Qualitative Inquiry
http://qix.sagepub.com/

Writing the Exotic, the Authentic, and the Moral: Romanticism as Discursive Resource for the Ethnographic Text

Amir Marvasti and Christopher Faircloth

Qualitative Inquiry 2002 8: 760
DOI: 10.1177/1077800402238078

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://qix.sagepub.com/content/8/6/760

Published by:

http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *Qualitative Inquiry* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://qix.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://qix.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://qix.sagepub.com/content/8/6/760.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Dec 1, 2002

What is This?

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

Writing the Exotic, the Authentic, and the Moral: Romanticism as Discursive Resource for the Ethnographic Text

Amir Marvasti
Penn State Altoona

Christopher Faircloth
Boston University Gerontology Center

The influence of the literary discourse of romanticism on the textual construction of social problems is examined using secondary content analysis of classical and contemporary ethnographies. Three discursive elements of romanticism (the lure of the exotic, authenticity, and the moral project) are highlighted and critiqued in relation to the researcher-participant duality, the taken-for-granted self, and promises of amelioration. The analysis points to the relations of power and misrecognized realties embedded in how social problems and deviant others are written. It is recommended that ethnographers reevaluate the emancipatory potential of their texts by subverting and reinventing the constitutive themes of romanticism.

The link between social science and literature is increasingly the topic of debate among qualitative sociologists. Two polar positions emerge from this discussion. The first is the positivistic notion that social science and literature are mutually exclusive domains, with the former discovering and explaining facts and the latter producing fictional accounts. From this perspective, the two modes of writing are, and should be, separate, each with its distinct style, method of inquiry, and subject matter. The proponents of this approach maintain that the commitment to scientific rigor is simply incompatible with the expressionistic tone of literary texts. For them, the pursuit of objective reality requires that the author all but disappear from the text by adhering to a rigid,

Authors' Note: We owe a debt of gratitude to Norm Denzin, Jay Gubrium, James Holstein, and the reviewers for their comments and assistance. We also wish to thank Karyn D. McKinney and Mike Ryan for their help with editing this article. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 1997 Meetings of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Please address all correspondence to Amir Marvasti, Penn State Altoona, 135 CAC, 3000 Ivyside Park, Altoona, PA 16601.

Qualitative Inquiry, Volume 8 Number 6, 2002 760-784
DOI: 10.1177/1077800402238078
© 2002 Sage Publications

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

technical style of writing. Thus, the very mention of the subject in the form of the pronoun *I* is viewed as a disciplinary violation and is duly chastised. In this context, any overt attempt to imitate or make use of literary domains presumably invalidates the very project of science.

The other side in this debate begins with a thorough critique of the notion of objective truth, as endorsed by positivists, and offers a subjective orientation as an alternative. Expanding the horizons of qualitative research into the realm of textuality, the critics of the positivist school view the production of social science writing as a social phenomenon in its own right. Influenced by the postmodern sentiment of blurring the boundary between fiction and reality, advocates of the "textual turn" aim to both deconstruct conventional social science writing (Agger, 1989; Atkinson, 1990; Van Maanen, 1988) and to experiment with alternative modes of representation that are intended to produce emancipatory knowledge (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Richardson, 1990, 2000).

A number of figures deserve particular attention in relation to the textual-turn paradigm, beginning with Geörge Lukács (1962), perhaps one of the first to underscore the emancipatory value of writing. He argued that writing, at least in a literary context, should be guided and evaluated in terms of its potential for empowering the masses. Or as Terry Eagleton (1976) summarized the project,

> In a society where the general and the particular, the conceptual and the sensuous, the social and the individual are increasingly torn apart by the "alienations" of capitalism, the great writer draws these analytically together into a complex totality. . . . In doing this, great art combats the alienation and fragmentation of capitalist society, projecting a rich, many-sided image of human wholeness. (p. 28)

Lukács's emphasis on the practical significance of the written text is very much in line with the basic premises of contemporary ethnographers. For example, Laurel Richardson (1990) argued, perhaps even more strongly than Lukács, that "writing is a moral site" (p. 38).

James Clifford and George Marcus's (1986) edited volume *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* is another notable work that reevaluates the status of social science text. Inspired by literary criticism, or the analysis of literary texts as sociohistorically located phenomena (Eagleton, 1996), the book urges social scientists to probe the ideological assumptions of their works. This sentiment is best expressed in the introduction to this volume, where the authors noted that "the making of ethnography is artisanal, tied to the worldly work of writing" (p. 6).

Another example of the textual analysis of social science writing is John Van Maanen's (1988) book *Tales of the Field*, which looks at the "narrative conventions" and "modes of cultural portiture" (p. 1) embedded in ethnographic writing. Identifying three styles of ethnographic writing (realist, confes-

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

sional, and impressionist), Van Maanen challenged the notion that social science text speaks a transparent and singular truth. In essence, he demonstrated that each method of writing produces a different reality about the empirical world, or as he noted, "There is no way of seeing, hearing, or representing the world of others that is absolutely, universally, valid or correct" (p. 35). For Van Maanen, representational issues replace the objectivist conventions of evaluating qualitative writing.

The intersections of feminism and qualitative research have also brought the "ethnographic text" into question. Feminist researchers deconstruct qualitative text to explore "form, nature, and content of the account" (Olesen, 2000, p. 232). Such works alert us to the importance of voice and the political implications of representation. For example, Laurel Richardson (1990, 2000) maintained that scientific writing is pieced together through the use of literary devices such as metaphors. She asserted that all forms of writing make use of these tools and that by doing so, they mask relations of power. Richardson (1990) wrote, "Power is, always, a sociohistorical construction. No textual staging is ever innocent. We are always inscribing values in our writing. It is unavoidable" (p. 12).

Similarly, Norman Denzin (1993) highlighted the postmodern crises that challenge the truth claims embedded in social science text. Central to these problems is the notion of legitimation, which he suggested involves "a serious rethinking of such terms as truth, validity, verisimilitude, generalizability and reliability" (p. 136). Accordingly, the written work of social scientists should be divested of both its authoritative facade and its authoritarian project. Denzin suggested that

> if there is a center to recent critical poststructural thought, it lies in the recurring commitment to strip any text of its external claims to authority. Every text must be taken on its own terms. The desire to produce a valid and authoritarian text is renounced. Any text can be undone in terms of its internal-structural logic. (p. 136)

For Denzin (1994), the textual turn in qualitative research has the potential to convey the experiences of those whose voices have been silent or silenced under the auspices of the search for objective truth. Therefore, he encouraged the production of experimental texts that reject the subject-object duality and "push the personal to the forefront of the political, where social text becomes the vehicle for the expression of politics" (p. 510).

These and related scholarly efforts have shed considerable light on how textual representations shape the knowledge and values embedded in qualitative research and have resulted in the proliferation of experimental methods of writing that challenge the conventional norms of positivism. The proponents of such alternative approaches promote the use of literary devices to create more engaging and liberating texts.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

However, the discursive status of literary form as a vehicle for the expression of the subject remains relatively underanalyzed in this debate. In line with the spirit of postmodern reflexivity endorsed by the textual turn in qualitative research, it is our contention that experimentation with literary form, in and of itself, does not translate into emancipatory knowledge. Indeed, the field of literature is brimming with "masterpieces" of literary form that echo colonial and racist discourses (see Barthelemy, 1987). The all-encompassing nature of the postmodern skepticism about totalizing narratives is perhaps best captured by Richardson (2000):

> The core of postmodernism is the *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge. . . . The postmodernist context of *doubt*, then, distrusts all methods equally. No method has a privileged status. The superiority of "science" over "literature"—or, from another vantage point, "literature" over "science"—is challenged. (p. 928)

It seems that to avoid the problem of proposing a new unreflective discourse, qualitative texts cannot be judged solely on the basis of subjective expressions, however innovative they might be.

In response to these and related issues, a number of scholars have taken on the task of mapping the terrain of the qualitative text. For example, Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (1997) methodically illustrated how the language of qualitative research has become increasingly "self-conscious." Particularly, they underscored the gradual movement of the field from the positivistic emphasis on objective observations, to consideration of the place of the subject or the self in the research enterprise, and finally to the more recent interest in representational issues. These points of emphasis, or "idioms," are respectively labeled as naturalism, emotionalism, and postmodernism. In a sense, Gubrium and Holstein showed how qualitative texts follow different "language games" (Wittgenstein, 1958). Consequently, their idioms reflect the range of representational choices and the ensuing descriptive projects in qualitative research.

In a related effort, Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000) put forth the notion of "ethnographic moments" to feature the epistemological shifts in qualitative research. Their focus is on a chronological order in which each moment becomes more progressive and politically conscious than its predecessor. It follows then that in "the seventh moment," or "radical" phase of the movement,

> we seem to be moving farther and farther away from grand narratives and single overarching ontological, epistemological, and methodological paradigms. The center lies in the humanistic commitment of the qualitative researcher to study the world always from the perspective of the gendered, historically situated interacting individual. From this complex commitment flows the liberal and radical politics of qualitative research. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, pp. 1047-1048)

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

In contrast, Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (1999) favored a more dialectic approach in place of historically progressive moments, one that is sensitive to the ongoing and recurrent tensions in the field of ethnography:

> A repeated dialectic between what might be thought of as a dominant orthodoxy, and other, centrifugal forces that have promoted difference and diversity. Rather than the temporal metaphor of the *moment* to describe historical development of the ethnographic field, a more appropriate one might be that of *vector*, implying the directionality of forces in an intellectual field. (p. 465)

For Atkinson et al., methodological considerations appear to be drifting away from the process of writing, and the attention to the epistemological underpinnings of qualitative method is not in synch with the dynamic practice of writing. As the authors pointed out, "the actual conduct and writing of ethnographic research remains relatively unaffected by the epistemological upheavals of blurred genres, the crisis of representation, or postmodernism" (p. 469).

As a whole, these debates have generated an unsurpassed level of critical examination of, and experimentation with, social scientific text. This article aims to add to the existing body of scholarly work by empirically examining how ethnographic writing is mediated by discursive influences. To demonstrate the place of discourse in the ethnographic enterprise, we focus on romanticism, chosen because it represents a relatively well-defined discourse with considerable influence on writing in general and on qualitative text in particular. We begin this undertaking with a brief definition of the term *romanticism* and its significance for social scientists.

ROMANTICISM AS DISCURSIVE RESOURCE

For the purpose of analysis, a general understanding of *romanticism* is conveyed by briefly highlighting its historical and philosophical roots. Historically, the term has been associated with three relatively distinct movements in France, Germany, and Britain (Steer & White, 1994). In all three countries, romanticism emerged around the late 18th to early 19th century. Although each school embodied its own artistic interpretation and techniques, French, German, and British romanticism all involved a passionate exploration of the exotic and the mysterious. In many respects, the artist's emotions and the strange Other converged on the canvas or the text to portray a reality that transcended the boundaries of reason and logic. The exotic was particularly significant for artists of this period because it symbolized the possibility of competing realities and different worlds of meaning.

Philosophically, romanticism is closely affiliated with transcendentalism, defined as "the idealistic system of thought based on a belief in essential unity of all creation, the innate goodness of humankind, and the supremacy of insight over logic and experience for the revelation of deepest truths"

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

(*Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995, p. 1128). The emphasis on "the innate goodness of humankind" and the primacy of "insight over logic" jointly crystallize the utopian project of romanticism and its commitment to social change.

Romanticism can also be regarded as a backlash against utilitarian rationalism, which reduces human cognition to a simple cost-benefit analysis for arriving at the most efficient course of action. The significance of this reaction for romanticists is described by Eagleton (1996):

> "Imaginative creation" can be offered as an image of non-alienated labor; the intuitive, transcendental scope of the poetic mind can provide a living criticism of those rationalist or empiricist ideologies enslaved to "fact." The literary work itself comes to be seen as a mysterious organic unity, in contrast to the fragmented individualism of the capitalist marketplace; it is "spontaneous" rather than rationally calculated, creative rather than mechanical. . . . Literature has become a whole alternative ideology, and the "imagination" itself, as with Blake and Shelley, becomes a political force. Its task is to transform society in the name of those energies which art embodies. Most of the major Romantic poets were themselves political activists, perceiving continuity rather than conflict between their literary and social commitments. (p. 17)

As a whole, romanticism, as a style and a movement, was inspired by a set of historical, philosophical, and political events that centered on rebelling against the reduction of human ingenuity to factual analysis of causes and effects, a development that parallels the contemporary tension between qualitative and quantitative research.

A number of social scientists have broadened our understanding of romanticism by showing its influence on social theories, particularly George Herbert Mead's theory of self-development (Hewitt, 1994; Shalin, 1984). In short, they contend that literature does not have to be seen as the antithesis of science; rather, it can provide context and inspiration for the development of scientific concepts and theories. Other sociologists take a less favorable position on romanticism. For example, David Silverman (1989b), in an article titled "Six Rules of Qualitative Research: A Post-Romantic Argument," warned researchers about the intellectual shortcomings of romanticism as an approach to writing social science. In the author's view, the "Romantic impulse" weakens the conceptual rigor necessary for conducting reliable social science, dangerously blurring the disciplinary boundary between social science and journalism.

Although encouraged by these developments, our project is especially sensitive to the relationship between discourse and domination. In this regard, we are influenced by Dorothy Smith's (1987, 1990) work on how discourse mediates everyday practice and perpetuates what she called "relations of ruling." According to Smith (1990),

> textual realities create a specific relationship between the reader and "what actually happened/what is." This relationship is organized not merely by choices of

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

> language and syntax: properties of the relations of ruling built into the text enter and determine the reader's relation to the realities constituted therein. (p. 89)

Borrowing from Smith's insights, we take the position that the discourse of romanticism as used in the qualitative text (a) supports the exploitive self-other duality (Fine, 1994), (b) privileges the bourgeois ethics of the modern self, and (c) presents humanism and the conditions of late capitalism (Jameson, 1984) as the only viable utopian project.

We make the case that the romanticized representation of the participant in ethnographic texts points to a taken-for-granted vision of morality and particular "relations of ruling," which are neither inherently nor invariably benevolent. The analysis rests on three foundational themes in the discourse of romanticism: the lure of the exotic, authenticity, and the moral project. Our point of departure from previous works is treating these concepts as constitutive discursive elements, thus broadening the existing debate on representational matters in qualitative sociology to include literary genres and discourses as theoretical, practical, and political considerations.

The Lure of the Exotic

A focus on the lure of the exotic has served as a vital component of the romantic literary style. Romantic authors and poets turned to the Middle Ages for themes, settings, and locales ranging from the Hebrides of the Ossianic tradition to the "Oriental" setting of Xanadu evoked by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1916) in his unfinished lyric "Kubla Khan." Similar throughout these texts is a fascination with times and places far removed from the drudgery of mundane reality.

This style of writing has profound implications for the language of qualitative research because it directly affects the textual representation of research findings. Beginning with the classical works of the Chicago School to the present, the exotic has continued to lure researchers into strange worlds of estranged others. Consider Robert Park's plea for sociologists to take their minds and their notebooks to the natural settings of the urban world, outside and far removed from the security of their offices. Park urges the sociologist to personally visit the urban exotic.

> Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedowns; sit in the orchestra hall and in the Star and Garter burlesque. In short, gentlemen, go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research. (quoted in McKinney, 1966, p. 71)

Park exhorts researchers to see the different and exotic through visits to the flophouses, the burlesque, and the "slum shakedowns." In a decidedly romantic tone, Park pushes sociologists to see "what is really going on" and to view, firsthand, the strange and unfamiliar world of those they study.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

Similarly, William Foote Whyte (1943) provided us with a pioneering example of romantically influenced ethnography in *Street Corner Society*, a seminal work that continues to inspire adoration and criticism in the field as evidenced by a special edition of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (Adler, Boelen, & Whyte, 1992). Although numerous methodological issues are implicated in the debate about *Street Corner Society*, Whyte's (1996, 1997) rebuttal to Richardson's (1996) questioning of his professional ethics is of particular interest here. Defending himself against the charge that the participants and their families were emotionally harmed as a consequence of his research, especially after 1 participant's (Doc's) true identity was revealed, Whyte (1997) stated,

> Clearly, some people were embarrassed by the book, but I could not find any evidence that I had seriously damaged any of them.
>
> The embarrassment of a few people may be a necessary price to pay for an intensive participant observer report that has been read by thousands of college students and others in the general public. Many professors have made the book required reading. (p. 34)

In this context, Whyte presented himself as the quintessential romantic hero, gallantly accepting both adoration and condemnation for a job he perceived had to be done. His defense invokes the romantic principle that the study of the exotic is a moral imperative in its own right. As Vidich and Lyman (2000) suggested, Whyte's research was "motivated by a sense of moral responsibility to uplift the slum-dwelling masses" (p. 51). His mission was to present the "human" side of the inhabitants of Cornerville to "respectable people," as the opening of the book indicates:

> To the rest of the city it is a mysterious, dangerous, and depressing area. Cornerville is only a few minutes away from fashionable High Street, but the High Street inhabitant who takes that walk passes from the familiar to the unknown. . . . Respectable people have access to a limited body of information about Cornerville. . . . Cornerville people appear as social work clients, as defendants in criminal cases, or as undifferentiated members of "the masses." There is one thing wrong with such a picture; no human beings are in it. (Whyte, 1943, p. xv)

Whyte's attempt to put a "human" face on an otherwise strange world is admirable for its eloquence and apparent sincerity, but his moral enterprise is founded on a dubious distinction between two spheres of life (i.e., the respectable and the mysterious). It is this dichotomy that allows the ethnographer to offer the strange Other for inspection by the peering eyes of the familiar self. The gap between the two worlds remains a foundational feature of Whyte's narrative, putting him in the privileged position to attest to the seemingly surprising ability of Cornerville's inhabitants to be orderly and "human." Inspired by the moral mission of normalizing the different in the service of the same, contemporary ethnographers continue to pursue the exotic, as indicated in this excerpt from Bruce Jacobs's (1999) ethnography of crack dealers:

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

> Qualitative methods provide a thoroughgoing exploration of the daily behaviors and careers of often hidden or hard-to-reach populations. Such methods allow researchers to decode the manner in which these persons and groups communicate and to describe a body of knowledge or cognition not easily understood by outsiders. (p. 11)

Similar to Whyte's work, the discursive foundation of this ethnography of inner-city dwellers is the presumed gulf between the familiar and the strange (i.e., "often hidden or hard-to-reach populations"). It is worth noting that empirical support for this chasm between the known self and unknown Other is itself textually accomplished. Such ethnographic accounts of the exotic begin by juxtaposing taken-for-granted order against reported chaos and end with a pacifying solution, taming the unknown in the reader's eyes.

Consider, for example, the contrast between the introduction and conclusion of the following ethnography on male strip clubs:

> It is like a mob—what seems like two hundred women packed into a room, all moving together, screaming, chanting. The room is hot, crowded. It is difficult to move from one area to another. It is impossible to do so without rubbing up against (or being rubbed against by) one of the sweaty, nearly naked men—clad only in skin-tight briefs, slithering through the club. Dancers hug women and kiss them on the cheek. Women, often under the influence of some kind of alcohol, take advantage of their freedom to stuff dollar bills into waistbands, to touch and grab, as if on a dare—with a tentative, yet devilish expression and usually with a squeal of delight.
>
> Such is the atmosphere of male strip clubs. The basic ingredients are the same: women, men taking off clothes, alcohol, and screaming. (Montemurro, 2001, p. 276)

> This research is important because we lack information on the way these and similar industries preserve order. Stereotypes about chaos in and "sleaziness" of strip clubs and rumors of rampant prostitution and drug abuse are called into question as The Hideaway [the research site] proved to be a profit-driven organization focused on and providing an entertaining, "sensual" show while operating within the law. Future research might examine the ways in which social control functions in other deviant occupations, particularly in female strip clubs, to explore the existence of rules, and structure. (Montemurro, 2001, p. 301)

In this research, the sociological imagination lies in the narrative transformation of reported disorder into believable order, the textual taming of the wild. The opening paragraphs set the tone for the narrative transformation by signaling chaos and uncontrollable lust: "It is like a mob." Ironically, the remainder of the article is devoted to contradicting the introductory textual representation. Also, the use of the pronoun *we* is very telling in the conclusion. Presumably, the *we* does not include the Hideaway's customers or staff but the "outsiders," or the equivalent of Whyte's respectable, normal society.

The immersion into the world of the exotic in effect has become a rite of passage for ethnographers and a formulaic feature of their work in sociology of deviance. For example, in her work with drug dealers, Patricia Adler (1985)

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

described how she and her husband become involved in the "subculture of drug trafficking." Theirs is a story of gradual involvement in the exotic world of drugs. Although narrated in a detached, realistic tone, a romantic sense of the exotic seasons this work throughout, as seen in the following description of the research participants:

> Ben was also very tall and broad shouldered, but his long black hair, now flecked with gray, bespoke his earlier membership in hippie subculture. A large physical stature, we observed, was common to most of the male participants involved in this drug community. The women also had a unifying physical trait: they were extremely attractive and stylishly dressed. (p. 58)

It is important to note that the lure of the exotic here is not an incidental feature but the defining characteristic of the story, giving context and meaning to the more mundane research practices such as gaining entry and establishing rapport with the natives. To a degree, Adler's risky encounters and long-term relationships with members of the drug underworld are the story.

The ameliorative effect of ethnographic research is best understood in relation to the seemingly relentless lure of the exotic, the romantic impulse that entices field workers to uncover supposedly mysterious, bizarre, and glamorous worlds. This is often done for the benefit of readers, who one can only assume are members of "normal society." As seen earlier in the case of Whyte's (1997) defense of *Street Corner Society*, this way of storytelling casts the ethnographer as the reluctant hero whose adventures allow "normal" readers to peer into the mysterious world of outcasts.

Examples of the unearthing of the strange are plentiful in ethnographies of the homeless. Here, stories of the exotic Others usually take the form of documenting their desperate attempts at normality, or their burning desire to be like the familiar self. Consider these excerpts from Elliot Liebow's (1993) *Tell Them Who I Am* and Snow and Anderson's (1993) *Down on Their Luck*:

> At first sight, one wonders why more homeless people do not kill themselves. How do they manage to slog through day after day, with no end in sight? How in the world of unremitting grimness, do they manage to laugh, love, enjoy friends, even dance and play the fool? How in short do they stay fully human while body and soul are under grievous assault? (Liebow, 1993, p. 25)

> What has impressed us most about the homeless we came to know and whose stories we have endeavored to tell is their resourcefulness and their resilience. Confronted with minimal resources, often stigmatized by broader society, frequently harassed by law enforcement officials, and repeatedly frustrated by their own attempts to claim the most modest part of the American dream, they nonetheless continue to struggle to survive materially, to develop friendships, however tenuous, with their street peers and to carve out a sense of meaning and personal identity. (Snow & Anderson, 1993, p. 316)

Undoubtedly, these notable scholars are sympathetic to the plight of the homeless; however, it is not their intentions but the textual representation

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

that is the subject of criticism. In this mode of writing about the homeless, the harmful effects of capitalism on the poor are relatively unexamined. Instead, the presumably heroic efforts of the down-and-out to be a part of normal society, "to claim the most modest part of the American dream," become the focal point of the story. Romanticism, in this case, masks or diverts attention from other possible realities. It serves as a "collective misrecognition" (Bourdieu, 1990) that softens the harsh realities of life under capitalism and, in doing so, tacitly approves of the status quo.

Other ethnographers, who can be placed under the broad umbrella of postmodernism, have a more ambivalent relationship with the exotic. In some ways, they both question and validate the exotic. For example, in his book *Images of Postmodern Society,* Norman Denzin (1991) invited us to entertain the notion that cinematic representations, exoticized or otherwise, are at the very core of postmodern reality. Turning his ethnographic eye toward Baudrillard's (1981) notion of hyperreality, Denzin noted that

> this society, Baudrillard argues, only knows itself through the reflections that flow from the camera's eye. But this knowledge, Baudrillard contends, is unreflexive. "The cinema and TV are America's reality!" (Baudrillard 1988, p. 104). . . . Voyeurs know and see themselves through cinema and television. If this is so, then an essential part of the contemporary postmodern American scene can be found in the images and meanings that flow from cinema and TV. (pp. vii-viii)

The "cinematization of society" has profound implications for ethnography and qualitative methods in general. Before, the ethnographer could ground his or her efforts in a particular time and a particular physical or social space; now, he or she is left with only a "sea of images," reflecting, mirroring, and broadcasting themselves in an exotic visual frame. Approaching such popular films as *When Harry Met Sally* and *sex, lies, and videotape* as ethnographic sites, Denzin (1991) resigned himself to the ubiquity of the exotic in popular culture.

> The new sexual order is based on lies. . . . It reflects not what is real, or truthfully felt, but what is pretended, what is thought to be appropriate, not what is. Baudrillard's hyperreal has become the real; the lie has become the truth. . . . That is what *sex, lies, and videotape* and *When Harry Met Sally* . . . are all about. (p. 122)

In various forms and contexts, the exotic is a central feature of many ethnographic stories. The variations in its use notwithstanding, the lure of the exotic is synonymous with the appeal of ethnographic research. Unfortunately, this discursive practice runs the risk of perpetuating the moral distance between the ethnographer and the research subject. Like the photographic gaze described in *Reading National Geographic* (Lutz & Collins, 1993), the ethnographic gaze connotes the worthiness of the exotic as a topic of study while simultaneously signaling its failure and unfulfilled desire to imitate the familiar self.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

Authenticity

This section begins by drawing a distinction between authenticity and autonomy to highlight the moral significance of the former for romanticists. Generally, autonomy or agency implies a sense of accountability and choice for one's actions. In contrast, authenticity suggests a sense of moral responsibility or "the actor's capacity to observe consistently a *self- imposed* principle" (Ferrara, 1998, p. 6). Although the two concepts overlap in some ways, they refer to relatively distinct realms of cognition and action. Romanticists are motivated by the belief that "the capacity for being oneself" is tantamount to the capacity for moral conduct (Ferrara, 1998, p. 8), and they search for the authentic in various people and cultures with the hope of revealing the nature of morality.

In this vein, ethnographic texts have become fertile ground for the crossbreeding of innovative literary and traditional scientific approaches in an attempt to better apprehend the authentic moral subject. Particularly, a group of ethnographers, loosely referred to as "emotionalists" by Gubrium and Holstein (1997), are ostensibly and deliberately self-absorbed. The emotionalists overtly advocate the use of, and reliance on, romantic themes.

> We live for feelings. Feelings lie behind, are the foundation of and the goal of, all thought. Feelings pervade thought, are fused with thought, inspire thought, and at the extreme, destroy thought. But feeling without thought is blind. Thought (reason, rationality) is the guide of feelings. . . . To present the whole picture we must begin with the beginning, the foundation and the end of all else: feeling. (Douglas, 1977, pp. 14-15)

In emotionalist research, the vague but intimate relationship between feeling and thought is often resolved in favor of the former. In essence, these researchers follow Rousseau's personal revelation that "I felt before I thought," or as David Silverman (1989a) wrote, they seek "the impossible dream of transcending the discourses we speak/speak us" (p. 38). For the emotionalists, the authentic is located deep within the self and is brought to life through a romantic writing style that privileges and praises imagination over reason, emotions over logic, and intuition over science. Indeed, the emotional approach is quite deliberate about its romanticist leanings. In the words of Carolyn Ellis and Michael G. Flaherty (1992), the goal is

> to capture and evoke the complex, paradoxical, and mysterious qualities of subjectivity. Instead of subordinating lived experience to the "tyranny of reason" or the "consolation of order" (Jackson 1989, p. 16), they [the emotionalists] follow Keats (1958, p. 193) in their attempt to cultivate the apprehension of "being in uncertainties, / Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." (p. 25)

Reveling in the very methodology of producing a self-conscious narrative, for these researchers the textual production is a liberating act in its own right.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

They blur disciplinary genres and incorporate a "messier" style in their writing (see Ellis, 1991; Ellis & Bochner, 1992, 1996a; Richardson, 1990, 2000), in an effort to "join ethnographic and fictional writing, the personal and the social, autobiographical and sociological understanding, and literature and science" (Ellis, 1993, p. 724). These exhortations have moved romantic qualitative researchers to openly share soul-searching journeys into their innermost beings.

For example, in her article "Multiple Reflections of Child Sex Abuse: An Argument for a Layered Account," Carol R. Ronai (1995) reported in vivid detail her personal tragedy as a victim of abuse. Her gut-wrenching descriptions of being violated are punctuated with a detached scientific tone. The changes in tone and style act as rhetorical devices that underscore the authenticity of the personal in juxtaposition to the professional. Ronai's multilayered approach effectively pulls the reader into her world and her memories of abuse.

Similarly, Lisa Tillman-Healy's (1996) work, "A Secret Life in a Culture of Thinness," takes the reader through a lifetime of experiences dealing with anorexia. To adequately express the depth and brutality of the exotic experience, Tillman-Healy used poems, reflections on everyday experiences, and at times "hard" social scientific facts to convey the authenticity of her experience. The goal, Tillman-Healy noted, is "to help you engage how bulimia feels" (p. 104); thus, "multiple forms are used to mimic the complex and multilayered nature of food addiction" (p. 104).

As moving and informative as these romantic accounts of authenticity are, they are not without their critics. For example, Regina Bendix (1997) saw the broader search for cultural authenticity as a quixotic effort to capture the essence of "pure" human existence. For her, this effort assumes a static and mythical view of culture that is incompatible with the actual complexities of social life. Similarly, Charles Taylor (1991) criticized "the ethic of authenticity" as a modern invention that places undue emphasis on self-awareness as both the instrument and the goal of morality at the cost of ignoring broader sociocultural factors that influence human behavior. In his words, the advocates of authenticity "see fulfillment as just of the self, neglecting or delegitimating the demands that come from beyond our own desires or aspirations, be they from history, tradition, society, nature, or God; they foster, in other words, a radical anthropocentrism" (p. 58).

The romantic preoccupation with the authentic self in qualitative research to some extent mirrors the scientific preoccupation with objectivity. Both romanticism and positivism assume a subject through whose gaze "truth" about an external world is accurately revealed, and in both cases, such a subject is a universal constant. Ironically, some avant-garde ethnographers take for granted the authentic self in the same manner their positivist rivals endorse universal laws that supposedly govern human behavior. In both

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

cases, empirical reality takes a back seat to unexamined ideological assumptions.

The enthusiastic emphasis on subjectivity as the source of authenticity and truth needs to be revisited with a more critical eye. Clearly, the pioneering literary-oriented works that reference the researcher self in the text have inspired ethnographers to challenge and to break away from the dominant positivist paradigm. Nevertheless, this approach raises its own epistemological questions. For example, we may ask, What are the discursive sources of the "selves" from which we write? Simply writing from a subjective stance does not resolve the representational issues that fueled the formation of alternative standpoints. Richardson (2000) captured the reflexive relationship between discourse and subjectivity when she wrote,

> Language is not the result of one's individuality; rather, language constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways that are historically and locally specific. What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them. . . . Experience and memory are thus open to contradictory interpretations governed by social interests and prevailing discourses. . . . Because individuals are subject to multiple and competing discourses in many realms, their subjectivity is shifting and contradictory, not stable, fixed, rigid. (p. 929)

Accordingly, an ethnographic subject that is not textually situated in, and critical of, the prevailing social conditions runs the risk of misrecognizing, or even masking, the "relations of ruling" (Smith, 1990) that mediate its expression. The subjective voice is not inherently free of dominant and oppressive discourses, no matter how emotionally, sincerely, or eloquently it is written.

In defense of the subjective standpoint in qualitative research, Bochner and Ellis (1999) stated,

> We write a story in which we are featured as a main character. Sometimes, we provide no explicit analysis, no explanatory theory. "How can this be science?" you ask. . . . Narrative offers a divergent rationality. What makes narratives believable is the sense of reality they create, their intimacy, economy, accessibility, verisimilitude, and their capacity to evoke and promote identification, feeling, empathy, and dialogue. (pp. 491-492)

Again, we acknowledge that the narrative turn represents a break from the false subject-object duality embedded of positivism, but we pose a different question. Namely, how do we assess the emancipatory potential of the new texts? As sociohistorically located constructs, rhetoric and affect were used to legitimize the worst systems of oppression in the 20th century. For example, Joseph Goebbles's masterful manipulation of emotionality and rhetoric was instrumental in the rise of the Third Reich. Goebbles's position on the relationship between art and education is particularly instructive in this regard. Speaking to a group of German filmmakers in 1941, he advised,

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

> This is the really great art—to educate without revealing the purpose of education. . . . The best propaganda is that which, as it were, works invisibly, penetrates the whole life without the public having any knowledge at all of the propagandaist initiative. (Kaes, 1989, p. 5)

This quotation suggests that the methods of oppression and liberation are disturbingly similar. Aesthetically oriented texts are not immune from the relations of ruling that make oppression possible. In this context, far from being irritating, constant analysis and explanation are necessary safeguards against totalizing narratives.

The Moral Project

Social reform and a moral emphasis on individual rights in a rapidly developing world have been prevalent themes in the works of romanticists. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, romantic authors were particularly critical of urban life and the conditions of the industrial city that Rousseau argued put "men in chains." Elaborating on this theme, William Wordsworth (1959), in "The Prelude," wrote of "the close and overcrowded haunts / Of cities, where the human heart is sick" (p. 467). Similarly, William Blake (1989), in the poem "Milton," spoke to the "dark satanic mills" that dominated the countryside of his native England.

Similarly, American sociology has long been concerned with a "moral salvation" of the social world. From its inception, social thought in America has had its roots in Christian religion, setting as its goal the establishment of a "Kingdom of God" on Earth (Vidich & Lyman, 1985, 2000). This orientation to the social world is obvious in the writings of Robert Park and other Chicago School devotees. Their works reflect a grand moral project to fight against the urban decay of the city.

> The great cities concentrate the great class which are being pushed to the wall. The rate of human wear and tear is dreadful in a great city. The great city draws in the best brains and brawn of the country all about. It is there that the great prizes are won but failure comes there too. Business failure but worse yet the physical failure of bad air, late hours, excitement, bad food, bad amusements, etc. All these tend to destroy mental and moral strength. . . . The cities kill off the masses just as the wars of the middle ages. (Church, 1965, p. 48)

Orienting their work to the "human junk" of modern society, the Chicago School concentrated on the social amelioration of the urban world and "the great cities" (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918). Leading this movement was Park (1927/1973): "I made up my mind to go in for experience for its own sake, to gather into my soul . . . 'all the joys and sorrows of the world' " (p. 253; as cited in Ritzer, 1996). Park focused on what he considered to be a general institutional crisis in the world and sought for a "brotherhood of mankind" (Vidich & Lyman, 1985).

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

In *Street Corner Society*, Whyte (1943) echoed a similar moral tone as he commented on his own personal "interest in economics and social reform." Whyte discussed the importance of visiting Cornerville firsthand and observing its "problems" so that they may be "solved." To Whyte, "it follows, therefore, that no immediate and direct solution to the problems posed for Cornerville can be a given" (p. xvi). One must go there, or as Park so bluntly stated, one must get the "seats of their pants dirty." He strove to see Cornerville not just as an Italian slum but as a complex and unique social structure whose study was a necessary step in carrying out the moral project.

The moral emphasis is also apparent in contemporary ethnographies. For instance, Barrie Thorne's (1994) research is written with an ongoing concern over the ways and mechanisms through which gender is constructed through the socialization of children. Thorne ended her book urging us toward a moral evaluation of gender and its construction. In the moralizing tone that has become a characteristic feature of most ethnographies, Thorne stated that she shared with many others "the long-range goal of eliminating the gender typing of tasks and activities, of allocating opportunities, resources, and teacher attention to the social categories of students" (p. 159).

Similarly, an appreciation of others and creating a sense of community are recurring themes in many ethnographies that use writing as a means of giving voice to alienated others and the disempowered. For example, Tillman-Healy's (1996) article on bulimia ends by reminding the reader that the piece is written for bulimics as an account of "comfort and companionship." Its goal is to "maintain a critical attitude" about our culture and its stories and relationships of body, gender, and food. Tillman-Healy put forth her work as a moral project that "direct[s] us toward healthier bodies and more contented hearts" (p. 105).

Ronai's (1996) autoethnography, "My Mother Is Mentally Retarded," provides another example of morally oriented qualitative research. In this piece, Ronai spoke of growing up as a child of a mentally retarded mother and of the relationship with her mother. She depicted the dramatic climaxes and ambiguities of this life through an intense emotional tone. Referring to this article, Ellis praised Ronai for a story that "extends beyond herself, to the backstage of disturbed families" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 32). Ellis went on to suggest that Ronai's story opens up the reader to experiences normally not discussed within clinical literature and provides a better understanding of very real issues that families, whether "disturbed" or not, must cope with.

The strongest support for the ameliorative effect of writing is expressed by Ellis and Bochner (1996), who suggested the very purpose of ethnography is no longer to write a "good" one but rather to write a "useful" one that can help to morally improve the social world. This can be seen explicitly, and in gripping detail, in Aliza Kolker's (1996) "Thrown Overboard: The Human Costs of Health Care Rationing," a moving account of her battle with breast cancer and the difficulties associated with an inadequate health care system.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

The story is especially enlightening and timely, given the recent political debates on health care reform. Kolker asked, Is it moral to ration health care? In this sense, her work can be considered a "useful" autoethnography, offering an emotional argument against a failing health care system. Morally, Kolker's text provides an excellent example of giving voice to experiences that are shrouded in secrecy (Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Ronai, 1995).

Similarly, the issue of morality in ethnographic research has been of particular interest to postmodernists, whose position on the romantic moral project can be divided into the two categories of "skeptics" and "affirmatives." As Pauline Rosenau (1992) noted,

> The skeptics are political agnostics, proposing that all political views are mere constructions and generally avoiding advocacy of any type. . . . Affirmative postmodernists are more politically optimistic. They support a wide range of political and social movements and advocate pluralism and tolerance rather than dogmatic and partisan postures. (pp. 23-24)

Hence, some branches of postmodernism view moral emancipation as a worthy objective. For example, Jean-Francois Lyotard (1983), in *The Postmodern Condition*, alluded to the moral struggle against the shackles of modernity:

> Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name. (p. 82)

Postmodern ethnography, in particular, embraces Foucault and Lyotard's position on knowledge as being productive of power and reality. Referring to this orientation, Richard Rorty (1989) argued that in a liberal society, it is the responsibility of "text," whether it be newspaper, film, poetry, or ethnography, to promote a "compassionate understanding" and to steer creative energies toward moral change and progress.

Following Lyotard's dissension with grand narratives of the past, postmodern ethnographers "critique science, realism, and the realist text" (Clough, 1992, p. 132; Denzin, 1997, p. 232). They denounce traditional narrative analysis and ethnography for being in the service of the modern technocratic state. Their differing standpoint epistemologies of gender, color, and sexuality promise to reverse this trend through the emergence of "messy texts." In a sense, for affirmative postmodernists the moral project of romanticism does not lose its significance but becomes more immersed in conscious theorizing and esoteric terminology.

An important aspect of the romantic moral project is the notion of humanism, which advocates the oneness of humankind based on purportedly universal strengths, frailties, and desires. Skeptic postmodernists are especially critical of the humanist agenda. As Rosenau (1992) put it,

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

> The skeptics contend that humanism has been used to justify Western superiority and cultural imperialism. . . . Neo-colonialism was humanist in that it asserted a responsibility to educate primitive peoples, to teach them to read and write. But in most cases education translated into assimilation to the culture of the colonial power, teaching the reading and writing of a foreign language. Similarly, native people in America were moved to reservations because it was said they could not take care of themselves. (p. 49)

The shortcomings of humanism in qualitative research are underscored by Alexander Liazos (1972) in an article titled "The Poverty of Sociology of Deviance: Nuts, Sluts, and Preverts." Referring to the labeling school's aim to "humanize and normalize the 'deviant,' " he pointed out the potential pitfalls of such well-intentioned efforts.

> A young woman who grew up in the South in the 1940's and 1950's told Quinn (1954, p. 46): "You know, I think from the fact that I was told so often that I must treat colored people with consideration, I got the feeling that I could mistreat them if I wanted to." Thus with "deviants," if in fact they are as good as we are, we would not need to remind everyone of this fact; we would take it for granted and proceed from there. But our assertion that "deviants" are not different may raise the very doubts we want to dispel. (p. 105)

Nevertheless, humanism continues to be a central theme in contemporary ethnography. Consider, for example, this excerpt from a participant-observation study of AIDS patients:

> Finally, this story shows how those who are often labeled as "deviant, aberrant, or pariahs" in our society are not really as different from the rest of us as many might think. I say this because the PWAs [people with AIDS] who reside at the Tahitian Islander [the research site] often want nothing more than a home, a family, friendship, and a chance to be remembered. And although it is easy to misunderstand a life that seems foreign, we must never overlook those reminders of humanness that might draw us all closer together. (Cherry, 1996, p. 26)

This passionate appeal for sameness glosses over a host of important considerations. It would be a statement of the obvious that people with AIDS are not all the same. They vary in income, race, sexuality, and nationality, and these differences tell us a great deal about who is afflicted with AIDS and who is fortunate to escape it and receive treatment for it. At a broader level, it may be that many "deviants" are different from "the rest of us." In many cases, it is the very struggle to preserve difference that results in their labeling as outcasts. In the course of bridging the gap between the familiar and the strange, romantic humanism normalizes exotic others in the service of the dominant culture, or "the rest of us." It prematurely dismisses differences in the name of a greater good (i.e., humanism).

Some ethnographers abandon any reference to the moral project of humanism altogether. Instead, they become immersed in data gathering as an end to itself. Bruce Jacobs's (1998) reflections on his research on crack dealers underscore the notion of ethnographer as the moral arbiter of the field.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

> The researcher must decide when to shade the truth and when to be forthright, when to offer and when to omit, when to induce and when to lie back. Such judgements are subjective and context specific, as any ethnographer will tell you. They must be made with audience in mind, whether that audience is legal, academic or social. Each choice affects the kinds of data obtained and revealed. (p. 174)

The vision of subjectivity in this case is not founded on the authentic self, nor is a moral project at the center of this work. Instead, the investigation of the exotic here is viewed as a utilitarian enterprise that can be molded to suit the needs of various audiences, be they technocrats, laymen, or academicians. Thus, the romantic moral project in ethnographic text ranges from writing as a "moral site" (Richardson, 1990) to a market-oriented approach that meets the diverse needs of its readership (Jacobs, 1998).

INTERROGATING THE DISCURSIVE PRACTICE OF WRITING

Our analysis rests on a basic question: What is the influence of the literary discourse of romanticism on the ethnographic text? Specifically, we reexamine the assumption that the literary form is a monolithic and neutral descriptive style that simply makes social science prose more reader friendly. The meaning of the ethnographic text does not serendipitously rise out of empirical reality or the imaginative mind of the researcher, but it is shaped by various discourses and attendant cultural practices. The goal is to unmask certain relations of power embedded in various descriptive styles. In this regard, our critique echoes the agenda of a newly established academic journal titled *Ethnography* and its stated mission: "the ethnographic and theoretical tracing of . . . how the interests and views of the powerful are often finally secured within the processes and practices which may seem to oppose dominant interests" (Willis & Trondman, 2000, p. 10).

Subsequently, we maintain that the three discursive elements of romanticism outlined here (the exotic, the authentic, and the moral) create a centrist or mainstream vision of social reality. For example, consider how the exotic serves as a road map in the quest for authenticity. In this context, the exotic is researched to rediscover the authentic self. As Taylor (1991) suggested, what is disturbing about this "ethic of authenticity" is that it takes for granted the bourgeois ethic of individualism and presents it as the ultimate moral struggle. The romantic focus on outcasts signals a mythical union of humankind regardless of situation or surroundings and reduces the complexities of social life to a self-centered search for the inner truth.

The moral project of romanticism is to maintain the integrity of a totalizing view of humanity, to attest to and perpetuate its existence. The romantic discourse, as we have described it here, rescues rationality from the throes of its

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

inherent contradictions by returning social outcasts to the humanist fold. In place of a thorough and radical critique of mainstream culture and its administrative apparatus, romantic descriptions of social problems paint colorful, optimistic portraits of human salvation. Romanticism as a discourse and a descriptive style in qualitative research glosses over the complexity of the postmodern life. It takes for granted the modern self as the source of truth and authenticity and retards the formation of alternative visions of morality and social change based on the myriad social influences that shape the postmodern self.

Our critique of romanticism in the ethnographic text does not call for a return to either cold realism or abstract purity. Rather, our stance on this literary trope is akin to Foucault's (1984) position on rationality, which he described as a revolving door that "refers to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time to its intrinsic dangers" (p. 249). Our discursive analysis does not debunk romanticism and its central themes but encourages more experimentation with, and interrogation of, this discourse. Such a trend appears to be already underway in the field. For example, promising new research in the area of race and ethnicity subverts the concept of the exotic by casting the familiar white self as strange (see Frankenberg, 1993). Similarly, constructionist approaches to subjectivity critique the place and significance of the modern self in social life by revealing its discursive and institutional footings (see Gubrium & Holstein, 2001).

To some degree, we feel what is needed is the emergence of new utopian projects. In recent decades, it has become less acceptable for sociologists to explore or propose radically new forms of social order, lest they be accused of adhering to an outdated grand narrative of social change. With few exceptions (see, for example, Feagin & Vera, 2001), researchers have been content with vague references to reforms that do little to transform modes of domination and existing relations of power. The emancipatory goals of the ethnographic enterprise can be advanced through moral projects that address a broader range of social issues and conditions. Although romantically inspired studies modestly point in this direction, their ideological ties with transcendentalism limit their full potential. Romantic descriptions urge readers to escape from social problems to an indefinable utopia with no, or very little, attention to the obdurate conditions that give rise to present realities. Vidich and Lyman (2000) referred to this condition when they wrote that "the postmodern sociologist-ethnographer and his or her subjects are situated in world suspended between illusory memories of a lost innocence and millennial dreams of utopia unlikely to be realized" (p. 59).

Our analysis admittedly does not offer a recipe for writing our way out of this representational challenge. Indeed, as evidenced by the recent issues of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* devoted to this topic (see Ellis & Bochner, 1996b; Loseke & Cahil, 1999), the field is not lacking for new and alternative approaches to writing. By suggesting that the romantic devices

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

used in constructing the ethnographic text may be elitist or exclusionary, our intention is to add another measure of self-reflection to the existing debate. In some ways, this is consistent with feminist scholars' critique of social sciences and academia. bell hooks's (1990) self-reflection on her role as an educator in mainstream academia can be particularly enlightening in this regard.

> These days when I enter classrooms to teach about people of color and the students are nearly all white, I recognize this to be a risky situation. I may be collaborating with a racist structure. . . . In such circumstances I must interrogate my role as an educator. Am I teaching white students to become contemporary "interpreters" of black experience? Am I educating the colonizer/oppressor class so that they can better exert control? . . . This challenge then confronts everyone who participates in cultural studies, and in other interdisciplinary programs like women's studies, black studies, anthropology, etc. If we do not interrogate our motives, the direction of our work, continually, we risk furthering a discourse on difference and otherness. (p. 132)

The reflexive and dialectical nature of ethnographic research has received much attention (Atkinson et al., 1999; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Marcus, 1994). In this article, we have applied these developments to the analysis of the discourse of romanticism in an effort to encourage a rethinking of the practice of writing among ethnographers and possibly a reconceptualization of all phases of the ethnographic enterprise (e.g., audience, rapport, access, etc.) and their impact on the oppressed.

Although our theoretical orientation, as inspired by Smith (1990) and Gubrium and Holstein (1997, 2000), points to the everyday practice of writing and how it is mediated by discursive footings, our analysis does not address the full range of reflexive relationships between institutional contingencies and textual constructions. More research is needed on how ethnographic writing is influenced by organizational necessities and agendas. In this regard, much can be learned from Richardson's (1997) work on how "the specific circumstances in which we write affect what we write" (p. 1). Such ethnographies of ethnographies could advance the theory and the ethics of qualitative research by revealing how the qualitative text is discursively and interactionally accomplished.

REFERENCES

Adler, P. (1985). *Wheeling and dealing: An ethnography of an upper-level drug dealing and smuggling community*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Adler, P. A., Boelen, W., & Whyte, W. (Eds.). (1992). Street corner society revisited [Special issue]. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *21*(1).

Agger, B. (1989). *Socio(onto)logy: A disciplinary reader*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Atkinson, P. (1990). *Ethnographic imagination*. London: Routledge.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., & Delamont, S. (1999). Ethnography: Post, past, and present. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *28*(5), 460-471.

Barthelemy, A. (1987). *Black face, maligned race: The representations of Blacks in English drama from Shakespeare to Southerne*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1981). *For a critique of the political economy of the sign*. St. Louis, MO: Telos.

Baudrillard, J. (1988). *America*. London: Verso.

Bendix, R. (1997). *In search of authenticity: The formation of folklore studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Blake, W. (1989). *The complete prose and poetry of William Blake* (G. Keynes, Ed.). London: Nonesuch Press.

Bochner, A., & Ellis, C. (1996). Introduction: Talking over ethnography. In C. Ellis & A. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing* (pp. 13-45). Thousand Oaks, CA: Alta Mira.

Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. S. (1999). Which way to turn. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *28*(5), 485-499.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford, CA: Polity.

Cherry, K. (1996). Ain't no grave deep enough. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *25*(1), 22-57.

Church, R. (1965). The economists study society: Sociology at Harvard, 1891-1902. In P. Buck (Ed.), *Social sciences at Harvard* (pp. 41-58). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. (Eds.). (1986). *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Clough, P. (1992). *The end(s) of ethnography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Coleridge, S. T. (1916). *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, and Kubla Khan*. Boston: Ginn and Company.

Denzin, N. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (1991). *Images of postmodern society: Social theory and contemporary cinema*. London: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (1993). Rhetoric and society. *American Sociologist*, *24*, 135-146.

Denzin, N. K. (1994). The art of interpretation. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 500-515). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). The seventh moment. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 1047-1065). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Douglas, J. (1977). *Existential sociology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Eagleton, T. (1976). *Marxism & literary criticism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Eagleton, T. (1996). *Literary theory: An introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ellis, C. (1991). Emotional sociology. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, *12*, 123-145.

Ellis, C. (1993). Telling a story of sudden death. *Sociological Quarterly*, *34*, 711-773.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (1992). Telling and performing personal stories. In C. Ellis & M. Flaherty (Eds.), *Investigating subjectivity* (pp. 79-101). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (1996a). *Composing ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (Eds.). (1996b). Taking ethnography into the 21st century [Special issue]. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *25*(1).

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

Ellis, C., & Flaherty, M. (Eds.). (1992). *Investigating subjectivity*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Feagin, J. R., & Vera, H. (2001). *Liberation sociology*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Ferrara, A. (1998). *Reflective authenticity: Rethinking the project of modernity*. New York: Routledge.

Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 70-82). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Foucault, M. (1984). What is enlightenment? In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault reader* (pp. 239-256). New York: Pantheon.

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press.

Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. (1997). *The new language of qualitative method*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. (2000). Analyzing interpretive practice. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 487-508). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. (Eds.). (2001). *Institutional selves: Troubled identities in a postmodern world*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. London: Tavistock.

Hewitt, R. (1994). Expanding the literary horizon: Romantic poets and postmodern sociologists. *Sociological Quarterly*, *35*, 195-213.

hooks, b. (1990). *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston: South End.

Jackson, M. (1989). *Paths toward a clearing: Radical empiricism and ethnographic inquiry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Jacobs, B. A. (1998). Researching crack dealers: Dilemmas and contradictions. In J. F. Ferrell & M. S. Hamm (Eds.), *Ethnography at the edge: Crime, deviance, and field research* (pp. 160-177). Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Jacobs, B. (1999). *Dealing crack: The social world of streetcorner selling*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Jameson, F. (1984). Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism. *New Left Review*, *146*, 53-93.

Kaes, A. (1989). *From Hitler to Heimat: The return of history as film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Keats, J. (1958). *The letters of John Keats 1814-1821* (H. E. Rollins, Ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kolker, A. (1996). Thrown overboard: The human costs of health care rationing. In C. Ellis & A. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing ethnography* (pp. 132-149). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Liazos, A. (1972). The poverty of sociology of deviance: Nuts, sluts, and preverts. *Social Problems*, *20*, 103-120.

Liebow, E. (1993). *Tell them who I am: The lives of homeless women*. New York: Free Press.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Denzin, N. K. (1994). The fifth moment. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 575-586). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Loseke, D., & Cahil, S. E. (Eds.). (1999). Ethnography: Reflections at the millennium's turn—Parts 1 and 2 [Special issues]. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *28*(5/6).

Lukács, G. (1962). *The historical novel*. London: Merlin.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

Lutz, C. A., & Collins, J. L. (1993). *Reading* National Geographic. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lyotard, J. F. (1983). *The postmodern condition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marcus, G. (1994). What comes just after "post?" The case of ethnography. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 563-574). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McKinney, J. (1966). *Constructive typology and social theory*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of literature. (1995). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.

Montemurro, B. (2001). Strippers and screamers: The emergence of social control in a non-institutionalized setting. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *30*(3), 275-304.

Olesen, V. (2000). Feminism and qualitative research at and into the millennium. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 215-253). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Park, R. (1973). Life history. *American Journal of Sociology*, *79*, 251-260. (Original work published 1927)

Richardson, L. (1990). *Writing strategies*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Richardson, L. (1996). Educational birds. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *25*, 6-15.

Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 923-948). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ritzer, G. (1996). *Sociological theory* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ronai, C. R. (1995). Multiple reflections of child sex abuse: An argument for a layered account. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *23*, 395-426.

Ronai, C. R. (1996). My mother is mentally retarded. In C. Ellis & A. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing ethnography* (pp. 109-131). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rosenau, P. M. (1992). *Post-modernism and the social sciences: Insights, inroads, and intrusions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Shalin, D. (1984). The romantic antecedents of Meadian social psychology. *Symbolic Interaction*, *7*, 43-65.

Silverman, D. (1989a). The impossible dreams of reformism and romanticism. In J. Gubrium & D. Silverman (Eds.), *The politics of field research: Sociology beyond Enlightenment* (pp. 30-48). London: Sage.

Silverman, D. (1989b). Six rules of qualitative research: A post-romantic argument. *Symbolic Interaction*, *12*, 25-40.

Smith, D. (1987). *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Smith, D. (1990). *The conceptual practices of power: A feminist sociology of knowledge*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Snow, D., & Anderson, L. (1993). *Down on their luck: A study of homeless street people*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Steer, J., & White, A. (1994). *Atlas of western art history: Artists, sites and movements from ancient Greece to the modern age*. New York: Parchment.

Taylor, C. (1991). *The ethics of authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012

Thomas, W. I., & Znaniecki, F. (1918). *The Polish peasant in Europe and America*. New York: Dover.

Thorne, B. (1994). *Gender play: Girls and boys together in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Tillman-Healy, L. (1996). A secret life in a culture of thinness: Reflections on body, food, and bulimia. In C. Ellis & A. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing ethnography* (pp. 76-108). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vidich, A., & Lyman, S. (1985). *American sociology*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Vidich, A., & Lyman, S. (2000). Qualitative methods: Their history in sociology and anthropology. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 37-84). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Whyte, W. (1943). *Street corner society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Whyte, W. (1996). Facts, interpretation, and ethics in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *2*(2), 242-244.

Whyte, W. (1997). *Creative problem solving in the field: Reflections on a career*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

Willis, P., & Trondman, M. (2000). Manifesto for ethnography. *Ethnography*, *1*, 5-16.

Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical investigations*. New York: Macmillan.

Wordsworth, W. (1888). *The complete poetical works of William Wordsworth*. London: Macmillan.

Amir Marvasti is a visiting assistant professor of sociology at Penn State Altoona. His areas of research include deviance, juvenile delinquency, and race and ethnicity. He is currently writing a book on Middle Eastern Americans for Rowman and Littlefield.

Christopher Faircloth is a National Institute on Aging postdoctoral research fellow at the Boston University Gerontology Center, researching the intersections of chronic illness, aging, and the body. Other interests include the life course, research methods, and community. He is currently editing a collection of original essays on the "aging body" for AltaMira.

Downloaded from qix.sagepub.com at SAGE Publications on November 19, 2012