work while commenting in passing on the difficulty of searching back through the history of his own intellectual path to some initial baseline. This very richness of autobiographic detail, a feature of the volume as a whole, exposes what Johannes Fabian has identified in *Time and the Other* as a form of double play in ethnographic writing: the ability of finely temporalized ethnographers to "move" through the static time of the Other. Of the four vectors of temporal experience relating to ethnography that Strathern lists (the time of the lives of individual ethnographers, of the lives of individual subjects, in the history of anthropology, and of "the life of the people studied, as a historical matter"), this volume marks an important moment in our analysis of the first. But the last remains largely unaddressed in Highlands ethnography.

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Brison's ethnography of Inakor village in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea explores two opposed, sharply contrasting but interrelated circuits of political communication. One is constituted by open, public discussion in meetings, and the other by private, secretive talk in the form of gossip and rumor. The character and consequences of their opposition are a topic of great interest to the Kwanga themselves, as Brison's meticulous account makes clear, and in the most general sense the structural tension between openness and secrecy poses a significant problem for every egalitarian form of social organization. Brison's analysis demonstrates, however, that these modes of discourse are two sides of the coin of Kwanga community life, each in some measure defining itself in terms of, and drawing content from, the other.

Brison argues that Kwanga leaders —along with virtually all players in the community political process—consciously employ both forms of communication in pursuit of power and influence. They attempt to manage people's impressions of events, thereby influencing actions based on those impressions, through public speech-making but also by strategic use of gossip, rumor, and innuendo. By focusing her analysis on both forms of discourse and on their functional interrelationships, Brison makes a valuable contribution to the balance of emphasis between the two in the growing ethnographic literature on talk and conflict in the Pacific. Contributors to two important collections on this topic, Brenneis and Myers' *Dangerous Words* (1984) and Watson-Gegeo and White's *Disentangling* (1990), have suggested the relevance of private, offstage talk in conflict management, but with only a few exceptions they have concentrated their research efforts on the more public forms of conflict talk and have not dealt fully with gossip and ordinary conversation. In the broader academic context...
arena, recent, language-oriented work in the ethnography of law in the United States, such as Conley and O'Barr's *Rules versus Relationships* (1990) and Merry's *Getting Justice and Getting Even* (1990), indicate a growing interest in the relationship between public and private talk in dispute contexts. Much of this work takes language and text as the primary focus, conceptualizing the legal process as the flow and counterflow of competing narrative accounts and looking for continuities and differences between the ways conflict stories are told in the public, legal discourse of the court and in the private discourse of everyday conversation.

Brison's approach is not fundamentally linguistic, however, and is open to the kind of criticism that Goldman (see, eg, *Talk Never Dies*, 1983), has earlier leveled at conventional legal anthropology. Goldman's complaint is that cases are too often summarized in English, and the reader is not given verbatim, vernacular texts of conflict interactions. Although this discourse or text-centered perspective has obvious merit, it can also be taken too far. Vernacular texts are invaluable for future researchers, but are literally unreadable for the vast majority of readers, and extensive use of them poses practical problems for publishers.

There are theoretical difficulties too. Avoiding selection by the ethnographer and providing the "real data" quickly resolves into an infinite regress because some kind of selection is inevitable, and some important linguistic, prosodic, or contextual material must always be left out. From this point of view, Brison's approach can be seen not in opposition but as complementary to text-centered analysis in that it focuses more on social structure—and what I would call the communication system—than on the language system. Pursuing the social structural perspective, her analysis enriches the area of intersection between sociolinguistics and the ethnography of disputing in a number of dimensions, including the exploration of functional interrelationships between public and private speech at the level of political and social institutions. This theoretical posture lends itself to critical, comparative analysis, which, whether it is in or out of fashion at the moment, has deep roots in social anthropology.

For example, open public discussions are often viewed—by both anthropologists and community members themselves—as providing a necessary check or counterbalance to the negative and disruptive excesses of gossip and rumor. At one level of exposition, Brison declares her own critical stance in support of openness. Adopting what I would interpret as a sort of pre-postmodernist position of Habermasian nonrelativism, the author indicates through word choices and direct statements that negative evaluations of secrecy and rumor are justified; the "duplicity" and "irresponsibility" inherent in the nonpublic system of conflict talk cloud the truth and constitute a "self-reinforcing web of suspicion and counter-suspicion" (108) that poses real dangers for individuals and for community functioning.

But openness can never eliminate secrecy in a political system like that of the Kwanga. Brison links the contrast
between public and private conflict discourses to a pervasive Melanesian theme of surface harmony masking hidden hostility and threat in social relations. From this perspective, the positive, prosocial surface of public discussion of conflict issues is inevitably linked with a “hidden, and more dangerous and uncontrollable, inside” (118). In autonomy-focused egalitarianism (see Brenneis’s essay, “Talk and Transformation” in *Man* 22 (3): 499–510), the bright light of openness, it would seem, must cast correspondingly dark shadows of secrecy in conflict discourse. And the Kwanga themselves, as practicing “ethnofunctionalists” (73–74), see the value of ambiguity and indirection in public talk about conflict, and recognize the contribution to public order and social control made by sorcery as a hidden system of revenge and justice.

*Just Talk* provides a stimulating discussion of the role of secrets—defined in terms of prohibitions not on what certain people may know but on what they may openly say—and what Brison calls “institutionalized duplicity” (eg, Chapter 6) in shaping Kwanga relationship systems. Furthermore, while the extensive literature on leadership in egalitarian Melanesian communities has stressed the importance of the “big voice” of leaders in public oratory, Brison argues persuasively that the widespread backbiting of private talk about leaders is an equally important part of the picture, and “Gossip and rumor are the most powerful forces in creating and preserving the egalitarian ethos of social relations” (245) among the Kwanga. Along with a useful discussion of the ethnographic literature bearing on the Melanesian ambivalence toward power, Brison provides a full and sharply drawn account of how the total speech economy of the Kwanga allows leaders to rise to power and serve necessary political functions in the community, but also limits them, drives them back down, and prevents any entrenched formation of power in the direction of permanent hierarchy.

Brison makes excellent use of cases in developing her arguments and illustrating key points. In fact, the overlapping character of the abundant case material, in which some of the same people and cultural institutions are seen in different but linked contexts, lends a feeling of depth, solidity, and credibility to the analysis. While this sense of believability is characteristic of many good ethnographies, one of the author’s most innovative contributions in this book is the discussion of that process—the power of interlinked stories to engender belief. Belief, being linked to action, is a crucial factor in conflict management, but it has been largely overlooked in legal anthropology. Here, again, Brison’s structural perspective and carefully worked out analysis raise basic questions and provide intriguing insights. For example, why do some stories have a powerful impact in a given dispute and others almost none? Focusing on the story as an element within a total narrative system, Brison shows how one may trace typical patterns of genesis, circulation, and impact on village behavior, explaining the striking differences observed in their life cycles. In a way
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that should stimulate further research, Brison demonstrates that analysis of narratives in conflict must consider the emergent meaning that results from the interactions of the intention of the speaker, the interpretations of primary and secondary audiences, and the text itself in relation to previous and concurrent texts.

Just Talk is more than just ethnography. It makes valuable theoretical contributions that will be appreciated in a number of subdisciplines, including those concerned with politics, law, and communication.

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This book is a remarkable portrait of the symbolic themes underlying myth, ritual, and exchange among the Gimi of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Through a dense and sometimes breathtaking explication of rites of death, birth, marriage, initiation, and curing, Gillian Gillison makes a definitive case for putting procreation beliefs at the heart of studies of Highlands exchange. But hers is not the well-worn point that we need to see Gimi transactions in terms of their underlying ideas of being—far from it. Instead, Gillison sees Gimi procreation beliefs as an idiom for expressing the most basic psychosexual conflicts, so that Gimi life-cycle events, which inevitably bring up “fantasied dilemmas that threaten [a person’s] development” (22), offer an ideal medium for enacting (and defending against) primordial sexual fantasies of incest and intrigue. Thus, “the conflictual, mythological basis of Gimi society is rooted in the overriding idea that exchange has a profoundly sexual origin and meaning” (xv). For the Gimi, these themes get played out in a hidden debate over women’s role in the mythical origins of social life and, by extension, their role as objects of transactions among men.

Gillison began her field study looking for “some kind of female protest or counterculture” (4), but found that women seemed to have no interest in undercutting men’s world. However, on a second trip she discovered that women did have myths of their own, told after dark in women’s houses, and these offered counter visions of the origins of social life. Women’s stories, it seemed, allowed a “clandestine debate” with the men’s world, while men and women themselves continued avoiding each other in much of their daily lives (xv). Gillison further found that both sexes’ myths effaced important structural elements that appeared overtly in the symbolism of life-cycle rituals. Throughout the book, with intriguing but not always convincing interpretive artistry, Gillison shows that the complex articulation of myth and ritual exchange, framed in a dia-