

FOR AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS DISCOURSE¹

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Abstract

In this paper I poise the particularism of anthropological studies of local discourse, which from my point of view, must begin with a view of language as verbal behaviour, ranged alongside of and not ontologically different from other observable behaviours, with the overly semiotized version of language that underlies a great deal of discourse analysis within avowedly Cultural Studies versions of social science. I polemically contrast these approaches with reference to my own long-term study of the verbal and discursive techniques of the Foi people of Papua New Guinea. Finally, I make a claim for the inherent multi-disciplinarity of anthropology, and poise this against the repressed monodisciplinary effects of Cultural Studies methodology.

Key words: anthropology, language, Papua New Guinea, cultural studies, inter-disciplinarity

Since the end of 1994, when I resumed fieldwork in Papua New Guinea after a seven year absence, I have been engaged in research on the public talk of the Foi people of Papua New Guinea as it is being shaped by the transformation their environment and society is currently undergoing as a result of petroleum exploration and extraction in their area, which began in 1989. The results of this research project I am currently engaged in will complete (temporarily) the ethnographic project that started in 1979 with my initial dissertation research. It began with my analysis of Foi myth (*The Heart of the Pearl Shell*, U. of California Press, 1988), and continued with a study of their poetry (*The Empty Place*, Indiana U. Press, 1991). This last project will result in the final instalment of a trilogy which could be called *A History of Foi Discourse*. In this lecture, I'd like to explain what I include under this rubric.

Throughout much of Papua New Guinea, public talk is a critical behavioural forum in which what we would like to call culture and communal convention is made visible. I deliberately do not use the phrase "communal culture is constructed" because I am going to make a case that it is not overtly constructed, in the manner in which the term is employed commonly these days², and I'm going to link this to a broader critique of what I take to be social science's current dilemma vis-a-vis the humanities later on.

To begin with, I'd like to explain the terms of this research project to you. What do I mean by a history of Foi discourse? First of course, let me identify the Foi: the speakers of the

¹This is a slightly revised version of the Inaugural Lecture I gave at the University of Adelaide on October 29, 1997. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Paideusis - JICS* for their valuable comments and suggestions.

²An effective example of the kinds of study I refer to here can be found in Handler and Linnekin 1984.

Foi language number around 7000 and inhabit the Mubi Valley to the east of Lake Kutubu in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. Until 1989, they were subsistence horticulturalists, fishers, sago processors, hunters and gatherers, living in communal longhouses in the dense rainforest at the edge of the central highlands. In 1989, the Kutubu Joint Venture, whose operating partner was Chevron Niugini, located a large reservoir of crude oil that runs northwest to southeast beneath a synclinal ridge west of Lake Kutubu. Since then, the Foi's attention has turned to the distribution of royalty money and equity within the Joint Venture itself that derive from petroleum revenues but which go chiefly to the neighbouring Fasu people, in whose territory most of the oil bearing land is located. While only a small number of Foi clans are involved directly in the receipt of petroleum revenues, all Foi people have experienced a dramatic alteration of their previously isolated valley when Chevron Niugini completed a road linking the region with the Highlands Highway in 1993.

Next, 'history': I draw upon those philosophers and social theorists who have advocated a strong social siting of the project of historical analysis-- in particular Marx, Heidegger, and Bourdieu³-- and begin by defining Foi history as a description of what we might call the conditions of possibility of events: the social context of the projects to which Foi people turn their ongoing concerned attention⁴. One of the lynchpins of Heideggerian phenomenology locates anticipation of the future as one of the originary moments of human temporality. This allows one ethnographic leverage on the Foi, who, in common with many New Guinea people, are oriented more towards the anticipation of the end of events than with their retrospectively construed origins as such.⁵ I thus begin with the way Foi anticipate events, and how this anticipation shapes and is marked in their verbal interaction.

We can continue with the proposition that 'social life' as such for the Foi begins with activity oriented towards a goal. In the case of the forest-dwelling Foi who spend much of their time gardening, hunting, fishing and in general wresting a living from the land which they inhabit, such action makes observable the effects of human agency as externally inscribed on the surrounding environment⁶. That is, since the Foi are a landed people who make their living off the land, they are prone to measure the passage of time and human history by assessing the traces of such activity on the land. By environment I mean the total external world comprised of both of a physical terrain as well as the other people within that terrain and their spatial and temporal situatedness in it. From this futural stance the Foi then confront a derivative sense of retrospection, as the evidence available to people of previous human actions. Here we see history has right from the outset for the Foi a futural as well as a retrospective dimension, for without anticipation of the future, there is no point in the backwards retrospection of event.

Such lived and living space for the Foi is, as the anthropologist Aletta Biersack calls it, 'biographical' (Biersack, 1990): for the Foi and other forest dwelling people of Papua New Guinea it is marked by the furrows and pathways and traces of human movement through it. This is what I have analyzed as the inscriptive effects of life activity in my second book, *The*

³See Lukács 1968; Heidegger 1962; Bourdieu 1989.

⁴For other versions of anthropological history see for example Sahlins 1985; Lawrence 1964; Rosaldo 1980; Wagner 1988, Langlas and Weiner 1988.

⁵See for example Wagner 1981.

⁶For other anthropological descriptions of inscriptive activity, see Jackson 1989; Feld 1982; Munn 1973.

Empty Place (1991). I would like to point out here that there is no one-to-one correspondance between intention, the consciousness of goal, and the concrete events which result from such intentional acts. The Foi find evidence for intentional acts of all kinds in their environment—human, animal and ancestral-spiritual—but they are not always sure of the nature of agency involved in the creation of this evidence. They thus have to make hypotheses about such acts of creation. This is another way of saying that not everything that humans do is constructed in the narrow sense in which the term is often employed these days in much humanities and social science writing. I'll return to this point shortly.

Apart from subsistence tasks, Foi communal life is also focused on a regular series of ceremonial exchanges of shell valuables and animal wealth, which for the most part regulate marriage, childbirth, compensation for injury, and land transfers. In these exchanges that give shape to the Foi's social alignments and categorizations, the Foi create with other humans what they do with their environment: as the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1988) has argued, they fix traces of their agency in the form of obligations incumbent on others.

I have said that action and productive life is forward-oriented. The manner in which the Foi balance this anticipation of the future with a retrospective assessment of event is through public talk. Discursive recreation of these life projects becomes necessary in the inevitable conflicts engendered by the collision of such 'life-lines'. The Foi recognize that there is a place for subjectivity in the world, and that there always emerge differing subjective assessments of events. Foi communal discourse-- their debates, arguments, disputes, moots, judgments and rhetoric-- is therefore the ground against which events surface in the Foi historical consciousness. The conventions of these communal discursive practice constrain as well as make possible the forms of historical consciousness; they provide the limits within which events are given meaning. These events then, as Biersack (1990) suggests, are never merely "'instantiations' of structure; they are project results", and the results themselves are always subject to discursive confirmation and negotiation.

Although the bodily manner in which Foi productive action creates its temporal and spatial horizons has important non-verbal dimensions, the Foi world of human action and intention and its temporal constitution depends heavily on the forms of speech through which these assessments are made publicly visible and conventional. Let me turn to the way I have approached the ethnographic study of Foi speech and language over the past 19 years.

My interest in formulating a theory of Foi discourse began for me with the realization that I required contrastive and even opposed linguistic theories to explain different aspects of the Foi discursive lifeworld. In my first book, *The Heart of the Pearl Shell*, I analyzed Foi mythology. I started out criticizing Lévi-Strauss' structural approach to myth⁷ for its factitious separation of conceptual activity from socially constituted discursive action. But I also admitted that the resolution of social predicaments that Foi myths embodied *had* to be mostly conceptual, mostly ideal, because their resolution in real life was not possible. The apparently sealed world of myth-- the fact that it seemed to effect a closure within the open-ended world of life activity-- encourages the analyst to pluck myth out of its context of communally praxically-constituted discourse. And the symbolic analysis of Foi myth was, for me, plain and simply extraordinarily productive. Myth indeed had a message, and for my purpose in the

⁷As first outlined in Lévi-Strauss 1963.

early stages of my research among the Foi, I was less interested in the ends to which these messages were deployed by its tellers (they were most often recited in casual, recreational situations).

My second book on the Foi, *The Empty Place: Poetry, Space and Being among the Foi*, is about the memorial song poems that the Foi perform on ceremonial occasions. Here an appeal to language as purely conceptually situated is unhelpful. Song poems are the product of Foi women's attempts to fashion for themselves an affective statement on the tragic nature of death, abandonment and loss. But women compose and sing them while engaged in the rhythmic work of sago pounding and shredding. These poems then must be situated alongside the total activity of the body-- they partake of the periodicity and rhythm of daily, purposeful female labour. As much as myth may belong to the world of concept, poetry for the Foi is language in its materiality. It makes use of the considerable iconism of the Foi language-- that is, the marked extent to which Foi speech sounds resemble the things they label. This is most notable with respect to their grammatical markers for space and time, and which, in common with other Papuan languages, are ubiquitous in the Foi language.

The poems are laments sung to the memory of dead male kinsmen. Most characteristically, a man's life is recalled in terms of the places he inhabited-- the gardens he made, the animal traps he set, the fish dams he built, and so forth. In singing of the life course of men, women poetically reconstruct an inhabited spatial world; they create embodied space as a product of the concerned life activity of men. I borrow from Martin Heidegger the notion of the unity of speaking, dwelling and building⁸, his discursive definition of placedness (which connotes much more than being merely located in space). As much as my first book addressed Lévi-Strauss and Durkheim, this one appealed to the non-Cartesian thinkers Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Cassirer.

Two portraits of Foi discourse, one classically Cartesian and conceptual; the other embodied, sensual, existential. The task I have set myself is not to choose between them, but to synthesize the very real contributions both make to an understanding of a total discursive life world. By this I do not mean just speech and language narrowly defined, but *discursivity*: all of the meaningfully activities through which humans appropriate and inscribe their agency upon an environment; the sum total of speech acts that go into creating an historically situated communicative *habitus*. Historicity is a key component to both Cartesian and phenomenological accounts of human perception; the cognitive and categorical are as temporally constituted as are the embodied and the sensory. A history of Foi discourse would therefore both fashion a sense of collectivity in the normative sense, and act as a vehicle for the embodiment of the self, without necessarily creating at the same time the unhelpful antinomy between society and the individual-- that is, it would not take language as axiomatically integrative or collectivizing, but would build upon language's subversive effect on consciousness, an effect which is fundamentally temporal and historical.

So, in my current research, I have first posed this question: What language lies wholly within both poetry and myth? What language is both thoroughly historically situated and also transcendent in that it fashions and appeals to the moral imagination? The answer in the Foi case is *political rhetoric*.⁹ In common with the Ku Waru people of the Western Highlands

⁸As given in Heidegger 1971a.

⁹See also Bloch 1975; Epstein 1974.

(Merlan and Rumsey, 1991) and the Huli of the Southern Highlands (Goldman, 1983), in every Foi community, events which affect the lives of its members are vigorously and continually debated, argued, inspected, litigated. Their world of history and event is continuously negotiated in this arena of discursive, competitive pre-emption, within which poetry and myth as *styles* are harnessed to rhetorical ends. Here the competing viewpoints among men are put forward and men who are skilled in asserting their interpretation of disputed events gain status (in common with most Melanesian societies, where skilful oratory is a prerequisite for men aspiring to renown¹⁰). Men defer to a history of their own recreation in putting forth their opinions, and both mythical and rhetorical restatements of history result from this.

In these public encounters men also display themselves in their most intensely masculine, flamboyant and assertive selves, as they do in ceremonial encounters generally. Here the nature of language as embodied activity is fundamental, for it is the self which is projected, constituted bodily through the activity of vigorous oratory and finally subjected to communal assessment and judgement.

There are at present two parts to my current research. The first consists of the background to a study of Foi rhetorical usages. The things I will be investigating in this first part are: (1) the forms appropriate to oratorical speech as a distinct mode, its exaggeratedly metaphorical nature, and because of this the elusiveness of its historical *reference*¹¹. Here I wish to concentrate on the speech act, the context of verbal action, and what we call the pragmatics of communal discourse, the manner in which the action of talking itself serves as an observable context for social engagement; (2) the subject of oratory and rhetorical dialogue: litigations concerning land disputes, adultery hearings, divorce, exchange defalcations, the aggressive speeches made during encounters between allied and rival villages. These contexts are what Foi history are all about; they *are* the stuff of history insofar as the events that constitute that history are discussed and disputed; their reality is a function of the fact that alternative interpretations are possible and necessary to their historical constitution.

The second part details the effects of oil exploration, extraction, and the negotiations between the Foi and the oil company and government on their political history. The subjects of the oil company's presence and its profound effects upon and anticipated effects on local life, are currently overshadowing other public topics. When I was in the Foi region in 1988 the different Foi and Fasu (another linguistic group who are the Foi's neighbours) villages were jockeying for advantage vis-a-vis the oil company. They were all concerned to convince the Company's representatives to commence drilling in *their* territories, and they referred to various myths to certify their belief that petroleum existed beneath their land. They used these same myths to justify their demands for a share of the anticipated revenue for oil found in territory other than their own. What seems clear first of all is that the *scale* of land disputes had broadened as a result of the company's presence; disputes limited to within the village or at most neighbouring villages now encompass the entire region. The Foi are learning to cope with a new sense of territoriality and placedness, and this is affecting their subjective assessment and legitimation of political claims amongst themselves.

¹⁰See Tipton 1982; A. Strathern 1975.

¹¹See Franklin 1970, 1972; Basso 1983, 1988; LeRoy 1978.

Throughout my investigation of the different forms that Foi language takes-- myth, poetry, magic and now public discourse and oratory-- I have been concerned to locate and characterize the different kinds and qualities of voice the Foi invoke and give shape to. This is not exhausted by merely describing the way the Foi talk, or detailing the biographies of the speakers. It is not only about the person as a sound-producing instrument, nor does it merely confirm the social experience of subjectivity. By voice I appeal to something that does not depend upon the expressivist approaches to language that force analysts to take the subjectivity and individuality of the speaker for granted. As does the linguistic anthropologist William Hanks, I am as much interested in describing the social contours of a social field of speech production, a social encounter which utilizes speech as a mode of engagement, rather than with a strictly expressivist, or what we might more accurately term a "productionist" account of language. As Hanks says, "... it is the socially defined relation between agents and the field that 'produces' speech forms" (1996: 230). To me, this is a methodological rendition of a central Heideggerian observation of human language: *it is language which speaks* (Heidegger, 1971b). I am therefore concerned with how and where within this field of language the Foi attribute responsibility for speech and meaning, how they infer the presence of speaking beings, what kinds of power or powers are thought necessary to effective speaking and to the effective shaping of social events through the use of speech. I am interested, therefore, in the way that the presence of voice is uncovered as an unintended by-product of people's intentions as they become visible within that field.

On the other hand, as is clear in the idioms that surround the use of the term *toktok* in New Guinea Pidgin (*tokpisin*), "talk" has very object-like qualities throughout Papua New Guinea and particularly for the Foi. In fact, far more than the flamboyant pearl shells and other ceremonial exchange items, talk is the object that ubiquitously passes back and forth between people, it is talk that mediates the social presences of persons and their identities and loyalties, it is talk through which exchange itself is resolved, affirmed and given public assessment in communal life.

Insofar as talk is an object, then it affects people. It is not a mere by-product of the mediatory action of sociality and its putative goal of social integration; it is the whole point of it. And this is what allows it to occupy so prominent a role in Foi historicization. According to Hanks, the historicization of speech "always involves objectifying practices and their verbal dimensions, through reporting, representing and evaluating them" (1996: 277).

I wish to make it clear that I see the contemporary Foi struggle with the effects of petroleum extraction as not simply that of the "impact of the west". The Foi exhibit far more agency in this conjunction of systems that a simple "impact" model allows for. I want instead to provide a Foi account of how the oil company's activities fit into their mythico-historical landscape as a transformation of their world of speech, place and power. This agency, again, is manifested through their discursive repertoire. One of the implications of studying the form of public talk at Lake Kutubu in the late 1990's is that the form of historicity and event is also subject to these socially delimited objectifying practises. The contrast that will emerge is of the appeals to a differently sited sociality, depending upon whether the conversation is located within the longhouse, or at a board room, government or ministry office or local meeting hall. We might be tempted to think of these as distinct domains whereby the local and traditional and the global or transcultural respectively are articulated. But this would be to turn away from the grammatical, syntactic, semantic fields which relate both and make of

both venues different sites for the discursive iteration of what Marshall Sahlins calls a culture of conjuncture (1981, 1985), and which a focus on event forces one to confront in local terms. I'd like to just expand on this idea for a moment before I turn to some broader issues.

It may be ironic to suggest that just as Cultural Studies is gaining formidable momentum, the notion of culture as anthropologists have been elaborating it for over a century is being accused of having exhausted its conceptual utility for anthropology. This is partly because of the inertia acquired by a term that is used for such a long period of time, and partly because the conditions which made the culture concept a useful analytical tool have changed greatly. Sahlins intended that the theory of the conjuncture would encompass within a social account of "event" at once the historical specificity of contact between the western and the non-western world, and the enduring, reproducible structures of the human lifeworld that we know through our empirical research have stabilizing and perdurable qualities. But as the western and non-western worlds have become more thoroughly imbricated, the momentous nature of these contact events become both more common and less 'eventful' themselves, and their capacity to make maximally visible a clash between two structured regimes of enculturated perception has also become attenuated. There are no doubt many, many dimensions to this that one could talk about and I will only have time to comment on a couple of the ones that are most pertinent to my research here. The first is that in a world in which a so-called global culture is becoming more and more universal, the forms of cultural difference that anthropologists used to identify as their subject matter seem to be narrowing. Although the intensity and visibility of human social differentiation is increasing, the terms of this differentiation are seen to have very little to do with culture in the broad sense in which anthropologists usually approach it: in large, multicultural nation states, this differentiation has much more to do with economic, gender, racial and ethnic identities, alongside which cultural identity, rather than "culture" per se, is ranged, but is not determinative of them. The Foi are now much more concerned with the problems of identification that are arising within their world, where some Foi clans who are oil landowners have more vested interest in associating with the neighbouring Fasu than they do with other Foi clans who are not oil landowners. A great deal of the public talk I am studying right now centres on the attempts to resolve this dilemma, since the terms of the new identifications are being established along lines that at first seem to have very little to do with traditional culture or custom. But the Foi and Fasu have a long history of contact and intermarriage, in a region of Papua New Guinea populated by small language groups who have traditionally attended to the minutiae of their praxic and cultural difference as part of establishing their distinct microregional identities. The current petropolitical gesture of some Foi clans towards the Fasu is no less a cultural issue and no less continuous with these long-term processes of regional adaptation and differentiation than the issue of what Foi and Fasu language are, or what constitutes appropriate Foi or Fasu costume at a singsing, even though the impetus for this current identification seems to originate externally to both. Identity and ethnicity and even culture have very little to do with what make the Foi and Fasu distinct to each other, whereas geography, the control of named places, and the ownership of certain powerful magical procedures are more salient forms of differentiation in this area. We called these latter dimensions "Foi" and "Fasu" culture, however, and in doing so, we create a conduit through

which this local world of territorial and discursive connection becomes opened up to the more transcendent versions of western *bildung*.

The self-conscious "constructed" versions of culture that I have alluded to show a marked lability and instability, to the delight of contemporary Cultural Studies. But the anthropological version of culture treats it in simultaneously narrower terms geographically and broader terms behaviourally, because it understands the human symbolic capacity and its ostensive products to be not radically dissociated from their psychological, biological as well as adaptive dimensions. We need, in other words, to be just as attentive to the formidable inertia and resistance to mutability that such embodied regimes of enculturation display and the kinds of momentum that institutionally entrenched forms of social reproduction display. Along with the conscious focus on the currently unpredictable local politics of petroleum, the Foi continue to garden, fish, make sago, husband resources, obtain brides from each other, and worry about the long-term circulation of cash and ceremonial valuables. These life concerns are not disarticulated from the formal and publicly debated issues of current regional alignments and in fact often intrude themselves into such considerations. Needless to say, an anthropology that treated culture as a product of such social, psychological, biological and adaptive forces as well as one of its preconditions would not find that any major discontinuity had been introduced to either their methodology or their object of study.

Let me use this last statement as a cue to turn away from an account of this research narrowly construed to some of its broader implications. Although the Foi are conscious of this struggle to define a new terrain or geography of identity, it does not follow that they are engaged in "constructing" it for themselves in a strict sense, since a variety of forces, discourses and influences, some local and others not local, are affecting and constraining their efforts in these directions. Another intention of this research therefore is that it provides an alternative to current theories of discourse which divorce the production of linguistic and semiotic communal meaning from the observable and concrete processes of verbal interaction. One of the paradoxes of the common use of the concept of "construction" is that it simultaneously invokes a strongly centered agent, conscious of what he/she is doing, and an unfocussed, uncentered process of crystallization in which the concrete social relations of production are invisible. Either it is claimed that agents are at work constructing themselves, or, especially with regard to the complex media institutions of western society, we hear only that meaning or identity *is* constructed, to which a piece of evidence, usually textual or pictorial, is adduced. What I would claim is the dialectic relating the consciousness of agent with the so-called "conditions not of his/her making" seems to be left unarticulated; this becomes very much the *terra irredentia* in this theoretical landscape. In this manner, the language of social and cultural construction preserves its literary-critical and textual origins, while masking itself as a *faux* social science. I won't say that it turns away from the task of analyzing the production and construction of meaning as observable and describable social process, because it never confronted these phenomena in this way in the first place. In the manner of the literary-critical establishment, it preserves what it has always confirmed as the auratic and enchanted properties of meaning, particularly literary and artistic meaning, but now refigures these literary techniques as a generalized aesthetic of social perception and intention. I should point out that as literary techniques they are perfectly valid. As descriptions of the conditions of social articulation, however, they do nothing so much as

preserve the broad aestheticizing of social and political life in the late 20th century¹². Because such a large portion of what used to fit under the rubric culture, at least as far anthropologists were concerned, has now shifted over to the domains of identity, property and power, it leaves culture “as-such” strangely attenuated and narrowed as an analytical field, because it itself has become only a component of these other domains rather than their (anthropologically-informed) marker and visible buoy. The more, it seems, that culture becomes spoken about by everyone, the less and less it refers to anything in particular; the more the public media pick up on it as a rhetorical device with which to enframe and make visible certain kinds of news, the less it serves as an analytical concept and the more it becomes a conceptual shorthand which anticipates and disposes of, rather than enables, social analysis.

I might also add on behalf of my historian colleagues that the enchanting of the processes of social and cultural construction elides a proper historical approach which I hope those in the audience will understand that I view as inseparable from a properly social scientific analysis as I have outlined it. A strongly worded version of this would stress that it does not neglect the empirical dimensions of speech and verbal formation, and I might even go so far as to say I borrow from W.V. Quine the maxim, “there is nothing in meaning that is not in behaviour” (see for example Quine 1970), which in this case we can take to mean that the Foi themselves could not countenance an account of their language that did not place in the center of it the action of sending and receiving and manipulating the very object-like thing they take talk to be.

Let me now give some of my current views on the wider situatedness of this approach to anthropology and social science and to comment on some of the current conditions of such research.

The Foi, in common with other local landowning populations in New Guinea and Australia, deal directly with the mining companies, often in opposition to the wishes and strivings of their respective governments (this was brought out in the recent negotiations between Aboriginal landowners and Century Zinc in central Queensland, Australia, by the way). In the Papua New Guinea case, they make alliances with the mining companies that although patently asymmetrical are nevertheless contiguous with the relational culture through which they establish other kinds of alliance, marital, ceremonial, productive and so forth and which have certainly adjusted to but not significantly lost their continuity with pre-Colonial forms. The Foi confront the mining company and various government bureaucrats and politicians but by this token they do not confront the “state” or the “nation” as such. The success of such alliances are, as Biersack observes for the Porgera Joint Venture mine and the Ipili people of Enga Province, Papua New Guinea, “utterly transgressive” (1995); they force us to reject the notion that the people like the Ipili and Foi are “encapsulated” within a nation state which itself is “encapsulated” by a world system. Instead, such fusions of greatly varying organizational entities captures the essence of contemporary globalization, which erodes our previous faith in the geographicity of local-global distinctions. But removing the geographic dimension of this contrast is not tantamount to removing the contrast *tout court* because it is also a more general form for the human articulation of the scale and

¹²See Baudrillard 1983.

proportionality of meaning. The effects of globalization as a process can go either way: they can create the potential for new forms of trans-local identification, but they also at the same time can reinforce a new sense of locality. From the Foi point of view, the alliances they make with the joint venture are no more nor less local than any of their other strategic connections. And as I mentioned above and also described in my article "The Origin of Petroleum at Lake Kutubu" (in Weiner 1995), the presence of the petroleum company and the various government representatives is accommodated within the Foi's own version of globality, a version which has mythic and totalizing features that otherwise seem quite localized to us westerners.

I want to use this alliance between the Foi landowners and Chevron, itself a model of a relationship between incommensurately scaled social agents that nevertheless does not result in simple hegemonic domination, to now consider interdisciplinarity as an avowed goal of contemporary humanities and social science divisions in Australian universities. I begin by describing an anthropology and ethnology that used to be perfectly comfortable about borrowing from, making connections with, and depending upon a variety of other disciplines. If you look at the bibliography of my first book (Weiner, 1988), which was a version of my dissertation, although its subject matter was the mythology and social structure of the Foi, there were entries such as: "Rainfall in the Tropical Southwest Pacific"; "Explanatory Notes on the Lake Kutubu Geological Sheet"; "Notes on the Aquatic and Semi-Aquatic Flora of Lake Kutubu"; "Report on the Birds of the Lake Kutubu area..."; "A Comparative Study of the Foi, Huli and Pole Languages..."; "Accounts of Early Exploration and Settlement of the Papuan Gulf Area", and "Recent Neolithic Trade in New Guinea". By my count, these works represent meteorology, geology, botany, ornithology, linguistics, history, and geography. I have always thought that the total study of a human life world includes a consideration of the total environment of such human life, which of course includes things whose nature and functioning and mode of explanation are not human, humanly constructed, or humanist themselves, but which nevertheless affect or impinge upon human behaviour and perception. But my use or deployment of these botanical, zoological and geological descriptions does not make them into anthropology. I make use of botanical, zoological and geomorphological data as such, without feeling it necessary to rephrase them as components of a human science to which they nevertheless have something to contribute by virtue of the very different foci they bring to investigating the world. In other words, my appreciation of what these disciplines provides is thoroughly local and specific to my main concern, that is the Foi life world.

But my point is that this is not the kind of inter-disciplinarity that we are being ordered to heed. We are being asked to consider a trans-disciplinarity, with its connotations of transcendence, to attend to a view of the world in very specific terms. Because these terms do not support a practise of empirical and particularist description and categorization as such, they do not resist refiguring into just about any disciplinary guise you'd care to choose. Because the literary methodology upon which this trans-disciplinarity is based is at best euphemized if not concealed outright, it loses track of the way it redefines the object of inquiry in the form which certifies its own assumptions concerning its constitution. Botany is therefore more interestingly rephrased as a consideration of the sexuality of the botanist, the flower as metaphor for the desire of the flower-watcher; ornithology becomes an approved topic when the practice of describing, collecting and classifying is phrased as crypto-colonial

regime of incarceration and surveillance. The class background of the geographer becomes implicated in the manner in which a hegemonic Cartesian territoriality is inscribed upon the body of the earth. We are thus being asked to participate in a venture that is not interdisciplinary at all, but rather which pushes aside the disciplines in order to claim the space between them. Into that space is placed a very monodisciplinary set of tools amalgamated from a variety of different fields but which seem to have in common a peculiar reading of the Gramscian revision of Marx, a reading which jettisons the materialism of Marx's theory and hence forfeits the possibility of a dialectical social science which such materialism made possible¹³. This field, far from being multidisciplinary actually serves as a quite unary field of theoretical propositions, ideological positions and avowed analytical end results. Anyone who has been sojourning within inter-disciplinary space but who is not making use of this new methodology is likely to be redefined as occupying some orthodox traditionally centrist position and is denied the aesthetically more desirable status of doing "critical" fill-in-the-blank. This new trans-disciplinary fusion of humanities and social science called cultural studies is for me the academic face of globalization, which denies the force of the local, and this is both its great strength and contribution to interpretive social science, and its singular methodological limitation.

I concede that important dimensions of the subjective transfiguration of the world are all illuminated by the concerns of cultural studies and postcolonial theory. In particular, they are attentive to the vast scale of human and symbolic movement that now characterizes planetary social and technological formations, and to the resulting novel spatial and symbolic juxtapositions-- which I would maintain make new forms of locality possible. But because they are not constituted as empirical social sciences and indeed often position themselves in opposition to empiricism (which they often confuse with objectivism), they are also prone to replace the analysis of social life with an avowed project of general social and moral progress. Hence they strike me as examples of what Bertrand Russell (1946) described as the conflating of desire for knowledge of the world with desire for edification-- as if they are terrified by the possibility that human nature is not growing steadily more noble. This is not social science, however, but something which we can call "adhominology": the attempt to redescribe the world in terms of the human and moral qualities one wishes most to discover in it. The analyses that devolve from this stance are *faux* critique, because the version of social science based on distanciation that would give them a real critical perspective has been jettisoned from their methodological repertoire.

In struggling to establish some workable relationship with cultural studies, I feel as an anthropologist very much as a Foi clan leader confronting the Chevron community affairs officer: I want something out of it without having to turn my conceptual garden into an oil spill. Insofar as I attempt to make an anthropological reappropriation from cultural studies, it is only to reclaim, I think, what was originally borrowed from anthropology and other localizing social sciences. I think there is ample opportunity for an effective synergy between the two disciplines, so long as anthropology is not seduced into abandoning its focus on the observable social processes through which regimes of meaning are made visible and so long as Cultural Studies does not pretend that it has a methodological advantage over the social sciences as such, including anthropology.

¹³See Inglis' account (1993 chapter 3-4).

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