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James Buzard: Disorienting Fiction

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CHAPTER ONE



Uneven Developments: “Culture,” circa 2000 and 1900

[A]lthough it is still spoken of as “the science of culture,” modern cultural anthropology might be more accurately characterized as the “science of cultures.”

—George W. Stocking Jr.¹

AT THE END of the twentieth century, the anthropological concept of “culture,” once heralded as a colossal advance in social thought, occupied an uncertain terrain. On the one hand, its usefulness and even indispensability were championed in a series of ambitious studies of international economic and political relations, including such works as Samuel P. Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* and David S. Landes’s *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, which sometimes treated “cultural differences” as if they were capable of accounting for virtually every feature of contemporary geopolitics, and especially for every troubling feature. As the title of a recent Landes essay puts it, “Culture Makes Almost All the Difference.”² Such books reflected the term’s phenomenal success outside of academic discourse, where, on talk radio and in book groups, on editorial pages and elementary schools, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that sustained conversation about human affairs could hardly be carried on without almost constant recourse to the idea that the world population is divisible into a number of discrete cultures, and that these cultures determine or at least explain much of what goes on in the world.

At the same time, in progressive circles in the field that had developed and promulgated the concept, culture had become something of a pariah, an embarrassing relic of early disciplinary formation and of anthropology’s implication in colonial institutions and agendas. Far from being an instrument encouraging sympathetic understanding of other peoples’ ways of life, “culture” had been accused of functioning as an “essential tool for making other,” corralling subjugated peoples into more readily governable thought-packets and giving the differences, separations, and inequities among groups of people “the specious air of the self-evident.”³ The anthropological concept of culture, it was said, “might never have been invented without a colonial theater that . . . necessitated the knowledge of culture (for the

¹ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 302.

² In Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington, eds., *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

³ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Writing Against Culture,” in Richard G. Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), 143. For correction of many charges leveled against anthropology, cf. Herbert S. Lewis, “The Misrepresentation of Anthropology and its Consequences,” *American Anthropologist* 100/3 (1999), 716–31.

purposes of control and regulation).”⁴ The “discourse of culture” was seen to operate “through [a] metaphor of totality [that] represses the reality of political differences and historical change.”⁵ Paul Rabinow had written of the “symbolic violence” that turns real, encounterable-in-the-field people into nothing more than mouthpieces and mannequins for their cultures.⁶ Arjun Appadurai had referred to the way culture subjects living communities to “metonymic freezing,” trapping them forever in (what James Clifford had called) that “ethnographic present” in which the “common denominator people” of anthropological discourse (“the Nuer,” “the Trobriander,” et cetera) describe the same “typical” motions endlessly.⁷ Anthropology had been found (by Johannes Fabian) to produce an effect of “allochronicity,” a “denial of coevalness” by which practitioners separate themselves from their objects, whom they deny any such open-ended, living temporality as they and their Western, history-possessing and history-making cohorts enjoy.⁸ The relativism extolled by liberals of an earlier era had been sneeringly dismissed as “the bad faith of the conqueror, who has become secure enough to become a tourist.”⁹ The best that might be said from within the terms of this critique was perhaps, as Bernard S. Cohn put it, that “[a]nthropologists developed practices through which they sought to erase the colonial influence by describing what they took to be authentic indigenous cultures,” but that “[t]heir epistemological universe . . . was [ineluctably] part of the European world of social theories and classificatory schema that were formed, in part, by state projects to reshape the lives of their subjects at home and abroad.”¹⁰

The multifaceted critique briefly surveyed here had tarnished the reputation of concepts and conventions central to anthropology, leaving it in a position not unlike that of certain companies unlucky in civil litigation that go on existing solely in order to pay off punitive damages to the plaintiffs ranged against them. Circa 2000 saw the publication of books considering *The Fate of “Culture”* and looking toward a future *Beyond the Cultural Turn*.¹¹ And anthropology’s late-century

⁴ Nicholas Dirks, “Introduction: Colonialism and Culture,” in Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 3.

⁵ Daniel Cottom, “*Ethnographia Mundi*,” in *Text and Culture: The Politics of Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 54; henceforth Cottom.

⁶ “Symbolic violence”: Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 129.

⁷ “Metonymic freezing”: Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in its Place,” *Cultural Anthropology* 3/1 (Feb. 1988), 36. “Ethnographic present”: Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority,” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 32. “Common denominator people”: George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman, “Ethnographies as Texts,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982), 32–33.

⁸ “Allochronicity” and “denial of coevalness”: cf. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 25–69.

⁹ Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1993), 110.

¹⁰ Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 11.

¹¹ Cf. Sherry B. Ortner, ed., *The Fate of “Culture”: Geertz and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

onset of scruples about its foundational idea dovetailed with increasingly aggressive argumentation coming from evolutionary psychologists who strongly suggested that all talk of culture and of cultural difference would soon be giving way to a perspective that recognized every significant aspect of human behavior as an adaptive mechanism, restoring “human nature” to the throne from which mistaken ideas about the sway of culture had deposed it.¹²

Yet at the same time, and somewhat uncannily, there arose in a different corner of the Anglo-American academy a new post- or neo-Marxist interdiscipline or superdiscipline known as “cultural studies” that circumvented most of the questions raised about culture and mystified and frustrated more than a few of the critics of anthropology in doing so. “Why,” Virginia Dominguez demanded, for example, “when the concept of culture has such an elitist history, would sympathetic antielitists [such as the practitioners of cultural studies] contribute to its discursive objectification by trying to argue *in terms of it*?”¹³ She might have pointed as well to the so-called new historicism, prominent in literary studies since the 1980s, which sometimes reified units of time and space, such as the “culture of Early Modern England,” in treating them as closed circulatory systems of meaning and value.

A hundred years earlier, the habit of putting an “s” to the word *culture* had not yet established itself in Anglo-American usage. The word *culture*, a German import, had of course been deployed and debated in works of social criticism arising out of the so-called condition-of-England question of the 1840s, when the polarizing pressures of intensified industrialization had driven essayists and novelists to wonder whether England was in fact one nation or two (rich and poor, capitalist and worker) and whether many celebrated “mechanical” advances from technology to politics did not degrade rather than cultivate humankind. In Matthew Arnold’s famous polemic of the 1860s, *Culture and Anarchy*, a never-defined, singular culture had afforded an external standpoint from which to criticize the shortcomings and blindnesses of a self-congratulatory modern Britain. For the most part, Arnold used *culture* as a universal standard for judging the development of human faculties, but, like John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*, like John Ruskin in “The Nature of Gothic,” and like some other leading Victorian theorists of the social, he sometimes drew tantalizingly near the conceptual territory of the later anthropological concept of culture as the wholeness of a particular people’s way of life.¹⁴

Yet the contemporaneous emergence of anthropology as a recognized academic subject—it earned its own section in the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) in 1874—seems to have discouraged further progress toward a *pluralizable* model of culture, for, as George W. Stocking Jr. has author-

¹² E.g. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002).

¹³ Dominguez, “Invoking Culture: The Messy Side of ‘Cultural Politics,’” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 91/1 (1992), 20. Cf. my “Notes on the Defenestration of Culture,” in Amanda Anderson and Joseph Valente, eds., *Disciplinary at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 312–31.

¹⁴ Cf. Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 54–57; henceforth Herbert.

itatively demonstrated, mainstream Victorian anthropology, massively invested in the project of constructing one single narrative about the evolution of human social forms and technologies, was committed to dealing with levels of human Culture—frequently written with a capital C—from primitive to advanced, and not with separate, relatively autonomous “cultures,” differently evolved under different environmental conditions. In a powerful essay published in 1968, Stocking demolished the myth, favored by many twentieth-century anthropological adherents of “cultures,” that exalted Edward Burnett Tylor’s 1871 study *Primitive Culture* as the sacred fount of the modern, relativistic culture-concept: contrary to this pious fiction, Stocking showed, Tylor had never treated culture “as an organized or functionally integrated or patterned way of life, nor did he use the word ‘culture’ in the plural form”; his method, rather, consistently “forced the fragmentation of whole human cultures into discrete elements which might be classified and compared out of any specific cultural context and then rearranged in stages of probable evolutionary development,” and it “presupposed a hierarchical, evaluative approach to the elements thus abstracted and to the stages thus reconstructed.”¹⁵ The increasing institutional authority of an evolutionary, comparativist anthropology, unfolding during the period in which the extension and intensification of European imperialism put a premium upon certitudes about the supposedly fixed characteristics—moral, intellectual, and physical—of human races, granted an effective monopoly to the discourse that involved a single human Culture, with higher or lower levels thereof, and that retained the ideologically useful idea of savagery, or a state of human society apparently so unconstrained by morality or law that it could even be said to lie *outside* the reach or below the line of Culture altogether.

Even around 1900, among authors capable of considerable sympathy for the conditions, customs, and institutions of so-called primitives, one finds at most an inconsistent pluralization of *culture*, and frequently the persistent *avoidance* of it. The parallel cases of Joseph Conrad and Mary Kingsley, fin-de-siècle writers noted for their exploration of the geographical and epistemological frontiers between human groups, are illustrative here. Consultation of the concordances to his writings shows that Conrad, who is sometimes treated as a writer of “intercultural” contact, *always* operated within the evolutionist discourse that treats of a single human Culture, never in the one that treats of cultures. We read, for instance, of people who are “as innocent of culture as their own immense and gloomy forests” in *Almayer’s Folly*, and of “Don Vicente Ribiera, a man of culture and of unblemished character” in *Nostromo*.¹⁶ Nowhere in Conrad do we find anything comparable to the meaning in Mary Kingsley’s statement, from the 1901 *West African Studies*, that the “Africans had a culture of their own—not a perfect one, but one that could be worked up towards perfection, just as European culture could

¹⁵ Stocking, “Matthew Arnold, E. B. Tylor, and the Uses of Invention,” in *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 81, 80.

¹⁶ Sue M. Briggum and Todd K. Bender, *A Concordance to Conrad’s Almayer’s Folly* (New York & London: Garland, 1978), 118; James W. Parins, Robert J. Dilligan, and Todd K. Bender, *A Concordance to Conrad’s Nostromo* (New York and London: Garland, 1984), 314.

be worked up"; and yet Kingsley herself would go on, in a chapter titled "The Clash of Cultures," to speak of "the African" as being "in a lower culture state."¹⁷ Even the 1922 text often regarded as a (if not *the*) founding work of modern ethnographic pluralism—Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*—harbors both old and new, singular and plural senses of culture, and it is dedicated to one of the foremost comparativists, J. G. Frazer. The discourse of "cultures," from which we are now exhorted to liberate ourselves, was then struggling to liberate *itself* from the universalizing vision of ethnological comparativism.

One particularly revealing text from that cusp of the twentieth century when *culture* was still striving to acquire its "s" is William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1896), a utopian narrative in which the hero, "William Guest," is sorely tempted to change his status if not his name, leaving behind his troubled nineteenth-century society once and for all and remaining in the (twenty-second-century) socialist paradise he has always longed for and finally dreamt himself into. In order to remain a dedicated late-Victorian socialist, and to avoid contaminating his dreamland by introducing into it the traces of an unjust society he bears with him from the past, he must subject this desire of his, to which he gives ardent testimony, to programmatic containment and disruption. The work is also a valedictory upon the Victorian (bourgeois) English novel, an "antinovel" holding a distorting yet strikingly illuminating mirror up to the major works of midcentury fiction.¹⁸ As I shall return to argue in the fourth part of this work, Morris's text opposes its great bourgeois precursors not so much by departing from their methods as by intensifying or radicalizing them. In doing so, Morris opens a new pathway for us between the frequently dissociated Victorian and modernist narrative forms, because *News*, functioning as a kind of Minerva's owl for the nineteenth-century novel, suggests that narrative disjunction or interruption constitutes *the* unacknowledged novelistic principle, a vital element in fiction's treatment of—it is Morris's subject, too—the historical destinies of distinct peoples, nations, or cultures.

I am going to claim that thinking about the nineteenth-century novel as a determinedly *self-interrupting* form permits us to grasp its relation to twentieth-century cultural anthropology, with which it participates in a general system of cultural representation whose shape and coherence has been obscured for us by separate disciplinary agendas since the early 1900s. In this book, planned to be the first of two, narrative self-interruption will be read as the formal signature of British novels devoted to the performance of a "metropolitan autoethnography"—by which admittedly cumbersome term I mean a number of things that will be specified in this and the ensuing chapters. Regarding Morris's little book as an extreme or (as seems fitting for the 1890s) a "decadent" instance of metropolitan autoethnography offers both a way in and then a conclusion to this account of the great nineteenth-century novels' own status as leading precursors to modern anthropological "cultures."

¹⁷ Kingsley, *West African Studies*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1901), xviii, 325.

¹⁸ Patrick Brantlinger, "'News from Nowhere': Morris's Socialist Anti-Novel," *Victorian Studies* 19 (Sept. 1975), 35–49.

Yet an ethnographic perspective on a work like *News from Nowhere*—or the nineteenth-century “realist” novel, for that matter—might appear an unpromisingly obvious one, for if we take *ethnography* in the loose sense of the study of a people’s ways, then what utopian work, with its detailing of (imaginary) social practices, *isn’t* ethnographic? What realist *novel* *isn’t*, with its “thick description” of social existence? It will be evident that I employ *ethnography* in a stricter sense than is conveyed by such questions: in the twentieth-century sense of a study of a people’s way of life centering on the method of “immersion” in extensive fieldwork and raising the issue of how, and how far, the outsider can become a kind of honorary insider in other cultures. Texts to which we can apply the looser sense of *ethnographic* do not all warrant the label when the term is more narrowly construed. For Thomas More’s Hythlodæus, *becoming* a utopian is never as much of an issue as it is for Morris’s William Guest. More wrote at a time when the perception of differences among human practices did not so readily usher in the idea that those differences composed separate “complex wholes,” bounded life-worlds such as now go by the name of *cultures*. For writers working after that philological revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the borders between linguistically and territorially demarcated groups increasingly tended to become epistemological borders as well, so that the movements, literal and figurative, of an agent capable of crossing those borders generated increased interest and even urgency.¹⁹

William Morris envisioned his utopia at the start of a decade of crucial developments toward the ethnographic notion of cultures—developments such as the work of W. B. Spencer and Frank Gillen, whose field researches among the Arunta people, recorded in *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), regarded native life as a distinctive unity centered upon some “totalizing cultural performance.”²⁰ The same decade saw the collapse of an ambitious campaign, undertaken by the Anthropology division of the BAAS, to organize a comprehensive Ethnographic Survey of the United Kingdom: the failure of this scheme cast light upon the fundamental differences of method and purpose between physical anthropologists and the forerunners of modern cultural or social anthropology, helping prepare the ground for the latter’s emergence as a more or less autonomous discipline in the opening decades of the twentieth century.²¹ It is only in regard to the more modern, more restrictive and reifying construction of differences in terms of cultures that navigating between the positions attributed to “insiders” and “outsiders” becomes a decisive feature in representations of human societies, producing images of the cultural authority as Participant Observer, capable of engagement and de-

¹⁹ Cf. James Whitman, “From Philology to Anthropology in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Germany,” in George W. Stocking Jr., ed., *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 214–29.

²⁰ George W. Stocking Jr., “The Ethnographer’s Magic: Fieldwork in British Anthropology from Tylor to Malinowski,” in Stocking, ed., *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 70–120; see 79.

²¹ See James Urry, “Englishmen, Celts, and Iberians: The Ethnographic Survey of the United Kingdom, 1892–1899,” in Stocking, ed., *Functionalism Historicized*, 83–105.

tachment, each in proper measure. Such navigation forms no vital part of the interest in works like More's *Utopia* (1516), Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), or Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759). *Ethnography* acquires its modern, restrictive significance when it becomes definable, for all practical purposes, as the discourse in which "a culture" and a Participant Observer reciprocally define one another. A *culture* amounts to "that which it takes a Participant Observer to find."

It was not until the publication, in 1912, of the fourth edition of *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* that the model of the lone field ethnographer, "immersing" himself in "the natives'" way of life, acquired theoretical formulation and scientific license under the imprimatur of the BAAS; Malinowski's classic reflections on method, given in the first chapter of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, appeared a decade later. But it is important to place the emergence of these ideas in the context of a larger turn-of-the-century shift toward mobile forms of authority than can temporarily "become" their objects of study. This shift, it seems clear, reflects the intensification and heightened self-consciousness of late nineteenth-century imperialism. The modern fieldworker's displacing of the amateur "men on the spot" who provided data to university-based ethnologists, or of the fact-gathering teams such as those employed in the Torres Strait expedition or the United Kingdom survey of the 1890s, represents one crucial variant, but it shares the notion of a deliberate blurring of boundaries between investigator and object with a host of contemporaneous developments. "Transference" situations begin to figure in Freud's work from 1895, drawing the physician willy-nilly into the patient's treatment; in 1910 Freud argued that a rigorous *Selbstanalyse* would be indispensable if the analyst were to "recognize [the] counter-transference in himself and overcome it."²² By 1922 the Congress of the International Psycho-Analytic Association had made submission to a training analysis a requirement for would-be analysts.²³ Earlier, Freud had subjected his own dreams to interpretation and himself to treatment with cocaine. The era includes as well Wilhelm Dilthey's notion of the "mysterious process of mental transfer" between interpreter and historical subject that distinguishes the *Geisteswissenschaften*: "We explain nature," Dilthey remarked; "man we must understand."²⁴ It's in this period that Sherlock Holmes characterizes his method by saying, "I put myself in the man's place, and . . . I try to imagine how I should myself have proceeded under the same circumstances."²⁵ During these years, the border-crossing subgenres of imperial travelogues, utopias, and tales of espionage flourish.²⁶ Fiction is peopled with scientists who experiment on them-

²² Sigmund Freud, "The Future Prospects of Psycho-Analytic Therapy," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey et al. (London, 1954–74), XI: 139–51; quotation from 144–45.

²³ See J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), 457, 454.

²⁴ Quoted in Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 104, 115.

²⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Musgrave Ritual," in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, n.d.), 395.

²⁶ In *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,

selves, detectives who mimic the criminals they pursue, imperial agents who merge with colonized peoples: Kipling's Kim "infiltrates a community by actually joining it."²⁷ In Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900), the character Stein utters what may be read as the motto for the turn-of-the-century's authorizing metanarrative: "In the destructive element immerse"—to which we might add, "but make sure you get out again."²⁸

For fin-de-siècle writers, the intensification of imperial rivalries, combined with numerous other factors political, technological, sexual, and aesthetic, gave new urgency and fascination to narratives about the danger that a frontier willingly but temporarily breached might vanish completely, stranding the explorer in the Other's place. These are, of course, the years of Jekyll and Hyde, of Kurtz. In Conan Doyle's "The Creeping Man" (1923), Professor Presbury, "the famous Camford physiologist," risks permanently transforming himself into an ape when he takes "serum of black-faced langur" in an attempt to recapture his youth.²⁹ Kipling's colonial policeman Strickland, who figures in several tales, has the holiday custom of disguising himself and "stepp[ing] down into the brown crowd [to be] swallowed up for a while," but he finds the habit dangerously addictive, as "the streets and the bazars, and the sounds in them . . . call[] to him to come back and take up his wanderings and his discoveries."³⁰ In this fraught context, an insistence upon the maintenance of the boundary, upon the final self-identity of the investigator, is indispensable to the desideratum of a controlled self-alienation. In crossing over, the mobile authority lays claim to the ability to set aside identity for a time, implying that such identity is there to begin with and that it will be recovered, rather than invented in defining contrast to, and engagement with, the visited (often the colonized and available-for-visiting) Other. In all these instances, authority derives from the demonstration not so much of some finally achieved "insideness" in the alien state, but rather from the demonstration of an *outsider's insideness*. Anthropology's Participant Observer, whose aim was a "simulated membership" or "membership without commitment to membership" in the visited culture, went on to become perhaps the most recognizable (and institutionally embedded) avatar of this distinctively modern variety of heroism and prestige.³¹

1983), Stephen Kern points to "an outburst of literary utopianism" between 1888 and 1900 (cf. 98, 332n9).

²⁷ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 25.

²⁸ Conrad, *Lord Jim* (1900; New York: Signet, n.d.), 161. But cf. Vincent P. Pecora, "The Sorcerer's Apprentices: Romance, Anthropology, and Literary Theory," *Modern Language Quarterly* 55/4 (Dec. 1994), 345–82.

²⁹ Doyle, "The Creeping Man," in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, 1072, 1082.

³⁰ Kipling, "Miss Youghal's Sais," in *Plain Tales from the Hills* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 25, 29.

³¹ Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 125; henceforth McGrane. Cf. Susan Sontag, "The Anthropologist as Hero," in Nelson Hayes and Tanya Hayes, eds., *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Anthropologist as Hero* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970), 184–96; Nancy Bentley, *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. chap. 1.

This was the turn-of-the-century maelstrom from which the Participant Observer and the correspondingly plural and spatialized conception of culture arose into articulated form and commenced their careers at the heart of single discipline asserting primacy over all matters cultural.³² Yet as Christopher Herbert has convincingly demonstrated, a more complete and complex understanding of “the culture idea” as an historical phenomenon requires that we approach the subject less as a discrete “idea” than as “a highly motivated discursive formation whose advent is registered, even before it has assumed distinct form, by the turbulence it generates within various nineteenth-century fields of thought” (Herbert 253). Like nationalism, as Benedict Anderson has famously handled it, culture, too, is not so much a kind of thought as a thing to think with, a “cultural artefact” in its own right, or what Kenneth Burke called a “scene word,” denoting “not so much a clear concept as a cluster of interchangeable ideas and allusions open to mutual substitution and reciprocal definition.”³³ Telling the story of its emergence thus requires us to look farther back than circa 1900, and it requires viewpoints different in kind from those of traditional histories of ideas, however expertly conducted they may be—as, for one splendid instance, Isaiah Berlin’s *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (1976) certainly was. Where Herbert charts “the ethnographic imagination” across a range of nineteenth-century discourses, this book concerns itself with a constellation of textual effects in British narrative fiction that I see as signs of an incipient *autoethnographic* imagination cutting against the grain of the self-universalizing mentality which critics have often imputed to elements of mainstream culture during Britain’s long era of imperial expansion and consolidation. I contend that a self-delimiting (or, in narrative terms, a self-interrupting) autoethnographic project informs—that is, does not merely arise in but comes to preoccupy—the British novel after the 1801 Act of Parliament creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. In the immediate aftermath

³² As with the first pluralization of *culture*, the first usage of *Participant Observer* is difficult to pin down. The OED’s first documented use of the phrase dates from 1924 but points to some earlier source: cf. Eduard C. Lindeman, *Social Discovery* (New York: Republic, 1924), 191. Robert J. C. Young oversimplifies matters in asserting (in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* [London and New York: Routledge, 1995], 49) that Anthony Trollope was the first to pluralize *culture* in an 1862 work. Cf. Stocking, *Victorian* 302–4, and Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 23–29, 59–72; henceforth Kuper.

³³ “Cultural artefact”: Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 13. “Not so much . . .”: David Simpson, *Situatedness: Or, Why We Keep Saying Where We’re Coming From* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 95; cf. 39–41. Simpson’s reference is to Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969). Influential studies of culture focusing mainly on debates within anthropology include Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn’s *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952), George W. Stocking Jr.’s magisterial *Victorian Anthropology* (1987) and other writings, and Adam Kuper’s recent *Culture* (2000). Important nonanthropologists’ accounts that argue for a broader view of culture’s emergence include Raymond Williams’s classic *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (1958), Christopher Herbert’s *Culture and Anomie* (1991), Susan Hegeman’s *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (1999), Marc Manganaro’s *Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept* (2002), and Michael A. Elliott’s *The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism* (2003).

of this nation-making legislation, Irish and Scottish practitioners of the National Tale and historical novel developed modes of fiction devoted to the representation of their own cultures—and to the self-conscious questioning of that task—but this book’s major argument concerns the selective adaptation of such modes by some of the mid-century *English* novelists we have long identified as the masters of Victorian fiction.

This study treats important nineteenth-century novels for their constitutive linkages among three tropes: first, the “metaphorization [in Roy Wagner’s phrase] of life into culture,” whereby phenomena encountered serially in a particular society are “translated” and assigned value in terms of their position in the iconic space of that society’s purported culture; second, the metaphorization of culture into *place*, whereby the iconic space of a culture is “mapped onto” the physical territory belonging to the people whose culture it is; and third, the metaphorization of a spatialized culture into the textual space of a novel.³⁴ The novelists I read practice upon their own people the fiction Roy Wagner has described as “the study of [humankind] *as if there were culture*”: in their labors to invent and to represent their cultures as if they were things in space, they trope the textual space of their fictions as ethnogeographical space (Wagner 10, emphasis added).

As David Scott has argued, what “organizes the epistemological and geographical disposition of the anthropological gaze” is not so much the kind of knowledge delivered by the fieldworker as the “‘constant dialectical tacking’ across a field or fields of difference,” the recurrent “movement . . . of going and returning.”³⁵ Such a movement constitutes what Clifford Geertz has called anthropology’s “inward conceptual rhythm.”³⁶ It seems to me that the nineteenth-century British novel’s contribution to the process that gave us the dyad of a culture and its Participant Observer has to be looked for in its reorientation and freighting with new significance of a fundamental aspect of narrative, the relationship between narrator and characters, or between what narratologists call *discourse-* and *story-spaces*.³⁷ As metropolitan autoethnography, the nineteenth-century novel anticipates modern fieldworking ethnography *in reverse*, by construing its narrator’s (and many characters’) desired position vis-à-vis the fictional world it depicts as that of an *insider’s outsideness*—“outside enough” to apprehend the shape of the culture (and its possibilities of reform), yet insistently positioned as the outsideness of a *particular* inside, differentiating itself from the putatively unsituated outsideness of theory or cosmopolitanism as conventionally represented. This book’s opening chapters spell out this claim in greater detail and explore some of the implications of making it.

³⁴ For Roy Wagner, see *The Invention of Culture* (1975; revised and expanded ed., Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 28; henceforth Wagner.

³⁵ Scott, “Locating the Anthropological Subject: Postcolonial Anthropologists in Other Places,” *Inscriptions* 5 (1989), 78.

³⁶ Geertz, “‘From the Native’s Point of View’: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 69.

³⁷ Cf. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978); also, on nineteenth-century fiction in particular, Harry E. Shaw “Loose Narrators: Display, Engagement, and the Search for a Place in History in Realist Fiction,” *Narrative* 3/2 (May 1995), 95–116.

Among the major benefits this argument seeks to accrue would be, first, a formally and historically richer way of understanding the English novel's transformation in the 1840s and 1850s from a loosely assembled entertainment to a self-reflexive "service delivery system" with aspirations to total formal integration: this commonly observed shift, which coincides with the novel's turn toward more ambitious social analysis, I want to construe as an important event in the story of culture's emergence. This effort, in turn, promises to adjust existing models for explaining the relationship between fictional form and imperial expansion during the nineteenth century. Most broadly, I suggest that the explicit formulation of culture as an anthropological category used mainly on remote, so-called underdeveloped societies actually follows and reverses a great deal of implicit reliance upon something operating discernibly *like* culture in novelistic representations of British society. A corollary of this thesis is that those strenuous critiques of anthropological representation that have so much occupied our attention and given shape to our assumptions in recent years have made it difficult to think about other motives for taking an "othering" or objectifying viewpoint on human affairs than those emanating from the desire to conquer and control. Once objectification gets limited to the kind of coercively reductive forms critics have found in anthropology, the obvious and correspondingly limited response is to promote the subjectification of everybody once anthropologically objectified. And that is what critics have limited themselves to doing, so far, with the concept of autoethnography.

In her *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt reasoned that "[i]f ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations."³⁸ Pratt influentially insisted upon the "transcultural" nature of the autoethnographic text, cautioning against simplistic views of it as an "authentic" or "autochthonous" expression of cultural essence. Yet what she called dialogue is not functionally distinct from "rebuttal": an erroneous and coercive representation of a culture, produced by hostile aliens, is counteracted by another that, however much it may appropriate the modes of the former for its own purposes, can be securely distinguished from it, and preferred to it, only by virtue of its author's indigenous status, which is taken to confer automatic authority to represent the culture. In the sense of "really proceeding from its reputed source or author," Pratt's model of autoethnography (only tentatively sketched to be sure) had everything to do with the cultural authenticity of the product.³⁹ In her tidy opposition, those who were once the direct objects of ethnographic depictions now "talk back" as the subjects of an inevitably self-referential discourse. Such an approach strikes me as having at least two major drawbacks. On the one hand, it makes no room for sustained consideration of how some individual member of a culture goes about *securing* the authority to represent or "speak on behalf of" the culture to which he

³⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7. Cf. my "On Auto-Ethnographic Authority," *Yale Journal of Criticism* (Spring 2003), 61–91.

³⁹ OED s.v. "authentic."

or she belongs. The logics, the narratives, the metaphors by means of which autoethnographers might need to explain to themselves and to others what they are up to remain analytical nonissues. In this book, I focus on the question James Clifford has raised in asking, “If, as I assume, no *inherent* authority can be accorded to ‘native’ ethnographies and histories, what constitutes their *differential* authority?”—for, as Clifford continues, “even when the ethnographer is positioned as an insider . . . in her or his community, some taking of distance and translating differences will be part of the research, analysis and writing.”⁴⁰ I read important acts of narration in nineteenth-century British novels as enacting precisely such “taking of distance” and “translating [of] differences.”

My second reason for being dissatisfied with Pratt’s description of autoethnography is that, because Pratt accepts the meta-anthropological critique that virtually identifies an “ethnographic perspective” with the brutal “othering” powers and aims of colonization, she (along with others) is predisposed to conceive of autoethnography solely as reversing ethnography’s presumed single tendency.⁴¹ I do not believe that twentieth-century anthropology’s widely held and vehemently professed relativism, even if it represents a utopian, ultimately unsustainable position, deserves to be wholly dismissed as the false consciousness of imperial dupes and stooges, however much the projects of anthropological fieldwork were constructed within and constrained by imperial power structures. Furthermore, it seems to me that any history of autoethnographic consciousness—the consciousness centered upon the notion of oneself as the product and possessor of a distinct culture—that accepts such preemptive bracketing of its subject matter renders itself both predictable and vitiated. When we remember that much passionate intellectual labor during the Victorian era was spent in coming to grips with the progressive invalidation of traditional theological underpinnings for society, and that numerous Victorian writers were much engaged in the effort to construct a vision of their way of life as *both* merely contingent *and* worthy of rededicated participation (cf. Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, for example), we should be prepared to insist upon a broader account of the emergence of autoethnography. Surely one definitive—and still ongoing—modern labor is that of finding that zone of productive ambivalence in which both the constructedness of and the undogmatic commitment to our systems of custom and value may be simultaneously affirmed.

The broader view of autoethnography which I recommend here might begin with a version of A. J. Greimas’s “semiotic rectangle” illustrating the possibilities of ethnographic and autoethnographic representation within the global framework of imperial and postimperial history:⁴²

⁴⁰ “Spatial Practices” in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 79, 86.

⁴¹ From such a viewpoint, the romantic strain in anthropology simply expresses that “imperialist nostalgia” which colonizers indulge in to bemoan the demise of their own victims: cf. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 68–87.

⁴² Cf. Greimas (with François Rastier), “Les Jeux des contraintes sémiotiques,” *Du Sens* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 135–55, and Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), esp. 163–68.

WHO IS REPRESENTED			
	Colonizable Periphery	Imperial Metropolis	
WHO REPRESENTS	Imperial Metropolis	Dominant mode of 20th-c. ethnography (Westerners study “traditional,” “other” cultures)	“Metropolitan Autoethnography” (19th-c. British novel, cultural criticism, sociology)
	Colonizable Periphery	Autoethnography as described by Pratt: colonized peoples speak of/for themselves (19th-c. romantic nationalisms; 20th-c. post-colonial nationalisms)	“Reverse Ethnography”: representation of metropolitan societies by the formerly colonized (a product of “reverse colonization,” esp. post-WWII)

It is into just such an overarching structure for modernity that I wish to insert this book’s readings in the English Victorian novel, that celebrated and, in recent years, suspect form whose relation to the British Empire has been the subject of considerable debate.

In seeking to rectify the systematic underdevelopment of autoethnographic thinking as it might apply to the imperial *center*, the next chapter will begin by taking up several inconsistencies that I construe as constitutive of, rather than simply flaws in, the ethnographic conceptualization of cultures.⁴³ These mainly have to do with the idea that the locations of ethnographic fieldwork “often come to be identified with the groups that inhabit them.”⁴⁴ A common understanding of the discipline’s history has been that a “spatial reorganization of human differences” was achieved when early twentieth-century figures like Malinowski and Franz Boas took to the field, breaking with their Victorian forebears in promoting a conception of plural, spatially distributed cultures.⁴⁵ As Margaret Mead succinctly put it, “we went to the field not to look for *earlier* forms of human life, but for forms that were *different*.”⁴⁶ Disciplinary “common sense” implicitly defined the “natives” of anthropology (to quote Appadurai) “not only [as] persons who are from certain places, and belong to those places,” but as people “somehow incarcerated, or confined, in those places,” whereas Western “explorers, administrators, mis-

⁴³ Cf. Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Press, 1996), on the “deeply paradoxical” nature of anthropology, whose “methodology, defined by the oxymoron ‘participant observation,’” is “split at the root” (5).

⁴⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Place and Voice in Anthropological Theory,” *Cultural Anthropology* 3/1 (Feb. 1988), 16.

⁴⁵ Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 32.

⁴⁶ Margaret Mead, *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* (New York: William Morrow, 1972), 156.

sionaries, and eventually anthropologists,” “regarded as quintessentially mobile . . . [,] are the movers, the seers, the knowers.”⁴⁷

Ethnography in its twentieth-century incarnation did not simply require travel, it depended upon the metaphor of knowledge *as* travel; conversely, the subject of ethnographic study, like the superceded model of nineteenth-century anthropological knowledge (the “armchair” scholar), was a stay-at-home. The ethnogeographical idea “that ‘a culture’ is naturally the property of a spatially localized people and that the way to study such a culture is to go ‘there’ (‘among the so-and-so’)” found its “clearest illustration . . . [in] the classic ‘ethnographic maps’ that purported to display the spatial distribution of peoples, tribes, and cultures,” maps on which “space itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference . . . [is] inscribed.”⁴⁸ What is more, the principle of native “incarceration [had] a moral and intellectual dimension,” inasmuch as indigenous peoples were considered “confined by what they know, feel, and believe[,] . . . prisoners of their ‘mode of thought’”—incapable, in other words, of thinking themselves “outside” the metaphorical “mental space” of their own culture to see it as historically produced and contingent rather than as natural or proper for all humankind.⁴⁹ Consequently, “all ethnography,” as Michael Herzfeld has characterized it, “is in some sense an account of a social group’s ethnocentrism.”⁵⁰ The modern ethnographic imagination likened the physical territory inhabited by supposedly immobile natives to the iconic space of a cultural totality presumed to order and give meaning to every aspect of native life. In perhaps the tersest statement of this ethnogeographical doctrine, Malinowski proclaimed that “[w]ithin the boundaries of the tribe the writ of the same culture runs from end to end.”⁵¹

A reexamination of this—in my view—only partly understood set of assumptions about the linkage between culture and place will prepare the foundation for my claim that English novels of the middle decades of the nineteenth century under pressures specific to their era, began crafting fictions of metropolitan autoethnography. The chapters in part II of this study juxtapose two major meta-novels produced in the early and middle nineteenth century, by writers self-consciously functioning as authoritative representers of their peoples: Walter Scott

⁴⁷ Arjun Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in its Place,” 37.

⁴⁸ “That ‘a culture’ . . .”: Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era,” in Gupta and Ferguson, eds., *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 3. “Clearest illustration . . .”: Gupta and Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7/1 (Feb. 1992), 7. The authors have in mind such texts as George P. Murdock’s various ethnographic atlases and the *Outline of World Cultures*, produced in several editions beginning in the 1950s. Cf. Liisa H. Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees,” in *Culture, Power, Place*, 52–74, and Karen Fog Olwig and Kirsten Harstrup, eds., *Siting Culture: The Shifting Anthropological Object* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁴⁹ Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in its Place,” 37.

⁵⁰ Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 18.

⁵¹ Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 60.

and Charles Dickens. Scott writes *Waverley* in the decade between 1805 and 1814 as a self-critical performance of his own cicerone-like authority over a “Scottish culture” he knew to be a largely invented tradition; Dickens writes *Bleak House* in 1851–52 as an anti-Great Exhibition, to return British emotional investment to a domestic scene neglected by British men and women whose sights were too much fixed upon global perspectives. The chapters in part III then study all four of Charlotte Brontë’s mature novels, considering the patterns employed and reworked across her entire short career as elements in a sustained consideration of autoethnographic possibilities in local, national, and international frameworks. Part IV briefly discusses those self-delimiting, self-interrupting elements in the work of George Eliot—the premier English novelist whose career unfolds entirely after the formalization of the British Empire in India—that will be considered in greater depth in the sequel to this book. I then return to William Morris’s anti-bourgeois antinovel *News from Nowhere* to frame the period to be explored in the sequel (roughly 1857–1900).

For Victorian case studies, I have chosen to emphasize Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Eliot, not only because I continue to find these the most lastingly stimulating of Victorian novelists, but because even an account limited for practical purposes to these three affords us a view of three quite different approaches to the question of an English autoethnographic fiction. I take their diversity as evidence that the autoethnographic turn in the mid-Victorian novel promised a general re-orientation of viewpoint—a promise largely forestalled and negated by official state epistemologies, as well as by the emergent sciences of society themselves. The readings in this book are extremely “close” and detailed ones because part of my burden is to show the depth of the English novel’s preoccupation with its new proto- and autoethnographic labor. These readings are invitations for more.

This book attempts, then, to read the emergence of anthropological *culture* in the formal effects of British novels written after the Act of Union that formalized British control of Ireland and created the United Kingdom. I will be guided by the principle that historical explanations of the novel ought to be asked to substantiate their claims at a level of literary detail, and with a degree of nuance, we are not accustomed to seeing in some of the most influential historicist criticism. Only by so doing will we meet Katie Trumpener’s recent challenge to make “literary form . . . legible as a particularly rich and significant kind of historical evidence.”⁵² The risk involved in trying to meet this demand is that fewer novels, not to mention other kinds of documents, can be dealt with in a single work of criticism of manageable size, which means that the historical argument connected to the detailed readings will always be open to the charge that examples have been selected for their suitedness to the thesis, in other words that the thesis cannot stand the test of a broader view. I have decided to accept this risk and partially indemnify myself against it by writing essays focused on some major reputations in the development of the British novel between 1800 and the late 1850s. By showing

⁵² Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xv.

how works of recognized masters of the form during this period exhibit a preoccupation with the prospects and pitfalls of autoethnography—a preoccupation they testify to recurrently, variously, probingly in their use of the materials afforded by fictional narrative—I intend both to complement and to raise questions about more sweeping accounts that cover more examples more quickly.

A decade ago, in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said wrote that his generative analysis of *Mansfield Park*'s marginalization of empire should be seen as “completing or complementing” other, more “mainstream interpretations” that, privileging the formal structure of Austen's text, mimicked rather than exposed its programmatic erasure of the imperial domain on which the Bertrams' English way of life was based. Said even went so far as to say “there is no way of doing such readings as mine . . . except by working through the novel,” “reading it in full” so as to take full measure of the literary activation of the self-blinding imperialist mentality.⁵³ Ten years on, it is time to reverse the situation and offer detailed formal analyses of novels as completing or complementing, as well as challenging, some of the tendencies of decentering approaches.

⁵³ Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 95.