

CASE STUDY

Ethnography as a 'blurred genre'

As in a novel, all participants (or characters) have a name and a face, and they are made individually recognizable so as to encourage the reader's emotional participation (Van Maanen, 1988: 105). Hence the ethnographic text is a 'blurred genre,' halfway between science and fiction: a tendency increasingly widespread in all fields of science, and not only today, as Czarnawska (2004) documents. Consequently, as Geertz acutely points out, by now we have:

philosophical inquiries looking like literary criticism (think of Stanley Cavell on Beckett or Thoreau, Sartre on Flaubert), scientific discussions looking like *belles lettres morceaux* (Lewis Thomas, Loren Eiseley), baroque fantasies presented as deadpan empirical observations (Borges, Barthelme), histories that consist of equations and tables or law court testimony (Fogel and Engerman, Le Roi Ladurie), documentaries that read like true confessions (Mailer), parables posing as ethnographies (Castaneda), theoretical treatises set out as travelogues (Lévi-Strauss), ideological arguments cast as historiographical enquiries (Edward Said), epistemological studies constructed like political tracts (Paul Feyerabend), methodological polemics got up as personal memoirs (James Watson) (1977: 20).

Geertz concludes, 'one waits only for quantum theory in verse or biography in algebra' (1977: 20).