

EXERCISE 12.1

Answer

As Silverman (2007: 21) states:

Kahn's joke has a serious significance. It shows that our concern for the 'experience' of creative artists neglects a central ethnographic issue: how their extraordinary products are located in the social organization of artistic practice (in Kahn's case, how the composition of a new song arose from a particular commission).

This means that interviewers' search for an artist's 'inspiration' in personal events serves to displace an ethnographic interest in literary production. As Pico Lyer has pointed out, such interviews now seem more central than the novels themselves. As he puts it: 'In the age of celebrity culture . . . a writer is encouraged to talk *about* books more than to *write* them, and to turn herself into a commodity the books promote (rather than the other way round).

He comments on an aggressive answer by the novelist and critic Susan Sontag to an interviewer's question about her life:

I heard in her response the last gasp, perhaps, of the last generation that grew up with a sense of books, and not the chatter about them, the TV profiles or the Google listings, really mattering or having the power to speak (*The Guardian*, Review, 8 July 2006).