

Text and Social Practice:

Narrative “Longing” and Bisexuality Among the Gebusi of New Guinea

BRUCE M. KNAUFT

Sexual desire is a common theme in the myths and narratives of many cultures. As symbol systems, such texts are amenable to various forms of analysis to elucidate the problems and contradictions underlying the text’s surface representations. Text analyses of this sort may, for example, follow structuralist, deconstructionist, or psychoanalytic paradigms to uncover deeper structures of textual meaning. All too often, however, these forms of text interpretation become locked in cycles of involuted self-reference and self-validation in an attempt to penetrate the hermeneutic and reflexivity of the text.

A form of text analysis is here proposed that moves progressively from interpretation of the text by itself to a consideration of real-life social action patterns and their relationship to narrative content. This approach mitigates the interminable reflexivity of hermeneutic analysis while retaining a critical perspective that penetrates deeply beneath the surface meaning of the text. The proposed method is illustrated through analysis of a Gebusi narrative of heterosexual longing. As interpretation of the narrative is pushed to deeper levels, it becomes increasingly evident that analysis of the Gebusi’s own sexual practices—both heterosexual and homosexual—are crucial to uncovering the meaning and motivational structure of the text. Ultimately, the narrative text and social action become mutual

BRUCE M. KNAUFT is Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

commentaries, with the understanding of each serving to deepen our understanding of the other. Elucidating this relationship facilitates comprehension of underlying orientations—in the present case, the dynamics of Gebusi bisexuality.

The current approach draws selectively on the suggestions of social theorists such as Giddens (1979, 1984) and Bourdieu (1977, 1984) that formal analysis of ideational structures should be supplemented by consideration of social practice—a critical rendering of the concrete strategies, motivations, and experiences of real social actors.¹ This perspective articulates both methodologically and theoretically with a growing consensus among those interested primarily in text interpretation and literary criticism. Semioticians, literary critics, and poststructuralists have often stressed that the reader—or the listener—is an active interpreter whose role is crucial in elucidating the meaning or “sense” of the text (Eco 1979; Culler 1981: ch. 3; Fish 1970; Jauss 1982: ch. 1; Seung 1982: ch. 7, 8). Most such analyses, however, continue to treat the reader as an abstraction; the formal relationship between “the” reader and “the” text is considered without addressing the relationship between the text and readers as real-life social actors (cf. R. Williams 1973).

How to assess the significance of a text to the lives of readers or listeners can be a difficult problem, particularly if one wishes to avoid an a priori commitment to a Marxist or Freudian paradigm. One rather straightforward approach is to intervene directly and ask their reactions and responses through post facto interviews and/or questionnaires. This is of course a common technique of anthropological fieldwork and it has also been tried as a technique of literary analysis (Holland 1975). While this kind of intrusive inquiry is often indispensable, it also adds an extra level of epistemological complexity to the analysis, since retrospective commentary is different both in content and in experience from the textual performance itself. In practical terms, retrospective discussion easily skews or filters out intellectual and emotional content. This is particularly true for texts that deal with sensitive topics such as sexual desire.

One very concrete way to begin penetrating the problem of textual impact is to consider the spontaneous reactions of audience members as they encounter the text in a natural setting. These responses can be behavioral and paralinguistic and are also likely to include what Goffman (1983) calls “fresh talk” during the course of the performance. As is highly evident in the present case, these concrete social responses can be crucial to text interpretation and can

even invert the otherwise apparent meaning of the text. Audience responses are also a point of departure for considering the selective isomorphisms, inversions, and other transformations between the narrative and social experience.

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

The narrative to be presently considered was performed among the Gebusi, a society of some 450 persons living in the lowland rain forest of south central New Guinea (Knauff 1985a, 1985b, in press). First effectively contacted in 1962, Gebusi remain one of the least acculturated societies in Papua New Guinea. Gebusi live in dispersed longhouse communities and coreside on the basis of diverse agnatic, affinal, and matrilineal ties. Several settlements form an integrated kin network and ceremonial community, the population of which averages 89 persons. Subsistence is based on a mixed strategy of foraging, sago processing, opportunistic hunting, and rudimentary horticulture—primarily unfenced banana gardens. Population density is low (2.5 persons per square km) and there is no discernible resource scarcity.

Politically, Gebusi society is extremely decentralized, having no big men, headmen, fight leaders, or gerontocratic elders. Spirit mediumship constitutes the only true leadership role, though the spirit medium has no special influence outside the spirit séance and is not paid for his services. In contrast to many New Guinea societies, status rivalry is markedly absent—there being, for example, no competitive exchanges or compensation payments, even for marriage. (Marriage is ideally based on sister-exchange.) Male demeanor tends to be friendly and self-effacing rather than boastful or aggressive. Gender separation is pronounced in daily activity, and men and women have separate socializing and sleeping areas in the longhouse. Male beliefs in female sexual pollution are formally acknowledged.

GEBUSI NARRATIVES AND “LONGING”

Gebusi men’s narratives are generally told during the evening in the settlement’s central longhouse, where the men of the settlement gather to relax and socialize. Women can hear the narrative from their sleeping section but are effectively excluded from the social dynamics of the performance. Most Gebusi narratives—this one included—are told in a spirit of leisure entertainment and enjoyment,

with the male audience members responding by fantasizing out loud what they would do in the various roles and circumstances depicted. Central to these circumstances, and to the audience reaction, is the notion of “longing” (*fafadagim-da*), which connotes burgeoning sexual desire in the face of social isolation and/or sexual prohibition.

The structure of Gebusi narratives is in many ways similar to that of a morality play, in which the virtuous restraint and chastity of the hero is handsomely rewarded while any profligacy by the villain—called the *Uhowi* in the narrative—is severely punished. Sexual “longing” is a central dynamic in this theme. The hero is almost invariably a young man forced by circumstances to live without the sexual and domestic companionship of a wife. Typically, he is at the same time exposed to the amorous advances of a beautiful young woman. The young man must, however, maintain his chastity for a prolonged period until he can be legitimately married. Premarital or adulterous sex risks violent retribution from the woman’s father or husband, both in narratives and in real Gebusi life.

Given the strong fears of female sexual pollution and of corresponding male debilitation in many New Guinea societies, one might be tempted—considering the text itself—to see Gebusi narratives as an instrument of heterosexual aversion which promotes solidarity and cohesion among the male audience. Analogous arguments have been made in various permutations for a number of New Guinea societies (see Langness 1967, 1974; Allen 1967; Meigs 1984; Meggitt 1976; Keesing 1982; Herdt 1982; and more generally, Herdt and Poole 1982; Whitehead 1986). As mentioned above, Gebusi men themselves espouse in formal terms many of the beliefs found in these cultures concerning the debilitating effects of female sexuality on men.

Correspondingly, it could also be tempting to see Gebusi narratives as a straightforward mode of symbolic male domination, exerting ideological force by the encouragement of male sex antagonism and misogynistic pollution beliefs (see Godelier 1982; Josephides 1985; and more generally, Foucault 1978). While these interpretations are not totally unwarranted (see further below), they vastly simplify the actual state of affairs, considering only the surface of Gebusi narratives. The danger of such an a priori conceptual assessment is increased by the apparently simple structure of Gebusi narratives themselves.

The plot structure of Gebusi narratives is in superficial terms quite close to what Eco (1979) has termed a “closed text.” Closed

texts convey a standard and invariant message, particularly as portrayed moralistically by a virtuous hero. (Examples from American culture include the classic Superman stories and contemporary cartoon heroes of the *Star Wars* variety.) Correspondingly, the central Gebusi character is always an archetypal hero, inexorably and invariably triumphing over the dire obstacles and feminine seductions that beset him; he is imbued with almost superhuman virtue, courage, and perseverance. This predictability of character shows itself in what Eco (1979:120) calls “hunger for redundancy” in the plot, with successive episodes repeating themselves over and over to illustrate a basic “law or universal demand” (1979:119). In the Gebusi case, the invariant maxim is one of virtue and sexual propriety. As evident from the narrative performance below, however, this apparently closed format belies a striking degree of active audience interpretation and response. These responses invert the apparent meaning of the text and become the grounding point for a deeper understanding and analysis of what the narrative is about.

Such an analysis presupposes presentation of the narrative text and accompanying audience responses. The setting in which the narrative was told was a spontaneous and natural one, namely the men’s section of the longhouse during casual evening socializing. The teller was a middle-aged man named Baya. Baya, like the male listeners, also made his own sporadic comments in the role of audience member/responder during the telling of the narrative. Those who made audible comments reflect as a whole the diversity of ages and statuses of the male audience: Winap, 12, uninitiated; Ulibayo, 15, uninitiated; Sagawa, 20, uninitiated; Yaywu, 22, uninitiated; Ubelo, 28, initiated, married; Baya, mid-40s, initiated, widowed; and Bebse, about 50, initiated, married. These persons were of diverse kin relationship/nonrelationship to each other, as is typical of Gebusi coresidence patterns. Collective shouts of amazement or laughter generally included most or all members of the male audience together.

THE NARRATIVE

The narrative performance was tape recorded and then transcribed and translated in the field with the help of monolingual Gebusi informants. In the present rendering, condensed narrative sections are enclosed by brackets, while expansions or clarifications of elliptical passages are set in parentheses. All passages not bracketed or enclosed in parentheses are verbatim from the tape. Audience

comments are indented and italicized and are preceded by the name of the commentator.

[A handsome young man (*wa gisay*) lived with his ugly elder brother, *Uhowi*. One day a beautiful young maiden (*oyfor*) came. Following custom, she had to marry *Uhowi*, as the elder of the two brothers. After the marriage, the younger brother went continually off to the forest, shooting pig and cassowary, and keeping the household very well fed. The *Uhowi*, however, was angry rather than pleased, since it was his own bamboo-tipped arrows that his younger brother used in hunting, and the arrows tended to break as the pierced and dying animal thrashed about. The *Uhowi*—much to the chagrin of his wife—commanded his younger brother to go deep into the forest and cut his own bamboo for arrows.]

The younger brother left on the trail (to cut the bamboo). He had gone just a little way when he heard the pounding of footsteps behind him. He turned around and saw the young maiden (the elder brother's wife). She had a net bag with food that she was carrying (to feed him on the trip).

BEBSE: *She's going off alone to sleep with him!*

"What did you come for?" said the *wa gisay*.

"So you can find the bamboo tips. You don't know the forest (whereas I know where the bamboo tips are). I'll carry a bag of food for you and you can give me your bag with your tobacco pipe and things, too. You'll be alone a long time (if I don't come.)"

"If your husband was coming too, *then* you could come!"

"But your brother said it was all right. He'll stay here because you'll be gone a long time; you shouldn't go alone."

So the two of them (the handsome bachelor and his brother's wife) went up the ridge and up the ridge a long way, until it began to get dark. While the young woman prepared their sleeping places, the bachelor sat and smoked. The woman built a lean-to for them and then went down and got drinking water (in other words, like a solicitous wife would do). When she came back, she took pork and sago from her net bag, giving half of it to the young man to eat and eating half herself. And she said, "You sleep here, and I'll sleep there (right next to him)." She got under the big bark cloth and took off her skirt and laid it to one side.

(*Audience gives big whoops and hollers. Shouts of "Rub Mother's vagina!"*)

"You better put your skirt back on, your husband will be very angry; it isn't good."

"That's all right, we're just sleeping in the forest. I'll just take it off and lay it over there."

BAYA: *I'll claim her and have sex! (Reaches for another man's crotch in a joking gesture.)*

She took off her skirt and laid it down and lay down herself. The handsome bachelor sat thinking of her and then got up and sat alone, wanting just to go cut the bamboo arrow tips.

"Why don't you come here and sleep with me?" But he was sullen and wouldn't sleep.

“I’m scared of my brother’s anger, and so I’m scared to sleep.” So he slept (on the other side of the shelter). But the woman got up and came over to him and hugged him.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m cold so I came to be with you.”

And they slept until morning.

YAYWU: *If someone hugged me like that I’d sure give them sex. I wouldn’t cut the bamboo arrow tips. I’d take my bamboo tip and shove it right in her! (uproarious laughter)*

The maiden reached over across his back to his waist and pulled him toward her and made him sleep with her.

(Yells, loud exclamations)

And they slept together under a single big bark cloth.

(More yells)

Later, she reached over and “hugged” with him again. *(More yells)* Then, when they were really finished, the bachelor curled up and went to sleep.

In the morning the young woman got up but her companion slept. “What are you sleeping for? You have to cut the bamboo arrow tips for your brother. Wake up! Before this, you got up early to shoot pig and cassowary. You should go out and cut the bamboo arrow tips. You should go quickly (or your brother will suspect you’ve been dallying with me). You should be going hunting, so don’t stay there and sleep!” She wanted him to go fast.

WINAP: *He sure had sex with her (to be so lazy in the morning)!*

(Gebusi believe heterosex to be inimical to hunting and to bachelor vigor in general. This is consistent with the sudden lassitude of the young man.)

[The same pattern continues for several days; the seductive woman manages to sleep with the bachelor against his stated wishes. The audience gives strong reaction to these romantic encounters, fantasizing themselves as the man having sex with the young woman. In the narrative, the bachelor becomes progressively indolent, even timid. Finally, they near the site of the bamboo. The bamboo is quite tall and dangerous to cut, since the end of the long stalk careens out at the cutter when it has been chopped through.]

They went along the path (toward the bamboo) but the young man went off scared and started back in the direction they had come. The woman spoke: “That’s the wrong way to the bamboo! Is it you who used to follow paths and go hunting? When you tracked pig and cassowary did you lose the trail so easily? What is it with you? Don’t go that way!”

They went along and saw bushes. They parted the leaves of the plants and saw a trail that led to a ridge. Suddenly, he rushed back to her and hugged her in fear, but she pushed his arms off her.

“What are you doing to be so scared in the forest? How could you hunt? Go back and see what it was!”

BEBSE: *Eeeeeiiiiiii!*

So he went in front and came upon a whole group of corpses standing up.

UBELO: *Rub Mother’s vagina, I’m scared!*

They all had their arms and legs spread out (in rigor mortis).

UBELO: *Mother’s vagina!*

Their hands were clenched and their tongues were hanging out and their eyeballs were bloated. And each had a bamboo pierced through his chest, and there was lots of blood flowing down their bodies. The bamboo had just been cut that morning and there was still blood flowing out of the men's mouths.

UBELO: *Mother's vagina! (others scream out)*

The corpses were standing up there and down over there and all about as the young man looked about.

YAYWU: *I'd be scared that I'd be struck dead, too!*

[Yaywu's comment is directly related to Gebusi belief that if a man has heterosexual prior to battle the arrow tips of the enemy will find the "smell of sex" on him and seek him out. The clear implication to the audience is that the corpses had succumbed to heterosexual seduction and so were killed by the bamboo arrow stalks when they tried to chop them down.]

The handsome bachelor was scared that he too would be struck dead by the big bamboo.

The woman took off her old skirt and put it around his forehead, like a forehead band of dog's teeth.

(More screams)

UBELO: *Did she put it on him like a sorcerer would?*

(Given that the scent of heterosexual will attract the wildly careening bamboo when the young man cuts it, the maiden putting her old skirt on his head will virtually ensure his death if he has indeed had sex with her, which seems in fact to be the case. A woman's "oldest" skirt wrap is the one she wears innermost. As such, it is most exposed to her pubic area and believed most covered with recent sexual secretions. Ubelo's comment is asking rhetorically if the beautiful woman has just been manipulating the situation in order to kill the young man in the end, as a sorcerer would.)

She was spreading her legs apart as she took the skirt to put on him (in other words, exposing it fully to her open vulva).

(More audience cries, yells)

"It's an old rotten skirt, I don't want to wear it."

"Wear it! If you hadn't shot/killed wild pig and cassowary and if you hadn't broken your brother's bamboo arrow tips, then you could refuse it, but you can't (refuse it). Since we left the settlement I've been tired from cutting firewood, making the sago oven, picking the greens, cooking the pig. But you haven't been tired from hunting. So you wear my skirt. Look here!" And he turned his head toward her and she put it on him.

BEBSE: *Woooo! I'm sorry for him!*

SAGAWA: *If it was me I wouldn't have wanted to have sex with (a woman who wore) such an old skirt!*

"Here's where your elder brother cut his bamboo arrow tips, right at the base of the stalk. The stalk next to it is for you. Cut it!"

Finally the young man cut it. The bamboo stalk snapped off sideways at him, but he jumped out of the way and it pierced into the wood beside him.

BEBSE: *He dodged the bamboo! He couldn't have had sex and done that!*

YAYWU: *If he had had sex with her, the bamboo would have pierced him!! But it didn't, so he didn't have sex!!*

(Narrator laughs heartily—having been successful in leading the audience on by innuendo about the bachelor’s sex life, without having ever stating exactly that he did in fact have sex with the young maiden.)

NARRATOR: *It must have been that way after all; if he had had sex with her, he would have been killed!*

The bamboo he cut had been bent, but he had been able to dodge it and it went past him without piercing him.

WINAP: *If he had chopped (alternatively) on both sides of the stalk it would have fallen straight over. (This is a standard Gebusi maxim for safely chopping a tree.)*

YAYWU (*joking loudly*): *If it was me who was chopping the bamboo it would have hit/killed me. (He would have had sex with her and would have been killed as a result.)*

The young bachelor looked around and saw the bent-over head of one of the corpses that had been struck in the chest and killed with a bamboo shaft. His head was hanging down and his buttocks were stuck in the air. There were lots of them there.

(*Yells of excitement and fear from the audience*)

Their bones were showing through, all bloody.

(*More yells*)

YAYWU: *They were the ones who had had sex with her!*

BEBSE: *If they hadn’t had sex with her they’d be all right.*

NARRATOR: *He had “just” slept when she took off her skirt, but those who wanted to make her “work” (make love to her), well, they chopped the bamboo and katoooooo! They were struck dead!*

YAYWU: *They had “seen” her vagina.*

UBELO (*joking coyly*): *If it was me I wouldn’t have had sex.*

[Ubelo is a spirit medium, and spirit mediums have a special injunction to avoid extramarital affairs, lest their spirit wife become angry and leave them, terminating their ability to hold séances. In fact, however, Ubelo was thought to be something of a flirt, and was reputed to have seductive designs on his deceased brother’s widow, hoping to make her his second wife.]

YAYWU: *Yes you would have! You’d have screwed her and screwed her. (Yaywu and Ubelo laugh) . . . If it was me, I’d have thrown it (the skirt) away before chopping the bamboo (to avoid being killed for adultery).*

WINAP: *If you did, she would make you wear it again! If it was me I’d keep it and then “eat” it!! (Double meaning: [1] I’d dispose of the skirt in a nonretrievable way and [2] I’d avoid danger first and then internalize the woman’s sexual secretions, in other words, have sex with her afterwards.)*

(*More laughter*)

ULIBAYO: *If you were that “hungry” you’d have “eaten” it before, on the trail (in other words, would have had sex with her before coming up the trail to the bamboo)!*

(*More laughter*)

YAYWU: *I’m fafadagim-da (sexually pent-up)!*

[The story proceeds with the young woman and the bachelor completing the task of procuring the bamboo tips and the arrow shafting string. They return (without seduction) back to the *Uhowi*'s settlement.]

The young man came up to his elder brother and said, "Here are the bamboo arrow tips for you. I cut them for you."

The maiden said, "The bamboo is from just beside the one you cut." The elder brother was happy. They smoked tobacco together and the younger brother carved the bamboo into arrow tips and tied them in cane shafts and gave them to his elder brother.

ULIBAYO: *He'll go out and shoot a dozen cassowaries now!*

[The woman says:] "I told him not to cut this or that bamboo, but showed him which bamboo and which string to cut. And he cut it well and has come back here now. If he had been hit with the bamboo he wouldn't have come back."

The young man finished carving the bamboo tips and shafted them and gave them to the elder brother. And the elder brother remarried his wife and they all lived together.

The narrative is rich in metaphor and innuendo and shows quite clearly the tension between formal heterosexual prohibitions and audience desires to break these restrictions. A somewhat different perspective, however, results from taking the narrative text by itself, which is how the majority of mythic texts in the anthropological literature are treated. Starting with this somewhat denuded rendition of the text, a structuralist analysis is quite possible, treating the narrative as a set of successively mediated oppositions and substitutions of the basic pattern woman:man :: nature:culture :: sex:chastity (Lévi-Strauss 1964–71; Ortner 1974; cf. Nadelson 1981). Such an analysis yields selective insights as well as certain biases, and can be undertaken as the point of departure for a less formalistic and more pragmatic interpretation (cf. MacCormick and Strathern 1980; Strathern 1981).

A STRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS

The narrative begins with the two brothers, elder and younger, living together. Their cultural life as two males is mediated by the appearance of a young seductive woman, who comes alone from the forest to their settlement. As is appropriate, she marries the elder brother, *Uhowi*. However, the contrast between the ugly *Uhowi* and his handsome younger brother immediately poses the problem of illicit sexual attraction and potential adultery.

Being virtuous, the younger brother avoids entanglement; he allows himself to be displaced by the young woman and occupies himself in the area she herself came from—the forest. He mediates his

relation to the beasts of the forest by using a cultural artifact, his brother's arrows. This poses a new problem, however, since the arrows break when the animals themselves die, to the great irritation of the elder brother. The elder brother proposes to mitigate this problem by withdrawing the arrows that mediate the relationship; he orders the young man to confront nature directly, by chopping down the wild bamboo and fashioning his own arrow tips. The bamboo, however, is a violent natural force that is deep in the forest. The young hero does not know the forest well enough to find the bamboo alone, and he thus requires the mediating help of the young maiden, for whom the forest is home. The *de facto* pairing of the bachelor and his brother's wife in the forest reintroduces the initial specter of sexual impropriety. This problem is now intensified, however, as the moral constraints of the elder brother and his settlement are left far behind.

The social and apparent sexual contact between the man and young maiden in the forest debilitates the young hero. The longer the young man stays with her in the forest, the weaker and more feminized he becomes. He gets indolent, scared, and loses his manly hunting skills. The woman, in contrast, becomes more aggressive, instrumental, and bold. The man's progressive demise is consistent with Gebusi's formal beliefs about the antipathy of male vigor and female sexuality, alluded to in the audience comments. The male-female reversal in the context of the naturalizing forest reaches its epitome in transvesticism, when the woman takes off her skirt and puts it on the young man, ordering him to cut the bamboo.

The destructive impact of natural female on cultural male is shown to be total with the depiction of the bloody male corpses—heterosex results in premature male death. The dramatic key to the narrative, however, is that the naturalization and feminization of the hero has *not* been complete, superficial appearances to the contrary. The hero has not in fact been contaminated by heterosexual congress. Hence, the wild bamboo of the forest does not strike him dead, as it has weaker men. Instead it is cut down and appropriated by the young man himself in the service of culture, being fashioned as arrow tips used to kill wild animals and procure food. This second transformation of bamboo, from a natural menace back into a cultural form, is performed by the young man himself, and makes possible his triumphant return to the social world of the settlement. The woman is returned in marriage to the elder brother, once again mediating the rivalry of the brother-brother relationship. This media-

tion can now be successful, as the younger brother's chastity has allowed him to procure and fashion the arrows that counteract natural danger and appropriate it for cultural benefit. The audience itself presages the successful continuity of the hero-nature mediation: "He'll go out and shoot a dozen cassowaries now!"

The structural analysis developed above is in many ways consistent with beliefs common in many New Guinea cultures, namely, an enmity between heroic masculinity and heterosexual contact. This polar opposition, particularly in the New Guinea Highlands, has been a powerful root metaphor, positing heterosexual contact as the antithesis of a number of archetypally male activities, for example, hunting, warfare, male cult activity, and even men's physiological development and physical survival.

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

The pragmatic response to the narrative by Gebusi men puts the structural analysis adduced above in a very different light.² The very need for the narrative persona to be chaste allows the *audience* to fantasize about promiscuity. The tendency for the audience to envisage themselves as promiscuous males is clearly evident in many of their comments, and is a preeminent dimension of audience response in the vast majority of Gebusi narratives, as well as in their ritual dances and spirit séances. Indeed, the more extreme the test of the bachelor's virtue, the more titillating the situation becomes for the audience, as grist for their own fantasies. As in many Gebusi narratives, the graphic portrayal of the hero's missed sexual opportunity itself becomes a foil for sexual innuendo and erotic arousal among the audience. Ultimately, then, the effect of the narrative is not simply to reinforce the moral norm, as one would think from listening to the narrator alone; rather, it is to increase the tension between formal norms of sexual restraint and the audience's increasing desires to break these norms with a vengeance.

By taking a wider perspective, it can be seen that the expressions of sexual desire made by Gebusi men are not simply a form of cathartic release. The problem of illicit heterosexuality is in fact quite great in Gebusi society. Adultery and its suspicion are major sources of domestic conflict. The problem is especially great since young bachelors must wait for initiation and subsequent marital opportunity until they are 17–25 years of age. Of 21 bachelors ready for initiation and marriage in three communities, fully one third (7) were known to have committed either adultery or have had premarital

sex. In one community, initiation plans were canceled by the married men due to the amorous activities of the novices; the young men were forced to move to another community, where they waited until an initiation there eventually took place.

Despite such problems, the men who joke and fantasize about illicit sex are not only bachelors; they are men of all ages. It may be noted that the narrator of the present tale was both middle-aged and yet one of the most bawdy sexual jokesters in the settlement. He clearly derived pleasure from the sexual fantasies that were expressed during his telling of the story. In short, the conflicting standards of sexual enticement and sexual prohibition are engaged for Gebusi men of all age categories.³

The schism between sexual norms and sexual desires in the narrative can be further elucidated by a deeper analysis of its symbolism. The link between bamboo arrow tip and penis—made explicitly by Yaywu in one of the audience comments—suggests a relationship between hunting and sexuality that can be traced through the narrative in light of associated Gebusi beliefs.

Hunting in Gebusi belief is a male activity that requires prior heterosexual abstinence in order to be successful. Given this association, the bachelor's initial and consistently successful hunting trips in the narrative are a *de facto* index of his sexual propriety. "Shooting one's bamboo" is an image commonly used by Gebusi men as a metaphor for their frustrated sexual intent. At one spirit séance, Gebusi young men actually shot arrows into the roof of the longhouse cooking section, as a graphic demonstration of how they would like to sexually "penetrate" a reluctant spirit woman. Correspondingly in the narrative, the activity of hunting itself—shooting the "bamboo tip" into a wild beast—appears to portray an effective sublimation of the hero's sexual desire for his brother's wife.

Later in the narrative, the young man successfully cuts the big bamboo stalk and survives to give it to his elder brother. Among Gebusi men themselves, the image of a long bamboo is commonly used as a metaphor for a large and uncontrolled penis. Correspondingly, the cutting or whittling down of bamboo is an implicit image of phallic/sexual limitation. In the narrative, those men who are unable to restrain their sexual desires are in effect killed by their own uncontrolled phalli, which pierce them through the heart in the form of huge bamboo stalks. The hero, however, is able to avoid this fate through sexual restraint; in the same way that he has truncated his sexual activity with the young woman, he safely cuts down the large

phallus that is the embodiment of this desire. In the narrative, then, the young man's cutting down of the bamboo and his giving of the arrow tips to the elder brother are not only the gift of continued good hunting and domestic order, but a statement of sexual self-denial through symbolic castration. The arrow tips the hero gives are thus, in one sense, the gift of his own severed penis.

At this point, an interpretation that takes audience response into account diverges from one based on the narrative text alone. At the formal level of plot structure, the tension between the *Uhowi* as married male and the younger brother as unmarried male is effectively mediated and resolved by the cut bamboo—the broken phallus. At the level of pragmatic impact, however, the tension is not at all resolved, but rather tightened and left hanging. As an ideal, symbolic self-castration may be an admirable outcome. As a practical solution to sexual desires, however, it is unrealistic, as the listeners themselves point out.

Paradoxically, then, narrative has a formal structure of sexual propriety (or of punishment for impropriety) while its practical impact on the audience is, if not a total negation of this, at least much more ambivalent. Perhaps, as Bettelheim (1977:7) suggests for Western fairy tales, the expression of the conflict itself helps bring to light otherwise repressed desires so that they may be confronted and effectively dealt with. However, the expression of heterosexual desire in Gebusi narrative is strong enough to be self-reinforcing in exacerbating the underlying problem: men's lustily stated desires for women are quite genuine in their own right. As behavioral psychologists have shown, "catharsis" in the form of verbal or physical expression often works to encourage the behavioral tendency in question, rather than reducing it (see for instance Geen and Quanty 1977; Bandura 1973; Baron 1980; Hokanson 1970; Mallick and McCandless 1969). In Scheff's (1979) terms, the Gebusi audience is too "underdistanced" from the sexual opportunities depicted in the narrative scenes to achieve a genuine cathartic release.

Thus, while Gebusi narratives resemble fairy tales, they may be closer still to Bettelheim's (1977) characterization of Occidental myths. In these, the heroes tend to be so heroic as to preclude—at least for the mere mortals in the audience—any practical integrated solution to the problems addressed (1977: 27, 34, 39ff.). The "solutions" entail virtue and courage that are, almost by definition, beyond the capacity of real people to possess. Thus, while Gebusi narrative audiences give ample expression to sexual (id-like) desires,

these are fundamentally *unintegrated* with the demands of the cultural super-ego, symbolized consistently by the young man's virtue.

This schismatic outcome stands the standard structuralist interpretation somewhat on its head: rather than resolving paradox and contradiction, the narrative itself generates unresolved antinomies in a very concrete way. The contradiction however, is not at the level of symbolic structure itself, but *between* this symbolic structure and lived reality. As a result, the narrative tension cannot be adequately comprehended within the confines of the narrative structure; it requires an awareness of the audience of living social actors.⁴

EXTENSIONS AND PROBLEMATICS OF SOCIAL ACTION

The analysis so far has documented the crucial importance of audience response to an interpretation of Gebusi narrative. More specifically, an attempt has been made to show how a combination of formal textual and pragmatic analysis deepens our understanding beyond what a self-contained semiotic analysis is capable of. With this as background, analysis of the narrative text vis-à-vis wider contexts of Gebusi social action becomes possible and productive. By pursuing this direction of inquiry, pragmatic textual analysis becomes an ever-widening window through which the dialectical relationship between symbols and actions can be viewed.

What is the behavioral impact of the sexual "longing" that is so prominent in Gebusi narratives—and in their ritual feasts and spirit séances? As noted above, one result is that illicit heterosexuality—and its suspicion—are a continuing problem in the community. At the same time, one should also consider the impact of idealized sexual provocations among the male audience members themselves: What effect does sexual longing have on male-male relations, both at the narrative performance itself and afterwards?

Men's loud and mocking self-attributions, such as "I'm sexually pent-up!" (*A fafadagim-da*), bring men themselves together in a spirit of humorous camaraderie. In this sense, men's open and hyperbolic proclamation of sexual desire for women transforms heterosexual lust into positive male affect. At the narrative performance itself, the problematic of male divisiveness over women is thus dramatically overcome; heterosexual arousal becomes a fantasy that all the men can share together in friendship. This process is not dissimilar to that of male fraternity or locker room banter in our own society; male voicing of sexual desire for women serves in an immediate social sense to create a diffuse sense of positive camaraderie—as op-

posed to rivalry—among the men present. Somewhat paradoxically, the identity of the male group is intensified to the de facto exclusion of the “longed for” target, that is, women.

Among Gebusi, this intensification of male affect and female exclusion reaches its logical conclusion in sexual liaisons between men themselves, that is, in homosexuality. Such a possibility is indeed hinted at during the narrative performance by one of the audience members: he reaches jokingly for another man’s genitals while he jokes aloud that he’ll have sex with the beautiful young woman in the narrative. Yet the possibility of homosexual outlets is conspicuously absent in the narrative text itself, as it is in all Gebusi narratives.

The prominence and juxtaposition of Gebusi homosexuality against men’s pronounced *heterosexual* banter during narrative performances suggests that another whole level of text interpretation is in order—one that critically relates men’s narrative fantasies to their actual sexual behavior. In order to pursue this analysis, the main dynamics of Gebusi homosexual relations must first be characterized.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Gebusi explanations of male homosexuality⁵ have two diverse dimensions. On the one hand, Gebusi men believe that ingestion of semen by pubescent boys is a necessary component of male growth and development. This homosexual “biologizing” of male growth is a strong symbolic statement of male independence and autonomy from women.⁶ Among Gebusi, insemination of adolescent boys is accomplished through fellatio. This provides them semen as a vital life force and allows them to reach full male stature and vigor. Reception of semen in this manner is pervasive for adolescents in the years prior to their initiation (single-stage), which occurs in early adulthood between the ages of 17 and 25. At the initiation itself, the young men are said to be at their physical and sexual prime—the word for initiation being literally “child become big” (*wa kawala*). The novices’ sexual desire is thought to peak at this time since as semen recipients they have not yet—at least in principle—served as sexual donors. Hence their sexuality is, in Gebusi conceptualization, completely contained and pent up.

As a counter to venting these burgeoning sexual desires, novices at the initiation ceremonies are harangued to keep away from other men’s wives and daughters. They have also undertaken a series of

taboos on eating numerous foods associated with female sexuality, symbolizing the inimicalness of heterosex to the young men at this stage of their development.

After the initiation, the new initiates' sexuality is displaced onto other males; they eagerly serve as sexual donors to the next cohort of initiate novices. This practice continues at least until the initiated men marry, at which point homosexuality is formally discontinued but can continue in fact.

While male sexual activity in early adulthood is preeminently homosexual, its primary ideology and verbal fantasy among men remains *heterosexual*: the ultimate sexual prize is always said to be a beautiful young woman. This gives rise to the second, more immediate and practical explanation of Gebusi homosexuality: it is said to be a stop-gap form of sexual release in the absence of a female sexual partner. Jokes about homosexual relations almost invariably take this rationale: "I'm so lonely and sexually pent-up (*fafadagim-da*) for a woman that I'll grab even *you* [another man] to satisfy me." It is apt that homosexual semen-giving is most common among that segment of the male population that is unmarried: newly initiated young men, divorced men, and widowers. Homosexuality and marriage are said in principle to be mutually exclusive.

Given the late age of marriage (often 20–25 years for men), homosexuality is a social and symbolic as well as sexual assertion of prolonged male independence from women. This tendency is facilitated by the practical freedom males have pursuing homosexual relations, in contravention of formal rules prohibiting homosexual semen-giving by married men and reciprocal semen-giving between male partners.⁷ Indeed, the strongest homosexual relationship in our village—also having the most heightened displays of public homoeroticism—was an unsanctioned reciprocal relationship between newly initiated age-mates. The partners, one of whom was in his mid-20s, claimed that their sexual attraction was so strong that they had no immediate desire to "claim a woman," that is, to get married.

It is consistent with this that young men's statements of heterosexual arousal are sometimes interwoven with aggressive or misogynistic characterizations of women at the same time that positive affect is redirected socially and sexually onto other males. The result, at one level, is increased sexual antagonism and assertion of male autonomy. One may note such aggressive misogyny above from the narrative commentary that "I'll take my arrow-tip [penis] and shove it right in her [vagina]." In parallel fashion, it is quite

significant that in spirit séances full of graphically erotic heterosexual imagery, audience members can avenge accompanying sexual frustration through the attribution of sorcery against a convenient target. Indeed, the suspect in question is often killed by execution sometime after the séance indictment. The process of scapegoating in the séance is in many ways similar to the way women can be targeted for comments of sexual aggression in narratives. Again, this is explicit in the present narrative—when an audience member refers to the seductive woman as a potential sorcerer (cf. Kelly 1976). Social psychologists have documented in our own society (under laboratory conditions) that intense but unfulfilled sexual arousal facilitates subsequent aggression (see for example Zillman 1971; Jaffe, Malamuth, Feingold, and Feshbach 1974; Baron 1980). Conversely, Stoller (1979) has suggested that hostility is an intrinsic and even universal component of sexual excitement.

MALE DOMINATION AND CONTROL

At least one recent analysis has suggested that Melanesian homosexuality has been a political mechanism of male domination and control (Creed 1984; see also Allen 1984; Van Baal 1984; Herdt 1984:65–73). Along these lines one could suggest that Gebusi homosexuality is a mode of sociosexual and symbolic authority vis-à-vis women: men appropriate female reproductive powers for themselves through an ideology of homosexual growth and development. At the same time, they resentfully put on *women* the onus of withholding heterosexual opportunity—though of course it is the dominant ideology of the male community itself that makes women and women's sexuality inimical and even harmful to men.

In this perspective, the narrative performance described above becomes the epitome of male false-consciousness. First of all, the role and even the existence of male homosexuality is omitted in the narrative. The only sexual outlet for the proprietous but sexually frustrated male hero is, ostensibly, the beautiful young woman. The male hero's lack of alternative sexual outlets heightens his difficulty in resisting her malicious and death-dealing seductiveness. Indeed, his vulnerability to these advances makes her actions seem all the more deplorable. Viewed in this light, the public secrecy of Gebusi men's homosexuality serves to maintain a strong double bind in Gebusi gender relations. On the one hand, women's sexuality is the sole publicly recognized source of male sexual satisfaction, while on the other it is viewed as a malicious threat to male physical devel-

opment and well-being. Women may thus always be condemned in one respect or the other; they are both too prudish and too seductive. Such contradictory derogations are commonly voiced by Gebusi men with respect to spirit women and real Gebusi women.

In a sense, we have arrived here at a synthesis through negation of the structuralist and the performance-oriented analyses of the original narrative. The structuralist conclusion that the text resolves gender opposition through sexual propriety has been shown through performance analysis to be a farce—a foil for the audience's poignant desire for illicit heterosexuality. At the same time, these stated expressions of heterosexual desire are themselves in large part a foil for men's underlying homosexual orientations, on the one hand, and for their de facto social and sexual opposition to women on the other.

BEYOND INTEREST THEORY

For all its merits, the present critical assessment of Gebusi male domination still confounds and leaves in abeyance several key aspects of our central focus: Gebusi men's sexual longing. First, this assessment of domination neglects and makes residual the core issue of Gebusi homoeroticism itself; it explains this eroticism negatively, as a means of divorcing men from women, rather than as a positive emotive and erotic force in its own right. Second, it fails to explain and indeed makes more paradoxical why Gebusi men, being so ostensibly antagonistic to women, should so fervently fantasize about *heterosexuality* in their narratives. Each of these points will be discussed in turn.

As developed by Creed (1984:168–172), a “homosexuality as domination” analysis entails that homosexuality is a form of institutionalized authority and social control among men themselves, for example, authority and control by inseminators over those males they inseminate. The implication of this conclusion is that homosexuality is a function of power relations, and is erotic, if at all, as a byproduct of this sociosexual authority. In support of this notion, Creed notes that for many New Guinea societies where homosexuality has been documented, the relation between inseminator/inseminated has been one of age-grade subordination or authoritarian kinship prescription between senior male/junior male (Creed 1984; Herdt 1984; Van Baal 1984; Allen 1984). Often, the homosexual relation is institutionalized between MB/ZS or between an adult man and his wife's younger brother. In some of these cases, homosex-

uality is viewed explicitly or implicitly as an analogue of marriage itself; for instance, the boy inseminated may be referred to as a “wife.”

Apart from its presumed applicability to these particular societies, Creed’s postulated paradigm is virtually absent among Gebusi. The development of Gebusi homosexual relations is not prescribed by particular kinship or obligatory relations; indeed, homosexuality between affinal, matrilineal, or agnatic relatives is effectively prohibited. Rather, homosexual liaisons develop between *unrelated* pubescent boys and young men—through spontaneous homoeroticism. These relationships are typically prompted by coy and coquettish behavior by the boy himself and develop on the basis of mutual affection and enjoyment rather than by obligation.⁸ The choice of sexual partners is thus markedly unconstrained. The age differential between the male partners is rarely great, and there is a conspicuous absence of authority or rivalry between initiated and uninitiated men. Even within age-grades, reciprocated orgasm and semen-giving between unmarried youths is tacitly allowed with a sense of amused understanding by the older men.⁹ It is consonant with this that there is no discernible control or attempt to control homosexual relations by elders. Indeed, while middle-aged and older men tend to joke in great ribaldry about homosexual liaisons, this is primarily a vicarious reliving of their own vaunted bisexuality of younger days; they seldom pursue such relations in fact. As these trends would suggest, there is no evidence of homosexual jealousy or manipulation among Gebusi; trysts shift easily on an ad hoc basis between and among the adolescents and young men.

In short, an analysis that links sexual form to social or political domination fails to capture—indeed ignores a priori—the key personal components of Gebusi homosexuality itself.

The second patent weakness of a “sexuality as domination” analysis of Gebusi narratives is that it leaves unexplained the pervasive and genuine sexual longing of Gebusi men for *women*. Why should both young and older men hold youthful women as the ideal sexual objects rather than misogynistically denying or minimizing their sexual attractiveness? One could perhaps hypothesize that men’s competition with and insecurity vis-à-vis women is great enough to motivate compensatory male fantasies or practices of heterosexual conquest. However, as Sørum (1984) has also noted for the neighboring Bedamini, Gebusi gender relations straightforwardly adhere in practice to male-female complementarity—with men in unques-

tioned ultimate control. Moreover, the spirit women Gebusi men fantasize about, like the maiden in the narrative, do not have to be “conquered”; they are eager for the pleasures of heterosex in their own right. Illicit heterosexual relations in real Gebusi social life parallel this tendency; these secret trysts entail mutual attraction and initiative on the part of women as well as men (Eileen Cantrell, personal communication).

THE BASIS OF GEBUSI MALE EROTICISM: PURSUING THE PROHIBITED

The emotional force of narratives for Gebusi men stems from the frustration of their sincere desire for prohibited heterosexual relations. This is reflected both in the narrative text itself and in the commentary of the audience members. In the narrative, the heroic bachelor is continually frustrated by his need to remain chaste in the face of the woman’s tantalizing seduction. Audience members are likewise aroused and frustrated not only by the woman’s blatant eroticism but by the failure of the hero himself to take advantage of these beckoning sexual opportunities. Indeed, the distinct sense is that the male narrative audience finds heterosexual scenarios all the *more* arousing and exciting for the very *reason* that they are prohibited and dangerous; the desire for heterosex and the excitement of its practical risk are mutually reinforcing.

In real life, this pattern of highly eroticized heterosexual risk taking for men is strikingly evident in their pursuit of adultery or premarital heterosex. In such endeavors they risk the violent vengeance of a woman’s husband, father, or brother, as well as the formal risk of physiological depletion that heterosexual contact entails.¹⁰

Heterosexual risk taking of an extreme nature is also evident in another sphere of Gebusi social life: romantic marriages and sorcery attributions. The Gebusi ideal of marriage is nominally one of sister-exchange—that a man should marry the sister of his own sister’s husband. In fact, however, Gebusi men have a strong penchant for establishing ad hoc amorous heterosexual liaisons. Many of these relationships develop into de facto unreciprocated marriages—common law unions for which there is no sister exchange. Due in part to this tendency, many Gebusi marriages are unreciprocated. At the same time, there is no bridewealth or brideservice, and affines are expected to live together in good company regardless of the state of marital reciprocity between them. Latent resentment over these romantic, unreciprocated marriages becomes a central grounding

point for sorcery attributions, which are both very common and also very violent in Gebusi society. The high rate of homicide in Gebusi society (32.7% of all adult deaths) is strongly correlated in statistical terms with the patterning and distribution of such nonreciprocal marriages (Knauff 1985b). That the majority of these homicide victims are men is consistent with a pattern noted above: just as Gebusi men displace fantasized heterosexual arousal onto each other in homosexuality, so too the sexual frustrations and sorcery attributions that follow in the wake of nonreciprocal marriage are often directed against other males.

While the mutually structuring relationship between Gebusi sexuality, marriage, and violent sorcery attribution is beyond the scope of the present discussion, it is important to note that Gebusi themselves exhibit a marked lack of concern—even a lack of practical awareness—concerning the connections between these phenomena. Young Gebusi men do not avoid and appear oblivious to the lethal complications of sorcery attribution that romantic marriages eventually invite.¹¹ This is consistent with the general pattern of psychosexual reinforcement revealed by audience responses to the narrative; heterosexual relations are unwittingly idealized in direct proportion to their ultimate potential cost. On a societal scale, such unintended and even unconscious tendencies exert a profound effect on Gebusi political and social organization as well as on their culture. The long-term structuring of societal development by such *unintended* consequences of action is a crucial feature that is often neglected by those interested in practice theory and exchange analysis (noted by Ortner 1984:157; contrast Giddens 1984; cf. Lloyd 1986).

In ethnographic terms, it has been shown that the playing out of men's psychosexual dynamics victimize men as well as women and are in fact most lethal to men themselves. This is once again evident in the narrative as well as in real social life; the bloody corpses are a series of men who have been drawn to death by uncontrolled heterosexuality. At the same time, the emotional and social climate among men—both among the narrative audience and in Gebusi communities at large—remains somewhat paradoxically one of strong male friendship, camaraderie, and diffuse homosexual attraction. It is consistent with this sense of collective male community that there is little if any differentiation of adult status among Gebusi men, including on the basis of polygyny (which is rare) or economic or exchange activity (which is minimal). Tangible social

and political gains of risking illicit heterosexual liaisons, as opposed to more legitimate hetero- or homosexual ones, are thus minimal.

What then of the Gebusi narrative and of men's sexual orientation? They both revolve around a key and fundamental psychosexual dynamic in Gebusi life: men's unremitting desire for those sexual relations that are in fact most dangerous and prohibited. It is the ambivalence and tension caused by *breaking* normative rules that creates sexual excitement in Gebusi culture. This is aptly symbolized by the self-stated drive of the narrative audience to break with a vengeance the hero's norms of heterosexual propriety—the potentially lethal consequences notwithstanding. In real life, we have seen this same pattern in men's pursuit of illicit heterosexual relations and romantic marriages. A similar tendency is also characteristic of homosexuality; as discussed above, formally prohibited insemination of younger males by married men and reciprocal semen-giving between adolescents or young adults are both fairly common. As with illicit heterosexuality, these “improper” homosexual relationships entail a special excitement of joking and élan among the male community for the very *reason* they are based on sexual desire that cannot be contained within normative bounds.

In all these cases, it is the relationship between normative rules and their contravention in word and deed that is exciting and meaningful—a meaning that is impossible to discern from normative structure and from narrative texts themselves. This gives one much pause when it is realized that the *great majority* of anthropological material on sexual activity and belief is based on pro forma normative statements of informants and on highly decontextualized myth and ritual texts. One central implication of the present study is thus that analysis of gender and sexuality based on existing ethnographic sources must be conducted with extreme caution, particularly when good case study data on actual behavioral and emotional patterns are lacking. Conversely, the collection of better information in these regards is of major importance.

Moving to deeper levels, beyond text and practice per se, it may be asked what the psychosexual underpinnings of Gebusi men's sexual motivation might be. Why do Gebusi men tend so inexorably and with such great risk to pursue the most prohibited sexual targets? Has the early and unmitigated association between Gebusi boys and their mothers been somehow transformed into an obsessive craving for those women who symbolize the most erotic and yet the most prohibited and dangerous oedipal love? At the same time,

have men themselves at some other level adopted a deep femininity that makes other males so sexually attractive? These questions raise issues beyond the scope of the present paper (Schwimmer 1984; Dundes 1976; Layard 1959; see Blos 1985). Such questions could certainly be addressed by relating textual and religious symbolism—which is often regressive in a psychological sense—to more thorough documentation of socialization and sex-identity formation. Yet we must be wary here of projecting an etiology of Western homosexuality onto sexual practices with different underpinnings from other cultural areas (Herdt 1984). Even among the majority of nonhomosexual New Guinea societies, primary socialization entails strong and unmitigated maternal attachment; this can hardly be adduced as an explanation of Gebusi sexual orientations *per se*. Perhaps more importantly, then, how do subsequent socialization and the secondary redirection of early maternal attachments produce such distinctive bisexual results among Gebusi? In this regard one must note a marked absence among Gebusi of sudden boy/mother separation, of early or traumatic male initiations, and of intratribal warfare, even in the precolonial era. These dimensions of hyper-masculine development, which have often been ascribed as central to Melanesian homosexuality, are strikingly absent in the Gebusi case (cf. Keesing 1982; Herdt 1984). In lieu of these factors, the idealized and perpetual images of erotic and yet prohibited *heterosexuality* in Gebusi ritual, narrative, and spirit séances are themselves likely to have an important psychosocial impact. Symbolic performances—so pervasive in male social experience—are important causes as well as reflections and transformations of Gebusi men's sexual orientations. They continually reintroduce and reinforce both the desire and the danger of primordial heterosexuality.

Obviously, the pursuit of such an analysis would carry the consideration of Gebusi symbolism and practice further afield; the dialogue between narrative text and social action has no arbitrary ending point. My own point, however, is simply that a progressive dialogue between symbol and concrete action is a productive way to widen and deepen our understanding of texts, of actors, and of their mutually influencing relationship.

CONCLUSION

Various forms of textual analysis attempt to penetrate the meaning of symbol systems by analyzing their internal structure, dialectic, or hermeneutic. Often the notion of "text" is expanded to in-

clude the cultural system at large, or even the relationship between this system and the process of ethnography itself. While all these approaches can give genuine and valuable insights, their power can be greatly increased by systematically relating symbolic forms back to the concrete lived realities and motivations of those social actors who adhere to them.¹² Carefully considering spontaneous audience reactions to textual performances is one effective way to initiate this analysis.

By establishing a regular dialogue between texts and concrete actions, analysis recapitulates the real-life fact that symbol systems and social practice are in continuing dialectical tension. The analytic result is a cultural critique that keeps the light of investigation focused clearly on the people studied. This stands in contrast to an ethnographic reportage that blurs the subject with the object of analysis (see for example Boon 1982; Geertz 1980). This latter tendency can lead to a self-avowed “preoccupation . . . with the form and rhetoric of anthropological writing” (Marcus and Fisher 1986:5). While critical self-awareness by authors is laudatory and even necessary, one must be careful that the strength of ethnography—its passionate documentation of its object of study—not become subordinate to artistic self-presentation.

This is in no way to deny—rather, it affirms—that symbol systems, including our own, have incredible aesthetic force and motivational power in their own right. And certainly symbolic or epistemological systems may be analyzed in terms of their own intrinsic properties (Wagner 1986a). There is a patent danger, however, particularly as techniques from literary criticism are applied, that interpretation will become involuted and caught in webs of self-reference. The problems of unrestrained reflexivity, solipsism, and even narcissism that the hermeneutic circle is prone to can be productively dealt with by repeatedly bringing the analysis back to concrete social action. This combination of symbolic and social analysis makes text interpretation not an ever-narrowing window on itself but an ever-widening window on societies and cultures.

NOTES

Acknowledgments. Comments are gratefully acknowledged from Eileen Cantrell, Raymond Kelly, and from the various members of the 1983–84 Melanesia seminar at the University of California—San Diego. Funding during various phases of research and writeup has been provided by the University of Michigan, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and, at present, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. Information concerning the Gebusi was obtained during 22 months of fieldwork conducted in 1980–82.

¹Theories of practice and agency have attracted major current interest in anthropology (see for example Ortner 1984; Karp 1986; Foster 1986). Because they are often abstract and/or polemical, these theories are in particular need of selective and critical application to concrete ethnographic data. As opposed to a more epistemological or philosophical treatment, this pragmatic usage itself follows reflexively from the notion of social practice.

²Following Singer (1984), pragmatics is defined as the relations of signs to their users. As such, pragmatics is distinguished from syntactics (relations between signs themselves) and from semantics (relations between signs and their meanings).

³This diffuse male sexual orientation is clearly seen in the large range of ages and statuses among the male audience members who made bawdy comments during the narrative.

⁴It cannot be effectively argued that the present narrative is only a single "moment" in a larger mythic cycle of progressive resolutions. As noted at the outset, Gebusi narratives virtually all present for the audience the same unresolved tensions (see Knauff 1985b: ch. 10).

⁵Homosexual practices of various kinds were traditionally common in many south central New Guinea societies; see Herdt 1984; Kelly 1976; Schieffelin 1976; F. E. Williams 1936.

⁶It is consistent with this that Gebusi beliefs of substance transmission in conception and birth are singularly unelaborated. The basic notion is that a woman's body is a passive vessel for the development of the fetus, that is, that it grows entirely from male procreative substance (Eileen Cantrell, personal communication; cf. Jorgensen 1983).

⁷The disjunction between homosexual norm and behavior was strikingly evident during the first social setting at which Gebusi men openly conveyed to me details of their homosexual practices. Only a few minutes after being told that married men are prohibited (*toym*) from engaging in homosexual liaisons, I was coyly asked by an adolescent youth if I would like to tryst with him. Thinking that I had a legitimate excuse, I replied that as a married man I could not undertake such activity. Totally unperturbed, my youthful companion said that this posed no practical impediment, adding that it was not at all uncommon in fact for married men to break the rule. I was thus forced to decline his proposition on personal grounds. As is consistent with the general *laissez faire* attitude toward homosexuality, the young man conveyed no hurt, embarrassment, or loss of face at my refusal, and he—like the other men—remained congenial and open in discussing this and other aspects of Gebusi culture.

⁸A somewhat similar pattern of flexible and casual homoeroticism has been described by Serpenti (1984:305) for some Kimam groups of south New Guinea.

⁹The same flexibility is also apparently characteristic of the neighboring Bedamini; see Sørum 1984:331.

¹⁰A number of other societies on the periphery of the New Guinea Highlands also reflect a tension between the formal inimicalness of male vigor and female sexual pollution on the one hand, and men's practical desires to prove themselves vigorous enough to ignore these dangers on the other (see Meigs 1984:16; Kelly 1976; Buchbinder and Rappaport 1976; cf. Meggitt 1964:223). For rich analysis of an Amazonian permutation on this theme, see Gregor 1985.

¹¹Sorcery attributions are carefully dissociated from everyday interaction. The sorcerer's identity is ascertained through elaborate procedures of public and "objective" divination, in which the suspects themselves take part. Voicing of personal grievances or opinions is virtually nonexistent, particularly prior to the definitive outcome of the "objective" spiritual indictment itself. Typically, no rationale is given for the sorcerer's purported actions; he or she is thought to be misanthropic by nature. The scapegoating of community members through such sorcery inquests is strikingly consensual; even the suspect's closet kin seldom oppose and often actively or tacitly encourage the ultimate execution of the suspect. Conversely, those persons not accused remain on amicable terms with one another. Hence, the execution of a coresident for sorcery exerts little long-term rift in community life.

¹²Among Melanesianists, Van Baal (1966), Burridge (1960, 1969), Tuzin (1976, 1980), Wagner (1972, 1986b), and particularly Young (1983) have been insightful in elucidating the close and mutually influencing relationship between narrative symbolism and social action.

REFERENCES

- ALLEN, MICHAEL R. 1967. *Male Cults and Secret Initiations in Melanesia*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- . 1984. Homosexuality, Male Power, and Political Organization in North Vanuatu: A Comparative Analysis. *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Gilbert H. Herdt, ed.), pp. 83–127. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- BANDURA, ALBERT. 1973. *Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- BARON, R. A. 1980. Aggression. *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry, 3rd ed., Vol. 1*. (H. I. Kaplan, A. M. Freedman, B. J. Sadock, eds.). Boston, MA: Williams & Wilkins.
- BETTELHEIM, BRUNO. 1977. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Importance and Meaning of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage.
- BLOS, PETER. 1985. *Son and Father: Before and Beyond the Oedipus Complex*. New York: Free Press.
- BOON, JAMES A. 1982. *Other Tribes, Other Scribes: Symbolic Anthropology in the Comparative Study of Cultures, Histories, Religions, and Texts*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- BOURDIEU, PIERRE. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Richard Nice, trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Richard Nice, trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- BUCHBINDER, GEORGEDA, and ROY A. RAPPAPORT. 1976. Fertility and Death Among the Maring. *Man and Woman in the New Guinea Highlands* (Paula Brown and Georgeda Buchbinder, eds.), pp. 13–35. American Anthropological Association Special Publication No. 8. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.
- BURRIDGE, KENELM O. 1960. *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium*. London: Methuen.
- . 1969. *Tangu Traditions: A Study of the Way of Life, Mythology, and Developing Experience of a New Guinea People*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- CREED, GERALD W. 1984. Sexual Subordination: Institutionalized Homosexuality and Social Control in Melanesia. *Ethnology* 23:157–176.
- CULLER, JONATHAN. 1981. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- DUNDES, ALAN. 1976. A Psychoanalytic Study of the Bullroarer. *Man* (N.S.) 11:220–238.
- ECO, UMBERTO. 1979. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- FISH, STANLEY. 1970. Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics. *New Literary History* 2:123–162.
- FOSTER, STEPHEN W. 1986. Reading Pierre Bourdieu. *Cultural Anthropology* 1:103–110.
- FOUCAULT, MICHEL. 1978. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. (Robert Hurley, trans.). New York: Pantheon.
- GEEN, R., and M. QUANTY. 1977. The Catharsis of Aggression: An Evolution of a Hypothesis. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 10 (Leonard Berkowitz, ed.), pp. 1–37. New York: Academic Press.
- GEERTZ, CLIFFORD. 1980. Blurred Genres. *American Scholar* 49:165–179.
- GIDDENS, ANTHONY. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. London: MacMillan.

- _____. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- GODELIER, MAURICE. 1982. Social Hierarchies Among the Baruya of New Guinea. *Inequality in the New Guinea Highlands* (Andrew J. Strathern, ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- GOFFMAN, ERVING. 1983. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- GREGOR, THOMAS. 1985. *Anxious Pleasures: The Sexual Lives of an Amazonian People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- HERDT, GILBERT H. 1981. *Guardians of the Flutes*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- _____. 1982. Fetish and Fantasy in Sambia Initiation. *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea* (Gilbert H. Herdt, ed.), pp. 44–98. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- HERDT, GILBERT H., ed. 1984. *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- HERDT, GILBERT H., and FITZ JOHN PORTER POOLE. 1982. “Sexual Antagonism”: The Intellectual History of a Concept in New Guinea Anthropology. *Sexual Antagonism, Gender, and Social Change in Papua New Guinea* (Fitz John Porter Poole and Gilbert H. Herdt, eds.), pp. 3–28. Social Analysis Special Issue, No. 12. Adelaide: University of Adelaide.
- HOKANSON, JACK E. 1970. Psychophysiological Evaluation of the Catharsis Hypothesis. *The Dynamics of Aggression* (Edwin I. Megargee and Jack E. Hokanson, eds.), pp. 74–86. New York: Harper & Row.
- HOLLAND, NORMAN N. 1975. *5 Readers Reading*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- JAFFE, Y., N. MALAMUTH, J. FEINGOLD, and S. FESH-BACH. 1974. Sexual Arousal and Behavioral Aggression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 30:759–764.
- JAUSS, HANS ROBERT. 1982. *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (Timothy Bahti, trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- JORGENSEN, DAN, ed. 1983. *Concepts of Conception: Procreation Ideologies in Papua New Guinea*. Special issue of *Mankind* (14[1]). Sydney: Anthropological Society of New South Wales.
- JOSEPHIDES, LISETTE. 1985. *Production of Inequality: Gender and Exchange Among the Kewa*. New York: Tavistock.
- KARP, IVAN. 1986. Agency and Social Theory: A Review of Anthony Giddens. *American Ethnologist* 13:131–137.
- KEESING, ROGER M. 1982. Introduction. *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea* (Gilbert H. Herdt, ed.), pp. 1–43. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- KELLY, RAYMOND C. 1976. Witchcraft and Sexual Relations: An Exploration in the Social and Semantic Implications of the Structure of Belief. *Man and Woman in the New Guinea Highlands* (Paula Brown and Georgeda Buchbinder, eds.), pp. 36–53. American Anthropological Association Special Publication No. 8. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.
- KNAUFT, BRUCE M. 1985a. Ritual Form and Permutation in New Guinea: Implications of Symbolic Process for Socio-political Evolution. *American Ethnologist* 12:321–340.
- _____. 1985b. *Good Company and Violence: Sorcery and Social Action in a Lowland New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- _____. In press. Managing Sex and Anger: Tobacco and Kava Use Among the Gebusi of Papua New Guinea. *Drugs and Interpersonal Relations in the Western*

- Pacific: Relations of Substance* (Lamont Lindstrom, ed.). Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania Monograph. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- LANGNESS, LEW L. 1967. Sexual Antagonism in the New Guinea Highlands: A Bena Bena Example. *Oceania* 37:161–177.
- . 1974. Ritual, Power, and Male Dominance in the New Guinea Highlands. *Ethos* 2:189–212.
- LAYARD, JOHN. 1959. Homo-eroticism in Primitive Society as a Function of the Self. *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 4:101–115.
- LÉVI-STRAUSS, CLAUDE. 1964–71. *Mythologiques I-IV*. Paris: Plon.
- LLOYD, CHRISTOPHER. 1986. *Explanation in Social History*. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- MACCORMICK, C., and M. STRATHERN, eds. 1980. *Nature, Culture and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MALLICK, S. K., and B. R. MCCANDLESS. 1969. A Study of Catharsis of Aggression. *Roots of Aggression* (Leonard Berkowitz, ed.), pp. 92–105. New York: Atherton.
- MARCUS, GEORGE E., and MICHAEL M. FISHER. 1986. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- MEGGITT, MERVYN J. 1964. Male-Female Relationships in the Highlands of Australian New Guinea. *New Guinea: The Central Highlands* (James Watson, ed.), pp. 204–224. *American Anthropologist* Special Issue, 66 (4, pt. 2).
- . 1976. Duplicity of Demons: Sexual and Familial Roles Expressed in Western Enga Stories. *Man and Woman in the New Guinea Highlands* (Paula Brown and Georgeda Buchbinder, eds.), pp. 63–85. American Anthropological Association Special Publication No. 8. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.
- MEIGS, ANNA S. 1984. *Food, Sex, and Pollution: A New Guinea Religion*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- NADELSON, LESLEE. 1981. Pigs, Women, and the Men's House in Amazonia: An Analysis of Six Mundurucu Myths. *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* (Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, eds.), pp. 240–272. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- ORTNER, SHERRY B. 1974. Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture? *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds.), pp. 67–88. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- . 1984. Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26:126–166.
- SCHEFF, THOMAS J. 1979. The Distancing of Emotion in Ritual. *Current Anthropology* 18:517–544.
- SCHIEFFELIN, EDWARD L. 1976. *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers*. New York: St. Martins.
- SCHWIMMER, ERIC. 1984. Male Couples in New Guinea. *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Gilbert H. Herdt, ed.), pp. 248–297. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- SERPENTI, LAURENT. 1984. The Ritual Meaning of Homosexuality and Pedophilia Among the Kimam-Papuans of South Irian Jaya. *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Gilbert H. Herdt, ed.), pp. 292–317. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- SEUNG, T. K. 1976. *Cultural Thematics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- _____. 1982. *Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- SINGER, MILTON. 1984. *Man's Glassy Essence: Explorations in Semiotic Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- SØRUM, ARVE. 1984. Growth and Decay: Bedamini Notions of Sexuality. *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Gilbert H. Herdt, ed.), pp. 318–336. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- STOLLER, ROBERT J. 1979. *Sexual Excitement: The Dynamics of Erotic Life*. New York: Pantheon.
- STRATHERN, MARILYN. 1981. Self-Interest and the Social Good: Some Implications of Hagen Gender Imagery. *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* (Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, eds.), pp. 166–191. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- TUZIN, DONALD F. 1976. *The Iahita Arapesh: Dimensions of Unity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- _____. 1980. *The Voice of the Tambaran: Truth and Illusion in Iahita Arapesh Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- VAN BAAL, JAN. 1966. *Dema: Description and Analysis of Marind-Anim Culture (South New Guinea)*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- _____. 1984. The Dialectics of Sex in Marind-anim Culture. *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Gilbert H. Herdt, ed.). pp. 128–166. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- WAGNER, ROY. 1972. *Habu: The Innovation of Meaning in Daribi Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- _____. 1986a. *Symbols that Stand for Themselves*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- _____. 1986b. *Asiwinarong: Ethos, Image, and Social Power Among the Usen Barok of New Ireland*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- WHITEHEAD, HARRIET. 1986. The Varieties of Fertility Cultism in New Guinea: Pts. I, II. *American Ethnologist* 13:80–99, 271–289.
- WILLIAMS, FRANCIS E. 1936. *Papuans of the Trans-Fly*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- WILLIAMS, RAYMOND. 1973. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- YOUNG, MICHAEL W. 1983. *Magicians of Manumanua: Living Myth in Kalauna*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ZILLMAN, D. 1971. Excitation and Transfer in Communication-Mediated Aggressive Behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 7:417–434.