

## Deep Play, Violence, and Social Reconstruction

**F**OR CLIFFORD GEERTZ: Errant Thoughts in a Blurred Genre—  
Errant—but hopefully not too erring. Thoughts in a blurred genre. Between the *Festschrift*—in which one offers in tribute one's own work as an extension of one's teacher's work—and the *slide show* on "works and lives." Indeed two slides can serve as frames: a slide of a fabulous large tapestry of a fighting cock that hangs in one of the chemical engineering buildings at MIT, a locus to which I shall return; and a slide of a painting of a buzkashi game that I recently brought back from Central Asia and that now hangs in my house, a game to which I shall also return.

So: errant thoughts in a blurred genre—for Clifford Geertz—in three movements: where we are now, where we have been, and on the trail of an anthropology to come. (One of the condundra of trying to talk about Cliff's work is that the very language of anthropology—the prose we speak—is suffused with the metaphors he has taught us to think with: turtles and metaphors all the way down.)

PART ONE: WHERE WE ARE NOW  
Emergent Forms of Life and the Anthropological Voice;

OR:

A post-Geertzian manifesto, where "post," "posts," and "postings"  
are defined as a sending-receiving relation  
between fathers and sons,  
and between the three or four phases of self-defined Geertzian work.

I start with an ethnographic datum, a stance toward ethics and politics,  
and a contextualist stance toward social theory.

We live (again) in an era in which there is a pervasive claim, or native model, asserted by practitioners in many contemporary arenas of life (law sciences, political economy, computer technologies, education, etc.) that traditional concepts and ways of doing things no longer work, that life is outrunning the pedagogies in which we were trained, that we are experiencing emergent new forms of life—in new cyborgian, hybrid, cross-

species biotechnological forms of life, in databank-networked and new materials infrastructures, in environmental and ecological changes, and in the legal, economic, psychological, and social institutional innovations that these require. *Call this native model an ethnographic datum.*

We live therefore (again) in an era in which new ethical and political spaces are thrown up that require action and can often have quite serious consequences, but for which the possibilities for giving grounds quickly run out. Traditional ethical and moral guides seem not always helpful, and we are often left to negotiate interests and trade-offs in legal or other tournaments of decision-making over time, and across terrains configured with multiply interacting new technologies, what I call ethical plateaus with due deference to Giles Deleuze, Gregory Bateson, and the Balinese. *Call this a philosophical stance toward ethics and politics*, one that Ludwig Wittgenstein formulated when he said that giving grounds comes to an end somewhere and that "the end is not an ungrounded presupposition; it is an ungrounded way of acting" or a "form of life," a sociality of action that always already contains within it ethical dilemmas, or, in the idiom of Emmanuel Levinas, "the face of the other." The "face of the other" is particularly of concern in the peopling of new technologies and technosciences.

In coming to terms with this ethnographic datum and this philosophical stance, anthropology is pushed to develop new tools of social theory. The social theory of the last quarter of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first is created out of quite different generational, social structural, communication infrastructural, and knowledge-making contexts and experiences from those out of which classical social theory was created at the end of the nineteenth century and turn of the twentieth. *Call this a contextualist stance toward social and cultural theory.* Classical social theory is hardly passé or superseded, but Marx, Weber, Dilthey, Freud, Durkheim, Fleck, Mauss, Schutz, et al. did not experience or analyze the kinds of shifts that have become focal for post-Algerian independence French theory (Cixous, Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, Derida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Touraine, Abeles, Latour, et al.), post-Green movement theory in Germany (Ulrich Beck, Friedrich Kittler) and Italy (Agamben, Melucci), post-cost-benefit analysis of high hazard high consequence industries from anesthesiology to aeronautics to nuclear power in the United States (Perrow), post-socialist nationalisms, and, importantly for my own work, social and cultural movements in the Islamic world seeking to move beyond patriarchal patrimonialism (inspired among others by Ali Shariati, Nawal al-Sadawi, Saad Ibrahim; and the powerful