Anthropology inevitably involves an encounter with the Other. All too often, however, the ethnographic distance that separates the reader of anthropological texts and the anthropologist himself from the Other is rigidly maintained and at times even artificially exaggerated. In many cases this distancing leads to an exclusive focus on the Other as primitive, bizarre, and exotic. The gap between a familiar "we" and an exotic "they" is a major obstacle to a meaningful understanding of the Other, an obstacle that can only be overcome through some form of participation in the world of the Other.

Geertz comments:

The brooding note of Loring Danforth's "Introduction" (Who am I to be saying these things, by what right, and to what purpose, and how on earth can I manage honestly to say them?) is one now very widely heard, in various forms and with various intensities.

Clifford Geertz, an acute observer of style, calls attention here to one mark of reflexive style. Reflexive styles might consider classic style to be naïve or philistine; but there is nothing naïve in a tacit acceptance of incongruities in the nature of writing and nothing philistine in making unhedged choices.

Classic Style Is Not Practical Style

In the model scene behind practical style, the reader has a problem to solve, a decision to make, a ruling to hand down, an inquiry to conduct, a machine to design or repair—in short, a job to do. The reader's need, not the writer's desire to articulate something, initiates the writing. The writer's job is to serve the reader's immediate need by delivering timely materials. The motive can thus be almost anything productive of a need: greed, enterprise, competition, philanthropy. Since the reader is engaged in solving a problem, the reading is not an end in itself, it is instrumental to some other end. That is why, in this scene, the prime stylistic virtue is ease of pars-

ing. In practical style, the best presentation will allow the reader to acquire timely information with a minimum of distraction because, in this scene, writing is an instrument for delivering information with maximum efficiency and in such a way as to place the smallest possible burden upon the reader, who has other—more important—burdens to bear.

In classic style, by contrast, neither writer nor reader has a job, the writing and reading do not serve a practical goal, and the writer has all the time in the world to present her subject as something interesting for its own sake. Her characteristic brevity comes from the elegance of her mind, never from pressures of time or employment. The writing is initiated by the writer, not the reader: the writer wants to present something not to a client, but to an indefinite audience, treated as if it were a single individual. Her motive is to present truth, not so that someone can use it to accomplish a practical goal, although someone might make use of it for such a purpose, but for its own sake.

Classic style and practical style have important areas of overlap; both styles place a high value on clarity and directness. Classic style values clarity because it sees itself as a transparent medium for the presentation of truth. Practical style values clarity because it places a premium on being easy to parse. Both styles can be described as precise and efficient, but for quite different reasons: practical style is precise and efficient because the reader wants to understand well and quickly for the purpose of making immediate use of what he is reading; classic style is precise and efficient because precision serves truth and because efficiency is a refinement. The efficiency of classic style is a sign of its having the leisure and luxury to afford refinement: the writer and reader have had all the time needed to train their minds to the requisite concert pitch.

Neither classic style nor practical style contains much of the sort of internal network of cross-references that linguists call "metadiscourse" ("I would like to tell you about x but first I have to tell you about y"). In classic style, such explicit acknowledgment of planning defeats the immediacy and spontaneity that mark the

style's model scene, conversation. In practical style, a network of cross-references, clotting the text, is a poor substitute for less distracting indications of coherence.

There are a few recognizable prototypes of the model scene of practical style. The first, drawn from the world of corporate business or the legal profession, is a memorandum to a superior who has asked for information. The writer knows more about the subject than the reader, but it is the reader who will make a decision or take action, and so stands in need of some of the writer's knowledge. The reader's need is the motive for writing. A second prototype is a memorandum to a subordinate whose activities the superior is trying to direct and manage. In neither case does the reader want or expect to know everything the writer knows about the subject. Practical style is selective in a way that classic style is not. The cast is hierarchical, not symmetric. Clustered around these prototypes are recognizable extensions: the manual telling someone how to perform routine jobs; the manual telling someone how to use something; the how-to book instructing the CEO in the art of negotiation; the book about financial planning telling those with discretionary income how to invest it; the advisory from a manufacturer to owners of the manufactured product telling them that it has a defect and how to get it fixed.

Another prototype of this scene is the delivery of the results of research to fellow researchers, which is to say, fellow insiders. The writer knows more about his own research than the readers do, but they are fellow professionals who expect to know everything he knows as a result of reading his report, or know at least what they need to know for their own purposes. What is reported will affect their own independent activities in ways that they alone can judge. The writer is imparting information and does not want his writing, as such, to be noticed; it should fulfill every standard expectation and be as easy to parse as possible.

Most writing in schools and colleges is a perversion of practical style: the student pretends that he is writing a memorandum. He pretends that he knows more than the reader, that the reader needs

this information, and that his job is to impart that information in a way that is easy for the reader to parse. This pretense is supposed to be practice for the real thing. Actually, the reader (the teacher) probably knows much more about the subject than the writer; the reader (the teacher) has no need whatever for the information; and the job of the writer is to cover himself from attack by his superior (the teacher). The actual scene interferes so much with the fantasy scene that the result is almost inevitably compromised, if not fraudulent.

The best-known teachers of practical style are Strunk and White, in their ubiquitous *Elements of Style*. The best teachers of practical style are Joseph Williams and Gregory Colomb, in Williams's *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* and a series of academic articles and technical reports.

Strunk and White's disarming treatment of what everybody really needs to know about writing has been treasured by generations of people who are occasionally forced to write something and view the prospect with a sinking feeling of dread. As a guide to writing, *The Elements of Style*, being little more than an apparently arbitrary mixture of grammatical digest, handy list of common mistakes, and expert hand-holding, is drastically incomplete, but it is a masterpiece of psychological insight. Its attractions derive, we suspect, first, from its implicit, cheery, and optimistic promise that if you just read its few pages and work those few surface tricks it teaches you ("In summaries, keep to one tense," "*less* should not be used for *fewer*"), you will not embarrass yourself; second, from its exhortatory cheerleading that seems so assured and upbeat; and third, from its tone of common sense that masks, at key points, an essential vacuousness: "Choose a suitable design and hold to it."

Such advice has the same immemorial power of "Just use your head, and you'll be all right." Advice of this sort has the great merit of being brief and supportive. There is a welcome assurance that there is really nothing to it, except for those truly mysterious aspects of the subject that cannot be taught at all. "I can teach you where to put a comma in ten minutes, but don't expect me to teach you to write like Shakespeare."

Williams and Colomb present an incomparably deeper and more orderly treatment of practical style. The style they present is consistent and mature; it makes decisions about all the major questions that define a style, and is fully developed. The claim behind Williams and Colomb's treatment is large and theoretical: just as readers of an English sentence have expectations about word order and the distribution of information in a sentence, so readers of what Williams and Colomb call "pointed texts" have in their minds a grammar of such texts that tells them where to look for what. Readers will use that grammar. Writing that conforms to it will be easy for the reader to follow. Writing that resists it will be difficult for the reader to follow. For example, a reader looks for an opening section ("the issue") and a following section ("the discussion") within each unit of a pointed text. He looks for a rich lexical field, at the end of the issue, which will be used to weave the discussion together, to give it cohesion, as it progresses. He looks for a point at the end of the discussion. If there is a point at the end of the issue, it will be taken to be an adumbration of the point at the end of the discussion. Units of discourse nest, so that units within the discussion will themselves be composed of an issue and a discussion. These principles work themselves down to the level of the sentence, where the reader expects the first part of the sentence to present an issue (topic) and the second part of the sentence to present a discussion (comment). The reader expects old information in the sentence before new. The reader prefers to understand things in terms of actions and agents, so the backbone of a sentence should be a verb that conveys action, and the subject of such a verb should be one of the agents—perhaps metaphorical—in this action-story. Since readers link agents to actions in pairs, writers should try not to separate the subject (agent) from the verb (action) with distracting information. And so on.

Williams and Colomb's finely detailed treatment of practical style provides an indispensable guide impressive in its scope and intelligence. It is missing just one thing, namely, an explicit acknowledgment of its fundamental stand, and an acknowledgment that its fundamental stand is one of many alternatives. While their

work is thorough, systematic, and theoretically sophisticated, and while they know that they are dealing with just one style, the work is misleading in its self-presentation: it pretends that the style it concerns, and about which it gives excellent advice, is universal and exclusive rather than merely ubiquitous. Practical style rests on a set of answers to basic questions; other styles rest on different answers to those same questions.

Practical style comes from deciding that what matters in style is the reader, and in particular the reader's ease in parsing features of the text, especially the discourse features of the text. Practical style is so firm in this decision that it treats it as no decision at all, but as a necessity: *of course* excellence of style consists in conforming to the reader's grammatical expectations in the act of reading. Why else would anyone presume to take up a reader's time than to solve a problem for the reader? Why then would anyone write except to inform the reader about a solution to that problem? How else can this be done aside from ordering the text so that readers can get the point before giving up in the face of the obvious difficulty? Williams and Colomb accordingly coach their students in a style of writing assimilated to a model of reading.

Classic style makes similar pretenses in adopting the rather different stand that the writer counts equally with the reader, that both are fully engaged by the subject, competent, and alert, that *of course* the reader will be interested in what the writer has to say, and that *of course* the reader will recognize truth once it has been clearly presented.

In the model scene of practical style, readers and writers hold standard job slots in existing institutions. The reader has no leisure and does not want surprises; the reader reads not for personal reasons but to accomplish a job. Accomplishing the job depends upon the communication of information, and practical style serves the purpose of keeping the information flowing efficiently through institutions. Since students will go on to such employment, they must be trained to write in practical style. The writer is not an individual writing to another individual but a job description writing

to another job description. There is a job to do and practical style is the appropriate tool for doing it: the style is thus fundamentally optimistic, pragmatic, and utilitarian. The motive is the job; eternal and noncontingent truth is irrelevant except as it bears upon the performance of the job—even then its eternal and noncontingent nature is beside the point.

There is a surface mark of practical style as presented by Williams and Colomb that derives from its fundamental stand and distinguishes it sharply from classic style. If the reader always expects to find certain kinds of things in certain "discourse locations," and the writer submits uniformly to those expectations, then the style permits skimming, because the cream is always in the same place. This can be highly useful in certain practical situations: if you are sitting at a desk and need to plow through forty-three memos, most of whose substance you already know, it will be a great help if you can rely upon the memos to present their main points in the expected places; then you can simply glance through and extract what you want.

If you try to skim classic writing in this way, you run the risk of missing indispensable conceptual nuances or refinements. In the model scene of classic style, the classic reader is not pressed for time, distracted by jobs to do, or mired in routine. The classic reader is competent, sophisticated, quite able to handle surprises, and unimpressed with predictability. The surface mark of classic style that is most uncongenial to practical style can be picked out by what we will call the "last-third" test: once you have progressed a little way into a piece of writing, block out the last third of each sentence as you come to it, and imagine the standard things you might expect to occupy that position, based on what you have already read. If what in fact does occupy that position is routinely one of those standard and expected things, then the piece may be a paragon of practical writing but is unlikely to be classic. This is not because classic sentences reverse themselves at the end: once you see the end of a classic sentence, you will recognize that the sentence was true to its direction, but that does not make the sen-

tence predictable, because it usually contains a conceptual refine-ment that is clear and simple as the truth but not a cliché and hence not predictable. Here are four passages that pass the last-third test beautifully; none of them is likely to occur in practical style:

> Although a dirty campaign was widely predicted, for the most part the politicians contented themselves with insults and lies. (Julian Barnes on the 1992 British parliamentary elections)

> With peer pressure and whippings at school and at home, we were soon completely socialized and as happy as chil-dren anywhere. (Ruth Baer Lambach)

> In the same year [1827] the United Kingdom, Russia and France decided to intervene to enforce an armistice "with-out however taking any part in the hostilities." The allied fleet went to parley with the Turkish fleet anchored in Navarino Bay (Pylos) and ended up destroying it. (*Greece* [Michelin Green Guide])

> It is from this weighing of delights against their cost that the student eater (particularly if he is a student at the Uni-versity of Paris) erects the scale of values that will serve him until he dies or has to reside in the Middle West for a long period. (A. J. Liebling)

Classic Style Is Not Contemplative Style

Classic style implicitly defines itself as a normal, practically inevi-table, perspective. It makes continual if tacit claims to transpar-ency; it does not interpret; it merely presents. These claims are, of course, false. When the style succeeds, it simply obscures the distinction and manages to pass off interpretation as presentation.

In contemplative style, the distinction between presentation and interpretation is always observed: the writer sees something, presents it to the reader, and then interprets it. The stress is on the interpretation, but the transition is always explicitly marked. E. B.