanger our security or victims in need of our benevolent interventions. Thus, after describing the slide into anomie in the Wik community of Aurukun between 1970 and 2000, Peter Sutton argues against the kind of cultural relativism that respects Aboriginal law, even though it licenses violence against women and children, and he urges intervention to protect innocent people "from extraordinary levels of rage, fear, anxiety, neglect, malnutrition, infection, diabetes, renal failure, sexual abuse, assault and homicide." Even more radically, however, he argues that Aboriginal "dependency"—which implies, in effect, a lack of autonomy in the Kantian and Enlightenment senses of the word (to live according to one's own lights and reasons rather than in reaction to external pressures and demands)—is a product of "traditional power structures," of "the ancient need to pursue family loyalties

over essentially foreign ideologies such as the doctrine of the common good," and of a tragic sense of life in which one accepts the way things are rather than seeks to improve equality.[32] A similar case against tradition is made by Louis Nowra in his 2007 book *Bad Dreaming: Aboriginal Men's Violence against Women and Children*. Like Sutton, Nowra rails against the Aboriginal men who invoke culture in defense of their "violations" of women and children, and argues for outside intervention to prevent human rights abuses without, however, examining the cultural bias of his own critique. In condemning child betrothal and arranged marriages as infringements of the rights of young women to decide their own destinies, he assumes that such women are being treated as objects or chattels, seemingly unaware of the strict rules governing Aboriginal marriage, or the autonomy achieved by Aboriginal children at a very early age in a society that encourages an ability to fend for oneself and demand food or resources from others on the strength of kinship obligations. Nowra's use of statistics is equally disconcerting. He notes that, according to one assessment, "the rate of domestic assault in indigenous communities is eight to ten times that of non-indigenous communities. Aboriginal boys are ten times more likely to be sexually assaulted than boys in the general population and the sexual abuse of girls is so widespread that one-third of thirteen-year-old girls in the Northern Territory are infected with Chlamydia and gonorrhoea."[33] Statistical generalizations like these, however, are not helpful in establishing differences between communities, identifying specific causes or circumstances, and deciding redressive action. As Diane Austin-Broos observes, "individual pathologies" are projected onto an entire people, and outside interventions undermine the ongoing struggle of local people to counter a history of violent interference in their lives and create viable communities.[34]

Given the vexed questions as to the different conceptions of autonomy among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, can we hope to articulate categorical imperatives, such as Kant sought, that hold true for all human beings? As an ethnographer, I see a first step as suspending judgment. Rather than pronounce on how people should behave, or might behave in an ideal world, we might focus on how people actually behave in real worlds and try to understand why. Where I depart from anthropological convention is in my refusal to explain behavior solely in terms of culture. Where I depart from philosophy is in my refusal to privilege reason over unreason, the life of the mind over the life of the body, the view from afar over the view from within. It seems clear to me that we have to give up on the idea that we can substantivize words such as culture, reason, freedom, faith, and autonomy, and learn to use these terms as ways of capturing

aspects of what is at play in any human situation. People can never be expected to be entirely reasonable, moral, cultural, or autonomous beings. But any empirical exploration of the situations in which human beings struggle to create viable lives—such as the situations described in this chapter—often reveals a determination to strike a fair trade-off between being able to live on one's own terms and accepting the different terms on which others choose to live. This is the meaning of being at home in the world. This is the balance that many Aboriginal people feel they have not been permitted to attain or sustain.

Coda

November 2009. I am in Sydney, following the latest reports on the Intervention, reading the conflicting evidence, hearing the competing views. Even among anthropological colleagues, the vehement opinions for and against make it difficult not to be partisan, and my own skeptical view—that we are seldom in a position to know the consequences of our actions or inaction, or understand fully the reasons for our decisions or indecision—seems, in the midst of these impassioned arguments, a little like taking refuge, as Henry Miller did, in the belly of the whale.[35] I retreat to Bronte Beach, where I find myself watching a young mother digging a hole in the sand so that her two toddlers can sit or paddle in an enclosed and shallow pool. Before she has made the hole big enough to accommodate both children, her oldest child muscles aside his younger sibling so he can also sit in the pool. The father, who has been standing like a statue, scanning the beach and showing no interest in his family, suddenly intervenes. Pent-up rage pours from his tensed body as he wrenches the errant child out of the pool, rips off the child's sun hat, then jams it back on the child's head. Taking the child's chin in a vicelike grip, his fingers now pinch the child's lips, bringing tears to the child's eyes. The father threatens the child with punishment if he does not stop crying. The father's anger is barely controlled. When the child does not stop crying, the father renews his threat. He then returns to his stony vigil on the beach, indifferent to his children and his wife, who is now trying to calm her older child and get him involved in enlarging the pool. I find myself wanting to intervene, to rescue the crying child from the rage of the father. But the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and I have no rights in this family. Even if I did have the power to intervene, I would be brought back to the ethical questions that have been on my mind for

days now. Under what conditions is the state justified in taking a child from its parents? When do we have the right to intervene in the life of an addict, to prevent someone taking his or her own life, or to assist a terminally ill loved one in dying? And to what extent should the state take care of its citizens, and how, in any case, can we determine the limits of our responsibility to take care of ourselves?

I have used the term "existential" to name that terrain of practical activity, thought, and endeavor that is *there* before it is apprehended academically and constructed substantively as *the* social, *the* cultural, *the* religious, *the* historical, *the* political. The term is therefore deployed strategically, as part of a critique of a tradition of understanding the world from the standpoint of power elites or the discourse of academics, as well as to undermine the pretensions of identity thinking—that all too readily assumes an isomorphic relationship between the empirical world and the words with which it is described. Like others before me, I want to prioritize the everyday situations, critical events, face-to-face interactions, reflections, imaginings, and stories that are the stuff of life as lived, thinking from the ground up rather than seeking a view from afar. Thought is construed not as a superior way of knowing and naming the essence of things, divining origins, identifying causes, and transcending the mundane; rather it is taken to be one of the many *technics* that we human beings deploy in our struggle for life in a world that is precarious, unpredictable, and largely beyond our grasp. The true analogues of thought are art, ritual, and agonistic play, means whereby we distance ourselves from the immediacies and difficulties of our lives the better to engage more effectively in them. In the following chapter I make a case not against philosophy as such, but for a philosophy that enters more deeply into a dialogue with the empirical and expands its horizons to encompass lifeworlds that the West has too long regarded as without history and without philosophy.

Where Thought Belongs: An Anthropological Critique of the Project of Philosophy

Philosophy is no longer applicable to the techniques for mastering one's life. At the same time, by abstaining from all definite content, whether as a formal logic and theory of science or as the legend of Being beyond all beings, philosophy declared its bankruptcy regarding concrete societal goals.   THEODOR ADORNO, "WHY STILL PHILOSOPHY?"[1]

To speak of the "end,"[2] or the "bankruptcy," of philosophy is perhaps to confess an exasperation and exhaustion at habitually turning to the Greeks as our sounding board—to thinkers who cannot talk back to us, with whom we cannot converse or interact face to face, and whose social circumstances were very unlike our own. It is also to acknowledge the difficulty of rethinking philosophy from within its own traditions. This is what Alain Badiou means when he says, as a methodological first principle, that we must forget the *history* of philosophy and wrest thought back from the "genealogical imperative."[3] But where do we go from here? Although Badiou evokes Saint Paul's conversion experience as a critical moment that takes us beyond the Jewish tradition of the law and the Greek tradition of wisdom,[4] his point of departure is, ironically, a historical rather than contemporary event, and he remains committed to the question of truth, even though the *singular* truth of an event subverts

the philosophical notion of truth as a *conceptual* understanding that can be universalized. As for Rorty's argument that philosophy may be reinvigorated or reinvented by reconsidering "edifying" thinkers like James and Dewey, for whom truth is a word we retrospectively assign to events whose outcome has proved positive for us, we are still left with the questions as to *what* kinds of events require philosophy, *where* in our own immediate world we might most usefully take up the task of thinking, and *how* we understand the very nature of thought. Badiou is right, I think, to encourage us to focus on an event, and to caution us that it may deliver "no law, no form of mastery, be it of the wise man or the prophet."[5] But why not make our point of departure current events, the events of everyday life, the critical events of a human lifetime? Rather than proceed from historical events and figures, why not locate our thinking in the here and now, immersing ourselves in the lifeworlds of others, taking our intellectual cues from their concerns, and conversing on terms that they decide? In short, why not find in ethnography the kind of inspiration that historicism once provided, moving elsewhere rather than earlier in time to enlarge the conversation of humankind in ways that Plato may not have dreamed of?[6] Whereas philosophers have typically sought a standpoint that frees the mind from its bodily, sensory, and practical embroilments in everyday life (a project that Adorno writes off as "delusional"), anthropologists insist that thought is always tied to mundane interests, embodied practices, material matters, and quotidian situations.[7] Accordingly, the separation of the *vita contemplativa* from the *vita activa* is not only false; it is utopian, which is to say it can be achieved nowhere. It is an illusion, akin to the alienation that follows the separation of product from process, text from context, mind from body, capital from labor.

At most, philosophy is a kind of bas-relief—an artificial, partial, and arrested image of the eventful and multidimensional procession of life itself; at worst, it imitates the self-perpetuating, self-reflexive figure of the Ouroboros. At the core of phenomenology, existentialism, critical theory, and pragmatism lies the methodological question as to how thought may be anchored in rather than abstracted from human lifeworlds, and how it may begin in media res, with the processes rather than the products of intersubjective life—cultural and symbolic forms, legal and moral codes, religious texts, found objects—much as the humanities eschew the focus in natural science on an *experimental* subject that is similarly decontextualized and generalized as a species, specimen, or typical example. In fact, the truth of any *human* subject can never be entirely encompassed by the

discursive subjects with which we conventionally identify and construe ourselves and others as male or female, old or young, working class or middle class, literate or illiterate, modern or premodern. To fully recognize the eventfulness of being is to discover that what emerges in the course of any human interaction overflows, confounds, and goes beyond the forms that initially frame the interaction as well as the reflections and rationalizations that follow from it. Though this indeterminate relationship between experience and episteme may not be readily apparent, it becomes dramatically obvious in critical events and limits situations when little in one's experience can be grasped or explained by reference to what is already known and named, or what one can be thought and spoken.

The Human Condition

Against the view that thought can escape the impress of the thinker's immediate situation and existential imperatives, we invoke the phenomenological notion of lifeworld to define the *social* space where thought arises, occurs, and transpires. Perhaps no one has made a better case for this *existenzphilosphie* or *lebensphilosophie* than Hannah Arendt, and in the following pages I summarize and contextualize her conception of the intellectual project, consider its limitations, and suggest that ethnographic method may provide a compelling way of realizing her vision of thought as inescapably political—working through our relations with one another in a common world rather than laying claim to a privileged position beyond it.

On Thursday, December 4, 1975, five days after completing the second section of her book *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt received two old friends—Salo and Jeanette Baron—for dinner in her Riverside Drive apartment in New York City. After dinner, the three friends retired to the living room. As they were talking over coffee, Hannah Arendt suffered a brief coughing fit, then slumped back in her armchair and lost consciousness. A heart attack had killed her instantly.

For the next three years, Mary McCarthy devoted herself to editing and publishing her friend's unfinished book. Working until late at night, and even in her dreams, Mary McCarthy would speak of this labor of love as sustaining "an imaginary dialogue . . . verging sometimes, as in life, on debate." McCarthy explains in her editor's postface that Arendt's book had been conceived in three parts—Thinking, Willing, and Judging. But the faculty of judgment had been, for Hannah Arendt, the "linchpin in

the mind's triad,"[8] for judgment brings home to us our connectedness to the world we inhabit with others; it is judgment that makes intellectual activity worldly and wise. At the time of her death, Hannah Arendt had written only scattered notes toward this third and final section of her book. These were found on her desk. Threaded into her typewriter was a sheet of paper, blank but for the title, "Judging," and two epigraphs that unfortunately gave little clue as to what she had intended to write. *The Life of the Mind*, then, resembled a story without an end.[9] Yet its conclusions were presaged in Arendt's lectures on Kant's political philosophy, delivered at the New School for Social Research in the fall of 1970.

In Hannah Arendt's view, judgment presupposes our belonging to a world that is shared by many. Unlike pure reason, judging does not consist in a silent Platonic dialogue between me and myself, but springs from and anticipates the presence of others. More than any other mode of thought, it is socially situated and socially mediated, taking its bearings from incidents in our lived experience and finding expression in stories.[10] The faculty of judgment, however, requires distance from "subjective private conditions," though this distance is not achieved through the kind of social and affective disengagement that scientific rationality demands—assuming "some higher standpoint . . . above the melée."[11] Remaining faithful to its essentially *social* character, judgment seeks distance through imaginative displacement—reconsidering one's own world from the standpoint of another.[12] Reminiscent of Jaspers's notion of "limit situations" (*grenzsituationen*), where philosophy gives up the search for bounded and coherent theories of the whole and addresses the conditions under which it may be confounded or unsettled,[13] Arendt's interest is on how thought may go beyond the thinker. She is, however, at pains to point out that the practical and experiential mimesis that one looks for when adopting the standpoint of others neither eclipses one's own being nor supposes an understanding of what actually goes on in the minds of others. Distancing oneself from one's own customary point of view is not, therefore, a matter of exchanging one's own prejudices for the prejudices of others. Nor does it imply passivity. Unlike classical empiricism, where the observer makes himself a tabula rasa in order to register his impressions of the observed, judging requires active engagement and conversation—allowing *one's own thoughts* to be influenced by the thoughts of others. Accordingly, judging implies a third position, reducible to neither one's own nor the other's: a view from in-between, from within the shared space of intersubjectivity itself.

"Imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective, to be strong enough to put that which is too close at a certain dis-

tance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, to be generous enough to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair. This distancing of some things and bridging the abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding for whose purposes direct experience establishes too close a contact and mere knowledge erects artificial barriers. Without this kind of imagination, which actually is understanding, we would never be able to take our bearings in the world. It is the only inner compass we have. We are contemporaries only in so far as our understanding reaches."[14]

But isn't there something too idealistic in this notion of judgment that is neither an empathic merging of one's own identity with the other nor an abstract conceptualization that sets one apart from others, but depends, rather, on a lateral displacement that puts oneself in the place of others even though their views and tastes may be repellent? Doesn't Arendt's view tend to play down the entrenched divisions in the public realm that militate against "communicative transparency" and make it practically impossible to accept what Bill Readings calls "dereferentialization"?[15] To inhabit a "dissensual community"—thinking without identity, thinking "without banisters"—may be within the reach of academics, but is it possible in situations where difference is not a matter for academic debate and edification but a matter of life and death? For example, in Veena Das's moving account of a woman called Shanti, who survived the death of her husband and three sons during the Delhi riots that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, we are confronted with the ideological impossibility of Shanti's loss being reconciled with the patriarchal ethos of her community. As the community scapegoats and shames Shanti for having lost her sons and betrayed "the male world," she sees that "a life built around female connections is not . . . a life worth living" and commits suicide.[16]

This brings me to my second point: that judging, in Arendt's sense of the term, is always, in practice, less a question of a person's *intellectual* acuity than of his or her emotional and social capacity. No matter how earnest our intentions, the fact is that whenever we endeavor to accommodate any kind of radical otherness, the habits and dispositions that define our own sense of who we are are placed in jeopardy. For this reason, people are unlikely to ponder their own worldview as it appears from the standpoint of another unless circumstances compel them to. In dealing with such situations where we are out of our comfort zones, storytelling becomes a critical strategy, not so much of changing our circumstances but of imaginatively remodeling and re-membering them.[17] Consider the

following ethnographic examples. In his study of the interplay of local and transnational identifications in Belize, Richard Wilk shows that one effect of the increasing presence of foreign goods, television, tourists, money, entrepreneurs, music, language, drugs, gangs, tastes, and ideas in Belize has been the self-conscious creation of localized culture, including the culture of food. This process, Wilk argues, is played out as a narrative or drama that pits the local against the foreign, self against other, and provides Belizeans with a sense of being in control of the "global ecumene" rather than at the mercy of it. "The moral of this story," he notes, "is that the technological apparatus of capitalism, including television and other media, has been turned to very local and anti-hegemonic purposes."[18] A second example, taken from Andrew Lattas's study of cargo cults in Papua New Guinea, also shows how storytelling enables an imaginative reconfiguring of the relationship of local and global realms. Cargo narratives are grounded in the traditional conviction that journeying across vast distances to unfamiliar places—particularly the land of the dead—is a precondition of enlarging one's understanding and increasing one's power. When Europeans arrived in Papua New Guinea, changing its cultural, economic, and political landscapes, this world of empowering otherness became identified with whites. Cargo cult stories accommodated this new focus while remaining preoccupied with "breaking out of contained spaces," transgressing boundaries in order to tap into and move within "the secret space of the other." Indeed, the Pisin word *stori* means "a narrative about secret and lost forms of power."[19] But these imaginative strategies should not be dismissed as modes of sympathetic magic. Although local metaphors speak of adopting another skin or inhabiting another body (in much the same way that we speak of putting ourselves in another person's shoes), the cult adepts rarely lapse into submissive modes of empathy and imitation but actively experiment with new imaginative and interpersonal strategies that will provide them with *real* power to control the world.

While Cargo narratives are informed by blatantly pragmatic designs, Hannah Arendt's notion of judgment is anchored in the humanistic goals of the Enlightenment. Understanding is its own good. Judgment is "representative" not because one adopts, advocates, or even empathizes with the views of others, still less because one comes into possession of an abstract knowledge that corresponds to some external reality, but simply because the understanding that informs one's judgment is pluralistic rather than monistic, intersubjective rather than subjective.[20] Yet, in her insistence that reality lies neither within oneself nor with the Other, but in between—in the "web of relationships" where self and other are as

natively intermingled as love and violence—Arendt unwittingly echoes the communitarian logic of much non-Western thought.

Ethnographic Judgment

It is obvious that, for Arendt, judgment grows out of our relationships with others rather than from first principles. Judging cannot, therefore, *proceed from* an a priori understanding of how we should relate to others, or how we might intervene to alleviate their suffering; judging must be an *outcome of* our engagement with the other. This means that judging, in Arendt's sense of the term, refuses any blanket separation between the one who judges and the one who is judged. Only in this way can one avoid behaving as if one knows best what the other needs, or committing the error of condemning difference on the egocentric or ethnocentric grounds that alien beliefs or practices belong outside the pale of what is human. On the contrary, judgment is a way of doing justice to the multiplex and ambiguous character of human reality by regarding others *not as inhuman, but as ourselves in other circumstances*—even though those "others" may include the Adolf Eichmanns of this world. We judge Eichmann not because what he did or licensed was subhuman and evil, but because he exemplifies a banal mode of human thoughtlessness—as superficial as it is self-interested—in which one assumes a knowledge of others without subjecting this knowledge to the test of putting oneself in the position in which the other has been placed, or in the position in which the other has placed himself or herself.[21] As a corollary, no judgment should claim to bring conversation to a close, for every judgment is itself, in turn, open to the judgment of others.

Neither of these points implies an argument for moral relativism; they simply make an appeal for strategies that make judgment conditional upon understanding—which is to say, thinking through one's relationships with others. As such, understanding, like storytelling, means beginning with "particulars and things close at hand" rather than with sweeping generalizations.[22]

One might argue, for instance, that what is most disturbing about those in the West who raise their voices against the "barbarity" of female genital operations, by declaring clitoridectomy to be an abomination of patriarchy or Islamic medievalism, is not the intrinsic "wrongness" of their point of view but the wrongness of their refusal to understand the phenomenon from any standpoint other than their own, coupled with their bad faith in invoking "human rights" to rationalize a position that

they have never risked by putting themselves in the place of the other. In other words, the "universal" should never be either one's own local or particular view projected onto the world at large, or a view from afar, allegedly liberated from social and worldly ties. Rather, the word is best used to denote an enlarged understanding that comes from a sustained *practical and social engagement* in the lifeworld of others.[23] In this sense, the assumption underlying Hannah Arendt's theory of judgment is similar to the assumption that underpins ethnography: that we deliberately put our own pre-understandings at risk by immersing ourselves in the lifeworlds of others. It is not that we necessarily cease condemning and condoning; rather that such value judgments are less likely to precede than to follow from our investigations, which rely on a method of suspending our accustomed ways of thinking, not by an effort of intellectual will but by *a method of displacing ourselves from our customary habitus*.

In her essay on Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt makes this observation: "Whatever I think must remain in constant communication with everything that has been thought."[24] Edification, it is here implied, ideally takes the form of a dialogue between the living and the dead—between ourselves and the past. As to which past we may most fruitfully turn, Arendt shares Jaspers's view that this should not be the Christian past, centered on the advent of Christ and focused on the idea of salvation and final judgment; rather it should be defined as the pivotal period between 800 BC and 200 BC that saw the birth of philosophy simultaneously in several places—Confucius and Lao-tse in China, the Upanishads and Buddha in India, Zarathustra in Persia, the prophets in Palestine, Homer and the philosophers and tragedians in Greece.

As an ethnographer, I question this view on the grounds that this distant "axis of world history" gives us only worldviews to engage with, not lifeworlds in which to sojourn. If one is to actually put oneself in the position of others, it is never enough simply to think one's thoughts by way of theirs; one must, at all costs, access and experience directly the lives that others live *in their own place*. In Arendt's words, this need to extend the reach of one's understanding means training "one's imagination to go visiting."[25] It may be, however, that anthropology, not history, provides the most challenging terrain for this "visiting imagination." Though it is certainly edifying to enter into "dialogue" with the ancients, it is surely important to learn the languages of those who seem most distant and alien to us in the world *in which we presently live*, and by sojourning among them discover the meaning of the truth that Arendt and Jaspers set such store by—the truth not of abstract knowledge *of* the other but of communication *with* the other.[26]

Ethnography thus provides an antidote to the idealism from which Arendt never completely escapes, for the ethnographic method demands not merely an imaginative participation in the life of the other, but a *practical and social* involvement in the various activities, both ritual and mundane, that contextualize and condition the other's worldview. This imposes great demands not only on an ethnographer's linguistic and conceptual abilities, but on his or her emotional and bodily resources. Ethnography forces the life of the mind from contemplation to experimentation. To paraphrase Foucault, being obliged to live among others on their own terms constitutes a kind of "limit-experience" in which one's identity and sanity are risked in order to explore the possibility of knowing the world other than one has known it before.[27] For this reason, anthropological understanding is never simply a cognitive matter, and perhaps no other intellectual discipline combines dispassionate observation and personal ordeal in the way that fieldwork does.

Because it entails a direct, intimate, and practical engagement with the object of one's understanding, ethnographic judgment abolishes the subject-object split of natural science and replaces it with an intersubjective model of understanding.

This implies a negative dialectic. For while the ethnographer is both influenced by his or her initial preoccupations *and* by the other's self-understandings, the outcome of any intersubjective encounter is never a synthesis of all the various points of view taken together, but an arbitrary closure that leaves both self and other with a provisional and open-ended view that demands further dialogue and engagement.

Although anthropology's foundational methodology—participant observation—supposedly allows for the coexistence of views from without and views from within, anthropology has always shuttled uneasily between so-called objective and subjective standpoints. At one extreme, there have been numerous methodological and rhetorical inventions to make anthropology a kind of natural science in which the observer is disengaged from the observed in order to discern the rules and regularities that underlie and explain social reality. At the other extreme there have been a variety of romantic variations on the metamorphic theme of "going native," in which the observer loses his or her identity in the other. The model of intersubjectivity overcomes the false dichotomy between these extremes, for object and subject are no longer construed as having any a priori, substantial, or static reality, but seen phenomenologically as words with which we mark moments or modalities of *experience* that reflect the various potentialities that are realized or foregrounded in the course of interactions between persons and persons, persons and

things, or persons and beliefs.[28] If ethnographic method is understood to be primarily not some arcane set of techniques we have to acquire, but a commonplace body of social skills we already possess (the protocols of hospitality and reciprocity, for instance); then we will be more inclined to accept that subjectivity and objectivity cannot be defined "objectively" and decontextually, since their value is always determined by one's relative position within—and one's particular *experience* of—a particular social field.

Hannah Arendt understood perfectly this relativity of objective and subjective positions. How, she once asked, can one write about totalitarianism without making explicit one's outrage at the injustices and terror involved? If one is to be "objective" about such phenomena, the lived experiences and consequences of the phenomenon are central, not distorting. Using the example of Nazism, she writes: "To describe the concentration camps *sine ira* is not to be 'objective,' but to condone them." She concludes, "I think that a description of the camps as hell on earth is more 'objective' that is, more adequate to their essence than statements of a purely sociological or psychological nature." In another example, she speaks of excessive poverty in a nation of great wealth. "The natural human reaction to such conditions is one of anger and indignation because these conditions are against the dignity of man. If I describe these conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and have thereby robbed it of part of its nature. . . . For to arouse indignation is one of the qualities of excessive poverty insofar as poverty occurs among human beings."[29]

The Visiting Imagination

Judging implies journeying,[30] and travel means travail—a succession of changing horizons, arduous digressions, and unsettling perspectives. The art of ethnography is to turn this deterritorialization to good account,[31] to make a virtue out of not being at home in the world.

Aristotle considered homelessness as one of the blessings of the philosopher's way of life.[32] In his *Protreptikos* he celebrates the life of the mind (*bios theoretikos*) as the life of a stranger (*bios xenikos*). The intellectual life is best pursued nowhere, doing nothing; it can only be hindered by a preoccupation with particulars, and with local allegiances. True thought, he observed, requires neither tools nor places for their work, for "wherever in the whole world one sets one's thought to work, it is surrounded on

all sides by the presence of truth."[33] I share Hannah Arendt's view that thought cannot free itself from the practical, physical, and sensible immediacies of the world, and imagine she might have embraced Merleau-Ponty's view that philosophy is not a matter of rising above the mundane but of a "lateral displacement" that enables one to critically reconsider one's views from another vantage point.[34] Rather than a "nowhere" outside of time and circumstance, one seeks an "elsewhere" *within* the world. For an ethnographer, this elsewhere is some other society; for the historian, some other time.

For Hannah Arendt, "otherness" had a very personal connotation. As a displaced Jewish German intellectual, her marginal status was both given and chosen. In the latter sense, it meant making a conscious virtue out of her pariah status.[35] Like the storyteller, the poet, and the refugee, the conscious pariah may, as a discursive figure, stand for the person who remains unassimilated, ill at ease, and suspect. This estrangement may endow the pariah with an ability to see into and see through the very society from which he or she is ostracized.

Anthropologists call this "stranger value." While insiders find it difficult to see the world from any point of view other than their own, the pariah has no fixed position, no territory to defend, no interest to protect. As a visitor and sojourner, as one who is always being moved on, he is much freer than the good citizen to put himself in the place of another. It costs him nothing. He can try out a plurality of perspectives without any personal loss of status or identity because he is already marked as marginal, stateless, and indeterminate. This "visiting imagination" of the pariah implies neither an objective standpoint (the pariah does not seek disinterestedness or distance from the other) nor an empathic one (the pariah is not interested in losing himself in the other); it is, rather, a way of trying on other identities. The result is neither a detached knowledge of another's world nor an empathic blending with another's worldview. Rather it is a story that switches from one point of view to another without prioritizing any one, yet it unsettles in the mind of anyone who reads or hears the story not only his certainties *but his belief in the possibility of certainty.* The work of exiles such as Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov, and Arendt all share this skeptical, creatively estranged attitude. What Camus called "lucid indifference" is linked, therefore, to the distancing effects of displacement. It is not a matter of seeing the world from some privileged "nowhere," nor of aligning oneself with any particular person or group of persons on the sentimental grounds that they are in sole possession of the truth, but of interweaving a multiplicity of particular points of view in a way that calls into question *all* claims for privileged understanding.

No matter how abhorrent the view of the other, it represents a logical possibility for oneself. It is in this sense that the difference between self and other is always conditional upon our social interactions and not predetermined by some genetic, cultural, or moral essence.

Where Thought Resides

To ground philosophy within human lifeworlds is to forego the epistemological presumption that thought should capture the essence of a culture, society, or person, and to desist from appraising the truth of a belief or behavior against some abstract ethical or logical ideal. It is, in fact, to embrace a pragmatist search for how thought, speech, and action are tied to human interests, measuring their worth against the consequences they have for human well-being. As John Dewey observed, "thinking is not a case of spontaneous combustion; it does not occur just on 'general principles.' There is something specific which occasions and evokes it," namely, "some perplexity, confusion, or doubt."[36] This may be a historical crisis or catastrophe such as the American civil war, which led Oliver Wendell Holmes to assert that certitude leads to violence and to develop a critique of ideology that gave birth to pragmatism,[37] or the period of Nazi power in Germany, which prompted Karl Jaspers to ponder the ways in which worldviews (*weltanschuungen*) are not so much ways of comprehending the meaning of human existence as avenues of escape from it. For Jaspers, thoughts that arise at the limits of what can be comprehensively thought or readily said may be more worthy of us than "formulated doctrines of the whole."[38] Thought is equally critical to situations in which our well-being depends on practical skill and know-how. Faced with the perennial possibility of crop failure and hunger, Trobriand Islanders have recourse to what we call "magic," as if their techniques for mastering the world were inferior science and infantile philosophy. But as Malinowski showed, Trobriand garden spells have to be understood not in terms of their conformity to some rational, logical, or religious *principle* but in terms of the effect they have on bolstering a gardener's confidence, focusing his attention, and helping him apply himself to the task at hand.[39] A fertile garden is not the direct result of the spell but of the careful and mindful work of preparing the soil, planting the taro, and tending to the growing crop.

Critical reflection may also arise from situations of radical scarcity, inequality, and imbalances of power. Consider, for example, Kenelm Burridge's description of a visit to the Melanesian island of Manam, dur-

ing which local nobles revealed to the anthropologist their ancestral lore, contained in a "book" that was in fact a dusty collection of traditional objects made of turtle shell, hardwood, and stone. Taking the white man into their trust was but a prelude to asking him why the lore that made whites so wealthy and powerful had not been shared, and why the "message" Burridge supposedly carried, which "would straighten things out," had not been communicated with his younger Melanesian brothers. People were in tears as they spoke. One impetuous young man, however, did not mince words: "You see, this, the things you have seen [the ancestral lore], belong to us. They are ours, our own, and all we have. We think that white men have deceived us. So we are turning back to our ancestors. How is it that white men have so much and we have so little? We don't know. But we are trying to find out."

The anthropologist's response? "There was little for me to say, little I could say."[40]

Such encounters suggest that when human beings seek guidance, illumination, or advice, it is not necessarily the *content* of *what* is said in response by an expert, or the content of a tradition or text, that is important. Rather it is the process and action of being free to voice one's concern and be listened to that matters, for in speaking or acting out one effectively externalizes what is on one's mind or in one's heart, and this alone transforms one's experience of the quandary, lifts the burden, restores a sense of agency, and lessens one's solitude. In short, speaking and acting are an ethical good in their own right, irrespective of what is spoken or what follows from one's action.

Finally, we must consider thought in relation to the social needs it answers rather than the epistemological character it may possess. Let us take as an example what has long been considered the Aboriginal denial of physiological paternity. This is less a reflection of ignorance (or mistaken thought) than of a need to affirm the connections that tie a person to his or her patrilineal *place* of origin rather than a specific father. As Edmund Leach argued, a belief like the Christian doctrine of virgin birth appears to be irrational when considered out of context but becomes explicable when its practical repercussions are understood—in this case, a need to affirm that Jesus is the son of God.[41] The metaphysical bias of Western philosophy has not only led European thinkers to measure or explain non-Western beliefs and practices solely in terms of their logical coherence or correspondence with objective reality (in the cases above, the "facts" of reproductive biology); it has persuaded many African philosophers to seek some intellectual high ground in explicating their own traditions. Either they find their own traditions wanting when

compared with the "systematic" and "speculative" thought of Kant,[42] or they focus on local sages and ritual specialists who bear comparison with the hierophants of Western thought. In this view, Africa appears to be interesting only in so far as it approximates Western conceptions of civilization—monumental architecture, monotheistic religion, centralized states, advanced technologies—or possesses philosophers such as Plato, sacred or learned texts, and deep cosmological knowledge such as that attributed to the Dogon sage Ogotemmêli by the French ethnographer Marcel Griaule.[43] Even those philosophers who criticize this kind of ethnocentrism, arguing that "the traditional and non-traditional must be granted *de jure*, equal and reciprocal elucidatory value as theoretical alternatives," tend to turn to the "fathers of secrets" to elucidate the "high culture" or "great tradition" rather than explore the existential quandaries of ordinary people, which, in my view, is the soil from which all thought springs.[44]

Where then, in any tradition—Melanesian, African, or European—does thought reside? It does not necessarily find expression in the work of great minds, isolated in ivory towers, accessing libraries, using abstract language, scorning "low" or "popular" culture, and proclaiming universal truths. Nor need it be located in myth, cosmology, proverbial wisdom, and beliefs (in witchcraft, sorcery, ancestral influence, and ritual forms) as Wiredu and others suggest.[45] Philosophy is neither a privileged vocation nor an activity that takes place in a protected location. It is a mode of being-in-the world and, as such, is inextricably a part of what we do, what we feel, and what we reckon with in the course of our everyday lives. This is the essence of Nietzsche's argument that philosophical thinking is, like all conscious thinking, an "instinctive activity," and that every great philosophy is "a confession on the part of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir."[46] It is a view that Foucault and Lévi-Strauss insisted on: that thought finds conscious expression in us but is not necessarily generated by a self-conscious thinking subject. For Heidegger, thought is similarly grounded—and may be compared with dwelling and building; it is a mode of constructive activity, a way of inhabiting the world.[47] For Heidegger's student, Hannah Arendt, thought belongs to the *vita activa*—the social field of interest, interaction, and intersubjectivity. Here it makes its appearance as thoughtfulness, mindfulness, care, discernment, and judgment. For Kuranko, such social skills define what it is to be a moral person. Personhood (*morgoye*) consists in having regard for others (*gbiliye*) and showing them respect (*lembé*)—recognizing their status, paying them their due, contributing to their well-being. At the same time, personhood is consum-

mated in self-restraint, bringing one's emotions under control, weighing one's words before speaking, thinking of the wider context in which one lives:

Morgo kume mir' la I konto i wo fo la. (Whatever word a person thinks of, that will he speak—that is, think before you speak, lest you blurt out stupid ideas.)

I mir' la koe mi ma, i wo lke la. (You thought of that, you do that—that is, think before you act, lest your actions belie your intentions.)

As my friend, Sewa Koroma put it,

When people do things or say things, you have to think twice, think why, why they're doing this, is it because of this? I'm young. I've got to think that even if the [Diang] chief lived a long life or I die, I have kids coming up, and if I have access to the chieftaincy they might be interested, you know. People don't write history, they don't write things down. You have to remember everything. We say, *i tole kina i bimba ko* [your ear is as wise as your grandfather's words]. When my father was young he was listening to the elders talk about things that happened long before his time. Then he told me those stories, and I will tell them to my son. They're not written down, but if you listen you will know them. Those are the things you have to think about, that you have to know deep down. Ade [Sewa's wife] says, "You think too much," but I tell her there are things you have to think about, things beyond normal, so that you'll know.

Clearly, reflective thought involves getting beyond oneself—thinking of one's immediate situation from the standpoint of one's forebears' experience and understanding. This is not a quest for a transcendent view but for identifying those factors and forces that lie in the penumbral regions beyond everyday, self-centered awareness. But reflective thought is not a matter of plumbing the psychic depths of other minds or achieving empathic understanding; rather it is focused on one's relationships *with* others. Kuranko refuse to speculate about other people's experience. "I am not inside them" (*n'de sa bu ro*), one is told, or "I do not know what is inside" (*n'de ma konto lon*). Empathic understanding is, however, not only thought to be impossible; it is regarded as largely irrelevant to behaving as a moral being possessing social intelligence or common sense (*hankilime*). The Kuranko emphasis is less on being of one mind than on moving with, working with, eating with, being with, and sitting with others (often in amicable silence). Accordingly, one of the greatest challenges to a Western anthropologist is how to acquire these techniques of practical mastery and mutuality in which knowledge of the motives,

mindsets, and sentiments of others counts for far less than one's social skills in *interacting* convivially with them. As Paul Ricoeur phrased this thought in his last writing, our goal is not an identification with the other, which is, anyway, "neither possible nor desirable," but "an accompanying" that means no one will have to live or die alone.[48]

This statement echoes the traditional Maori view. Much has been written in commentary and criticism of Mauss's reading of Tamati Ranaipiri's elucidation of the Maori notion of *hau* (wind, breath, vital essence), but for me the enduring value of Mauss's reading lies in its sensitivity to the Maori emphasis on striving for life and vitality (*mauri ora*) against degradation, enervation, and death. *Mauri tu mauri ora, Mauri noho mauri mate*—an active spirit means life, an inactive spirit leads to death. Life is a constant struggle between the processes of *tupu* (unfolding, growing, strengthening) and *mate* (weakening, diminishing, dying). Sometimes this effort entails giving life to others; sometimes it requires the violent taking of life and the ritual absorption of that life within one's own body. Sometimes it demands being welcoming and open to the outside world; sometimes it demands closure and opposition. Hence the saying "Ko Tu ki te awatea, ko Tahu ki te po."[49] Since everything is evaluated in terms of its life-enhancing potentiality or potency, it is not surprising that the Maori conception of knowledge (*maatauranga* or *wananga*) draws on notions of *oranga* (necessity for life) and *taonga* (cultural wealth), suggesting that it is like the ancestral land through which one's identity is affirmed—the matrix of life, language, and livelihood, the milieu in which the living and the dead are united as one body. Knowing has no value apart from sustaining the life of the community whose *taonga* it is. Indeed, for many Maori people knowledge is so utterly embodied that its loss imperils the life of those who give it away. In the words of Te Uira Manihera of Waikato, knowledge that goes out of a family is quickly dissipated among others. The knowledge thus loses its "sacredness" and its "fertility." "And knowledge that is profane has lost its life, lost its tapu."[50] As my friend Te Pakaka Tawhai put it, what matters is life—life that produces life. In Te Pakaka's view, "ancient explanations" and ancestral wisdom (*korero tahito*) were invaluable, not because they held the key to understanding every epoch or every existential quandary that human beings face, but because they were flexible and adaptable, able "to accommodate the capacity of the narrator to render them more relevant to the issues of the day."[51]

Te Pakaka died in 1988, so I cannot ask him if we still do justice to life when "the issues of the day" often seem to admit of no ultimate resolution. But in his conviction that thought is a technique among other

techniques for creating a more viable and equitable world I see a common thread with thinkers like Hannah Arendt and John Dewey, for whom philosophy does not require us to make claims to certitude or truth; it asks only that we reflect on the implications of what we think and say and do for the well-being of all in a world of increasing scarcity and inescapable difference.

Epilogue

Over two hundred years ago, Immanuel Kant proposed four fundamental questions: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope for? What is a human being?[1] For Kant, the last question—the question of anthropology—encompassed the first three, and though he defined three fields of inquiry on the basis of them (metaphysics, morals, and religion), an existential anthropology might reinterpret these as covering the fields of general knowledge, ethical and practical action, and human well-being.

It was Kant's student and subsequent rival, Johann Gottfried Herder, who proposed that philosophy fully metamorphose into anthropology,[2] so initiating the line of descent through von Humboldt, Hegel, Dilthey, Klemm, and Tylor that culminated in Kroeber's seminal 1917 essay, "The Superorganic," and laid the groundwork for modern American cultural anthropology. That Herder's anthropology was conceived of as a philosophy for the people (*Popularphilosophie*) rather than academic or metaphysical speculation (*Schulphilosophie*) reminds us that the tension between achieving knowledge for knowledge's sake and knowing how to apply knowledge for the betterment of humankind has always vexed the Enlightenment tradition.

In its emphasis on informed testimony, existential anthropology helps us define a path between these extremes. As Veena Das observes, although we anthropologists live in a world that moves us to make value judgments and stirs us to action, "yet we bring a certain ambiguity to the situation because of our commitment to understanding the local

context that situates actions in ways that may seem incomprehensible from the outside."[3] Bread is vital to life, but we do not live by bread alone. One cannot, therefore, divide humanity into those who are reduced to bare life, degraded by disease, poverty, ignorance, and superstition, and those who have found solutions to these problems even if they are uncertain how to implement them. Such simplistic divisions belie the extent to which those who are ostensibly bereft of the basic requisites for an adequate life nevertheless possess an enviable joie de vivre, while those who seemingly have everything to live for find life empty, oppressive, and unfulfilling.

Judith Sherman once gently reminded me, when sharing her experiences of Ravensbrück, "Sometimes bread is just bread. And the presence of bread today never erases the memory of the absence of bread in the past." But even in extremis, bread was not the only thing on Judith's mind. In Ravensbrück, she would wake at three-thirty every morning and go the washroom. "There would be dead bodies on the floor. Either nothing flowed from the tap into the rusty basin, or it would cough out brown and slimy water. But in turning on this tap, I felt empowered. In going through the motions of washing my hands as my mother had taught to me, I kept her alive."

How then, can we have it both ways? How can we speak for others unless we recognize the ways in which they speak for themselves? What can we give to others that equates to what they give us? How can we address the needs of strangers without compromising the moral claims of our immediate families and friends?

While the existential anthropology I have explored in this book may have value in deconstructing worldviews that we experience as second nature, in questioning the wisdom of actions whose rightness we take to be self-evident, and in calling into doubt the validity of discursive distinctions between modern and premodern mentalities, we would become mired in a state of perpetual uncertainty, relativism, and inactivity unless the existential perspective allowed the possibility of forms of human understanding and interaction that were not predicated upon any particular ethics, any particular values, any particular beliefs—forms that followed naturally, so to speak, from our common humanity. But it would contradict every argument I have made in this book were I to invoke some notion of the universal or the rational, as Kant did, to arrive at categorical imperatives that hold true for all people, under all circumstances, in all societies.[4] This hesitancy, however, does not preclude the assumption that human existence is contradictory and ambiguous. We

seek to enforce rules as often as we seek to transgress them. We build today what we will destroy tomorrow. We are potentially as open to others as we are closed to them. And we are capable of accepting things as they are with the same passion with which we engage in making the world what we will.

This contrary or changeable character of our humanity implies a restive and opportunistic search for strategies to uplift rather than depress our sense of well-being and to provide a sense that we may shape our lives to the same extent that they are shaped by circumstances beyond our comprehension and control. My ongoing fieldwork among African migrants in Europe has sharpened my sense of how hard it is to determine when profit has outweighed loss, or when the things one has given up or given away have been redeemed by what one has gained. In leaving his natal world behind, the migrant assumes the right to enter another world on which he has pinned his hopes of renewal. Although the logic of capitalism makes him only too well aware that even his labor may be insufficient to win him a livelihood, the logic of socialism pervades his dreams: from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs. This cosmopolitan assumption that worth is not necessarily relative to birth and that determination can overcome every obstacle means that he inhabits not so much a world without borders as a world in which he is entitled to cross those borders in quest of the wherewithall for life.

Whether one applies this kind of reasoning to migrants or ethnographers, the logic of exchange holds true. In this regard, it is significant that Marcel Mauss, whose essay on the gift remains one of the seminal works of modern anthropology, was inspired not by a European philosopher but a Maori elder, Tamati Ranapiri, explaining to the ethnographer Elsdon Best why, when a hunter takes game birds from the forest, something must be given in return (*utu*) to replenish the *mauri* or life source from which the birds were taken. Truths that come to light in distant places often illuminate the places where we live, and the exotic transforms our awareness of the quotidian. As Anne Salmond points out, the Maori notion of *hau*—the "spirit of the thing given" that compels the receiver to honor the giver and to pass the gift on to a third party—"goes far beyond human gift-giving" and underlies the ethical protocols that govern relations between *all* life forms. This same "spirit of the gift" informs the migrant's search for a better life and the anthropologist's search for mutuality in his or her relations with those he or she studies—"your wisdom for mine (*waananga atu, waananga mai*) as we cross our thoughts together (*whakawhitiwhiti whakaaro*)."[5]

Paths toward a Clearing

Consider this path. It winds through the montane forest between Barawa and Woli chiefdoms in northern Sierra Leone. In the dry season of 1970, I traveled this path with my friend and field assistant Noah Marah. About half a mile before reaching the village of Bandakarafaia, we stopped to rest by a massive granite boulder. Men and women passed us on their way to and from their farms. Most greeted us warmly, asking where we were headed and where we had come from. Some recognized Noah and asked after his family. Some referred to me as Noah's "white man" (*tubabune*), the implication being that I was like a djinn whose help Noah had enlisted, or with whom he had struck a deal.

Such pacts are fraught with ambiguity and danger. Though a djinn might give a barren woman a child, empower a dancer, inspire a musician, or enable an aspiring politician to succeed, it might take as repayment the life of someone near and dear—as though the improvement of an *individual's* fortune logically entails a *social* loss. Years later, when I sought to help Noah come to New Zealand to further his education, his mother dissuaded him from leaving Sierra Leone. Whatever he might gain from going abroad would attenuate or eclipse his ties to home.

Raw and cooked rice, kola, bananas, and strips of white cloth were scattered on the ground beneath the stone. As I watched, several women returning to Bandakarafaia from farms deep in the bush threw down some of the palm nuts they had gathered that morning. When I asked Noah why they did so, he cited a Kuranko adage, *nyendan bin to kile, an wa ta, an segi*, alluding to a particular species of soft grass, used in thatching, that bends before you as you pass through it, then bends back the other way when you return. Although this logic of reciprocity holds true even of one's relationships with the extrahuman world, I would learn that it also contained the seeds of both life and death. In Kuranko parlance, the path along which blessings flow may become blocked or darkened. This is because it is humanly impossible to agree on whether a gift has been returned, respect shown, honor satisfied, words heeded, justice done, or a fair apportionment of scarce resources secured. Accordingly, the human mind is a site of endless internal bargaining, calculation, and rationalization: "I've done everything for you; why don't you do something for me for a change?" "If I offer this red goat to the ancestors, surely they will favor me with their blessings?" "I've had so much good fortune in my life, it's about time I gave something back." "You've had all the luck; isn't it about time I got a break?"[6]

That morning, after paying our respects to Chief Damba Lai Marah, whose house stood in the shadow of an enormous mist-swathed granite escarpment, I inquired about the stone.

It was called Mantene Fara (Mantene's Stone). The chief was its custodian (*tigi*, lit., "owner" or "master"). As for Mantene, she was a djinn and had come to the chiefdom in Damba Lai's grandfather's time.

To seal a political alliance, Damba Lai's grandfather had been given a woman in marriage by the chief of Kombili, the capital of Mor'findugu chiefdom to the northeast. Because this woman knew how to address and praise Mantene, the djinn followed her to Woli and made its home there.

In the course of fieldwork in other chiefdoms, I discovered that most chiefly lineages were once associated with a djinn and made sacrifices to them to secure the well-being of their chiefdoms. The Mansaré clan led the sacrifices for the "upper" Kuranko chiefdoms at Yalamba (west of the Loma Mountains, in Guinea), while the Koroma clan led the sacrifices for the "lower" Kuranko chiefdoms at Bonkoroma. When I asked the Woli chief why these sacrifices had been discontinued, he said it was because adulterous affairs had "spoiled" relations between the clans involved and no sacrifice could be made to ancestors, God, or the djinn if such undeclared intrigues, either political or sexual, existed among the parties involved. In other chiefdoms, however, where rulers had embraced Islam, no major sacrifices were offered to the djinn, and over the next forty years, as Islam extended its influence through the Kuranko area, I witnessed a steady decline in public or formal references to the djinn. Where people once turned to these genii loci as a source of insight into their fluctuating fortunes or as an extrahuman power on which they might pin their hopes for amelioration of their lot, they now turned to Allah or, in the cities to the south, to political big men and benefactors, to Pentecostal ministries, schools, colleges, and NGOs, or set their sights on migration to Europe as their best chance of being given another life.

Some anthropologists have divined in these expanding horizons and new fixations a radical departure from ancestral values, characterized by a preoccupation with money and mobility, a search for pleasure and personal empowerment,[7] and a prioritizing of self-fulfillment over community solidarity and the common weal. This argument for rupture finds expression in Charles Piot's recent observation that Africa is now characterized by "a culture and imaginary of exile" in which everyone is searching for exit strategies that will carry them away to a utopian elsewhere either through geographical migration or occult forms of transport and affective transformation, as well as in Achille Mbembe's pronouncement

that Africa "is turning inwards on itself in a very serious way."[8] Ethnographies of the *longue durée* and in-depth ethnographic biographies, however, cast doubt on this model of radical discontinuity, pointing out that tensions have always existed in rural West Africa between duty and desire, marriage and love, conservation and innovation, outward behavior and inward imaginings. Folktales provide abundant evidence of utopian yearnings, transgressive fantasies, and the ethical dilemmas of staying put or moving away, of reconciling oneself to one's lot or rebelling against it. As Arthur Kleinman observes of China, one must be careful not to divide societies according to whether they are permissive or austere in their attitudes toward instant individual gratification, for *both* desire *and* responsibility, self-interest *and* the collective good, figure in the moral calculations people make in their everyday lives.[9]

I have argued that an existential focus on *situations* helps us see that people are not simply determined by dominant epistemes, whether formulated by foreign anthropologists or local polities, but opportunistically engaged in a search for technics whereby life can be made viable within the limits set by individual resources and the affordances of their environment. This may involve a "double-consciousness" in which one orientation is feigned or foregrounded in one situation only to be suppressed or backgrounded in another.[10] After all, every society, like every individual, has a shadow side. Alluding to "that place of terror and death" (Ravensbrück), Judith Sherman observed, "I live dealing with two existences simultaneously." Elsewhere she writes, "I live on two tracks—always. I am here and I am there, when I have a shower, when I eat potatoes, when I am hungry, when I am not."[11]

It may be that the djinn have been driven underground by Islamic or Pentecostal prohibitions of "demonic" beliefs and pagan practices, but the existential imperatives that once led people to seek benefit from capricious spirits still exist, and the same social imaginary of reciprocity that once governed relations with chiefs, ancestors, and colonial authorities now governs relations with Pentecostal ministries, NGOs, and the global north. Underlying historically determined forms and culturally approved practices lie recurring existential needs and conflicts. The utopian fantasies, mimetic desires, and magical thinking that find expression in a passion for lotteries and pyramid schemes, advantageous liaisons with foreigners, membership in churches that promise supernatural abundance, Internet searches for exit strategies, and a turn to the intense if transient pleasures of sex, drugs, and popular music have antecedents in alliances with supernatural helpers, sacrifices to ancestors, village festivals, and the search for imported commodities and magical medi-

cines. It is necessary to remind those who see the village as a vanishing form of life that "the little community" stands for the microcosms in which all human lives unfold, and that ethnography's singular contribution to our understanding of the human condition lies in its perennial ability to show that such small-scale lifeworlds—familial, immediate, communal—are windows onto wider worlds that may mirror or impact upon them but whose reality is reciprocally shaped by them.

William Blake urged us to "see the world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild flower." In thinking of this flower as Lévi-Strauss's *pensée sauvage*, anthropology might be persuaded to turn its attention from the space of the polis to the penumbral regions that surround it, to reprise Merleau-Ponty's notion of a *logos endiathetos*,[12] a logos of carnality, emotionality, play, excess, and ecstasy that reason does not completely govern yet mediates everything we do, say, or think. In Kuranko parlance, our focus shifts to relations *between* the village and the wilderness that surrounds it. Just as a viable and vital social existence depends, in the Kuranko view, on a peoples' ability to tap into and tame the forces of the wild, so, one might argue, an edifying academic discourse depends on its ability to draw upon the capricious, inchoate, contingent, and chaotic force fields that surround and underlie our socially constructed orderings of the world.

Acknowledgments

Notes

PREFACE

1. William James, "A World of Pure Experience," in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 42.
2. James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 1–26 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 2.
3. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955), 98–99.
4. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 142, 105.
5. *Aporia* literally means "lacking a path" (*a-poros*), or a path that is impassable—hence the aporetic method of broaching problems without offering glib solutions, of exploring the existential quandaries of life without expecting rescue, resolution or salvation. Such a method recalls John Keats's notion of negative capability.
6. Clifford Geertz refers to this question as anthropology's "recurrent dilemma." Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 22. More recently, George Stocking notes that the entire "history of anthropology may be viewed as a continuing (and complex) dialectic between the universalism of 'anthropos' and the diversitarianism of 'ethnos' or, from the perspective of particular historical moments, between the Enlightenment and the Romantic impulse." Stocking, *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 347.

7. Jerry Jangala, in *Stories from Lajamanu* (Darwin: Northern Territory Department of Education, 1977), 6–7.

8. Michael Terry, *War of the Warramullas* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1974), 69.

CHAPTER ONE. THE SCOPE OF EXISTENTIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

1. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 10.

2. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1974), 356.

3. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay in Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 32–36.

4. Henry Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 537. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 57–58. Cf. Heidegger's adaptation of the Greek notion of *aletheia* (unconcealment) as philosophical method. Unlike Lévi-Strauss, Heidegger is careful *not* to claim that what one discloses is necessarily the truth. Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 386–92 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

5. William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950), 1:243.

6. Theodor Adorno, "On Subject and Object," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford, 245–58 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 257. Adorno's comments are reminiscent of Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of the "singular universal": "A man is never an individual. It would be better to call him a singular universal: totalized and thereby universalized by his period, he retotalizes it by reproducing himself in it as a singularity. Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by the universalizing singularity of his projects, he demands to be studied from both sides." Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857*, trans. Carol Cosman, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981–93), 1:1, 7–8.

7. Building on the work of Gilbert Simondon, Bernard Stiegler also notes that the individuation of an *I* participates in the "process of collective individuation," since "*I* do not exist other than in a group: *my* individuation is the individuation of my *group*—with which nevertheless I am not confounded, and, moreover, I may belong to several groups, which may be in disharmony." Stiegler, *Acting Out*, trans. David Barison, Daniel Ross, and Patrick Crogan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 66.

8. Adorno, "Subject and Object," 245.

9. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2–3, 116. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 175. Adorno, "Subject and Object," 245.

10. Otto Rank, *Will Therapy: An Analysis of the Therapeutic Process in Terms of Relationship* (New York: Knopf, 1936), 31.

11. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958), 20.

12. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 408. There is a "family resemblance" between Adorno's negative dialectics and Wittgenstein's notion of naming as "an occult process" that involves "a *queer* connexion of a word and an object"—the function of a "language-game" that ritualistically or magically gives the impression of a real correspondence between a thing and the name assigned it. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 18e–19e.

13. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 109–11, 142–43.

14. A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojiwa Metaphysics of Being and the Perception of Persons," in *Person Perception and Interpersonal Behavior*, ed. R. Taguiri and L. Petrullo, 63–85 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 65 (emphases added).

15. Michael Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness: Ethics and Ambiguity in Kuranko Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 17–18.

16. Werner Heisenberg, *The Physicist's Conception of Nature*, trans. A. J. Pomerans (London: Hutchinson, 1958), 29 (emphasis in text)

17. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Itinerary of a Thought," *New Left Review* 58 (1969): 45.

18. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 103.

19. See Holly L. Wilson, *Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology: Its Origin, Meaning, and Critical Significance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

20. Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 15.

21. Robert A. Orsi, "Theorizing Closer to Home," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 38, nos. 1 and 2 (2010): 29–36, quotation at 29 (emphasis added).

22. George Devereux, "Culture and the Unconscious," in *Ethnopsychoanalysis: Psychoanalysis and Anthropology as Complementary Frames of Reference* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 63–64; George Devereux, "Fantasy and Symbol as Dimensions of Reality," in *Fantasy and Symbol: Studies in Anthropological Interpretation,* ed. R. H. Hook (London: Academic Press, 1979), 23.

23. Kenelm Burridge, "Other Peoples' Religions Are Absurd," in *Explorations in the Anthropology of Religion: Essays in Honour of Jan Van Baal,* ed. W. E. A. Beek and J. H. Scherer (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 10.

24. Hermes is probably derived from the Greek for "stone heap" and was represented as an ithyphallic block of stone. Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press,

1990), 32. This symbolism is reminiscent of the phallic display whereby primate males mark and defend the edge of their home ranges.

25. Michael Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 9.

26. Foucault's distinction is elucidated by James Miller in *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 269–73.

27. Michael Jackson, "The Kuranko: Dimensions of Social Reality in a West African Society," Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1971, v–x.

28. Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), chap. 5.

29. In his introduction to Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss's *Primitive Classification*, Rodney Needham wrote: "If our first task as social anthropologists is to discern order and make it intelligible, our no less urgent duty is to make sense of those practically universal usages and beliefs by which people create disorder, i.e., turn their classifications upside down or disintegrate them entirely." Needham, introduction to *Primitive Classification,* by Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, trans. Rodney Needham (London: Cohen and West, 1963), xl. In 1967, Victor Turner's *The Forest of Symbols* explored the same phenomenon, noting that "liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence." Of the "promiscuous intermingling" of animal and human imagery, or organic and mechanical material, in masks and effigies, Turner drew on William James to argue that such radical dissociations are not so much ways of terrorizing neophytes as "making them vividly and rapidly aware of what may be called the 'factors' of their culture." Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 106, 105. Mary Douglas was also exploring "plays upon form" whereby jokes, narratives, and rituals subverted or invalidated dominant ideas, indicating that "an accepted pattern has no necessity." Douglas, "The Social Control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception," *Man*, n.s., 3, no. 3 (1968): 361–76, quotations at 364, 365.

30. Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 7.

31. Jacques Derrida's 1966 lecture "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," published in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), is an important marker of this Nietzschean turn from a logocentric preoccupation with causation, determinacy, and structure to a fascination with play, possibility, de-centered meaning, subversion, and genre blurring.

32. Genevieve Calame-Griaule, *Ethnologie et langage: La parole chez les Dogon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

33. Dominique Zahan, *The Bambara* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 15.

34. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 67.

35. This "pleasure-focused sociological tradition" begins with Émile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, in which Durkheim

argues that episodes of emotional intensity, delirium, "collective effervescence," and transgression are essential to social viability. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965), 258–59. The critical point is that such forms of uninhibited union allow "people to transcend the limits of their own personality and *become part of a larger and more powerful whole*." Sébastien Tutenges, "Louder! Wilder! Danish Youth at an International Nightlife Resort," Ph.D. thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, 2010, 28–29 (emphasis added).

36. Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 18:14–16, quotation at 16.

37. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 23.

38. D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 18–23.

39. Norman O. Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

40. Karl Marx, *Die Frühschriften*, as translated in Erich Fromm, *The Crisis in Psychoanalysis: Essays in Freud, Marx and Social Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 83.

41. Sartre speaks of this as the absurd, and its emotional tenor is nausea. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), 185–88.

42. In pointing out that individuation is a process whereby the self emerges in a context of other selves, Bernard Stiegler argues that the "*existential* dimension of *all* philosophy, without which philosophy would lose all *credit* and sink into scholastic chatter, must be analyzed through the question of the relation of the *I* and the *we,* in which consists this psychic and collective individuation." Stiegler, *Acting Out,* 3 (emphases in original). Stiegler attributes his insight to Gilbert Simondon, but it is also anticipated in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's brilliant essay "Other Selves and the Human World," in *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), pt. 2, chap. 4.

43. "If you ask the Igbo why he believes that the world should be manipulated he will reply, 'The world is a marketplace and it is subject to bargain.'" Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 15. The images of puppets and piano keys are drawn from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (New York: Signet, 1961), 115.

44. As Hannah Arendt states, because an actor is always acting in relation to other actors "he is never merely a 'doer' but always at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin" (*Human Condition*, 190). For a more recent iteration of this point, see Soren Reader, "Agency, Patiency, and Personhood," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of*

Action, ed. Timothy O'Connor and Constantine Sandis (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 200–208. At issue here is "the silenced and 'othered' aspects of personhood, which are passive, but nonetheless as inalienable and central to personhood as 'agency' is commonly assumed to be" (200). Jane Bennett has recently taken this argument further, writing against the post-Cartesian characterization of nature as inert and lifeless. Bennett's "vibrant materialism" gives "the force of things" their due, arguing that agency informs everything from our political life to our climate, from digitalized networks to the natural environment, and she refuses to attribute purposiveness solely to human beings (anthropocentrism) or some divinity (ontotheology). Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

45. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 358.

46. Drawing on Wittgenstein's view that philosophical problems have their origin in a sense of being lost and in an unfamiliar place, Veena Das sees ethnography as a way of orienting oneself in a world of radical otherness—of learning the rules governing behavior and discourse *as well as* learning how to go beyond them and find one's own path. Das, "Wittgenstein and Anthropology," in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998): 171–95, quotation at 179.

47. Theodor Adorno, "Notes on Philosophical Thinking," in *Critical Models*, 131–32.

48. John Dewey refers to his philosophic method as "empirical naturalism or naturalistic empiricism" in order to underscore his argument that experience refers not only to *what* the world consists of—cities, landscapes, relationships, dissatisfactions—but *who* works in the cities, lives on the land, relates to others or is dissatisfied, and *how* these individuals strategize and struggle, alone and together, to accomplish their various ends. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 1a, 8. The identification of experience with "subjective private consciousness set over against nature, which consists wholly of physical objects, has wrought havoc in philosophy" (11).

49. That philological and unconscious connections may be traced among words such as "knee," "know," "narrate," "generate," "generation," and "can" suggests that an ability to go out into the world, independently, "on one's own two feet," is basic to knowing how to exist socially and to reproduce one's kind. H. A. Bunker and B. D. Lewis, "A Psychoanalytic Notation on the Root GN, KN, CN," in *Psychoanalysis and Culture*, ed. G. B. Wilbur and W. Muensterberger (New York: International Universities Press, 1965), 363–67.

50. John Dewey, *How We Think* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), 12.

51. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 7. More recently Pierre Hadot has made a similar case for philosophy as a way of life, "a preparatory exercise for wisdom," involving "spiritual exercises" that might include dietary or discursive regimes, meditations or conversations, practical action or intellectual

reflection. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

52. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 183.

53. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 113, 116 (emphasis in original).

54. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 136–47.

55. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, trans. Bernard Frechtman, 1948), 53–58.

56. Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 52.

57. As Wittgenstein remarks, "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'" (*Philosophical Investigations*, 32).

58. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Frogmore: Paladin, 1973), 50–60.

59. Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973–74): 5–20, quotation at 6.

60. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998–2009). See also the later work of Michel Foucault for an emphasis on *techné* (the arts and practices of living) over *epistemé* (knowledge of how the world works). Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

61. Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 121.

62. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 33 (emphasis in original).

CHAPTER TWO. HOW TO DO THINGS WITH STONES

1. My title pays tribute to J. L. Austin's notion of "performative utterances" that are not used to make truth claims or prove falsehoods but to perform "illocutionary" acts, such as launching a ship or directing a play. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

2. Michael Puett, "Innovation as Ritualization: The Fractured Cosmology of Early China," *Cardozo Law Review* 28, no. 1 (2006): 23–36, epigraph at 30, 36.

3. Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

4. "The subjectivity inherent in all observations [is] the royal road to an authentic, rather than fictitious, objectivity . . . defined in terms of what is

really possible, rather than in terms of 'what should be.'" George Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), xvii.

5. Werner Heisenberg, *The Physicist's Conception of Nature*, trans. A. J. Pomerans (London: Hutchinson, 1958), 16.

6. See, for example, Einstein's letter to Max Born, where he writes: "Quantum mechanics is very impressive, but I am convinced that God does not play dice." A. Einstein, *The Born–Einstein Letters* (London: Macmillan, 1971), 91.

7. The traditional mode of divination among the Temne, *an-bere*, derives its name from the Mande word *bere*, pebble. Rosalind Shaw, "Gender and the Structuring of Reality in Temne Divination: An Interactive Study," *Africa* 55, no. 3 (1985): 286–303.

8. *Encyclopedia Britannica,* 1974 ed., 917, 918.

9. Michael Jackson, *The Kuranko: Dimensions of Social Reality in a West African Society* (London: Hurst, 1977), 193.

10. Michael Jackson, "Structure and Events: Witchcraft Confession among the Kuranko," *Man* 10, no. 3 (1975): 387–403.

11. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 185.

12. William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 97.

13. Victor Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 287–88; W. D. Hammond-Tooke, ed., *The Bantu-Speaking Peoples of South Africa* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 348.

14. C. K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1931), 329.

15. Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 68.

16. Ibid., 151. Among the Kuranko, of the three major categories of the divine only the bush spirits (*nyennenu*) and God are alluded to in this context. Ancestors are never held to be the source of divinatory messages or considered to be mystical tutors in divinatory skills as they are elsewhere in West Africa (for example, among the Yoruba, Fon, and Ewe, and in Dahomey).

17. Ibid., 69.

18. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, 170. Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 47–48.

19. Cf. G. Roheim, *Magic and Schizophrenia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963),1:182, 197–98.

20. G. K. Park, "Divination and Its Social Contexts," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 93 (1963): 195–209.

21. R. Firth, *Human Types* (London: Nelson, 1956), 160–61; Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 169; M. Fortes, "Religious Premises and Logical Tech-

nique in Divinatory Ritual," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London,* ser. B (1966): 251, 409–22; R. Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science," *Africa* 37 (1967): 50–71, 155–87.

22. Turner, *Drums of Affliction*, 27.
23. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, 175; Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual*, 50.
24. R. Finnegan, *Survey of the Limba People of Northern Sierra Leone* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965), 115.
25. Meek, *Sudanese Kingdom*, 327.
26. Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science."
27. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, pt. 2, chap. 2.
28. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 36.
29. W. T. Harris and H. Sawyerr, *The Springs of Mende Belief and Conduct* (Freetown: Sierra Leone University Press, 1958), 56.
30. Fortes, "Religious Premises and Logical Technique," 413.
31. Michael Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness: Ethics and Ambiguity in Kuranko Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 235.
32. G. Devereux, "Art and Mythology, Part 1: A General Theory," in *Studying Personality Cross-Culturally,* ed. B. Kaplan (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 235.
33. James, *Pragmatism*, 98.
34. As William James puts it, "The true thought is useful . . . because the [thing] which is its object is useful. The practical value of true ideas is thus primarily derived from the practical importance of their objects to us. Their objects are, indeed, not important at all times. . . . Yet since almost any object may some day become temporarily important, the advantage of having a general stock of *extra* truths, *of ideas that shall be true of merely possible situations*, is obvious. We store such extra truths away in our memories. . . . *Whenever such an extra truth becomes practically relevant to one of our emergencies, it passes from cold-storage to do work in the world, and our belief in it grows active*." Ibid. (emphasis added).
35. S. Arieti, *The Intrapsychic Self: Feeling, Cognition and Creativity in Health and Mental Illness* (New York: Basic Books, 1967), 278.
36. G. Steiner, *After Babel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 224–27.

CHAPTER THREE. KNOWLEDGE OF THE BODY

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (Switzerland: Librairie Droz, 1972). John Blacking, ed., *The Anthropology of the Body* (London: Academic Press, 1977). Marcel Mauss, "Les techniques du corps," *Journal de Psychologie* 32, nos. 3–4, 5–23.
2. Michael Jackson, "Knowledge of the Body," *Man* 18 (1983): 327–45.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 35.

4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

5. John Dewey, "Human Nature and Conduct," in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924* (1922; Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1983), 14:27, 25.

6. Michel Foucault and Richard Sennett, "Sexuality and Solitude," in *Humanities in Review,* ed. D. Rieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), vol. 1.

7. Many of the religious figures in Roman life were firmly grounded in agricultural practices (Flora and Pomona, fruit; Consus, "the storer"; Robigus, blight; Ceres, growth, cf. *creare*), and ancient lists of invocations demonstrate how the gods were generally thought of in terms of pragmatic functions (the "springiness of Neptune" as in the gushing of a fountain; the "growing power of Vulcan"; the "strength of Mars"; the cult of Mercury associated with business transactions, etc.). The gods were not looked upon to make people *morally* better but to control the natural forces on which the *material* bases of prosperity and happiness directly depended. Practical and religious activity were one. R. M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), 10–21. *Oxford Latin Dictionary,* 1969 ed.

8. Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 1968), 94–95, 129.

9. Cf. John Dewey, who notes how the classical distinction "between vegetative, animal and rational souls was, when applied to men, a formulation and justification of class divisions in Greek society. Slaves and mechanical artisans living on the nutritional, appetitive level were for practical purposes symbolized by the body—an obstruction to ideal ends and as solicitations to acts contrary to reason. . . . Scientific inquirers and philosophers alone exemplified pure reason . . . *nous*, pure immaterial mind. Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1929), 251.

10. As quoted in A. L. Kroeber and C. Kluckholn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 81.

11. Ibid., 284.

12. John Tyler Bonner, *The Evolution of Culture in Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 10.

13. E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 168.

14. Cf. Norman O. Brown's argument that "culture originates in the denial of life and the body" and "the recovery of life in the body is the hidden aim of history." Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 297.

15. Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 85.

16. According to Thass-Thienemann, "Whereas the conscious ego speaks through the rational verbal language, the observable behavior of the body

speaks an expressive language of its own. It may even say 'no' when the verbal language asserts 'yes.' We understand this language of facial expression, posture, gesture, or involuntary bodily changes first and best. The small child understands the facial expression of his mother long before he understands the verbal language." T. Thass-Thienemann, *Symbolic Behavior* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 38–39.

17. Cf. Wilhelm Reich: "The living body not only functions before and beyond word language; more than that, it has *its own specific forms of expression which cannot be put into words at all . . . the biopathy, with its disturbed expression of life, is outside the realm of language and concepts.*" Reich, *Character Analysis* (New York: Noonday Press, 1949), 361, 363 (emphasis in original).

18. Ludwig Binswanger, *Being-in-the-World: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Needleman (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 222–25. Cf. Reich, *Character Analysis*, 435.

19. Being is "standing presence," says Heidegger. The root *sta* is found in terms for physical, conceptual, *and* social being: standing, estate, understanding, stasis, status, institution, constitution, statute, etc. E. W. Strauss, *Phenomenological Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 143.

20. David Best, *Philosophy and Human Movement* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), 137.

21. This view is elaborated by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).

22. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings,* 87.

23. "It was thus not the body that imposed its law on the mind. It was society that, through the intermediary of language, took the commands of the mind and imposed its law on the body." J. Starobinksi, "A Short History of Body Consciousness," in *Humanities in Review*, ed. D. Rieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1:29.

24. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 277–78.

25. Michael Jackson, *The Kuranko* (London: Hurst, 1977), 181.

26. Ibid., 182.

27. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 116.

28. L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, trans. A. C. Miles, ed. R. Rhees (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), 7. Cf. "A religious symbol does not rest on any *opinion.* And error belongs only with opinion" (3). Also Maurice Leenhardt's comment on Canaque myth (New Caledonia, Loyalty Island): "What is lived cannot be disputed." Leenhardt, *Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World*, trans. B. Miller-Gulati (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 19.

29. Cf. Michael Oakeshott's arguments against the notion that activity springs from "premeditated propositions about the activity" such as the grammar of a language, rules of research, canons of good workmanship, etc. His example of the cookery book succinctly summarizes his view: "The cookery book is not an independently generated beginning from which cookery

can spring; it is nothing more than an abstract of somebody's knowledge of how to cook; it is the stepchild, not the parent of the activity" and already presupposes a knowledge of cooking and a capable cook. M. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962), 91, 119.

30. Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 116. Cf. M. Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa* (London: Cohen and West, 1963), 118.

31. E. Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology* (London: Athlone Press, 1961), 132–36.

32. P. Rigby, "Some Gogo Rituals of 'Purification': An Essay on Social and Moral Categories," in *Dialectic in Practical Religion*, ed. E. Leach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 172–73.

33. Franziska Boas, *The Function of Dance in Human Society* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1944), 55.

34. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

35. Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," trans. B. Brewster, *Economy and Society* 2 (1973): 70–88; Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 277–78.

36. Hypnotic induction depends on rhythmic stimulation and some kind of constriction. Swaddling of infants may condition hypnotic responsiveness, but Steven Black argues that the intrauterine environment is probably the basis for the hypnotic patternings. Black, *Mind and Body* (London: William Kimber, 1969), 161–63.

37. Control of emotions at funerals is considered vital if the spirit of the deceased person is to accept separation from the living and begin his or her journey toward ancestorhood. If the living are seen grieving their loss, unwilling to let the dead soul depart this world, then the shade will also be reluctant to leave them.

38. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 116.

39. H. Sarles, "A Human Ethological Approach to Communication: Ideas in Transit around the Cartesian Impasse," in *Organization of Behavior in Face-to-Face Interaction*, ed. A. Kendon, R. M. Harris, and M. Ritchie (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 19–45, 30.

40. Body praxis thus reinforces emotional *and* cognitive attitudes (ethos *and* eidos). Cf. Gregory Bateson's arguments concerning the periodic offsetting of complementary schismogenetic (distancing/estranging) tendencies with ritualized forms of schismogenesis (mimetic and performative identification). Bateson, *Naven* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 289–90.

41. A comparable explanation has been offered for female imitations of male behavior in the Zulu Nomkhulbulwana rites. When Zulu girls dress in their lovers' clothes, they say it is a way of inducing thoughts of and exerting influence over their lovers, who are often living away in the mines: "the ones we are thinking of when we do this thing are the men who love us. We wish to think of them. . . . If we wear the dress of our lovers then *Nomkhulbulwana* sees that we want her to assist us in marrying them." A.-L. Berglund, *Zule Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (London: C. Hurst, 1976), 68.

42. The term is used by Marcel Mauss to designate a person's imitation of actions that he has seen successfully performed "by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him." Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," 73.

43. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 185.

44. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* 120.

45. George Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), xvi–xvii.

46. E. Boagey, *Poetry Workbook* (London: University Tutorial Press, 1977), 40.

47. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 137.

CHAPTER FOUR. THE MIGRATION OF A NAME

1. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), 341.

2. This sense of estrangement in fieldwork means that anthropologists might be especially attracted to hermeneutics, which calls attention to the fact that "the lack of immediate understandability of texts handed down to us historically or their proneness to be misunderstood is really only a special case of what is to be met in all human orientation to the world as the *atopon* (the strange), that which does not 'fit' into the customary order of our expectations based on experience." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 24.

3. As Yves Person notes, "A fairly general rule, which holds good for oral tradition as a whole, is that memory is only good as far back as the last migration and begins with the settlement of a group in their present territory." Person, "Oral Tradition and Chronology," in *French Perspectives in African Studies*, ed. P. Alexandre (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 211. In the Kuranko case, oral sources of Barawa tradition vary somewhat when referring to the time before the rule of Marin Tamba, whose two sons— Morowa and Balansama—established two ruling houses within the one Marah ruling lineage.

4. *Namu* is from the Arabic *na'am*, an interjection to signify one has heard and understood what someone is saying, particularly a chief.

5. In Kuranko, *yigi* means "hope" or "trust," and a person may place his trust in another person (i.e., a mentor) by saying "ne n'yigi sigi bi ma na sina" (let me place my trust/hope in you, not for today but for tomorrow). In brief, a mentor is a helpmate outside one's kinship circle whom one can call upon in times of need.

6. C. Monteil, *Les empires de Mali* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1929), 80. Wagadugu is the Mandingo name for the land of old Ghana, ruled over by the Tounkara-Cissé. Ghana was eclipsed by the Mande Empire in the early thirteenth century.

7. E. F. Sayers, "Notes on the Clan or Family Names Common in the Area Inhabited by Temne-Speaking People," *Sierra Leone Studies* 12 (1927): 14–108, 80.

8. Ibid., 80–81.

9. Sayers observes that "if no other praise has succeeded in extracting a present from a miserly chief, the Yeli will play his trump card, that of comparing his patron to the great Yurukhernani, and this rarely fails to loosen the purse strings" (ibid. 80). In medieval Europe, troubadours and jongleurs did likewise, making their home "in that court where they best rewarded" and combining "their praise of their liberal lord with as gratifying disparagement of his close-fisted rivals." G. Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 214.

10. D. T. Niane, *Sundiata, an Epic of Old Mali*, trans. G. D. Picket (London: Longmans, 1965), 90. Sayers, "Notes on the Clan," 80. E. A. W. Budge, *The Alexander Book in Ethiopia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), xvii.

11. Niane says that Dhul-Quarnein was another name of Sunjata, who ruled in Mande between about 1230 and 1255 (*Sundiata*, 90). Sayers concurs: Yurukhernani was "probably a Mali king under another name" ("Notes on the Clan," 80). Certainly the Ghana kings, whom Sunjata eclipsed, traced their descent to Alexander, and Sunjata clearly imitated and emulated Alexander in his campaigns and in his life. A. Tronson, "The 'Life of Alexander' and West Africa," *History Today* 32 (1982): 38–41.

12. The sources and reasons for Alexander's journey to Siwa are confusing. Robin Lane Fox has clarified matters considerably, especially the historical background concerning how the Greeks came to acknowledge Ammon (the Egyptian Amun; cf. Greek *ammos*, sand) as a form of their Olympian Zeus. R. L. Fox, *Alexander the Great* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 200–218.

13. According to Saint Jerome, the ram's horns represent Darius's two kingdoms of Media and Persia. Cary, *Medieval Alexander,* 120.

14. H. W. Clarke, *The Sikander Nama, E Bara or Book of Alexander the Great* (London: W. H. Allen, 1881).

15. P. Sykes, *A History of Persia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 1:239.

16. Fox, *Alexander the Great,* 26.

17. Sykes*, History of Persia,* 1:240.

18. Most of the Alexander romances can be traced back to some point after AD 200, when an anonymous Alexandrian wrote a fabulous account of Alexander that was falsely attributed to Callisthenes, Alexander's companion and historian. This work was translated from the Greek into Latin by Julius Valerius, an African and freedman, about AD 320–330, but both Latin and Greek versions were disseminated widely through Europe and the East, and it was not until the Renaissance that the histories of Arrian, Plutarch, Diodorus, and Quintus Curtius were referred to as means of establishing the truth about Alexander's conquests. Fox, *Alexander the Great*, 26–27; Budge, *Alexander Book in Ethiopia*, xv–xvii; Cary, *Medieval Alexander*, 9–10; J. A. Boyle, "The Alexander Legend in Central Asia, *Folklore* 85 (1974): 217–28; J. A. Boyle, "The Alexander Romance in the East and the West," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 60 (1977): 13–27.

19. C. B. Welles, "There Have Been Many Alexanders," in *The Impact of Alexander the Great,* ed. E. N. Borza (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1974), 9.

20. Michael Jackson, *Latitudes of Exile* (Dunedin: McIndoe, 1976), 10.

21. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. H. Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968), chap. 3.

22. Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Itinerary of a Thought," in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, trans. John Matthews (London: Verso, 1983), 41–42.

23. Published in Michael Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness: Ethics and Ambiguity in Kuranko Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 203–8.

24. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973).

25. N. Yalouris, "Alexander and His Heritage," in *The Search for Alexander* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1980), 20.

26. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Overture" and "Finale," in *Mythologiques*, trans. J. Weightman and D. Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970, 1981).

27. Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness*, chap. 6.

28. The ambiguity of the word *magnanimity* throughout the medieval period should be noted. "It means a quality of greatness that may consist in nobility of mind, in the narrower meaning of determined and ambitious bravery, or even in ferocious and fool-hardy self-confidence; its exact interpretation must differ in every writer." Cary, *Medieval Alexander,* 200.

29. Ibid., 110–16.

30. In the 1890s Kipling would spend part of the year in South Africa to escape the English winters. In Cape Town he met Rhodes and fell under his spell. "Daniel Dravot is a kind of Rhodes, long before Kipling had any thought of meeting him." P. Mason, *Kipling: The Glass, the Shadow and the Fire* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 145–46.

31. Kwame Nkrumah, *Towards Colonial Freedom* (London: Heinemann, 1962), 1.

32. J. L. Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, trans. R. L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 16.

33. This process may be understood in neurophysiological terms as a balancing or harmonizing of left and rights sides of the brain. Gregory Bateson writes: "Mere purposive rationality unaided by such phenomena as art, religion, dream, and the like, is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life." Bateson, as quoted in R. May, *Freedom and Destiny* (New York: Norton, 1981), 222.

34. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 28.

35. Both Dewey (1929) and Devereux (1967) have shown how the search for objective certainty and universal laws reflects a deep anxiety about the aleatory and capricious nature of human existence. While we are often bemused by "primitive" magic, Dewey points out that "our magical safeguard against the uncertain character of the world is to deny the existence of chance, to mumble universal and necessary laws, the ubiquity of cause and effect, the uniformity of nature, universal progress, and the inherent

rationality of the universe." J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1929), 44. Cf. George Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), xvi–xx.

36. R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 360.

37. F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 10.

38. Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 85.

39. Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness*.

40. Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Caldar and Boyars, 1973). Gordon Innes makes the same observation about the recitation of the Sunjata epic in the Gambia: "the story is true in all its versions in that *it is true to the facts of the moral and social life of the Mandinka*." Innes, *Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1974), 30. Innes makes the same point in another study of variability in the telling of the Sunjata epic: "griots commonly hear other griots relating versions of the Sunjata legend substantially different from their own version, but this does not seem to worry them, nor their audiences. The question of which version is 'correct' or 'true' just does not arise; in some sense, they are all regarded as 'true.'" Innes, "Stability and Change in Griot Narratives," *African Language Studies* 14 (1973): 105–18, quotation at 107.

CHAPTER FIVE. THE MAN WHO COULD TURN INTO AN ELEPHANT

1. William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 34.

2. Diviners always dream bush spirits allies in *human* form, and in Kuranko oral narratives, wild animals tend to assume human form when they enter a village. Thus, the domain of culture "tames" or transforms animality, just as the bush makes human beings susceptible to transformation into animals.

3. Michael Jackson, *Barawa, and the Ways Birds Fly in the Sky* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 185–87.

4. I borrow these terms from Michael Polyani, *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 55–56.

5. This is equally true of the manner in which Kuranko had begun to embrace Islam in the 1980s. Only the imams and alhajis were fervent believers and proselytizers; most villagers simply went along with what others were now doing, paying lip service to Islam for social reasons but without any private investment in the religion as a worldview.

6. William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 98. See also George Devereux, "Art and Mythology, Part 1: A General Theory," in *Studying Personality Cross-Culturally*, ed. B. Kaplan (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 378–79; George Devereux, "Normal and Abnormal:

The Key Concepts of Ethnopsychiatry," in *Man and His Culture: Psychoanalytic Anthropology after Totem and Taboo*, ed. W. Muensterberger (New York: Taplinger, 1969), 123.

7.   Michael Jackson, "Structure and Event: Witchcraft Confession among the Kuranko," *Man* 10, no. 3 (1975): 387–403.

8.   K. J. Beatty, *Human Leopards* (London: Hugh Rees, 1915), 1–14. B. Lindskog, *African Leopard Men*, Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia 7 (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1954), 6–7.

9.   Lindskog, *African Leopard Men*, 43–46.

10. Ibid., 5.

11. Ibid., 60. Other commentators suggested that leopard societies came into existence as "counter-measures to slave-trading activities" and formed to protect people "from the arbitrariness of their chieftains and kings"(84). Thus Barret, in 1888 saw the phenomenon of *hommes-pantheres* as "an outlet for the pent-up resentment of the slaves for their captors; it was the means of relieving the hunger for vengeance of the oppressed" (as quoted ibid., 68). In this context, the reasons for the spread of the Ngbe (leopard) cult among the Banyang of the Upper Cross River around 1940 are interesting: "One of the main reasons given by Upper Banyang for the spread of the Ngbe is the loss of status suffered by men from their area when during the early period of administration they visited the Lower area (where the administrative headquarters were and where Ngbe was already established) and were obliged to drink their palm-wine standing." M. Ruel, *Leopards and Leaders* (London: Tavistock, 1969), 217. The same theme of redressing injustices runs through Jean Buxton's account of were-men among the Mandari: "The appearance of beast-men is not random; they are deliberately summoned by those who feel themselves denied justice through customary channels, and are a recognized, if rarely used, ritual sanction. An informant first raised the subject of them with me in this context, comparing them with acts like deliberate 'rain-spoiling.' All are legitimate but dangerous ways of drawing attention to wrongs, because the user, who confesses in the hope of regaining redress, runs a calculated risk if widespread harm is thought to have resulted." Buxton, *Religion and Healing among the Mandari* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 262.

12. R. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 15.

13. M. Kalous, *Cannibals and Tongo Players of Sierra Leone* (Trentham, New Zealand: Wright and Carman, 1974), 94, 93–94, 104.

14. R. G. Berry, "The Sierra Leone Cannibals, with Notes on Their History, Religion, and Customs," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 30 (1912): 15–69, quotation at 51.

15. Creole traders were often known as "white men." The terms designated sociopolitical status rather than physical appearance. C. Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 298.

16. Berry, "Sierra Leone Cannibals," 51.

17. Lindskog, *African Leopard Men,* 61.

18. Fyfe, *History of Sierra Leone,* 308–12.

19. T. J. Alldridge, *The Sherbro and Its Hinterland* (London: Macmillan, 1901), 5–7. M. Kalous, *Cannibals and Tongo Players,* 1–2. Fyfe, *History of Sierra Leone*, 440.

20. Though it is impossible to ascertain the status of all the leopard men, many had been slaves. Kalous, *Cannibals and Tongo Players,* 51.

21. Beatty, *Human Leopards,* 86–87; Kalous, *Cannibals and Tongo Players,* 6–7; Fyfe, *History of Sierra Leone,* 298.

22. All these factors would be present in years preceding the rebellion and civil war that devastated Sierra Leone in the 1990s and throw light on the recurring issues that cause existential dissatisfaction and drive political insurgency.

23. It is tempting to relate certain contentious features of the cults to this theme of power. Kalous (*Cannibals and Tongo Players,* 65) mentions that donning the skin of a leopard gave "super-human strength." W. B. Griffith observes that eating one's victim "reinvigorated" or "rejuvenated" men past their primes. Griffith, "Preface," in Beatty, *Human Leopards*, vii–viii. And Fyfe (*History of Sierra Leone,* 442) refers to chiefs profiting from leopard killings because they could seize goods from the village nearest the place of murder and fine those guilty of it.

24. *Ungeziefer:* a low and contemptible person, a "louse," literally, "the unclean animal not suitable for sacrifice." Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. Stanley Corngold (New York: Bantam, 1972), 1.

25. In his letters and diaries, Kafka "frequently represents himself as a thing and as an animal." S. Corngold, *The Commentator's Despair* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1973), 52. One might also remark here the dehumanizing effects of mechanistic, objectivist language in the social and psychological sciences. R. D. Laing, for example, observes that schizophrenics often experience themselves as automata, robots, bits of machinery, or animals. "Such persons are rightly regarded as crazy. Yet why do we not regard a theory that seeks to transmute persons into automata or animals as equally crazy? . . . Treating people as things is just as false as treating things as persons. We disparage the latter as animist thinking and wrong, but elevate the former to objectivity and science." Laing, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 23, 24.

26. T. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," in *Prisms*, trans. S. Weber and S. Weber (London: Spearman, 1967), 255, 262.

27. Wallace Stevens, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), 465–89, quotation at 470.

28. B. Bettelheim, "Joey: A 'Mechanical Boy,'" *Scientific American* 200, no. 3 (1959): 117–27.

29. Ibid., 117.
30. Ibid., 120.
31. Ibid., 118.

CHAPTER SIX. CUSTOM AND CONFLICT IN SIERRA LEONE

1. Michel Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 57.
2. Mariane Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1; Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (London: International African Institute, 1996), xviii.
3. Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 20.
4. The Tamaboros were a civil defense militia made up of mainly Kuranko and Yalunka recruits. Kuranko informants gave me two versions of the etymology. Tamaboro may mean "walk-about bag," because hunters never announce directly that they are going to the bush; they use the circumlocution "I am going walkabout." Alternatively, Tamaboro (*ta ma bo aro*) may be loosely translated as "go and free us," that is, from this war, this mess, this plight. Under the leadership of Komba Kambo, the Tamaboros enlisted the support of hunters (*donsenu*) and others with special powers of witchcraft, shape-shifting, and traditional hunting skills. Cf. Melissa Leach, "New Shapes to Shift: War, Parks and the Hunting Person in Modern West Africa," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6, no. 4 (2000): 577–95; Mariane Ferme, "La figure du chasseur et les chasseurs-milicens dans le conflit sierra-léonais," *Politique Africaine* 82 (2001): 119–32.
5. An American consortium had been mining gold in Diang chiefdom for several years, though the war had forced a momentary suspension of operations.
6. Sewa later told me he had sought to appease his captors and make his escape, because as the son of a chief he dreaded the shame that being with the RUF would visit upon his family.
7. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950), 2:415.
8. In his monograph on formations of violence in Northern Ireland, Allen Feldman has explored how the dialectical tension between "doing and being done" (vernacular markers of the difference between being an active subject and being violently subject to the actions of others) is nowhere more powerfully expressed than in the subjective meaning of being armed. "To wield a weapon is literally *to take one's life in one's hand*. In violent praxis the fate of embodiment ('life') is detached from the self and transferred to the instrument of violence. In turn the weapon as a political and forensic artifact of both the self and the Other is encoded with the reversibility of doing/ being done." Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 102.

9. Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Violence," *New York Review of Books*, February 27, 1969, 24–26. Elsewhere, in remarks that speak directly to the rebellion in Sierra Leone, Hannah Arendt writes: "If tyranny can be described as the always abortive attempt to substitute violence for power, ochlocracy, or mob rule, which is its exact counterpart, can be characterized by the much more promising attempt to substitute power with strength." Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 203. She adds presciently: "The vehement yearning for violence . . . is a natural reaction of those whom society has tried to cheat out of their strength" (203–4).

10. This was vividly brought home to me when Sierra Leonean friends described, not without self-deprecating humor, their unstable behavior during the war years, when one was susceptible to every rumor of impending danger. The sounds of gunshots, or even of a car backfiring, would send one into a paroxysm of fear, so that one found oneself trying to hide or flee to Lumley beach, waiting until things seemed to have returned to normal.

11. Carl von Clausewitz observed that warfare, as "an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will," is "nothing but a duel on an extensive scale." Clausewitz, *On War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 101.

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 46. Veena Das makes brilliant use of Nietzsche's comments in her account of the Partition riots of 1949. Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 182–85. Writing of "invisible" forms of symbolic violence in Sierra Leone, Mariane Ferme observes that getting "satisfaction" through the actual physical punishment of a political opponent is rarer than public ridicule and shaming—"singing in public songs that revealed embarrassing, concealed physical deformities, the infidelity of a spouse, or quirky personal habits." Ferme, "The Violence of Numbers: Consensus, Competition, and the Negotiation of Disputes in Sierra Leone," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 150–52, nos. 2–4 (1998): 555–80, quotation at 570.

13. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 12.

14. Ibid., 36. This radical subversion is what defines rebellion, and it is this same phenomenon that Frantz Fanon famously invoked when he wrote that decolonization is the "putting into practice" of the well-known phrase "the last shall be the first and the first last." Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 28.

15. Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), 48 (emphasis added).

16. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 122.

17. Krijn Peters and Paul Richards, "Why We Fight: Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone," *Africa* 68, no. 2 (1998): 83–210, quotation at 93.

18. Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky*, 123.

19. Geneviève Calame-Griaule, *Ethnologie et langage: La parole chez les Dogon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

20. Dominique Zahan, *The Bambara* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 15.

21. Max Gluckman (*Custom and Conflict in Africa*, 134) argued that life crises "disturb" the "intricate set of relationships" that comprise "the moral order" of a society, and that life crisis rituals are means of righting this disorder. In my 1983 analysis of the imagery involved in rituals of rebellion, and of the ways in which such rituals crucially enable actors to reassert individual and collective agency in the face of unpredictable and disturbing events, I showed how Kuranko initiation involved the borrowing or transferal of iconic behaviors from everyday contexts, as well as from mortuary rituals, and concluded that though this radical reconfiguring of behaviors, roles, and images may occur "spontaneously," it is ritually contrived at critical moments of disruption or disjuncture in a social environment, and it is precisely this "magical manipulation" of objective symbols that stands for a subjectively confused situation that enables people to grasp and re-create their social world. Michael Jackson, "Knowledge of the Body," *Man* 18 (1989): 327–45.

22. Michael Jackson, *The Kuranko: Dimensions of Social Reality in a West African Society* (London: Hurst, 1977), 181–217.

23. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 116.

24. Slavery is frequently invoked in Sierra Leone as a metaphor for social degradation, and Rosalind Shaw has perceptively traced out the ways in which the trauma of slave trading continues to be inscribed in the " ancestral" practices, images, rumors, and beliefs associated with witchcraft among the Temne of Sierra Leone. Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

25. Paul Richards (*Fighting for the Rainforest*, 30, 81) has also noted the parallels between initiation and rebellion in his account of the RUF, which sought to "manipulate to its advantage the cultural 'infrastructure' of rural life in Sierra Leone." My argument, however, is that cultural precedents for armed rebellion are not so much invented as exploited, since these cultural thought-models for comprehending disorder and managing misrule already exist *in potentia* and do not necessarily have to be orchestrated to appear *in presentia*. Several trenchant insights on the gendered symbolism of the rebellions in Liberia and Sierra Leone are to be found in Ferme, "Violence of Numbers," 560–61.

26. Krijn Peters and Paul Richards argue that "confusing war and play, child combatants are heedless of danger" ("Why We Fight," 183). Though young

men often go to war as if it is an adventure or game, combat quickly destroys this illusion. Fear is endemic to all warfare (which is why the rebels devoted so much effort to combatting or masking it), and I agree with Johan Huizinga, that combat can only be called play when "it is waged within a sphere whose members regard each other as equals or antagonists with equal rights." This condition changes, Huizinga observes, "as soon as war is waged outside the sphere of equals, against groups not recognized as human beings and thus deprived of human rights—barbarians, devils, heathens, heretics, and 'lesser breeds within the law.'" Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Paladin, 1970), 110–11.

27. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen and West, 1954), 63.

28. Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic capital" covers this same field of rare, incalculable, and "priceless things"—of "'fair words' or smiles, handshakes, shrugs, compliments or attention, challenges or insults, honor or honors, powers or pleasures, gossip or scientific information, distinction or distinctions, etc." (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 178).

29. Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), 42.

30. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 195.

31. Jackson, *Kuranko*, 149–61.

32. William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1912), 34, 71.

33. Alexander Gordon Laing, *Travels in the Timanee, Kooranko and Soolima Countries* (London: John Murray, 1825), 186–87.

34. Ibid., 433.

35. W. Winwood Reade, *The African Sketch-Book* (London: Smith, Elder, 1873), 2:424.

36. See also Michael Jackson, *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 108–24.

37. In a 1992 study of the culture of education in Sierra Leone, Caroline Bledsoe observes that formal education is never enough to guarantee one's future; blessings must be earned as well. While knowledge may be learned from books, blessings are earned from obedience and respect toward one's teachers, work performed for elders, as well as the endurance of hardship and the cultivation of benefactors. Although Bledsoe spells out the means whereby one deserves such favors, she does not explore the vexed reasoning that follows from the split between what a person feels he or she is owed and what he or she actually receives. Bledsoe, "The Cultural Transformation of Western Education in Sierra Leone," *Africa* 62, no. 2 (1992): 182–202.

38. Rosalind Shaw, "The Production of Witchcraft/Witchcraft as Production: Memory, Modernity, and the Slave Trade in Sierra Leone," *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 4 (1997): 856–76.

39. Michael Jackson, *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 108–11.

40. Buckminster Fuller, "Total Thinking," in *The Buckminster Fuller Reader*, ed. James Meller, 297–314 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 297.

41. Kassim Kone, personal communication. Bambara images of life's generative capacity for and power of self-perpetuation ("fire producing fire") include allusions to the *zaban* vine, which sprouts anew whenever cut, and the following proverbs: *Foronto boro koro mana koro cogo o cogo* (No matter how old the bag of hot pepper gets, you will find something capable of causing a sneeze in it); *Ni kononin kili cera, ni a boda ma kala, a na kili were da* (When the little bird's eggs are taken away, unless its anus is sewn up it will lay more eggs); and *Kelenkelensa te du ci fo den wolobaliya, do be sa, do be wolola* (Dying one after another does not destroy a family; unless the family is barren, some die and others are born).

CHAPTER SEVEN. MIGRANT IMAGINARIES

1. Henry Miller, *The Cosmological Eye* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 14.

2. When I saw Sewa in London a year later, and we discussed this dream again, Sewa spoke of a certain younger brother who had spread a story alleging that Sewa had received special powers from his father, which is why he enjoyed greater good fortune than his brothers. This, Sewa told me, was the source of the dream image of his brothers' resentment and aggressiveness toward him.

3. Mariane Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1–8. Lest one seem to be attributing paranoid obsessions to Africans that are presumably absent among Europeans, it is worth noting that questions of trust and transparency pervade the ethical and epistemological discourse of the West, and that the "deceptive order of ordinary appearances" is a recurring and endemic issue of everyday life in *all* societies. What Henri Ellenberger calls "the unmasking trend" in European history, characterized by "the systematic search for deception and self-deception and the uncovering of underlying truth," may be traced back to the seventeenth-century moralists. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 537. In anthropology a similar view informs both British empiricism and French structural anthropology, hence the remarks by Claude Lévi-Strauss that "the nature of truth is already indicated by the care it takes to remain elusive" and that "to reach reality one has first to reject experience." Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes*

Tropiques, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 57–58. In other words, anthropologists take as little at face value as the people they study.

4. Michael Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy* (New York: Berg, 1992).

5. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 95, 169).

6. Nigerians refer to Peckham as "Little Lagos."

7. Sewa separated from his girlfriend Stephanie because of fears that her jealous ex-boyfriend, who was half-Jamaican and half-English, might stab him or have one of his gang do so. "You have to be very careful of that mixed race; they are dangerous, they could do anything."

8. Michael Jackson, *Existential Anthropology: Events, Exigencies and Effects* (New York: Berghahn, 2005), xiv–xv.

9. René Devisch, "Frenzy, Violence and Ethical Renewal in Kinshasa," *Public Culture* 7, no. 3 (1995): 593–629.

10. In his study of the "cultures of secrecy" associated with cargo cults in Papua New Guinea, Andrew Lattas perceptively observes that a preoccupation with realizing "new identities and new forms of sociality" that would emancipate the imagination and give scope for greater autonomy actually *increases* paranoid fears that others, notably whites, are tricksters and deceivers who are determined to keep power and wealth to themselves. Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy: Reinventing Race in Bush Kaliai Cargo Cults* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), xxii, 45–49.

11. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 70.

12. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

13. As quoted in Arendt, *Human Condition*, 88.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 50.

16. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 191–72.

17. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. Jonathan Webber, rev. Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre (London: Routledge, 2004), 30. I find Georg Groddeck's notion of the "it" helpful here—the nebulous, pre-objective, and amorphous life force that precedes specific symbolic or cultural expressions of identity, so that we may say not only "I live" but "I am being lived" and, methodologically, set greater store by abstaining from immediate interpretation than by rushing to judgment. Groddeck, *The Meaning of Illness: Selected Psychoanalytic Writings*, trans. Gertrud Mander (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), 132–57. The same tension between "I" and "it" is found in Zen practice, where the absence of will and striving allows action to occur of its own accord, in its own time,

in its own way. Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 73–86.

18. René Devisch, "Introduction: The Yaka," in *The Law of the Lifegivers: The Domestication of Desire,* by René Devisch and Claude Brodeur (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1999), 54.

19. René Devisch, "Sorcery and Fetish," in Devisch and Brodeur, *Law of the Lifegivers*, 60.

20. A similar conception of spirit beings (*maroi*) is found among the Beluen aboriginals of the Cox Peninsular in northwest Australia. Like the imaginative unconscious, which is forever in search of objective expression, the *maroi* are associated with patrilineal forebears and are said to search for parents in whom they can become embodied beings, and try to "catch" people hunting, camping, and traveling through the countryside. Elizabeth Povinelli, *Labor's Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 140. Among the Tupian Urubu of Amazonia, it is the father's soul that in night dreams or daydreams moves about as a ghostly wanderer "looking for some material object in which to embody itself." Francis Huxley, *Affable Savages* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), 185.

21. D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 113–16.

22. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 184.

23. Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 202.

24. Sartre, *Imaginary,* 70.

CHAPTER EIGHT. THE STORIES THAT SHADOW US

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 50.

2. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 365.

3. William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950), 1:293–94.

4. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 176.

5. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 107–16.

6. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 50.

7. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunniston (London: Cohen and West, 1954), 8–12.

8. Ibid., 37.

9. Pierre Bourdieu speaks of this struggle for justice and equity as the "law of the conservation of violence." Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 40.

On the "impossibility" of the gift and its paradoxical relation to time, see Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6–33.

10. Mauss, *Gift,* 63.

11. Francis Fukuyama emphasizes Hegel's "need for recognition" in arguing against the reductionist view that economic life is driven chiefly by "rational desire" for material gain. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

12. Marshall Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange," in *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*, ed. Michael Banton, ASA Monograph 1 (London: Tavistock Press, 1968).

13. Hence the familiar rationalizations of violators: I was only taking what was mine; I was only doing what I was told; I was following orders; I was at the mercy of circumstances beyond my control.

14. A powerful example of this contrast is provided by Allen Feldman's study of political violence in Northern Ireland, where the verb "to do" was used in its active and passive modes to designate any form of aggressive attack, while "being done" or "getting done" signified betrayal, arrest, or death. Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 99–101.

15. Pierre Bourdieu, *La misère du monde* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993). Arthur Kleinman, "The Violences of Everyday Life: The Multiple Forms and Dynamics of Social Violence," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphele Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds, 226–41 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

16. Kleinman, "Violences of Everyday Life," 234.

17. W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 78–79.

18. The Nazi reduction of Jews to *figuren*, or *stücke*—"dolls," "wood," "merchandise," "rags"—and racist reductions of others to skepsels, bugs, geeks, wogs, niggers, etc., are well-known examples, though it should be noted that while racist violence is predicated on such radical othering, it is *motivated* by the rage of recognizing that, despite reducing the other to a mere object, his or her humanity remains obdurately and undeniably recognizable. Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 165–66. Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Violence," *New York Review of Books*, February 27, 1969, 190.

19. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 50–51. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

20. Alison Parr, *Silent Casualties* (Birkenhead, New Zealand: Tandem Press, 1995), 18–19.

21. Ibid. 43; 58; 102; 65; 109,110,111.

22. Consider the comment, characteristic of stories of survivors, of the siege of Sarajevo: "Everything is out of your hands, you are completely helpless, someone else decides over your life and death. You are helpless." From

Ivana Macek, *War Within: Everyday Life in Sarajevo under Siege* (Uppsala: Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology, 2000), 58.

23. Les Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994). Unless otherwise noted, Cleveland's quotations are from my March 1999 interview with him.

24. Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

25. Maja Povrzanovic comments on this discrepancy and "incompatibility" between "national narratives" and "personal narratives" in the Croatian war. Povrzanovic, "The Imposed and the Imagined as Encountered by Croatian War Ethnographers," *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 2 (2000): 151–62, quotation at 153.

26. Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* ed. Cathy Caruth, 61–75 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 66.

27. This pattern of forcibly separating mixed descent children from their birth parents and "merging" or "absorbing" them into the European population as menials was established from the earliest days of European occupation, though "merging" only became a national policy of systematic "assimilation" in 1937. Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* [henceforth *HREOC*] (Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia, 1997), 27–37. Whether children were "forcibly taken" from their birth parents, "stolen," or simply "given up" for adoption is largely irrelevant, for what is at issue is the entrenched social injustice and deprivation, reinforced by government policies, that turned the childhoods of countless Aboriginal children of mixed descent into living nightmares. Ghassan Hage has explored the homely images that delineate such modalities of structural violence as strategies and logics of "domestication." Hage, "The Spatial Imaginary of National Practices: Dwelling-Domesticating/Being-Exterminating," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14 (1996): 463–85, quotation at 479.

28. Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," *Jewish Studies* 6 (1944): 99–122, quotation at 114.

29. Coral Edwards and Peter Read, eds., *The Lost Children: Thirteen Australians Taken from their Aboriginal Families Tell of the Struggles to Find Their Natural Parents* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1989), 34.

30. Ibid., 63–64.

31. Carmel Bird, *The Stolen Children: Their Stories* (Sydney: Random House, 1998), 57.

32. *HREOC*, 68.

33. Bird, *Stolen Children,* 22.

34. Ibid., 29.

35. *HREOC*, 82.

36. *HREOC*, 371.

37. Edwards and Read, *Lost Children,* 22.

38. As Tim O'Brien observes, recounting his experiences of being a foot soldier in Vietnam, "story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth" because only story-truth can convey the experience of what things were like and, in doing so, "make things present." O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 203.

39. Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 139–40. Vieda Skultans, "Theorizing Latvian Lives: The Quest for Identity," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3, no. 4 (1997): 761–80, quotation at 763. Das, *Critical Events*, 174. Arthur Kleinman, "Neurasthenia and Depression: A Study of Somaticization and Culture in China," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 6 (1982): 117–89. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

40. *HREOC*, 177.

41. Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," in Caruth, *Trauma*, 158–82, citations at 160–63, 175.

42. Understandably, many Aboriginal people construct the state as a quasi-parent and turn to it for redress precisely because they were "parented" and raised, as children, in state-run institutions.

43. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1970), 81.

44. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 959.

45. Bird, *Stolen Children,* 9.

46. *HREOC*, 372.

47. Alcinda Honwana, "Healing for Peace: Traditional Healers and Post-War Reconstruction in Southern Mozambique," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace and Psychology* 3, no. 3 (1997): 293–305.

48. Belinda Bozzoli, "Public Ritual and Private Transition: The Truth Commission in Alexandra Township, South Africa 1996," *African Studies* 57, no. 2 (1998): 167–95, esp. 189–92. One of the most poignant and widely publicized examples was the refusal of the Biko family to accept the granting of amnesty to the murderers of Steve Biko. See Jeremy Sarkins, "The Trials and Tribulations of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *South African Journal on Human Rights* 12, no. 4 (1996): 626–28.

49. As quoted in Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), 31.

50. Parr, *Silent Casualties,* 172.

51. Lawrence Langer, "The Alarmed Vision: Social Suffering and Holocaust Atrocity," in *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 55.

52. Dan Glaister, "Whitbread Completes Clean Sweep for Poet," *Guardian Weekly*, February 7, 1999, 29.

53. Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 140–41.

54. Stephen Weissman, *His Brother's Keeper: A Psychobiography of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1989), 122.

55. Krog, *Country of My Skull*, 160–61.

56. Bozzoli, "Public Ritual and Private Transition," 169.

57. Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry* (London: Verso, 2000).

58. I am echoing here Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's incisive critique of Hannah Arendt's tendency to hypostatize the social as an alien, monstrous, bloblike entity, inimical to human freedom. Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998),

59. Cf. Hage, "Spatial Imaginary of National Practices."

CHAPTER NINE. FAMILIAR AND FOREIGN BODIES

1. Michael Jackson, "Literacy, Communications and Social Change: The Maori Case, 1830–1870," M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, Department of Anthropology, 1967.

2. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, ed. Maurice Hindle (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 9.

3. Don Ihde, *Technics and Praxis*, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 24, ed. Robert S. Cohen and Marx W. Wartofsky (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), 4.

4. For example, Lucy Suchman, *Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human–Machine Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1.

5. Ihde, *Technics and Praxis,* 4.

6. Tim Ingold, "Eight Themes in the Anthropology of Technology," *Social Analysis* 41, no. 1 (1997): 106–38, quotation at 107; Pierre Lemonnier, *Elements for an Anthropology of Technology*, Anthropological Papers, no. 88 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, 1992), 79–85.

7. Brian Pfaffenberger, "Fetishised Objects and Humanised Nature: Towards an Anthropology of Technology," *Man* 23, no. 2 (1988): 236–52; Brian Pfaffenberger, "Social Anthropology of Technology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 491–516.

8. Gary Lee Downey, *The Machine in Me: An Anthropologist Sits among Computer Engineers* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 27.

9. Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, trans. J. Cohen (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964), 89–91; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The German Ideology," trans. C. Dutt, in *Karl Marx–Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 5:43. Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1986); Alf Hornborg, "Symbolic Technologies: Machines and the Marxian Notion of Fetishism," *Anthropological Theory* 1, no. 4 (2001); Janet Hoskins, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

10. Martin Heidegger, "The Question concerning Technology," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings,* ed. David Krell, 294–95 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 362.

12. Michael Jackson, *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9.

13. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Zande Therapeutics," in *Essays Presented to C. G. Seligman*, ed. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth, and Bronislaw Malinowski (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1934), 59.

14. George Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), 32–34. Consider, for instance, the following lonely-hearts columnist's advice to a woman who "could not bear being on her own in her single-bed flat": "If Elaine can look around her flat and see that everything in it, from the cat to the washing-up liquid to the very air itself, is as dependent on her for its useful existence as she is dependent on it, she may get great comfort. It sounds crazy, but if she can imagine that, say, the electric blender is actually looking back at her, as she looks at it, she may find a huge sense of calm coming over her. Oh, stop laughing. Just try it." Virginia Ironside, "Dilemmas," *Independent* 3 (May 2001): 19.

15. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 70, 78.

16. Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method*, 32.

17. For example, Chris Hables Gray, ed., *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

18. Downey, *Machine in Me*, 147, 148.

19. Ibid., 238. Devereux's work on the moveable boundary between "I" and "not-I" and the experience of inside/outside anticipates this point. Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method*, 321–28.

20. Downey, *Machine in Me,* 185–92.

21. Stephen Barley, "The Social Construction of a Machine: Ritual, Superstition, Magical Thinking and Other Pragmatic Responses to Running a CT Scanner," in *Biomedicine Examined*, ed. Margaret Lock and Deborah Gordon, 497–539 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), 520.

22. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948); Pfaffenberger, "Social Anthropology of Technology," 501.

23. As cited in Anna Forsberg, Lars Bäckman, and Anders Möller, "Experiencing Liver Transplantation: A Phenomenological Approach," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 32, no. 332 (2000): 327–34, quotation at 331.

24. Eleni Papagaroufali, "Xenotransplantation and Transgression: Immoral Stories about Human-Animal Relations in the West," in *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Philippe Descola and Gísli Pálsson, 240–55 (London: Routledge, 1996), 251.

25. Daisy Price, "A Family Affair," *Independent*, April 23, 2001, 18.

26. Ibid.

27. Lesley Sharp, "Organ Transplantation as a Transformative Experience: Anthropological Insights into the Restructuring of the Self," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1995): 357–89, quotation at 365.

28. Leslie Rebecca Bloom, " 'How Can We Know the Dancer from the Dance?': Discourses of the Self-Body," *Human Studies* 15 (1992): 313–34, quotation at 323.

29. Susanne Lundin, "The Boundless Body: Cultural Perspectives on Xenotransplantation," *Ethos* 64, no. 1 (1999): 5–31, quotations at 22–24, 18.

30. Ibid., 12.

31. As cited in Forsberg, Bäckman, and Möller, "Experiencing Liver Transplantation," 332–33.

32. Janice Weems and Ellen Tate Patterson, "Coping with Uncertainty and Ambivalence While Awaiting a Cadaveric Renal Transplant," *ANNA Journal* 16, no. 1 (1989): 27–31; Sharp, "Transplantation as a Transformative Experience," 380; Forsberg, Bäckman, and Möller, "Experiencing Liver Transplantation," 330.

33. Renée Fox and Judith Swazey, *The Courage to Fail: A Social View of Organ Transplants and Dialysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

34. Sharp, "Transplantation as a Transformative Experience," 378–82.

35. A. L. Kroeber, "The Superorganic," *American Anthropologist* 19 (1917): 163–213.

36. Ihde, *Technics and Praxis,* xix–xxiv.

37. Downey, *Machine in Me,* 238.

38. As cited in Forsberg, Bäckman, and Möller, "Experiencing Liver Transplantation," 332.

39. Tine Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, "Close Encounters with Fertility and Procreative Technology," in *Managing Uncertainty: Ethnographic Studies of Illness, Risk and the Struggle for Control*, ed. Vibeke Steffen, Richard Jenkins, and Hanne Jessen, 71–91 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005).

40. Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002).

41. Bruno Bettelheim, "Joey: A 'Mechanical Boy,' " *Scientific American* 200, no. 3 (1959): 117–26.

42. Brian Pfaffenberger, "The Social Meaning of the Personal Computer: or, Why the Personal Computer Revolution was No Revolution," *Anthropological Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1988): 39–47, quotation at 44.

43. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "Beyond Nature and Culture: Modes of Reasoning in the Age of Molecular Biology and

Medicine," in *Living and Working with the New Medical Technologies: Intersections of Inquiry*, ed. Margaret Lock, Alan Young, and Alberto Cambrosio, 19–30 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

44. Paul Rabinow, *Essays on the Anthropology of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 99.

45. Royal Commission on Genetic Modification 2001, form 1, p. 1 (http://www/gmcommission.govt.nz/). Nancy Scheper-Hughes dramatically makes a similar point, referring to the stories that circulate in the third world about organ stealing. "The rumours express the subjectivity of subalterns living in a 'negative zone' of existence where lives and bodies are experienced as a constant crisis of presence (hunger, sickness, injury) on the one hand, and as a crisis of absence and disappearance on the other. The stories are told, remembered, and circulated because they are *existentially* true." Scheper-Hughes, "Theft of Life: The Globalization of Organ-Stealing Rumours," *Anthropology Today* 12, no. 3 (1996): 3–11, quotation at 9.

CHAPTER TEN. PROSE OF SUFFERING

1. William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (Harmondsworth: Penguin,1967), 262.

2. Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 139–40.

3. James Rupert, "Machete Terror Stalks Sierra Leone," *Guardian*, January 3, 1999, 12.

4. The Revolutionary United Front, or RUF, are otherwise known as the rebels.

5. The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, or ECOMOG, is a military force, made up mainly of Nigerian troops, that was brought into Sierra Leone to quell the rebellion.

6. *Hake* is sometimes translated as "sin," though the word covers a multitude of motifs—hatred, ill will, malice, envy—and distracts from the principle of retributive justice that lies behind it. In Kuranko thought, intersubjective relationships are governed by reciprocity, so that if a person offends, wrongs, or injures another person without justification, the offense calls for payback (*tasare*). This compensatory action may be effected through several means. It may follow a court hearing, in which case the offender must indemnify the person to whom injury has been caused. It may follow a verbal apology, in which the offender begs forgiveness. It may, if recourse to legal means or the workings of individual conscience are unavailing, lead the injured party to take matters into his own hands and seek sorcery as a form of revenge. Alternatively, if the injured party feels that no worldly agency can secure redress, he may be inclined to leave matters in the hands of God. In previous fieldwork, informants emphasized automatic redress, in which an unprovoked and unjustified offense will boomerang back against the offender, particularly if the victim is protected by magical medicines. In conversations with Kuranko informants in January–February 2002,

however, such redress was thought to require divine agency. As Noah put it, "People feel that God is just and omnipotent. One way or another He'll avenge the crime or wrong-doing."

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1958), 237*)*.

8. Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), 57, 62, 164–67.

9. Michael Jackson, *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 20.

10. That all villagers were equal in the eyes of the rebels, may, ironically, have helped them endure the trauma they experienced, for although RUF violence destroyed the lives of so many, it reinforced a sense of solidarity among the survivors. This solidarity was clearly evident when the Civilian Defence Force War Widows, Orphans, and Ex-Combatants Association was launched in Kabala, northern Sierra Leone, on January 11, 2002, with the aim of rebuilding villages, clinics, and schools, of offering vocational training in gara-dying, carpentry, and tailoring, and of providing medicines and microcredit to villagers.

11. We in the West dwell much on the self. We make a profession of our wounds. In our stress on psychic inwardness, our own sympathetic suffering all too easily blinds us to those who are really suffering, or making our own feelings, rather than our relations with others, our primary concern. This view informed Desmond Tutu's invocation of the African concept of *ubuntu* at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission—for reconciliation, he argued, required a movement from "I" to "we." More forthrightly, the psychologist Nomfundo Walaza condemned those who put the salving of their own consciences, the saving of their own souls, the absolution of their own guilt, before the actions that would, in concert with others, create a new *social* order that might redeem the order of the past.

12. In a meticulous account of the social history of PTSD, Allan Young argues that this syndrome is "not timeless, nor does it possess an intrinsic unity. Rather, it is glued together by the practices, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented, and by the various interests, institutions, and moral arguments that mobilized these efforts and resources." Though the syndrome is historically and socially constructed, this does not mean that the label "trauma" or "PTSD" does not signify profoundly real *experiences* of human distress; it simply means that we should acknowledge that it has the same "fictive" status as "witchcraft" among the Azande. Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5–6.

13. Michael Jackson, *In Sierra Leone* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

14. Odo Marquand, *In Defense of the Accidental: Philosophical Studies*, trans. Robert W. Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11–12.

15. W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001), 183.

16. Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The Appeal of Experience: The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times," in *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

17. Pierre Bourdieu, *La misère du monde* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993).

18. Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1872–1914* (New York: Atlantic–Little, Brown, 1967); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (1995): 418.

19. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. Donald A. Cress (London: Hackett, 1992); John Adams, "Discourses on Davila," in *Works of John Adams,* vol. 6 (Boston, 1851); Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963), 66–67, passim.

20. Arendt, *Revolution*, 65.

21. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

22. Andrew Motion, *Keats* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 279, 301 (emphasis added), and 377–78.

23. Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, trans. Graham Burchell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81; Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 58–61.

24. Vincent van Gogh, *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, selected, edited, and introduced by Mark Roskill (London: Collins, 1963), 117.

25. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," afterword to *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 213–15.

26. John Berger, *A Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1976), 124, 145. Some years after the publication of *A Fortunate Man*, John Sassall committed suicide under great personal pressure. He "was frightened in case a patient comes into the surgery with a problem I can't solve." Ken Worpole, "There Is Nothing, Then There Is Something, Then There Is Nothing Again," May 5, 2005, http:\\www.opendemocracy.net/arts-literature/article_2484.jsp.

27. Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 35.

28. Ibid.

29. Das, *Critical Events*, 143.

30. Lawrence Langer, "The Alarmed Vision: Social Suffering and Holocaust Atrocity," in Kleinman, Das, and Lock, *Social Suffering*, 47.

31. Scheper-Hughes, "Primacy of the Ethical," 409–20.

32. Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 191.

33. Ibid., 292.

34. Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling*, 255–56.

35. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 43.

36. Arthur Kleinman, *Writing at the Margin: Discourse between Anthropology and Medicine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 96–97, 187, 98.

37. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race* (London: Michael Joseph, 1971).

38. As quoted in David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994), 310.

39. Baldwin and Mead, *Rap on Race,* 197 (emphases in the original).

40. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 50–51.

41. Boltanski, *Distant Suffering,* 3.

42. Arendt, *Revolution*, 84, 81.

43. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 4–6, 165.

44. Michael Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Democracy* (New York: Berg, 1992).

45. Arendt, *Revolution,* 84.

46. Steven Sampson, "From Reconciliation to Coexistence," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 79–184 , cite at 180.

47. E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 208.

48. Miriam Cendrars, "Interview with Frédéric Ferney, Boulogne-sur-Seine, 21 December 1992," in *Blaise Cendrars*, by Frédéric Ferney (Paris: Éditions Francois Bourin, 1992).

49. Blaise Cendrars, *L'homme foudroyé* (Paris: Denoël, 1945), 265–66.

50. Blaise Cendrars, "Blaise Cendrars vous parle: Entretien premier, and entretien cinquième," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Denoël, n.d.), 8:547, 599.

51. Miriam Cendrars, "Interview with Ferney," 134.

52. Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality and Thought of Traditional Africa,* trans. K. E. Martin and L. M. Martin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 117–18.

53. Ing-Britt Trankell, "Songs of Our Spirits: Memory and Conflict in a Cambodian Cham Community," unpublished conference paper, AAS, Chicago, 2001.

54. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 73–74.

CHAPTER ELEVEN. ON AUTONOMY

1. John Christman, "Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, 2009).

2. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 50, 51–52.

3. Otto Rank, *Will Therapy: An Analysis of the Therapeutic Process in Terms of Relationship* (New York: Knopf, 1936), 31.

4. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 155.

5. One of the most compelling ethnographic explorations of this tension between autonomy and interdependence is Robert Desjarlais's study of the Yolmo of Nepal. Desjarlais speaks of "two contradictory cultural values: those of independence and interdependence. Yolmo wa, though deeply communal beings, also profess a strong notion of individuality, with this dialectic fostering a conflict between the desire for autonomy and the need for independence." This sociocultural dynamic, he adds, is "common to Tibeto-Burman peoples of the Himalayan region." Desjarlais, *Body and Emotion: The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 47.

6. This is often referred to as "relational autonomy." Rather than emphasize autonomy as an individual trait, autonomy is seen to be a property of a person's relationships with others—something that can be gained or lost depending on the how such relationships are lived. See, for example, Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, eds., *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

7. Theodor Adorno, "On Subject and Object," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 257.

8. Fred Myers makes the same observation in his ethnography of the Pintupi, where "relatedness" (*waltyja*) implies shared identity and moral values of amity and mutual support entailed by being part of a social network with common ties to a particular tract of ancestral country. Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 22.

9. Shame is a form of social death in which any reflections on *who* one is are eclipsed by the external definition of *what* one is in the eyes of others. No longer a subject for oneself, one is reduced to being an object—isolated, exposed, fixed, categorized, and judged by the Other. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Society, 1956), 221–22, 288–91.

10. Steve Jampijinpa, "Ngurra-kurlu," electronic document, www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFZq7AduGrc.

11. Michael Jackson, *At Home in the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 23.

12. Robert Tonkinson, "Aboriginal 'Difference' and 'Autonomy' Then and Now: Four Decades of Change in a Western Desert Society," *Anthropological Forum* 17, no. 1 (2007): 41–60, quotation at 42. Cf. Francesca Merlan on

Aboriginal notions of autonomy as self-assertion, and the repudiation of outsiders who seek to impose their will or agendas on Aboriginal people. Merlan, "Ordinary Ethics and Changing Cosmologies: Exemplification from North Australia," in *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language and Action*, ed. Michael Lambek (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 207–24, quotation at 215.

13. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 288 (emphasis in text).

14. See Gilliam Cowlishaw's compelling account of urban Aboriginals in the western Sydney suburb of Mt. Druitt, a "city outback" or "suburban western desert"; Cowlishaw, *The City's Outback* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009).

15. The report was from a Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse commissioned by the government of the Northern Territory, Australia, in August 2006.

16. As quoted in Phillip Corey, Peter Hartcher, and Stephanie Peatling, "Just Imagine if It Was Marrickville: Why the Prime Minister Took Control," *Sydney Morning Herald*, weekend ed., June 23–24, 2007, 25.

17. Ibid., 28.

18. The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act became law in August 2007.

19. Marcia Langton, "The Shock of the New: A Postcolonial Dilemma for Australianist Anthropology," in *Culture Crisis: Anthropology and Politics in Aboriginal Australia,* ed. J. Altman and M. Hinkson (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010), 91–115, quotation at 100. Langton is citing Francesca Merlan, "More Than Rights," *Inside Story*, March 11, 2009; electronic document, inside.org.au/more-than-rights/.

20. Marcia Langton, "Anthropology, Politics and the Changing World of Aboriginal Australians," *Anthropological Forum* 21, no 1 (2011): 1–22.

21. As quoted in Patricia Karvelas, "Inside Story," *Weekend Australian*, June 23–24, 2007, 1.

22. Ean Higgins, "Town at the Coalface in Fear of Overflow," *Weekend Australian*, June 23–24, 2007, 7.

23. Diane Austin-Broos provides a balanced assessment of the intervention in the Western Arrernte community of Ntaria/Hermannsburg in *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past: Invasion, Violence, and Imagination in Central Australia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), chap. 9.

24. "Lajamana and the Police," electronic document, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsJBTEC_i8c.

25. The act allowed the compulsory acquisition of townships currently held under the title provisions of the Native Title Act 1993 through five-year leases with compensation that was less than just.

26. "Stop the Intervention—Facts and Info," electronic document, http://stoptheintervention.org/facts.

27. Yasmine Musharbash, personal communication, Sydney, December 7, 2011.

28. Yasmine Musharbash, "Only Whitefellas Take that Road": Culture Seen through the Intervention at Yuendumu," in Altman and Hinkson, *Culture Crisis*, 212–25, cite at 213.

29. Ibid., 221 (emphases added).

30. "Lajamana and the Police," electronic document.

31. According to one assessment, "the rate of domestic assault in indigenous communities is eight to ten times that of non-indigenous communities. Aboriginal boys are ten times more likely to be sexually assaulted than boys in the general population and the sexual abuse of girls is so widespread that one-third of thirteen-year-old girls in the Northern Territory are infected with Chlamydia and gonorrhoea." Louis Nowra, *Bad Dreaming: Aboriginal Men's Violence against Women and Children* (Melbourne: Pluto Press, 2007), 7. It should be noted, however, that statistical generalizations like these are not helpful in establishing differences between communities, identifying specific causes or circumstances, and deciding redressive action.

32. Peter Sutton, *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the End of the Liberal Consensus* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2009), 12, 84–85.

33. Nowra, *Bad Dreaming*, 7.

34. Austin-Broos, *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past,* 246.

35. George Orwell's 1940 review of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* criticizes Miller's abstention from political action in the face of the rise of fascism in Europe while admiring his philosophy of accepting the world rather than seeking to change it. Orwell uses the image of Jonah inside the whale to conjure this refusal to engage with the world or claim knowledge of how its problems may be solved. Orwell, "Inside the Whale," in *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), 9–50.

CHAPTER TWELVE. WHERE THOUGHT BELONGS

1. Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 5–6.

2. Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

3. Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 4–5.

4. My argument is against Ricoeur's assumption that our philosophy is invariably "Greek by birth" and that the philosopher must necessarily speak "from the depths of his Greek memory." Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 20.

5. Badiou, *Conditions*, 42.

6. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 391.

7. Adorno, *Critical Models,* 7. Psychologists have recently made a similar case

for using behavioral science tools to test long-standing questions about human morality, and several philosophers have answered this call to take their field back to its empirical roots. See Beth Azar, "Revisiting Philosophy with MRI," *Monitor on Psychology* 41, no. 10 (2010): 40–43.

8. Carol Brightman, epilogue to *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949–1975*, ed. and with an introduction by Carol Brightman (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 391.

9. Ronald Beiner, "Hannah Arendt on Judging," in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, by H. Arendt, ed. R. Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 89–156, cite at 90.

10. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, enlarged ed. (New York: Viking, 1968), 220, 14.

11. Ibid., 220; Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 42.

12. Arendt's ideas here resemble those of Adorno, for whom thinking demands the abrogation of the ego. "Open thinking points beyond itself," he observed. "What has been cogently thought must be thought in some other place and by other people." Theodor Adorno, "Resignation," *Telos* 35: 165–68, cite at 168. It is also worth remarking a parallelism with the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (possibly because both models have their source in Kant), for whom "the reciprocity of perspectives" and "the interchangeability of standpoints" defined the strategic field of intersubjectivity and "common-sense" thinking. Alfred Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations: Selected Writings*, ed. Helmut R. Wagner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 183–84.

13. Hannah Arendt, "What Is Existenz Philosophy?" *Partisan Review* 13, no. 1 (1964): 34–56; Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace , 1994), 182.

14. Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, 323.

15. Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 122–24, 166–67.

16. Veena Das, "Our Work to Cry: Your Work to Listen," in *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Violence in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das, ed., 346–62 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

17. Michael White, *Maps of Narrative Practice* (New York: Norton, 2007), chap. 3.

18. Richard Wilk, " 'Real Belizean Food': Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean," *American Anthropologist* 101, no. 2 (1999): 244–55, quotation at 248.

19. Andrew Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy: Reinventing Race in Bush Kaliai Cargo Cults* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 199), 71, 82.

20. Arendt, *Between Past and Future,* 241.

21. Writing in January 1945, Hannah Arendt already anticipates the conclusions she will reach in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). "Himmler's over-all organization, relies not on fanatics, nor on congenital murderers, nor on sadists; it relies entirely upon the normality of jobholders and family

men." Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed. Ron H. Feldman (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 232. James Baldwin, also writing of the Holocaust, says very much the same thing: "a civilization is not destroyed by wicked people; it is not necessary that people be wicked but only that they be spineless." Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dell, 1970), 77.

22. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971), 193.

23. Arendt, *Between Past and Future,* 221.

24. Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 87.

25. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 43.

26. The history of anthropology has involved a transition precisely from historical to ahistorical modalities of understanding. Thus the late nineteenth-century anthropology of Tylor, Frazer, Morgan, and de Coulanges centers its cross-cultural inquiries on antiquity and the model of cultural evolution, whereas the ethnographic method of Malinowski that establishes the modern fieldwork tradition places history in parenthesis (as does the later structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss).

27. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality,* trans. R. Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 8–9.

28. Michael Jackson, *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Ethnographic Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

29. Hannah Arendt, "A Reply," *Review of Politics* 15 (1953): 76–84, quotations at 79, 78.

30. In her account of Hannah Arendt's notion of judging, Lisa Jane Disch coins the phrase "the visiting imagination" to capture Arendt's notion of visiting as a way of "constructing stories of an event from each of the plurality of perspectives that might have an interest in telling it and imagining how I would respond as a character in a story very different from my own. It is a kind of representation that arrives at the general through the particular." Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 158.

31. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

32. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 197, 199–200.

33. Aristotle, *Selected Fragments*, vol. 12 of *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. and ed. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 34.

34. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. R. C. McLeary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 119.

35. Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," *Jewish Studies* 6 (1944): 99–122.

36. John Dewey, *How We Think* (New York: Prometheus, 1991), 12. Cf. Wittgenstein's comment 123 in *Philosophical Investigations*: "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about,'" the implication

being that thought is occasioned by the need to gain clarity or to reorient oneself in a world where language has come to confuse and muddle more than it illuminates. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 49e.

37. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 61.

38. *Karl Jaspers: Basic Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Edith Ehrlich, Leonard H. Ehrlich, and George B. Pepper (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 12. Writes Don Seeman, "Scholars have been reluctant to confront the hard limits placed on meaning-making by radical suffering, which can be both world and consciousness destroying." In his compelling reading of Rabbi Shapira's writings from the Warsaw ghetto, Seeman criticizes the study of religion for its tendency to "privilege discursive coherence at the expense of sufferers' desperate concern with practical efficacy." Seeman, "Ritual Efficacy, Hasidic Mysticism and 'Useless Suffering' in the Warsaw Ghetto," *Harvard Theological Review* 101, nos. 3–4 (2008): 465–505, quotation at 466–67.

39. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, 2 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965).

40. Kenelm Burridge, *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 6.

41. Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 95.

42. Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 114.

43. Walter van Beek, "Dogon Restudied: A Field Evaluation of the Work of Marcel Griaule," *Current Anthropology* 32, no. 2 (1991): 139–67.

44. Barry Hallen, "A Philosopher's Approach to Traditional Culture," *Theoria to Theory* 9 (1975): 259–72, quotations at 261, 264. See also Barry Hallen and J. O. Sodipo, *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy* (London: Ethnographica,1986), 8–9.

45. See, for example, the collection of essays published by the International African Institute in 1965, titled *African Systems of Thought*, ed. Meyer Fortes and Germaine Dieterlen (London: Oxford University Press).

46. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,* trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 17, 19.

47. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 146–51.

48. Paul Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 17.

49. Literally, "Tu in the daytime, Tahu in the evening." Tu is the god of war, and his spirit (Mauri Tu) governs the space in front of a meetinghouse where visitors are met with aggressive displays; Tahu (to light) symbolizes

"the milder and quieter reception within the lighted house at night." Te Rangi Hiroa, *The Coming of the Maori,* 2nd ed. (Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1966), 373.

50. Michael King, ed., *Te Ao Hurihuri: The World Moves On* (Wellington: Hicks Smith and Sons, 1975), 7.

51. Te Pakaka Tawhai, "Aotearoa's Spiritual Heritage," in *Religions of New Zealanders,* 2nd ed., ed. Peter Donovan, 11–19 (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1996), quotation at 14.

EPILOGUE

1. Kant first proposed them in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781); he added the fourth question in *Logic* (1880) to summarize his "philosophy in the cosmopolitan sense of the word." See Michel Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's "Anthropology,"* trans. Roberto Nigro and Kate Briggs (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2008), 74–75.

2. "What fruitful new developments would not arise if only our whole philosophy would become anthropology." As quoted in John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1, and discussed 6–8.

3. Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 209.

4. Cognitivists seek naturalistic explanations of cultural behavior by invoking evolved psychobiological dispositions to think and act ritualistically, religiously, and magically. These explanatory models, however, are as speculative, nonspecific, and simplistic as those they allegedly supersede. In their indifference to biographical, experiential, and contextual specificities and complexities, neurocognitive models fail to accommodate the active and meaningful role of the human subject, in relation to other subjects, in the inventive and interminable work of creating those forms of life that tend to appear, in hindsight or from the outside, as genetically or culturally determined. See Koen Stroeken, "Questioning Cognitive and Interpretive Takes on Ritual," *Anthropological Theory* 11, no. 3 (2011): 355–72.

5. Anne Salmond, "Maori and Modernity: Ruatara's Dying," in *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values,* ed. Anthony P. Cohen (London: Routledge, 2000), 37–58, quotations at 37, 56.

6. Michael Jackson, "Violence and Intersubjective Reason," in *Existential Anthropology: Events, Exigencies and Effects* (New York: Berghahn, 2005), 35–51, quotations at 36.

7. Writing about first- and second-century Greece and Rome, Michel Foucault speaks of the care and cultivation of the self as entailing the governance of *aphrodisia* (a desire for heterosexual intimacy). Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self,* vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1986). A comparable emphasis on self-control characterizes the

ethos of rural West Africa and informs traditional initiatory instruction of both men and women. Unbridled sexuality and emotionality were seen as inimical to social cohesion and collective life. Writing about Kuranko prescriptive marriage rules in the 1970s, I noted that "it is as if a sophisticated system of control engineering ironically required, as an integral unit of its operation, a piece of organic tissue, perishable, volatile, and with a mind of its own." Michael Jackson, *The Kuranko: Dimensions of Social Reality in a West African Society* (London: Hurst, 1977), 116.

8. Charles Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3–4; Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 68.

9. Arthur Kleinman, Yunxiang Yan, Jing Jun, Sing Lee, Everett Zhang, Pan Tianshu, Wu Fei, and Guo Jinhua, introduction to *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person: What Anthropology and Psychiatry Tell Us about China Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 5.

10. Kleinman et al., *Deep China,* 285.

11. Judith Sherman, *Say the Name: A Survivor's Tale in Prose and Poetry* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 151.

12. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible (followed by Working Notes),* ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 12–13, 169.

Index

Michael Jackson's *Lifeworlds* is a masterful collection of essays, the culmination of a career of exploring the relationship between anthropology and philosophy. Drawing inspiration from James, Dewey, Arendt, Husserl, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, and from ethnographic fieldwork among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, the Warlpiri of Central Australia, and the Māori of Aotearoa (New Zealand), Jackson outlines an existential anthropology grounded in the dynamics and quandaries of everyday life. He offers a pragmatic understanding of how people act to make their lives more viable, to bridge the gap between self and other, to grasp the elusive, and to transform abstract possibilities into embodied truths.

"*Lifeworlds* is an extraordinary book, remarkable for its scholarly depth and literary sensibility. It puts the whole question of anthropology's relation to philosophy in a new light. The framing of these essays by the first and last chapter as well as the experience of reading them as a series with the rippling effect of themes that are developed through different kinds of stories and through different voices makes one realize that Michael Jackson is not only a great ethnologist, he is also a major theoretician of anthropological knowledge. Not many people could have taken up such profound issues while wearing their scholarship so lightly." **Veena Das**, Johns Hopkins University

"Michael Jackson is an extremely productive ethnographer, a serious reader of phenomenological and existential philosophy, and a remarkable writer at a level that one rarely sees in anthropology. *Lifeworlds*, unsurprisingly, is no exception. The several essays included here fit into an impressive whole that sets out a compelling case for a type of ethnography of which Jackson is one of the masters. The writing is strong and the critical reflections impressive. This book defines an approach to anthropology that is resonant enough to challenge the leading models of our time." **Arthur Kleinman**, Harvard University

"*Lifeworlds* comprises a stellar set of essays that advances a convincing testament to the value and pressing need for an existential anthropology. I know of no other text that advances such a statement in such rich and informed terms. The writing is lively and engaging throughout, and the scholarship on which the text rests is strong and well informed. Michael Jackson, one of the leading and most innovative anthropologists today, draws on a wealth of anthropological, literary, and philosophical resources to make his case on the matter. Part anthropological inquiry, part philosophy, *Lifeworlds* stands out in the ranks of anthropological tomes published of late." **Robert Desjarlais**, Sarah Lawrence College

MICHAEL JACKSON is the Distinguished Visiting Professor of World Religions at the Harvard Divinity School.

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