

Theory in Furs

Masochist Anthropology

by Don Kulick

Was will die Anthropologie? Freud's analysis of masochism can serve as a lens with which to explore the long-standing anthropological interest in powerless or disenfranchised people. Recent anthropological work can be examined not only in the terms encouraged by its own diegesis as a relation between anthropologist and the powerless but also as elements in a constellation that includes anthropology as a discipline and capitalism. Exploration of the libidinal structure within which our discipline has taken shape—that is to say, the structure that gives not just possibility and meaning but also pleasure to the practice of anthropology—can shed light on the nature of the pleasure that anthropologists derive from identification with the powerless.

This essay is a speculative reflection on anthropology's disciplinary identification with powerless people. It is a reflection on this identification in terms of pleasure and desire—masochistic desire, to be precise. It is also an essay about failure. One thing my suggestive title surely suggests is that the observations which appear here will probably fail to live up to the perhaps pungent expectations raised by the term “masochist anthropology.” That failure is instructive. It can serve to highlight the larger issue I wish to address of how anthropological desire to be aligned or identified with the powerless is forever subject to unfulfillment and failure.

What might the point of such a perspective be? First of all, it might help us to understand the long-standing anthropological interest in powerless or disenfranchised people exemplified, for instance, in James Scott's compelling calls for social scientists to study what he has called “weapons of the weak.” A discussion of anthropological desire might also allow a slightly different perspective on the recent upsurge of urgings that anthropologists identify more closely with powerless people. Representative of this phenomenon are Nancy Scheper-Hughes's exhortations that anthropologists engage in what she has called a “barefoot anthropology” and Unni Wikan's remonstrances that anthropologists should focus on “resonance” and “experience-near anthropology.” While I, along with presumably most other anthropologists, wholeheartedly support the political agendas that buoy up such calls, they are also susceptible to suspicions of being expres-

sions of “guilt-ridden forms of liberalism” (Dominguez 2000, 366) or even “paternalism and elitism” (Robins 1996, 343) that “flatter and excite [but] counter effective engagement” (Crapanzano 1995, 421). To help us see how such suspicion might arise and also to further a reflexive critique of anthropology, it might be helpful to subject the calls to identify with the powerless to some critical scrutiny. We need a better understanding of what is at stake when anthropologists go barefoot or begin to resonate.

That is the first reason for this paper. The other reason is that it is part of a larger series of studies that focus on investigating the roles that pleasure, fantasy, and desire play in our understanding of and engagement with social phenomena (Cameron and Kulick 2003, 2006; Kulick 2000, 2003*a, b*, 2005). One of the legacies of Marx, Durkheim, and the other great founding figures in the social sciences has been the impulse to reduce questions of subjectivity and identification to issues of knowledge—knowing, cognition. Anthropologists from Boas on have written of “the unconscious” (e.g., Boas 1964 [1911], 1995 [1911]; Sapir 1995 [1927]), but what they have usually meant by that word was not the same thing as the Freudian unconscious.¹ They (and most anthropologists who followed them) were referring more to embodied knowledge or to what Freud labelled the “preconscious”—that which is outside of conscious awareness, latent knowledge outside of cognitive reach. The Freudian unconscious is something very different from habitus or the preconscious. It is a dynamic structure, produced through repression, that exerts influence on what is and is not expressed or performed. As Freud himself makes clear and later commentaries have emphasized, the unconscious is not a structure that is created at

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1. Some important exceptions are Allison (1996), Frank (2002), Moore (1997), Obeyesekere (1981), Weiner (1995), and Sangre (2004).

some point and then left to fester (Freud 2001a [1915], 151; Billig 1999; Butler 1990). On the contrary, like consciousness, the unconscious is an achievement, a process, an activity. It is continually re-created in social life and continually subject, therefore, to change.

Now, as countless critics have pointed out, Freud's manner of conceptualizing the unconscious and, hence, subjectivity and identification is far from perfect or definitive. However, its unsurpassed advantage is that it does not ignore (to the contrary, it foregrounds) those elements of subjectivity—such as fantasy, desire, and pleasure—that social science has most trouble considering. This trouble is itself suggestive of modes of repression that may structure social science discourse and that remain relatively unacknowledged and unexplored. My recent work has tried to explore that repression by examining some of the ways in which fantasy, desire, and pleasure must be critical in explaining how cultural artefacts and discourses affect people and move them.

With this in mind, this paper examines the anthropological investment in “the weak” or “the powerless” not in the more usual (and absolutely necessary) terms of political engagement, moral commitment, or even epistemological advantage (D'Andrade 1995; Farmer 1999; Robins 1996; Starn 1994) but in terms of libidinal economies. Taking my cue from Freud's famous question “*Was will das Weib?*” (“What does Woman want?”) I want to ask “*Was will die Anthropologie?*” And how does a focus on powerlessness give it that?

Anthropology and the Powerless

While many of the points I make in this paper might arguably be extrapolated to other social sciences, I believe that they are particularly pertinent to anthropology because anthropology has always aligned itself, more or less explicitly, against power. Lewis Henry Morgan's research on Native American kinship systems was grounded in his indignation that they were being killed and robbed of their land (Nader 1974 [1969], 285). E. B. Tylor, the very first professor of social anthropology anywhere in the world, argued that “the science of culture is essentially a reformer's science” (Diamond 1964, 432). And it is easily shown and widely appreciated that anthropology as a discipline and as articulated by its most respected practitioners has always aligned itself with groups of people that we might unproblematically call powerless. Malinowski's famous calls to get off the mission veranda and attend to the native's point of view, Boas's unchaining of language, culture, and race, Mead's bold assertions that culture overrode biology, Benedict's gentle admonition that modern civilization hardly merited the label, and Leacock's and Wolf's insistent documentation of the havoc that European colonialism had wreaked on the people anthropologists studied all worked to establish anthropology as, if not the “revolutionary” discipline that Stanley Diamond (1964) once claimed it was, then at least the “unsettling” discipline that Clifford Geertz could assert it was in his “Anti anti-relativism” lecture (1984, 275).

At the same time as they were being unsettling, however, many anthropologists were simultaneously collaborating with powerful forces that were directly responsible for the subjugation of different groups of people (Wolf and Jorgensen 1970). Many writers have commented that anthropology was born out of this subjugation, but none has depicted this relationship as eloquently as Lévi-Strauss (1966, 126):

Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves have been ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases that they were unable to resist. Anthropology is the daughter of this era of violence: its capacity to assess more objectively the facts pertaining to the human condition reflects, on the epistemological level, a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treated the other as an object.

I will be returning to this passage later, and I will attempt to tease out some implications of the libidinal structure it sets forth. For now, I would just like to note that, for all its commitment to set forth the native's point of view and to insist that the West is not superior to the rest, anthropology is inextricably implicated in highly unequal relations of power. This means, as many of the writers I just cited argue, that any attempt to theorize anthropology's alignment with powerlessness must take into account its origins in and its continued alignment with power.

But the relationship of anthropology and anthropologists to power has been a difficult one for the discipline to come to terms with. As late as 1973, Talal Asad could assert in his introduction to *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* that “there is a strange reluctance on the part of most professional anthropologists to consider seriously the power structure within which their discipline has taken shape” (1973, 15). In the 1980s, Edward Said's (1978) criticism of Orientalist knowledge and the related disciplinary trend that came to be known as reflexivity was one attempt to address precisely that power structure, and it was hugely successful in getting anthropologists to at least consider it, if ultimately perhaps for the most part only in relation to the textual strategies they used in their texts to create authoritative accounts. What strikes me in all this is that, despite continuing debates, what has yet to be seriously addressed in our discussions of power is the role of *desire* in the constitution of our discipline. Thus, paraphrasing Asad, we could note that there is a strange reluctance on the part of most professional anthropologists to consider seriously the libidinal structure within which their discipline has taken shape—that is to say, the structure that gives not just possibility and meaning but *pleasure* to the practice of anthropology. What is the nature of the pleasure that anthropologists derive from the powerless?

It is my hypothesis that the nature of this pleasure is masochist. It is masochist not (only) in the banal sense that anthropologists have constructed a discipline that frequently puts its practitioners in singularly uncomfortable and exacting situations for extended periods of time. That anthropologists are masochists in this sense is something of a truism. When Gilles Deleuze observes that “the masochist must undergo punishment before experiencing pleasure. . . . Suffering is not the cause of pleasure itself but the necessary precondition for achieving it” (1989, 89), he could well be describing the relationship between fieldwork, successful writing, and a career in anthropology.

Rather than focusing on the more obvious senses in which it might be possible to agree that anthropologists are masochists, my concern here is with the far more complex sense in which anthropologists derive pleasure from identifications with the powerless—identifications that are unconscious in the sense, once again, that they are a dynamic resource or structure that is not or cannot be acknowledged because to do so would threaten the backdrop against which certain positions emerge as intelligible and desirable (and others as unintelligible and undesirable). Because they are unacknowledged and hence largely unexamined, there is a risk that these unconscious disciplinary structures may in some senses work to engineer particular silences and sustain particular relations of power rather than challenge them.

The Psychic Structure of Masochism

In order to develop this argument, I will need to say a few words about the psychic structure of masochism. Masochism is a rich topic in the psychoanalytic literature: a recent volume titled *Essential Papers on Masochism* gathers together nearly 30 papers by eminent scholars and is indeed essential reading for anyone interested in the range of issues that have been discussed by psychoanalysts (Hanly 1995). While some of the issues raised in accounts by other psychoanalytic scholars merit exploration, my account will focus on Freud’s writings, for two reasons. The first is that Freud’s discussions of masochism are the touchstones for all subsequent psychoanalytic work on the topic. The second is that Freud proposes a specific framework of fantasy, substitution, and pleasure that, like all of Freud’s writings, is contestable and amendable but has the advantage of offering a way of imagining particular configurations of desire—a way that I hope to show may be illuminating of the structure of anthropological desire.

The term “masochism” was invented not by Freud but by the Austrian sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing. In his monumental treatise on perversion *Psychopathia Sexualis* (first published in 1887 and subsequently revised and expanded 12 times), Krafft-Ebing coined the word “masochism” to designate “a particular perversion of the psychical *vita sexualis* in which the individual affected, in sexual feeling and thought, is unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the op-

posite sex; of being treated by this person as by a master; humiliated and abused” (1950, 131).

Krafft-Ebing graced this perversion with the name of a man who was still living at the time, the writer and scholar Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Sacher-Masoch was an Austro-Hungarian professor of history who wrote a large number of novels, the most famous of which is the 1870 work called *Venus in Furs*. Sacher-Masoch’s novels were not exactly wide-ranging: the plot usually revolved around a nobleman who enjoyed being ordered about and whipped by an icy woman in furs. Despite the repetitive nature of this theme, Sacher-Masoch was a famous and honored writer during his lifetime, though he died in 1895 lamenting the fact that his literary oeuvre had fallen into neglect.²

Krafft-Ebing seized on Sacher-Masoch’s name in christening his perversion because, he wrote, “the author Sacher-Masoch frequently made this perversion, which up to his time was quite unknown to the scientific world as such, the substratum of his writings” (1950, 132). Sacher-Masoch, it is reported, was not amused at this and would undoubtedly be even less so today were he able to perceive that what he is remembered for is not his literary talents but his sexual proclivities.

In any case, Sigmund Freud accepted Krafft-Ebing’s discovery of the perversion, and in a number of publications he set out to uncover the psychological origin and function of masochism. He mentioned masochism several times in the 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1975 [1905]), and he discussed it as an example of how a drive could turn into its opposite in his 1915 essay “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1957 [1915]).³ But his first focused treatment of masochism occurred in his 1919 “A Child Is Being Beaten,” an essay subtitled “A Contribution to the Study and the Origin of the Sexual Perversions” (Freud 1997 [1919]). This essay is an analysis of the pleasure that people attach to the fantasy of a child’s being beaten. Anticipating the question how common this particular fantasy might be, Freud begins by saying, “It is surprising how frequently people who come to be analyzed for hysteria or an obsessional neurosis confess to having indulged in the fantasy: ‘A child is being beaten’” (1997 [1919], 97). He suggests that the fantasy can be understood if we see it as composed of three distinct phases. The first is a pseudo- or proto-sadistic fantasy in which the subject imagines, in Freud’s words, “My father is beating a child.” The third is a voyeuristic phase which Freud summarizes as “A number of children are being beaten (and I am watching).” It is the second phase, however, the one he calls “the most important and most monumental” (1997 [1919], 104), that was of most interest to Freud and is of most interest to this discussion. This is the phase in which the original child being beaten

2. For excellent précis of the life and work of Sacher-Masoch, see Deleuze (1989) and Smirnoff (1995).

3. At this stage in his theorizing, Freud saw masochism as sadism turned round upon the subject’s own ego (1957 [1915], 127). He later came to modify this view (1959).

is replaced in fantasy by the person recounting the fantasy; “My father is beating a child” becomes “I am being beaten by my father.”

This phase of the fantasy is labeled by Freud as the explicitly masochist phase, “the essence of masochism” (1997 [1919], 108). This “essence” is the substitution of self for the other. In fantasy, one comes to take the place of the person being beaten so that the child being beaten is the self being beaten. This substitution, says Freud, arises out of guilt: guilt that the child experiences because of the incestuous love that had previously said “He (my father) loves only me, and not the other child, for he is beating it” (1997 [1919], 106). The guilt attached to this love causes it to be repressed. And the effect of this repression is to redirect the pleasure generated by the love from the genitals to a site of gratification that preceded genital organization, namely, “the naked bottom” (1997 [1919], 99). In proposing this redirection, Freud is accounting for two things: that his patients derived erotic pleasure from the beating fantasy, and that the anus, in his view, is a repository of drives that center on control (e.g., 2001b [1924]). The point I wish to highlight in Freud’s analysis is his suggestion that guilt for the object of desire results in a fantasy in which the child being beaten (that is, the powerless) is replaced by the self. It is crucial to keep in mind the pleasure that is produced through that substitution, pleasure that is raised by atoning for a guilty desire for the father (i.e., the powerful).

The libidinal schema adumbrated by “A Child Is Being Beaten” is fully elaborated five years later in Freud’s 1924 paper entitled “The Economic Problem in Masochism.” In that essay Freud distinguishes three types of masochism, “erotogenic masochism,” a “feminine masochism,” and a “moral masochism.” The first of these types, erotogenic masochism, is pleasure in pain, and it lies, says Freud, at the bottom of the other two forms.

The second type, feminine masochism, is the easiest form to observe, he writes, and is a main component of the phase-two masochism described in “A Child Is Being Beaten.” Feminine masochism is evidenced by the desire to be “pinioned, bound, beaten painfully, whipped, in some way mishandled, forced to obey unconditionally, defiled, degraded” (1959 [1924], 257). Freud tells us that “the obvious interpretation of these fantasies and actions” is that that masochist wants to be treated like “a little, helpless, dependent child.” What makes these fantasies and actions feminine is that they place the subject “in a situation characteristic of womanhood, i.e., they mean that he is being castrated, is playing the passive part in coitus, or is giving birth” (1959 [1924], 257). In other words, the “feminine” in feminine masochism means “passive.” This is an old idea—Krafft-Ebing himself described masochism as “a pathological overlay of feminine psychic elements, . . . a morbid exaggeration of certain aspects of a woman’s soul” (quoted in Nacht 1995, 22).

This is the point in a discussion about Freud when social scientists might be tempted to play their trump card of bi-

ological essentialism, using it to wave away his theories on the grounds that they are nothing more than egregious patriarchal ideology masquerading as insight. Clearly Freud often did imply or assert that physical morphology determined psychic development, as did his followers (Helene Deutsch, for example, explained female masochism with the assertion “In my view, this turning in the direction of masochism is part of woman’s ‘anatomical destiny,’ marked out for her by her biological and constitutional factors” [1995, 414]). However, as feminist critics from Gayle Rubin and Juliet Mitchell to Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler have argued, psychoanalysis, its problems notwithstanding, contains a unique set of concepts for understanding human subjectivity—concepts which should be developed, not just rejected or ignored. In that spirit, therefore, rather than arrest the discussion here because we consider Freud a sexist reductionist, we could move beyond this potential impasse by interpreting his remarks on passivity, as Jacques Laplanche suggests (1985, 88), in the sense of “grammatically passive.” This would mean that being beaten signifies being placed in a passive grammatical position (i.e., “I am beaten” as opposed to “I beat”). Such an interpretation seems particularly authorized in this case, especially since all of Freud’s case examples of feminine masochism were men (Dimen 2003, 267).

At the same time, though, it is important not entirely to lose sight of the gendered significance of Freud’s appellation “feminine masochism.” In anthropology, it is not uninteresting that some of the most ardent calls for an anthropology of the powerless are being made by female anthropologists. Edith Turner (1987), for example, has promulgated “advocacy anthropology in the female style, that is, speaking on behalf of a culture as a lover or a mother” (cited in Tedlock 1995, 271). Using a similar trope, Virginia Domínguez (2000) proposes applying “a love-based criterion of value” in assessing the worth of anthropological projects. Inspired by this, the American Anthropological Association meetings in 2001 hosted a session entitled “Challenging Disciplinary Acts through and within a Politics of Love and Rescue.” All of the panelists and over 90% of the audience were women. (This session was concurrent with another titled “Culture and Historical Agency”—no cigar for correctly guessing the gender composition of that panel.) Ruth Behar links what she calls vulnerable writing partly to considerations of how women might “make other women the subjects of their gaze without objectifying them and thus ultimately betraying them” (1996, 28). She ends her book *The Vulnerable Observer* with the suggestion that “anthropology that doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing anymore” (1996, 177). Nancy Scler-Hughes goes so far as to offer “womanly anthropology” as a synonym for the brand of activist anthropology that she advocates.

There are several factors that could explain this trend, including feminist epistemologies that encourage explorations of the personal dimensions of political processes, the fact that female anthropologists are both more likely and more au-

thorized to focus their attention on women and children (who are often the most disempowered in any social arrangement), and the more general cultural expectation that women are responsible for performing what Arlie Hochschild has dubbed “emotional labor” (Hochschild 1983; also Lutz 2002). Hence, that female anthropologists would foreground vulnerability, breaking hearts, and love is culturally unsurprising. But in addition to all this there is the Freudian scheme of things, which asserts that masochism is not really a perversion in women. On the contrary, it is a natural (which is to say, a culturally exhorted) dimension of the female psyche. From this perspective, it is predictable that the libidinal structure of masochism should more readily find expression in the work of female anthropologists.

Freud’s third type of masochism, moral masochism, is characterized, first of all, by its very loose connection “with what we recognize to be sexuality” (1959 [1924], 262). Moral masochism, unlike feminine masochism, is not administered by a loved person. It is the suffering that matters—whether the sentence is cast by a loved or an indifferent person is of no importance. Freud explains that moral masochism arises in the relationship between a subject’s ego and his superego. The superego in Freudian theory, of course, is (or, more correctly, contains as part of itself) the model that the ego strives to emulate—the ideal identity to which the ego aspires and by which it constantly measures itself, but in relation to which it is always found wanting.

Freud explains that the superego is formed as a resolution of the Oedipus complex. This resolution is achieved through the introjection of that which cannot be possessed in reality and must consequently must be renounced—the parents. The introjection of the parental images into the psyche desexualizes them and changes what was formerly object libido into narcissistic libido—that is, it changes what was formerly love for the father into identification with him (for the boy) and what was formerly desire for the mother into identification with her (for the girl).

The precise nature of these transformations has been a much-discussed topic in recent years, primarily because of Judith Butler’s focus on the role that psychic processes of melancholy play in choreographing them (1990, 1993, 1997; cf. Žižek 1999:247–312). While it clearly would be profitable to explore the specific gender configurations of these libidinal relationships in more detail, here I simply want to foreground Freud’s observation that in moral masochism, when love for the parents is transformed into identification with them, instinctual “defusion” takes place (Freud 1959 [1924], 264). In other words, the aggression toward the parents that was formerly commingled with libido becomes incorporated into the superego and turned around on the subject’s self. Freud explains that the superego “has retained essential features of the introjected persons [i.e., the parents], namely, their power, their severity, their tendency to watch over and punish.” While in normal development the installation of the superego is “the origin of morality in each one of us” (Freud 1959 [1924],

265), in instances of moral masochism this punishing relationship between the superego and the ego becomes resexualized, re-Oedipalized, so that it comes to take pleasure in the pain inflicted on it by the superego: fear of punishment gives way to the wish for it.

My argument is that these different forms of masochism are intermingled in anthropology in different ways. I have already suggested that the kinds of phantasmic substitutions that Freud outlines in “A Child Is Being Beaten” and that he sees as integral to feminine masochism are more readily available for conscious articulation to female than to male anthropologists because their dynamics generate less tension in the culturally raised psyches of Western women.

It also seems possible to develop the argument that Freud’s moral masochism is an integral part of the process of becoming recognized as a professional anthropologist. Fieldwork, for example, is commonly presented as being (and, in many cases, felt to be) a punishing puberty ritual: one might recall the commonplace trope of likening anthropological fieldwork to, as Susan Sontag put it, “the puberty ordeal which confers status upon members of certain primitive societies” (1966, 71). I suggest that the psychic structure of that ritual might be read as one of Freudian introjection and the creation of a superego: the anthropological “fathers” (from Boas and Malinowski on) become introjected into the novice anthropological self through fieldwork. Once introjected, they retain, as Freud notes, “their power, their severity, their tendency to watch over and punish.” They never stop punishing, as all of us who have ever had a Ph.D. thesis examined, an article peer-reviewed, or a book reviewed know. And yet, despite the severity of the punishment and the continual anxiety that we will never live up to the greatness of the fathers, we continue to do anthropology; we continue to try. Might this not be a textbook case of fear of punishment transforming into pleasure in punishment? The truly important thing, however, for the point I am developing is this: that the process I am describing is one that occurs between individual anthropologists and anthropology as a discipline. The people encountered and studied during fieldwork are merely facilitating surfaces on which the anthropological Oedipal relationship is resolved.

Oedipus in Anthropology

In psychoanalytic theory, then, masochism is one means of resolving the Oedipus conflict. I will now try to develop what I see as the dynamics of the anthropological Oedipal resolution and show how it in some senses involves the elision of the people we study. I will do this in the somewhat counterintuitive way of examining the work of three scholars who are well-known partly because they emphatically exhort us *not* to elide the people we study. These scholars all urge us to study and identify with, or even “as,” the powerless, the weak, and they develop arguments that criticize scholarship that does not do so. They call for political and epistemological change, and they position their own arguments, either im-

plicity (in the case of James Scott) or explicitly (in the case of Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Unni Wikan), as being better and more ethically grounded than the work of social scientists who engage in other kinds of enterprises.

Before discussing these scholars' work, though, I need to acknowledge that the words "masochism" and "masochist" do not generally have positive or neutral connotations. This means that the potential for misinterpreting what I am about to argue is great. In order to forestall certain misunderstandings, I offer three explicit caveats.

The first is that this discussion of what I am calling "masochist anthropology" is not intended facetiously. I am not mocking political engagement, nor am I suggesting that masochist anthropology is delusional, sinister, or bad—indeed, if an explicit evaluation were demanded, I would respond that I think it is, on the whole, good. Furthermore, I would not exempt my own work, which has focused on economically vulnerable villagers in Papua New Guinea and a group of people in Brazil who are subjected to multiple abuses, from the critique I develop here (Kulick 1990, 1998). My argument about masochist anthropology is not that it is personal. My argument is that it is *structural*.⁴

My second caveat is that in psychoanalytic theory, as I have noted, masochism is classified as a perversion. It is important to be clear about the fact that, besides its more quotidian meanings, the word "perversion" also has a technical meaning. In psychoanalysis, a perversion is not so much a stigma as it is a structural category.⁵ Psychoanalysis has always insisted that human sexuality is fundamentally perverse (recall Freud's assertion that the sexual instinct in all children is "polymorphously perverse" (Freud 1975 [1905], 100). "Perverse" here means that human sexuality is anything but the natural unfolding of an invariant biological program. On the contrary, all human sexuality (and, in consequence, all human subjectivity) is an achievement, one that, moreover, is profoundly unnatural: it is developed in social interaction and shaped by social forces and conventions—it is, in a word, cultural. "Perversion" in its more specific sense also has a particular diagnostic structure. One way of putting this is to say that perversion is a particular position in relation to an Other. It is a particular way of desiring an Other and deriving

pleasure from the relation one creates with that Other. What makes particular relations "perverse" in psychoanalytic theory is partly that they are sexual without necessarily being genital and partly that the desiring agent confuses what the Other means to the agent with what the Other means to him or herself.

Both those caveats are about structure, and they lead directly to my third caveat, which is that my focus on the three writers on whose work I comment is in no way intended as a personal slur. Anyone who manages to reduce this essay to a name-calling game ("Kulick says that Nancy Scheper-Hughes is a masochist") has missed the point. I could have chosen other politically committed and articulate anthropologists to argue my points: Ruth Behar, Virginia Domínguez, Paul Farmer, and Renato Rosaldo all come to mind.⁶ I have selected Scott, Scheper-Hughes, and Wikan because I find their writing particularly provocative and arresting. The monographs that ground their arguments—Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1985, 1990), Scheper-Hughes's *Death Without Weeping* (1992), and Wikan's *Managing Turbulent Hearts* and *Generous Betrayal* (1990, 2002)—are all brilliant works. *Death Without Weeping* in particular I regard as one of the most powerful anthropological monographs ever written. All three writers have produced texts that are particularly compelling examples of the trends I examine here, and it is for this reason that I discuss them.

These three writers also differ in a number of important ways that both anchor my focus on structure and also suggest variations. For example, one of the differences between them is nationality: Unni Wikan, unlike the other two, is not American. On the one hand, this is important to my argument, since I am not only discussing a particular nationally inflected version of anthropology but also suggesting that the structures of identification I outline will manifest themselves in any definitional struggle over what anthropology is and what it should do. However, the fact that Wikan is Norwegian and

4. "Structural," as Saussure taught us and Sahlins reminded us, is not the same as "ahistorical." The libidinal configurations I discuss here obviously did not arise fully formed with the establishment of anthropology, even if they were present in some sense in the writings of founders of the discipline and will be important in any struggle over what anthropology is and should do. But certainly salvage anthropology and the Marxist-inspired anthropology of the 1970s are not exactly the same as post-1980s identification with or as dispossessed or powerless people. Perhaps anthropologists' encounter with Said's *Orientalism* could be analyzed as a structure of conjuncture which produced the conditions under which the masochist libidinal structure I discuss here could manifest itself more explicitly.

5. This is true of psychoanalytic theory. For an interesting critique of how understandings of perversion can play out in clinical practice, see Dimen (2003, 257–91).

6. That so many of these writers either are Latina/o or work with Latino/Caribbean groups may be nothing more than an artefact of my own reading biases and limitations. Or it may indicate that the people with whom anthropologists work in these parts of the world elicit or demand emotional connection and political commitment in ways that have shaped the anthropology of the region. The writers are also all American, which I suspect is not a trivial detail. In this light it is interesting that Domínguez (2000, 385) has suggested that there is an "apparent leeway given to minoritized scholars in the U.S. academy at the present time" to express emotions such as love in their scholarly writings. In terms of the argument I develop in this paper, Domínguez's suggestion raises the intriguing possibility that minoritized scholars may be structurally positioned in specific ways in relation to masochistic desire. Recent reformulations of psychoanalysis (e.g., Butler 1993; Eng and Kazanjian 2003) stress that sexuality cannot be considered as prior to or somehow more fundamental than race in subject formation. Therefore, it should be both possible and fruitful to explore the relationship between masochism and minoritized subjects in particular national contexts, thus complicating Domínguez's observation and extending it in new directions.

the others are American draws explicit attention to nationality, thus raising the possibility that different national traditions of anthropology might be analyzed as exhibiting different libidinal configurations. Another difference between the three writers is that James Scott's writing is not self-referential in the style of the other two. This, too, is important to my argument, because I believe that Scott's texts are examples of anthropological writing that draws on and activates the same structures of pleasure invoked by Scheper-Hughes and Wikan, even though they do not explicitly highlight his person as an object of identification. Scott's work is also important because it is written by a man. As I noted above, Freud asserted that masochist subjectivities are to be expected in females, and this observation seems borne out in anthropological writing. However, most versions of psychoanalysis would also argue that male and female are culturally socialized subject positions, not biological givens. This means that while masochism may be a feminine structural position, it is not one that all females must occupy or desire to occupy, nor is it one that males cannot or do not desire to occupy.

What interests me in the texts I will discuss are the fields of desire and identification that are suggested or demanded through the writing—a topic which also requires attention to what is not expressed or expressible (such as the writer's own position within and in relation to the discipline of anthropology). My concern is not to psychoanalyze or second-guess particular writers in the style of analysts such as John Wengle (1988) or Marianne Torgovnick (1990).⁷ However, I do discuss the textually invoked personages of Scheper-Hughes and Wikan because they themselves make it a point to base their claims to authority on their own experiences and opinions. I also use these writers because my sense is that all of them relish a good argument. It is my hope that, rather than taking offense that their names are linked here with what I am calling masochist anthropology, they may find the thought intriguing.

That said, let me begin with James Scott. Scott is a political scientist by training, but he holds an appointment in anthropology at Yale University. He has conducted long-term fieldwork among peasants in Malaysia, and he often returns to that ethnographic material to discuss theories of hegemony, resistance, and power. Scott's ideas about power and powerlessness and his phrase "weapons of the weak" have entered the anthropological canon in much the same way as concepts such as "imagined communities," "invented traditions," or

"doxa." His work constitutes required reading for any anthropologist interested in issues of power and resistance.

Scott's basic argument is that social theory has misrecognized the ways in which powerless people resist power. Influenced by both bourgeois and Leninist conceptions about what constitutes political action, social science has seen resistance to power as being about institutionalized politics and class actions led by a vanguard party. This view of resistance, says Scott, marginalizes, trivializes, and misses what he calls "everyday resistance"—practices such as "footdragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on" (1990, xvi). These "weapons of the weak" constitute "hidden transcripts" that are developed "offstage," out of view of the powerful. They are evidence that, Gramscian claims to the contrary, the weak in fact do penetrate and see through hegemonic ideology. More recently, Scott has emphasized what he calls *mētis*, a Greek word which translates as "practical knowledge" or "cunning intelligence" (1998, 313), as a perspective from which we might work to reform state institutions. The main theoretical point that his work makes is that these unrecognized or "hidden" forms of knowledge and everyday resistance are not a substitute for concerted political resistance but, instead, a precondition for it. Furthermore, in order to understand how power can be and is resisted, social scientists need to uncover and examine the hidden transcript. Uncovering this heretofore hidden voice of the oppressed Other will allow social scientists to use that voice to speak against power.

Scott's writing style is detached; he uses the first-person pronoun sparingly. Although we are given glimpses of him interacting in sympathetic ways with his Malaysian informants—discreetly making a large contribution to help a poor man with funeral expenses or spending "much of the previous two weeks threshing paddy along with many of the poorer men in the village" (1985, 8, 144)—he presents himself more as a chronicler and analyst of injustice than as a champion of the poor.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes takes arguments like Scott's for an anthropology of the powerless and pushes the envelope in a much more self-consciously "activist" direction. In her monograph *Death Without Weeping* (1992) and in a number of articles published in the mid-1990s (1994, 1995), Scheper-Hughes has developed a case for what she calls a "militant" or "barefoot" anthropology. Her arguments for a more activist anthropology reappear in various forms in much of what Scheper-Hughes has written since then (e.g., 2000). Tired of anthropology's continued pretense of objectivity and critical of theoretical developments in the discipline that stress transnational, borderless anthropology and that, in so doing, she says, flee from "local engagements, local commitments, and local accountability" (1995, 417), she argues that anthropology, to have any purpose and value at all, must become "active, politically committed, and morally engaged" (p. 417; see also 410, 415, 419). This involves speaking and writing against power, "collud[ing] with the powerless to identify their

7. Wengle (1988) examines the psychological trials that supposedly confront anthropologists during fieldwork (for a critique, see Kulick 1995). Marianne Torgovnick (1990, 227–35) fantasizes about how Malinowski's relation to his own body affected his responses to the bodies of the Trobriand islanders. In my opinion, neither of those exercises is illegitimate; on the contrary, I find them both extremely suggestive. In both cases, the authors are attempting something similar to what I am attempting here, which is an exploration of the libidinal structure of anthropology as a discipline. Their methods differ from mine, it seems to me, but not their goals.

needs" (p. 420), not being afraid to intervene on their behalf, and being willing to "participat[e] in the struggle" (p. 414). It involves being not only anthropologists but also "comrades and *companheiras*" (p. 420). Indeed, a bearing claim in Scheper-Hughes's argument is that barefoot anthropology leads to closer identification with the people with whom anthropologists work. In South Africa she presents herself as being acknowledged not as a professional white foreign anthropologist but as a member of the African National Congress, a comrade in arms (pp. 413, 414). In Brazil, she tells us repeatedly, she is a *companheira*.⁸

Scheper-Hughes's arguments are enormously compelling, but they are also (and I have no doubt that she would be the first to concede this) coercive. She proposes a dichotomy that enmeshes us all in a very specific moral discourse, one in which she reserves for herself a significant power of adjudication. In her view, there are two kinds of anthropologists: the "active, politically committed, and morally engaged" and the other. But who among us would like to be seen as one of those other ones? Who would want to be regarded by our students, our colleagues, or the people we work with in the field as passive, politically uncommitted, and morally disengaged?

Aside from its coerciveness, what is particularly provocative here is the way in which Scheper-Hughes's dichotomy generates a particular field of desire that structures identifications and subjectivities. The images that she crafts to give form to that field are striking ones. "I am tempted to call anthropology's bluff," she proclaims at one point (1995, 410), thereby heroically figuring herself as a kind of mouse that roars, a scholarly version of the "little guy" so beloved in American mythopoeisis, the one who stands apart from his cowering co-workers, throws back his shoulders, and dares to speak Truth to the destructive hypocrisy of Big Business, Big Government, or, in this case, Big Anthropology. In another passage, Scheper-Hughes uses a similar rhetorical tactic to perpetrate what arguably can be read as an expression of love and caring and/or as a shameless blurring of her own position as an upper-middle-class white American professional with that of an impoverished Brazilian mother. Referring to a Brazilian girl she knew who died during her fieldwork, Scheper-Hughes tells us that "three-year-old Mercea died abandoned by both her mother and her anthropologist during the Brazilian Carnival celebrations in 1989" (1992, 409). She creates a similar elision in her presentation of an

8. This foregrounding of identifications other than or in addition to that of an anthropologist is a feature of Scheper-Hughes's work that has continued in her more recent writings. Thus, in an article about sexual abuse in the Catholic church, she points out that she writes not as an expert on child sexual abuse and not only as an anthropologist but also as "a heterodox Catholic woman" (1998, 295–97). In a report on how her university department handled the repatriation of the famous Native American Ishi's brain and ashes, she says that her actions are those of "a citizen rather than as a specialist, though obviously informed by anthropological principles" (2001, 12).

event in South Africa in which she, a total stranger to the community, removed from the community a young man who had been punished for theft. In justifying her (apparently unsolicited) action, she invokes the mother of the young man and declares that she acted in her place (1995, 414). At still other times, she places herself in the role of moral conscience, denouncing what she calls "lapse[s] in moral courage" (1995, 410) in the work of her medical-anthropologist colleagues.

An effect of these scenarios is the crafting of an image of "Nancy Scheper-Hughes," defender of righteousness and righter of wrongs, who courageously confronts the languid voyeur that is anthropology and stands at the forefront of what she proclaims will be a "new cadre of barefoot anthropologists" (1995, 417), anthropologists who will help bring enlightenment and justice to the world.⁹ While we might applaud the political and ethical concerns that explicitly motivate these sentiments, part of what makes them problematic for some (e.g., Crapanzano 1995; Kuper 1995; Nader 1995; O'Meara 1995; Marshall 2000) may be that they can be read as an expression of a desire to position their writer as a kind of Freudian super-ego for anthropology itself—an ego-ideal that we should all aspire to imitate as best we can but in relation to which we must, necessarily, always be found wanting. Part of the discomfort may also arise from the perception that that ego-ideal is profoundly re-gendered: the founding fathers here are supplanted by a mother.

Scheper-Hughes's calls for ethical commitment and local accountability build a chorus of sorts with the work of Unni Wikan. In her monograph on Bali (Wikan 1990) and most pointedly in a couplet of articles that appeared in the *American Ethnologist* and *Cultural Anthropology*, Wikan encourages anthropologists to conduct what she calls "experience-near anthropology" (1991, 1992). Her arguments are different from Scheper-Hughes's in that they are not as self-consciously or explicitly "militant", nor do they call on anthropologists to "become alarmists and [moral] shock troopers" (Scheper-Hughes 1995, 417). However, they are similar to both Scheper-Hughes's "barefoot anthropology" and Scott's focus on the "hidden transcripts" of the weak in that they fault traditional anthropological understandings of culture as being "built on a complicity between people in power and us. They were the vocal ones, the eloquent, the experts we sought out while the poor, the infirm, women, and youths were disregarded and uninformed about 'truth'" (Wikan 1991, 291).

In her most recent work on immigrants in Norway, Wikan, like Scheper-Hughes, presents herself as a scholar who "run[s] the risk" (2002, 78) of saying things others dare not say. She "speak[s] up on . . . behalf" (p. 9) of people who cannot or

9. I invoke superhero imagery here purposely. Although Sontag (1961) drew attention to "the anthropologist as hero" many years ago, I think that it remains one of the great unexplored (repressed?) tropes of anthropological writing. A recent book by John Jackson Jr. recognizes the pleasure generated by this fantasy and humorously exploits it in the adventures of his alter ego, an intrepid fieldworker imbued with "super-scientific powers" whom he calls "Anthroman©®™" (Jackson 2005).

will not speak for themselves, thereby helping to “break the silence” (p. 7) and eliciting “gratitude and relief” (p. 77) from audiences who want to hear her say the things that others are afraid to.¹⁰ This image and the work in which it features are consistent with Wikan’s urgings that anthropologists “modify . . . die-hard habits of work and mov[e] down on the social ladder away from association with culture’s spokesmen and evocateurs to more ordinary people of humdrum, inostensible concerns” (1991, 290). We should do this, she tells us, by rejecting “anthropology’s romance with words, concepts, text, and discourse” (1992, 465) and “transcend” language—“go . . . beyond the words” (p. 466). Indeed, in an argument that resurrects Margaret Mead’s disarmingly kooky assertion that anthropologists do not need to “speak” languages in the field but only need to “use” them (Mead 1939),¹¹ Wikan goes so far as to suggest that learning the language spoken by the people in our field site might actually be counterproductive for understanding: “Improving one’s language facility does not necessarily improve one’s accounts or understanding,” she insists. “It may even have the opposite effect” (Wikan 1992, 474).

Instead of language, or of cognitively knowing, Wikan believes that anthropologists need to focus more on what she calls “resonance”—the “feeling part of thought” (1991, 299). She argues that anthropologists will be able to better grasp the “lived experience” (p. 292) of others if we use our own experiences to wordlessly intuit the intentions of others. This empathetic connection will give us better access to and understanding of the “voice of ‘the other’ ” (p. 192). And like Scheper-Hughes’s identification of herself as a South African activist and a Brazilian *companheira*, Wikan’s resonance with

10. Wikan’s descriptions of her own behavior have elicited a predictable response in at least one reviewer. Employing language that Wikan might have used self-referentially, the reviewer described *Generous Betrayal* as both “a call to arms” and “a depth charge to the heart” (Carter 2002, 405).

11. In a debate with Robert Lowie over the role of language in anthropology, Mead (1939) asserted that all the Boasian fuss about learning native languages was intimidating to anthropology students and just plain wrongheaded. It wasn’t necessary. All you needed to do, she advised (in a wonderful “Listen cookie” voice that comes from and invokes another era, when natives knew their place and didn’t dare mess with bossy anthropologists), was learn enough of the vernacular language to do three things: (1) *ask questions* (in order to “get an answer with the smallest amount of dickering” [1939, 198]), (2) *establish rapport* (“Especially in the houses of strangers, where one wishes the maximum of non-interference with one’s note taking and photography” [1939, 198]); and—this is my favorite—(3) *give instructions*: “If the ethnologist cannot give quick and accurate instructions to his native servants, informants and assistants, cannot tell them to find the short lens for the Leica, its position accurately described, to put the tripod down—sun from the place where the ceremony is to take place, to get a fresh razor blade and the potassium permanganate crystals and bring them quickly in case of snake-bite [wouldn’t you love to know how she barked this in Iatmul?], to boil and filter the water which is to be used for mixing a developer,—he will waste an enormous amount of time and energy doing mechanical tasks which he could have delegated if his tongue had been just a little bit better schooled” (1939, 199).

people in her field sites leads her to argue that it doesn’t just make her a better fieldworker. It goes much further: her ability to resonate with others has led those others to see her “more as a decent human being” (1992, 470). This is a claim (like those made by Scheper-Hughes and, in more dispassionate language, by Scott) that ultimately must be taken to be an authoritative assertion about the nature and status of her anthropological texts.

The Anthropological Family Romance

In thinking about the writings of Scott, Scheper-Hughes, and Wikan, it is helpful to begin with the fundamental structuralist insight that the true nature of things lies not in themselves but in the relationships between them and that an element has significance only in relation to all the elements in the system. The elementary structure, if you will, at work in the cases I am discussing here consists of at least four terms: the anthropologist, the powerless, the powerful, and the discipline of anthropology. In order to understand any of these terms, it is necessary to understand how all of them relate to one another. To this basic structuralist truism and to the Freudian understandings of identification that I have outlined I would also add Jacques Lacan’s redeployment of Freud, in which he insists that desire not be conceived as something originating in and localized in the self, since the source of our subjectivity is not some internal individualized core that grows and sprouts identity. Instead, the source of self is language—a dynamic structure that exists independently of the self but that the self requires in order to exist at all. From this perspective, “desire” is the term for that which we do not have and, in fact, can never really have, since we can never be wholly self-determining. Desire is, then, an address to something outside the self. In this sense, it is always transitive; it is always a relation, always directed at another. Furthermore, it always has two objects: one spoken, the other unspoken. The thing or object demanded is a means of maintaining a certain relation to the Other. The question is, of course, what kind of relation?

At this point, we can return to Lévi-Strauss’s sketch of the structure of anthropology’s relation to power. Since no structural sketch by Lévi-Strauss, of all people, could ever be arbitrary or empty, it is instructive to look closely at what relations he sets up in his brief remarks. He begins by explaining that “anthropology . . . is the outcome of a historical process” (which is to say that it is a system of structured relations, a structure) “which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other.” In other words, anthropology is aligned with power. But it is aligned with power in a very particular way; remember the observation that follows: “Anthropology is the daughter of this era of violence” (1966, 126).

Could a libidinal relationship be stated any more clearly? “Anthropology is the daughter of this era of violence”—not just “the child” of this era but “the daughter.” That anthropology is gendered, conceived as a girl by one of its most

eminent practitioners, is suggestive of many more avenues of exploration than I can do justice to here.¹² It certainly casts anthropology's long-standing anxiety over its relation to the "hard sciences" in a new light. It also implies that Butler's oeuvre, which boils down to a long complex reflection of how the initiatory performative "It's a girl" works in social and psychic life, may have more relevance for anthropology than perhaps has been appreciated. The discursive gendering of anthropology as a daughter resonates with the way the discipline is portrayed in popular culture, in which a cultural anthropologist will almost inevitably be female—in contrast to the archaeologists and physical anthropologists, who most often seem to be swaggering Indiana Joneses. It may go some way toward explaining the attraction of the discipline for women, who nowadays make up the majority of university students and Ph.D.s.¹³ It may also provide us insight into issues such as the construction of the canon in ways that "erase" the writings of women anthropologists (Lutz 1990) and the perception of certain specializations (the anthropology of sexuality and gender, for example, or the anthropology of children) as less "mainstream" than others. In both these latter cases, one might posit a disavowal or a defense against allowing anthropology too openly to manifest its own constitutive conventions.

The interpellation of anthropology as a girl also leads us back to Freud. In my earlier discussion of the term "feminine masochism," I noted that Freud maintained masochism to be a predictable dimension of the female psyche and not, except in extreme cases, a perversion. Female and male are important to Freud because psychoanalysis is centrally concerned with the assumption of gender—how individuals come to assume the position of female or male. As far as this discussion is concerned, his gendered analysis suggests that female and male anthropologists will be differentially configured in relation to the libidinal dynamics of the discipline. We would expect this to express itself in a variety of differences; examples might be the gender of those advocating "a politics of love and rescue" or Scott's more impersonal writing style as compared with that of Scheper-Hughes and Wikan. That said, however, I also noted earlier that "female" and "male" should be interpreted to mean culturally available subject positions rather than biological necessities. This implies that to the extent to which anthropology as a discipline exhibits or evokes alignments and identifications that are culturally coded as feminine, anyone identifying with the discipline will be figured in significant ways as feminine. If we remain within the Freudian frame, this figuring of the anthropologist as feminine authorizes us to say that masochism is not in fact a perversion in anthropology—at least not one that needs to remain un-

acknowledged for the discipline to be able to proceed and develop. Instead masochism, in a sense, is a predictable or necessary feature of anthropological identity. A real perversion in anthropology would be for the anthropologist to explicitly and guiltlessly identify with power and as the powerful.

Freud's analysis argues that masochistic pleasure is the result of the child's desiring the father but repressing that desire and ultimately deriving satisfaction from having the guilt that it generates be atoned for through punishment. If we transpose this schema onto anthropology, would it be too far-fetched to imagine anthropologists unconsciously desiring the power that inheres in Western capitalism but repressing that desire? After all, as Lévi-Strauss reminds us and as many others have observed, anthropology is by no means separate from Western colonialism and capitalism. On the contrary, it is dependent on them for its existence. And individual anthropologists working in the West are rewarded by the legacies of colonialism and the continued workings of capitalism. This includes all of us who work in the academy, and it certainly includes anthropologists like Nancy Scheper-Hughes and myself, who work at elite American universities and whose yearly salaries may exceed the *lifetime* earnings of many of the people we have worked with in Brazil.

Proceeding with the Freudian schema, we might continue: would it also be too far-fetched to imagine that anthropologists perceive the "beatings" that people around the world take (recall phase one of Freud's analysis: "My father is beating a child") but phantasmatically substitute themselves for the ones being beaten (recall Freud's phase two: "I am being beaten by my father"), thereby both repressing the desire they feel for capitalist recognition and rewards and deriving pleasure from the substitution because the punishment inflicted on those others (which is to say, in this fantasy, on the self) is punishment that atones for the guilty desire?

We might also ask, furthermore, whether the kind of substitutions which Scheper-Hughes's work exemplifies when she blurs the differences between herself and women with whom she works would be *possible* unless there was some kind of libidinal structure at work in anthropology that made those substitutions desirable and intelligible? This is not just a question, as it is more usually posed in epistemological terms, of the anthropologist's getting to know a group of people intimately and therefore being able to construct more reliable knowledge about them. I am querying the economy that underlies claims not just to understand or empathize or politically ally oneself with but actually to *be*. And I am suggesting that the structure in question is a particular economy of desire that permits certain substitutions (of the anthropologist with the powerless) as felicitous or possible and blocks others (of, for example, the anthropologist with the powerful) as infelicitous or impossible. I would also suggest that this libidinal economy may be an important root of the incessant anthropological fear of "going native." Anxiety about "going native" seems to belie a deep-seated terror that the anthropologist might not just substitute him- or herself for the child being

12. I am grateful to Emily Martin for pushing me to think through this and other dimensions of the gendered analysis I present here.

13. According to one recent survey, by the late 1990s, women were receiving about 55% of the anthropology doctorates awarded in the United States (Patterson 2001, 162).

beaten (i.e., the powerless) in fantasy but actually *become* that child in conscious life. If, for example, instead of just phantasmatically identifying with (or as) poor Brazilian and South African mothers, Scheper-Hughes were to quit her university job, divest herself of her savings and property, move to the Alto do Cruzeiro or the Chris Hani squatter camp, and live there as a (m)Other, her actions would place her beyond the realm of intelligibility. In terms of the libidinal economy by which I am suggesting anthropology operates, such a move, going native, would not be feminine or moral masochism; it would be psychotic—an overflowing and disgorging of the unconscious into the realm of the lived. Hence the fear.

I have one more point to make about masochist anthropology: that it can be seen in some senses as a controlling kind of anthropology, a disguised will-to-power. A common misconception about masochism is that it is about being reactive and passive. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. One of the first points stressed in all contemporary writing about sado-masochistic sex is that, appearances notwithstanding, it is the masochist who controls the sex, by setting limits on the types of activities that can be engaged in, by signaling participation or disinclination, and by deciding when it is time to stop (Kulick 2003a). Freud himself argued from the beginning that masochism does not exist independently of sadism and that in the psyche there is a combined entity “sado-masochism” involving a fantasy of a dyadic transaction of “dominating/being dominated” that can go in either direction, often in the same person.¹⁴ In his analysis of Sacher-Masoch’s oeuvre, Deleuze argues at length that Freud was wrong to link masochism and sadism, but he ends up making a similar point as Freud when he observes that in Sacher-Masoch’s novels the masochist is not placed in a passive position vis-à-vis anyone else. On the contrary, the masochist is the active fashioner of the relationship: “In all of Masoch’s novels,” Deleuze writes, “the woman, although persuaded, is basically doubting, as though she were afraid” (1989, 21). Similarly, in her analysis of masochism in T. E. Lawrence’s (aka “Lawrence of Arabia”) writings, the literature and film scholar Kaja Silverman notes that Lawrence actually dominated his Arab companions by virtue of his greater capacity for enduring pain (1992, 324). Furthermore, although Lawrence had a gargantuan desire for masochistic suffering (in a letter from 1922, for example, he confessed to feeling a “horrible satisfaction” whenever he was able to “cut a piece out of [himself] and draw the edges neatly together”

14. An obvious example of this in anthropology would be to return to my earlier suggestion that anthropologists come to introject the founding fathers as a process in the formation of our anthropological superegos. One would be unobservant if one did not also remark that the same individuals who have undergone this process and who regularly submit themselves to potentially punishing professional scrutiny are also the ones who routinely punish others when they decide on admissions and hires in their department, decline to write letters of recommendation or write tepid ones, and review manuscripts, grant applications, and books.

[p. 314])), he sought out and endured this suffering without renouncing activity (p. 324). Interestingly, and with clear resonance for anthropological trends, Silverman labels this type of masochism with a particular name: “reflexive masochism.”

This last point is really my greatest concern about anthropological attractions to the powerless as they are expressed by the writers I have discussed. Without questioning for a moment the political engagement both encouraged and practiced by Scott, Scheper-Hughes, and Wikan, we would be naïve to ignore the ways in which the anthropological investment in the powerless is not only about the Other but also about the self and the self’s relation not only to the Other but to its own academic and social structures. Unless this relation is recognized, there is a risk that the Other will function as a prop or a substitute for the self, facilitating the self’s coming to terms with its own relation to power and deriving pleasure from doing so. This kind of relationship need not be pernicious, and it may well be unavoidable. But by making it explicit we can at least debate it. Furthermore, an unsettling corollary of the idea that masochist fantasies may play any role at all in anthropological pleasure (and this is pertinent even if it is granted that they are not completely irrelevant, whether or not one accepts my suggestion that they are importantly structuring) is the idea that *sadistic* fantasies also resonate, perhaps in even more deeply disavowed senses, in the anthropological unconscious. How such fantasies are articulated in the practice of different anthropologists is a question that might generate some interesting reflection and debate.

In any case, I believe that the libidinal dynamics that suffuse anthropology merit more interrogation and scrutiny than they have received until now. I also believe that they require scrutiny in somewhat different terms than anthropologists are used to. A few years ago I published an article in which I used my data from Brazil to critique James Scott’s framework (Kulick 1996; see also Kulick and Klein 2003; Gal 1995). I suggested there that his theory of “hidden transcripts” inaugurates foreclosures that have unfortunate consequences for our understandings of oppressed people who avail themselves of “weapons of the weak” that might not meet with liberal approval. While I still think that those kinds of criticisms need to be made and extended, I also think that work like Scott’s could productively be analyzed in terms of the desire it exhibits and the considerable pleasure it generates in those who produce and consume it.

Once again, to phrase the enquiry in this way is not to suggest that considering libidinal economies is more important than engaging in political action, nor is it to belittle or denigrate the anthropological contributions and the political agendas of scholars like Scott, Scheper-Hughes, and Wikan. It is to illuminate anthropological work by seeing it not only in the terms encouraged by its own diegesis as a relation between anthropologist and the powerless but also as elements in a constellation that includes anthropology as a discipline and capitalism and that also includes desires and pleasures that are not or cannot be openly expressed. By looking at this

particular “family romance” and staking out the libidinal investment that is raised through it, I hope I have made it clear that a fuller investigation like this one would not trivialize the work of the scholars I have discussed. I think, rather, that it would complicate that work and enrich it by helping us to think about the different kinds of positions and investments that are materialized by it, but that also are assumed, but-tressed, hidden, or blocked by it. By making sure that these elements are included in our discussions, we will not solve the problem of what Anthropology wants, any more than Freud ever solved “the great question” of what Woman wants.¹⁵ But that failure, itself, might contribute to making anthropological investment in the powerless even more focused, innovative, self-critical, and powerful than it already is.

Acknowledgments

This paper has had a long gestation. I began presenting versions of it several years ago, but I hesitated to submit it for publication out of concern that the scholars I discuss might interpret it as belittling their scholarship and political engagement—something that, I repeat, is not at all my point. The comments and advice from the participants of the seminars in which I presented the paper eventually convinced me that I should try to publish it, and they also helped me see where and how I needed to strengthen the argument. I am especially grateful to T. O. Beidelman, Deborah Cameron, Muriel Dimen, Jonathan Friedman, Dieter Haller, Mark Harris, Aisha Khan, Bruce Knauft, Fred Myers, Esra Ozkan, Joanna Overing, Ben Rampton, Bambi Schieffelin, Christopher Stroud, Emily Yates-Doerr, and especially Emily Martin for their critical comments at various stages. I also thank the five anonymous reviewers and Ben Orlove, whose suggestions for improvement were enormously helpful. Rebecca Howes-Mischel, Aminata Maraesa, and Stephanie Sadre-Orafai assisted me with literature searches. The standard caveat that all remaining faults are the responsibility of the author applies emphatically here.

15. The quote from Freud is from Ernest Jones’s biography, which reports that Freud “said once to [his former patient, friend, and benefactor, the psychoanalyst] Marie Bonaparte, “The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is ‘What does a woman want?’ (*Was will das Weib?*)” (Jones 1955, 421). My translation of the German question differs from that in Jones’s book but is a common one in the literature on psychoanalysis and women.

Comments

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Kulick, both individually and together with Deborah Cameron, has been producing important, provocative, and highly original work. “Theory in Furs” is no exception, as Kulick uses Freudian theory to ask, “What is the libidinal structure of anthropology?” This is an awkward question because it invites us to examine things that are more comfortable to ignore. According to Paul Ricoeur (1970), psychoanalysis is the “hermeneutics of suspicion”: the very nature of psychoanalytic inquiry encourages us to suspect what people say about their desires. Kulick applies this hermeneutics of suspicion to the desires that are acceptable, even obligatory, within contemporary anthropology. Anthropologists, especially feminist anthropologists, proclaim their desire to identify with the powerless; they even declare their love for the weak. Kulick, skillfully employing Freudian concepts, warns that the outward love may involve other complex desires.

Kulick concentrates on anthropology as a discipline. He emphasizes that he is talking not about personal desires but about those that are structurally in-built into the position of the contemporary anthropologist. One might argue that any such libidinal economy subsists within a political economy. Anthropology as a discipline depends on a context of university funding, grants, careers, etc. Although it may possess unique features that possibly make it susceptible to structural masochism, it also shares a political economy with other social sciences. In consequence, many of Kulick’s comments also apply to psychology, especially that branch now called “critical psychology.” Today critical psychologists often claim to empathize with their research participants, suggesting that the aim of their research is to “empower” those participants. It is as if the power and status of the researcher were being “wished away.” This can be particularly striking when critical psychologists (or advocates of “critical pedagogy”) write about their own teaching. They will tend to write about creating spaces for discussion, empowering disadvantaged students to speak, and so on (e.g., Maguire 2001; Nightingale and Neiland 2001). By and large, such discussions are characterized by a curious but central omission. The teacher’s exercise of power through the grading of students is not discussed. As academics, we do not write about how we exercise power over our students in order to produce the records of unequal achievement that are demanded by our own employers and by the prospective employers of our students (Billig 2003). We do not desire to think of ourselves as functionaries who are paid to exercise this power on behalf of others.

There are similarities here with the structure of desire that Kulick identifies in anthropology. In both cases there is a

denial or textual repression of one's own power, as well as identification with the powerless. Moreover, the denial of power is directly connected with its exercise. Today, academics achieve position, status, and increased earning potential through scholarly publication. There is an academic market for writings that display empathy, good-heartedness, and radicalism. Although this market may be smaller than that for mathematical modelling or computer-aided simulation, it is nevertheless a market. This is not to pass judgement but to state a fact whose implications most of us involved in critical inquiry prefer to ignore. Academic writers who write the sort of brilliant monographs that Kulick discusses are increasing their disciplinary power by creating their identification with the powerless in their own published texts. This is not a matter of bad faith or hypocrisy, as if, with good intentions, the dilemma could be avoided. The good intentions are part of the dilemma that reflects the contradictory political (and libidinal) economy of contemporary academia.

The virtue of Freudian analysis—or at least the sort of reformulated Freudianism that both Kulick and I are drawn to (Billig 1999)—is that it draws attention to beliefs that are routinely overlooked. The idea that radical social scientists should identify with those whom they study takes something very important for granted: namely, that the social sciences should study the powerless. It does not say how one should study those whom one might wish to disempower—such as the extreme right-wing groups that I studied many years ago and or that Kathleen Blee has recently examined (Billig 1978; Blee 2002). Moreover, the emphasis on studying the powerless leaves a huge gap in the contemporary social sciences: the direct investigation of the powerful and their ways of exercising power.

Kulick, with his idea of a disciplinary libidinal structure, helps explain this gap. We wish to deny those elements in ourselves that we might share with the powerful. The paradox is that social scientists will really take a risk of becoming professionally threatened when they study the operations of power close to home in their own departments, universities, and disciplinary institutions—and when power is attributed not just to powerful “others” but also to the professional self. That will be uncomfortable because it will threaten the desire of academics, especially the powerfully successful, to appear as the powerless good guys.

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I suspect that many anthropologists will hate Kulick's essay. As someone who periodically takes risks, I appreciate his courage in publishing it. But is this essay really about the pleasure anthropologists derive from the powerless, and is its goal critical, political, or ethical? So much of the writing stays on

the descriptive-analytic level that there is, in my view, much room for speculation.

Kulick seems to argue that anthropologists derive enjoyment, even that more physical version we think of as pleasure, from “the powerless.” The kind of pleasure suggested here is not sexual per se but libidinal nonetheless; it enriches the life experience of the anthropologist at the expense of those Kulick assumes to be “the powerless.” I read all this as very critical of the practice of anthropology and key to his essay, whether or not I accept his apparent premise about the people, places, and communities within which many anthropologists live, love, act, and do fieldwork.

Yet for most of its pages, “Theory in Furs” comes across as an exploration of Freud's notions of pleasure (especially masochistic pleasure) and as an examination of analytic distinctions Kulick considers useful in understanding why some anthropological motivation seems masochistic to him. Toward the end, the essay reads like a controlled critique of empathetic claims by scholars explicitly framing their anthropological work in terms of political and economic power.

Strongest, of course, is Kulick's critique of Nancy Scheper-Hughes, and on first reading I suspected that his primary motivation was disapproval of her impassioned activism. But I now think that a fundamental paradigm difference is more in evidence. What Unni Wikan, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, and James Scott have in common is telling, and in this I agree in part with Kulick. But he alternates between making these three appear to be part of a particular and delimited section of the anthropological community and making them seem just good examples of something all too widespread in his view.

I do not think Kulick has quite put his finger on what troubles him, and I wish he had been more direct. Scheper-Hughes, Wikan, and Scott clearly all foreground power, domination, and the injustices of existing hierarchical systems in their scholarly and professional practices today and in doing so resemble much of the contemporary anthropological community in the United States and elsewhere. This, I suspect, troubles Kulick, who seeks to point it out without appearing unthinking or unfeeling toward much of the world. It seems no accident that “Theory in Furs” uses a nonpolitical or economic analytic frame to do its work or that Kulick comes close to stating a sociopolitical critique but arguably never takes that extra step many of us would take. With the former he keeps his type of scholarship in line with his message; form and content remain consistent.

Kulick implies, and I agree, that some anthropologists today do work on projects not easily characterized as questions of power, injustice, and agency, but they do not seem to be the ones attracting attention. Indeed, the days dominated by debates concerning kinship, descent, and alliance, religion and ritual, and cognitive mappings have long since faded, and questions of power and agency, resistance and tactics do seem hegemonic now. Has this gone too far or gone on too long, and, reading between the lines, might this not be the real challenge to us all in Kulick's essay? He is not the first to

think this or imply it, but I hope that his provocative way of broaching the subject will prove productive for us all.

Finally, it is clear that Kulick does not want to be criticized for choosing to think with and through Freud despite Freud's frequently misogynist assumptions and assertions. I think he makes a good case for finding Freud useful, and I may differ with many readers on this point. But I remain troubled by the clearly gendered sociology Kulick offers, which distances him from intellectual and ethical positions he attributes to women anthropologists, disclaimers about cultural gender notwithstanding. Is the "emotional labor" he and others link to women a good thing or a bad thing? Kulick never critiques it directly, but he names it, signals it, and associates it with a kind of anthropology of which he is somewhat more openly critical—with Scheper-Hughes and Wikan serving as exemplars. Why?

We end up here with an essay on "masochism" in the practice of anthropology, offering a veiled but loud sociology of gender in anthropology today that calls into question the politicized engagement of a growing number of anthropologists (many women prominent among them). Whatever Kulick's conscious intentions, it is the work he accomplishes in framing, naming, and threading these points together that leaves me wondering and troubled.

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I commend Kulick both for his arguments and for his audacity. He is certainly correct that "the libidinal structure within which [our] discipline has taken shape" deserves more attention. With particular reference to what he terms "masochist anthropology," he is also right to point out that revealing the libidinal economy manifest in this genre (or trope) does not in itself obviate its insights or value (although he may underestimate the challenge his critique offers). Yet he discerns a "strange reluctance" to undertake the sort of reflexive self-examination he advocates, and it is to this reluctance that I address my comments.

In brief, I believe that Kulick's psychoanalytically informed critique of anthropology's unconscious pleasures can be augmented by putting this critique into institutional motion. Kulick points the way when he notes that masochism is not submission but, oddly, a fantasy of control or domination. With this thought in mind, he suggests that masochist anthropology sets itself up as a sort of disciplinary superego that, in the name of identifying with the powerless ethnographic object, fantasies itself master of . . . anthropology. A self-styled *critique* of power veils an underlying *will to power*.

One might suppose that a discipline that has reveled in various forms of self-criticism would welcome Kulick's ideas. Yet when he wonders whether Nancy Scheper-Hughes identifies with poor Brazilian mothers enough to give up her

university position and join her informants in their powerlessness, one can almost hear the collective shudder automatically activated when a crucial boundary in professional etiquette is crossed. And it is precisely this boundary that accounts for the reluctance of anthropologists to consider how desire inflects our theories and practices. The kind of reflexivity that he is calling for was assiduously avoided in the 1980s "postmodernist" invocation of the term. By all means speak truth to power, divest of authority the Cartesian subject of knowledge, insist upon an unhierarchized hearing for multiple voices, indict anthropology for its complicity in colonialism. But to suggest, as Kulick does, that in our own writings—whatever their self-proclaimed high-minded political scruples—"the people encountered and studied during fieldwork are merely facilitating surfaces on which the anthropological Oedipal relationship is resolved"—is a far more dangerous kind of reflexivity. Here one departs from mere theoretical or epistemological debate toward what etiquette might interpret as personal attack.

I wholeheartedly agree that what Kulick proposes would constitute a more honest, less self-aggrandizing reflexivity than that with which we are familiar. Yet drawing attention to unspoken motives for our practices threatens the doxic constraints of our discourse far more than any critique we might make of capitalism or of the unified subject. Moreover, what Kulick has to say about gender, masochism, and anthropology is discomfiting because it clearly undercuts one of the discipline's major marketing strategies. If in the context of relations with other social science disciplines anthropology's claim to identify with the powerless is compromised as infused with desire (i.e., self-interest), what, other than old-fashioned claims to truth and explanation, can it claim as a particular distinguishing virtue?

On this last point it is fair to point out that the authority of "masochist anthropology" relies less on analysis offered in the spirit of logical evaluation than on assertions of empathy and identification—that is, on what Kulick terms moral coercion. Implicit in his critique is that this rhetorical strategy, by relying on assertions of intention and sentiment, also violates disciplinary norms of discussion. From this viewpoint, Kulick might be viewed as a disciplinary whistle-blower, transgressing our implicit agreement to avoid discussing unspoken desires in order to reveal masochist anthropology's more fundamental transgression of seeking coercively to elevate assertions of sympathy over dispassionate analysis.

In sum, our collective reluctance to follow where Kulick might lead is systemic—it is part and parcel of the sociocultural system that constitutes institutional anthropology. As he does, I hasten to add that pointing out the personal pleasures and institutional advantages of masochist anthropology does not mean that anthropologists should refrain from political advocacy or cultural critique. It follows that championing the powerless is better achieved by exposing and analyzing the forms of their oppression than by claiming moral authority via empathy or identification. Kulick's analysis thus recom-

mends an attentive wariness with respect to the libidinal benefits associated with claims to identify with or speak for the powerless.

To say that Kulick's critique is discomfiting should not be construed as an argument against it—just the opposite. Psychoanalysis, too, is dangerous from the vantage point of the neurotic but potentially therapeutic. Kulick assumes that revealing the repressed desires that structure some of our characteristic disciplinary fantasies can be similarly therapeutic, encouraging a more mature accommodation with an anthropological reality principle. To push the analogy, it will be interesting to see what sorts of defenses his timely and provocative paper elicits.

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Kulick expresses contradictory fears about his intelligent paper and its provocative title: either it cannot live up to the erotic pleasures it promises or it will cause unintended offense. I hope, instead, that those whose hostilities are initially aroused will eventually be seduced by the considerable intellectual pleasures contained within it. He will not win over the utterly humorless, however, for while he is not making fun of us, he does like to tease. The phrase he has plucked from Freud—"A child is being beaten"—is so perfect a satiric summary of most ethnography (and liberal journalism) that I laughed out loud, albeit ruefully, when I read it.

Kulick also deserves thanks for paying attention to Lévi-Strauss. French and Jewish, Lévi-Strauss knew his Freud and offered a perceptive reading of him through the lens of South American myth. Kulick uses Freud to read Lévi-Strauss and in the process illuminates the difficulties I have encountered in my own recent efforts to "study up." I thought it was merely a question of tone: in writing of the rich, one should not sound admiring, yet it seems bad taste to be snide about one's subjects. Kulick diagnoses a larger ill: studying up leads us into precisely that identification with the powerful that we seek to disavow. Thus my persistent anxieties: isn't it immoral when there are so many poor people in the world (*Somewhere, a child is being beaten . . .*)? More selfishly, will other anthropologists want to read a book that isn't about the sufferings of the poor?

Kulick's thesis is illuminating, but it has a few lacunae. Consider, for example, the sticky question of overidentification with our research subjects. He treads carefully here, but I won't: An empathetic intelligence is absolutely necessary for what we do, but when we claim actual—rather than political—sisterhood with the oppressed, we are simply deluded. But what does it matter that for some readers this is so satisfying? This is where "reflexive masochism" needs sharper definition. Kulick gives us two different origins. One is Krafft-Ebing and Sacher-Masoch, a lineage that leads directly to

Mapplethorpe and the suburban couple with the padded dungeon in their basement; the other is Freud and his neurotic Viennese, with their phobias and nosebleeds. In other words, one signifies harmless fun, the other incapacitating illness. Which kind of masochists are we?

We can answer this best if we first confront the other perversion that lurks at the heart of reflexive anthropology: narcissism. Kulick's essay suffers from it a bit: the goals he mentions are "all about us": that we might understand ourselves, or our project, better. He does speak about other parties to our masochistic romance: the anthropologist, the powerless, the powerful, and the discipline of anthropology. But the terms are too static, and the relations between them, whether actual or phantasmagoric, are underdeveloped. Oddly, too, his discussion of "going native" misses the anthropologists who already are. But the most crucial absence is our true interlocutors. The ones who matter are not the peer-reviewers and dissertation committees whom Kulick finds so sadistic but our readers (or viewers). These are the people we betray when we offer only an illusory and oh-so-pleasurable identification with the powerless. This fantasy not only abets the various fictions of capitalism, with its penchant for disguising relations of power; it also supplants an ultimately more satisfying—and more political—possibility: rather than pretending to *be* other people, we might learn how to be *with* them and to engage in an exchange.

Intercourse, rather than identification, could be our goal. After all, the parties in an S and M encounter derive pleasure from each other not because they are the same (the bourgeois feminist model of sex) but because they are not. In racial and ethnographic terms, the goal need not be to play at being brown—the anthropological equivalent of Norman Mailer's "white negro." Instead, one might try to find out what it means to be white—as understood by someone who isn't. This model makes us more like the playful masochist who searches out unpredictable interactions with strangers so as to explore the nexus between pleasure and violence that governs our relations with one another. After all, the alternative Kulick offers us is a grim one: the anxiety-driven neurotic who avoids engagement with others, instead endlessly replaying old fantasies in which the script is already written and the end is passive despair.

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I welcome Kulick's invitation to critical self-reflection beyond the conventional declarations of anthropology's complicity with Western dominance. Stimulating as it is, however, his analysis suffers from the usual Freudian weakness of "one story fits all." The many choices we make in our research are no doubt motivated by factors beyond our "libidinal economies." Our life experiences and circumstances and pure hap-

penance play significant roles in shaping our decisions, and so we need to reflect far more closely on the particulars of our individual trajectories.

As one of the three anthropologists chosen to illustrate Kulick's thesis, let me annotate his interpretations of me. I started my career in anthropology with fieldwork among the poor in Cairo. My wish in going to Egypt was to live among Bedouins in the desert, but the 1967 war between Israel and Egypt prevented me from studying anywhere but Cairo. That in retrospect I have come to count myself lucky for "ending up" among the poor in Cairo is a different thing. When later I chose field sites they were Oman, Bali, and Bhutan—hardly strong candidates for masochistic punishment. So I am perhaps not such a good candidate for Kulick's argument as he thinks. I have not been squarely on the side of the powerless. Experience-nearness is something I try to achieve even with regard to the powerful. My current efforts to understand what motivates people to kill their own daughters or sisters for honour's sake have earned me praise in Scandinavia but also criticism for "betraying the victim" (Wikan 2003). Even my studies of poverty have not been studies of "the powerless." My 37 years of work in Cairo, for instance, have increasingly focused on people *transcending* their disabilities and triumphing in shaping their lives (Wikan 1996; 2004).

Indeed, I question the very dichotomy of "the powerless" and "the powerful," a Western idea reflecting both an ethnocentric disrespect for the lives of others and a cherished Western illusion of our own power of self-determination. Many of the people I have met, even among the poor and disenfranchised, seem to cherish their personal achievements and overlook some of the lamentable limits on their power (except in some forms of political rhetoric).

Am I, then, like so many other anthropologists, prone to "guilt-ridden forms of liberalism" and deriving vicarious pleasure from identification with capitalism and Western power? Perhaps. But I believe Kulick makes too little of the difference between being a national of a superpower or an excolonial nation and coming from a far corner of the world. Is it plausible that I, a girl from a peripheral town on an island in the Arctic Ocean in the small and till recently poor country of Norway should have identified so strongly with Western power as to feel guilt that would shape the nature of my pleasure as well as my anthropological method?

A deeply motivating interest of mine since my return from my first fieldwork has been a rebellion against abstracting the study of anthropology from the experiences of "real people." This has been the main spur to my emphasis on intimacy and resonance in the field. It is not a matter of "wordlessly intuiting," as Kulick phrases it: what I call for is attention to people's actions as reflecting their concerns and their perceived opportunities and not just the form of their words. And it seems to me totally unacceptable ethically, if it is true, for anyone to use the people encountered in the field as "merely facilitating surfaces on which the anthropological Oedipal relationship is resolved."

I have sought intimacy during fieldwork to be in a position to interpret as sensitively as possible what people actually seek and are up to. I know that I have felt commitment to discovering, knowing, and if possible furthering *their* compelling concerns. I come from a society that is still deeply marked by an ideology of social welfare, and I have experienced fieldwork as an extension of my life in society. My authority as a writer of anthropological texts depends on the extent to which this has been successful. Thus I have conceived of my fieldwork also in terms of "duty" and of making a contribution to social justice. "Going public" is not just a preference but an obligation.

Is it fortuitous that I am calling for an experience-near anthropology and a public anthropology at a time "when anthropology is beleaguered by new disciplines like cultural studies, and is searching for new directions, new theories, and new objectives"? No. I believe that anthropology is losing ground and that a reengagement with the real world is urgent if we are not to become voyeurs. Do I make a moral claim to superiority? And is there a disguised will to power in the kind of anthropology I advocate? I don't think so. But there is clearly a will to *act on the world, to make a difference* in terms of social equality and social justice. Kulick's exploration of "what is at stake when anthropologists go barefoot or begin to resonate" will help further a much-needed reflexive critique.

Reply

I agree with Dominguez that "many anthropologists will hate Kulick's essay." One of my biggest fears in submitting it to CA for possible publication and comment was that my anthropologist commentators, eyeing words like "Freud" and "masochism," would hate it so much that they would simply dismiss it, leaving me to devote my entire response to droning on about why psychoanalysis and anthropology are not totally incommensurable projects. That I do not have to do this is something for which I thank the editor of the journal, who chose to send the manuscript to scholars whose work has been crucial in demonstrating how psychoanalytic concepts and approaches can enrich our understanding of social life (Billig, Sangren, and Weismantel) and scholars whose writing, which I much admire, has inspired me to reflect on the topics I discuss (Dominguez and Wikan). I am grateful to the discussants for engaging with the arguments thoughtfully and seriously, even when they found them incomplete or troubling. As Dominguez's prediction about the paper's reception indicates, thoughtful engagement is far from the default response when psychoanalysis is brought up in most anthropological contexts.

Even though none of my respondents professes to hating the paper, I think that it nevertheless might be apt to use

Dominguez's remark about hate as a way of beginning my response. "Hate" is a strong word, the kind of word that makes both psychoanalysts and anthropologists prick up their ears because it suggests links to an underlying system of values. What is it in the paper that "many anthropologists will hate"?

A strong contender is the main question I ask in the essay, namely, "What is the nature of the pleasure that anthropologists derive from the powerless?" This question, as Billig and Sangren observe, is "uncomfortable" or "discomfiting" because it implies that anthropologists' research and writing are influenced by unspoken motives and self-interest. It is difficult to imagine that anyone would actually dispute that this is so; the problem arises when one then proceeds to ask how one might critically analyze this dimension of anthropological practice. The issue becomes perhaps even more discomfiting if it is framed in terms of desire, which in its psychoanalytic sense implies motivations that are not or cannot be acknowledged without fundamental transformations, taking place in the self.

I wager that if my question about pleasure were posed to individual anthropologists, many would answer in the ways that Wikan does and that Billig reports critical psychologists do when they discuss their work: their pleasure lies in empathizing with others, empowering the powerless, reporting abuses suffered by others, etc. All of this is indisputably laudable, but what it leaves unproblematized is the matrices of power that give shape to the discipline and embed it in capitalism and other oppressive structures that anthropologists routinely analyze in relation to the people they study. Dominguez suggests that I am troubled by issues of power, but I would hope it is clear that my text is centrally concerned with power. Weismantel recognizes this when, extending the themes raised in the paper, she cautions that anthropological identification with the powerless "abets the various fictions of capitalism, with its penchant for disguising relations of power." Billig's and Sangren's remarks also explicitly link anthropological identifications and desires with power. In my reading and, I know from their work, in their readings as well, psychoanalytic understandings of desire are fundamentally about power, and hence to ask questions about desire is to ask questions about power: how it is articulated, circulated, and—importantly—disavowed by those in a position to exercise it over others (Cameron and Kulick 2003, 111; Billig 1999; Sangren 2004; Weismantel 2001).

Part of my argument is that this disavowal is a structuring feature of anthropology as a discipline. This point is helpfully elaborated by several of my commentators, and those elaborations should be borne in mind when I respond to Dominguez's query concerning what the essay is "really" about. What is its real goal, she asks? Is it critical, political, or ethical? My answer must be that it is all those things: critical in the sense that it asks us to scrutinize anthropological doxa, political in its implication that power is channeled through the seemingly benign structure of our identifications, and ethical in its call for more suspicion on the terms of our engagement with "the weak." (I would not, by the way, dispute Wikan's

point that "powerful" and "powerless" are problematic terms and that people labeled "powerless" often regard themselves as triumphing and shaping their lives. It seems to me that this is precisely James Scott's point with his "weapons of the weak" concept, and it is the anthropological identification with oppressed people and their triumphs that is the main topic of my essay.) But in addition to being critical, political, and ethical, the goal of my paper, as Sangren explicitly recognizes, is also *therapeutic*, in the sense of helping to bring to conscious awareness and reflection the repressed desires and the unacknowledged identifications that structure what we as anthropologists (can) say and do.

It is important that I address two misunderstandings that have great potential to hinder or derail discussion of the issues I raise. Dominguez feels that my essay "calls into question the politicized engagement of a growing number of anthropologists (many women prominent among them)." She also reads the article as distancing my own intellectual and ethical positions from those I attribute to women anthropologists.

This is a reading that I do my best to forestall in the essay, but since my efforts were not successful, at least in Dominguez's eyes, let me repeat: I am emphatically not "calling into question"—in the sense of decrying, denigrating, or wishing it would stop—the politicized engagement of anthropologists. What I am doing is querying what current discourses and practices of politicized engagement do outside their own diegesis: if we go "beyond the words," to use Wikan's phrase, of politicized engagement in anthropology—if we go beyond the story that this discourse tells us about itself—then what kinds of positions do we see materialized? What positions are buttressed? Which are hidden? Which are blocked? What kind of power, benefiting whom, is routed through this discourse? These, it seems to me, are the kinds of basic anthropological questions we consider it our professional duty to ask of practices we encounter among people we study. Why, then, not ask them about our own practices, especially those practices that, as Billig notes, we consider to be acceptable, even obligatory, within our discipline?

Phrasing the enquiry as a structural critique of the discipline (and not just of a few named anthropologists) means that my purpose is not to distance my own intellectual and ethical positions from those of the women anthropologists I discuss. On the contrary I derive pleasure from and strongly identify with much of the work of those and other women, which is the reason I read their work and write about it. Anyone familiar with my own research, which has focused on gender, sexuality, and the language socialization of children, might reasonably conclude that it has more in common with the concerns associated with women anthropologists than it does with those generally associated with men anthropologists. And while I have never explicitly portrayed myself as an advocate of or activist for the people I have studied, I do hope that people who read my books on Brazilian *travestis* or villagers in Gapun, Papua New Guinea, come away feeling what Wikan terms an intimacy or an empathetic connection with

them, not just an analytic understanding of them. So far from distancing myself from the intellectual and ethical concerns of the women anthropologists I discuss, I regard myself as deeply implicated in those concerns. As I say in the essay, I do not exempt my own work from the critique I develop of others'.

I can end by reiterating Weismantel's pointed query, "Which kind of masochists are we?"—an excellent discussion question and one we can leave for interested others to debate. What it is hard to resist noting, however, is that the "harmless-fun" masochists in Weismantel's example acknowledge their masochistic impulses and make them explicit, thereby facilitating elaboration, engagement, and, perhaps, change. The ones who suffer from "incapacitating illness" disavow their masochistic desires and are unable to discuss or come to terms with them. Which kind of masochists are we?

—Don Kulick

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