

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

As scholars, we engage in research and writing with a view to having the results made available to an interested audience. That audience ranges from colleagues in anthropology and linguistics with whom we share modes of discourse and general theoretical understandings, to beginning students and interested members of the general public, for whom the subject of our research might be wholly novel. The difficult, and unenviable, task for the editors of an encyclopedia is to achieve concise but clear exegeses of some important concepts, theoretical concerns, and facts about a subject together with a guide to further resources, that will be accessible to any and all potential members of this audience.

Clearly, scholars and their research are a necessary prerequisite to such an enterprise. Under the best circumstances, the relationship between an editor and the researcher/author is one of mutual give-and-take, with compromise on both sides until a satisfactory outcome for both parties is achieved. Such a conception of the editorial process was *not* held by the editor(s) in the case under review, and the serious issue at stake involves the important question, "whose work is represented in the end?". If scholars are unable to recognize their own voice in the final product then surely the relationship between an author and editor has been seriously violated. That an author should not be allowed to withdraw under such circumstances is a matter for a court of law, in my view.

The editor(s) of this encyclopedia clearly had no interest in the *anthropological* perspective of the authors, for this is what has been systematically eliminated. To take just one example, compare what Fisher wrote at the start of her article with the edited product to see *what kind of* information was deleted:

Dances lie at the heart of much ritual life. This means that the difficult nature of changes affecting that ritual life are felt with particular force by those wishing to preserve its meaning and significance [edited version].

Dances and dancing lie at the heart of much Aboriginal ritual life. Consequently, changes affecting ritual are felt with particular force by those wishing to preserve the meaning and significance of

traditional performing arts. A growing number of people understand the *essential role* of these performances as *carriers of the identities and unwritten histories* of Aboriginal peoples. A smaller number are aware of the *religious, revelatory and initiatory nature of knowledge and power* which characterises the *Aboriginal model of danced events*. [Fisher's version: emphasis supplied].

First, we have lost the subtle but important distinction between dances and dancing -- between choreographed events with structures that endure, and the physical activity itself -- a distinction that is not at all obvious, and which might have provoked the observant reader (if not that editor) to pause for thought as to what, exactly, such a distinction might entail. Second, we have lost the entire anthropological content regarding the *significance* of the *Aboriginal model* of these dances: the essential role they play in identity; as unwritten history; and as fundamentally involved in ontological and epistemological matters regarding knowledge and power.

An encyclopedia is a cultural artifact *par excellence* in that it represents the categories and classifications of the culture that produced it. Franklin (this issue, p. 182) is correct to point out that the status of the study of dances and dancing in Western cultures may be a factor in the particular editorial events of concern here. Presumably, an encyclopedia on Australia could not omit entries on its indigenous peoples. If "primitives" dance a lot, and this is of interest to the general public (as tourists?) then sections on Aboriginal dances were desirable categories, but only in so far as the information admitted keeps the subjects -- Aborigines and dancing -- safely confined within the expected bounds of "the primitive." It must clearly represent "them" not "us." An anthropological perspective is uncomfortable precisely because it challenges such ethnocentric boundaries.

The irony of the situation is that while such publications require that anthropologists do the research to furnish the material for such accounts, the editors found it necessary to stifle the anthropological rationale for that research: a genuine understanding of "them." I suggest that the editors, as members of the dominant culture, wish only to confirm their own categories and classifications, not to challenge them or their readers' expectations of the subject matter, the educational nature of the enterprise notwithstanding. Hence the reduction of Fisher's article to a tourist guide: the cultural icon of the primitive Aborigine remains safely entrenched.

As researchers, we cannot, and do not, of course, permit such editorial policies and their publications to dictate the content and meaning of our work (this issue of JASHM bears testimonial to our resolve in this). The extent to which the unfortunate experience discussed here is common or an aberration can perhaps be discussed in further commentary by readers of this journal.

The editor(s) in this case appears to work under a naive empiricist model that reduces the author's role to that of "collector of the facts." Such treatment carries serious implications for future research, both for scholars and for potential students. For example, If this kind of treatment were to become widespread, qualified researchers would be justified in refusing to contribute to such products. Important opportunities to reach a wider public would then be lost, which in turn would prevent a field of enquiry from achieving or maintaining visibility, and attracting new generations of students, the corollary of which is that access to funding for research becomes more difficult.

Potential students are, of course, the primary losers. Students who only have access to the edited versions of these papers are likely to go no further with the subject at all, having been denied access to what is most interesting -- the theoretical framework from the discipline of anthropology that produced "the facts." They have also been denied the opportunity to confront some thought provoking reversals of their (probable) stereotypical expectations about Aborigines and "primitive dancing." In my view, the bland product they are presented with is likely to squelch any nascent interest rather than entice a student to further exploration.

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