

20-21. So, there are three characteristics of ethnographic description: it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms ... But there is, in addition, a fourth characteristic of such description, at least as I practice it: It is microscopic.

nrpgehhtoray

5. In anthropology, or any social anthropology, what the practitioners do is ethnography.

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Micro

5. And it is in understanding what ethnography is, or more exactly what *doing ethnography is*, that a start can be made toward grasping what anthropological analysis amount to as a form of knowledge.

Scopic

5. This, it must immediately be said, is not a matter of methods.

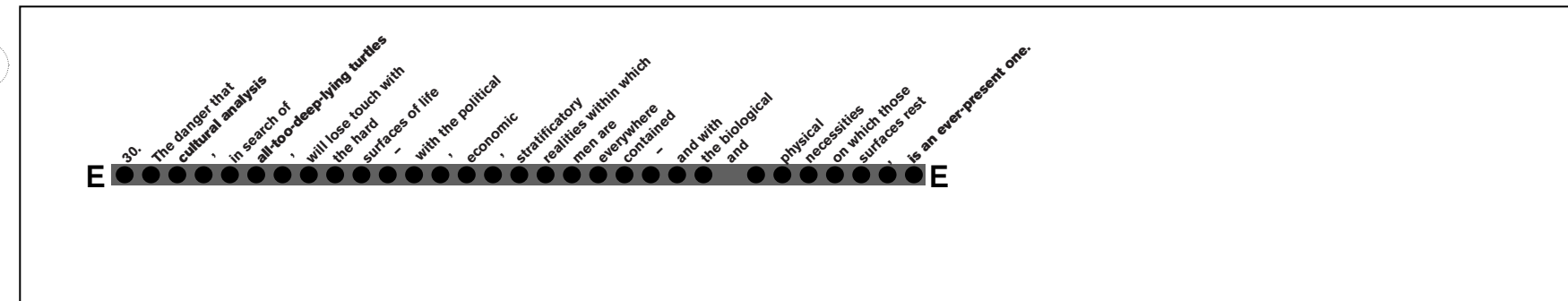
Ethnographic Writing

18. If ethnography is thick description and ethnographers those who are doing the description, then the determining question for any given example of it, whether a field journal squib or a Malinowski-sized monograph, is whether it sorts winks from twitches and real winks from mimicked ones. It is not against a body of uninterrupted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers. It is not worth it, as Thoreaus said, to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar.

15. In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot. (By definition, only a 'native' makes first order ones: it's his culture.) They are thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned....

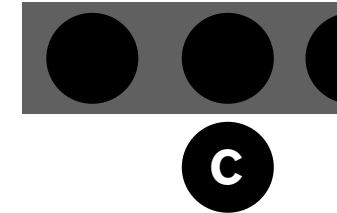


E Thick Description



30. The danger that cultural analysis, in search of all too-deep-lying turtles, will lose touch with the hard surfaces of life with the political, economic, stratificatory realities within which men are everywhere contained and with the biological and physical necessities on which those surfaces rest is an ever-present one.

Danger
cultural



Cultural Analysis

16. Anthropologists have not always been as aware as they might be of this fact: that although culture exists in the trading post, the hill fort, or the sheep fun, anthropology exists in the book, the article, the lecture, the museum display, or, sometimes nowadays, the film. To become aware of it is to realize that the line between mode of representation and substantive content it as undrawable in cultural analysis as it is in painting; and that fact in turn seems to threaten the objective status of anthropological knowledge by suggesting that its source is not social reality but scholarly artifice.

29. Anthropology, or at least interpretive anthropology, is a science whose progress is marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a refinement of debate. What gets better is the precision with which we vex each other. (Below also 29.)

