

# Performing as a Moral Act:<sup>1</sup> Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance

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## DWIGHT CONQUERGOOD

For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity . . . . The self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as those of the family, the neighborhood, the city, and the tribe . . . .

Without those moral particularities to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin; but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists.

—Alasdair MacIntyre<sup>2</sup>

During the crucial days of 1954, when the Senate was pushing for termination of all Indian rights, not one single scholar, anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or economist came forward to support the tribes against the detrimental policy.

—Vine Deloria, Jr.<sup>3</sup>

Ethnographers study the diversity and unity of cultural performance as a universal human resource for deepening and clarifying the meaningfulness of life. They help us see performance with all its moral entailments, not as a flight from lived responsibilities. Henry Glassie represents the contemporary ethnographer's interest in the interanimation between expressive art and daily life, texts, and contexts:

I begin study with sturdy, fecund totalities created by the people themselves, whole statements, whole songs or houses or events, away from which life expands, toward which life orients in seeking maturity. I begin with texts, then weave contexts around them to make them meaningful, to make life comprehensible.<sup>4</sup>

Joining other humanists who celebrate the necessary and indissoluble link between art and life, ethnographers present performance as vulnerable and open to dialogue with the world.

The repercussions for "thinking," which Clifford Geertz attributes to Dewey, can be transposed to a socially committed and humanistic understanding of "performing":

Since Dewey, it has been much more difficult to regard thinking as an abstention from action, theorizing as an alternative to commitment, and the intellectual life as a kind of secular monasticism, excused from accountability by its sensitivity to the Good.<sup>5</sup>

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This view cuts off the safe retreat into aestheticism, art for art's sake, and brings performance "out into the public world where ethical judgment can get at it."<sup>6</sup>

Moral and ethical questions get stirred to the surface because ethnographers of performance explode the notion of aesthetic distance.<sup>7</sup> In their fieldwork efforts to grasp the native's point of view, to understand the human complexities displayed in even the most humble folk performance, ethnographers try to surrender themselves to the centripetal pulls of culture, to get close to the face of humanity where life is not always pretty. Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard wrote that fieldwork "requires a certain kind of character and temperament. . . . To succeed in it a man must be able to abandon himself to native life without reserve."<sup>8</sup> Instead of worrying about maintaining aesthetic distance, ethnographers try to bring "the enormously distant enormously close without becoming any less far away."<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, ethnographers work with expressivity, which is inextricable from its human creators. They must work with real people, humankind alive, instead of printed texts. Opening and interpreting lives is very different from opening and closing books. Perhaps that is why ethnographers worry more about acquiring experiential insight than maintaining aesthetic distance. Indeed, they are calling for empathic performance as a way of intensifying the participative nature of fieldwork, and as a corrective to foreshorten the textual distance that results from writing monographs about the people with whom one lives and studies.<sup>10</sup> When one keeps intellectual, aesthetic, or any other kind of distance from the other, ethnographers worry that other people will be held at an ethical and moral remove as well.

Whatever else one may say about ethnographic fieldwork, Geertz reminds us, "one can hardly claim that it is focused on trivial issues or abstracted from human concerns."<sup>11</sup> This kind of research "involves direct, intimate and more or less disturbing encounters with the immediate details of contemporary life."<sup>12</sup> When ethnographers of performance complement their participant observation fieldwork by actually performing for different audiences the verbal art they have studied *in situ*, they expose themselves to double jeopardy. They become keenly aware that performance does not proceed in ideological innocence and axiological purity.

Most researchers who have extended ethnographic fieldwork into public performance will experience resistance and hostility from audiences from time to time.<sup>13</sup> This disquieting antagonism, however, more than the audience approval, signals most clearly that ethnographic performance is a form of conduct deeply enmeshed in moral matters. I believe that all performance has ethical dimensions, but have found that moral issues of performance are more transparent when the performer attempts to engage ethnic and intercultural texts, particularly those texts outside the canon and derived from fieldwork research.

For three and a half years I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork among Lao and Hmong refugees in Chicago. The performance of their oral narratives is an integral part of my research project and a natural extension of the role of the ethnographer as participant to that of advocate. When working with minority peoples and disenfranchised subcultures, such as refugees, one is frequently propelled into the role of advocate. The ethnographer, an unin-

vited stranger who depends upon the patient courtesies and openhearted hospitality of the community, is compelled by the laws of reciprocity and human decency to intervene, if he can, in a crisis. Further, the stories my Laotian friends tell make claims on me. For example, what do you do when the coroner orders an autopsy on a Hmong friend and the family comes to you numb with horror because according to Hmong belief if you cut the skin of a dead person the soul is lost forever, there can be no hope of reincarnation? Moreover, that disembodied soul consigned to perpetual limbo will no doubt come back to haunt and terrorize the family.

I have performed the stories of the refugees for dozens of audiences. In addition to academic audiences, where the performance usually complements a theoretical argument I want to make about the epistemological potential of performance as a way of deeply sensing the other, I have performed them before many and varied non-academic audiences. I have tried to bring the stories of the Lao and Hmong before social service agencies, high schools where there have been outbreaks of violence against refugee students, businessmen, lawyers, welfare case workers, public school teachers and administrators, religious groups, wealthy women's clubs, and so forth. Often I have been gratified to see the way the performance of a story can pull an audience into a sense of the other in a rhetorically compelling way. Many times, however, the nonacademic audiences are deeply disturbed by these performances. I have been attacked, not just in the sessions of discussion and response immediately following these performances. One time the anger and hostility was so heated that I was invited back to face the same group two weeks later for a three-hour session that began with attack and abuse but moved gradually, and painfully, to heightened self-reflexivity (for me, as well as them). The last hour we spent talking about ourselves instead of the refugees.

Here is a partial list of the offenses for which I am most frequently condemned. Members of certain religious groups indict me for collaborating in the "work of the devil." My refugee friends are not Christian, and their stories enunciate a cosmology radically different from Judeo-Christian traditions. Fundamentalist Christians perceptively point out that by the very act of collecting, preserving, and performing these stories, I am legitimizing them, offering them as worthy of contemplation for Christians, and encouraging the Lao and Hmong to hold fast to their "heathenism." Welfare workers despise me for retarding the refugees' assimilation into mainstream America and thereby making the caseworker's job more difficult. From their point of view, these people must be Americanized as quickly as possible. They simply must drop their old ways of thinking, "superstitions," and become American. Developing resettlement programs that involve careful adjustments and blends between the old and new would require too much time or energy or money. Some social workers and administrators clearly emphasize that videotaping ancient rituals, recording and performing oral history are not morally neutral activities. Some public school educators interrogate me for performing in a respectful tone a Lao legend that explains the lunar eclipse as a frog in the sky who swallows the moon. After one performance I was asked, "How do the Lao react when you tell them they are wrong?" When I replied that I do not "correct" my Lao friends about their understanding of the lunar eclipse, the audience

was aghast. Some stormed out, but some stayed to chastise me. I've been faulted for not correcting the grammar and pronunciation of the narrative texts I've collected and thus making the people "sound stupid and backward." Weeks after a performance I've received letters from people telling me how angry they were, that they "couldn't sleep" when thinking about the performance, and that it had given them "bad dreams."

In another vein, from audiences who are moved by the performance, I am sometimes challenged in an accusing tone, "How can you go back to being a professor at a rich university? Why don't you spend full time trying to help these people learn English, get jobs, find lost relatives?" In comparison to nonacademic audiences, the criticism from academic audiences pales. Nevertheless, remarks get back to me about how I'm "moving the field off-center." The ostensibly neutral question, "What does this have to do with oral interpretation of literature?" thinly veils deep misgivings. One specialist in eighteenth-century literature was more direct, and I respect him for that. At a Danforth conference, this senior gentleman rose to his feet after my presentation and in authoritative and measured tones declared: "You have confused art and nature, and *that* is an abomination!"

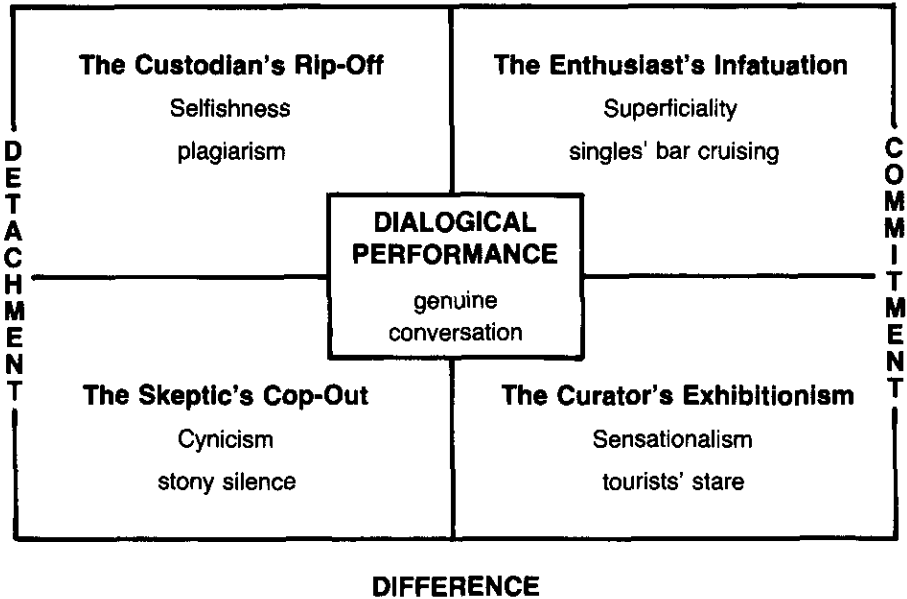
The one question I almost never get, however, is the "white guilt" accusation, "What right do you, a middle-class white man, have to perform these narratives?" Usually whoever introduces me gives some background information about my participant observation research. One time some audience members came in late, after the introduction, and sure enough, one of them was the first to raise his hand after the performance and accuse me of white man's presumptuousness. However, other audience members came to my defense before I had a chance to respond. They explained to him that I had lived with the people for more than three years, that I was not a weekend commuter from a comfortable suburban house. This information seemed to subdue him.

Even though my ego is probably as vulnerable as the next person's, I take courage in knowing that negative response, more than approving applause, testifies to the moral implications of this kind of work. I can be grateful to my detractors for forcing into my awareness the complex ethical tensions, tacit political commitments, and moral ambiguities inextricably caught up in the act of performing ethnographic materials. Indeed, I began doing this kind of work focused on performance as a way of knowing and deeply sensing the other. Hostile audiences have helped me see performance as the enactment of a moral stance. Now I have become deeply interested in the ethical dimensions of performing the expressive art that springs from other lives, other sensibilities, other cultures.

I agree with Wallace Bacon that the validity of an intercultural performance is "an ethical concern no less than a performance problem."<sup>14</sup> Good will and an open heart are not enough when one "seeks to express cultural experiences which are clearly separate from his or her lived world."<sup>15</sup> I would like to sketch four ethical pitfalls, performative stances towards the other that are morally problematic. I name these performative stances "The Custodian's Rip-Off," "The Enthusiast's Infatuation," "The Curator's Exhibitionism," and "The Skeptic's Cop-Out." These four problem areas can be graphically represented as the extreme corners of a moral map articulated by intersecting axes

of ethnographic tensions. The vertical axis is the tensive counterpull between Identity and Difference, the horizontal axis between Detachment and Commitment (see Figure 1). The extreme points of both sets of continua represent "dangerous shores" to be navigated, binary oppositions to be transcended. The center of the map represents the moral center that transcends and reconciles the spin-off extremes. I call this dynamic center, which holds in tensive equipoise the four contrarities, "Dialogical Performance."<sup>16</sup> After mapping the five performative stances in order to see their alignments, I will discuss each one in more detail.

**FIGURE 1.**  
**Moral Mapping of Performative Stances Towards the Other\***  
**IDENTITY**



*The Custodian's Rip-Off*

The sin of this performative stance is Selfishness. A strong attraction toward the other coupled with extreme detachment results in acquisitiveness instead of genuine inquiry, plunder more than performance. Bacon provided a striking example of this performative stance when he cited the case of the Prescott Smoki cultural preservation group who continued to perform the Hopi Snake Dance over the vigorous objections of Hopi elders. This group appropriated cherished traditions, reframed them in a way that was sacreligious to the Hopi, and added insult to injury by selling trinkets for \$7.50, all in the name of preserving "dying cultures."<sup>17</sup> The immorality of such performances is

\* This graphic representation is derived from Mary Douglas' method of grid/group analysis. See *Cultural Bias* (1978) and *In the Active Voice* (1982).

unambiguous and can be compared to theft and rape.

Potential performers of ethnographic materials should not enter the field with the overriding motive of "finding some good performance material." An analogy from my fieldwork situation would be my performance of some of the stunningly theatrical shaman chants of Hmong healers replete with black veil over face and sacred costume. Not even a Hmong man or woman may perform these sacred traditions at will. You must be called to shamanic performance, which typically is signalled by a life-threatening illness, during which you have tremors, "shake" (*oy nang*, the Hmong word for "shaman," is the same word for "shake"). When the shaman shakes and chants, he or she is talking and pleading with the spirits that control the world. These ecstatic performances are extraordinarily delicate and dangerous affairs. A Hmong Shaman risks his or her life each time the soul leaves the body and ascends the tree of life on the ecstatic journey to the spirit kingdom. I had worked with the Hmong for about three years before I was privileged to witness one of these ecstatic trance performances. Now I am not only permitted, but encouraged to videotape them. I have even participated in one of these rituals of affliction as the victim. An elderly shaman "shook"—went into ecstatic performance—for my blind eye. However, I would never try to simulate one of these powerful performances because not only would that be a desecration, it would be perceived by the Hmong as having catastrophic consequences.

### *The Enthusiast's Infatuation*

Too facile identification with the other coupled with enthusiastic commitment produces naive and glib performances marked by superficiality. This is the quadrant of the quick-fix, pick-up artist, where performance runs aground in the shallows. Eager performers get sucked into the quicksand belief, "Aren't all people really just alike?" Although not as transparently immoral as "The Custodian's Rip-Off," this performative stance is unethical because it trivializes the other. The distinctiveness of the other is glossed over by a glaze of generalities.

Tzvetan Todorov unmasks the moral consequences of too easy and eager an identification with the other:

Can we really love someone if we know little or nothing of his identity, if we see, in place of that identity, a projection of ourselves or ideals? We know that such a thing is quite possible, even frequent, in personal relations; but what happens in cultural confrontations? Doesn't one culture risk trying to transform the other in its own name, and therefore risk subjugating it as well? How much is such love worth?<sup>16</sup>

"The Enthusiast's Infatuation," which is also the quadrant where "fools rush in where angels fear to tread," is neither innocent nor benign.

Fredric Jameson, to whom we are indebted for naming the Identity-Difference interpretive dilemma,<sup>19</sup> complements Todorov by showing how too easy affirming of identity not only banalizes the other, but seals off the self from any moral engagement:

... if we choose to affirm the identity of the alien object with ourselves—if, in other words, we decide that Chaucer, say . . . or the narratives of nineteenth-century Russian gentry, are more or less directly or intuitively accessible to us . . . then we have presupposed in advance what was to have been demonstrated, and our apparent comprehension of these alien texts must be haunted by the nagging suspicion that we have all the while remained locked in our own present with its television sets and super-highways . . . and that we have never really left home at all, that our feeling of *Verstehen* is little better than mere psychological projection, that we have somehow failed to touch the strangeness and the resistance of a reality genuinely different from our own.<sup>20</sup>

Secure in our protective solipsism, those of us in this performative stance will never permit the other “to come before us as a radically different life form that rises up to call our own form of life into question and to pass judgment on us, and through us, on the social formation in which we live.”<sup>21</sup> Superficiality suffocates self as well as other.

### *The Curator's Exhibitionism*

Whereas the enthusiast assumed too easy an identity with the other, the curator is committed to the Difference of the other. This is the “Wild Kingdom” approach to performance that grows out of fascination with the exotic, primitive, culturally remote. The performer wants to astonish rather than understand. This quadrant is suffused with sentimentality and romantic notions about the “Noble Savage.” Performances from this corner of the map resemble curio postcards, souvenirs, trophies brought back from the tour for display cases. Instead of bringing us into genuine contact (and risk) with the lives of strangers, performances in this mode bring back museum exhibits, mute and staring.

Jameson explains that when one affirms “from the outset, the radical Difference of the alien object from ourselves, then at once the doors of *comprehension begin to swing closed*. . . .”<sup>22</sup> *The manifest sin of this quadrant is Sensationalism, and it is an immoral stance because it dehumanizes the other. Todorov makes strikingly clear the moral consequences of exoticizing the other in his brilliant case study of the most dramatic encounter with the other in our history, the discovery and conquest of America.*<sup>23</sup> He clarifies how the snap-shot perspectives of “Noble Savage” and “dirty dog” can come from the same view-finder:

How can Columbus be associated with these two apparently contradictory myths, one whereby the other is a ‘noble savage’ (when perceived at a distance) and one whereby he is a ‘dirty dog,’ a potential slave? It is because both rest on a common basis, which is the failure to recognize the Indians, and the refusal to admit them as a subject having the same rights as oneself, but different. Columbus has discovered America but not the Americans.<sup>24</sup>

Too great a distance—aesthetic, romantic, political—denies to the other membership in the same moral community as ourselves.

*The Skeptic's Cop-Out*

The fourth corner of the map is the prison-house of Detachment and Difference in which, according to Jameson, "we find ourselves separated by the whole density of our own culture from objects or cultures thus initially defined as other from ourselves and thus as irremediably inaccessible."<sup>25</sup> Instead of a performative stance, it is an easy bail-out into the no man's land of paralyzing skepticism. This corner of the map is the refuge of cowards and cynics. Instead of facing up to and struggling with the ethical tensions and moral ambiguities of performing culturally sensitive materials, the skeptic, with chilling aloofness, flatly declares, "I am neither black nor female: I will not perform from *The Color Purple*."

When this strange coupling of naive empiricism and sociobiology—only blacks can understand and perform black literature, only white males John Cheever's short stories—is deconstructed to expose the absurdity of the major premise, then the "No Trespassing" disclaimer is unmasked as cowardice or imperialism of the most arrogant kind. It is only the members of the dominant culture who can hold to this high purity argument regarding cultural intercourse. It is a fact of life of being a member of a minority or disenfranchised subculture that one must and can learn how to perform cultural scripts and play roles that do not arise out of one's own culture. As a matter of sheer survival refugees must learn how to play American ways of thinking and social conduct. "Code-switching" is a commonplace ethnographic term used to describe the complex shifts minority peoples deftly and continuously negotiate between the communication styles of dominant culture and subculture. Todorov, who refers to his own "simultaneous participation in two cultures,"<sup>26</sup> offers a strong rebuttal to the skeptic's position:

Ultimately, understanding between representatives of different cultures (or between parts of my own being which derive from one culture or the other) is possible, if the will-to-understand is present: there is something beyond 'points of view,' and it is characteristic of human beings that they can transcend their partiality and their local determinations.<sup>27</sup>

There is no null hypothesis in the moral universe. Refusal to take a moral stand is itself a powerful statement of one's moral position. That is why I have placed squarely on the moral map the skeptic's refusal to risk encounter to show that nihilism is as much a moral position as its diagonal counterpart, naive enthusiasm. In my view, "The Skeptic's Cop-Out" is the most morally reprehensible corner of the map because it forecloses dialogue. The enthusiast, one can always hope, may move beyond infatuation to love. Relationships that begin superficially can sometimes deepen and grow. Many of my students begin in the enthusiast's corner of the map. It is the work of teaching to try to pull them toward the center. The skeptic, however, shuts down the very idea of entering into conversation with the other before the attempt, however problematic, begins. Bacon, who is keenly aware of the "deep and difficult and enduring problems,"<sup>28</sup> rejects the skeptic's cop-out when facing up to the alternatives for action in the world:

What, then, do we do? Do we give up performing ethnic materials? Do we say, with Anaya, that to the Hispanics belong Hispanic treasures?



Surely not, because our world has never before cried out so needfully for understanding among us all. Never has a sense of the other seemed more crucial for our own humanity. The embodiment of texts of all kinds is . . . one real path to the understanding of others.<sup>29</sup>

The skeptic, detached and estranged, with no sense of the other, sits alone in an echo-chamber of his own making, with only the sound of his own scoffing laughter ringing in his ears.

### *Dialogical Performance*

One path to genuine understanding of others, and out of this moral morass and ethical minefield of performative plunder, superficial silliness, curiosity-seeking, and nihilism, is dialogical performance.<sup>30</sup> This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another. The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing. Dialogical understanding does not end with empathy. There is always enough appreciation for difference so that the text can interrogate, rather than dissolve into, the performer. That is why I have charted this performative stance at the center of the moral map. More than a definite position, the dialogical stance is situated in the space *between* competing ideologies. It brings self and other together even while it holds them apart. It is more like a hyphen than a period.

The strength of the center is that it pulls together mutually opposed energies that become destructive only when they are vented without the counterbalancing pull of their opposite. For example, good performative ethnographers must continuously play the oppositions between Identity and Difference. Their stance toward this heuristically rich paradox of fieldwork (and performance) is both/and, yes/but, instead of either/or. They affirm cross-cultural accessibility without glossing very real differences. Moreover, they respect the Difference of the other enough to question and make vulnerable her own *a priori* assumptions. When we have true respect for the Difference of other cultures, then we grant them the potential for challenging our own culture. Genuine dialogical engagement is at least a two-way thoroughfare. Glassie insists that the ethnographer's home culture should be as open to interpretation, questioning, weighing of alternatives, as the host culture.

Old societies alienated from us by chronology become but academic curios, no challenge at all to the status quo. The outward search for alternatives can likewise die into thrills and souvenirs, but when the traveler is serious, the quest through space leads through confrontation into culture, into fear, and it can prove trying, convincing, profoundly fruitful. The reason to study people, to order experience into ethnography, is not to produce more entries for the central file or more trinkets for milord's cabinet of curiosities. It is to stimulate thought, to assure us there are things we do not know, things we must know, things capable of unsettling the world we inhabit.<sup>31</sup>

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In order to keep fieldwork dialogically alive, Glassie construes it as "intimate conversation," a description that resonates both literally and metaphorically with the praxis of ethnography:

Ethnography is interaction, collaboration. What it demands is not hypotheses, which may unnaturally close study down, obscuring the integrity of the other, but the ability to converse intimately.<sup>32</sup>

Todorov makes the same point about the dialogical stance towards textual criticism:

Dialogic criticism speaks not *of* works but *to* works, rather *with* works. It refuses to eliminate either of the two voices present . . . . The author is a 'thou,' not a 'he,' an interlocutor with whom one discusses and even debates human values.<sup>33</sup>

He argues that the honesty of dialogic criticism lies in two voices that can speak simultaneously and interactively. Like good conversation, the event is a cooperative enterprise between two voices, neither of which succumbs to monologue: ". . . as in personal relations, the illusion of fusion is sweet, but it is an illusion, and its end is bitter, to recognize others as others permits loving them better."<sup>34</sup>

Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them. The sensuous immediacy and empathic leap demanded by performance is an occasion for orchestrating two voices, for bringing together two sensibilities. At the same time, the conspicuous artifice of performance is a vivid reminder that each voice has its own integrity. The performer of a Laotian cosmological legend stands before an audience in all his Scots-German facticity. Dialogical performance celebrates the paradox of "how the deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less different."<sup>35</sup> Bacon quoted Auden, who evocatively etched the moral lineaments of dialogical performance: "When truly brothers/men don't sing in unison/but in harmony."<sup>36</sup>

Dialogical performance is a way of finding the moral center as much as it is an indicator that one is ethically grounded. One does not have to delay entering the conversation until self and other have become old friends. Indeed, as the metaphor makes clear, one cannot build a friendship without beginning a conversation. Dialogical performance is the means as much as the end of honest intercultural understanding. But what are the qualities one absolutely needs before joining the conversation? Three indispensables, according to Glassie: energy, imagination, and courage.

Scholars need energy to gather enough information to create full portraits. They need imagination to enter between facts, to feel what it is like to be, to think and act as another person. They need courage to face alternatives, comparing different experiences to help their fellows locate themselves.<sup>37</sup>

If we bring to our work energy, imagination, and courage—qualities that can be exercised and strengthened through dialogical performance—then we can hope not to trample on "the sweet, terrible wholeness of life."<sup>38</sup>

Finally, you don't have to do years of fieldwork with a people before you can perform their verbal art. Fieldwork is enormously time-consuming and

labor-intensive; it appeals to a certain kind of person and temperament, but certainly it is not for everyone. Ethnographers would be selfish and arrogant to set themselves up as cultural game wardens, insisting that you have to have "been there" before you understand. Geertz is quite insistent that good ethnography is not dependent on the fieldworker's being possessed of some mystical powers that enable her to "commune with natives"; good ethnography can be done "without recourse to pretensions to more-than-normal capacities for ego-effacement and fellow-feeling."<sup>39</sup> He argues that ethnographic understanding "is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke—or, as I have suggested, reading a poem—than it is like achieving communion."<sup>40</sup>

It is the responsibility of the ethnographer of performance to make performance texts derived from fieldwork that are accessible—and that means performable—for responsible interpreters of texts who have callings other than fieldwork.<sup>41</sup> The ethnographic movement in performance studies will die if it does not reach out to share the human dignity of the other, the other-wise, with audiences larger than a coterie of specialists. If it turns in upon itself, then, quite appropriately, it will become an "inside joke" that only fieldworkers can "get." The ethnographic movement is dependent on the existence of traditional interpreters and teachers of literature, who continue to deepen in new generations of students sensitivity to the other of a Renaissance text, or a contemporary poem, so that when performance texts from nonliterate cultures are produced and made available, it will be possible for more voices to join the human dialogue.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This essay is the result of an ongoing dialogue with three voices other than my own. My transposition of Clifford Geertz' title, "Thinking as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of Anthropological Fieldwork in the New States," *Antioch Review*, 28 (Summer, 1968), 139-158, explicitly signals the deep impact that essay has had on my own fieldwork project. Wallace Bacon first introduced me to "the sense of the other," an idea that changed my life and is a luminous demonstration of "thinking as a moral act." For more than a decade, Mary Strine has given me lists of difficult books that ask hard questions, and insisted that I read them. Particularly the dialogical marxism of Mikhail Bakhtin, which she introduced to the field, has challenged me, and even though not explicitly cited, I hope its presence is felt by the very nature of the questions that shaped this paper.

<sup>2</sup> *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Avon, 1969), p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. xvi.

<sup>5</sup> "Thinking as a Moral Act," p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> "Thinking as a Moral Act," p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> For an incisive historical explanation of this concept, see Beverly Whitaker Long, "A 'Distanced' Art: Interpretation at Mid-Century," *Performance of Literature in Historical Perspectives*, ed. David Thompson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 567-588. See also the provocative discussion of "moral distance" in Mary Frances HopKins, "From Page to Stage: The Burden of Proof," *The Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 47 (Fall 1981), 1-9.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Clifford Geertz, "Slide Show: Evans-Pritchard's African Transparencies," *Raritan*, 3 (Fall 1983), 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 48.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> "Thinking as a Moral Act," p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> "Thinking as a Moral Act," p. 141.

<sup>13</sup> See Jean Speer and Elizabeth Fine, "What Does a Dog Have to do with Humanity?: The Politics of Humanities Public Programming," paper presented at the Eastern Communication Association Convention, Ocean City, Md., 1983.

<sup>14</sup> "The Interpretation of Oral and Ethnic Materials: The Ethical Dimension," *Literature in Performance*, 4 (April 1984), 94-97.

<sup>15</sup> Bacon, p. 95.

<sup>16</sup> I have discussed "dialogical performance" in the philosophical context of the theories of Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Wallace Bacon in "Performance and Dialogical Understanding: In Quest of the Other," *Proceedings of the Ninth International Colloquium on Communication*, ed. Janet McHughes (Tempe: Arizona State Univ., 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Bacon, p. 94-95.

<sup>18</sup> *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 168. It is noteworthy that two other books have appeared recently that deal centrally with the concept of "the other": Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983); Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, trans. Christopher Macann (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> "Marxism and Historicism," *New Literary History*, 11 (Autumn 1979), 41-73.

<sup>20</sup> Jameson, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> Jameson, p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> Jameson, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> Todorov writes, "My main interest is less a historian's than a moralist's, the present is more important to me than the past," p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Jameson, p. 49.

<sup>25</sup> Jameson, p. 43-44.

<sup>26</sup> "A Dialogic Criticism?" *Raritan*, 4 (Summer 1984), 69.

<sup>27</sup> "A Dialogic Criticism?" p. 70.

<sup>28</sup> Bacon, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> Bacon, p. 97.

<sup>30</sup> The recent explosion of interest in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin now being translated from the original Russian and made accessible to western readers has given widespread currency to the idea of "dialogue" as a way of being in the world. Two of Bakhtin's works now available in translation are useful starting points for engaging the complexities of his thinking: *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984). I recommend also two invaluable scholarly tools for anyone working with Bakhtin: the intellectual biography by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), and the critical assessment of his ideas in their programmatic context by Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984). Clark and Holquist point out in their biography that Bakhtin had a lifelong involvement with performance and theatre ranging from the German governess who organized the young Bakhtin brothers in dramatic renderings of the *Iliad* to his dramatic performances in the Nevel theatre groups long after his university days (p. 21). Todorov concludes his assessment of Bakhtin's lifelong career by arguing that the term that most richly encompasses the scope and depth of his intellectual project is "philosophical anthropology": "I have reserved for this last chapter those ideas of Bakhtin that I value most and that, I believe, hold the key to his whole work: they constitute, in his own terms, his 'philosophical anthropology.'" (p. 94).

<sup>31</sup> Glassie, pp. 12-13.

<sup>32</sup> Glassie, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> "A Dialogic Criticism?" p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> "A Dialogic Criticism?" p. 73.

<sup>35</sup> *Local Knowledge*, p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Bacon, p. 94.

<sup>37</sup> Glassie, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Glassie, p. xiv.

<sup>39</sup> " 'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," *Symbolic Anthropology*, eds. Janet L. Dolgin, David S. Kemnitzer, and David M. Schneider (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1977), p. 492.

<sup>40</sup> " 'From the Native's Point of View,'" p. 492.

<sup>41</sup> See Elizabeth C. Fine, *The Folklore Text: From Performance to Print* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), and Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

