
IN MEMORIAM, CLIFFORD GEERTZ (1926–2006): AN APPRECIATION

Shelly Errington

“It’s the end of an era,” several friends in several disciplines commented when they heard of Clifford Geertz’s death in late October 2006. They are not anthropologists, but they are in the humanities and social sciences, and they were awake during the second half of the twentieth century. I thought the same. And it put me to thinking about what that “era” was and about Clifford Geertz’s place in it.

Geertz’s productive academic life largely coincided with three interconnected eras in the second part of the century. One was the United States’s waxing and waning influence; after WWII, it began its superpower status in a mood of generosity and hope—or so it must have seemed at the time—starting with the Marshall Plan, Truman’s Point Four Program, and “modernization theory,” but this era ended with the gloomy triumph of global neoliberalism and the US invasion of Iraq. A second simultaneous “era” traces the fates of the former colonies of Africa and Asia, which began with decolonization and nationalist agendas for social and economic justice, and ends with falteringly imagined national communities under duress due to various assaults including the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank. And third, an era of changing intellectual landscape for academics and intellectuals; it began with confident models of knowledge embedded in the notion of progress, objectivity, atomized facts, and a resolve to emulate physics, and ended with many Situations of, Conditions of, and Discourses of, and post-’s and neo-’s. Geertz’s career and thoughts were intertwined with all three of those eras.

1.

I first read Geertz's work as a graduate student at Cornell University in the late 1960s and early 70s. I remember not understanding what the fuss was about. In retrospect, I can see that my naïve and unappreciative attitude was due partly to, first, my complete ignorance at the time of the state of the field when Geertz entered it, and, second, the fact that I was absorbing even more-radical and more-extreme ideas about meaning and social theory from my teachers at the time, with the result that Geertz's work seemed tame by contrast.

I was ignorant about anthropology upon arrival in graduate school. As an undergraduate major in political "science," I was unable to reconcile in my mind its two parts—classical political theory, which I liked very much, and behavioral political science (then much in vogue), which I did not. Intuiting in May of my senior year that anthropology, which I knew little about, would be more to my liking, I landed by a happy accident at Cornell, the only graduate program that accepted me.

The buzz at the time was all about Lévi-Strauss and Foucault on major theory, not Geertz; about Victor Turner and Mary Douglas on symbols, not Geertz; about Anderson, Kahin, Siegel, and Wolters on Indonesia and Vietnam (the Vietnam War was raging and getting worse), not Geertz.

At the time, Marxists (think Marvin Harris and Leslie White as figures taken seriously in that era) and "culturalists" were at odds, to say the least, especially as perceived by students, who picked up on and absorbed the raging debates in the larger academic world in an effort to form opinions and find a voice. The former—the Marxists and other proponents of hard facts—thought the latter—those interested in literature, art, meaning, and language, most particularly if they were in the social sciences—to be mushy-headed, mystical, and soft on liberalism to boot. The latter thought the Marxists and their ilk to be strident, self-justifying, and willingly blind. Anthropology's positivist heritage, sometimes inflected by a variety of mainstream scientific assumptions and methodologies, had its non-Marxist proponents as well, of course, who were equally hostile or, at best, irritated and puzzled by the culturalists. By the time I was writing my dissertation in the early 1970s, I went around telling people that I studied false consciousness, only partly joking. (Of course, I had absorbed an appreciation of *form* as meaningful from my revered teachers.)

Now, when theories of power and of meaning have long since been put into a relationship, in several plausible and useful ways, it is hard to imagine that all those dichotomies—the substructure and the superstructure, substantial hard facts versus decorative mere thoughts—loomed large. But at that time, we culturalists felt defensive and beleaguered, even though we believed we were onto something very important, something exciting, a different way of understanding humans.

If that was the state of anthropology circa 1970 (at least at Cornell, as I experienced it—it would have been more advanced in Chicago), imagine what it was like twenty years earlier. In 1951, the youngish Clifford Geertz, a veteran who attended Antioch College on the GI Bill, fresh from being a philosophy and English major, and editor of Antioch's literary magazine, but having taken no undergraduate course in anthropology (there were none), landed at Harvard graduate school with his wife Hildred (also there to become an anthropologist). He told me that the first book he was

given to read in order to understand the field he was about to enter was G. P. Murdock's *Social Structure* (1949). It is hard to imagine anything further from his sensibilities. He must have been shell-shocked.

The 1950s was a period when "culture" was imagined as the superorganic; or as a collection of traits, which could be correlated as atomized bits and scientific conclusions (drawn from the facts); or as a projection of childhood psychological upbringing, writ large. In America, at Harvard, the most ambitious theorizer of the time and place was Talcott Parsons, who was attempting to integrate all social sciences under a so-called General Theory of Action. Parsons's image of "the social actor" was diagrammed as a series of concentric circles, with the "biological" in the central core, "culture" at the furthest periphery, and "psychology" and "sociology" between. In this schema, "culture" was the least central part of being human—a kind of decoration on the solid core of biology.

In Britain, both between the world wars and for several decades beyond, British Social Anthropologists regarded themselves as sociologists of the non-West, assiduously studying structure (largely kinship) and its "functions." Until Victor Turner's work caught on in the 1960s, they dismissed religion and symbolism as an irrational frame in which, for example, native Africans pursued attainment of things like sacred stools and leopard cloaks; but the Social Anthropologists wrote as if what the Africans were *really* after, unbeknownst to them, was wealth, status, and power, the universal goals of rational men. (I came across the startling assertion, in the notoriously boring *African Political Systems* [1962], that if the native Africans understood what they were *really* pursuing, the whole society would collapse.) The British Social Anthropologist Edmund Leach wrote an article claiming that the fact that women get married in virtually all societies is an aspect of structure; whether they wear wedding rings or mark their foreheads with a vermilion dot to show it is an expression of culture. In these views, "culture" stood as either delusion or decoration.

2.

After two years of graduate school, Clifford and Hildred Geertz, for their doctoral research, joined a Ford Foundation-funded team going to Indonesia, where very little anthropology, or something akin to it, had been done at all. The Dutch had worked on texts; Lévi-Strauss on a long-distance analysis of Eastern Indonesian kinship; Cora Du Bois on the Alor; and Bateson and Mead (and the extraordinary group of European writers, dancers, and artists there at the same time) on Bali—but little else comes to mind, and even less in English. So anything that this team of Harvard graduate students were to publish about Java had the chance to begin a new phase, a new framing for subsequent work in this new nation, this new field of study.

Clifford Geertz's work did become a major frame, setting the terms for much subsequent work in the region. His doctoral dissertation, packed with texts and information, turned into *The Religion of Java* (1960), giving us multiple voices sorted into various *aliran*, an enduring account of *alus* and *kasar*, *lair* and *batin*, and the Javanese "person" protected by a wall of language made by someone else, and much else. It was quickly followed by his other soon-to-become classics on the region: *Agricultural Involvement* (1963), *Peddlers and Princes* (1963), *Balinese Kinship* (1975; with

Hildred Geertz, first author), and *Negara* (1980). The Geertz's fieldwork in Morocco resulted in more ethnographic and comparative work, notably *Islam Observed* (1971) and *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society* (1979; by C. Geertz, H. Geertz, and L. Rosen). And, of course, Geertz exercised a further, if indirect, influence on Indonesian social sciences by recommending in 1971 that a series of small, regional research stations be created, and that they be dispersed throughout the islands to train and encourage Indonesians in field research. The Ford Foundation, which had requested his recommendation, established and funded those stations.

Geertz's written works, especially the early ones, set the terms of the scholarship on Indonesia, in the sense that generations of scholars either elaborated, extended, and explored his formulations of the issues, or they contested and disputed them. Geertz's works prompted generations of scholars to do research on many different fronts and to *theorize* their work (rather than take existing theory for granted or apply received wisdom, derived from other disciplines or regions). Geertz's influence was extremely fortunate for the field—to have a major figure doing research right after Indonesia's independence and, therefore, at a time when the region was opening up to social-science research from places other than its colonial power, a person who happened to be a scholar with a well-defined, fruitful, comprehensive vision of what was at issue and how to go about exploring it—opened the way for many kinds of studies, and many kind of views. Scholars who disagreed or questioned Geertz's vision—and there were many—were prompted to debate issues that matter: the nature of power; the nature of hierarchy; how groups were organized (or not); the sensibilities that sustain (or do not) the shape of everyday life; the kinds of “selves” assumed and produced locally; how the tangible expressions of meaning (music, language) signify and shape personal and public life; how people make sense of new economic and political arrangements; and how economic and political arrangements may be inflected and shaped by everything else.

The world-political context and the intellectual context in which these ethnographic and comparative works were written differed substantially from the contexts that existed before World War II. In large part, these changes resulted from the break-up of European colonial regimes. During the first few decades of independence for Asian and African “new nations,” most of them former colonies that had taken the opportunity presented by WWII to throw off their colonizers, a predominant preoccupation of both the new nations and the Americans and Europeans was the struggle to “modernize” their economies. Moreover, Cold War competition between “first” and “second” worlds for the allegiance of the struggling-to-be neutral “third world” resulted in funding for scholars doing research on the third world, especially on economic matters. Upon returning from his doctoral research, Geertz was part of a research seminar on economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and he taught an ecology course that became *Agricultural Invololution*. In 1960, after his initial fieldwork, a year teaching at UC Berkeley, and a stint at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral and Social Sciences in Stanford, a group of scholars from a variety of disciplines, among them Geertz, moved to the University of Chicago and formed the Committee on New Nations (where Geertz stayed until moving in 1970 to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton). In those decades, “modernization theory” and questions about how modernization might work out for the good of all were still preoccupying scholars. It was a time of intellectual intensity

about issues that seemed solvable (e.g., what circumstances could lead to economic “take-off”?). In works like *Peddlers and Princes*, *Agricultural Involution*, and *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society*, Geertz’s interest in the encounter between meaning-making and ethos, on the one hand, and the shaping of life’s “hard” aspects (making a living, markets, farming), on the other, is obvious.

During those same decades, a revolution (or at least a turn) was occurring in the human sciences. Whatever the nature of anthropology’s visions of human nature and human agency had been in earlier eras (and they were various), the 1960s and 1970s produced something different: an effort to re-theorize culture by putting symbols, meaning, and thought at the center of our understanding of what it is to be human. Every social-science discipline presumes the existence of its theory’s agents; these *homunculi* populate the theory and make it work, in theory. So economists, notoriously, postulate rational man, maximizing his advantage; political science’s denizens jockey for position in their relentless pursuit of status and power; psychologists, regardless of their stripe, attend to internal processes or perhaps black boxes (or now brains), but in any case see a collection of islands that may aggregate into society but hardly derive from it.

Derived from and expressed in several different intellectual traditions, what could be called a turn toward meaning in anthropological theorizing seemed to be in the air at the time—that’s what we culturalists felt excited about at Cornell when I was in graduate school there. But the air was thickest at the University of Chicago, where Geertz taught between 1960 and 1970. He was not alone in his impulse to create a different way of understanding anthropology and how to interpret human actions.

Geertz was not alone in advocating a turn toward meaning, but he was probably the most widely read anthropologist outside his discipline, and he was highly explicit about meaning-making as a fundamental aspect of being human. His very widely read “Thick Description” (1973), with its forever-quoted “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has made,” and its clarification of the difference between the twitch (biological) and the wink (intentional), stands as a manifesto defending the difference between the kind of social analysis that accepts human meaning and intention as the keys to understanding social life, and the kind that disregards or discounts them. But to me the most remarkable and still radical and unabsorbed statement of Geertz’s position is “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man” (first published in 1966).

To cut to the chase, he points out that humans are born incomplete, and we need culture (first, language and all it entails for meaning-making) to complete ourselves. You would not think this would come as a surprise, but the implication of Geertz’s way of putting it went against two centuries or so of European knowledge-production (ever since, as Foucault put it, *L’Homme* was invented at the end of the eighteenth century). Geertz’s argument asserted that, at a physical/biological level, we are programmed for using language and creating and using symbols, and that, therefore, culture and meaning-making are not superficial decoration but the very the core of our being as humans. We are winkers, not merely twitchers, and intention pervades everything we do. The presumption of biological sciences and psychology, as well as other kinds of social sciences in overt or covert ways, was that we can discover the core of what it is to be human by stripping away all that humans do not have in common—

in other words, cultural variations—in order to discover a generalized and universal “human nature;” the misleading and empty result of that endeavor, Geertz maintained to the end, is to create empty generalities. His view was that the scientific and rhetorical task of the investigator is to tack between the smallest particulars of lives lived by real people in real places and times, and the deepest and broadest questions that humans, as humans, deal with, using each to illuminate the other and help us understand their significance. The further uncomfortable implication of his argument is that “we” knowledge-producers, whether scientists or artists or anthropologists, like everyone else who ever lived, are also meaning-making animals; the knowledge and arts we produce (science, economics, the idea of history, ...) do not stand outside of culture any more than do those knowledge and arts of the cultures we study. Some version of this notion is commonplace in anthropology, but it is hard to swallow for the physical and biological scientists and those in the social sciences who would aspire to imitate them.

Geertz went about for much of his career showing us how construing (to use a favorite term of his) humans as inevitably and intrinsically meaning-making creatures would alter our ways of understanding social life, history, art, religion, economics ... everything, in fact.

He insisted, for instance, that thinking is a public activity, not a private one; that “culture” is neither a reified *thing* with boundaries (an idea that, curiously, some anthropologists attribute to Geertz) nor is it what’s left over when other explanations fail (as syndicated columnists seem to believe). This approach resists separating “biology” and “culture” and reifying the former; and it resists attributing to genes or the like explanatory power (DNA as an explanation of behavior, the “selfish gene” as an explanation of sexual attraction and sibling rivalry). It goes against any essentialized notion of races, ethnicities, and primordial tribalism, and against the easy-to-understand and totally misguided notion that essential and clearly demarcated “cultures” or “religions” inevitably clash. And, of course, to bring it up to date (for now it seems everything old is new again), this approach would reject the conviction that “we” are the possessors of facts, reason, science, and a rational economic system while “they” are burdened with narrative, culture, tribalism, and irrational hate. Geertz’s view of humans is still too far from the mainstream of received wisdom and psychological (and other kinds of) investment to make much of a dent in either popular culture or the corridors of bureaucracy and power.

At the end of the 1970s, world events delivered a blow to modernization theory. The Iranian Revolution, which deposed a secular modernizer as head of state (true, the Shah was corrupt and a puppet of the United States, but he remained emblematically a secular modernizer) and installed an Ayatollah, gave pause to those who believed that less-developed economies and nation states were becoming, or wanted to become, “just like us”: secular, rational, and modern. At the same time, the turn toward meaning in the human sciences shifted visibly into a new and far more self-critical phase. In 1979, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* was published; three years later, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1982) was published; and at the end of the 1970s, Michel Foucault’s works were translated into English and published at an increasing rate. These books catalyzed major shifts in the intellectual projects of anthropology, history, comparative politics, and literary studies in the United States and beyond.

They ushered in colonial discourse, attention to the relations of power in the production of knowledge, a rejection of the notion that “tribes” live “before” or outside history, and, in general, prompted the move toward self-critique of the disciplines, self-reflexivity in the human sciences, and related changes in acceptable prose styles that would occur in the 1980s and 1990s.

3.

The turn to reflexivity and colonial discourse involved paying new attention to knowledge-production and its fixing by inscription, both in large senses and in what we ordinarily call “writing.” Various anthropologists turned to opine about “writing culture.” My favorite *bon mot* about it is Jim Clifford’s (himself a non-anthropologist but a leader in this movement), who commented to me that “your cooked is my raw.” Just so. Everybody attended to writing and style. Geertz’s contribution was the utterly delightful *Works and Lives* (1988, but given as lectures in 1983). Check out especially “Slide Show: Evans-Pritchard’s African Transparencies.”

Then there was the matter of the politics of style. For the first few decades of Geertz’s professional life, his conscious and writerly prose was rejected by many academics as too artful, too conscious of its rhetorical devices, as not muscular enough to convey the hard facts; it seemed soft and unscientific. His style of writing was for a while, then, too radical for his critics: he legitimized the reflective essay that uses “I” and situates the writer/observer not outside the “object” of investigation but within it, conversing with—above all, conversing with!—the “objects” of investigation, who, talking back, become “subjects” themselves, on the same level as the anthropologist. With the advent of the 1980s and its attendant focus in anthropology on how one should “write culture,” and its brief turn to extreme self-reflexivity, Geertz’s reflexive and reflective essay style snuck up and bit him in the back. Suddenly it was not radical enough for his new critics.

Some of his other ideas either became unfashionable or were willfully misunderstood during the 1980s and ‘90s. (Actually, many of his ideas were willfully misunderstood his whole career, but that is a perpetual hazard for the famous and enviable.) For one, there was Geertz’s unfashionable belief in the intentional self, which expresses itself with words. Translated into a political stance, Geertz was something of a liberal humanist. A phenomenologist at heart, he certainly did believe in the *subject*, one of the many reasons he didn’t care for French structuralism. In structuralism and post-structuralism, too, *subjects* disappear, or rather never were part of the equation; and, besides, they speak only *parôle*, which is of no consequence: only *la langue*, only *la structure*, are worth attending to. Liberal humanism, out of fashion in Marxist-inflected thought during the Vietnam War, was out of fashion again during the post-structuralist era.

Another serious complaint concerned Geertz’s apparent indifference to analyzing power. The fact is, he did not *want* to demystify, which he regarded as equivalent to finding the same thing everywhere—power, exploitation, the mode of production. I think he found that claim intellectually uninteresting and, besides, it had been done before. He wanted, rather, to show us the varieties of difference, in conversation with people and taking seriously their beliefs about their lived experience. He wanted to

study false consciousness. As he put it somewhere (I'm paraphrasing here), why go to Timbuktu and get beriberi in order to find out that big fish eat little fish? His intention was to give us a different way of seeing, to reverse our common-sense perceptions of what's going on—to make us understand that power serves pomp in Bali, or to make us see charisma as a cultural system. As a consequence, to my mind there is no doubt that he underreported the exploitation of the peasants by the elite. But there is also no doubt that doing so was a deliberate rhetorical choice related to his life-long intellectual project—not due to a moral failing or to indifference.

Unlike the intellectual project of many people who study the unfolding of power within history, Geertz was not inclined to lay bare the interlocking chains of factors that bump against each other causally and form straight lines (especially if they lead to “us”). Geertz did not think in straight lines, and he did not write in straight lines. He thought and wrote in patterns, as he frequently pointed out about himself.

Indeed, in almost every way one can imagine, Geertz and his prose were non-linear. He would not write a straightforward, declarative sentence with a strong claim that might unambiguously carry his argument forward. His authorial voice was deeply ironical, and he was always stepping back from what he was saying, gently mocking it and himself if his claim—just made or about to emerge—sounded too much like a pronouncement. His lists, his asides, his parenthetical remarks (sometimes even in parentheses), his strings of dependent clauses ... made his sentences less like paved roads going somewhere and more like meandering streams, caught in eddies, doubling back, flowing laterally, acknowledging the existence of whole powerful rushing rivers while dismissing them with a wave of the hand, finally stopping to pool and spread and deposit for inspection a pattern made by the flora and fauna picked up on the way ... and then finding a crevice or slot to spill out from and continue its constantly self-interrupted but ultimately purposeful journey toward a conclusion (for water travels downhill, and writing and books go from beginning to end, so one knows it will end up somewhere). Usually, especially in his middle years, when he was writing theoretical pieces instead of ethnography, the stopping-pools were three examples—Java, Bali, and Morocco.

As a consequence of his intellectual convictions and temperamental inability either to think or to write in a straight line, he did not write social science, and he did not write history. About social science I'll say no more, since it is obvious—I'm referring to big social science, the kind that uses questionnaires and charts and statistics and makes claims and infers causality, not the kinds of essayistic reflections in the humane sciences that his own prose helped to legitimate.

History was a different matter—what can I say, some of his best friends were historians—and he liked and read history. But think of *Negara*—a kind of anti-history. Although ostensibly situated in time, the picture of the Balinese state that he paints underplays change and history. In fairness, the apparent timelessness of that picture was not due to his imagining Balinese culture as essentialized and changeless, but because he believed that the political project of the state endured through many vagaries of history. (It is probably my least favorite of his books, although not for that reason.)

And think of *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (1995). Geertz begins that book by discussing at length the impossibility of the task at hand: it is Heraclitus cubed and worse, he says, because when everything has changed—the world, the anthropologist, the discipline—there is no place to stand to locate what has changed and what has not changed. “Change, apparently,” he writes a few pages later, “is not a parade that can be watched as it passes.” The stories one tells, he observes, have a beginning, middle, and end, not because that is the “inner direction of things,” but because of one’s own intersection with them (not his phrasing), presumably at an earlier and then a later point in one’s life. And, of course, if he had no taste for the parade of change seen from a vantage point outside it, he had even less for the idea of progress resulting in the self-congratulatory European “us,” a related idea admittedly not exactly the same.

He organizes *After the Fact* not as a before-and-after story with the ends connected as strings of causation, which would have looked something like “history.” He organizes it, instead, thematically, by towns, countries, disciplines, and so forth, a rhetorical strategy that allows him to write about patterns of contrast in each, and to make it clear in the structure that the story being told is about his encounters and reflections, not about the parade of change as such.

In the last section of the book, “Modernities,” he describes a new ritual he attended in Java—the product of “modernity” in some way, and rather incomprehensible. It occurred to me that, but for the fact that he does not see this pastiche as a consequence of the latest phase of late capitalism, does not make pronouncements, uses no jargon or abstraction, and his tone is ironic and self-deprecating, he could be a post-modern Marxist describing a certain hotel in Los Angeles. As the Indonesians might say, “*sama saja*” —but for the fact.

4.

Cliff Geertz’s intellectual project, which you could say in brief was to show patterns made up of parts that affect each other and that go nowhere clearly or directionally, was no doubt related to his temperament and sensibilities as well as to his convictions. He had the inclination, even at a young age, to take meaning and varieties of consciousness seriously. He was of a literary and philosophical turn of mind, had read Dewey in college, and despised instrumentality in human relationships and, I suppose by extension, as a theory of human nature. Perhaps his favorite poem was W. H. Auden’s “In Memory of W. B. Yeats,” which was read at the private family memorial for him (kindly sent to me by Hildred Geertz, his first wife). A stanza he especially liked and quoted began

*For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its saying where executives
Would never want to tamper; . . .*

Cliff Geertz was a person of great professional and personal integrity, generous in spirit (which did not exclude some occasional skewering wit), and enormously hard working (the mind boggles imagining the number of letters of recommendation he wrote . . . never mind the writing he was famous for).

He was also highly sociable, which may come as a surprise to some. At his memorial service at the Institute for Advanced Study on March 4, 2007, it was said several times that he didn't like small talk. It is understandable that he got that reputation, but that characterization doesn't quite nail it. True, he was not really programmed to make strangers feel at ease, and he was impossible on the phone—abrupt, impatient. He didn't like boring talk, which includes almost any type of rating talk (he disliked “invidious comparisons” in almost any context), or posturing, or arguments about anything except ideas, or any kind of adamant and uninformed talk. He also was not someone to brainstorm with—he expected your positions on serious topics to be well thought out and well informed, even if speculative.

But he loved conversation—anecdotes, funny stories, stories with a punch line, insightful observations, thoughtful speculations, contrasting and comparing views of this and that, or discussion of serious issues fraught with moral significance. And he enjoyed talking about baseball.

Cliff's second wife, Karen Blu, contributed this remembrance at his memorial service at the Institute and graciously sent it for inclusion here:

When he was in the hospital at the University of Pennsylvania, toward the end of his tortured, nearly three-month stay, the doctors had said he might, in time, actually recover enough to come home and to go to his office. Cliff, ever the skeptic, was not convinced. In trying to find a way to encourage him, I asked him what, for him, would be *the one* most important thing required for a meaningful life. Although his body had been battered repeatedly, his mind was very much there. He thought about it for awhile, and then he said, “talking to people.” Perhaps that gives you some idea of the value he placed on the conversations you had with him. He was not always an easy man to talk with, but good talk was the thing he valued most.

When I reflect on the last fifty or sixty years of anthropology, I think that it has changed the most of all the human sciences. A prime reason for that is that during fieldwork we converse with people who converse with us, thus changing the premises and framework of the questions asked and answered—something that doesn't happen if the method of data-collection is a survey form. Cliff rejected the one-sided notion of “objectivity,” which implies a privileged point of view rather than a mutually constructed one. (He *was* a fiend for accuracy, something very different from “objectivity.”) He loved good conversation, and it is probably no accident that his model of the anthropological enterprise of fieldwork was the back and forth of conversation. As we enter a new, more cynical era in the early twenty-first century, those humane and liberal values, like Clifford Geertz himself, who both embodied and articulated them, will be missed.

CODA:

A CARTOON DRAWN FOR CLIFFORD GEERTZ

Cliff Geertz did not think in straight lines, and he was quite a humorous fellow, both of which characteristics (among other things) put him at odds with conventional social science. I drew this cartoon for him circa 1982, and he enjoyed it a lot.

— Shelly Errington

in the
GALLERY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

