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**The Ethnographic Component
in Chicano/a Literary Discourse**

One can say in total assurance that there is nothing fortuitous about the fact that the critique of ethnocentrism--the very condition of ethnology--should be systematically and historically contemporaneous with the destruction of the history of metaphysics. Both belong to a single and same era.

Jacques Derrida, *The Structuralist Controversy*

Introduction: The Ethnographic Context

Since the arrival of post-structuralism upon the Anglo American literary scene, the subject position has not been the same.¹ Jacques Derrida's deconstructions of such fundamental concepts as 'experience', 'the linguistic sign', and 'identity' through such analytical categories as the 'trace', 'differAnce', and "erasure" have deeply impacted the Anglo American Academy, the Humanities most of all.² In all realms of culture where writing is a necessary instrument, the reduction of the self-presence of the Cartesian subject to a grammatical function with a heartbeat has not ceased to be felt. In *What is An Author?*, Michel Foucault has called this reduction of the writing subject the death or disappearance of the author. But we would misunderstand Foucault's metaphor were we to conclude that such a disappearance or death means the end of writing or threatens it in any way. Despite the death of the author, the institutional practice of writing lives on in the author-function.

It seems that for someone dead or dying, the author gets a lot of writing done in the space of a heartbeat. Despite its deconstructability, the subject position is still coveted and all the more so as it becomes a necessary precondition for seizing the modes of discourse production through the author-function. The declaration notwithstanding, the death of the author continues to make its appearance as a political presence or reality in the form of the proper name. That is, despite the promotion of the author's name over the proper name pure and simple--"the author's name is not, therefore, just a proper name like the rest" (122)--it is still to the proper name that we look to fill the author function. The movement between the death of the author and its reassertion through the proper name can be seen with some regularity in the minority discourses addressing multicultural America today.

JanMohammed and David Lloyd rightly describe this historical situation as one in which minority writers must steer between essentialist and non-essentialist views of the subject.³ This dialectical movement is necessary for all minority discourses since these writers write to escape transcendental anonymity, as Foucault puts it. Chicano/a writers, for instance, write to escape from the oblivion of American history and restore a certain memory. The desire to escape erasure through the restoration of historical memory immediately puts contemporary Chicano/a writers in a double bind. It is this double bind--the problematic status of the subject--that this essay tries to outline. The questions of narrative authority that surround the subject position are myriad: how does someone decide to write? how does someone take on the responsibility to represent culture through the pen? how comes that right? what authority does the writer have to represent the culture he or she writes about? More subtly, how does a writer assume the authority to tell a story a certain way and not some other? Why should the storyteller be believed in the first place? Given the scope and the necessity of such questions, no wonder the subject position is a contested site. As Foucault rightly points out, when a proper name congeals with the author-function, the subject position enters and turns into a site of

production, a place where discourses are materialized, exchanged, and things make a difference, writing makes a difference.

It is into this exchange that contemporary Chicano and Chicana writers want to enter in order to restore a presence in the American literary canon, that is, give America a name more in accord with its Latin face. But this project of restoration--this discursive formation--puts contemporary Chicano and Chicana writers in a double bind that is very much at the heart of the historical condition we call postmodern. Contemporary Chicana/o writers are caught in the double bind Derrida announces in the epigraph to this essay where he asserts ethnography's condition of possibility as the critique of ethnocentrism. Why should the critique of ethnocentrism be the condition of possibility for ethnography? And why should contemporary Chicano/a writers be caught in this double bind? The answer to both questions has to do with cultural relativism, especially when radicalized. Derrida tightens that knot of contradiction that European and American ethnography enters into when it moves into the field in order to gaze on the cultures of other people as objects of study. On what grounds does ethnography give itself the right to assign the subject and object roles, the one to itself and the other to other cultures? This kind of radical critique of its scientific premise puts ethnography under erasure. That is, ethnography begins to erase itself when it expresses, begins to articulate, and otherwise put into practice a fundamental mistrust of the scientific premise, which is always already an ethnocentric one, as Derrida insists. Therein lies the destruction of metaphysics and its contemporaneity with culture, its political effects upon material culture. The recognition that studying another's culture from the standpoint of another culture provides no independent view of 'the object of study' brings a swift application of the erasure mark over ethnography's scientific project--*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, as deconstruction summarizes it. The desire for scientificity is under erasure in ethnography, but the erasure does not bring an end to the institutional practice of ethnography. Thanks to the Academy, ethnography has an open author-function, albeit under erasure and in the political sphere.

Postmodern ethnography is the model of the Humanities I trace in order interrelate the inheritance of the erasure mark by contemporary Chicana and Chicano writers. These writers write under erasure because they are aware that too much politics can spoil the story but so can not enough aesthetics. Steering between the exigencies of politics and aesthetics, these contemporary writers are producing a literary discourse that contests Anglo America's narrow understanding of the Chicano/a experience: its attempts to distance itself from the socioeconomic and linguistic reality the Chicano/a experience presents and represents to it, not to mention its historical complicity in the geographical formation of the latter. On these discursive points of culture and criticism, ethnography and Chicana/o literary discourse intersect and to these points I now turn.

Ethnography Under Erasure

When Derrida makes the critique of ethnocentrism, "the very condition of ethnography," he at the same time introduces the erasure mark into this science of the Western humanities (1970, 250). The deconstruction of Western metaphysics causes ethnography no small amount of solicitude since it puts its scientific status into peril and thrusts it into the realm of the political. It is precisely the political import of deconstruction that Robert Young, in *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* clarifies so succinctly when he states: "If one had to answer, therefore, the general question of what is deconstruction a deconstruction of, the answer would be, of the concept, the authority, and assumed primacy of, the category of 'the West'" (1990, 19). Indeed, Derrida announces the political import of deconstruction at the moment that he identifies ethnography's condition as the critique of ethnocentrism. Nothing about this identity is an accident, Derrida reminds us, as both belong to the same metaphysical era of lack, indeterminacy, and exhaustion. That the critique of ethnocentrism should be ethnography's condition is already a sign of that exhaustion. That is,

ethnography arises on the condition that it critiques ethnocentrism, a condition that puts it in a double bind out of which it cannot escape. As Derrida puts it: "the ethnologist accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he is employed denouncing them. This necessity is irreducible" (1970, 252). On an ideological scale this condition of possibility has enormous consequences for ethnography. On the 'scientific' level, for instance, ethnography is left with the difficult task of studying the plurality of human cultures, without the benefit of a centered subject position. If ethnography exists to critique ethnocentrism, then by rigorous implication ethnography *cannot* fail to critique its own assumptions, among these, the desire to be a science of the Western humanities. At this level, the conjunction of critical tasks begins to look very much like the double movement of the erasure mark. Following one requirement, ethnography stands to give a better 'scientific' account of its object of study, human culture, the more it de-centers itself. However, the more it de-centers itself the more it would at the same time erase its authority as a science of the Western humanities. As a consequence, the necessity, logical and ideological, to perform--write--a scientific discourse *under erasure* makes it impossible for ethnography to produce scientific discourses except in the most ironic ways. For this reason it is possible to perceive in contemporary ethnography a resemblance to the postmodern narrative arts. Under erasure, ethnography appears radically de-centered, occupying a precarious position as a scientific discourse.

Thus in "Post-Modern Ethnography," Stephen A. Tyler rejects the authority of a 'scientific' vocabulary in ethnographic discourse:

The whole point of 'evoking' rather than 'representing' is that it frees ethnography from mimesis and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric that entails 'objects,' 'facts,' 'descriptions,' 'inductions,' 'generalizations,' 'verification,' 'experiment,' 'truth,' and like concepts that, except as empty invocations, have no parallels either in the experience of ethnographic fieldwork or in the writing of ethnographies (1986, 130).

The significant differences in meaning that 'evoking' carries over 'representing' signals the extent to which the erasure mark is felt in ethnography's scene of writing.⁴ The differences place ethnography and the Western Humanities closer to writing and textuality than to the claims, methods, and rhetoric of the hard sciences. For Tyler, ethnography's authority is not the authority of an 'objective' empirical science because ethnography is not the type of science where the instrument of inquiry, language, can be kept pure, apart from the object of study, human cultures. And far less can ethnography keep its 'empirical' results free from the taint of subjectivity, since subjectivity, personal field experience, is what is necessary to give ethnographies validity, or in a sense, to make them of any interest. No wonder Tyler decisively rejects a 'scientific' vocabulary that would designate just what kind of authority properly belongs to ethnography in the social act of writing. In Tyler, it is possible to see to what extent ethnography can go to critique its own ethnocentric assumptions. His discourse on postmodern ethnography is a call for an ethnographic practice that is not only thoroughly self-critical but also free of the 'objectivist' rhetoric of science. In this, he keeps it close to the practice of writing, close to the role of personal fieldwork experience, sensitive to their interplay at the scene of writing.

Similarly, in *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (1988), Clifford Geertz makes a case for the twin roles that experience and writing have in shaping the authority of ethnographic writing. The complementary essays comprising the work, "Being There: The Anthropologist and the Scene of Writing" and "Being Here: Whose Life Is It Anyway?" aim to align both categories together--experience and writing--via the agency of the social act of writing. Through the act of writing, Geertz explains, "Ethnographers need to convince us ... not merely that they themselves have truly 'been there,' but ... that had we been there we should have seen what they saw, felt what they felt, concluded what they concluded" (16). Summarily Geertz further adds: "The textual connection of the Being Here and Being There side of anthropology ... is the *fons et origo* of whatever power anthropology has to convince anyone of anything..."

(144). If Geertz describes the authority of ethnographic writing and experience in a way that is reminiscent of the language of classical Western metaphysics it is not because he is essentializing anthropology's scene of writing. Rather than granting the discipline of anthropology a reified site of authority, Geertz' *Works and Lives* is more of an extended meditation on its present decenteredness and contingency as a scientific discourse, as well as its promise as a discourse tending toward the literary.

From this perspective, Geertz' view of the current state of ethnography is on par with what James Clifford says of culture in general, anthropology's 'object' of study. "Culture," says Clifford, "is contested, temporal, and emergent" (1986, 19). Because human cultures are complex and changing, in a state of constant movement, ethnography must likewise keep itself constantly changing. No doubt this makes the writing of ethnography a far more complex process in the postmodern context. It is perhaps for this reason that, in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, a work Clifford calls a "spliced ethnographic object, an incomplete collection", he also refers to culture "as a deeply compromised idea I cannot yet do without" (1988, 10-13). The irony of this situation for ethnography--where culture is a 'necessary object' of study but also a contingent position from which to study it--is, in a sense, already contained within Derrida's critical theorem that "language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique" (1970, 254). Because ethnography must base its results on the authority of personal fieldwork experience and the field of textuality, it is a human science that gets better 'scientific' results when it writes under erasure, and this perhaps for reasons that could be called essential. What I am suggesting is that the degree to which ethnographers like Clifford, Geertz, and Tyler abandon any secure center for their own discourses is the degree to which they make the critique of their own presupposition the very expression of the 'scientificity' in their discourses. Specifically, in Tyler, Geertz, and Clifford we see a version of writing under erasure where anthropology does not altogether abandon its desire for 'scientificity' and yet deeply mistrusts it. To date, ethnography has not ceased to

be disturbed by the solicitude this subject position provokes. The moment ethnography ceases to be occupied by this solicitude is the moment it is most capable of forgetting its condition of possibility. It seems to be an irreducible condition for this science of the Western humanities that the best ethnography is that which is most self-critical.

Chicana/o Literary Discourse and Ethnography

Ethnography has a tradition of forgetting the historical and philosophical condition on which it exists when it has come to the study of the Chicano/a experience. In his classic essay, "On Ethnographic Work Among Minority Groups: A Folklorist's Perspective" (1984), Américo Paredes provides a well-modulated critique of the tendency in ethnography to forget its condition of possibility. What Paredes exposes in that essay is a snapshot of the troubled history surrounding the cultural, political, and linguistic contact of the Mexican and Anglo peoples in the American Southwest. In the foreground of this exposure are the anthropologists William Madsen and Arthur Rubel, who suffer from such amnesia. Liable to the charge that their ethnographies fail to attain even basic observational adequacy, Paredes refers to this failure as "unconscious bias, the fitting of data to preconceived notions and stereotypes" (1984,2-3). The unconscious bias Paredes exposes in their respective ethnographies provides a handy picture of the tensions that can arise when anthropology falls short of its 'scientific' ideals. In ironic tone, Paredes states:

... *perhaps* the methodological safeguards to compensate for a normal degree of bias are not working very well. Anthropologists *may* need to re-examine the argument that they can give us substantially true pictures of a culture by following time-honored methods. And when the group under study is part of one of our minorities, the situation takes on a good deal of urgency. It was one thing to publish

ethnographies about Trobrianders or Kwakiutls half a century ago; it is another to study people who read what you write and *are more than willing to talk back* (1984, 2, italics are mine).

Paredes' ironic style is more than a reminder of anthropology's shortcomings. In the picture is also the fact that the natives are carrying their own pad and pencils. Paredes rejects the exoticizing of the Chicano/a experience and the distancing effect it has as a proper point of view for the study of the Chicano/a experience. That Chicano/a groups should experience such distancing on the part of its ethnographers portends at the general scale upon which the problem of unconscious bias operates. Assuming this distance it is easy for Rubel and Madsen to misperceive their Chicano informants, missing their linguistic performance. "When is an ethnographer's informant giving him information," asks Paredes, "and when is the informant doing something else?" Paredes stresses the issue of language, calling on the ethnographer to have more than a surface knowledge of Chicano/a language varieties. An ethnographer who does not reckon with the sociolinguistic complexities of Chicano/a speech communities may lose sight of Paredes' point that an informant " ... may in fact be taking the anthropologist's measure" (1984, 8).

In making this statement Paredes sheds considerable light on the subject position Chicano/a writers have been assuming in the social act of writing.⁵ The unconscious bias through which Madsen and Rubel view the Chicano groups they study is in many ways symptomatic of Anglo America's predisposition to see Chicano/a culture and society in negative or stereotypical terms. Their oblivion to the myriad of ways Chicano/a informants may take the anthropologist's measure is on par with Anglo America's indifference to a Chicano/a presence in the making of the economic base of the United States of America. Paredes' debate with Anglo American anthropology, I would insist, is all the more critical when seen as a paradigm at once of Anglo and Chicano/a cultural contact and an index of the political and aesthetic oblivion from which Chicano/a writers want to emerge.

Furthermore, it is at this complex sociolinguistic juncture that a certain symmetry between the subject position of the ethnographer and that of the Chicano/a writer also takes on a more explicit shape and form. As the ethnographer is at pains to ward off unconscious bias so as not to compromise the 'scientific' aims of his/her ethnography, so Chicano/a writers must balance the equal demands of politics and art. Nothing about being an insider of Chicano/a culture guarantees that a writer can portray the Chicano/a experience with understanding or transform it into an aesthetically pleasing literary discourse. The contingent authority of personal experience holding at the scene of writing for the anthropologist holds as well for the Chicano/a writer. Thus it is not surprising that ethnographers of the Chicano/a experience and Chicano/a writers should share the same necessity to perform a continual critique of the language and intentions with which they depict that experience. For Chicano/a writers the self-reflexive process of critique insures that their insider's perspective does not become a source of incontestable insight. And while the empirical differences between these two subject positions cannot be erased, the process of self-critique safeguards against those differences being turned into essential ones and acknowledges the empirical possibility that a non-Chicano/a can write with sensitivity toward and understanding of the Chicano/a experience. This is not to say that it is common for non-Chicano/a writers to do so, only that it is possible.

Ethnicity, an Inside/Outside Question

In their *Guide to Chicano Literature*, Francisco Lomelí and Donaldo Urioste, early in the history of Chicano/a critical discourse, inaugurated the phrase 'literatura chicanesca' to designate a body literature written about the Chicano/a experience by a non-Chicana/o writer. 'Literatura chicanesca,' they maintained, provided a valuable external points of view on the Chicano/a experience. They praised John Nichols as one chief exemplar of successful *literatura chicanesca*. Otherwise, as Antonio Márquez has argued, *literatura*

chicanesca has been largely a disappointment, serving ideologically to perpetuate Anglo America's stereotypes of Mexico and Mexicans. With John Nichols, we may now also place *Famous All Over Town*, the work of Daniel James/Danny Santiago. The controversy surrounding *Famous All Over Town*, its reception as bona fide text of Chicano literature, is a clear sign that the Chicano/a experience is not essential but constructed, able to be reproduced and reprinted by someone who is not Chicano or Chicana. Consequently, the reproduceability of the Chicano/a experience should be welcome news for all, ethnographer and *literati* alike.

James' creation of his protagonist Rudy (Chato) Medina, his depiction of East Los Angeles Chicano life, the eventual razing of that life by capitalist interests, accomplishes in pragmatic terms nothing less than what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls a fusion of horizons.⁶ That is, James successfully and creatively brings his own historical past to bear on his present understanding of a historical situation that is not his own but *becomes* his own as he is willing to explore what Gadamer for his theory neutrally but suggestively calls hermeneutic prejudice. James' account of that process towards understanding closely echoes Gadamer's point that hermeneutic understanding must fuse the foreign with the familiar, the present with the past:

I realized that the Chato character *was* me. Of course, he has none of the advantages that I had. He didn't go to college, and didn't study Marxism. He comes from a poor Mexican family and has little formal education and no ideology. But Chato and I are also very much alike. We're both writers. Like him I wanted to put my mark on the wall. His ruined street *became* all the constructs of my past, including the Communist Party, which had collapsed for me (Raskin, 251, my italics).

James' *méconnaissance* of his own ideology hardly takes into account the divided subject of psychoanalysis. James' claim that his protagonist Chato has no ideology is no doubt a symptom of the erasure mark over his hermeneutic project, but the force of the erasure mark does not invalidate it *in toto*. Chato indeed has an

ideology and it is one that James understands well because it resides in the political unconscious of United States history (Jameson, 1981). As such, James has access to that ideology no less than his character Chato, the exclusionary practices of that ideology speaking to a common core of experience between author and character. That is, James has no problem grafting his experience of being a blacklisted writer in Hollywood during the 1950s to the repression of a Chicano/a presence in the making of United States history in general or to the displacement of a way of life in East Los Angeles in particular.

Consequently, James' hermeneutical achievement should be welcome news for ethnographers who make Chicano/a groups their object of study. Here, in literary example we have inside and outside collapsing into each other. Anglo America can and does understand Chicano/a America: that mexican presence that reappears in migrant fields, factories, restaurants, and other forms of labor. The inside of Chicano and Chicana literature is not an inviolable field of experience, just as this field of experience cannot be immaterial to the historical formation of the American nation. In particular, James' novel adds strength to the correlation that Michael M. J. Fischer, in "Ethnicity and the Post Modern Arts of Memory," makes between ethnographic knowledge and contemporary ethnic autobiography in the United States. In that essay, Fischer looks to the contemporary writing of American ethnic autobiography as a model for contemporary ethnography, seeing in the one a critical element that might revitalize the other. Surveying autobiographies from a variety of American ethnic groups--Armenian, Chinese, Chicano/a, and Native Americans--Fischer makes the highly suggestive statement that " ... the emergence of ethnographic knowledge is not unlike the creation of ethnic identity" (1983, 208). Fischer bases his argument in large part on the kind of sociolinguistic and psychoanalytic phenomena that tend to occupy this literary production. In the midst of such complex phenomena, American ethnic writers must continually juxtapose two or more cultural traditions, constantly reinvent their cultural selves, and do so with a critical eye toward the political hegemony of Anglo American culture and its homogenizing

tendencies. For these reasons, Fischer places American ethnic autobiographies fully within a postmodern cultural nexus and allies its critical and aesthetic dimensions to the project of ethnographic writing. American ethnic autobiographies, writes Fischer,

... illustrate intertextuality, inter-reference, and the interlinguistic modalities of post-modernist knowledge. On the practical level, such self-conscious and virtuoso technique could contribute to a reinvigorated ethnographic literature, one that can again fulfill the anthropological promise of cultural criticism: of making our taken-for-granted ways recognizable as sociocultural constructions for which we can exercise responsibility (1983, 202).

With respect to Chicano/a autobiography, Fischer correctly observes how the sociolinguistic phenomenon of inter-reference in the literary texts serves as a mode of critique of Anglo American cultural hegemony. Because inter-reference brings into contact two linguistic codes, and more than two cultural traditions, its role in the construction of Chicano/a ethnicity is crucial for the understanding of the authority it confers on contemporary Chicano/a narrative. Inter-reference being, as Fischer says, "what ethnicity is essentially all about" (223), it surfaces throughout contemporary Chicano/a narrative and could perhaps explain why so many Chicano/a writers are so committed in one form or another to the genre of autobiography. The genre allows them ready access to the broad range of sociolinguistic phenomena through which Chicano and Chicana ethnic identities are constructed at the scene of writing.

Reading America(n) Writing

At that cultural divide, Chicano and Chicana writers take the anthropologists' measure and write within the conflicted nature of the postmodern style, its plurality and uneven character. A writer like Alejandro Morales (1975, 1983, 1988) uses both Spanish and

English to pen his narratives. The mixture of languages, the process of switching between linguistic codes, contributes to the heterogeneity of postmodernism and its eclectic style in the realm of the narrative arts. But not only in the switching of codes do Chicano/a writers have their impact on the postmodern condition. Chicana writers like Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Ana Castillo (1977, 1986), in addition to code-switching, as much break as play with the law of genre and tell their stories in open and plural ways. Anzaldúa uses the autobiographical genre to practice a narrative art she calls the writing of critical theory in the low mode. In *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986), Castillo puts the epistolary genre to work in the service of Chicana feminism by telling her stories in ways that displace linear time and which thereby speak of the effects of patriarchal oppression on her female protagonists. Likewise, Chicano writers like Gary Soto and Richard Rodriguez practice the short, dramatic essay as a narrative art that at once reaches for totality but then backs away from it. *Living Up the Street* (1985) and *Hunger for Memory* (1982) represent supreme stylistic efforts by Soto and Rodriguez respectively, to put us 'there', that is, give readers a sense of what it is like to grow up with both English and Spanish, as Mexican and American, in the United States. Furthermore, writers like Denise Chávez, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Erlinda Gonzalez-Berry, and Arturo Islas add layers of experience to the discursive formation the United States created when it annexed large portions of Mexico.

The sociolinguistic competence required to evoke this discursive formation has to do with the willingness of Chicano writers like those mentioned above to write their narratives under erasure, that is, with the authority that belongs 'properly' to the

erasure mark. Under its authority, Chicano/a writers find strategies for coding in their stories 'contradictory' elements, be they from the realm of genre, linguistic codes, thematic concerns, or otherwise. For those Chicano/a writers who write under erasure--steering between essentialist and non-essentialist subject positions--the erasure mark furnishes a link between politics and art as they in effect produce a double coded American literary discourse that addresses the political exigencies of the postmodern condition. Chicano/a writers have long been aware of the political nature of the social act of writing,⁷ and, in these postmodern times have been quick to seize on the enabling conditions that postmodernism and post-structuralism offer. The social act of writing for these writers is a political act because it is a fact that Chicano and Chicana writers have a lot to say to the Anglo American nation. Through their literary production these writers help us to understand the formation of this nation and its current multicultural pains. How much does the contemporary Anglo American literary scene miss when it ignores these American voices? For an enlightened society, too much.

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¹ Vincent Leitch (1988) gives a thorough and insightful account of the different versions of deconstruction that have found a home on American soil.

² See Jacques Derrida (1973), *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essay on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, for a precise deconstruction of the notions of 'experience' and the 'linguistic sign'.

³ Abdul R. JanMohammed and David Lloyd edit and introduce a volume of essays that address the complex issues facing the formation of minority discourses in the United States. Their introduction to the volume speaks directly to the difficulties that attend the minority writer who wants to seize the author-function. The minority writer writes to escape disappearance at the historical moment that disappearance is making an entrance. JanMohammed and Lloyd rightly speak of the subject position as a category and space that must be negotiated between essentialist and non-essentialist view of the subject.

⁴ Clifford's essay, "Spatial Practices" is an extended discussion of how the category of field work becomes quintessentially a matter of stylistics: "The legacy of intensive fieldwork defines anthropological styles of research, styles critically important for disciplinary (self)-recognition" (1997, 59). The pairing of style with self-recognition brings an ineluctable strain of Lacanian psychoanalysis. See Torres (unpublished manuscript) "For a Sociolinguistic Stylistics of Literature" for a discussion of how these issues interrelate.

⁵ I am indebted to Chon Noriega for pointing me to Miguel Diaz Barriga's essay "The Culture of Poverty as *Relajo*." Barriga's essay not only retraces Paredes' debate with Anglo American ethnography through the figures of Rubel and Madsen and shows its applicability in another domain, it also clearly draws out the political role humor plays in undermining the authority of ethnographic discourse.

⁶ In *Truth and Method* (1986, 273), Hans-Georg Gadamer explains the classical conceptual metaphysics involved in the hermeneutic project and process: "In fact the horizon of the present is being continually formed, in that we have continually to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing is the encounter with the past and the understanding of that tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present that there are historical horizons. Understanding, rather, is always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves."

⁷ For a collection of essays that chronicle the history of the social act of writing with respect to New Mexico, see Erlinda Gonzalez-Berry, ed. (1989). *Pasó por Aquí: Critical Essays on the New Mexican Literary Tradition 1542-1988*.