In May 1984, during the first few weeks of fieldwork in Kuzaki, I stuck close to the grandmother (ōbāsan) of the fishing and diving household that had taken me in. Through her I began my participation in family and community life: I cleaned fishing nets in the morning, helped with the drying of seaweed, went to the fields with her afterward, chatted with her as she prepared meals, sat with her by the television while she repaired nets or supervised the three children of the household, and took her cue about when it was my turn to enter the bath. Along with what at the beginning seemed to me to be impenetrable monologues on Kuzaki history and gossip, she taught me the correct greetings and responses to the family and outsiders. It seemed my Japanese was much too polite and Tokyo-like for a community as close-knit as Kuzaki, where “ohayo gozaimasu” (good morning) became the much more breezy and informal “hayai desune” (lit., it’s early, isn’t it?) or even “hayai ne?” People of the same generation also referred to each other by a nickname (aishō), generally consisting of part of one’s first name and the affectionate suffix chan. Thus the grandmother was bā-chan to most and Ki-chan (short for Kisa) to the women of her own age.

A short, sturdy woman, Ōbāsan was baked brown by the sun and—despite her age of seventy-six—was always on the move, always busy. Her hands were rough, cracked, and sometimes clumsy from a lifetime of hard work. Her teeth were brilliantly white and even, as were the teeth of most of the people of her generation; it took me months to understand that they were actually beautifully made, complete dentures. Ōbāsan at first seemed eternally cheerful. She was an endlessly patient teacher to the clumsy foreigner who had come to stay in her household, although part of her mode of communication was to shout in the hope that I would understand anything if it was said loudly. She dressed in the conventional trousers (monpe) of farming women, over which she wore a blouse and an apron. On ceremonial occasions she wore a kimono, but she only once appeared in a Western-
style dress—for a trip to Osaka to visit her grandnieces when their father suddenly died.

After the first few months when fieldwork expanded, I was not always available to help ōbāsan with her work. I was watching divers and, in the summer, diving myself; I was spending evenings in Kuzaki inns helping to serve the tourists; or I went out with the men—my only chance to talk to them separately. During the preparations for Kuzaki rituals, I alternated observing what went on in the household with what was being done outside. Thus while I still cleaned nets, I helped less with other tasks. Once, on a busy day when sweet potatoes had to be harvested, I felt I should at least bring in the crop I had helped plant earlier in the year.

It was a gray, cool day and the work was less arduous than I had expected, turning the plants over with a hoe to expose the potatoes underneath and then collecting them in a basket. The field (hatake), like all Kuzaki fields, was a tiny parcel of land tucked away in one of the numerous mountain valleys and was reached by climbing along a series of narrow, winding, intersecting paths that led to other small hatake. This field was only large enough to produce vegetables for a family of six, and not all of it had been planted in sweet potatoes. After a few hours of work, as ōbāsan and I made our way back for lunch, pushing the wheelbarrow full of tools and potatoes,
we were stopped by two other grandmothers who had been working nearby. This seemingly chance meeting was not the usual cheerful session of making jokes about the foreigner. It appeared that the women had something on their minds to tell me and, being elderly country women, they were direct—there was none of the usual wrapping that foreigners might associate with the Japanese (although the fact that they were probably articulating a concern that was ōbāsan’s is an example of another form of indirectness).

“You should not spend so much time in the inns,” said one.

“It’s not healthy for a young woman to go drinking,” lectured another.

“It’s good that you are helping bā-chan today, that is what you should stick to doing,” said the first.

I tried explaining, again, about anthropological fieldwork and what it involved. In reply, I received the surprise of my life. The first grandmother got even more serious with me, and said: “Wakatta, wakatta (We know, we know). But if you are really serious about learning what goes on in a household, you should marry one of the young men here, be a yome-san (daughter-in-law). Then you would know about the ie (household) and the village. Instead you are here, away from your husband, at an age when you should be having babies, still a student, doing what?”

It was my first sense that I had crossed a boundary—that in a place where everyone thought they knew what anthropology involved (Kuzaki had had a team of Japanese scholars studying them for ten years in the 1960s), I was causing some anxiety. Previous village studies had involved large teams of scholars, asking everyone questions about diving, household names, fishing techniques, festivals, and so on, and they had stayed for only a few weeks at a time. I was a foreigner, so it was to be expected that language might hold me up, and working alone was certainly an oddity; but as a woman on her own who did not always stay by the grandmother’s side, I was causing some worry, or so it seemed to me at the time. Not wanting to cause trouble, I curtailed evenings out with men and stopped going to the inns as often. Other aspects of fieldwork also intervened, as in November village life slowed down and preparations for the New Year and its related ceremonies began.

Yet the statement that I should try being a real yome-san struck me as a particularly astute one. I had been incorporated into the household as if I were a new member of it. I had learned the customs of the household and become involved in such a way that I had helped the grandmother with her workload. On the one hand I had not taken on some of the more arduous tasks performed by the actual yome-san of the household: getting up first thing in the morning, bathing last, preparing the bath, preparing the rice
for the day and making the children’s school lunches, cooking, or doing the laundry; but on the other hand I had helped in some tasks that the yomesan had refused to do. I realized, when I thought about it, that the women were lamenting a change in the role of daughters-in-law that my presence had helped to magnify: New wives in Kuzaki households often refused to do some of the harder tasks. Net cleaning was one that I was praised for doing, often in the same breath as it was pointed out that so-and-so refused to do it at all. But in contrast to these young brides, I could call upon my research as a way out of the work—and I would eventually leave, so that my help was only a temporary thing, perhaps resented as much as it was appreciated. I realized that I needed to rethink what it was that I was doing.

On Being an Anthropologist

This ambivalence about my presence, about my role, about the value of what I was actually doing not only colored the rest of my fieldwork (upon which I had embarked rather confidently), it has caused me some concern in the years since. It was not a new issue for me: As an undergraduate anthropology major, I had wondered whether as a woman—and in the United States, a member of an ethnic minority—I could even be an anthropologist. The realization that anthropology was dominated by white men had, at the end of my third year of college, caused me to change my major—a real shock to friends and family who had heard me saying, since the age of thirteen, that I wanted to be an anthropologist.

This early decision to “study man,” as I often joked when challenged as a teenager on this strange choice, did not just come out of what was at the time a common adolescent encounter with Margaret Mead’s utopian vision of a sex-filled, happy adolescence in Polynesia. Rather it came out of the sense of recognition that I had when I read her work. “Oh, that,” I thought. “I’ve always done that. It’s easy.”

By “that,” I meant the attempt to understand and interpret—even mediate between—the ways in which other people behaved and interacted. That I had literally always done. I was born in Spain, daughter of a Spaniard mother and an American father. I grew up in an era when people were not hyphenated or transcultural—just products of their nation. Arriving to live in Chicago with three small children, my mother was definitely a foreigner to the way of life she encountered there. More interestingly, it was the mid-seventies before I realized that since my long-dead paternal grandmother was actually a Mescalero Apache, I was a quarter Native American, and my
father was half—as we said then—Indian. Not only was I ethnic, I was a real minority.

My embracing of anthropology, however, grew out of a very different sense of being other: This was due to my mother. From a family of political radicals and academics, she clearly found much of American middle-class life alien. Her critical assessments of the American way of life helped form a basis for my seeing the United States as only one possible way of living in the world. Moreover, I was raised to be bilingual (as she had been, with Spanish and French), and I was sent to visit her sister (part of a Spanish expatriate community in Mexico) to keep up reading and writing in Spanish. As the eldest of what became a large family—eight children in all—I seemed to be always explaining, interpreting. And, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I struggled to reconcile my political beliefs, which found any war barbaric, with my father’s service in the U.S. Air Force. Coming across a discipline that seemed designed to understand social and cultural differences was like finally finding the map to help me chart my way through an unknown sea. I was not quite drowning, but I didn’t know how to get anywhere any more.

This is a very different description of my discovery of anthropology than, let us say, Lévi-Strauss (1976), who felt it was the only way to combine his range of interests: linguistics, communism, and geography. He presents his embracing of the discipline as an intellectual decision. For me it was an emotional response to being an outsider, which grew into an intellectual position: As a teenager, I chose to continue to be a stranger while at the same time trying to be a hippie, with all the political implications that carried. I was interested in traveling, in other people and other ways of life, and had been lucky enough to have traveled some already and to be literate in my mother tongue as well as in English. What else to be if not an anthropologist—a professional stranger?

After wavering during my undergraduate years, I decided to take a year in Oxford and see if anthropology still attracted me. There I soon encountered others like me: transcultural people who spoke more than one language and who saw no impossibility in the task of understanding others. My experience was not unique, but it was outside of the still dominant discourse of modernity and nationalism: I was supposed to belong somewhere and to only one place. Meeting British students brought up outside the UK, Africans educated in colonial languages (French, English) and later by the Catholic Church, British people whose origins were definitely non-English, did not serve to articulate a dissatisfaction with this model of belonging,
but it did allow me to relax. That the founding fathers of anthropology were a Pole (Malinowski) in the UK and a German (Boas) in the United States brought home to me that my decision was not so unusual; other people became anthropologists for reasons similar to mine. So I came back to anthropology.

But I chose to specialize in Japan!

I was drawn to Japan for a variety of reasons, most of them, in hindsight, related to my general antiestablishment attitudes. Anthropology was supposed to be the study of primitive societies, but Japan was not primitive—it was economically booming, modern in the extreme, and seen to be somewhat of a threat to U.S. technology and industry. Nor was it any longer a basically peasant nation-state (the other domain of anthropology) but a democratic society in which literacy was prized and mass culture thrived. It was not a former colony of a Western power (although it had lived with the threat of colonization), and its people bore the reputation of being difficult, if not impossible, to understand—if one could learn the language in the first place! Moreover, my first encounter with Japanese ethnography was through the work of women: Benedict (1947) and Nakane (1970). This attracted me in light of my earlier misgivings: It seemed positive that the famous works on Japan were by women, one of whom was a native. So, loving Japanese film and having been taught that mass culture was an area worthy of study that needed anthropological attention, I decided to learn Japanese and attempt to tackle the anthropology of a modern society.

But as I was at Oxford, where working in such a modern place was seen to be rather wimpish (not as bad as doing a library dissertation, but not far from it), I was steered toward fieldwork in a small, rural community. Looking at the literature on Japan, I found that agricultural communities seemed well covered, but that—oddly enough for an island nation—fishing communities rarely appeared in the ethnographies. Once I had read what was available on fishing communities, it was clear that as a woman I would not really be allowed to go fishing. It was a chance conversation with a friend who had seen pearl divers while on a holiday in Japan that led me to seek more information about diving women (ama). Since apparently only one ethnographic book on divers existed in English (Maraini 1962), it struck me that if I was going to be working with women, it might as well be women who were not part of an already large literature on Japanese females. Thus, beginning with the intention of working in a thoroughly modern place, I found myself planning to work on a seemingly exotic and traditional aspect of it. I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

It must be noted, however, that whatever personal and historical
moments brought me to Japan in 1984, the fact remains that as a place created and re-created in response to the outside world, Japan exists within a reality of its own. Whatever I brought to it was outweighed by the fact that I was one person living within a society that had its own history, its own accepted view of that past, its own ways of dealing with outsiders, and—even in a place as small as Kuzaki—its own agenda for allowing an anthropologist to stay there. I was at the mercy of large government structures (Monbusho, the Ministry of Education, which gave me leave to study in Japan and a generous grant); a university system (Tokyo University, elite and boasting of its own excellent anthropology department); and the wider world of anthropology (David Plath, a senior American anthropologist, was also studying divers at the same time). And I was reliant on the goodwill of the people with whom I ended up living. I never felt more powerless than when I was in the field. And that, I have decided over the years, is a good thing, even if also frightening.

It has been many years since I submitted my thesis for examination in Oxford and almost twenty years since I left for fieldwork in Japan. In that period, many of the certainties that it seemed my fellow anthropology students had taken for granted—the right to study other peoples, the belief that a person could learn about other societies and theorize about the experience—have been questioned. Yet in my daily life I have continued to teach the subject, albeit framing my lectures on kinship, religion, gender, tourism, or the media with critical and reflexive comments on the state of the discipline. Such comments are not mere lip service to the latest theoretical trends. They grow out of the deep concerns I felt even as I wrote the doctoral thesis.

For example, during the first nine months back from the field, I wondered if I really knew anything about the place in which I had lived and studied for fourteen months of my two years in Japan—whether I had the right to speak as an expert. After all, despite the warm and helpful training I had been given by おばさん, it had been made clear that there was a limit to what I could learn. Throughout that time, I veered between writing the same core chapter over and over and asking why my raw field notes were not enough proof that I had done my job as an anthropologist. I resolved my writer’s block by going back to the field in 1986 to ask even more questions. The people with whom I had worked thought my return rather amusing. In one way or another, they said, “You have already asked all that; go home and write your thesis.” With that blessing, such as it was, I went home and finally sat down to work. The resulting dissertation was typical of the sort of ethnography then on its way out: Full of ethnographic description, it
made less of the wider analytical issues than it did of the correct Japanese etymology for the term “ama” (diving woman).

Now I find myself looking back on the empirical data in much the same way I did upon my return from the field in 1985. On its own, it does stand as proof that I had done what anthropologists are supposed to do. That is, I had lived, worked, and collected information in a medium-sized village. I had learned the language, followed the rituals, sat for hours talking with people, and I had also lived through the longueurs of illness, boredom, and depression that anthropologists don’t like to discuss except with other anthropologists. I had been through the rite of passage that separates ordinary folk—other sorts of scholars, travelers, and tourists—from the anthropologist. I had learned through experience. But the question that haunted me during the writing has bothered me over the years and contributed to the delay in producing this book: Could I do a good job not only of sharing the experience but of giving a clear, honest picture of what life was like for the people of Kuzaki-chō?

This question is not a disingenuous attempt to build up to a postmodernist discourse on the role of the narrator in anthropology, important as that issue may be, but rather frames my attempts at analyzing what I lived through in Japan. For I believe that it is only in trying to unpack the experience that the anthropologist can begin to make clear the complexity of what life in any social reality is like. This is not to say that we are the ultimate authorities on our areas of study, but that by entering the field as strangers who need to be socialized into others’ ways, we begin to understand the amazing creativity and diversity that fuels human societies. It is this sense of a shared human ability to form social groupings and to do so in a variety of ways that seems to have disappeared from anthropology. The relativism in which I was educated from the mid-1970s onward celebrated the right of others to be different—but in stressing difference, it allowed for a subtle sort of racism to creep in. If other people in other societies are so different from us—whatever we are—then it is not a far step from thinking of them as so alien that they are beyond comprehension. Total deconstruction meant not only seeing society as an arena of negotiable realities, it also led to questioning whether our perceptions of any shared reality were not somehow false. Communication across cultures was made to seem impossible at the same time that global cultures and technologies were being touted as the new terrain of anthropology.

Over the years, I have wrestled with various issues. The question of representing the Japanese who, among other things, have their own anthropologists and their own theories on groups and individuals, and the problem
of working within a discourse that seemed to be disappearing below my very feet, are just two of the issues I had. As I’ve noted, my time has not been spent wandering in a desert but in teaching courses on Japan, on tourism, and on theory in anthropology. In these years I have visited Japan several times; kept in touch through others’ work; supervised the dissertations of students who have brought up the very issues that had so worried me in 1986; and I have published articles and edited books on Japan. In short, as a colleague pointed out to me, I was still involved in something that might be called “ethnographic time,” and I had not yet come to terms with the fact that I learned more about my subject with every passing year. This concept of ethnographic time has all sorts of implications for understanding a revitalized anthropology, and I want to devote some space here to considering the issue.

**Time Machines and Fieldwork**

One of the ways in which I had been taught to think about fieldwork was to view it not only as essential to my formation as an anthropologist, but as time away. Recent anthropological theory (Fabian 1983; Thomas 1989) has criticized one aspect of this—how the discourse of time in anthropology can lead us to a discussion of others that places them on a continuum that is based on the principle of pre- and post- something or other, and thus always essentially different. Yet it seems to me that this critique has not carried the concept to its logical conclusion. If we can wonder how the doing of anthropology can become a way of writing culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986)—imposing the weight of written texts upon others as well as placing them within a hierarchy of time—we should also think about the way in which we are constituted by these others during our fieldwork. In the end, it is not time away upon which we are embarking, as if climbing aboard Lowenthal’s (1985) time machine in order to take part in some sort of ritual suffering only available elsewhere that will turn us into professionals. Fieldwork is part of larger political and economic relationships that should not be viewed as separate from global processes nor as being somehow out of time.

While the transformative aspect of fieldwork has long been implicit, anthropologists have only recently tried to grapple with the issue of where this experience belongs in the larger world. Few anthropologists would argue with the idea that our time in the field can be seen to be both a real and a transformative experience, akin to that of going on a pilgrimage where the merit gained in the journey is not lost upon return. While away we are liminal, taking part in a rite of passage that upon our return will see us slowly
reincorporated into our own community (through the act of writing the dissertation), ending with a final ordeal (the viva voce or doctoral examination) of which the successful outcome will be the celebration of our achievement: the conferment of the title, Doctor of Philosophy. And this last part of the rite is generally perceived to be permanently transformative: We are now something other than the students we were. One question concerns what we are reincorporated into. Generally, we end up working in the systems of knowledge production, which many anthropologists now label as hegemonic—the Western university system.

I owe the inspiration for some of this formation of the anthropological experience to that grand observer of British anthropologists, Barbara Pym. In her novel, *Less than Angels* (1955), she reflects on the community of London-based Africanists that the narrator, Catherine Oliphant, has come to know through her lover, the anthropologist Tom Mallow. In the search for difference, exoticism, and strangeness, implies the novel, we need look no further than the tribe of anthropologists: They are given to odd behavior understandable only to other anthropologists and tolerated on the grounds that fieldwork, that baptism of fire, is worth the resulting eccentricity. Catherine Oliphant, who as a writer observes not only anthropologists but the city of London around her, is somewhat bemused by their certainty that being in the field is what it is all about—and by their blindness to the fact that the field might well be everywhere. Fieldwork for Catherine involves a state of mind, an interest in human behavior, an attitude: place is less important than an ability to observe, converse, and reflect.

I have often reread this novel in the years since I returned from the field for a variety of reasons. The notion that London was as worthy of anthropological observation as any other place struck me as perceptive of Pym and appealed to me, a foreigner in England. More important was her rather amused examination of the relationships within a group of anthropologists. Her tongue-in-cheek descriptions made bearable the realization that I belonged to this strange tribe. Yet I have also been haunted by her image of field notes as a burden and have long been convinced that writing a novel is the secret ambition of many an anthropologist. Like any writer, we turn lived experience into words on a page; unlike quantitative sociologists, we try and do it mostly in plain language. Unlike travel writers, ambience is not what we are trying to depict—we are after larger human truths. The crux of what we do, however, is in the fact that we have done it somewhere far away, amongst strange people—perhaps even having grand adventures in the process—and we have come back loaded down with proof of our journey. Then the writing up of these notes takes the adventure, flattens it out, and
turns it into an intellectual exercise. Perhaps this is necessary lest we be accused of exoticizing others.

But I think the most important lesson to be learned from Pym’s novel is that the usual representation of fieldwork as a discrete experience that is over when it is over, and that writing up is a necessary part of our return to the real world, is false. Fieldwork—the embracing of other places and other people—is not a self-contained rite of passage but a process that never ends and can take place anywhere: It is a frame of mind. If that was true in the late 1950s when communication was only by letter, parcel, and telegram, it is even more true now, when communications are so much better, air travel is possible almost anywhere in the world, and our informants are just as likely to get on an airplane to come and see us as we are of returning to visit them. Also, that small band of scholars Pym knew has expanded and our students and colleagues keep mining the shaft that we either were the first to explore—or that, as a second or third generation of postwar scholars, we were already reexploring. Ethnographic time, if we think of it as the time spent learning about our subjects, never really ends. Our knowledge is only ever fragmentary, open to criticism and revision, as well as cumulative and interactive. The days of an anthropologist finding one key theme that leads to the complete understanding of a society are over. We must admit that all we do is provide more and more pieces that go into the making of intricate jigsaws. If we travel in time, it is only along the time frame of a young discipline that is ever growing (cf. Cohn 1990), not in a world fragmented by disjunctures of an evolutionary nature.

Thus a return to my field notes after many years is a return with a deeper but not necessarily complete understanding of Japan. I owe this understanding not only to the people of Kuzaki who taught me so much during my time with them but to my fellow scholars who as Japanologists and anthropologists have added to my initial knowledge. Critical as I might occasionally be of others’ work, the fact remains that any new work on Japan adds to our understanding of that nation and its people. The book I attempt to write now is very different from the one I would have written a decade ago, although the empirical data upon which it is based remain the same. The book I might wait to write ten years from now would be different as well.

Yet because this book is a product of hindsight as well as fieldwork, it is also a reflection on a variety of issues that have come to the fore in the anthropology of Japan during the 1990s. Not only that, I have chosen to write almost consistently in the past tense. Return visits have shown how things change, even in traditional villages like Kuzaki, and I think it would
be wrong to write about 1984 as if it were the present. Still, the overall thrust of the book remains much the same as in my thesis: to understand how a community in the 1980s defined itself both as unique within its region and nation and yet ultimately being as Japanese as anywhere else. More importantly, it is about the making (tsukuru) and becoming (naru) of place and person. One reason why I do not hold to the idea that single models explain anything about a society is the fact that while I was in the field, people were always telling me what to think and what they thought, but no one ever said exactly the same thing as the next person. Thus, while this book ends by focusing on an analysis based on the concepts of making and becoming, I do not see this as the final word on the subject of understanding Japan. Nor am I introducing a new subject. Making and becoming might well be glossed as structure and agency—familiar subjects in the anthropology of Japan—but I have chosen to use a vocabulary that reflects the way in which the people of Kuzaki talked about their lives, their village, and their rituals. Nor am I the first to use the term “becoming” without reference to wider debates: Hendry’s *Becoming Japanese* (1986) examines many of the ways in which a child is “made” by mothers, teachers, group life, and so forth and “becomes” Japanese. The emphasis in her book is on the structures to which this making adheres, an oblique reference perhaps to Bourdieu’s “structuring structures which are structured” (1977). I want to balance this meaning of naru with the “making” of tsukuru, involving the ability of people to act both on themselves and others, creating individuality as opposed to individualism. But it is impossible to make a neat dichotomy between the two terms. Without making, there can be no becoming; without a structure to work within or against, there would be no agency.

The vocabulary of making and becoming reflects not only a certain Japanese attitude but a fact about the researcher. As I have argued, our understanding develops and changes over time as well. For example, I have had to rethink much of my understanding of ritual and religion in writing this book. That is, while much of the symbolism of Japanese religion falls into dichotomies that appear to offer us neat conclusions, I would rather invoke Ricoeur, who in his critique of structuralism noted: “More than one interpretation is justified by the structure of the discourse which permits multiple dimensions of meaning to be realized at the same time” (1968, 94). What Ricoeur argues is that the practice of analyzing words or symbols in opposition to each other ignores the larger structures in which they are embedded. Meaning transcends the single symbol or term; it is the relationships, both diachronic and synchronic, that must be understood.

It is this approach that I have taken in trying to describe and understand
both everyday life and religious practice in Kuzaki. While my first attempts fell rather easily into structuralist patterns, I have always been uneasy with the solution offered by this approach. The uneasiness stems from the fact that the practice of religion, like the use of words in sentences, transcends the tidy categories into which we might put implements, figures, offerings, gestures, or actions. Religious practice in Kuzaki always seemed to be about something more than just the worship of the ancestors, deities (kami), and the structural principles of the community; it was, as I have come to understand it, also about the making of place and identity and about the way in which a person made the journey through life and death. It is not possible to ignore the fact that, in Kuzaki at least, religious practices not only reaffirmed the importance of the community, they also continued to uphold patriarchal ideals. My first attempts to analyze religion in Kuzaki focused quite strongly on the relationship between male and female as seen through religious practice; I have retained that in this book, but I also try to give a better sense of how polysemous religion in Kuzaki was.

The polysemous aspect of religion in Japan, not just Kuzaki, means that trying to make sense of it all is rather like reading a palimpsest: Some meanings have been written over more than once. Eco (1992) and Ginzburg (1989) both warn of the temptation to make neat Sherlock Holmes–like interpretations, and I have tried to veer away from such analytical tidiness. Religious practices in Kuzaki—and perhaps all of Japan—can be said to be at the core about making and becoming, about an opening out to the manifestations of power and a creation of meaning. It also could be argued that all Japanese rituals mimic the moment of creation when the founder deities stirred up the oceans until land came into being—the beginning of the making and becoming of all things. All rites, then, are a form of mimetic performance; however, the experience and the hoped-for end product are different for different people. Thus, precisely because Japanese rituals are polysemous in meaning, they are also dialogic in their practice (Bahktin 1981; Csordas 1994). Moreover, there exist competing discourses about the interpretation of religious practices.

On an individual level, then, the people of Kuzaki interpreted religious practices in various ways. Some saw them as coercive but necessary; others as important because they believed, whatever that means; others because they hoped for the this-worldly benefits that Reader and Tanabe (1998) discuss; and a few expressed open skepticism. And these categories often overlapped. My introduction to the shrine at Kuzaki involved being taken there on my first day by an innkeeper, who beckoned me in, laughing at my questions about worship. “Here,” he said, opening the doors to the inner sanc-
tum, “is where Amaterasu is. Want to see inside?” I hesitated, and he went to pull aside the curtains that veiled whatever the shintai (the physical object in which the deity resides) was. As he put his hand on the curtains, he too hesitated: “No, it wouldn’t be good.” Shutting up the inner shrine, he added, “Omoshiroi [meaning both interesting and funny], isn’t it?” but he never explained whether it was his pulling back that was interesting or if it was the idea of Amaterasu being inside the shrine that he found funny. It was probably both.

Given the variety of ways in which religion is experienced, then, what does an analysis of ritual practices as being about making and becoming offer us above and beyond such a deconstruction? The concept of making—tsukuru—has been written about by Yamaguchi (1991) as an essential part of ritual, performance, and the very thingness of objects. Nor is making opposed to becoming; naru can also mean making. In Japanese, becoming is both a natural process and an artificial one. In relation to human beings, becoming is not possible without the effort of making; it is also acknowledged that one is acted on by others—hence the importance of acquiring passive verb forms when learning Japanese. There is no dichotomy. The dead would not become nothing if others did not do the making. A community would have no solidarity if its members did not make an effort. A woman could not become a good diver unless she worked at it. Process, then, always involves effort: The art (in Japan) lies in making such efforts look natural. Rituals such as the ones described in this book “make” at all sorts of levels: in terms of individual need; for the community; in support of patriarchy; to reestablish gender divisions; to mark where the wilderness ends and the social begins, thus making place; and to keep the lines of communication open between humans and the power that is kami. Rituals, then, are not just about a one-to-one mode of communication—the channeling of the chaotic into the ordered (cf. Rappaport 1999)—although they might well have that function to some degree. Rather, rituals are about an opening out into the myriad possibilities of human existence. While it could be pragmatically, scientifically argued that rituals change nothing and have no impact on the world, for many practitioners the possibility that they are acting on reality and that something might come of this action is important. As Taussig (1993) put it—albeit speaking of the shaman and his rites—social reality is made through these acts of mimesis.

It should be noted that few are the places in Japan where the fusion of daily life, the community, religious practice, and ritual are as important as they were in Kuzaki in the 1980s. Yet the persistence of ritual in the lives of the vast majority of Japanese requires the student of Japan to rethink some
basic assumptions about global processes: the idea that the truth of science will defeat the arcane forces of false religious belief; or that modernity is about secular rationalism in opposition to a premodern irrationality—both bear reexamination (van Bremen 1995). As Evans-Pritchard (1976) argued, witchcraft and oracles make sense if we understand that they explain the Azande experience of reality. The critique is valid that, in trying to explain such a worldview to others, anthropologists reduce experience to a discussion of analytical terms rather than considering the thing itself. It is here that I hope detailed ethnography will save me from such barren reductionism. I have much to say about making and becoming and of how they are not only part of an experience of reality but also essential to its making. My analysis can make sense only in the light of what ritual and daily life were like in Kuzaki. For that reason, the core of this book combines descriptions of the household, fishing, diving, and tourism with the ritual life of the place.

**Toward a Conclusion**

The above might be taken as a very long explanation, more or less, of my position in the terrain of a postmodern anthropology. I need to add just one or two points. While I will not take Campbell’s (1995) line and refuse to use any trendy jargon in this book, I do take seriously Ardorno’s (1973) point that jargon is a dangerous and political tool frequently used to justify the wielding of knowledge as power. So I will use some familiar anthropological terms in this book, but in a clear and accessible way. There are, however, three key terms that need defining at the onset: seken, role, and identity.

The term “seken,” originally Buddhist, means various things: the world, society, life, people, the public. Its usage often implies a person’s awareness of others’ opinion and can be felt as a very heavy weight. It is “society” in its more Victorian usage: the panoptic eye that evaluates people and judges their actions; it is the “them” of “they say.” The term “role” I use in the Maussian sense (Mauss 1985), but it is clearly linked to the concept of seken: It is the playing out of a person’s status within society, and this implies a multiplicity of roles since people exist in a network of relationships. As an anthropological term, “role” is rarely used these days, although in the study of Japan it is often described as the ideals to which people try to adhere in the making of the self without being clearly defined. I will use the term “identity” to mean the sameness of a group, rather than individual difference. All three terms refer to the very highly organized structuring of Japanese society, which I hope to challenge.

Finally, I should add that the most important outcomes of the debates
about anthropology as writing for me have been: (1) to reaffirm the importance of empirical data, but framed by some reflexive comments so that readers can judge and interpret the anthropologist’s interpretation for themselves; and (2) to acknowledge the importance of historical context, as well as the national, local, and scholarly contexts that help make sense of the material gathered during fieldwork. This last point, however, must not be taken to an extreme; while an understanding of Kuzaki is all the better for knowing some history, lived experience means that all the dominant discourses fragment on close examination as well. In no case is this truer than when discussing gender, and thus the next chapter is an attempt to bring history, various forms of scholarship, and the anthropology of Japanese women together. Finally, I must note that I will not take a feminist stance (whatever that is), although I acknowledge that postmodernist theory draws on feminist concerns about models that were static, unitary, and rigid. Japan has feminists and feminist theories that its women can choose to adhere to or not. It is not my job as an anthropologist to preach, but to understand. Thus, in this work, I try to analyze how the construction of both male and female roles creates social reality.

When I first tackled these questions, I was still writing within a discourse on Japan that emphasized its homogeneity over its differences. The pendulum has swung the other way now: Japan is being looked at as a place of heterogeneity, and it is perhaps appropriate that I have finally written this book.