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Author(s): Herve Varenne, Arie De Ruijter, Marshall Durbin, Peter M. Gardner, R. M. Keesing,
Michael Moffatt, Renato Rosaldo and Milton Singer

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Collective Representation in American Anthropological Conversations: Individual and Culture¹

by *Hervé Varenne*

Les oeuvres individuelles sont toutes des mythes en puissance, mais c'est leur adoption sur le mode collectif qui actualise, le cas échéant, leur "mythisme."

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS, *L'homme nu*

THE INDIVIDUAL AS A SELF-MOTIVATED AGENT is a fundamental category in American culture. It is a central symbol around which social practices in the United States are organized. The symbol of the Promethean individual is at the heart of political representations, religious life, private concerns, popular musings about the fate of society, and the highest expressions of scientific and philosophical quests. I do not offer these generalizations as an adequate description of the characteristically American. I have tried to give such a description elsewhere (1977, 1978, 1982). For present purposes, it is sufficient to mention that an emphasis on the centrality of the individual is commonplace in all the disciplines involved in American studies. There is little doubt in most of the work in these disciplines that the "American way" is a culture that is integrated, systematic, and distinctive.

These assertions are intentionally controversial. It was only for a rather short time that assertions of this kind were ac-

ceptable to more than a small group of anthropologists in the United States. Since the late '50s, it has been generally accepted that one cannot talk of "cultures" in such holistic terms. The radical critique of the position led to the collapse of a whole subfield—culture and personality—that had been associated with the interest in "cultures as wholes." The recent reawakening of work on personality processes has been accompanied by various attempts at distancing this work from the previous formulations, particularly as it relates to assumptions of "commonality" (Wallace 1961, Schwartz 1978).

Indeed, interest in making statements about "American" (or any other) culture has become something of an oddity. Only a few anthropologists seem to find such arguments interesting. Most often loosely associated with "symbolic anthropology," they are comfortable with Geertz's statements on Java, Bali, and Morocco, with Schneider's on America, and with Dumont's on India. These statements provoke others to write reviews criticizing them for "ignoring diversity" (e.g., Feinberg [on Schneider] 1979, Magnarella [on Geertz] 1980). Critics point out that, in any geographical space in which a culture is said to be found, many persons do not act (think, value) as one might expect them to act (. . .) if the cultural account were right and argue that the existence of such persons invalidates the statement criticized.² What such critics fail to realize is that people like Geertz and Schneider are fully aware of the "diversity" argument and, in ways they may not explain well enough, do not consider it relevant.

This paper takes up, from a holistic perspective, issues that the diversity criticism raises. I rephrase this perspective to take into account the empirical experiences (i.e., disagreements, disputes, shifts in point of view, etc.) that are used to demonstrate diversity. Such experiences are certainly something that any theory of culture must handle, but it is something else altogether to make them instances of "diversity." On what theoretical grounds can one make "the fact of" such diversity the foundation of radical critiques of the attempt to deal with cultures contrastively, separately and holistically? One must ask whether such a theory does any justice to the intuition that

¹ This paper is a moment in a very long process. I can only mention a few of the people who have contributed in various ways to its production. I have talked most directly about it with Jim Boon, Lee Drummond, Clifford Hill, Mike Moffatt, Milton Singer, and George Spindler. Ray McDermott worked on it extensively. As tradition requires, I must emphasize that none of them are responsible for it. The extent to which "I" am responsible for it I leave to the evaluation of the reader.

HERVÉ VARENNE is Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University (New York, N.Y. 10027, U.S.A.). He is the author of *Americans Together* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1977); with C. Hill, "Family, Language, and Education: The Sociolinguistic Model of Restricted and Elaborated Codes" (*Social Science Information* 20:187-228); with F. Ruskin, "The Production of Kinds of Ethnic Discourse in the United States: American and Puerto Rican Kinds," in *The Sociogenesis of Language and Human Conduct*, edited by B. Bain (New York: Plenum Press, 1983); and *American School Language: The Rhetorical Structuring of Daily Life in a Suburban High School* (New York: Irvington, 1983). His current work focuses on the cultural structuring of natural conversations. The present paper was submitted in final form 1 x 83.

² There are more principled versions of the "diversity" argument that do not necessarily lead to the collapse of the culture-as-system idea. Particularly interesting is Drummond's (1980) attempt to translate linguistic theories of creolization into a workable cultural theory of systemic imbalance.

there is something in human behavior that produces an appearance of stability within times and places and change across them. Finally, one must ask what in the way modern holistic statements are made makes it appear that the diversity argument is relevant.

For many, diversity has never been a central issue. At one extreme, there is the position that does not allow for the possibility of diversity. This is the position implicit in most macrosociological theories that deal with massive categories of people, and it is the least defensible of the holistic approaches. Another position simply does not consider diversity to be central to the kind of generalizations to be made. Diversity here is "deviance," a peripheral issue. And finally, there is the position of those for whom diversity is itself the product of overwhelming social forces and thus cannot be understood except holistically (Bourdieu 1977, 1980). This may be the most radical "sociological" position. In this perspective persons who act in the most diverse fashion can be understood as products of identical forces, the identification of these forces being considered the primary goal of social scientific inquiry.³

This last perspective is the one which provides the basis for my consideration of the diversity dispute as the product of a specific cultural discourse. I want to emphasize that this argument is not predicated upon a radical denial of the possibility of extraordinary intuitions about the constitution of the world. Indeed, I make the argument through an analysis of what may be such an extraordinary intuition in an American context, the holistic intuition itself, and its fate in the writings of a few persons whose work has historically been appropriated in American intellectual conversations, in anthropology particularly. I show that the fate of this work must be understood in terms of the contextual constraints that precede, surround, and follow the statement of the intuition and—most importantly—provide the actor with the tools and raw materials with which to produce the comparatively "new" or "diverse" act.

In this paper I want (1) to highlight the extent to which the diversity argument can be recognized as characteristically American because of the emphasis that is placed upon preserving the autonomous individual as the unit of study; (2) to emphasize the need to preserve what Dumont calls "holism" in anthropological inquiry; (3) to suggest a way of being holistic while remaining faithful to the openness and uncertainty of the process of human life; (4) to remind readers that some of the major philosophical traditions in the United States have recognized the need to be holistic ("social") and have produced extraordinary, controversial works; (5) to investigate the historical fate of these traditions as they have become incorporated into the overall conversation and have ceased to be considered controversial; and (6) to highlight the symbolic processes (both in the writing and in the reading of the texts) that have allowed for the transformation of these traditions into less controversial and more ordinary understandings.

The body of the paper is concerned with Points 4, 5, and 6. Points 1 through 3 provide the background for the analysis performed. The analysis, in turn, is intended as an example of the fruitfulness of the stance adopted. The intellectual traditions dealt with are those in which Dewey and G. H. Mead, Benedict and Bateson, and Geertz and Schneider are recognized as dominant figures; they are known as "pragmatism," "culture and personality," and "symbolic anthropology," respectively. In spite of great differences in style, reliance on previous traditions, and points of emphasis, these traditions have in common the goal of understanding individual behavior in terms of the social environment in which the individual

participates. While this sentence is itself ambiguous, these are the most "sociological" of the intellectual traditions found in the United States. Writers in these traditions are particularly comfortable with statements about the specificity of cultures (plural), and most of them explicitly state that their work is a reaction against the psychologism of the dominant traditions of their time.

The writers considered here wrote or are still writing in English.⁴ Their work was initially published in the United States and has had a distinct impact on the evolution of cultural anthropology in the country. I include Bateson in this group precisely because he was not born or raised in the United States and—as is revealed in his later work—may have had the most radically "social" intuition. Early in his anthropological career, however, he got into extensive conversations with both Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict and wrote his first book, *Naven*, within the framework and in the vocabulary they had suggested to him as they read and criticized drafts of his manuscript. Bateson's influence in the United States was sufficient to make him a kind of cult figure. Willy nilly, Bateson is an American figure to the extent that his work has been incorporated into the American conversation.⁵ The point here is not to discover what any of these writers "really meant" or whether their intuitions were "really" different from the ordinary. It is rather to highlight how the means they used to express whatever they meant allowed their audience to transform their statements in a particular, culturally specific, direction.⁶

THE STATUS OF THE INDIVIDUAL: AGENCY AND GROUP APPROPRIATION

The diversity argument assumes, fundamentally, that any *individual* instance of apparent difference from a postulated cultural model is to be considered a challenge to the adequacy of the model. Why should this be so? It is because most statements of such models are written, or read, in a way that makes them dependent on plural "commonality," "sharedness," and eventually sameness: "American" culture is understood to be the culture "of Americans," in their plurality. American culture is made a property of individuals. Thus, of course, the demonstration that people we would want for a priori reasons to label "Americans" (because they live in the United States, for example) do not behave in an American way is a plausible ar-

⁴ I deliberately ignore the fact that this list includes a person who was born and raised in Britain, several Jews whose families have more or less recently arrived in the United States, someone who claims a particular knowledge of Navajo culture, and—as far as I can tell—only one White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. My rationale for this decision should become clearer as this paper proceeds.

⁵ And so, of course, is any writer who is widely read and discussed in American terms, even if he never addressed an American audience. Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and others obviously, as individuals, could not in any way be said to "be" Americans, but in all of them there is something that can be used in an American discourse either negatively, as a statement against which to define oneself, or positively, after radical transformation. Some have in fact argued that there are definite, though unacknowledged, ties between Durkheimian and pragmatist sociologies (Wolff 1960; x-xi; Nisbet 1974:33). Parsons himself reads Durkheim for what he has to say about internalization. According to Parsons (1960:121), "the keynote of Durkheim's definition of the *conscience collective* is clearly beliefs . . . within it."

⁶ This paper is not, strictly speaking, a paper in personality and culture or psychological anthropology. My main interest is in incorporating the fact of constant individual creativity into a theory of culture. My approach may, however, be interesting to modern psychological anthropologists if Spindler (1978:411) is right in his interpretation of the direction now taken by the field: "There is a shift from emphasis on predispositions, inherited from previous socialization, that the individual brings into the social situation and that determine individual behavior in those situations as they trigger the predispositions, to an interactionist view of individuals making sense in situations that are structurally possible in a given cultural system setting."

³ If, as some have argued (Gonos 1977, Lemert 1979), it is fair to look at some work in ethnomethodology (particularly that of Goffman and Garfinkel) in a structuralist mode, then a lot of this work can be understood as an attempt at seeing even extremely idiosyncratic behavior in holistic terms. See, for example, Garfinkel's (1967: chap. 5) study of "passing."

gument against what is made into a psychological model.⁷ It is then easy to argue against the usefulness of *any* cultural model on the grounds that individual experiences, by definition, are the product of unique biographies and thus cannot be reduced to any generalizing statement. Any conversation about cultural specificity seems to have to follow a three-stage progression: (1) An initial statement about cultural integration is made. (2) It is then asserted that to talk about cultural integration is to assume that, within a spatiotemporal locality, all persons "share" a personality, character structure, or value orientation (depending upon the methodological caution of the author, the argument may be made in probabilistic terms with such phrases as "most people," "many," "more than elsewhere"). (3) It is then asserted that even the probabilistic statements are too strong in specifying distinctive shared characteristics.⁸ At this point it becomes easy—and altogether logical—to deny the value of the initial statement in the name of the "real living individuals" who would disappear in a culturalist account.

One can follow this oriented evolution in the theoretical conversations that are now known as the "culture-and-personality" school, moving, for example, from Benedict's early works (1932, 1934) to one of the last critical reviews to deal with her work seriously (Singer 1961). One can also follow this evolution in the conversations known as "symbolic anthropology," from the early works by Schneider or Geertz to the work of their students and critics. Something familiar happens as one moves from Schneider's definition of culture as "a system of symbols"—footnoted to Kroeber, Benedict, and Dumont (1968:1)—to a recent general statement introducing a series of papers intended to clarify the convergence between cognitive and symbolic anthropology. As Dougherty and Fernandez (1981:415, *italics mine*) write: "Here, culture is being examined as a series of productive and *individual acts* aimed toward the construction of meaning for the *acting individual(s)* whose behavior is guided by an integration of cultural symbolization/classification and *personal experience*. The notion of culture as an object to be delineated is missing from these works." The same evolution could in fact be traced within many of the other subtraditions that make up anthropology. The "new ethnography" of the early '50s, with its goal of increasing accountability and reliability in description, was transformed into the "cognitive anthropology" of the '60s, with its intense interest in personal cognition and "psychological reality" (Frake 1980).

Anthropology is not alone in progressing from holistic to intrapsychic accounts. The intensely sociological work of conversational analysts (e.g., the work on turn-taking [Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974]) is being appropriated by researchers treating it as an investigation of individual strategies (West 1980). Farther into the sociological mainstream, Parsons and Shils (1951:195, *italics mine*) themselves tried to define a "social system" as "a *system of interaction of a plurality of actors* in which the action is oriented by rules which are complexes of complementary *expectations concerning roles and sanctions*." To understand social systems one would thus have to understand individual "orientations" and "expectations." One could not be much farther from Durkheim's fundamental in-

sight: "Sociological phenomena cannot be defined by their universality. A thought which we find in every individual consciousness is not thereby a social fact. . . . It is the collective aspects of the beliefs, tendencies, and practices of a group that characterize truly social phenomena" (1938 [1895]: 6–7).

The repetition of such a progression in controversy reveals the strength of a cultural orientation as it inexorably brings what researchers produce back to a certain orthodoxy which can easily be related to other conversations in the United States, in politics, religion, education, etc. But the repetition is also testimony to the strength of the initial intuition: many scholars who have been educated in the United States, from Dewey to Schneider, or Garfinkel to Boon, have tried to produce theories of experience that are more sociological than psychological, more oriented to community life than to individual agency. I have shown elsewhere (1977) how notions of community and social life are central to American culture, and one should look in this direction to understand the source of the intuition that human beings are not quite Promethean in their activity. What I would like to do here is to highlight the symbolic processes that drive the evolution of conversations in an American environment. In particular, I want to show how the rhetorical form of the original documents *constrains* the expression of possibly extraordinary intuitions in ways that could easily lead to individualistic readings of the texts.

The argument is predicated upon a theory of individual action in a group that is quite different from the more or less explicit theories to be found nowadays. As Durkheim emphasized many years ago in *Suicide* (1951 [1887]), there is no way to relate individual behavior in its inner motivation to a general social trend. There is never any reason to argue that a practice is socially important because it is widely shared. In fact, it is doubtful that it could ever be established that two individuals "share" orientations. It is more helpful to assume that two individuals, even if they are very close in a social space, never share anything but an environment, including the responses to their joint actions by the other people they come in contact with and the resources at their disposal as they are historically constituted and distributed. In these terms, a cultural orientation consists in the type of feedback people receive from their actions. It consists in what is "always already there," in the words of the Russian philosopher-cum-social-scientist Bakhtin (published under the name of Vološinov 1973 [1929]). In this sense cultural specificity is a social event, a set of practices in Bourdieu's (1977) terms—including the intellectual practices of text production and reproduction in the speech of others who appropriate the text and in the process transform it. Most importantly, a cultural orientation consists in the fact that feedback and reproduction are never amorphous. They are always oriented.

This broad statement of a theoretical stance is obviously strongly marked for a European kind of Durkheimian/Saussurean intellectual tradition that has been widely criticized in recent years for a variety of sins, particularly those of overgeneralization and oversystematization, not to mention the more classical ones of abstracting the social and losing track of the fact that it is individual persons who act out the practices we observe. To these criticisms I would be tempted to oppose Dumont's (1979:799) blanket statement: "Whenever one is protesting against the 'oversocialized conception of man' in contemporary sociology, or whenever one declares that, in the final count, and beyond all abstraction, one is concerned with living men, i.e. living individuals, all I can see there—from the point of view I hold—is a protest of modern ideology against a true sociological perspective." Such statements have often been misinterpreted as saying something about individual experience. At most, they are about the *fate* of individuals within the groups in which they find themselves. In order to make Dumont's

⁷ It is paradoxical that the rejection of the idea of a *cultural* system is dependent upon an implicit model of distinguishable *social* systems. In order to observe diversity "in a group," one has to have some a priori criteria for recognizing the presence of such a group apart from its cultural manifestations. Drummond (1981) has recently written a penetrating critique of such "representational" theories of the relation between group and culture.

⁸ There are, of course, other possible conversations, particularly outside of anthropology. The dominant one in sociology and social psychology is the one that has produced the atomistic correlational and probabilistic studies that relate one item of individual behavior to an item abstracted from the "environment." In these studies, individual behavior is always the fundamental unit to be understood, and the notion of system has been reduced to simple functional equations of the type $y = f(x)$, where both x and y are independently specifiable.

statement more palatable, I will phrase my own position in terms of "group appropriation" of individual acts and statements. From this perspective, cultural integration is the product of the action of an audience on an individual statement as this audience appropriates the statement and restates it "in other words." This is an old position that has not had all the impact it should have. One can find many statements prefiguring it, such as that of Jakobson and Bogatyrev (1929, quoted by Holquist 1980) that "a work of folklore comes into existence only at the moment it is accepted by a particular community." This was later appropriated by Lévi-Strauss (1971:560) when he wrote the statement I have used as an epigraph to this paper ("All individual works are potential myths: it is their appropriation in the collective mode which, should it occur, activates their 'mythism.'"). A similar argument has been developed by Boon (1978) in his writings about the importance of collective memorization as the world is told and retold. For him, anthropologists interested in the operation of culture should "welcome any 'tricks that memory plays' as clues to differentiated ways in which significant items from ongoing experiences are selected and ordered in retrospect" (1978:238). The "original" event or text is of little importance except as it allows an observer to see culture at work in the displacement between the "original" and the retelling.

Such a theory implies the existence of a dialectical, *conversational*, process through which (possibly) extraordinary intuitions expressed in a certain kind of text are transformed in a specific direction as they are read, reproduced, and criticized. This progression-in-conversation can be presented schematically as follows: (1) A person has an intuition produced by a possibly unique though highly constrained biography. (2) This person attempts to express this intuition in a language that is given to him/her, thereby producing a text. (3) This text is read, and from it new texts are produced that *can be shown to be coherent with some aspects of the first text*, though perhaps not with the initial intuition or with each other.

I will not deal here with the sources of the initial intuitions. I simply assume that, however enculturated a person may be, he/she can personally possess an extremely idiosyncratic version of the culturally dominant text. I also assume that this intuition cannot be reached directly (though one may suspect its existence in the presence of "irregular" forms in the texts produced); it can only be reached through the language that is used to express it. This language, being very rich in possibilities, places radical constraints on expression in that it allows coherent readings alternative to the one the author may have planned. Thus the language shapes the ensuing tradition. While this makes the original intuition available in a limited form, it allows for the development of a *tradition of interpretation*, or culture. While the intuition can only be reached (or expressed) mediately, a tradition of text construction is immediately available in outward, observable events: texts and their restatements. Merleau-Ponty (1962 [1945]:197) put this as follows:

One might draw a distinction between the *word in the speaking* [*parole parlante*] and the *spoken word* [*parole parlée*]. The former is the one in which the significant intention is at the state of coming into being. Here existence is polarized into a certain "significance" ["sens"] which cannot be defined in terms of any natural object. It is somewhere at a point beyond being that it aims to catch up with itself again, and that is why it creates speech as an empirical support for its own not-being. Speech is the surplus of our existence over natural being. But the act of expression constitutes a linguistic world and a cultural world, and allows to fall back into being that which was striving to outstrip it.

To deal with the dialectic of individual "meaning" (and local historical events) and cultural (i.e., "social"—in the structuralist sense) integration, I partially draw on what certain theorists of the speech act have been saying, namely, that to use language is to perform an action with a certain power. I further assume that, given a statement, we cannot know *what* action

actually has been performed until we know how the statement has been appropriated and what the response has been. Without a response we only know what action *may* be performed, given an a priori knowledge of the range of possibilities.⁹ It is not simply that the response transforms the original statement. This statement, for example, if it is printed or tape recorded, *remains available for new kinds of appropriation*. Should it be picked up again in a different time and place, it may be made to do something other than it once did. The import of any statement within any overall conversation, or tradition, lies in what it is taken to have done. Or perhaps, to be fully consistent with the vocabulary chosen here, it lies in what is done with all that it might have done.

In what follows, I first review some classical statements in American social thought about the relationship between the individual and society and show how they can be read in two different, albeit internally coherent, ways. One of these ways, the one which has been appropriated "in the collective mode," leads straight to a sole concern with individual experience in its uniqueness and, eventually, to a rejection of the very possibility of a social discourse (that is, a social discourse about forces that transcend the individual's ability to transform them radically). The other way, which has generally not been appropriated even though it regularly reemerges in the American conversation, leaves open the possibility of such a discourse. I deal with these interpretive potentialities first in the general terms in which such theoretical discussions are generally couched and then in the detail of the constitution of the texts to show how the linguistic means at the disposal of writers conspire to lead their readers back into the more culturally appropriate interpretation. Next I turn to recent work in symbolic anthropology to show how the same interpretive potentialities weave themselves into the writing of various authors and lead them in theoretical directions many of which end in the same kind of impasse as has just been described.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY: SOME CLASSIC STATEMENTS

DEWEY, MEAD, AND BENEDICT: PRAGMATIC QUESTIONS

It might be said of much of the writing by Dewey, G. H. Mead, and Ruth Benedict that it is an attempt to express a sociological insight, or intuition, to an audience that is not ready to accept it.¹⁰ Furthermore, it has to work with the communicative resources of a symbolic system that is not quite congenial to a social vision. Simply to mention the power of a cultural pattern can be cause for scandal to an American audience. Benedict confronts the scandal head on at the end of *Patterns of Culture* (1934:251–52):

The exigencies of the situation [an account of a civilization condensed into a few dozen pages] are misleading only when the necessity [of describing individual behavior as it exemplifies the motivation of that culture] is read off as implying that [the individual] is submerged in an overpowering ocean. There is no proper antagonism between the role of society and that of the individual. One of the most misleading misconceptions of this nineteenth-century dualism was the idea that what was subtracted from the individual was added to society. . . . The man in the street still thinks in terms of a necessary antagonism between society and the individual.

⁹ This knowledge is itself based on our cultural experiences and perhaps on our intuitions. It can be expanded, but it is never absolute. I develop this argument in my work on conversational analysis (Varenne n.d.).

¹⁰ That their students and critics have understood their work differently than they may have intended is suggested by the fact that Bourdieu (1977:11)—altogether a very Durkheimian writer—refers positively to G. H. Mead's work, not to mention Jakobson's and Lévi-Strauss's approval of Peircean semiotics.

This passage comes at the end of a book the first sentence of which is "Anthropology is the study of human beings as creatures of society" (p. 1). Between these two most social formulations, Benedict makes strong statements about the importance of *custom*, any habitual way of doing things. She speaks disparagingly of "our" feeling that "the linear workings of our brains are uniquely worthy of investigation" (p. 2). And yet, if we look at the evolution of the response to her work we see that she could so little escape this "feeling" that her work was eventually associated with research in psychological anthropology on culture and personality, was criticized for being methodologically bad psychological anthropology, and is now suffering the general neglect that has befallen this central historical moment in the history of the discipline as a whole.¹¹

This fate is all the more interesting in that the closest sources¹² one can find for Benedict's approach, Dewey and G. H. Mead, specifically presented themselves as antipsychological. As the latter wrote, "It is absurd to look at the mind simply from the point of view of the individual organism; for, although it has its focus there, it is essentially a social phenomenon" (Mead 1967 [1934]: 133). Yet, of course, these philosophers thought of their work as founding a psychology, albeit a social one—and this may explain in part the evolution of Benedict's legacy. They reacted violently against the Durkheimian vocabulary and all approaches to interaction that did not proceed through individual action, reaction, and its reflexive consequences on the original action and the actor. They were, above all, interested in the fate of individuals. For Dewey the problem was "how those established and more or less deeply grooved systems of interaction which we call social groups, big and small, modify the activities of individuals who perforce are caught up within them, and how the activities of component individuals remake and redirect previously established customs" (1930

[1922]:60, italics mine). In fact the pragmatists had a good hunch as to what these processes were. As Mead put it, "gestures" (i.e., actions) are "internalized," and they "arouse the same attitudes in the individual making them that they arouse in the individuals responding to them" (1967 [1934]:47). This understanding of the enculturation process is prefigured in some even earlier writing by Dewey (1916: chap. 2) on the process of general human socialization. His are obviously anthropological insights. They are the fundamental justification for the work in culture and personality that flourished some time later. Yet, if the works of the pragmatists are still read nowadays, it is in some limited traditions in sociology, while the discipline that they founded—social psychology—is housed in departments of psychology and considered a subfield of that discipline.¹³

This may be because Dewey's, or Mead's, awareness of the relevance of cross-cultural variation—as a middle ground between the individual and society in general—is rather limited. For Benedict, of course, as in some modern anthropology, culture is at the center, and this leads her to be more radically "social" than most of the pragmatists. But Benedict in fact found it very difficult, if not impossible, to express her insight through a symbolic system, a language or rhetoric, suited to the expression of the alternative, individualistic intuition. As I mentioned earlier, my goal is not to determine what Benedict "really meant," in an inner, personal sense. The complexity of what this might be is made evident by a review of her work (including her poetry and journal) by Lummis (1980). My goal is rather to show how the means she used, means that were imposed on her, as she was well aware, can lead readers in various directions that are internally coherent but inconsistent with one another.

RUTH BENEDICT AND *Patterns of Culture*

In *Patterns of Culture*, Benedict states that she is reacting against overly psychological and universalistic interpretations of human action. She specifically ties this tendency of the behavioral sciences of her time to an ideological a priori which she makes it her task to challenge: "We interpret our dependence, in our civilization, upon economic competition, as proof that this is the prime motivation that human nature can rely upon, or we read off the behavior of small children as it is moulded in our civilization and recorded in child clinics, as child psychology or the way in which the young human animal is bound to behave" (1934:6). She also writes, "No man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes" (p. 2). "Pristine eyes" are the eyes psychology assigns to man (and woman, of course); the role of anthropology is to show how eyes are tinted.

However, her very entry into a debate about the tinting of eyes produces a certain ambiguity. The formula I have just quoted focuses the attention of the reader on "man" not as "Man," but as a single entity: "No man ever," not "Man never." The ambiguity that derives from the initial framing of her argument in terms of the validity of traditional generalizations about psychological makeup is reinforced by the reintroduction of the debate in the last chapter of the book, where she shifts the focus of her reflection from the validity of behavioral science generalizations to the possible impact of her work on philosophical debates about the relationship of the "individual," that is, the single human being considered as a distinct entity, to "society."

The title of the chapter is "The Individual and the Pattern of Culture." In it she says that "in reality, society and the

¹¹ This mode of interpretation of her work, which has become typical, is particularly flagrant in the later assessments (Singer 1961: 23–29, 66–67; LeVine 1973:52–55). Singer believes that, by the time Benedict was writing *Patterns of Culture*, she had shifted from a purely cultural to a psychological understanding of her work (pp. 22–24). While it is precisely my point that we can find evidence of such a shift, I still believe that Benedict's emphasis on the individual is derivative. It was imposed on her by the rhetoric she had to use to make her book widely accessible to an American audience and by her intellectual environment at Columbia (particularly her friendship with Margaret Mead). The best proof that her intent must have been, initially, to produce something other than a psychological investigation is that—given her data base—it could not be such. As psychology *Patterns of Culture* is an utter failure because, as Singer writes (p. 27), "[Benedict's] data are predominantly cultural and social, including ceremonies, songs and poetry, social and economic organization, war practices, institutionalized attitudes and the like. One looks in vain for the life histories, and other personal documents, and the results of psychological tests, which have become the essential appurtenances of contemporary personality and cultural study." One cannot imagine that Benedict was not aware of this. It must be assumed that she chose her data *deliberately* because they were particularly appropriate for what she wanted to do: a (socio-)cultural rather than a psychological study. In fact, one critic at least is very clear in his appreciation of the fact that the promise in her work lies in a more determined focus on cultural (linguistic) material. Mills (1940:911) writes: "Among the ethnologists, Ruth Benedict has come up to the edge of a genuinely sociological view of motivation. Her view remains vague because she has not seen clearly the identity of differing 'motivations' in differing cultures with the varied extant and approved vocabularies of motive." As far as I know, no other critic has ever picked up on this line of reasoning—except perhaps Benedict herself, whose analysis of Japanese culture (1946) proceeds almost solely from textual material.

¹² It is only indirectly that I justify here my feeling that the sources of Benedict's (and maybe of the other Boasians') conceptions about the relationship of culture to the individual owe more to the American intellectual life of the period—in the work of James, Dewey, Mead, etc.—than to the Franco-German authors who—then as now—appeared more prestigious. One cannot imagine that Benedict, at Columbia in the '20s, was not profoundly influenced by Dewey's work. She does refer to him in *Patterns of Culture*. The fact that Dewey and Mead have almost completely disappeared from modern discussions in anthropology should not make us ignore their influence.

¹³ This is particularly true of Dewey and Mead. In recent years there has been a strong renewal of interest in Peirce (Silverstein 1976, Boon 1979, Singer 1980). But Peirce, like all pragmatists, allows for differing readings of his work on semiotics even though, as is expectable, the psychologizing readings seem the more abundant.

individual are not antagonists" (p. 251). We may wonder, however, whether her negation of an antagonism is not more powerful, symbolically, than the assumption that there is a dualism to overcome. Later she writes, in direct expansion of the title: "No individual can arrive even at the threshold of his potentialities without a culture in which he participates" (p. 253). The individual is thereby installed as a category with an independent existence susceptible of independent study—even if it is to show how much his constitution owes to his participation in a society. The ensuing ambiguity is furthered in the details of Benedict's writing as she develops the argument.

In the passage just quoted, Benedict clearly puts the individual in the secondary position in relation to culture: "No individual can arrive . . . without a culture in which he participates." Culture is a vessel in which individuals develop. In less guarded moments, however, Benedict also writes that the culture in which a man participates is *his* culture: "His culture provides the raw material of which the individual makes his life" (pp. 253–54); ". . . a man of exceptional knowledge of his cultural forms" (p. 259). A relationship of possession is established, and it is undoubtedly the individual who is placed in the dominant, possessing position. In what way is a culture the participant's own thing? There is here, I suggest, a paradox.

It might be argued that I am giving too much weight to a stylistic detail that should be understood as only a shorthand summarizing form: (1) "the culture in which he participates" and (2) "his culture" would be equivalent under the principle that "his" = "in which he participates." The two forms may in fact have been equivalent for Benedict. However, when they are put side by side, we may doubt that my earlier analysis of "in which he participates" is accurate. Could it not be that the participation of the individual in cultural processes (I will not write "his" culture!) is (jointly) *creative* rather than passive? Particularly if we are to understand participatory creation in a very concrete sense (and not in the abstract sense simply deriving from the fact that culture is a human phenomenon) in which actors who are *agents* make decisions about the shape of their society that have the power to change this shape, then it would not be a misleading metaphor to write that the participant owns "his" culture, in much the same way as a writer is said to own "his" creative productions.

Where does Benedict herself stand? It is not quite clear. Her defense of her argument is oriented toward a different issue, that of demonstrating that acts of individualism (in the sense of acts which make an individual stand out from the crowd) are themselves constituted by their cultural environment. No act is in itself extraordinary. It only becomes so in a certain context. Benedict here appears to recycle Durkheim's argument about the nature of civil law and morality (1960 [1893]:81) and to take a determinedly "social" point of view. Indeed, in the kind of origin myth she offers early in the book to concretize her argument about the power of culture, she says of the child that he is "the little creature of his culture" (p. 3). Obviously such a child is not an agent in the full sense of the term.

Such statements, and many others throughout the book, would support the contention that Benedict places culture in the encompassing position vis-à-vis the individual, at least as far as her personal consciousness of what she wanted to write was concerned. But her conscious intent, "what she really meant," is only one thing. We must also consider what she may justifiably be said to mean on the basis of the form her argumentation takes. When her work is looked at from this angle, we can see how she does open the door to readings of her work that ignore some of her more explicit statements and focus on formal details of her exposition to build the interpretation.

I have already talked about the ambiguity of Benedict's use of the possessive. Now I want to point to her use of the third person singular and plural in the presentation of data. Benedict regularly shifts her mode of presentation. At times she writes

about "customs" or "institutions" and describes them in terms of quasi-jural or administrative rules. The case of the murderous Eskimo is typical: "Among the Eskimo, when one man has killed another, the family of the man who has been murdered may take the murderer to replace the loss within its own group. The murderer then becomes the husband of the woman who has been widowed by his act" (p. 256). It can be surmised from such writing that Benedict considers the rule to be relevant to all instances of murder, whether or not it is applied in actual cases. The rule of evidence for the existence of a jural rule lies in the demonstration that it *constrains* what people can do. They have to deal with it. This may include *not* submitting to it, but even a revolt is shaped by what it is a revolt against. At other times, Benedict writes in a way that directly suggests that a mode of behavior is of cultural relevance because it is either ubiquitous or very prevalent within a group of individuals. Talking about the American Middletown, she writes: "Children in school make their great tragedies of not wearing a certain kind of stockings, not joining a certain dancing-class, not driving a certain car" (p. 273). The rule of evidence for such a generalization lies in the demonstration that all (most, many, more than elsewhere) children do think this way about stockings and cars. Many children have to be sampled and *individually* queried. In the first case we have a statement about a system of constraints, in the second a statement about psychological consequences.¹⁴ In the first case, we have an implicit call for a symbolic analysis, in the second for a psychological one.

Benedict allows for this dual reading throughout her book, even at times when her actual analysis is strongly oriented in one of the directions. For example, at the beginning of her account of Pueblo culture she writes (pp. 59–60, italics mine):

The Zuni *are* a ceremonious people, a people who *value* sobriety and inoffensiveness above all other virtues. *Their interest* is centered upon their rich and complex ceremonial life. Their cults of the masked gods . . . are formal and established bodies of ritual with priestly officials. . . . No field of activity competes with ritual for foremost place in their attention.

She continually writes of the Zuni in the plural, as a collectivity, even though she did not survey many individual Zuni. She shows that Zuni culture, as a set of practices, rituals, and a style of telling myths, *is*, in the singular (and contrastively), "ceremonious," sober, and inoffensive. She shows that Zuni culture is somehow "different." One may justifiably wonder whether Benedict is also offering the hypothesis that the Zuni, in the plurality of their personalities, *are* ceremonious. At least on one occasion, she blames the language at her disposal for her inability to write in a purely sociological fashion without imputing psychological motivations to groups (pp. 231–32). Yet she also uses grammatical forms that can mislead and provide justification for many different kinds of criticisms depending upon the forms one focuses upon. Her use of third-person plural forms allows for criticism of her apparent inability to see that, for example, the Zuni are "capable of an outpouring of the heart" (Li 1937). Her use of words like "interest" or "value" necessarily focuses attention upon the individual, for, in our semantic system, only individuals can value or have interests. It is only if one looks at her work as a whole, including her controversial work on Japan (1946), that one can come to realize that her identification with culture-and-personality research may be misleading. Her work is fundamentally different

¹⁴ In order to make sense of the situation in Middletown in terms of a system of constraints, Benedict would have had to say something about the fact that all adolescents in American schools must deal with requirements for self-determination and the formation of like-minded communities of friends. It could then have been pointed out that these requirements are very difficult to follow and often produce very serious psychological dilemmas for adolescents (Henry 1963; Varenne 1977, 1983).

GREGORY BATESON AND *Naven*

from that of the major writers in that field. Benedict does use the texts she analyzes for what they reveal about the various conceptions of man in his relationship with himself, his fellow men, and the rest of the world, but it is more to explicate various types of "folk" or "ethno-" psychology than it is to psychoanalyze the informants.

To understand Benedict's writing, it is thus probably more helpful to look at the American social psychological pragmatism that came earlier than at the ensuing development of psychological anthropology. Benedict quotes Dewey twice (pp. 2, 271), as well she should; as early as 1916, he had already provided the theoretical basis for the kind of statements she makes about the impact of culture: "In other cases [*the immature human being*, when he is not trained like an animal] really shares or participates in the common activity. He not merely acts in a way agreeing with the actions of others, but, in so acting, *the same ideas and emotions are aroused in him that animate the others*" (Dewey 1916:13-14, italics mine). This is immediately followed by the illustrating "case of the warlike tribe and its children," in which Dewey prefigures the type of statement that later became anthropological common sense. But one can note the extent to which we are rhetorically focused on the fate of the individual. In Benedict this statement, a virtual "origin myth" of individual enculturation, takes the following form: "The vast proportion of all individuals who are born into any society always and whatever the idiosyncrasies of its institutions, assume, as we have seen, the behavior dictated by that society. Most people are shaped to the form of their culture because of the enormous malleability of their original endowment" (p. 254). This passage reveals a drift from the strict interactionism represented by Dewey. Dewey writes of actors' having *emotions* "aroused" through *their own* actions; Benedict writes of society's "dictating" *behavior*. The speech acts are different, and so is the localization of the evidence that enculturation has taken place. This, in itself, would be enough to place Benedict's work on the side of the sociologists, in spite of the approving way she quotes Dewey and the other stylistic matters I have pointed out. She is unequivocally on the social psychological side only when she is relating personality to cultural environment. She asserts that apparently (to us) aberrant—i.e., psychologically impossible—behavior is indeed possible for individuals who have been trained since infancy to regard it as normal. She does not consider the possibility that the mere presence of a custom may tell us nothing about the psychological price participants pay for performing it. It seems that, to the extent that a customary act is performed, it must be relatively easy for many of the people who are required to perform it. Only a "congenial bent" or a "congenial drive," i.e., a quasi-genetic abnormality, may allow individuals to escape enculturation into the norms. Indeed, it is because of the "original endowment" of the human species that cultural variation is possible. Here again we are led back to the individual and his endowment, albeit by a different route.

The point of this discussion is not to criticize Benedict for fuzzy thinking. Nor is it to highlight the internal coherence of her work by situating it in its intellectual milieu. It is rather to show how the text produced by Benedict is written in such a way that what may have been her intuition is expressed through symbolic means that allow for understandings of her work that move in a different, and perhaps more conventional, way. It is rather easy to see why this should be. Benedict was writing for the archetypical American psychologist, and this necessarily influenced the topics she dealt with and the vocabulary she used. She was trying to establish the validity of a new field of inquiry, but she was forced to do it in terms of the traditional rhetoric of another, competing field. This ambiguity acted upon a work that presented itself very self-consciously as standing in the framework of *Patterns of Culture*, Bateson's *Naven* (1958 [1936]).

Bateson's *Naven* is a difficult and, to many, confusing book. This may well be because it can be read in two radically different ways. First, it can be read literally. Second, it can be read as prefiguring the work that Bateson would be doing later—even when this means leaving aside large segments of the book. As we have seen, Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* can also be read in two different ways, but the two may be better integrated, and Benedict's later career does not provide clear clues about her own reading of her work.

We can pass swiftly over the points on which Bateson's statements are extremely close paraphrases of Benedict's, particularly the point that cultural specificity is built upon the selective development of precultural "potentialities" (the word which appears, in Bateson's writing, at the points where Benedict would have written "congenial drives" or "original endowment"). Bateson (1958 [1936]:115) writes, for example:

A human being is born into the world with potentialities and tendencies which may be developed in various directions, and it may well be that different individuals have different potentialities. The culture into which an individual is born stresses certain of his potentialities and suppresses others, and it acts selectively, favoring the individuals who are best endowed with the potentialities preferred by the culture and discriminating against those with alien tendencies. In this way the culture standardizes the organization of the emotions of individuals.

There is, however, a definite evolution in Bateson's writing that can lead readers much farther along the route of understanding anthropology as a comparative social psychology. For Benedict, we have seen, the specification of the individual character was a secondary problem. Her main concern was to build a "science of custom" and to demonstrate the "integration of culture" by showing how all the manifestations of the behavior of a people, whether myth, ritual, or familial relationship, exhibited similar characteristics. She only suggested that the reason for such an integration was historico-psychological, and it seems to have been an afterthought. Bateson starts at the same place she would, with a custom, a ceremony, *naven*. The ceremony is a kind of key for Iatmul culture that can help to highlight the principles around which it is organized. It is only as a second step that he attempts, in a rather confused manner at times, to account for this integration. In this attempt, he focuses on those aspects of Benedict's work that suggest the need for psychological research.

The shift occurs in the middle of the book. Bateson moves from talking about "cultural structure" to talking about "thought" and "value" and the remark that these latter terms "have been snatched from the jargon of individual psychology." Eventually he makes a remark which breaks with the Durkheimian tradition and Benedict's intuition that a need exists to study culture in itself: "At the present time, we must follow the opinion of the majority of psychologists in dismissing the theory of the group mind as unnecessary, and therefore regard all the thinking and feeling which occurs in a culture as done by individuals" (p. 113). This leads him directly into a discussion of "ethos," the "culturally standardized system of organization of the instincts and emotions of individuals," and "eidōs," the "cultural standardization of the cognitive aspects of the personality of individuals" (p. 220). The "ethos" is a system of emotional attitudes and responses, the "eidōs" a system of classification an individual uses to distinguish among stimuli (p. 274).

This distinction prefigures certain analyses of Parsons and Shils (1951) and much that happened in anthropology during the following decades. It is not that Bateson himself directly influenced the discipline. It is rather that, given a certain phrasing of a theoretical problem and a certain environment, solutions necessarily evolve in a particular direction. For various

reasons, the stress in the intellectual debates was put first on the emotional aspect of the cultural specification of personality with research on the sources of temperament (e.g., in the toilet-training debate) or the universality of certain character traits (e.g., male/female typification in the division of labor). It is only later that emphasis was placed on cognition by what became "cognitive anthropology," a type of work that could also have been called "eidological" anthropology. What is certain is that both types of work defined themselves in psychological terms even as they challenged certain basic ideas of mainstream experimental research. One only has to remember the long debates about the psychological plausibility of alternative analyses of American kin terms to recognize the importance of the individual in this work.

And yet there is, in Bateson's *Naven* as in Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, the suggestion of the possibility of another route. This suggestion is indicated first in Bateson's theoretical comments about what he calls "schismogenesis" and second in his refusal to adopt certain stylistic forms that Benedict herself commonly uses and that are most consistent with a psychological orientation. Bateson defines schismogenesis as "a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behavior resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals" (p. 175). He talks of the "reactions of individuals to the reactions of other individuals," which he considers "a useful definition of the whole discipline" in which, we may surmise, he places his own work, "social psychology" (pp. 175–76). This interest in interaction, it is now recognized, allows one to transcend the individual as the basic unit of study and focus on the group-created organized event that Benedict called a "custom" and that is in fact the basic unit of anthropological fieldwork and constitutes the bulk of all ethnographies.¹⁵ But in *Naven* Bateson does not go that far. He sees in schismogenesis a means of escaping talk of the collective unconscious and justifying his generalizations about individual personality, "the norms of individual behavior."

If we look at Bateson's later work, we can recognize the importance of the chapter on schismogenesis in the development of his thought about systemic processes. But things are not clear yet in *Naven*. The writing of *Naven* leaves the door open to various possible evolutions. Indeed, as we have just seen, the clearest statements are written in terms of interaction between individuals. Yet Bateson's discomfort with individualistic formulations is very great, particularly outside the more theoretical passages of the book. For example, I have not found in the book any place where he writes in the possessive mode that came so easily to Benedict. He writes about "Iatmul culture" and *its* cultural structure. This structure provides settings. Ceremonies contribute to the integration of Iatmul society. Indeed, when relationships of possession are established, it is always the culture that is put in the encompassing, superordinate position: the ethos is the ethos of Iatmul culture, not

the ethos of Iatmul men. The culture, then, is a subject which acts upon the men and women of Iatmul as objects. Could it be that Bateson is so vehement against the "group mind" because he cannot write except in terms of one? Indeed, it may be because the book was already so ambivalent about a psychological anthropology of emotions that it had so little impact until after the discipline had collapsed.

SOME MODERN STATEMENTS

In many ways, including perhaps its evolution, symbolic anthropology carries forward in a more modern vocabulary the work begun by the Boasians. Of course, most writers within this tradition do not specifically refer their work to Kroeber, Benedict, and Margaret Mead (or to Dewey, G. H. Mead, and others). They prefer either Weber, Schutz, and Sartre or Durkheim, Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, and Dumont. But Geertz and Schneider (whose work I take as paradigmatic of the early years in the evolution of symbolic anthropology), like Benedict and Mead, have been above all interested in giving accounts of the systematicity (integration) of cultures. They feel comfortable talking about American culture and Javanese, Balinese, or Moroccan style. This early work also contains some of the strongest statements about the independence of social action from the psychic makeup of individual actors. Finally, it shows signs of a displacement of its recognized relevance that is not unlike the fate of Benedict's work. One can observe the progress of a determined and multipronged attack on the original intuitions in the name of the need to focus upon the fate of the individual within a culture. In the process, some writers come to deny the usefulness of the very concept of culture as an encompassing historical system. Geertz, for example, writes wistfully about the difficulties of getting at "the native's point of view" (1976), and a critic of his work wonders about the extent to which his models are "psychologically real" (Magainella 1980:677). Critics of Schneider's work emphasize the absence of any statement from him on the sociological extension of his models: they ask "how many" (single) individuals carry the American culture he talks about (Feinberg 1979). Rabinow (1975:4) wants to "stress that men act," that "it is men, not social systems, who produce social action."

These criticisms are not necessarily misdirected. They can be considered the positive side of the negative reaction to the sociological insight. Singer (1978:223) may be right in arguing for a "semiotic" anthropology that would do what a "semiological" (structural) anthropology supposedly cannot do, namely, "deal with the problems of how different cultural 'languages' are related to empirical objects and egos, to individual actors and groups." The fact that this work is explicitly inscribed within an American tradition does not make it less valuable.¹⁶ Individuals are a kind of "empirical object." If, to paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, "myths think themselves through men," there is also much evidence that something happens in the retelling that orients it. There is here an intuition into the human condition that anthropology cannot ignore. However, this insight is so powerful in an American environment that it can easily obscure the vitality of the alternative insight. One may fear

¹⁵ I am thinking here of the work of the communication theorists who like to think in terms of socially constructed environments governed by their own laws. In such an environment, the activity of the participants is dealt with essentially as involving sensible reactions that take into account objective constraints. In the process the participants position themselves in such a way as to make it possible for all of them together to complete a possible sequence within this environment. As McDermott (1977) has shown in his analysis of a reading lesson as such an environment, the completion of the sequence may lead to many individual "failures" that can be extremely painful—emotionally—to all those involved, the more so in that they are unaware of the source of the failure. The value of such an analysis lies in its implication that the performance of appropriate behavior in an environment is not dependent upon individual "internalization" of patterns appropriate to this environment, since it is the environment itself which guides the behavior and corrects it when threatened by it. This means, methodologically, that the unit of study must be the environment—the situation, the scene, and then the network of scenes—never the individual's inner constitution, for this is never accessible except through the individual's behavior in a certain kind of scene and through a particular type of verbalization.

¹⁶ Most of those who can be seen in relation to this movement refer their work more willingly to the legacy of Max Weber and the German phenomenologists, particularly A. Schutz, than to that of the pragmatists, but the two legacies are very compatible. Schutz himself in fact mentions Dewey regularly and positively. Interactionists refer their work to Blumer, and the work of Peirce on semiotics is being rediscovered; indeed, it could be said that a lot of American anthropology is "coming home." This is, however, rather recent. While one can find passing references to Dewey in Geertz's writing (e.g., 1968:139–41; 1973:45, 58, 365), there is no systematic relating of Dewey's insights to Geertz's analytical work. The "Americanness" of this tradition is not diminished by the fact that Merleau-Ponty may have been struggling all his life with the same intuition that became institutionalized in pragmatism.

that Singer's care in emphasizing the dialectical nature of the constitution of the self will not have the same impact as a statement like "the problem is the empirical one of discovering the bonds of feeling that hold people together or tear them apart, and what their interrelations and conditions are" (Singer 1980:500). This statement may seem, to an American reader, so much "clearer" than the rest of a very difficult paper that it may stand as what Singer, eventually, "meant to say," what is to be appropriated of his statement.

SCHNEIDER AND SYSTEMS OF SYMBOLS

In "Notes toward a Theory of Culture" (1976), Schneider writes that "the object of a theory of culture is to contribute to an understanding of social action" (p. 197). No subject for "social action" is specified for the following six pages. Schneider does not write of "the actor"; "culture" is what is to be understood. It is studied through a direct, very detailed observation of the "actual, concrete behavior of human beings" (p. 198). Culture is concerned with meaning. It is an aspect of communication, that is, of interaction. The individual, as such, is not the unit of analysis, even in American culture. (But of course the fact that the individual is a unit of the culture makes it particularly difficult to write about this culture for an American audience.) Thus, and quite coherently, Schneider puts culture in the encompassing position when he establishes the relationship of possession; he writes of "a particular culture's units and norms" (p. 200). Whether he is talking about norms as patterns for action or about culture as a body of definitions and premises, etc., he does not need the individual. Culture is integrated. This is an observational fact. There is no need to speculate, at this time at least, why this should be so.

But the individual does enter the picture, interestingly and significantly, at the point when Schneider starts to deal with the most frequent objections to his work. He objects to definitions of culture that do not concern themselves with "meaning" and explains the need for this concern in terms of the idea that all visions of nature and reality are cultural constructions. At this point, he begins to write in terms reminiscent of Benedict and Bateson (p. 204):

The world at large, the facts of life, whatever they may be, are always parts of man's perception of them as that perception is formulated through his culture. The world at large is not, indeed it cannot be, independent of the way in which his culture formulates his vision of what he is seeing. There are only cultural constructions of reality, and these cultural constructions of reality are decisive in what is perceived, what is experienced, what is understood.

But if we look carefully, we can see that Schneider's "his" refers not to any individual, but to "man" in the neutral, that is, humanity. There is a major difference here, particularly from the pragmatist statements (see the passage from Dewey quoted earlier).

Of course, Schneider writes, culture provides the basis for the construction of reality *for* the actor; "who else is there?" (p. 205). But from this point on, he departs widely from the earlier phrasings of Benedict and Margaret Mead by emphasizing that cultural patterning is not all there is to an actor's personality. Culture is only one of the factors that constitute it. Thence, though he does not mention it, the uselessness of trying to approach cultural specificity through individual personality structure. Such a structure is both smaller and greater than the cultural structure which surrounds it. It is independent of it even as it is in relation with it.

One last thing might be noted. Schneider mentions the issue of the spatio-socio-temporal extension of the commonality of norms and cultural definitions—the issue most commonly raised in relation to his work—in two places, once in the context of a discussion of norms and once in the context of the discussion of the constitution of the actor that we have just reviewed. In the former context, he rejects the relevance of the issue as

traditionally phrased. In the latter, he returns to the traditional phrasing, writing, "Social action requires commonality of understandings, implies common codes of communication . . ." (p. 206). What does the adjective "common" refer to here? A property of all (or many) of the individuals in a group, one that constitutes the specificity of the group? Or simply the fact that a group of people participates in an activity that is structured through their interaction? It is only recently that certain social scientists have moved in the latter direction (Birdwhistell 1970, Schefflen 1973). Schneider stops with a reference to Durkheim's "collective representations," suggesting thereby that he is thinking of the commonalities as social facts rather than psychological ones. But, given the inherent possibility of an individualistic interpretation of "in common," the use of the word can easily lead the reader away from a sociological interpretation.

GEERTZ'S NATIVE POINT OF VIEW

In Geertz's "From the Native's Point of View" (1976) the ambiguity that derives from the use of individualistic forms is so much more pronounced as to appear systematic. Geertz does not seem ever to hesitate to place the individual in the encompassing position vis-à-vis culture: the point of view he is interested in is that *of* the native. His paper is about the best way of learning about this point of view. It is an essay in the epistemology and methodology of a cross-cultural psychology (in the sense of Singer's "semiotics of the self") and not an essay in the analysis of culture.¹⁷ But soon a certain ambiguity reappears (ignoring the fact that Geertz does not speak of his work in the terms I have just used). The main point of the paper is to remind those who are interested in recapturing the native's own point of view that the ethnographer perceives only what the natives "perceive 'with'—or 'by means of' or 'through' " (p. 224). Talking about the Balinese definition of self, he writes: "Again, all this is realized not in terms of some general mood the anthropologist in his spiritual versatility somehow captures, but through a set of readily observable symbolic forms: an elaborate repertoire of designations and titles."

We are back to behavior, external observation, and the play of custom. This is not too far from what Benedict might have written, and yet there is a difference. Geertz builds his illustrative accounts differently from Benedict. He first states a rule and then shows how difficult it is for an individual actor to apply it, thereby escaping the appearance of suggesting that, for example, all Javanese have mechanically stilled their emotions and shaped their behavior (p. 227). He does not assume that the very fact of participating in an interaction necessarily produces a specifiable emotion that is the same as the emotion produced in the other participants.

Geertz knows that his position is ambiguous. He closes his paper on a question that he does not quite answer: "What do we claim when we claim that we understand the semiotic means by which, in this case, persons are defined to one another? That we know words or that we know minds?" (p. 235). Geertz wants to know minds. He talks of Dilthey's hermeneutic circle in a way reminiscent of Bateson's reflection on the circularity of his own argument (1958 [1936]: 118–19). But we are left hanging, as perhaps we should be. An ambiguity like this one has dialectical properties which can drive generations of researchers toward a deeper, more reflective understanding of the relevance of their work. It can also lock them within a

¹⁷ Geertz does write elsewhere that "culture is [not] . . . a psychological phenomenon, a characteristic of someone's mind" (1973:13), but this is in the context of an attack on the "cognitive fallacy." The remainder of the introduction to the collection of essays in which this attack is included shows that Geertz is interested—albeit in a more complex fashion—in the constitution of the individual.

Kuhnian paradigm and make their work an ever staler "normal science."

THE CRITICS

It would be repetitive to show how the same struggles to express a difficult intuition and the same ambiguities characterize most of the work of those who have explicitly placed themselves in the tradition Geertz and Schneider inaugurated (see, for example, Ortner 1978, Witherspoon 1975). Of the many statements critical of symbolic anthropology, I shall concentrate on those by sympathetic critics, writers not fully committed (in their critical writing) to the theoretical phrasings of Schneider or Geertz but in agreement that the domain of cultural anthropology consists in the behavior of (though not exclusively) simple people going to church on Sunday, marrying, dying, and *talking* about and symbolizing it. I have chosen as exemplary two papers, a thoughtful review by Keesing (1974) and a more recent paper by Feinberg (1979) that has the advantage of being followed by commentaries by several anthropologists.

The latter, which is the less sophisticated, begins with a discussion of three "types of inconsistency which may be found within a culture" (p. 544):

The first [type] involves the existence of rules and definitions that are contradictory but nevertheless are found within a single cultural system and may be held simultaneously by a single individual. The second type of inconsistency is that between rules and people's actual behavior. A third variety is found when rules and definitions differ from one subgroup or one individual to another.

My intent here is not to evaluate the accuracy or relevance of Feinberg's criticism. It is rather to uncover its (concrete) logic. It is immediately clear that the three types of inconsistency concern the *extension* of certain things (rules, definitions, behavior) across a certain space, either social (a group in which subgroups and individuals can be found), personal (individuals who act differently from the rules which would seem to apply to them), or semantic (contradictory rules). For Feinberg these criticisms are relevant because Schneider "assumes that meaningful-symbolic systems are fully integrated and consistent . . . [that] the symbols and conceptions which comprise a culture are mutually consistent . . . and . . . [that] a culture must be shared in its entirety by all of the participants" (p. 549). He goes on to argue that, since Americans can be both communists and fascists, American "culture" is neither integrated nor shared. In other words, if, within a social space, contradictions and exceptions to common rules are found, then we cannot talk of this space as being integrated or consistent. To the extent that Feinberg refers to a social space as a "culture"—following the least interesting American usage on this point—then, of course, he is consistent with himself when he talks of nonintegrated, diverse cultures. He has not noticed that Schneider conceives of culture not as a *space*, but as a *system* of consistencies. If, within a social space (a "group" or "society" but not, for Schneider, a "culture"), it can be shown that there are indeed several systems of consistencies, then this group can be said to be the meeting point of several cultures.

Feinberg's criticisms, however, are not entirely incoherent with suggestions that are contained within Schneider's own writing. Schneider does write about commonality, and commonality evokes questions of plurality in an American audience. It is not surprising that it is Feinberg's statements about the impossibility of establishing a theory of culture based on the concept of commonality that find the most consistent echoes in the commentaries on his paper. Whatever else they say, they all say something that is most succinctly stated by Gray (p. 552): "When Feinberg criticizes Schneider's conclusions on cultural consistency and sharing by pointing to variations in the meanings of symbols, I believe he is essentially correct." And rather than moving on from such statements to a criticism of of the notion of commonality as being in any way relevant to

culture theory, they request a return to the individual. Lingenfelter summarizes this movement succinctly (pp. 554–55): "I applaud Schneider's concern for understanding the high-level, symbolic core of a culture but deny any existence of these symbols apart from the minds of individuals who order them, combine them, reject them. . . ." We are back in 1940, when the sympathetic critics of Mead and Benedict transformed their insight about cultural specificity into a psychological anthropology.

Keesing's (1974) review is much more balanced in that he recognizes that the social scientist is confronted with a phenomenological dilemma: only "ego-centered *perspectives* on [norms, symbols, and meanings] exist in the cognitive worlds of the subjects," but "each actor perceives the way of life of his people as in some sense *external*" (p. 85).¹⁸ But Keesing does not escape the traditional discourse in which the paradox is reduced to a discussion of the extension of commonality: "Treating the realm of cultural symbols as shared and public, as transcending the minds of individuals, raises the danger not only of the cultural interpreter's creating a spuriously integrated and internally consistent symbolic design . . . but also of his hiding diversity and obscuring change" (p. 88). He moves on to sketch a solution that would not necessarily lead in fact to a psychological investigation, but he too is led to deemphasize the need to study the external as a precisely external determinant force.¹⁹ This solution consists in a call to adapt the competence/performance distinction of American linguistics. A central property of this distinction (in opposition to the Saussurean *langue/parole* distinction, in which *langue* is specifically understood as a social fact) is that it focuses attention on the carrier, the actor/producer of competent sentences formed on the basis of an inner capacity.²⁰

ONE POSSIBLE FUTURE

No analysis of the present is intended here. I just want to highlight the distance that has been covered in the transformation of symbolic anthropology into what Singer (1980) calls a "semiotics of the self." In 1981, the *American Ethnologist* published a special issue dedicated to the convergence of symbolic and cognitive interests in anthropology. This issue is opened by two papers intended to review the past and outline a future. For the authors, the important development lies in "the new emphasis on choice, constraints, and strategies" (Colby, Fernandez, and Kronenfeld 1981:438), with cognitive anthropology contributing its ethnographic techniques and symbolic anthropology its ability to "identify problems that go to the heart of how cultural experience orders life and nature" (p. 442).

This is indeed the most probable direction to be taken by the tradition. It is the most "regular" in an American context, for it brings the discipline back to a focus on the "acting individual(s)" (Dougherty and Fernandez 1981:415). This may not be an unprofitable way to go, but to assume that it is the

¹⁸ In fact, Keesing gives here an essentially individualistic account of the need to deal with the external. He writes that externality is something which *each* actor *perceives*—singularly. The reality of the external is a matter of psychological apprehension.

¹⁹ Keesing, interestingly, has no problem in assuming the external character of the material-ecologico-economic-social world—an exteriority of the "natural" which great philosophical traditions have persistently doubted.

²⁰ It is therefore surprising that the linguists who have chosen to work on competence have been content to do so in terms of their own personal, individual intuition, while those who have chosen to work on performance are those who became interested in social interaction and renewed the study of the relationships between language and culture. By contrast, those who have worked within the Saussurean tradition in France have never ceased to focus on the social aspect of the semiotic domains they explored. It is also not surprising that students of Schneider generally prefer to think in Saussurean terms (e.g., Boon 1979).

only useful one or even that it is consistent with the successes of the past is to be tricked by an uncriticized ideology that hides culture behind individual, Promethean decision makers. Following Boon (1978:238), we may in fact look at these new papers for the tricks that the collective consciousness has played on individual productions. The papers, for example, offer no mention of the American sources for work in symbolic anthropology, whether in anthropology (Benedict et al.) or in philosophy (Dewey, Mead, et al.). There is thus no way for the authors to see themselves as participating in a long tradition. Durkheim's contribution to the field is—rather surprisingly—made out to be what he would have had to say about “how people—that is to say, *individuals*—experience their collective identities” (Colby et al. 1981:422, italics mine). While not entirely inconsistent with certain passages of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1961 [1905]), this is certainly a very unusual reading. The fundamental work of Louis Dumont is ignored. Little mention is made of the fact that most of Geertz's work has consisted in the demonstration that cultures are internally coherent—as in his work on person, time, and conduct in Bali (1973 [1966])—and historically different.

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

The above shows how the evolution of a theoretical conversation could be bringing symbolic anthropology to the same impasse that caused the collapse of culture-and-personality research. The vocabulary has changed, the overall phrasing is more complex. Some, like Singer, struggle mightily to strike a balance. But the main outline of the old pragmatists' argument remains. Culture is interesting, but only as a limiting factor on individual behavior or as the product of this action. In this perspective there cannot quite be an “American” or a “Balinese” culture. There can only be culture, unqualified by an adjective of place or time. As a matter of fact, the word is not once qualified in the last papers we have examined. At most, “a” culture is made into a statistical event. Keesing writes, “A culture is . . . a system of knowledge, a composite of the cognitive systems more or less shared by members of a society” (1979:15). The emphasis is on the individual as the carrier of cultural specification. Society evaporates.

But does this settle the issue? What are we to do with the fact that so many have felt the need to talk in terms of “collectivities,” even at the risk of making the social a quasi-mystical category? What are we to do with the profoundly human intuition that cultural forms are typified in terms of times and places? Why are holistic analyses so powerful? Is there truth someplace and confusion somewhere else? Couldn't it rather be that we must recognize more concretely than we have up till now the value of both of the driving intuitions we have looked at?

The (American) pragmatic intuition into the constitution of the individual personality is certainly of fundamental importance to the social sciences. It addresses a series of empirical problems that strict Durkheimian theory cannot handle.²¹ But the theoretical revulsion against the sociological intuition, a revulsion which is consistent in the forms it takes with all that has been written about American culture, must also be recognized for what it is. When it reveals itself in the writing of a particular person, this revulsion is certainly a psychological event. It is probable also that, statistically, most American anthropologists feel more comfortable with theories of culture

that can be read individualistically than with those that cannot. It is also a fact that some “Americans” can, individually, feel the presence of a problem and be moved in such a way that they will refuse to perform their work in social psychological terms. We could easily arrange the writers we have examined on a kind of continuum from Feinberg at one end, as the least self-critical, to Schneider at the other, as the most ready deliberately to ignore the individual except as a social construct. But I hope I have indicated that it is not enough to stop here. American anthropology, as an ideological reality, is not made up of a diverse group of anthropologists who “more or less share” points of view. First, I have shown how difficult it is to decide where any one writer in fact stands. Second, I have suggested that it does not quite matter where each, in his/her own individual mind, stands, for they all allow for other readings of their work than the one we might consider most likely to be the “true” reading. They allow for such readings through the fact that they feel they must address the objections that will be leveled against them and through the fact that they use vocabularies, syntactic constructions, what I have referred to elsewhere as a “rhetoric” (Varenne 1978), that are strongly associated with certain interpretive modes.

From this point of view, American ideology as far as it relates to anthropology is the rhetorical organization of statements about Man (“about human beings” would be a more American way of putting it) that one cannot escape when one is writing in an American environment—whether one has personally appropriated it or not. One cannot escape it both because one is writing in borrowed words and because one cannot quite control the readings of one's words that one's audience will make. *America is always already there*. It is in this sense that the ideology, or culture, is an external, social fact that is part of the environment of individuals. To the extent that it is part of the environment, it is something to which individuals will adapt and against which they may react, but it is not in itself this adaptation or reaction.

These final statements will certainly strike many as “oversocialized” and altogether scandalous given the (statistically) common argument that American theories of culture are too diverse to lend themselves to overall generalization. I hope to have shown that diversity does not necessarily imply the absence of an ordered environment at another level. This, I believe, was Benedict's intuition. Even if one does not want to follow the line of argument I have adopted, I hope at least to have suggested that this intuition cannot be ignored or reduced to scientific error or confusion on the way to the truth. The confusion itself is, in fact, proof that Benedict was on to something that one misses when one reads her work as a study in psychological anthropology. It is proof, in any event, of the direction of a “bias” that is not so much to be deplored as to be understood. One may not want to recognize, with Dumont, that anthropology will be successful only to the extent that it is holistic rather than individualistic. But neither can one expect that holistic approaches within anthropology will cease to claim the right to be heard even after the most scathing critiques. What one can hope is that the time will come when the debate between the various approaches will be conducted at a level where the fundamental intuitions of each can be preserved in their essential vitality.

Comments

by ARIE DE RUIJTER

Drossaardslaan 11, 4143 BD Leerdam, The Netherlands. 7 XI 83

Varenne presents an interesting exposition of the interwovenness of North American cultural values with the topics and

²¹ The impact of this realization of the presence of another kind of impasse is very clear in the work of Bourdieu this past decade, as he has tried to give an account of cultural specification (“habituization,” in his terms) that incorporates a processual element (1977, 1980). Bourdieu's approving references to G. H. Mead have a surprising character within the French intellectual conversation which may act as a catalyst for a transformation of the conversation. By contrast, the same references may have the reverse effect within the American conversation.

views of U.S. cultural anthropology and argues that this leads to a certain interpretation of the problem of the group-individual, culture-personality relationship. The article gives a good impression of the struggle between the atomistic and the holistic (superorganic) perspectives in American anthropology. Two questions of a general nature arise, however:

1. Does the definition of culture frequently used in American anthropology allow for a really holistic perspective? Two striking elements of this definition are (a) the focus on superstructure to the exclusion of infrastructure (mode of production, mode of reproduction) and structure (domestic economy, political economy) and (b) the description of superstructure as a complex of values and norms. This concept of culture implies the study of the largely conscious or preconscious rules by which man is guided. Hence one queries the psychological validity and the homogeneity versus heterogeneity of a culture, with its link to social groups and the related problems of demarcation. However, if one wants to study culture as a superorganic whole, as a code—the prevailing tendency in cognitive and symbolic anthropology in recent years—then it is necessary to transcend this concept and search for implicit, covert rules—the ordering principles, the grammar responsible for the “organization of diversity.” This reorientation in symbolic anthropology has more or less logically resulted in the predominant analogy of structural linguistics, with its distinction between competence and performance. Whether there exists a common structure of rules or cultural grammar is a key question. To determine this is far more complicated than in language in view of the more complex and less systematic character of culture, with its many verbal and nonverbal sign systems. But even if this “order of orders” can be demonstrated for a particular culture, one is confronted with the question *why* exactly *this* order of orders. In order to answer this question, one must appeal to the infrastructural and structural components of the sociocultural system. In short, restriction to superstructural components will result in a limited holism.

2. One of the objectives of the article is “to highlight the extent to which the diversity argument can be recognized as characteristically American because of the emphasis that is placed upon preserving the autonomous individual as the unit of study.” In support of this, Varenne points to ambiguous definitions in (among others) Ruth Benedict’s and Gregory Bateson’s publications and shows how, in interpreting these studies, their American colleagues overemphasized the importance of the individual. However, doesn’t this ambiguity originate rather in the character of the object—man as creator and creature of culture? There is a dialectical process in which the former exists by the grace of the latter and vice versa. One may define culture apart from the individual or group, as a code or a system of symbols, but if one is to explain *change* one has to have recourse to concrete individuals and groups acting in tangible, concrete contexts. Hence, Schneider’s definition of culture as “a system of consistencies,” more or less defended by Varenne, is not a solution but only a shift of the problem of the demarcation of one culture with respect to another. Besides, an explanation of the relative emphasis on the individual in American anthropology—at least compared with the European—may be found in the organization of the discipline. U.S. anthropology is more open and multidisciplinary, rather closely linked with psychology and linguistics, whereas in Holland and England, for example, training is narrower and the institutionalized ties are with sociology and economics. This leads to other emphases, views, and objectives, irrespective of the general culture in which anthropology functions (and by which it is also coloured).

by MARSHALL DURBIN

Box 1114, Department of Anthropology, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo. 63130, U.S.A. 9 XI 83

Throughout this paper there is an intimation that various forms of communication should provide evidence for an analysis of

American culture. Reference in the text and the bibliography to terms such as “semiotic,” “vocabularies,” “communication,” “kinesics,” “cognition,” “perception,” “speaking,” “spoken word,” “speech acts,” “symbols,” “talking,” “*langue*,” and “*parole*” as well as to linguists such as Silverstein would indicate that somehow language and its associated human communication systems might provide a methodology for the analysis. Nevertheless, this methodology is not present. More difficult to understand, however, is the lack of any kind of discussion of the kinds of data bases available to the researcher in the field. Particularly annoying is that Varenne presents no data or proposed analyses of his own. For example, he might have included data pointing to the concept of *institution* within the cognitive framework of the individual by giving minimal discourse pairs of sentences such as

- 1) They don’t allow nudity *at* Terre Haute (High School, Hospital, etc.)
- 2) They don’t allow nudity *in* Terre Haute (city limits, police jurisdiction, etc.).

Data such as these indicate not only that the language carries information about institutions, but that the speaker must assume that the hearer shares this information. While I am not opposed to conjectural and review articles, I do believe that the topic under discussion warrants an analysis with data rather than a purely polemic approach.

by PETER M. GARDNER

Department of Anthropology, University of Missouri, Columbia, Mo. 65211, U.S.A. 9 XII 83

Although Varenne supports his argument with a few well-presented cases, he is far from persuasive that there has been a general progression toward focus on the individual in U.S. anthropology or U.S. social science as a whole. Surprisingly, he makes no reference to Leaf’s (1979) much more comprehensive attempt to provide a history of this dimension of anthropological thought. Leaf has not only described a recent swing in emphasis from a dualistic tradition of enquiry (entailing the study of some “social or cultural entity or system”) to a monistic tradition (“focussing on the free and purposive individual”) but shown an apparent long-term interplay and alternation between the two (pp. 6, 10, 335). Their concepts are similar enough for one to insist that Varenne’s subject matter is a rephrased subclass of Leaf’s. Because Leaf is describing disciplinewise (rather than U.S.) phenomena and periodic shifts of interest back and forth (rather than a short-term, unidirectional trend), his portrait constitutes a substantial challenge to Varenne. The latter needs to reexamine his own culturally specific causal explanation of the trend. He needs to ask whether his argument holds up if he adopts a broader framework in time and space.

It is important to encourage such work. Whether or not it will be corroborated in the long run, Varenne’s explanation is plausible in reference to a subset of the phenomena Leaf treats. Varenne is one of a small but growing number of anthropological metatheoreticians to place our theory in a broad intellectual setting. In so doing, he contributes significantly to an escape from tunnel vision (Hexter 1961, Fischer 1970) in the writing of our discipline’s history. What is more, his attention to American values is a step toward explanatory, as against particularist, anthropological historiography.

by R. M. KEESING

Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, G.P.O. Box 4, Canberra, A.C.T. 2601, Australia. 7 XI 83

In this thoughtful and powerfully argued paper, Varenne challenges us to think again about the social and cultural as transcending the subjective and individual and about the cultural

situatedness of the first principles on which our theories have been built.

I remain convinced (as I have argued in Keesing 1981 and 1982) that we must maintain a split vision that sees the cultural heritage of a people *both* as constituted by the cognitive worlds of the particular human beings who comprise the population at a given time and as social, external to and constitutive of the private experience of any of them and (except for an Ishi) outliving any of them. Taking one view to the exclusion of the other commits us either to cognitive reductionism or (I would still argue) to massive category errors of reification.

The latter errors of reification seem built into our language as much as the psychologism Varenne skillfully dissects. Once we create—in Campbell's words, attribute "entitivity" to—culture/society as external and thinglike, we endow "it" with powers to cause, to shape, to define, to constitute. That members of our species subjectively perceive (or at least in conventional metaphors [Lakoff and Johnson 1980] talk about) the societal and cultural as "thinglike" is a phenomenon to be explicated, but not (I would argue) necessarily replicated, by the social theorist. Whether we can ultimately escape from our own folk models—either of the individual as constitutive of the social or of the social as constitutive of the individual—is (as Varenne notes for the former) deeply problematic. Despite our special fetishism of the "individual" (Sahlins 1976) and despite different culturally conventional metaphoric schemata for talking about personhood, subjective experience, "mind," and society, I suspect that all peoples everywhere have constructed understandings of both the subjective, private (and, yes, "individual") nature of personal experience *and* the external, social nature of custom. For creatures with our brains, living in groups, such an experiential perspective is probably inevitable. Though we as social theorists seek to extricate ourselves from experiential realities as culturally shaped in folk models and language, we probably inevitably remain entrapped. Varenne has skillfully reminded us how trapped we are.

by MICHAEL MOFFATT

Department of Anthropology, Douglass Campus, Rutgers College, New Brunswick, N.J. 08904, U.S.A. 2 XII 83

Varenne's argument is intelligent and provocative. It makes a good case for Geertz's proposition that culture is not "in" actors but between them, and it fruitfully adds Bourdieu and other French holists to the model to bring power and rhetoric into the elemental cultural act: communication and reinterpretation. Varenne's further point, that American individualistic ideology drives us toward atomistic readings of holistic insights, is an acute one, and especially true when we try to communicate widely. Dougherty and Fernandez's reduction of holism probably results from their attempt to find a consensus among theoretically disparate American cultural anthropologists (an easy consensus is one based on unexamined common cultural assumptions). Those monuments to even more general communication, our introductory textbooks, are further evidence for Varenne's point, positing the individual unproblematically while treating culture warily:

Culture is incompletely shared in every group . . . culture is [not] a monolithic structure . . . individual differences do exist. . . . [Swartz and Jordan 1980:v]

[In] the inference of cultural traits . . . we are . . . entering the realm of thought, i.e. attempting to infer the mental or cognitive processes . . . in the minds of members of [a] society. . . . [Dubbs and Whitney 1980:25]

I'm not entirely convinced that the increasingly psychological readings of Benedict had much to do with the fine points of her language use on individual and culture, however. Much more obvious sources are Benedict's relation to Margaret Mead (mentioned by Varenne in a footnote), Mead's own popularizing agenda, and scrambled overt conceptualizations of "culture" in earlier pages of *Patterns of Culture*. A culture is modelled

variously on an art object, a language, and a well-integrated personality; cultures are characterized as "megamaniac" and "paranoid"; and the theme is constantly stressed that a given culture defines the normal and abnormal personalities of those who carry it.

A third point of Varenne's, that apparent cultural diversity in American culture does not speak for itself, is a useful and important admonition for those who seize eagerly on any cultural difference as evidence for tremendous and fundamental American cultural diversity. Some ethnic differences in current American society may be, on the contrary, more like totemism—one or two boundary-maintaining symbols of group "difference" within a wider set of deeply shared assumptions about the autonomy of the individual, about choice and identity, and so on.

However, I have the same general problem with some of Varenne's rhetoric as Varenne has with Benedict—I question its reification of the individualism/holism dichotomy. I don't think it is unfair to suggest that readers might come away from this article under the impression that Varenne feels the following questions are unworthy of right-minded analytic attention: What does thus-and-such *really* mean, inwardly, to particular persons? What's the sample? What systematic diversities *do* exist? To locate culture externally in a tradition of interpretation does not solve the problem of reinterpretation; it merely relocates it. Inward, perhaps (shudder) psychological questions still exist: Do they really mean that? Are they being ironic? Are they lying? In his own fine analysis of high-school culture, Varenne (1978) himself has to ask the questions: What did the principal think he was doing when he wrote a rhetorically inept memo? What did the teachers think when they received it? Likewise, questions of sampling and generalization cannot be avoided entirely. How many interpersonal texts support a given cultural typification—e.g., that American culture is "individualistic"—and how many don't? Quinn (1982:796–97, n. 4) has raised some of these questions in a comment on David Schneider's *American Kinship*. This piece by Varenne might be taken as a partial reply: Varenne locates culture in the interactions of natural communication, making the sort of careful statistical sampling Quinn can carry out in controlled interviewing contexts more difficult. But a more positive reply will be necessary, I think, to convince those who think anthropology has something to do with science-like, replicable method of the value of the interactive, holistic approach to culture being argued here.

Nor am I convinced that the sort of careful cultural analysis that Varenne, Quinn, Carol Greenhouse, and a few others have been producing on the white American middle class has yet been done on American working-class populations, on ethnics, or on recent-immigrant groups (for one exception, see Di Leonardo 1981), leaving questions of fundamental cultural diversity wide open. Serious, theoretically sophisticated anthropology of American culture is just beginning; the present piece, along with much of Varenne's other work, is among the most interesting initial formulations of the field.

by RENATO ROSALDO

Department of Anthropology, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif. 94305, U.S.A. 9 XI 83

Varenne offers, among other things, a proposition about the recent history of American cultural anthropology. In its best moments, usually initiated by relative outsiders (immigrants, minorities, women), cultural theory has achieved true sociological insight. Such writers as Benedict, Bateson, Schneider, and Geertz have succeeded in retaining the Durkheimian vision. One wonders whether this is because they stand alone as intellectual giants or sit perched upon the shoulders of their historical epochs. In either case, the central argument appears

to be that sociological wisdom contradicts American culture's sacred construct of the individual as an autonomous locus of thought and action. American theories of culture, precisely because Americans produce them, contain the seeds of their own destruction—or at any rate because it's in their culture American anthropologists tend to dilute their best (most sociological) theories.

Plausible as it is, Varenne's view remains unconvincing. To begin, the main evidence for the current trend toward individualism comes from reviews by Richard Feinberg and Paul Magnarella. Can a pair of unsophisticated reviews represent a shift in thought? Moreover, if there is a new turn in thought it seems rather to be represented, for example, by Pierre Bourdieu's emphasis on practice. This focus on the problem of human agency should not be conflated with the methodological individualism (the theoretical elaboration of an American sacred value) that Varenne so detests. Finally, the theory of intellectual history offered here seems to place American anthropologists in an eternal battle against their own eternal cultural values. Is this theory one of charismatic breakthroughs and re-enculturation? Is this a return of the superorganic? This view of the repeated struggle between sacred individualism and sociological wisdom reduces complex historical processes to timeless conflicts. Varenne seeks, not unlike Santayana, to warn us that those who do not know their own histories are condemned to repeat them. Ironically, instead of histories his analysis seems to offer the eternal recurrence of binary oppositions.

by MILTON SINGER

Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, 1126 E. 59th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637, U.S.A. 8 XII 83

It will come as a surprise to most American anthropologists to read that "they feel more comfortable with theories of culture that can be read individualistically than with those that cannot" and that they "cannot escape" using a vocabulary, syntax, and "rhetoric" that lends itself to being so interpreted "when . . . writing in the American environment—whether one has personally appropriated it or not." Yet this is a logical application, one must admit, of the culture concept to American anthropology and society. That is of course the thrust of Varenne's paradoxical hypothesis—that orthodox American cultural ideology is *not* holistic and social but individualistic and psychological and that American anthropological discourse is as much shaped by this national ideology as are other domains of American discourse.

I cannot speak for "most American anthropologists," but I should like to respond to Varenne's comments on my discussion of Benedict (Singer 1961) and on my articles about semiotic anthropology (Singer 1978, 1980). Varenne predicts that my critical review of Benedict and my recent plea for a semiotic anthropology will be interpreted "in the American environment" as powerful support for the individualistic American ideology and will obscure the vitality of the alternative holistic insight—however mightily I may struggle to restore the balance.

Perhaps Varenne's apprehensions on my behalf will be allayed if I point out that I have yet to see evidence of such individualistic misinterpretations of my articles. It may forestall such possible misinterpreters if I remind them (and Varenne) that my comments on Benedict were made in the context of a general historical and critical review of the development of culture-and-personality theory and research, a review that was far more critical of the individualistic-psychological concepts of "modal personality" and "basic personality" than of Benedict's configurational theory. I not only observed that *Patterns of Culture* was short on individual psychological data, but also explained why its configurational theory of personality types would not give a high priority to such data. This explanation was "not meant as a criticism of the use of cultural data,

for these are essential even when psychological data are employed," but rather stressed "that because the 'psychological types' were conceived as attributes of whole cultures, it was not considered important to present evidence on the psychology of individuals, although the theory in its later forms did assert some very definite relations between the 'psychological types' of whole cultures and of individuals" (Singer 1961:27–28). This can hardly be interpreted as obscuring the vitality of the holistic insight.

A similar caveat applies to Varenne's anticipations of individualistic and psychological interpretations of Peircean semiotics and of my "semiotics of the self" in particular. I agree with Varenne that "Peirce, like all pragmatists, allows for differing readings of his work on semiotics," but I do not share his opinion that "the psychologizing readings seem the more abundant" (n. 13). Certainly such readings are not evident in the cited writings of Boon (1979) and Silverstein (1976) or in the works of such authoritative interpreters of Peirce as Fisch (1978, 1982a, b) and Sebeok (1979). In the vast and growing literature of the Peirce revival I am sure some individualistic psychological interpretations will be found; I doubt, however, that such interpretations will be the more abundant or that Varenne would want to base his argument about the efficacy and pervasiveness of American official ideology on a statistical frequency of citations.

In my "Personal and Social Identity in Dialogue" (Singer 1982b) I traced a continuous pragmatic and symbolic interactionist genealogy for a semiotic analysis of the self in the use of pronouns in conversation. The genealogy started with Peirce and included William James, Royce, Baldwin, Cooley, G. H. Mead, and Dewey. The updating of this legacy in modern anthropology was illustrated from Warner, Redfield, and Geertz. Despite the construction of such a genealogy for a semiotics of the self, I did not claim that it expresses orthodox American individualism for two reasons: (1) there were important differences among American pragmatists and symbolic interactionists on this score, for example, between an individualistic James and a holistic Peirce, and (2) the features they all shared were not necessarily indigenously American but may have derived from a common foreign source, such as the German scholarship of the 19th century. Peirce acknowledged the German sources, particularly Kant, Hegel, and Schiller, and even speculated that he might have been "infected" by a benign form of the "virus" of Eastern mysticism (see Singer 1981, Fisch 1982b).

The development of American anthropology is surely somehow related to American culture and its dominant values. Varenne's configurationist and structuralist approach to this problem is fresh and challenging. As he continues the study he will soon discover, as Ruth Benedict did in her study of Japan, that there is more than one dominant national configuration, even at the level of orthodox ideology, and many varieties of subdominant configurations. With Kroeber, Kluckhohn, Redfield, and Geertz, he may also recognize that national cultural configurations are historically derived from other cultures and themselves change over time. How the growth and spread of American anthropology are related to the growth and spread of American culture is itself a culture-historical problem. This is as true of French structuralism and of British structural-functionalism as it is of American configurationism or of semiotic anthropology. The most significant cultural historical events for these developments in anthropology may be that they derived in part from encounters with foreign national traditions—from Lévi-Strauss's listening to Jakobson lecture on Saussure in New York City in 1942–43; from Malinowski's emigrating to England in 1910, Radcliffe-Brown's teaching at Chicago in 1931–37, and M. N. Srinivas's bringing his Coorg field notes to Oxford in 1946; from Boas's bringing German liberalism to the United States in 1884; and from Peirce's spending so much time on Kant and Schiller while an undergraduate

at Harvard in the 1850s (for more details, see Singer 1963, 1967, 1968, 1976, 1984a, b).

Varenne's article is a contribution to the study of such intercultural encounters. As a young Frenchman who came to the United States for graduate anthropological studies, he was probably struck by the contrasts with French schooling, manners, and conversation and began to wonder about the difference between American and French cultures. His experience in this respect was probably not very different from de Tocqueville's on his first trip to the United States or Ruth Benedict's on hers to the Southwest. Such experience can generate original insights and useful hypotheses. In Varenne's case it generated a genuine curiosity about American culture and fresh interpretations of how official political rhetoric is related to "American ideology as it is lived, or at least talked," in a small Midwestern town and in some Eastern suburban high schools (Varenne 1977, 1982). It has also generated, as the present article indicates, a searching and stimulating examination of how American anthropologists talk about culture, revealing, incidentally, that this talk is more like the talk of other Americans (and thus shows more coherence in American culture) than many American anthropologists are prepared to admit or recognize.

Reply

by HERVÉ VARENNE

New York, N.Y., U.S.A. 23 I 84

None of those who commented on my paper picked on a word in the title that I am probably guilty of not having more explicitly discussed. The word is "conversation," and I chose it purposefully. As I believe comes out in the paper, I want to approach the structuring of symbolic creativity, what we call "culture," as the product of an encounter between what may be an original insight and a tradition that appropriates it. I like the word "conversation" because it does not imply any end to the process. Appropriation is never final. The actor can and does resist it. The institutionalization of a tradition, the "culture," may be extremely powerful in our type of society, but it is not so powerful as to prevent people from struggling against it with a modicum of success.

In many ways, as Singer points out, the holistic perspective in anthropology has had more than a modicum of success in the United States. He may be right in feeling that his work and some aspects of the pragmatic tradition of the past 100 years will stand. In fact, my paper is testimony to an interest in consciousness of the social in the United States. Since I first read the pragmatic philosophers (particularly Dewey and G. H. Mead), I have been fascinated by their struggle with psychologism and the myth of the "Promethean self"—as McDermott (1980) refers to James's individualism. I have been all the more fascinated because these philosophers and social scientists are often extremely explicit in their rejection of absolute individualism as a basis for knowledge of human behavior. If my paper were simply another argument for the importance of the social, there would be nothing original in it: "Americans" from Dewey to Geertz, in the high mode of philosophical discourse and in all the other possible modes, have repeatedly emphasized the dangers of individualism.

Singer suggests that "pragmatic holism" (my phrase) is one of "many varieties of subdominant configurations" in American social thought. Earlier (1977) I suggested that, in fact, concern with "community" is an integral part of the American configuration. I do not think that one can understand any aspect of American culture without understanding the logic of community building. My argument, then, was also that this logic emphasizes the central, encompassing place of the individual, the person, the "people" in their aggregation, as the

motor of community. "Unless pains are taken [by active human beings] to see that genuine and thorough transmission takes place, the most civilized groups will relapse into barbarism and then into savagery," writes Dewey in the philosophical mode (1916:3-4), adding that "men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common." It is also said, in the sacred mode of the Constitution, "We the People of the United States . . . [actively] form a more perfect Union [by enacting a constitution]." Communities are built by people acting—and we come back to individualism. From this perspective the pragmatists are not "diverse" in relation to the dominant configuration. Rather, they provide the dramatic tension that allows for traditional resolution.

In my recent work on friendship, cliques, and other ways of organizing people in high schools (1976, 1978, 1982, 1983), I have tried to go beyond this kind of structuralism to look at communicational processes as they are traditionalized in temporal (i.e., irreversible) development. In this sense I am not interested exactly in a "structure of rules or cultural grammar" as de Ruijter suggests. I was not trying in this paper to show the extent to which the pragmatists I have read are, in spite of their explicit rejection of Promethean individualism, "American" after all. As I have just suggested, this could be done, but at this stage I wanted to do something else. The paper is, above all, a step in my search for a theory of culture that preserves the traditional intuitions about the usefulness of broad characterizations of language families, cultures, and civilizations without reducing culture to personality (thereby possibly also reducing personality to a mechanism) or to an idealistic "superorganic" entity. As Leaf (1979:4) writes, "every consistent theory must be applied or be applicable both to those the anthropologist studies and to the anthropologist himself." "American" anthropology, in my paper, is both object and subject.

I do not know whether this makes the paper a subset of Leaf's subject matter as Gardner asserts. I certainly do not view the tension between individualism and community as a "short-term, unidirectional trend," and I am not denying that the discipline as a whole can be characterized. On the contrary, I would argue that the whole of modern Euro-American social philosophy is characterized by a tension between individualism and holism that resolves itself in a reaffirmation of the primordial place of the individual. Dumont (1970, 1979) has done this most properly by contrasting this social philosophy with an alternative though ultimately related one, that of Indian culture. My paper is in part an attempt to demonstrate that there can be varied ways of institutionalizing Euro-American individualism. Gardner, however, speaks of interests shifting "back and forth." This may be a different version of Singer's "subdominant configurations." It suggests that any "interest" is a unitary event and that we can decide once and for all what it "is." If this is what Gardner means, then I part company with him. If he wants to suggest—as Singer eventually does—that "interests," traditions of inquiry, respond to each other and point the theoretician and the reader of theory towards an uncertain future, then I am with him.

Certainly, Leaf himself is not clear. I should have known about Leaf's book but did not. My reading of a few passages for this reply leaves me wondering. He rejoices in the development of the "monistic" alternative, which he footnotes to Merleau-Ponty, Schultz, Garfinkel, and the American pragmatists, including Singer. While these are writers whom I, too, find useful, I doubt that they can stand by themselves. For example, in Leaf's call "for a new conception of anthropology as the study of free, creative activity" (p. 336), what are we to do with "free" and "activity"? He may be observing the movement towards purposive individuality. He may also be one of those I fear (for). His monism may be of the "pragmatic holistic" type, or may be of the type that transforms pragmatism into

a social psychology, with the emphasis on "psychology." Certainly, the pages I have read, by themselves, are open to multiple readings. They are the result of an activity. My reading—that is, my attempt to restate Leaf—is another such activity. Leaf wants to be read, and he is continually building an audience and trying to manipulate it. I must deal with Leaf's words, but, I would argue, they are not powerful enough to determine my reading.

This emphasis that I want to put on activity and uncertainty brings me to Rosaldo's comments, Bourdieu, and the processes through which intellectual futures come about. Bourdieu is indeed relevant, as Rosaldo mentions while failing to realize that I think my work compatible with his (though not by any means in a purely replicative sense). My recent work has made me more and more aware of two only apparently contradictory aspects of cultural structuring: (1) the limits of the power of culture over personal consciousness and (2) the radical limits that are placed on the expression of this consciousness and, even more, on its institutionalization. On the one hand, we must take Bourdieu extremely seriously when he stresses that the structuring of behavior is not a mechanical process. On the other hand, we must recognize that he never denies the existence of traditions, what he calls *habitus*—his word for what American anthropologists have known as "culture." Bourdieu's work on education and "symbolic violence" is paradigmatic.

My paper, as Moffatt comes close to saying when he chides me for suggesting that there is no use in questioning "what someone *really* means," is not about American anthropologists. It is not about people. I never wrote, as Rosaldo implies in paraphrasing my paper, that "American theories of culture, *precisely because Americans produce them*, contain . . ." (my emphasis). "Americans" do not produce theories of culture; people do. These theories are not "American" because of the birthplace of their authors. They become "American" only to the extent that they are appropriated within a conversation conducted in the midst of a particular institution. The *same* theory of culture can be made American, European, or something else. The Americanness of a theory or of any other cultural manifestation lies in what is made of it—"how it is appropriated in the collective mode," as Lévi-Strauss put it.

At this point I would like to quote a remark by Nice (1977:viii) in his introduction to his translation of Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977):

There is . . . reason to fear that the frequent references made to the Anglo-American philosophical tradition—a heaven-sent weapon against the theoreticism which so strongly characterizes French social science, from Durkheim to Lévi-Strauss—may, when returned to their original universe, take on a significance very different from the one they were given in a context in which that tradition is disdained or unknown, and be seen as a sign of allegiance to positivism.

I agree with Rosaldo that Bourdieu's focus on human agency "should not be conflated with . . . methodological individualism." To state this peremptorily is, however, insufficient defense against a collective appropriation that would conflate Bourdieu with a theoretician of socio-psychological strategies. Bourdieu does not stand alone. A call for careful scholarly reading is not enough. We cannot, as Rosaldo wants to do, dismiss Feinberg and Magnarella simply because they are "unsophisticated." The problem is that our words belong to the unsophisticated.

Moffatt understands better than Rosaldo what a focus on "human agency" means if we analyze anthropological practice as, precisely, a *social* practice. Benedict is "guilty" of yielding to Mead's entreaty that she write a popular book. Dougherty and Fernandez are guilty of reducing holism to bring together all cultural anthropologists. Anthropology becomes American not when it is written by "Americans" but when it is passed on. It is American when it is taught to undergraduates in American colleges out of textbooks that mangle the concept of

"culture" to make it fit the popular conversation about "culture" (after all, "culture" is an American cultural category—along with individualism!).

If we want to look at symbolic structures or, better, symbolic *structuring* as an interactional practice, then perhaps someone like Bakhtin will be more directly helpful than Bourdieu. I mentioned Bakhtin in passing in the paper. At the time I was writing it, I was just discovering him. I have since read more, and I would like to take this opportunity to cast my argument briefly in terms borrowed from him. To begin his argument in "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin (1981:269) sets up a straw man:

Philosophy of language, linguistics and stylistics . . . have all postulated a simple and unmediated relation of speaker to his unitary and singular "own" language, and have postulated as well a simple realization of this language in the monologic utterance of the individual. Such disciplines actually know only two poles in the life of language, between which are located all the linguistic and stylistic phenomena they know: on the one hand, the system of *unitary language*, and on the other the *individual* speaking in this language.

On the one hand, there is "English" and, on the other, there is "what Ruth Benedict says" (I will use Benedict as an "Everywoman" here). Bakhtin goes on to build what he calls a "dialogic" approach to language which emphasizes what happens when any statement is used by another statement in a conversational process that goes far beyond face-to-face interaction. For Bakhtin, neither "English" nor "what Ruth Benedict says" is a stable entity. They cannot be traced in themselves apart from a conversation. Even the search for "the" structure, "what someone really means," is a conversation. It is, of course, "interpretation." Practically, it is a retelling "in one's own words"—except, of course, that words are never "one's own."

In this sense I agree with Keesing that a search for culture must not be transformed into a search for an "it." The language we use, that is, the tradition of retelling or appropriating this search, may make it appear that we are looking for an object. We may be retold by readers (sophisticated or not) as doing just that, as Keesing is afraid I might be doing. I see the danger. Indeed, my interest in conversation, appropriation, unsophisticated retellings derives from my goal of continuing the work done by the classical cultural anthropologists, from Benedict to Geertz, in such a way as *not* to reify the concept of culture—while not rejecting the usefulness of dealing with broad characterizations of structuring processes in communication.

I agree with Keesing that "we must maintain a split vision" and be interested in "the cognitive worlds of particular human beings." I also agree with Moffatt's plea for continuing to ask "what does thus-and-such *really* mean, inwardly, to particular persons?" Certainly, my refusal to close my discussion of "what Benedict really meant" is not a challenge to Benedict's having meant *something*. Indeed, I try to produce a theory that preserves the possibility that she might have meant something much more radically "different" than we can envision. Here again Bakhtin is helpful. As a recent commentator put it (Emerson 1983:260–61):

The eternal and inevitable inadequacy of all names permits new meanings to happen and new messages to be created. This permission . . . is Bakhtin's novelistic gap, which not even the author can (nor should wish to) bridge. And it is the lack, the absence at the center, that keeps the outer word and our inner speech in permanent dialogue, out of that danger which Bakhtin saw of collapse into single consciousness, which would be non-existence. Inside that gap, it is always worthwhile to try naming it again.

Such a reading of Bakhtin could, in fact, in further American appropriation, lead to a radical reaffirmation of the central place of the individual as the locus of a consciousness unique in relation to the consciousness of other individuals. That this consciousness should arise "in interaction with," "in dialogue with," a social environment is not, in any event, surprising to

American pragmatists. If McDermott is right, even William James, that most individualistic of pragmatists, presented the self as a relation rather than a substantive center, while continuing to stress that "the active self is hydra-headed and brimming with sensorial capacities, each of them capable of rendering distinctively personal even the most obvious of commonness" (McDermott 1980:99).

I propose another reading of Bakhtin. This reading does not deny the place of individual transformation and struggle. Nor does it deny the methodological usefulness of digging for the uniqueness of a perception. As far as I am concerned, the very Bakhtinian principles that allow us to preserve a place for individual consciousness in social structure also make it impossible to argue that we have arrived at a knowledge of any such consciousness that can be made explicit. The fact that all knowledge proceeds through dialogue means that the nondialogical knowledge implied in the question "What is this, *really*?" is beyond the limits of our investigative capacities. "Really" is a moot question. It may be the social-science equivalent of the frictionless perpetual-motion machine.

Once again, to accept limits on what we can know about reality is not to deny reality. I am not denying the possibility of a self. I am not even denying the methodological utility of searching for what something, including a "meaning," might really be. I simply want to place our own analytic activity where it must be, whether we are conscious of it or not, which is in the midst of a multiplicity of hierarchically arranged conversations that we neither personally nor absolutely control. Methodologically, this means that even the search for "what Benedict might mean" is essentially a search for the various conversations within which she has historically been placed (conversations with Dewey, Margaret Mead, Boas, the unsophisticated readers of *Patterns of Culture*, the critics of her work, etc.). This search is undertaken in the hope that each conversation will highlight different *possibilities* contained within Benedict's writings but not necessarily appropriated in any one conversation, and it yields two complementary results. If the emphasis is on Benedict herself, it keeps her thought open by highlighting its wealth. If the emphasis is on structuring processes within any conversation, it is a good way of highlighting the impoverishing aspects of the structure—not only what it notices, but also what it ignores.

This is the methodology I tried to use in my high-school work, and it is the one I have used here. While short on "data," the paper does have methodology, though perhaps not in the traditional sense of proceeding from explicit step to explicit step. Durbin would have liked something like this. He calls for a contrastive analysis of "minimal discourse pairs." Although the paper does offer remarks on the structure that ties together, and contrasts, phrases such as "the culture to which he belongs" and "his culture," ultimately I am not interested in formally describing the syntactic or semantic features that distinguish such phrases or make them equivalent. I am more interested in investigating the *consequences* these features may have for the retelling of the phrases within different conversations.

This means that I am not sure that Quinn's work does offer the grounding for analyses of American culture Moffatt is looking for. I agree with him that her work provides the best documentation we have of American views of marriage and love as, for example, Schneider (1968) presented them, but I would not have been convinced if her work had stood alone. She proceeds from only *one type* of conversation—however many of these she may have worked with. She writes at great length about "commitment" because this is a word she encounters often in her informants' statements. She does not encounter the word "love" and therefore does not talk about it. This may be empirically grounded, but it leaves us with an analysis of "American marriage" that does not address what our intuition tells us should be at its core, "love." The problem is not simply

that Quinn's analysis is limited in scope, but that, by not arranging her sample in such a way as to elicit other types of conversations, she has lost the opportunity to challenge our intuition about "love" by demonstrating, as she in fact does by default, that "love" is possible only in certain conversations. In most conversations about marriage, interviews, gossip sessions, or scholarly analyses, "love" is not what American marriage is all about; "commitment" is much more likely to be what is talked about. American marriage is explicitly talked about in terms of "love" only in some conversations, in songs, novels, and movies, and also, one continues to suspect, in parked cars, during midnight strolls, behind closed bedroom doors, in conversations between spouses or perhaps-spouses-to-be. The cultural structure of American marriage probably lies in the *alternation* between settings in which "love" can be uttered and settings in which it is relevant but cannot be mentioned. And so, perhaps, after all, "love" may still be the best symbol to summarize American marriage. The point is that cultural meanings can be found within any conversation, but the analysis is convincing only if a wide range of conversations has been examined.

The cultural structure is of course not absolutely deterministic. Despite the taboo on "love" in sociological discourse, Schneider was able to place the word in the conversation—or at least to try to do so. He certainly did not transform the tradition: Scheffler (1976) was still able to write a detailed review of his "interpretation" as if Schneider had never even mentioned the word "love." This silence may be better than another possible appropriation of analyses of "love": a certainly unsophisticated reviewer of my own work wrote that "Varenne, for one, thought that small towns are the place where human love works" (Perrin 1980:2).

This inadequate analysis of what is implied, methodologically, by my interest in conversations should make more explicit what I mean when I talk about "appropriation within institutionalized traditions." Bakhtin develops his "dialogism" to emphasize the centrifugal role of "local fairs and buffoon spectacles," the "clown, . . . the street songs, folksayings, anecdotes," conversations for which "there was no language-center at all, . . . all 'languages' were masks and . . . no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face" (1981:273). Singer makes the same point here when he stresses the role trans-Atlantic fertilization has played in the American (and European) anthropological imagination. Bakhtin, however, was also keenly aware that the centrifugal character of any specific conversation is necessarily in counterpoint to a centripetal movement towards what he calls a "unitary language." "Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject," he writes, "serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear" (1981:272, my emphasis). In summary (pp. 270–71):

A common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms. But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language, forces that unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought, creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language. . . .

And *that* is what culture is all about.

I hope that these comments clarify what I wanted to say when I talked about the dangers of "individualization" in American *conversations* about culture. Anthropologists interested in holism are in danger when they read in the United States, but not "because they are Americans." Nor are readers, sophisticated or not, in danger of individualizing "because they are Americans." We are all *in* America together, i.e., we are all struggling participants in an institutionalized conversation in which, ultimately, anything can be said but almost everything, unless it is carefully articulated rhetorically in such a

way as to have an impact, will disappear as if it had never been said.

Rosaldo may be right when he implies that this is a pessimistic (though certainly *not* timeless) analysis of "eternal recurrence." As a cultural anthropologist, I am rather certain that it is not quite "eternal." I easily envision the time when the tension between "individualism" and "community" will have become moot as a cultural structure. However, I am not convinced that we are "progressing." It seems to me that the true pessimism was the one that made it appear that soon we would see the light and all speak the same rational, enlightened language. Heteroglossia, the struggle to express oneself (a struggle that is made necessary by centripetal forces but possible only to the extent that they are not overwhelming), will cease only when life ceases.

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