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Partial Failure: The Attempt to Deal with Uncertainty in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and in Anthropology

Tanya M. Luhrmann 

The paper identifies and tries to explain a style of argument that can be found in recent psychoanalytic writing and anthropological writing. In particular, it seeks to explain why similar styles of argument (which emphasize narration, interpretation, uncertainty, and the professional's incomplete knowledge of the patient or fieldsubject) are presented in these different fields with such different affect. The paper suggests that these differences might arise from the different moral goals of the disciplines and, specifically, from the differences between a clinical and a nonclinical enterprise.

Anthropology and psychoanalysis are not unlike. The task of each is to understand other human lives. Their practitioners have trained for years. They have read extensively about the process of understanding. They have invested so much time—hundreds of analytic sessions, years of fieldwork—in the people they want to understand that they baffle most outsiders. They become engrossed in the lives they study, and they become a part of those

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lives, intimately absorbed into other people's dreams and daily rhythms. And yet at the end of their attempts they sometimes struggle with a sense of ignorance, and with what could perhaps be called the paradox of human knowing: that the more we understand a person, the more acutely we become aware of the ways in which we do not know him or her. The struggle that anthropologists and psychoanalysts have in common, then, is the struggle to come to terms with a sense of partial failure.

The sense of knowing or understanding here is more than the command of rules and facts that characterize, say, the game of chess. Knowing the rules is one thing; being able to use them unreflectively is another. Having the skill to use them well is something else again: one can say, the computer often wins, but by God it plays bad chess. Anthropologists and analysts are usually interested in the experience of the chess-playing, and yet it is not clear that an analyst/anthropologist of mediocre chess ability can ever understand the experience of a profoundly skilled player.

The complexity of this question perhaps encourages the use of metaphor to evoke an ideal sense of intimate knowing: anthropologists/analysts might say that they want to know what it is like to live inside the chessplayer's skin. Analysts and anthropologists want to know what it is like to think like the other person, to assume that person's analogies, play in her/his idioms, anticipate her/his startlement. They want to know what it would be like to live that other life, with those parents, those expectations, that disordered personal history. The analysts, of course, have also a therapeutic aim, which the anthropologists, at least explicitly, do not. But they both want to know what it would be to live as another person lives. Without defining this kind of more-than-ordinary understanding precisely, it is clear that it entails an as-if quality: to know another person, one should be able, in one's imagination, to understand in detail how that person responds to the world.

Taken to its limits, this project is inevitably doomed. The life that confronts you is not the one you would lead if you suddenly found yourself in those circumstances—suddenly set down, in Malinowski's phrase, with all your books and trunks. This other life is

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one in which the very style of thinking, feeling, and experiencing may be (often is) profoundly unlike your own. At some point, the most expert observer falls short of a complete understanding of another person. This, of course, has always been true for all people, among them analysts and anthropologists.

This essay springs from the recognition that there is in contemporary anthropology and contemporary psychoanalysis a body of work which emerged in the 1980's and which addresses the problem of the incomplete knowledge of other people as a real problem with relevance for the professional activities of their respective disciplines. The anthropological arguments are called "postmodern,"

while the psychoanalytic ones usually are not, but they each have the feel of normal science with respect to each other. Both the analysts and the anthropologists who write in this style reject the stance of the scientist in search of universal laws. Both analysts and anthropologists place the authority for knowledge of the patient or fieldsubject in the hands of the patient or fieldsubject more than they did before. They share, to some extent, a similar vocabulary, a similar intellectual stance, and similar concerns. In both of them one finds frequent references to Ricoeur, Foucault, Habermas, Jameson, and Nietzsche, and above all to hermeneutics and interpretation. There is the same relentless emphasis on partial knowledge.

I am an anthropologist who has recently been reading widely in psychoanalysis, and as I read, I was struck by the similarities in the arguments, but also by what I took to be their different tone. It seemed to me that these roughly similar arguments had, in their respective disciplines, been presented and received quite differently. The psychoanalytic writing seemed to have a less provocative quality, and there seemed to be less overt controversy around the ideas than there was in the anthropological writing. The psychoanalysts who write in this vein wrote as if it were straightforward that an interpretive sensibility and the acceptance of uncertainty made them better analysts. The anthropological writing was attended by a turbulent ocean of outrage.

My goal in this essay is to explore the question of why that

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difference may exist. There are, of course, great distinctions between the disciplines in style, culture, history, and so forth. I will argue that the most illuminating difference here is the ultimate purpose of the discipline and the different kind of moral distress that this entails.

First, though, let me explain what I take to be the similarities in argumentative styles, and, as far as I can gather, the concerns to which they responded.

Anthropology

In 1973 Clifford Geertz published a collection of essays which became the dominant key of anthropological thinking for a generation. *The Interpretation of Cultures* was a subtle, mellifluous volume. Geertz used his Balinese to meditate on power, death, status, and the eternal. He compared a scruffy cockfight to *Macbeth* and *King Lear* and made the comparison so compelling that the essay became a humanistic classic. Culture became the public symbols through which people gave meaning to the brute facts of human life: that we envy, love, lust, and hate, that experience is often unfair and usually painful. Geertzian anthropologists capture these symbols with thick description to grasp the idiosyncrasy, the moving particularity, with which others invest significance in the mundane, and for Geertz the anthropologist's relationship to "his" culture was like a literary critic's relationship to "her" text. Anthropology could best be understood as an interpretive enterprise, not as a science. Geertz had been trained by people who collected "data," but he saw himself as being for the cultures he studied an interpreter in every sense of the word: he translated, he explained, and he imposed his own artistry upon the explanation.

As an argument, this was intellectually quite powerful. It drew on new arguments, mostly French (Ricoeur was one of Geertz's primary influences), which argued that social life could be understood as a text. One of Geertz's best known remarks, for example, was that "the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves

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ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (1973p. 452). It must also be mentioned, in this context, that he was an extraordinarily gifted writer, whose ethnographies had delicate, deft characterizations which bristled with intellectual allusion and sophistication, and he set a standard for literary achievement so high that very few people could even dream of emulating it. They did, however, begin to notice the power of good prose.

In 1986 the University of California Press published a collection of essays which became the most notorious instance of what was called anthropological postmodernism. (It is these essays, and not Geertz's work, that I am trying to compare to the analytic writing.) The authors of *Writing Culture* (see **Clifford and Marcus, 1986**) were mostly men in their forties, some of whom, in one way or another, had worked with Geertz. All of the essays took Geertz's literary sympathies to their logical extreme, and some of them used his own arguments to attack him. The mood of this volume was perceived by many anthropologists as angry, iconoclastic, and daring. At least some senior anthropologists regarded it as parricidal. Certainly, its publication and the publication of a companion volume became an event. I myself have heard graduate students gossip about carrying the volume around their department corridors, and heard senior anthropologists worry that the volume signaled the end of the field as they knew it. The emotional intensity of the debate in the journals and in the classrooms suggested that the future of the field was at stake. Through *Writing Culture* and a cluster of other books—*Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (**Marcus and Fischer, 1986**), *Tuhami* (**Crapanzano, 1980**), *The Predicament of Culture* (**Clifford, 1988**)—postmodernism became *the* emotionally charged discussion in anthropology. I know of no anthropologist who does not have views and feelings about it. It is these claims, so controversial in anthropology, that seem to be echoed in psychoanalytic writings.

On the page, the intellectual claims do not seem unduly dramatic. The authors of *Writing Culture* ask how the fact that

production of ethnographic knowledge, particularly in a cultural climate in which the right of marginalized people to speak for themselves has become a charged political issue. If I had to summarize the claims of this collection, they would be these: 1) that ethnographers are situated in the ethnographic context, that they cannot see all that context, that their presence alters it, that they have a certain political and psychological relationship with it and to it; 2) that the way in which you write about something reflects an implicit truth claim or assertion about what you know and how you know it; and 3) that culture is not some coherent set of propositions or symbols shared and acted upon by all members of a society, but that different members of a culture have varied interpretations and experiences of whatever culture is.

None of these claims is a denial that there is a meat-and-potatoes reality (although one essay in the collection did make such assertions), and none is a claim of epistemological relativism. Rather, they are assertions of the partial nature of ethnographers' experience and their use of literary form to assert persuasively their knowledge of that world. The introduction to the volume specifically denies a relativist stance, and explicitly argues that one cultural account is not always as good as any other and that there are standards for evaluating ethnographic texts. For the most part, the writing circles around writing: ethnography as literature, writing as an interpretive and rhetorical act.

But the writing always returns to an attack on the external vantage point, or rather on the idea that an anthropologist can have one. The introduction to the volume is entitled "Partial Truths." That title captures the polemical essence of the volume well: no ethnographer can see the whole of any social world, and all ethnographers present these partial truths through the vehicle of literary expression, with the potential strengths and weaknesses of that medium. Clifford (in **Clifford and Marcus, 1986** p. 2) remarks: "The essays collected here ... see culture as composed of seriously contested codes and representations; they assume that the poetic and the politic are inseparable, that science is in, not above, historical and linguistic process." He also says, "Ethnographers

are more and more like the Cree hunter who (the story goes) came to Montreal to testify in court concerning the fate of his hunting lands in the new James Bay hydroelectric scheme. He would describe his way of life. But when administered the oath he hesitated: 'I'm not sure I can tell the truth.... I can only tell what I know'" (p. 8). And the introduction says also: "A major consequence of the historical and theoretical movements traced in this Introduction has been to dislodge the grounds from which persons and groups securely represent others.... We ground this, now, on a moving earth. There is no longer any place of overview (mountaintop) from which to map human ways of life, no Archimedian point from which to represent the world" (p. 22).

These arguments generated fury, not because of their explicit concerns but because of what seemed to be—*seemed* to be—their authors' underlying motivations. The fact that anthropologists were embedded in their ethnographic context and that this embeddedness partially obscured their vantage point was probably as obvious to the "dinosaurs" of anthropology (the classic anthropologists who published in the interwar period) as it is to those whom Edwin Ardener called (in a charming comparison) the "furry little mammals" of the modern discipline. After all, the limited (but useful) vantage point is what the phrase "participant observation" implies: that the observers see more because they participate, but that their participation will affect what they see.

The reason for the outrage against the essays (and other writing that followed in this style) was that some anthropologists understood them to imply that ignoring the anthropologist's embeddedness was tantamount to asserting the anthropologist's authority over her/his fieldsubjects. From that perspective, anthropology was not only morally difficult but morally corrupt. When Evans-Pritchard makes generalizing assertions along the lines of "The Azande believe that x," he asserts his superiority and dominance; he speaks for the Azande, as if he knew them better than they know themselves; he colludes—so goes the implication—with colonialism and with racism. (There has been a remarkable amount of critique along this line, both from outside the field and from

within. Edward Said [1993], for instance, remarked that anthropology carries "as a major constitutive element, an unequal relationship of force between the outside Western ethnographer-observer and the primitive, or at least different, but certainly weaker and less developed non-European, non-Western person" [p. 56]).

Others understood the essays to imply, by merely raising the importance of style and rhetoric, that anthropology was neither empirical nor fact bound. If we see that one anthropologist is better known than another and suspect that it is because the one better known is a better writer, perhaps the facts don't matter at all. Essay after essay in the volume asked how Benedict, or Evans-Pritchard, or Geertz himself, had persuaded their readers to take them seriously and to believe their claims about places that the reader had never seen and their generalizations about complexly individual people whom the reader had never met. Sometimes this questioning became a not-so-implicit challenge to the so-called facts; more often, it was perceived as such. The interesting, important aspects of this work raise questions about the nature of the knowledge gained through anthropological fieldwork and the problems associated with the representation of that knowledge. What came to be seen as one of the underlying motivations of anthropological postmodernism in this and other works was far more subversive: to challenge the very possibility of anthropological fieldwork and anthropological

knowledge by labeling that attempt as hegemonic, authoritative, and morally bankrupt.

There is considerable disagreement about whether these interpretations of *Writing Culture* are appropriate or accurate, but there is no disagreement that they were made and that what came to be called postmodernism was perceived by some members of the profession as a moralizing, radical, self-destructive, parricidal attack on the discipline from within.

For the present essay, I am not interested in whether these evaluations of *Writing Culture* are correct, or whether the arguments are in general good ones. I simply want to observe that

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these arguments generated a great deal of emotional anxiety, distress, and hostility in the field.

Psychoanalysis

We come now to psychoanalysis, and I must immediately admit my lesser grasp on the dynamics in this field, because I am an observer. (I have spent five years studying psychiatric residents as an anthropologist: I have been interested in what residents must learn to diagnose and prescribe well, and what they must learn in order to do good psychotherapy.) However, my observer's impression is that the arguments I see echoed in mainstream psychoanalytic writing have not produced the kind of distress that the arguments have done in anthropology. This is not to say that the arguments of these authors are not controversial: they are indeed controversial. But they are not controversial in the same way. They have not been perceived as a direct threat to the field, at least in the way that other psychoanalytic arguments (for example, those about self psychology) have been. And again, to the extent that this is true, the interesting question is why.

There is a mainstream, ego-psychological, psychoanalytic literature which seems to respond to the same intellectual climate as does *Writing Culture*. There is the same sophistication about being situated and so limited in one's perceptions, about using rhetoric to persuade, about being trapped within one's own history. The authors share a common focus on the way analysts build an edifice of knowledge about a patient—using metatheories, models, preconceptions—and they all point to the shaky foundations of the edifice, and the way that the neglect of the shakiness of the edifice can impede good analytic work. The authors that I am thinking of include Schafer, Schwaber, Spence, Renik, S. Cooper, Margulies, Hoffman, McLaughlin, Bollas, Jacobs, and others. Their particular concerns are often quite distinctive and each may have writings which are irrelevant to this discussion. Nevertheless, they seem to share some themes in common.

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In reading this work (I will give three examples shortly) the following claims emerged which seemed to echo the claims in *Writing Culture*: 1) the analyst is not outside the analytic situation, watching objectively as the sessions unfold; 2) the patient tells a narrative, not necessarily a historically true accounting, in which the analyst's listening is implicated; and 3) the patient's experience has an oblique relationship to metatheories about the grand theories of psyche, self (or self-representation), and development for which psychoanalysis is justly famous; and indeed, the metatheories can impede the analyst's listening. In other words, the analyst, like the anthropologist, is not observing from a truly external vantage point; the analyst, like the anthropologist, gives up the claim to authoritative, final knowledge of what “really” happened; the analyst must not fit the patient to the theory, just as the anthropologist must not fit the person to the anthropologist's understanding of the culture. As in anthropological theory, these patient-centered writings take authority from the professional observer and give it to the observed subject.

To what are these authors reacting? The psychoanalysis of the 1980's and early 1990's was carried out in the shadow of disciplinary debates about self psychology, about Jacques Lacan, and in a *Zeitgeist* of literary theory which privileged uncertainty. To be specific, however, these authors seem to react to doubts about the analyst's empathy—a crucial analytic tool of understanding—or at least to the way that an earlier generation of psychoanalysts seemed to have conceptualized it.

Empathy is a very complicated process, with the same vulnerability to skepticism as the fieldwork process (which, after all, depends in large part on empathy). Empathy is supposed to refer to the listener's capacity to feel at the moment, to some extent, what it is that the analysand is feeling. It is to be able to understand, from the inside, what the analysand's experience is like. When analysts empathize they experience themselves as feeling the analysand's feeling. Greenson, whose 1967 *Technique and Practice of Psychoanalysis* still stands as one of the leading instructional introductions to the field, presented empathy as follows:

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Empathy is a model of understanding another human being by means of a temporary and partial identification. To accomplish it the analyst must renounce for a time part of his own identity, and for this he must have a loose or flexible self image. This is not to be confused with role playing, which is a more conscious phenomenon. It is more like the process of “serious make believe,” which is experienced when one is moved by a work of art, a performance or a piece of fiction. It is an intimate, non-verbal form of establishing contact (p. 382).

At one point Greenson described his experience of feeling empathic:

At this point I change the way I am listening to [the patient]. I shift from listening from the outside to listening from the inside. I have to let a part of me become the patient, and I have to go through her experiences as if I were the patient and to introspect what is going on in me as they occur. What I am trying to describe are the processes that occur when one empathizes with a patient. I let myself experience the different events the patient has described and I also let myself experience the analytic hour, her associations, and her affects as she seems to have gone through them in the hour. I go back over the patient's utterances and transform her words into pictures and feelings in accordance with her personality. I let myself associate to these pictures with *her* life experiences, *her* memories, *her* fantasies. As I have worked with this patient over the years I have built up a working model of the patient consisting of her physical appearance, her behavior, her ways of moving, her desires, feelings, defenses, values, attitudes, etc. It is this working model of the patient that I shift into the foreground as I try to capture what she was experiencing. The rest of me is de-emphasized and isolated for the time being (1967pp. 367-368).

For this seasoned, teaching analyst, the experience of empathy involved a cognitive representation of patients and their words, and a vicarious emotional identification with them, an imaginative participation in their lives. He described empathy as an “intimate, non-verbal” form of contact. It is, he said, a kind of sharing of the

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emotions. In psychoanalysis, this emphasis on shared intimacy is the more striking because during the analytic hour, the analyst and the analysand cannot see each other. The analysand is lying on a couch, staring at the ceiling. The analyst is sitting in a tall-backed leather chair at the head of the couch, from which he or she cannot see the patient's face. The analyst cannot even see whether the patient is crying.

There are some good reasons to suspect that while analysts do experience what they call empathy, this experience is not always a reliable source of information about the patient. First, analysts are inevitably mired in the swamp of their own personalities. The need for the personal analysis in analytic training used to be presented as a means to “eliminate blind spots” in the analyst's personality and “to maintain clinical objectivity.” I am quoting, in this case, from a 1974 handbook of psychiatry (Solomon and Patch, 1974p. 490), but the view that the psychoanalysis somehow allowed young analytic candidates to get rid of the embarrassing conflicts that distorted their perceptions of others, or at least to be sufficiently aware of them to render them impotent, was widespread in the decades in which psychoanalysis held an unquestioned sway over psychiatry.

Second, the patient sees the analyst under peculiar social conditions. The analyst never sees the spouse, the boss, the children, or the co-workers. The analyst never sees the patient interact with other people, never sees the patient work or eat lunch or do any of the thousands of small tasks that form the crucial background to most of the layperson's intimate conversations.

Third, the subtleties of emotional perception depend not only on the face—which the analyst cannot see during the analytic hour—but on a shared culture, and there is no guarantee that the analysts share their patients' local microcosm of a culture. Analysts listen to patients of different ages, different genders, and different professional engagements. The male analyst might not anticipate, for example, that a woman's cultural experience might be quite different from his own.

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The analytic writings that concern me take off from these various doubts about the knowledge obtained through the experience called empathy. What I, as an observer, find fascinating is that these authors do not use their doubts to question the validity of psychoanalysis, nor do I believe that their papers are read as a threat to psychoanalysis. On the contrary, in their discipline, these doubts are used as part of an account of how to do and understand psychoanalysis more deeply.

The first of my examples comes from the work of a (in analytic time) young analyst, Steven Cooper, whose first articles signal his membership in an interpretive community different from that of his elders. He has edited a symposium entitled “What Does the Analyst Know?,” which featured two articles, one which relied heavily upon Rorty's understanding of philosophy as an inherently inconclusive conversation about an unknowable reality, and another which argued that the transference is always, in a literary sense, a fiction. Cooper's introduction is baldly entitled “Hermeneutics and You.” He opens with this remark: “These questions attempt to move the analyst clinically from the high ground of being an expert decipherer to some common ground of being a participant-observer.... there is generally more and more agreement that the truth of the matter is contextually, not objectively, defined” (1993ap. 169).

In an essay from the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*—as public and traditional a forum as one could find—Cooper (1993b) describes this new hermeneutic perspective.

Much of contemporary analytic theory, varied as it is, has in common an increased emphasis on the fallibility of the analyst as a participant and interpreter within the analytic process. By the term “fallibility” I mean to suggest neither flawed technique nor faulty outcome, but rather the limitations of anyone in determining, absolutely, the nature of “objective” or psychic reality, in judging the accuracy of interpretation, or in remaining impervious to countertransference influence or transference enactment (p. 95).

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In other words, the analyst can never be a truly independent, objective observer, because he or she is so embedded in the analytic process.

Later, Cooper summarizes the impact on psychoanalysis of what he calls “revisionist psychoanalytic theory.” He describes this impact as the “deidealization” of the therapist and describes it as

increased emphasis on the analyst as participant-observer attempting to understand psychic and multiple realities rather than as the arbiter and dispenser of views of objective reality within the analytic situation; emphasis on psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic discipline shifting, in Heidegger's terms, away from “canonical” truth to the creation of a “mutual” truth; transference as meaning and expression of psychic realities, not exclusively distortion; the inevitable arousal of the analyst's subjectivities (transference and countertransference); and enactment as a frequent prelude to the capacity to put into words the patient-analyst process (p. 109).

There is no true external vantage point; while analysts have always known this on some level, Cooper implies, they need to take it more seriously, and hermeneutics provides the theory to help them do so.

Roy Schafer is an older, highly distinguished, and widely respected analyst. He has always been slightly on the margins of the psychoanalytic mainstream. Nonetheless, in recent years he has been increasingly granted considerable mainstream prominence. And his views are more radical than Cooper's.

Schafer is sometimes called a constructivist, by which it is meant that he understands analysands' accounts of their experience to be constructed in the interaction between analyst and analysand. Schafer understands the analytic process as an interaction between two people who are different in this dyad from the way they are in nonanalytic contexts. In the analytic dyad, as he conceives it, both analyst and analysand work with “second selves.” By virtue of their analytic attitude, analysts do not respond in kind—as a friend would—to attacks or declarations of love; analysands, by

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virtue of their pain, do not present the strengths they might in other contexts. These second selves are “fictive,” in that they are created in the concrete interactions between two people, and the two second selves of the analytic dyad weave together, as they talk, a narration of the analysand's life. Freudian analysts, Schafer suggests, organize this material in particular ways, often around body parts; others organize it differently.

The point is that the account of the patient's experience is built out of a complex negotiation between what the patient says, how the analyst understands it, and how the patient interprets what the analyst says. One cannot, Schafer says, contrast the different schools of psychoanalytic thought on the basis of the “facts.” This does not bother him. Schafer is less interested in the relationship between word and in-the-world reference—in what one thinks of as the “truth” of an analytic theory—than he is in the transformative power of empathizing within the fictive interaction. It is the retelling of the analysand's life, rather than the analyst's understanding of that life, which is the heart of Schafer's conception of the analytic attention. “Psychoanalysts may be described as people who listen to the narrations of analysands and help to transform these narrations into others that are more complete, coherent, convincing and adaptively useful than those they have been accustomed to constructing” (1983p. 240).

Schafer writes of the analytic process as “worldmaking,” borrowing Nelson Goodman's term, and with philosophical and literary sophistication argues that the way we conceive of ourselves in the world is intertwined with the way we feel and behave. Changing our conceptions—our narrative—changes our experience, adding possibility to our worlds. “Character change lies, then, in the analysands' now living in vastly more complex worlds with vastly more complex repertoires of action, including the actions of representation of self and others in relation” (p. 158).

So it is not that analysands come to remember a more complex past or even to understand more deeply; it is that they have experienced that past in a different way, and so have profoundly changed it. Schafer argues that it is wrong to say that in the transference

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the analysand repetitively relives the past. “Another ... better account,” he says, “tells of change of action along certain lines; it emphasizes new experiencing and new remembering of the past that unconsciously has never become the past” (p. 220). Analysands who break into torrential weeping upon remembering their father's actions in the past are not reliving the past; they are altering their understanding and memory of that past and relating it to the present in a different way.

Accompanying the emphasis on narration is a quite specific emphasis on language. Schafer writes of the need for “action language,” which is a mode of speaking wherein the speaker remains the active agent of his or her experience. The speaker does not say, “The dreams stayed with me all day,” but rather learns to say, “All day I continued to think about what I had dreamed.” The speaker does not say, “The sadistic fantasy came between me and my climax”; the speaker says, “I delayed and attenuated my climax by imagining sadistic situations” (1983pp. 246-247). From Schafer's perspective the traditional metapsychology works against this notion of a learning, changing agent, and should be avoided. Terms like “drive,” “ego,” “id,” suggest a fragmented person who is

incapacitated by the fragments, and this, he suggests, is unhelpful. The suggestion is quite subversive. Schafer is recommending that psychoanalysts abandon most of the language they were given by Freud. Analysis, he says, is an interpretive enterprise, not a natural science, and its interpretive nature is what enables it to change the narrative self-account of its participants. Its interpretive nature is what enables it to cure.

Evelyne Schwaber, again a distinguished senior analyst, regards herself in many respects as quite orthodox. She distances herself from constructivists like Schafer and certainly from self psychology. She focuses on the analyst's mislistening, but is uncomfortable with the idea that mislistening might alter the story that the patient tells. Nevertheless, her work belongs in this discussion because it persistently challenges analytic presumptions and analytic authority, with the aim of emphasizing the patient's point of view. Her work takes the authority for knowledge about the patient

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away from the analyst and gives it back to the patient. And because she so intently emphasizes the need for the analyst not to assume knowledge, she celebrates the uncertainty of human understanding. She quotes Kundera: "It is precisely in losing the certainty of truth and the unanimous agreement of others that man becomes an individual" (1986p. 912).

One's analytic job is to listen, Schwaber says again and again, and anything—anything at all—that interferes with that listening must be derogated in the interest of the more important job, which is understanding what the patient's experience is for the patient. "If ... a patient (with no organic visual abnormality) sees a red dress where the analyst is wearing beige, we may assess the *inaccuracy* in the specification of color. But this is a matter different from a judgment about the correctness in the *experienced* reality ..." (1992p. 1042). Schwaber is not rejecting external reality or the analyst's surprise at having communicated something different from what she had intended. One learns something if one is wearing a beige dress and the patient perceives it as red. But from Schwaber's perspective what one learns is not that the patient has made a mistake so much as that one does not yet understand the patient.

Much of her work, then, is focused on the ways in which adherence to a model interferes with the capacity to hear. In a commentary on Breener's description of a case, she says: "only the model tells us that the patient 'wished' [as Brenner had assumed] to maintain the same set of relationships [to her analyst as to her father]" (1987p. 266). In a recent review of a book of psychoanalytic case studies, she remarks: "Consider [and here she quotes from another analyst's case study]: 'His voyeurism was an attempt to deny castration. He remembered how once he saw his mother bending over after she had finished on the toilet, and that afterwards he told his grandfather that mother had hair around her behind. The public hair was ... a falsification designed to maintain the illusion that in front there was still something'.... It is not at all clear," Schwaber remarks, "what was the patient's expressed idea or fantasy, and what the analyst's formulation"

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(1993p. 411). She quotes again from another case in which the analyst remarked, "'One of the difficulties of conducting any analysis is that the insights of the analyst often outstrip those of the patient'.... Surely," she says, "things may also happen the other way around ..." (p. 412).

Yet Schwaber does not believe that these insights reveal the theoretical models to be inherently wrong or that it might be possible to do analytic work without them. It is simply that she wants analysts to be aware of the ways in which their models can limit them. As she says, "There is a fundamental difference in outlook between an interpretive effort that attempts to help the patient arrive at a truth, the existence of which the analyst has implicitly pre-existing knowledge, and an interpretation that inherently derives from a question to which the analyst does not yet have an answer" (1990p. 239). To Schwaber, it is extremely difficult to understand someone else, and there is an enormous temptation in psychoanalysis to use analytic theories and to use one's own experience to interpret and to judge the other. The analyst's interest in theory or in her or his own experience of the patient must not override the focus on the patient's physical reality. And it is this focus, and the shared recognition of the patient's experience, which is therapeutic. "It is such profoundly, if subtly expanded and articulated shared recognition, that underlies the mutative power of psychoanalysis" (1992p. 1055).

Discussion

Before the cultural shift in the late sixties, both anthropology and psychoanalysis had role models who presented themselves as authoritative scientists. Helene Deutsch and Margaret Mead, to take prominent exemplars, conceived of themselves as practicing scientists who collected data, developed theory, and spoke as knowledgeable experts about the patients and cultures they surveyed. Now in the uncertain nineties, both anthropology and psychoanalysis have produced a more uncertain role model (though it is

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not adopted by everyone in the field). These uncertain professionals are interpreters, highly conscious of their limitations, highly conscious of their capacity to distort, humble in the face of their ignorance, and hesitant to assert their knowledge of someone else's life. And yet although these anthropologists and psychoanalysts draw from the same intellectual *Zeitgeist*, they develop its themes with a different affect. Schafer, Schwaber, and Cooper do not seem as angry about the older generation as do some authors in *Writing*

Culture, nor as bleak about the achievements and possibilities of their profession as, at times, the anthropologists seem to be. And the reactions to these writings in the two disciplines appear different as well. The anthropological reaction to postmodern anthropology has been stormy and doom-ridden—appropriately or not; that the interpretation of these writings is far more jaundiced than the writing itself is one of the most interesting features of the debates—and the emotional tension around it remains. My impression is that the psychoanalytic community has not been torn apart by analysts who tackle these themes, nor have their claims been exaggerated past recognition and treated as a risk to the very discipline itself. Why has the interest in narration and the limitation of knowledge not seemed so dangerous to the analysts?

One route of explanation lies in the different disciplinary institutions. For analysts in private practice (at least in America) to assert that therapy is morally bankrupt is quite a different matter than for tenured professors to claim that the scholarship in their profession is intellectually suspect. The analysts' writings are in some sense a reflection on a professional commitment that they continually renew with each patient they agree to treat; after tenure, the anthropologists' professional commitment need renew itself only in teaching, and in any event to teach and write from a position of deep skepticism is a time-honored style within the academy. Moreover, it is hard to attack anthropologists' status as anthropologists if they have doctorates in anthropology and jobs in anthropology departments, whereas psychoanalysts, no matter what their institutional affiliations, are always vulnerable to the

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argument that they are “not doing psychoanalysis.” In addition, analysts are not chosen to be training analysts—the senior authorities in the local institutes—until quite late in their careers. These institutional differences must encourage greater caution among psychoanalysts.

The more interesting explanation of these different disciplinary responses to similar arguments lies in what can be called the different moral characters of the fields. By “moral character,” I mean the sharp awareness of what counts as a good or bad performance of the craft of the discipline, and even more, the emotional response to a performance which signals whether it is in accord with or violates the field's expectations of right behavior. Ultimately, these standards are tied to the goals of the enterprise. Potters' skills are not the same as those of plumbers, and economists' are not those of historians, and that is because they need to achieve different ends. But we often forget that there is a moral quality to these construals, that it is not simply a matter of knowing how to use the clay, but being “good” with clay, that there is a way to have integrity as a potter which is different from the way one has integrity as a plumber. The good potter uses the clay as it “ought” to be used, with respect for its substance and the demands of its skill. These evaluations are tied in specific ways to the achievement of the potter's goals. The good historian, as Bernard Cohn (1987) informs us, is “solid”: he or she is thorough, has exhausted the archives, and has competence in his or her domain. The good historian finds abhorrent the misremembering of details, because the method of the work depends inherently on the accumulation of small details, and the historian is less troubled by the thinness of explanatory theory, because an abstract account of social change is not foremost in his or her aims. The historian who never writes before reading through all the relevant archival sources, whose references are always accurate, has integrity, whereas a minister's integrity depends more on being able to keep confidences and to be honest. And this is true for all fields—that an individual's achievement of the field's goals is bound up with moral expectations around the method that she or he uses.

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Anthropology and psychoanalysis have ultimately different goals, and the emphasis on narration and uncertainty offends only the anthropological ones. Anthropologists see their main task as producing the public, published description of the people they have studied. Fieldwork is a means to an end, which is the dissertation or the book, which is then reviewed in print for its accuracy in getting the description right. Any suggestion that the description may be inherently flawed is bound to be met with intense feeling, for that suggestion states that the goals of the field cannot be met by the methods it has chosen and, thus, implicitly argues that the methods of the field are morally corrupt—as the essays in *Writing Culture* were interpreted to imply, although that is not what their authors necessarily intended to state.

For the psychoanalyst, the reverse is true. Book-writing, theory-developing, and fact-finding may all be important, but the psychoanalyst is a clinician first and foremost. By this I do not mean at all to belittle the importance of psychoanalytic theorizing; it is simply that one can be an excellent, well-regarded analyst irrespective of whether one publishes, and Cooper, Schafer, and Schwaber all seem to me to write to an audience focused on clinical goals. A literature which argues that an epistemological stance will improve patient care is less likely to send shock waves through this readership, even if, as is the case with Schafer and others, the suggestion involves a radical approach to traditional metapsychology. Given a forced choice, most American psychoanalysts would probably choose therapeutic efficacy over theoretical orthodoxy or even consistency. That is, the “bottom line” in psychoanalysis is the health of the patient—not the analyst's knowledge of the patient or the analyst's theoretical sophistication. What really matters is whether the analyst can help the analysand to achieve greater self-knowledge and greater ease.

There was an intellectual challenge to psychoanalysis which threw the discipline into the same level of outrage and disarray as anthropology has experienced with what is called postmodernism, and that occurred in the years after Kohut introduced self psychology. Self psychology argued that analysts were using the

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wrong techniques to help their patients. Orthodox Freudians understood their patients to be emotionally conflicted, and held that cure emerged through insight (broadly speaking); the analyst's role, then, was to interpret the conflict to the patient. Kohut argued that many patients were troubled not by conflict, but by deficit, and that the point of the therapy was (again, broadly speaking) to reparent them, or to restructure their emotional insufficiencies by engaging in a certain kind of relationship with them. That argument (far more elaborate than presented here) could be read as attacking the Freudian analysts for failing to treat their patients effectively; and that perception led psychoanalytic institutes to fragment and even to split apart across the country. (Lacanian psychoanalysis could probably also have produced intense conflict, as it did in France, but my understanding is that Lacan has had relatively little impact upon the practice of American psychoanalysis.) By contrast, the claim that most anthropologists did their fieldwork ineffectively would provoke far less heat than the charge that their ethnographies were based on inherent misperceptions.

Anthropologists and psychoanalysts both rely on empathy to some degree as a central methodological tool. The achievement and denial of empathy is the heart of participant observation—a phrase used by all anthropologists, and by psychoanalysts at least since Sullivan, to describe their enterprise. Greenson (1967) says: “It is necessary for the analyst to feel close enough to the patient to be able to empathize with the most intimate details of his emotional life; yet he must be able to become distant enough for dispassionate understanding. This is one of the most difficult requirements of psychoanalytic work—the alternation between the temporary and partial identification of empathy and the return to the distant position of the observer, the evaluator, etc.” (p. 279). Both disciplines demand an oscillation between empathic identification and distance. But because the goals of the disciplines are quite different, the moral cost of empathy's vulnerability to skepticism are weighted very differently.

Psychoanalysts listen at great length to a small number of

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people whom they get to know well, very well, within the limits of the professional relationship. By the nature of this relationship and its model of cure the analyst in general does not meet the people about whom the patient talks. The analyst strives to understand the patient's experience of these people from the patient's point of view, and pragmatically speaking, the accuracy of these representations is probably irrelevant to the practice of the therapy. This is not to say that analysts do not recognize that the patient distorts the event—therapists become sophisticated interpreters of the bare words of the patient's presentation—but that recognizing the possible unreliability of the empathic connection should, practically speaking, make little difference to what the analyst does in the therapy except to make the analyst try to listen more carefully, which is what analysts are supposed to be doing in the first place. Self psychology suggested that analysts do their work differently; that methodological innovation created schisms and fights in abundance. The psychoanalytic work discussed here, epistemologically shocking though it may be, can be read as an affirmation to analysts to tell them to do as they have always tried to do: to listen to the patient, to understand the patient's point of view.

Anthropology, by contrast, is founded on the belief that empathic connection—the anthropologist's experience of partially identifying with the group she or he has come to study—produces publically verifiable information about that group. As a result, these arcane epistemological arguments about narration tear directly at the basic fabric of the enterprise. Anthropological self-hood is founded on the notion that good fieldworkers connect with their fieldsubjects, share their experience to some degree (they empathize with the Bedouin woman who recites poetry when she is gloomy), and from this experience produce good ethnography. To notice that the experience of empathic connection may not always provide reliable information is to attack the moral sculpting of the domain, or at least to be easily perceived as doing so. That sense of attack accounts, I believe, for the peculiarity of the debate around anthropological postmodernism: that

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the authors often point out obvious surface features of the way that anthropology is done, and their remarks are greeted with the great emotional attention that betokens moral distress. The work of *Writing Culture*, innocuous as its descriptions may be, is perceived as a moral attack when it is understood to suggest that the field's aims cannot be achieved with its methods.



The most interesting feature of this new discourse of uncertainty in both anthropology and psychoanalysis is that it privileges the subjective understanding of human connection. It does portray the professional as greedily eager to tell the story of the interaction in the way that serves him or her best. But in the process it paints a far more delicate, nuanced, psychological account of the interactions between people than we have had before (often, in the case of anthropology, while being supposedly antipsychological). There are, of course, problems with the chic excesses of the new enthusiasms. Nevertheless, these new approaches in psychoanalysis and anthropology present a complex account of empathic engagement in its strengths, distortions, and vulnerabilities. Psychoanalysts do not always see the challenge that these analyses present to their presumptive knowledge base. Anthropologists see the challenges as fire-breathing dragons. Both these responses reveal something about the deep moral fashionings of our disciplinary construals of self.

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