Introduction:
Critique and the Deconstruction of Anthropological Authority

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This book began to take shape in December 1988. The setting was the Department of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam. A conference was held in memory of the anthropologist Bob Scholte, whose sudden death in the preceding year shook his students and colleagues profoundly. The Conference was intended to follow lines of critical and reflexive inquiry initiated by, among others, Scholte himself. It appeared to be a particularly auspicious moment for such an event, as critical, feminist and symbolic perspectives in anthropology seemed to converge. Political critique, reflexive analysis and the experience of multiple voices had combined to produce doubts about the authority of the anthropological expert, whose line of descent includes sexist, racist and imperialist ancestors. As anthropological authority was questioned and the anthropologist's voice toned down, there seemed to be a promise for a conversation with other voices.

Yet, despite the potential present at the Conference to engage in fruitful conversation, more often than not it resembled a showdown, a confrontation between (academic) identities. The configuration of opponents changed continuously and pitted neo-Marxists, feminists and postmodernists against their respective others. No one could deny the academic vigour displayed at the event. But at the same time, the confrontations reinforced the impression of a stalemate in anthropology.¹

As we write this Introduction, we have become increasingly aware that the Conference portrayed to a certain extent the current state of the art of anthropology and reverberated the debates which are occurring in the other human sciences. The feeling of crisis could easily be attributed to the ingression of postmodernist thought and its tendency to undermine all efforts at legitimation of the scientific project. But this explanation ignores the fact that postmodernism in anthropology is a product of a history of critical and reflexive initiatives.

Anthropology's root, its preoccupation and confrontation with
the 'other' of the white male academic, has sprouted branches which have contributed to postmodern initiatives. Instead of taking the easy way out by accepting postmodernism as the most influential current in contemporary anthropology, we opt for a different interpretation. We think the feeling of crisis is generated by the fact that anthropology, like other social sciences, has developed a thorough critique of its own academic authority since the 1960s. Anthropology has reached a stage at which even the critics of academic authority criticize each other's authority.

The papers collected in this volume address the present situation of professional uncertainty. They deal with problems related to the legitimation of anthropological projects and to the identity of the anthropologist in the field and at the academy. All the papers grapple with the critique of grand theories, of academic rhetoric and of fieldwork practice. The diagnoses and therapies they propose or deny are different and at times in conflict. The reader might get the impression that the present stage in the development of anthropology is one of a paradoxical convergence: a situation of fragmentation in which everybody is denied the possibility of ready-made political, theoretical or methodological solutions. For the postmodernist, all seems to be well.

However, is it possible simply to accept the lack of a common identity or a common project in anthropology? We, the editors of this book, are still baffled by the experience of a conference room full of critical and reflexive anthropologists whose critique of each other seemed to preclude reflexivity in debate and conversation. Why is feminist anthropology still largely the province of women? Why are many politically engaged anthropologists worried by postmodern initiatives? Why have the promises of earlier decades crumbled under the weight of criticism and counter-criticism? We think that it would be wrong to erase from this volume the context of disagreement in which these chapters were first presented. We propose, in this Introduction, to provide that context by an interpretation of the role of critical perspectives in anthropology and their relationship to the profession. This will give the non-anthropological reader a more comprehensive – though simplified – view of the field under discussion. Moreover, it will give us the opportunity to formulate our misgivings about present so-called 'postmodern' attempts to reformulate the professional task of the anthropologist. These attempts, it seems to us, call for a restatement of the reflexive critique of anthropology which Bob Scholte introduced (1974).

Before we do this, a word on the relevance of these papers for non-anthropological readers. The history of anthropology has its own
rhythm; it is more closely linked to colonialism and neo-colonialism than any other social science. The end of political colonialism in the 1960s has hurt anthropology's authority more than that of other disciplines. However, now that anthropology questions its capacity to define authoritatively the non-Western other, it returns to the metropolis with fresh approaches to the Western self. Nowadays, ethnography and anthropological theory are deployed to investigate and criticize the central metaphors of Western identity (see, for instance, Sahlins, 1976; Latour and Woolgar, 1979). Thus, because of its sociohistorical position on the boundaries of Western culture, anthropology promises a more radical reflexivity, which can be of use to all social scientists.

**Critique in occidental anthropology**

*Professional authority and cultural critique*

One of the most curious documents in the history of anthropology is surely Malinowski’s reaction to an attack by the Chief Secretary of the Government of Tanganyika Territory, P.E. Mitchell (Malinowski, 1930). From the opening sentences, it is hard to imagine that we are dealing with the leader of British functional anthropology who is engaged in a campaign to sell his discipline to the colonial establishment. On the contrary, Malinowski eloquently laments 'the curse of science'. 'Science is the worst nuisance and the greatest calamity of our days.' Modern man is condemned to 'passive receptivity', to a 'standardized level of taste ... at the cost of originality and spontaneous life':

One of the refuges from this mechanical prison of culture is the study of primitive forms of human life as they still exist in remote parts of our globe. Anthropology, to me at least, was a romantic escape from our overstandardized culture ... And now, after twenty years of anthropological work, I find myself, to my disgust, attempting to make the science of man into as bad and dehumanizing an agency to man as physics, chemistry, and biology have been for the last century or so denaturalizing to nature. In short, I am attempting to make anthropology into a real science. (Malinowski, 1930: 406)

Subsequently, the tortured writer settles for the dictatorship of instrumental rationality with resignation, only comforted by 'the feeling of power given by the sense of control of human reality through the establishment of general laws'. This power should be harnessed in order to 'assist colonial control' if only stubborn administrators like Mitchell could be convinced of the value of anthropology.

The essay summarizes Malinowski's trajectory since his fieldwork
in the Trobriand Islands and the writing of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). He has left much of his earlier critique of missionaries and colonial administrators behind (see Powdermaker, 1966: 43). Through his intensive contacts with missionaries such as J.H. Oldham and former administrators like Lord Lugard in the International African Institute, Malinowski hoped to attract Rockefeller money to support functionalist anthropologists at the expense of their ‘antiquarian’ colleagues such as Elliot Smith — and he succeeded (see Stocking, 1985).

Therefore, Malinowski had to claim a special role for the professional anthropologist. He argued that functional anthropology was a necessity for the ‘practical man’ in the colonies, and that the anthropological fieldworker was the only one capable of filling that need (Malinowski, 1929). As Mitchell’s reaction (1930) shows, not all practical men agreed with this claim to professional authority (see Junod, 1935 for a missionary’s qualms on the subject). But, after 1945, functionalist anthropology was firmly established, both in the colonies and in the academy.

Malinowski’s essay shows that a critical attitude towards the achievements of Western civilization contradicts the claim to serve its civilizing mission. However, it also shows that the one could not exist without the other. Both are based on the Western anthropologist’s desire to be the broker of ways of life and thought different from those at home. The postulate of a cultural ‘other’ was a necessary element of gaining professional authority and a position from which to speak to the anthropologist’s clients in the colonies and at home. The middleman was Janus-faced, however: to speak for others often implied defending them and, consequently, to attack the ethnocentrism of the values of one’s own civilization.

Thus, the critical impact of classical anthropology was mainly related to the anthropologist as the broker of the other’s culture. The impact of anthropology was to relativize, either in the subordinate sense of adjusting colonial policy to a better knowledge of the culture of the colonized, or in the absolute sense (defended by the American culturalists, see Leclerc, 1973: 100) of proclaiming an ineradicable difference, essentialized in the concept of culture.

The consciousness of different cultures gave, and still gives, anthropology much of its distinctiveness. It is the basis on which Michel Foucault (1973: 373ff) and Leszek Kolakowski (cited in Lemaire, this volume) claim a peculiar and unique mission for anthropology: the ability to be a ‘principle of perpetual dissatisfaction’, a permanent scepticism about the possibility of the Western ratio. This classical critique of Western values was most forcefully reasserted in the early 1960s by culturalism and structuralism, two
new or not-so-new appearances of the brokerage of other points of view. For Clifford Geertz, anthropological authority was founded on the capacity to read and reproduce cultural differences by describing indigenous symbolic systems (Geertz, 1973). Lévi-Strauss argued that the sterility of Western philosophical oppositions could be countered and raised to a new level of universal awareness by taking the other's way of reasoning seriously (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). Geertz based his theory on a Weberian interpretative approach, and Lévi-Strauss was influenced by linguistic theory from which he derived a radical break with empiricism. These two perspectives made an important contribution to the radical reflexivities that emerged in the late 1960s.

Epistemological rupture and the intrusion of politics
The political upheavals that rocked the anthropological boat in the late 1960s were preceded by another important development in the early years of that decade outside anthropology: the rupture in scientific consciousness that was produced by Thomas Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Suddenly, scientific procedure seemed to lose its foundations that had rested on systems of logical reasoning and the application of correct methodologies of empirical research. Science was no longer a unilinear process of accumulating knowledge. It underwent paradigmatic shifts carried through by groups of scientists. The paradigms at one period were not built progressively from the preceding paradigms; they were simply incommensurable with each other. Kuhn claimed 'a role for history' (1962: 1–9), exposing science to the external influences that academic authority is meant to keep at bay.

As Scholte (1983) points out, Kuhn's theses were taken up by many young anthropologists and used to attack established anthropology and its entrenched symbolic systems, evolutionisms and the like. If society entered into the constitution of a scientific paradigm, then politics must be part of this influence. Combined with the inspiration of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, the 'Kuhnian break' provided the conditions under which the supposed neutrality of theory and method could be unmasked as a Western ideology.

Critique of anthropology inspired by Kuhn never developed into a distinct movement: before long, 'paradigm' became a household word which often served to define one's theoretical identity against that of other fellow academics. While Kuhn's theory was reinterpreted to reinforce academic authority, Feyerabend's plea for scientific anarchy (1975) was not an alternative either. It relinquished criteria of judgement, the boundaries between the scientific
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and non-scientific, and therefore also alternatives for classical scientism in anthropology. Critique derived from the history of science only proved powerful in combination with other intrusions in anthropological self-consciousness. A most persistent, though for a long time marginal, current was the epistemological critique of anthropology which combined critical theory – the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas and others – with the Kuhnian break. Fed by phenomenology and the critique of structural linguistics, it provided an alternative to positivism by concentrating on ethnography as communication (see, for instance, Fabian, 1971b). The epistemological critique, however, was only a part of what was later to be called 'critical anthropology' (see Scholte, 1978a). As Fabian has written, 'critical anthropology' is hard to define, as it corresponds to no distinct social entity, subdisciplinary boundary, content or method. Its unity is mainly historical, a movement characterized by certain common themes which emerged in the late 1960s.

Professional complacency was no longer possible in the face of the destruction wrought by Kuhn, Feyerabend and their followers. Academic authority appeared in a new light, as an ideology. The first steps towards an anthropology of anthropology (Scholte, 1966) and a history of anthropology (Stocking, 1982, first published 1968) were soon followed by a critique of the uses of anthropology in colonialism (Asad, 1973) and an attempt to 'reinvent' the discipline (Hymes, 1974). Even if the critics did not have links to the politicized counter-culture that threw up barricades in Berkeley, Paris and elsewhere (and at least some of them did), establishment anthropologists identified them with it. They saw in the new developments the influence of 'flickering lights and the use of drugs' (Max Gluckman, cited in Scholte, 1978a: 5) or of 'mystics, religious fanatics and California cultists' (Marvin Harris, cited in Ortner, 1984: 126).

Unlike certain American Indian and African scholars (Deloria, 1969: 83ff, p'Bitek, 1970: 6), radical anthropologists did not call for a complete abandonment of anthropology. However, the first question in Hymes's introduction to Reinventing Anthropology was whether anthropology, if it did not exist, would have to be invented (1974: 3). The answer was no. Anthropology was, to a large extent, a survival from a colonial past, and the 'niche' in which it found its professional home had disappeared (1974: 4). The 'reinvention' of anthropology was in fact an attack on all the trappings of classical anthropology and its professional legitimation. 'The entire profession is on trial' (Fabian, 1971b: 19). Training provided by anthropology departments was seen as inhibiting
There were attempts to restructure the depoliticized nature of anthropological fieldwork (the idea of 'action-research'; see Huizer and Schrijvers (both in this volume) for an overview of the literature). Many critical anthropologists found a rival theoretical legitimation in Marx. The relegation of culture to the domain of ideology (Ortner, 1984: 140) made room for a rival conception of difference which stressed the power differences created by global capitalism.

The attack on the profession plunged anthropology into crisis. Once the complex of classical anthropological authority – university education, value-free theory, the brokerage of cultural difference, the legitimation of fieldwork as a politically innocent method – became suspect, the former plurality of theories within a professional framework developed into an incommensurability of anthropological identities. From the position of radical critique, any anthropologist who did not align him- or herself with the project of global liberation that it promised was under suspicion.

The most radical attacks on the profession, however, did not enjoy a long life in the academic context. Attempts at reform (such as the action-research perspective) did not take a firm hold, and the critique of anthropology's colonial and neo-colonial uses (Wolf and Jorgensen, 1970; Asad, 1973) failed to continue its rewriting of anthropology's history. The attention of the practitioners of 'critical anthropology' turned to the perfecting of its neo-Marxist theoretical armour and its ethnographic potential, to the correction of male or class bias, and to the formulation of alternative epistemologies. In 1978, Scholte complained that the critical perspective was in danger of being domesticated by the establishment and was in need of reflexive critique in order to avoid being encapsulated by it (Scholte, 1978a).

The radical critique of anthropology, which illuminated its role in colonialist and neo-colonialist practices, has recently been called 'a document of the moment' which was 'too immoderate and ungrounded in practice to have much effect' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 34–5); its negative portrayal of the anthropologist was an unrealistic 'caricature' (Clifford, 1986: 9); its critique 'merely scratched the surface' (Ortner, 1984: 138). Thus, the contemporary interpretation of this instance in anthropology has transformed it into a historical relic. It is possible that this attempt to dismiss radical critique is part of the re-entrenchment of academic authority. We will elaborate on this below.

Of the 'critical anthropologies' that emerged in the wake of the radical critique of the late 1960s, Marxism and feminism deserve our special attention. The critique of class and male bias in
anthropology brought distinct political intrusions to the fore which directly affected the conception of the anthropological object. Classical anthropology hid its political projects: the responsibility for the creation and legitimation of professional anthropology and for the support of colonialism was covered with the cloak of the neutral and value-free study of cultural difference. In contrast, both Marxism and feminism brought a political project – the emancipation of the oppressed – to front stage by conceptualizing the object as the study of the oppressed and the ways in which they are oppressed.

Culture, for Marxists, is first of all ideology, and serves projects of domination in society (Ortner, 1984: 140). Culture obscures the material relations of production and the processes of class-formation, and therefore has to be criticized. Thus, Marxism provided an alternative conception to the classical anthropological object – other cultures – by replacing it with differences in class or mode of production. This alternative conception of the anthropological object was a necessary component of the critique of professionalism. However, the Marxist critique of the primacy of cultural difference reduced the relativizing potential of anthropology. Marxism faced the paradox of pleading for a 'view from below' (see Huizer and Mannheim, 1979), while at the same time denying the value of the cultures in which this view could be expressed.

The early feminist critics of anthropology were in a still more complex position. They shared objectives with both leftist politics and classical anthropology, but were dissatisfied with both. On the one hand, the 'anthropology of women' sought to correct male bias in the discipline by challenging the representation of women by existing perspectives in anthropology. The critique of male bias was in many ways a form of the critique of ethnocentrism (see Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974: 2). As such, it 'shared the majority of anthropology's aims' (Moore, 1988: 187). Moore may be right in claiming that in this respect the anthropology of women was 'more remedial than radical' (1988: 6), although one should not underestimate the substantive theoretical innovations of the formal/informal power, domestic/public and nature/culture debates.

On the other hand, the inspiration and political urgency provided by the feminist movement could also be expressed in the more radical form of Marxist feminism (see Nash and Safa, 1976; Critique of Anthropology, 1977). This current seems to have had more influence on European feminist anthropology and was theoretically most forcefully expressed by relating gender ideology
to the re-evaluation of women's reproductive labour and their position in the labour market. But the attitude towards Marxism was similar to that taken towards classical 'cultural' anthropology: it is essential to correct for male bias (see, for instance, Molyneux, in *Critique of Anthropology*, 1977).

Feminist anthropology was inspired by the critique of inequalities between men and women in Western society and this is probably the major reason why it has been, and still is, 'ghettoized' in the academic sphere (Moore, 1988: 6). However, early feminist critique began to speak of women for women (see Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974: 1), and it used existing forms of critique (of ethnocentrism and of capitalism) in order to develop its approach to the question of the universal subordination of women. This restriction of the feminist voice may have limited its potential to criticize its own marginalization and recognize its own forms of ethnocentrism obscured by the concept of universal subordination. It did not attack the profession as a whole (except as Marxist feminism), but only its representation of women. When the emphasis shifted from 'women' to male–female relations and gender systems, feminism invaded traditional *topoi* of anthropology such as kinship theory (see Rubin, 1975; Ortner and Whitehead, 1981). It made undisputably clear that the study of gender was a concern of anthropology as a whole. But at the same time, feminists questioned the universality of women's subordination (see Poewe, 1981). This critique of the essentialist conception of the object of feminist anthropology (see Rosaldo, 1980a) is, in the last analysis, a critique of the constitution of the anthropological object as such. We will turn to that in the next section.

**Critique of universalism and the deconstruction of ethnographic authority**

Sherry Ortner's essay on anthropological theory (1984) was the first attempt to delineate some order in anthropology since the late 1960s (for example, Harris, 1968). Ortner predicted that the 1980s would see the reign of the concept of practice (1984: 144ff). She suggested that the sense of crisis felt by many of anthropology's practitioners in the late 1970s in fact concealed a convergence of perspectives, a cross-fertilization which opened up the comfortable prospect of normal science under a stable paradigm.

In a sense, we share with Ortner a feeling of convergence and a growing consciousness of common problems in anthropology. However, we tend to be a bit more cynical. The crisis in anthropology is, after all, not generated by the lack of a theoretical
common denominator, but by the breakdown of classical anthropological authority. If there was a ‘convergence’ in anthropology in the 1980s, it came from the fact that the authority of anthropologists had been further deconstructed, resulting in a shared recognition of the problematic status of their claim to speak for others.

We would like to highlight two features of this development. The first is the critique of universalism in feminist and Marxist anthropology, and the second the demise of ethnographic authority.

*The loss of a universal object*

Both Marxism and feminism in anthropology brought a political project into the open. Marxism provided the theoretical armour which served to describe the global subjection of the peoples of the world to capitalist domination, while the anthropology of women started from the assumption of woman's universal subordination. Thus, they shared a similar epistemological approach: their stories gained their validity from the fact that they could claim to speak from a subordinate position: the world’s truths were deemed easier to apprehend from the bottom up than from the top down. This view from below was based on a universal object (the subordination of the world under capitalism, the universal subordination of women, or of women under capitalism) which supported their political projects (the liberation of their respective oppressed).

The crisis of legitimation that took shape during the 1970s and 1980s within ‘critical anthropology’ was in many ways produced by a critique of the universality of the object. An epistemology based on the privileged viewpoint of the oppressed assumed this viewpoint and therefore objectified it before even the oppressed themselves had been heard. In a sense, Marxists and feminists encountered a similar predicament in relation to non-Western others as the critique of classical anthropology had brought forward. Value-free social science, as proclaimed in classical anthropology, kept silent about its political alliances with colonialism, and also about its own politics of knowledge: the claim to the professional status on the basis of a privileged access to ‘other cultures’. In this way, it hid its political project behind a neutral object (see Pels, 1983). Marxism and feminism, in contrast, did not keep silent about their political alliances, but initially failed to problematize their politics of knowledge. While they did not hide their non-academic engagement behind a neutral object, the claim to speak from the viewpoint of the oppressed did conceal a politics of knowledge, a claim to authority which gave Western
academics the power to define problems and solutions (see Scholte, 1983: 263; Moore, 1988).

It seems that of the two critiques, the feminist one was the first to address this problem. The fact that feminist anthropologists partly relied on the critique of ethnocentrism and partly on the critique of capitalism may have contributed to the raising of questions about the universality of the subordination of women. The shift from ‘defining women’ (Ardener, 1978) to the study of gender, that is, male–female relations (Ortner and Whitehead, 1981) was based on relativizing the former Western assumption that male dominance was universal. This relativizing was clearly inspired by symbolic anthropology, the heir of culturalism. In a pivotal article, Michelle Rosaldo argued that the most serious problem of feminist theory was the tendency to cast problems in universal terms on the basis of dichotomous assumptions of male and female nature (1980a: 414–15). Karla Poewe used the inspiration of Marxism to try to demonstrate that, in fact, universal male dominance is a fiction (1981: 25–51).

Thus, gender theory developed a critique of the essentialized conception of the universal object of feminist theory. The object could no longer be conceived as the complex of male dominance and female subordination only. From both culturalist and Marxist perspectives, feminist anthropology developed a perspective in which no single conception of difference (gender, culture, class) could predominate. When, therefore, black women criticized Western feminist ‘imperialism’ (see Moors, in this volume, p. 122, n. 6), it became clear that the power of Western feminists to define the object in universal terms was suspect. The common identity of women as subordinate to male dominance could not be upheld in the face of a proliferation of cultural, gender, class and race differences. The universal ‘sameness’ of women was lost (Moore, 1988: 10).

This deconstruction of the object did not necessarily imply the loss of a common political project (the emancipation of women), but it was clear that the legitimation of the project by its connection with a universal object could no longer be taken for granted. Presently, commonalities among women have to be demonstrated, not assumed (Rosaldo, 1980a: 417; Moore, 1988: 198). Feminist anthropology, once inspired by feminist politics, now attempts to reform it by stressing the necessity of solidarity through difference (Richters, in this volume).

For critical anthropology inspired by Marxism, the loss of a universal object seems harder to countenance. Marxism fuses object and project by looking at culture as ideology, as a
superstructure which serves to reproduce relations of production and class inequalities (Ortner, 1984: 140). Thus, the project becomes the critique of the classical anthropological object, replacing it by an alternative object, class difference. Many are justifiably loath to give up this powerful heuristic apparatus, which provides the ‘reinvention’ of anthropology with the most complete set of alternatives to classical authority: theory, object, epistemology and politics all in one. But Marxism also carries ethnocentricities and biases which contribute to a crisis in its own legitimation.

This becomes especially clear when the reduction of culture to ideology is questioned. By identifying culture with ideology, Marxist anthropology tends to reduce culture to dominance. In this way it denies others their means of cultural expression, including expressions of resistance. Thus, the critique of global structures of domination reproduces these structures in text, giving the impression of a monolithic apparatus of power impossible to resist (Fabian, this volume).* All voices – except the anthropologist’s – are drowned by the drone of capitalism and its subordinate modes of production. Or is it the drone of the analysis of capitalism? In this context, the question of whether Marxist anthropologists are themselves aiming at unquestioned authority becomes focal (see Scholte, 1983: 242, 263).

If the critique of the conception of culture as ideology does not serve to shrink the object of Marxist anthropology to less than universal size, there still remains the problem of the proliferation of differences brought to the fore by feminist anthropology. Class differences cannot encompass ethnic, race and gender differences. As it becomes more difficult to legitimate the critical project by means of a universal object – the structures of dominance created by global capitalism – Marxist anthropology faces the fate from which feminist anthropology freed itself: being reduced to a remedial exercise, merely correcting class bias in anthropology. In a sense, Marxist social scientists are already engaged in such a remedial exercise by responding to the critiques of academic authority which have been labelled ‘postmodern’ (see, for instance, Jameson, 1984b). The response is formidable, but it remains a response. In the questioning of hegemonic discourse in anthropology, the initiative has now been taken by the literary critics of academic rhetoric.

The literary turn: questioning ethnographic authority
If ‘practice’ was the catchword of anthropological theory in the past decade, ‘text’ was the central metaphor of its epistemological
reflections. Anthropology took a literary turn in the 1980s, follow-
ing the discovery that apart from being researchers and theorists, anthropologists are ethnographers, that is: writers.

One of the first and most radical critiques of ethnographic author-
ty came from outside the discipline, from literary studies. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) was an attack on that most elementary aspect of professional authority of anthropologists: the postulate of cultural difference and the subsequent necessity to translate it into 'our' terms. Orientalism, according to Said, was a means of the West to represent the other to itself. The other was subjected to a complicated apparatus of creating difference which was part of occidental strategies to reproduce its global power. Said takes a clearly anti-anthropological stance (see also Said, 1989), suggesting that the necessity of translation of cultural difference serves the anthropologist's or orientalist's professional interests.

Said's critique of orientalist ethnography appealed to a certain strand of anthropological critique which, though also politically engaged, did not completely identify with the Marxist position. This strand combined epistemological critique with issues derived from the critique of structural linguistics (the 'ethnography of speaking', see Hymes, 1970), focusing on the epistemology of fieldwork practice to produce an account of ethnography as communi-
cation (Fabian, 1971b, 1979c). Analysts showed that while the fieldwork process depended on communication, this shared experience of anthropologist and informant was deleted from the ethnography that was its result (Dwyer, 1977, 1979; Fabian, 1979c, 1983; Webster, 1982). Consequently, the ethnographic text appeared in a new light: it lost its continuity with the fieldwork situation. Ethnography was not simply 'writing up' research: it turned out to be a genre which creates its own authority by rhetorical means (Clifford, 1983).

When writing lost the innocence of a mere recording device, it was clear that writing practice was a form of interpretation. Inter-
pretive philosophy (Ricoeur, Gadamer) flowered under the aegis of symbolic anthropology which remained sceptical towards Marxist analysis and the ethnocentric implications of its 'practical reason' (Sahlins, 1976). Hermeneutics and the critique of ethnographic writing linked up to produce a sustained critique of the ethnographic genre which emphasized the experimentation with texts to devise new and more justifiable forms of 'writing culture' (Marcus, 1980; Marcus and Cushman, 1982; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986).

The apparent compatibility of the critique of ethnographic
writing and hermeneutics conceals a difference in their critical approaches. The contributions of Said and the ethnography of fieldwork communication were inspired by an approach that was critical of the postulate of cultural difference (see Moors, in this volume). Both implied that the object of anthropology was created by a projection of difference, by constituting the other as other, and that this constitution of the object was part of a hegemonic discourse characteristic of the West. Instead, the ethnography of fieldwork communication concentrated on what anthropologists and informants shared. Whether in terms of 'dialogue' (Dwyer, 1977) or 'coevalness' (Fabian, 1983), the emphasis was on the way anthropologists and informants co-produced ethnographic knowledge. In that way, the authority of the anthropological fieldworker was qualified and the assumption of the primacy of cultural difference questioned. Through the alliance between hermeneutics and symbolic anthropology, however, the critique of ethnography retained a link to the classical locus of anthropological authority: the interpretation of cultural difference. We will return to this issue below.

The movement of textual criticism was quickly labelled 'postmodern'. But if the postmodern condition is, as Lyotard (1984: xxiii) argues, a crisis of legitimation based on incredulity towards metanarratives, several of the critics of ethnographic authority are not so much 'post'-modernists as modernists of the literary turn. Their 'crisis of representation' is merely an experimental moment in which we can look for other, and possibly more adequate, means of representation (Marcus and Fischer, 1986). Their experiments do not produce the bewilderment created by a truly 'postmodern' crisis of legitimation in which the possibility of representation per se is questioned (see Clifford, 1986: 21; Tyler, 1987c).

What are the implications of the crisis of representation or legitimation for critique in and of anthropology? Since we stand in the middle of the postmodern movement, it is difficult to point to a single direction. Different histories of critique emerge from it, which display certain similarities but are sometimes radically opposed in their explicit aims and manifestos. The present volume brings some of them together (compare for instance the chapters of Richters and Tyler in this volume). It is not necessary to repeat these arguments in this Introduction. But we would like to point out a feature of the crossroads on which we seem to be standing now.

Jean-Paul Dumont has written that two steps can be distinguished in the literary turn in anthropology. The first is the critique
of the hitherto unquestioned links between hegemonic discourse and anthropological rhetoric, a project which seems commensurable with critical perspectives in and of anthropology (Dumont, 1988: 6). Political projects such as the Marxist and feminist may lose their legitimation by a universal object, but that does not necessarily mean that they lose the capacity of critique as such. One has to balance the different objects of a critique: ethnocentrism, racism, phallocentrism, capitalism, scientism. While the critique of scientific discourse may seem unsettling, it also promises a liberation from hitherto constraining narratives, opening up the possibility of participation in political projects that do not need the 'sameness' of a unitary object as legitimation.

The second step, however, is more distressing for the possibility of a critique: the question whether representation is at all legitimate (Dumont, 1988: 6). This question is most forcefully put by Stephen Tyler (in this volume). When he argues that critique is necessarily implicated in what is criticized and is therefore part of the totalitarian Gestell, this may shock the hitherto heterogeneous practitioners of 'critical anthropology' into an awareness of what they have in common. With Tyler, the crisis of representation becomes the end-game of anthropology, even of the human sciences in general, as he goes beyond Lyotard's pragmatic affirmation of narrative (see Jameson, 1984b for a lucid interpretation of Lyotard's position). If no story can be legitimated, then, indeed, 'how about . . . '?

What next? On culture essentialized and identities ignored

'I'd rather stare at my navel than walk up to the native ass backwards.'

(Bob Scholte)

The preceding paragraph, if left alone, would give the impression that, though all is not well, we are at least working in a field with recognizable boundaries. We are all questioning our grands récits about our objects, we are all uncertain about our projects, and we all doubt the representation of local knowledges in local texts. Ortner's image of paradigmatic unity, whether it is under the flag of 'practice', 'text' or 'postmodernism', seems applicable.

We shall not discuss here whether this is a good assessment of the present postmodern condition, or whether it addresses a mere surface appearance of a thoroughly capitalized global condition in which pragmatism reigns (but see Friedman, in this volume; Jameson, 1984a). However, we still wonder why, during the conference that was the basis for this book, the multiple voices of
anthropological experience did not seem to get an equal hearing. Identities were upheld and defended, but also ignored or suppressed. To us, that suggests that a more radical anthropology of anthropology is still necessary, or, better yet, that we should be careful not to lose the radical anti-professional critique of anthropology of the late 1960s. We have not yet stared at our navels long enough.

Our worries about the reflexivity of the literary turn are illustrated by the cover photograph of *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). It shows Stephen Tyler writing – with his back towards, indeed, whom? Savage, native, informant, interlocutor or co-producer of his texts? To what extent do we still work ‘ass backwards’? We need a self-conscious writing practice, agreed, but if we concentrate on ethnographic writing only, it may be merely a convenient symbol with which to reduce anthropological experience. Moreover, it may become a new claim for anthropological professionalism founded on an essentialized concept of cultural difference.

This accusation has especially been levelled at those closest to symbolic anthropology, and at Geertz himself. Friedman (in this volume) rightly points out that the Geertzian perspective is meant to have the ethnographic project continue (see also Kapferer, 1988, who describes Taussig’s ethnographic experiments as a ‘new positivism’). Marcus and Fischer found anthropology on the Geertzian claim for authority, making the description of cultural diversity the hallmark of anthropology (1986: 19). They dismiss the critique of the primacy of cultural difference by someone like Edward Said (1986: 1–2). Everything points to a renewal of the claim to ethnographic authority on the basis of the classical reflexivity of getting to know Us by means of Them (see Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 137). The anthropologist’s cultural mission comes home to the West, but it remains a critique of the Western us for the Western us by using the non-Western other, all ethnographic experiments notwithstanding. This would also explain why the less distressing forms of postmodern anthropology have almost become mainstream in less than a decade (Handler, cited in Wilford, 1990: B8), something to which other critical initiatives have never been able to aspire.

Such a re-entrenchment of anthropological authority can easily go together with a critique of ethnographic authority: for is it not the Western academic who has the initiative in calling for experimentation? Therefore we do not have a reflexivity which goes beyond the limited conception of the anthropologist as ethnographer. We need a more encompassing view of writing, including
the contexts in which we start to write. To acknowledge that our writing is a process of the conversion of our and the other’s experience and communication into academic capital, we have to be clear about the fact that we are not merely engaged in ‘writing down’ field notes and ‘writing up’ research results. To be taken seriously in the academy, we also have to write ourselves in the history of the discipline and, consequently, write off rival academic currents.\textsuperscript{11}

An anthropologist’s field experience implies not merely the notebook, tape-recorder and the communication process that is needed to make use of them. It also implies that the researcher is physically present and, consequently, that the anthropologist can freely dispose of sponsors’ money, travel possibilities and whatnot. Relying on these assets, the anthropologist takes the initiative in the processes of negotiation, dissimulation, power play, bribe and plain lying which accompany fieldwork. That does not preclude the possibility of becoming a friend, nor does it deny that the anthropologist’s feelings go beyond the dictates of research goals and methods. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the coming of the stranger is conditioned by global and local inequalities. We must not assume that each and every event in the fieldwork process is distorted by these inequalities (that may have been the mistake of the critique of the late 1960s): the people we encounter as anthropologists are usually perfectly capable of taking care of themselves. But suspicion is justified and we need a lot more accounts from the grassroots to see where we stand. (The chapters of Fabian, Pool and Schrijvers in this volume are examples of such accounts.)

Coming back from the field also has its structural constraints. Marcus definitely does not go far enough into an ethnography of anthropology’s professional culture if he merely remarks on the exigencies of producing a dissertation (Marcus, 1986). An understanding of the power-play necessary \textit{after} having been accepted formally as a qualified anthropologist is equally important for the formation of a critical anthropological practice. In this struggle, authority is contested; it is simultaneously reaffirmed and denied by a process of inscribing oneself and writing off others.

The postmodern movement, like many other anthropological claims for authority, uses these strategies of inscription and ‘writing off’ to its own advantage. As noted above, postmodern and symbolic anthropologists try to embalm and bury the radical critique of anthropological professionalism which we try to reassert. A new claim for professional identity has to play down threats against the profession. Feminist anthropology, too, is put aside by ill-concealed strategies. Clifford, for instance, cannot hide
the contradiction between the claim that feminist anthropology 'has not produced unconventional forms of writing' and his simultaneous citation of three important examples of it. He attempts to clean ethnographic experimentation of feminist stains (1986: 20–1), while making use of the insights put forward by feminism. (See his discussion of Lienhardt, in 1986: 17. The point is taken from Mascia-Lees et al., 1989.)

Postmodernists also hide their present claim to authority by inscribing it in the past. A rather innocent example of this is Tyler’s eschatological way of presenting the coming of postmodern anthropology: the use of the past tense for what has gone before and the present for postmodern anthropology (1986: 123) reminds one strongly of the way he described the epistemological divide between ‘cognitive anthropology’ and the unscientific bricolage that he thought preceded it (1969: 2–3, 11). In a more pernicious vein, Marcus and Fischer rewrite anthropology’s history by claiming the culturalist experience (‘not to make universally valid statements’, 1986: 22) as the general experience of anthropology, and suggesting that the project of a generalized science of man (and its consequent subsumption of cultural difference under a more encompassing framework) died in anthropology when we entered the twentieth century. Lévi-Strauss would not agree, nor do we.

Given the ascent of postmodern initiatives to mainstream status, these writing practices, far from being innocent, exhibit the strategies of inclusion and exclusion necessary for the accumulation and increasing of academic capital (reputation, tenure, publishers). These academic projects may be necessary in the present historical context, also for critical anthropologists. But the boundaries between reflexivity and silence do not become less arbitrary by ignorance. Feminists claim that these strategies, the exclusion of specific anthropological identities, work to the detriment of women (see Moore, 1988: 6; Mascia-Lees et al., 1989; Richters, in this volume). The cases cited above confirm their points.

Similarly, the structures of academic production still effectively keep out non-Western voices: the standards of production of texts, availability of research opportunities, library facilities, printing possibilities, all are still largely in the hands of Western academics. Occasionally, a non-Western voice manages to intrude (as the example of the black women’s critique of feminist theory shows). But, generally, the initiative is in Western hands, as is unfortunately also demonstrated by the list of contributors to this volume.

So, contra Clifford (1986: 9), we argue that the image of the
exploiting anthropologist cannot (yet) be dismissed as a caricature. It will remain necessary to look for the structural constraints on the production of anthropological knowledge and the formulation of anthropological projects as long as the present structure of the academy remains as it is (Fabian, in this volume). The reduction of the crisis of anthropology to a crisis of representation (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 8), and of writing practice to the ‘dialogue of fieldwork’ and the ‘communication to a readership’ (1986: 31) stunts our reflexivity. It erases our consciousness of the social context in which we work and the political engagements we enter into to such an extent that we cannot make use of the theories of the subject of science which have been in use for some time outside anthropology (see, for instance, Bourdieu, 1975; Latour and Woolgar, 1979; several essays in Harding and O’Barr, 1987; Haraway, 1988).

Anthropology itself has already produced sophisticated accounts of the ways in which we create objects out of the communication process going on in the field (see, for instance, Fabian, 1979, 1983). We need these ‘second-order narratives’ (Richters in this volume) about the academic subject and object to become acquainted with the power relationships in which we move. If our own project is not clear, we will fail to recognize the project of others. If we keep silent about the motivations of our own statements, other voices will be muted by it. This may be the ‘anthropology’ for which Friedman enters a plea (in this volume). Our objects may crumble, but that may be a necessary step if we still want our projects to aspire to the generality of the root: anthropos.

The book’s contents

There remains the task of accounting for our organization of the essays that follow. Anthropology has embodied the ideals of the Enlightenment by paradoxically combining the critique of Western values and the trust in Western rationality. The liberation promised by these ideals has become suspect in the postmodern condition. The juxtaposition of the chapters by Ton Lemaire and Gerrit Huizer in Part I is meant to show that we are not necessarily past modernism in the postmodern condition. On the one hand, Enlightenment ideals still carry promises. Ton Lemaire argues that we either abandon the claim for a general social science or accept the exceptional character of modernity. Huizer shows that current anthropology still holds on to a Western concept of reason in the encounter with healing and witchcraft, making imperative a further
step in the liberation from ethnocentric premisses. On the other hand, both authors also show the paradoxes to which Enlightenment ideals can lead. Huizer says anthropology is still ethnocentric, while Lemaire says Western reason is the vehicle for the overcoming of ethnocentrism even though it is so by virtue of a history of domination. While Huizer stresses participation, Lemaire argues for a more distanced view. The first stresses that we relinquish doubt in the belief of others, for the second it is the prime characteristic of the Western ratio.

Part II opens with a chapter by Robert Pool, which is the only essay not presented at the Conference. He shows how the uncertainty about ethnographic form and content created by postmodern critiques in fact opens up possibilities which make the writing of an ethnography decidedly more adventurous and the voice of others more clear. While he shows the advantages of a postmodern approach, Tyler shows its extremes. The two chapters thus represent positive instances of postmodernism in anthropology.

Part III is devoted to the critique of postmodernist interventions in anthropology. Jonathan Friedman provides a strong argument against the essentialized conception of culture of many postmodernists. Annelies Moors questions the primacy of the concept of difference in postmodernism and postmodern feminism. Both voice the doubts that we have referred to in this Introduction. Their chapters, together with Annemiek Richters's comprehensive overview of the tension between postmodern perspectives and critique, provide the kind of critical confrontations with postmodernism we think are sorely needed. All three produce doubts about the new professionalism which postmodernism invites, from the standpoint of distinct political projects — and in particular by the feminist consciousness of the marginal position which feminist anthropology still finds itself.

In the last part of this volume we have grouped the essays which address the possibility of a more thorough reflexive study of anthropological thought and praxis. Olivia Harris takes a hard look at the way in which the comparisons inherent in ethnographic writing use a concept of time which relies on a fictitious Western identity. Joke Schrijvers and Johannes Fabian provide grassroots accounts of ethnographic work, providing that enrichment of anthropological thinking which can only come from fieldwork experience. They also show that critical anthropological perspectives are as heuristically fruitful as they are practically uncomfortable.
Notes

1 For a more detailed report of the issues which arose at the Conference see Nencel and Pels, 1989.

2 This would attribute to postmodernism a position in mainstream anthropology which it may have attained (see Handler, cited in Wilford, 1990: 88) but which we doubt it truly merits.

3 Stocking makes clear, however, that it was not colonial utility but the promise of esoteric scientific knowledge which sold the discipline to the Rockefeller Foundation (1985: 137).

4 Of course, this subversion was generally masked (see Crapanzano, 1986). The ethnographer always moves in a field of paradox, where, for instance, the attack on Western values could not do without a reaffirmation of the (Western) anthropologist's authority.

5 In a draft of the essay published in this volume.

6 This is one of the few objections to Moore's overview of feminism and anthropology (1988): her account of the origins of feminist anthropology lays too much emphasis on Ardener (1975, first published 1971) and places Marxist feminist theory on the side as merely one of the currents.

7 An example of this ethnocentrism was the concept of motherhood, which was conceived as oppressive in the Western feminist context, and transposed to Third World contexts without questioning its validity for these societies.

8 Thus, paradoxically, the globalization of the object discouraged the globalization of the project, a world-wide emancipation of the oppressed, due to the gloomy picture it developed of the possibilities of this emancipation.

9 Which was what happened when Tyler presented this paper at the conference on critical anthropology in Amsterdam.

10 In the meantime, we are inclined to dismiss Tyler's rejection of representation as it appears to deny the very possibility for an engagement with others. The reflexivity we stand for is not meant to create a modernist consensus or a postmodernist 'dissensus' (see Tyler, this volume) but to validate communication between self and other. Though Tyler aptly warns us for pretending to speak for others, we doubt whether his poetics will improve our capacities for listening or speaking to them. It may be that representation and, indeed, some form of self-critique, is necessary for any communicative performance. Conversely, his attempts to 'evolve' instead of to represent suggest that he uses a kind of 'meta-reflexivity' which Latour (1988) claims serves to maintain the upper hand on the reader in the politics of explanation.

11 The terms 'writing down' and 'writing up' are taken from Fabian (this volume). The accusation of ignoring 'writing in' and 'writing off', however, is not levelled at him. 'Writing in' or 'inscription' refers to a process in which the statements (in this case, interpretations of the history of anthropology) inscribed are stripped of their subjectivity and made into facts (see Latour and Woolgar, 1979). 'Writing off' has a double connotation, both applicable to anthropology. In this context, however, we do not refer to 'writing off' as in 'living off' other people, but to the second connotation: 'dispensing with'.