# Talk and Real Talk: The Voices of Silence and the Voices of Power in American Family Life

Herve Varenne

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**Hervé Varenne**
*Family and Community Education*
*Teachers College, Columbia University*

> All messages . . . are like phrases or segments of equations which a mathema-
> tician puts in brackets. Outside the brackets there may always be a qualifier or
> multiplier which will alter the whole tenor of the phrase. Moreover, these qual-
> ifiers can always be added, even years later. . . . What exists today are only
> messages about the past which we call memories, and these messages can always
> be framed and modulated from moment to moment.
>                                                         —Gregory Bateson
>                                           "The Group Dynamics of Schizophrenia"

If we are to understand how American culture is made relevant in the lives
of those who live in the shadow of the United States, we must start with an ap-
proach to the concept of culture that preserves what it is that continues to make it
indispensable to anthropologists, and many others as well. The approach I find
most useful as a starting point is one proposed by Boon: " 'Culture' pertains to
operations which render complex human phenomena communicable"
(1973:227). That is, culture is an activity that human beings perform on what is
given to them in the course of their lives: biological needs, ecological imperatives,
social structural constraints, historical remnants, and, last but not least, the lan-
guage of their contemporaries and coparticipants in everyday life scenes.

This article is an exploration of the perspectives opened by such an approach.
To do this, I examine some instances when a variety of speakers construct new
discourses over the words of their contemporaries and, in the process, reproduce
what we have been taught to recognize as "America." By the same token, this
article is an exploration of a new way of talking about people in the United States
that does not reduce their multifaceted activities into "Americanism."

The methodological challenge lies in the displaying of cultural operations in
the historical process of their occurrence. We need to catch human beings in the
act of operating on the world, or, in the more popular, though easily misleading
vocabulary of the Geertzian tradition, we catch them "interpreting." The chal-
lenge is not any more to look at "interpretations," that is, at texts distanced from

everyday life that are clearly marked for symbolic elaboration. It is rather to look in detail at texts that are not distanced and that are not marked for "interpretation," but that are still produced by human beings and should thus display the signs of the cultural process. The challenge is to start with texts of everyday life and only later investigate how these relate to texts of philosophical commentary.

We know now that it is particularly difficult to do cultural anthropology around America. One of the many reasons is that, in the United States, there are everywhere signs that point us toward a pre-analysis of America and how it should be qualified. People with rhetorical fluency are particularly adept at the production of texts, written or dramatically performed, that have so much the form that interpretive texts should take that it can be very difficult to do the anthropological double take that leads us to be particularly skeptical of anything that makes too much immediate sense. In fact, traditional ethnography, that is, ethnography that relies heavily on asking questions of informants, may be impossible to conduct in America, since the informants are so good at moving the attention of the interviewer away from the original event toward "the interpretation." How many anthropologists of America have had to suffer through informants telling them: "Don't think that what just happened is what you saw! What *really* happened is . . ." My fear, of course, is that anthropologists of America did not suffer and that, rather than building up their skepticism, they cocked up their ears in excitement, since they were now getting the "real scoop."

Some of the moments I look at here are precisely moments when "what really happened" is told. Some of the other moments are instances of those when, if I followed the native terminology, I would have to say that "what was happening was not really happening." Of course, I am not going to fight a semantic battle over the notion of reality within American culture. Eventually, I make a lot of the fact that a distinction is made between "what happened" and "what really happened." At this stage, however, I only want to say that the article is based on a set of recordings of language behavior. Whether they "really" happened or not, the moments I look at did "simply" (?) happen.

These moments are the following:

1. A few seconds of transcript of a domestic conversation held one weekday evening between an urban middle-class couple concerning the buying of a piece of furniture
2. A few seconds of transcript of the wife giving information about this conversation
3/4. A few seconds of transcript of the wife talking about her marriage with different people over the two years that followed the initial conversations
5. Excerpts from *Therapeutic Discourse* (Labov and Fanshel 1977), where they present graphically a progression from "what was said" to "what really happened"
6. Excerpts from the first chapter of *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 1985), where the authors first use the word "individualism"

These moments are *each* moments of interpretation, that is, moments when the human beings involved operate on their world and on each other, since, quite obviously, the world of human beings is mostly made up of other such human beings. This is not only true of the more or less spontaneous, improvised, and oral speech of the anonymous persons I quote in the first four texts. It is also true of the carefully composed and edited speech of the well-known authors I quote in the last two texts.[1] In each case, we can see participants actively transforming the words of their interlocutors in a process of *bricolage*,[2] which makes new objects out of the initial utterance without abolishing it. We also see the participants transforming the *conversations* of others around them in subsequent conversations that incorporate features of the earlier ones to construct themselves.

I am particularly interested in the latter process—the ways in which utterances both prefigure possible responses and yet only achieve their historical power *after* they have been appropriated by following utterances that may not quite be what they had prefigured. This process of action in conversation is quite well documented by research in conversational or discourse analysis (Garfinkel 1967; Goodwin 1981; Labov and Fanshel 1977; Sacks, Scheggloff and Jefferson 1978; among many others). Notions of intertextuality have been brought to our attention by all those who have resurrected the work of Bakhtin, from Kristeva (1978) to Clark and Holquist (1984), and now many others (Emerson and Holquist 1981; Emerson 1983; Todorov 1981). Such notions can revivify the old anthropological intuition that, above all, culture is a process of establishing connections between aspects of the experiential world that are eventually institutionalized as certain connections become the politically "right" ones.

This article is about patterning in the making of such connections both within texts (intratextual coherence) and across texts (intertextual coherence). When such patternings are established, we will be able to specify more accurately the historical processes that establish a "dominant ideology," that is, a "culture," in the sense of the word that we have inherited from Boas and Durkheim, Benedict and Mauss, Geertz and Dumont.

## Five Texts

It might be preferable to present the five texts used here in a "random" arrangement, since the order of the presentation I use will probably suggest to the reader an overall organization, a process of ordering the data, which is precisely the process I want to examine and criticize. In fact, any arrangement is easily transformable into a general story. What is important is to become conscious of, or, more exactly, to bring out in our analytic texts, our own ordering activity. Indeed, we are really dealing here with six texts, since the text I am now writing is inevitably involved in creating the other five.[3]

The "first" text (Text 1a and Text 1b) was, historically, collected first. It consists of a few verbal exchanges within a wider set of exchanges performed by a woman, her husband, and three children one weekday evening during the hour before the two younger children were put to bed. During this hour a large number

of topics was addressed. Most had to do with activities being performed at the time (homework, disciplining of children, planning of future events, cooking, pre-bedtime reading, etc.), with the rest having to do with stories of events that occurred that day. I am focusing here on some of the utterances concerning something that the husband, Ray, did that day, something that had to involve the wife, Connie, before the matter could be pursued. Specifically, Ray "had found" a "proper china closet" to display Tiffany china purchased ten years earlier when Connie and he got married. He was now involved in telling her about it so that she could give her opinion about whether to proceed with buying this particular cabinet.

As will be seen, the actual language used to perform these tasks was quite cryptic for outsiders—as all such language always is. We thus felt the need to ask some specific informational questions. The second text (Text 2a, Text 2b, Text 2c) was, historically, collected second. The participants were the two senior researchers, faculty at Teachers College (Clifford Hill and myself), one student (a woman, M. S.), and Connie.

The third text (Text 3a, Text 3b, Text 3c) and fourth text (Text 4a, Text 4b) were collected two years later. One of them was produced as an interview of Connie by a student writing a dissertation about "women's loneliness in marriage." The other text was an interview I conducted with Connie to bring me up to date on her recent history and to talk in general "about the marriage."[4]

The fifth text (Text 5) is a quote from *Therapeutic Discourse* by Labov and Fanshel (1977). I read the book while the other activities proceeded. From the first, I was impressed by this book as both a masterful analysis and a reconstruction of the American pattern of interpretation.

The sixth text (Text 6) is an excerpt from the first chapter of *Habits of the Heart* by Bellah et al. (1985). This is but the most recent in a long tradition of work in interpretive sociology (from Tocqueville [1969] through Lasch [1978], Riesman [1961], Slater [1970], and others) that has constructed the association of "America," (i.e., some of what happens in the United States) with "individualism." Note that I am not questioning the validity of the association. In fact, I have contributed to its construction (Varenne 1977, 1984). Rather, I am treating this association, and the way it is made, as "data" about the same process of cultural interpretation in which all my other informants are also involved.

If we are not careful, this arrangement of the texts will transform them into an overall coherent scholarly story: two researchers collected some data. They checked the context and the history so that they could place the data accurately. They got one of the participants to talk about the original event. They read the relevant literature and, now, one of the researchers writes an article that will say something about American family life.

The coherence of this story is very strong. It is so strong as to make us think that each part of the story was coherent with each other part *outside* of this story. We should remember, however, that each text was initially produced separately from the others. This is particularly true of Text 3 (the quote from the interview with the other researcher), Text 5 and Text 6 (the quote from Labov and Fanshel

and the quotes from Bellah) in relation to Text 1, Text 2 and Text 4. Text 2 and
Text 4, however, were not generated by Text 1, but by the research itself. As I
now show, these texts are radically different in their internal structure. Why I
should find it possible to link them, why the audiences to whom I present this
analysis should agree with me on the possibility of this linkage (and should gen-
erally find it so difficult to understand my skepticism), and why Connie should
have lent herself to this exercise, why it should make sense to her: all these are
the questions that I want to raise.

### A Family at Work: Constructing the Present (Text 1)

The first excerpt starts at second 5 in our transcript. Connie was sewing an
ear back to a stuffed Snoopy doll. She is surrounded by the two younger children
(Mike—who is brain damaged—8, and Kate, 6) whom she has had with Ray, her
second husband. Living with them, and also participating in the talk, is Jack, 15,
Connie's child from her first marriage. Ray had just walked into the room and the
following exchange ensues:

*Text 1a*

|  | Ray | Mike | Connie | Kate | Jack |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15- | • well | • • | • • | • • | • • |
| 16- | Connie I think I | • • | • you're always | • • | • • |
| 17- | found us our thing | • • | so generous/• | • • | • • |
| 18- | today/ | • • | • you did | • • | • • |
| 19- | • • | • • | what?/• | • • | • • |
| 20- | • found us | • • | • • | • • | • • |
| 21- | uuh | • • | • • | • • | • • |
| 22- | • a proper | • • | • • | • • | • • |
| 23- | china thing/ | • • | • • | • • | • • |
| 24- | • • | • • | I don't believe | • • | • • |
| 25- | • • | • • | it/• | • • | • • |
| 26- | • • | • • | • I told Mary | • • | • • |
| 27- | • • | • • | to look for your ring/ | • • | • • |
| 28- | • • | • • | • I also | • • | • • |
| 29- | • • | • • | had the—had the | • • | • • |
| 30- | • • | • • | • people come | • • | • • |
| 31- | • • | • • | up to— | • • | • • |
| 32- | • • | • • | check the sink/• | • • | • • |

Even a brief glance at the above transcript will reveal certain general char-
acteristics of familial talk that I do not expand on here, since they have been well
described in the literature on everyday speech (Garfinkel 1967): verbal reduction,
use of deictics, overlaps, multiplicity of topics concurrently addressed, etc. I want
to emphasize the general ability of all the participants to pick up immediately on

new topics, even when they are introduced in an apparently cryptic manner. Four seconds into Ray's first utterance, an utterance completely unrelated to what Connie was doing and overlapping with her talking to the children, she is aware that Ray has done something ("You did what?" Text 1a:18–19). Five seconds later, and without him being much more explicit, she seems to know what he is talking about in the sense that she orients her next utterance to his statement and comments on it: "I don't believe it" (Text 1a:24–25). This is confirmed a minute later when she asks Ray to "tell me about the china closet" (107–108).

I want to focus on something other than "common understandings," however. First, we must see these five people as a family "at work." Like a storyteller improvising the telling of an epic tale, the people actually had to perform something that did not exist until they had created it. This is no simple task when so many are involved as primary speakers, including young children who must both be taught and be allowed to take part in the performance. Throughout the hour of the recording, the conversation did flow with no manifestations of disagreement in overall agenda and no explicit negotiation to define the event. The family was creating something they knew very well. A great amount of information was passed around, and many practical tasks were accomplished. Nobody needed to be explicitly reminded of the relevance of any topic of conversation. The many transitions were made smoothly. Colloquially, this family "had it all together." This was a "working" family.

The second matter I want to focus on concerns the limits that the family collectively put to what could be performed that evening. What they did was fully functional to the tasks at hand, but a description of this functionality does not exhaust what we must say about what was done. The participants could say much more. Any reader of this transcript will probably want to say more. The institutions that support "research" require that we, as analysts, say more. Why, then, didn't the family say more that particular evening about the matters that we can see at hand?

To make this point more concrete before I expand on it, let us look at Text 1a. Let us look in particular at Ray's statements in their propositional form and at Connie's answer. These statements are closely related. In fact, the second is a reproduction of the first, after Connie's prompt "You did what?" (18–19).[5] Two things can be mentioned initially about his response. It is not an exact repetition. It does not include a full specification of the action. And yet it does not produce a second query. Connie seems satisfied. If we compare Ray's two statements, it becomes apparent that he is concerned with emphasizing something else than the cabinet itself:

16–18: well, Connie, I think I found us our              thing today.
20–23:                              found us a proper china thing

What is particularly striking is the redundant use of first person plural forms, *us our,* and the apparently close relationship that exists between this group and *a proper china thing,* which is substituted to *our* in the reprise of the first statement.

Why should this be made explicit in such a fashion (viz., redundantly and deicti-
cally) while so much more information is left implicit (viz., the fact that what was
found was a closet, the location of the store, the occasion of the shopping, etc.)?

One should not try to answer such a question until we understand better the
many complex mechanisms involved in choosing any answer to this question.
One should, however, notice the comparative oddity of this statement in relation
to what one might think would be a more obviously functional statement, that is,
one that gives new information in the reduced manner appropriate to a familial
setting (e.g., *"I found the cabinet today").[6] That such a statement was not pro-
duced indicates that the reduction mechanisms described by Garfinkel (and by
Bernstein earlier, 1974) do not operate mechanistically. Speakers can rely on
shared knowledge, the situation of the speech and other such matters to reduce
their speech and thus to say more in the limited time given them by turn-taking
mechanisms. But in these few seconds, a speaker has the opportunity of choosing
his words and thus saying more while saying less. In that process, something has
happened that is not quite "expectable." Culture, always, triumphs over func-
tion.

Connie's response is equally creative. Her "I don't believe it" (24–25) is
said in a low monotone and seems surprising if we expect enthusiasm. Most strik-
ingly, she immediately moves on to a different, though indirectly related topic:
the search for a lost ring. This shift transforms Ray's statement. His voice, to use
a term cross-referencing my work to Bakhtin's, seemed to proclaim, "I INITI-
ATED AN EXTRAORDINARY EVENT IN WHICH BOTH OF US ARE IN-
TIMATELY INVOLVED." Connie's voice answers by stating, "I PER-
FORMED A ROUTINE HOUSEHOLD EVENT." One property of Ray's state-
ment has been appropriated (the performance of a practical event). Other prop-
erties are dropped. Discourse, in real life as in the novel, is a polyphonic
performance.

Strikingly enough, Ray does not protest the shift. After all, his own state-
ment was perhaps an attempt at shifting the family into a mode (*"wow! really!
where? what does it look like?") that would have disrupted the routine. Connie
might simply have been reminding him of what was possible at such times as this.
As we will see presently, Connie herself was willing to go further, interpreting
the "meaning" of this sequence. Most people who read about this transcript want
to go faster through the descriptive step that we are now taking toward "what was
really happening." The story makes great sense in different contexts ("American
marriage," "how people hurt each other," "miscommunication," etc.). But I do
not want to go there before we have understood the processes that make a histor-
ical moment.

These mechanisms, we now see, involve work by the participants, a work
that requires dealing with functional needs of information, transmitting and con-
tinually choosing a way of expressing oneself from the many that accomplish the
functional requirements. However strict were the mechanisms that structured the
talk that evening, the experience of the participants must have been one of uncer-
tainty: all of the utterances that greeted their own were, up to a point, not the

utterances that a literal (or wishful) reading would make one expect were the ones that "should" have followed. And yet, after the return utterances had been made, they could be seen as possible. Nobody talked in ways that were totally mysterious. Even the most inarticulate utterances of the children made interactional sense. They were always the basis for further utterances.

There is another mechanism at work in the production of such texts. To introduce it, let us look at another moment when the china closet is brought to the surface of the speech. During the preceding three minutes, Ray had been busy measuring various spaces in the living room. He had muttered numbers but had not fought for the floor. Then there was a six-second silence after Connie and Jack finished a bantering exchange about the honesty of the building employees. Ray started talking about the name of a woman that they had met during a vacation. He mentioned that her husband was "in the furniture business" (190–191), and this may have been enough to establish that the topic was, for the second time, the china closet. However, it takes 40 more seconds before the matter is directly addressed:

*Text 1b*

|       | Ray                       | Mike      | Connie      | Kate      | Jack    |
|-------|---------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|---------|
| 228-  | but anyhow he's           | + + +     | • •         | • •       | • •     |
| 229-  | in the furniture business,| • •       | • •         | + + +     | • •     |
| 230-  | • •                       | • •       | • •         | + + +     | • •     |
| 231-  | • he                      | • •       | • •         | + + +     | • •     |
| 232-  | probably could get        | • •       | • •         | • •       | • •     |
| 233-  | this thing                | • •       | • •         | • •       | • •     |
| 234-  | for zilch money/          | • •       | • •         | • •       | • •     |
| 235-  | • •                       | • •       | • •         | • •       | • •     |
| 236-  | • •                       | • •       | • •         | mommy     | • •     |
| 237-  | • •                       | • •       | • •         | • •       | • •     |
| 238-  | • x-                      | • •       | • I could   | • •       | • •     |
| 239-  | • it's a                  | • •       | build it/ • | • •       | • •     |
| 240-  | thousand dollars/         | • •       | • Jack      | • •       | • •     |

Notice the following: the closet is not directly mentioned, Connie is not being very enthusiastic ("I could build it" [238–239]),[7] something very concrete is said about it ("it's a thousand dollars" [239–240]).

The main closet discussion occurs five minutes later and lasts a little more than three minutes. It has the same characteristics which we found in Text 1a and Text 1b. These can be summarized as follows:

- Ray does not name the closet, which is always "it," "this thing," etc.;
- Concrete details about the closet are explicitly mentioned (e.g., its price, size, and color);
- Connie's lack of enthusiasm is only expressed indirectly by the relative inappropriateness of her responses given Ray's indirect calls for enthusiasm ("I don't believe it" [23–24]; "I could build it" [238–239]);

- Ray does not explicitly mention her lack of enthusiasm or challenge her, except through declarative comments about features of the closet ("It's a thousand dollars" [239–240]).

This list of formal characteristics should clarify what is a central point of this analysis: there is a ratio between what is brought out in literal speech and what is not, which is not simply depending on the functional needs of reduction in crowded settings. As with all ratios, the import of this observation will gain its weight only when we look at it comparatively and find out that other conversations allowed other matters to be made explicit.

Let us look briefly at the tension that all those who read this transcript (including Connie) say they hear each time the closet is discussed. One would have to be an extreme formalist to say that the fact that there is no explicit mention of it in the data forbids us to mention it. On the other hand, one must be extremely confident about modern sociolinguistic analysis of voice quality, topic shifts, sequencing of utterances, and the like to say that such evidence is equivalent to explicit mention. Labov and Fanshel seem rather convinced that proper analysis can yield interpretative certainty, or something closely equivalent. I personally doubt it.[8]

The main issue, however, is that it is a formal characteristic of the conversation that the tension is *not* brought out in literal speech. And yet, Connie's disapproval is conveyed. As we learned later, the particular closet under discussion was not bought.[9] We may wonder "why" Connie does not challenge Ray's indirectness, or his presumption in shopping for a piece of furniture by himself and insisting on the priority of the topic. We may wonder "why" Ray does not directly challenge Connie's evasiveness and lack of enthusiasm. But in fact they do not do these things, and yet the evening does proceed. Something was accomplished in a particular way. The particularity of the process must be emphasized, for it is only if we pay attention to it that we can, first, become aware of other particular ways of conducting conversations in the United States and within American culture, and, second, understand the way ideology appropriates everyday experiences.

One way to summarize the particularity of any conversation is to point to the set of "coherence principles" that can be said to underlie what can be connected explicitly to what is happening. These principles make what Garfinkel called "the method of the speaking" (1967:29) and participate in defining the situation—until, of course, this method, or manner, pattern, indeed "cultural structure," is changed. Figure 1 summarizes the coherence principles of Text 1 by emphasizing what it is that was "expanded" that evening; that is, what it is that was explicitly brought up.

### Establishing the Past: What Happened

When it became evident that we could not go very far into any analysis (and even a complete transcription) by ourselves, we asked Connie to come and listen to the tape with us, correct the transcription, provide any background information
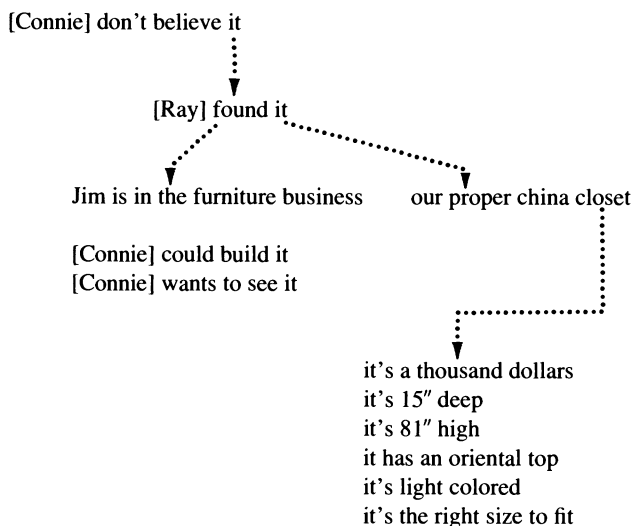
[Connie] don't believe it

⋮
▼

[Ray] found it

▼

Jim is in the furniture business          our proper china closet

[Connie] could build it
[Connie] wants to see it

▼

it's a thousand dollars
it's 15″ deep
it's 81″ high
it has an oriental top
it's light colored
it's the right size to fit

**Figure 1**
**Pattern of explicit emergence in exchanges about the china closet**
**(in pretext).**

that she considered important, and answer any question that we might put to her about factual matters.[10] Before we thought about it further, we presented the task in which we were jointly involved as a time to talk "about" what the tape had picked up and what Connie remembered of the original scene. We did not think of this "playback scene," as they are called in the literature (Labov and Fanshel 1977:5), as data. We thought of it, as interviews generally are, as an ideally transparent conduit to information, not as information itself. We did not consider that the interview could itself be the *subject* of research and that the information gained, that is, the matters that could be explicitly brought out in this setting, could better be seen as data for what can be said in interviews than it could be seen as data about the original scene.

It will not be possible radically to divorce the information gained in this interview from the information gained in Text 1. I have, in fact, already used some of it. It will eventually be necessary to look at the connections that Connie makes between the texts as data themselves. At this stage, however, the goal is to look at the playback session as another situation when a group of people constructed something together according to certain rules of coherence that determined what could easily be said explicitly without forcing a difficult reordering of the situation. It would be redundant to repeat here the kind of analysis that we performed earlier to establish that, in this situation too, all the participants had to make choices constrained by the previous utterances but not determined by them. The participants worked, they fulfilled functional requirements, they set limits on what could be said and allowed certain kinds of expansions.

What concerns us here are the specific characteristics of what could be told in playback situations. There were two of these. In the first, Connie and I were by ourselves and we were able to hold what I will refer to as the "historical frame" quite consistently. Typical of the talk that was produced is this telling of the closet story:

*Text 2a*

> Connie: When we got married, we selected the most beautiful china from Tiffany and have never had anything to put it in. In fact it sort of sits under in the cabinet. We hardly use it. So now, ten years later, it's just about we are feeling ready to really get a cabinet and two weeks ago we did. We went down to Asia House and he pursued it. I didn't because, you know, I'm not bringing in the bread. He found a pretty china cabinet with mother-of-pearl inlay. I must say it was his decision.

This is the most explicit statement we got about the nature of the china closet/ cabinet (note the shift in vocabulary). It was produced as an answer to my question about Ray's initial statements in Text 1a (15–23), particularly of his "our," "us," and "proper" qualifiers. This telling reveals that Connie had information, even while constructing Text 1, that neither she nor Ray had to mention: none of the information contained in Text 2a appears in Text 1. Conversely, none of the information about the closet that is made explicit in Text 1 (price, size, etc.) is mentioned here. Particularly typical of an interview setting is the well-constructed, linear quality of the story. Altogether, this is history more than it is story, as far as the manner of the telling is concerned, of course.

There may be something else in Text 2a that suggests that something was specifically not said, even though it came very close to the surface. The last three sentences can be read as implying the existence of a disagreement that is lingering. Connie does not make it any more explicit. This is certainly partially because I rather deliberately controlled the interview so that it would stay informational and would not drift into a telling of psychological motivations, something which I knew could easily occur and might be destructive.[11]

The second playback session was quite different. It involved a greater cast of characters (three faculty members and a student besides Connie). In many ways this gave this session some of the characteristics of a familial scene, particular as far as turn-taking, time allowed for holding the floor, and topic shifts were concerned. Much information was transmitted, but only information of a certain kind. Here again, we held ourselves to the making explicit of historical details. By that time, however, we had agreed that we were hearing some tension around the closet issue in Text 1, and we asked Connie about it while still steering clear of any language that would trigger the display of what we would have seen as "deep" motivational issues. We wondered whether the difficulty had to do with "authority over household matters," "relative competence in handling such matters," and/or "involving the husband in household management."[12]

Connie could talk fluently about such matters. She agreed with us that there might be a problem here, but she specifically minimized it as "the kind of small

problems that all happy families have.'' She talks about the constant shifts in Text 1 between Ray's emphasis on the appropriateness of the closet and her bringing in new topics as of a ''negotiation.'' In Text 2b, she is expanding on the first shift following Ray's introduction of the closet topic, as she moves to a description of the search for his ring, a search that involved opening the kitchen sink's drain:

*Text 2b*

> Connie: I'll tell you what this wife is doing. If she's into this house business which I would say it's kind of a role that he's enjoying more and more. I am angry about that ring loss on the basis that the sink should have been corrected a long time ago and I have tried to play it into his role. And believe I got that sink fixed. Wife did and he paid $75 to get that sink fixed after two years of negotiating for that. And we got the cabinet. So that was good negotiation.

This telling does not have the expository regularity of Text 2a, but it is still an explicit account of a historical process. There is mention of an emotional state, but the story is not constructed as exemplary of the causes that led to Connie being ''angry.'' As we will see presently, this a common organization of storytellings in the next set of interviews we examine. The anger is just part of the history.

This focus on history in the philological sense of establishing the text, footnoting odd statements, and cross-referencing obscure utterances gave a distinct coherence to the scene but raises again all the questions we asked earlier about the exact relevance of the other scenes to it. Given the differences in the way in which it was constructed, how can we say that the information expanded in Text 2 was ''about'' the information expanded in Text 1?

### (Re-)Constructing the Past: What ''Really'' Happened (?)

If Text 2 is seen as a stage in the philological annotation of Text 1, the two may then be seen as tightly connected within the framework of an essentially formalistic analysis.[13] Such analyses are generally said to be ''thin'' and altogether unrelated to the participants' experience. Analysts are supposed to do more, that is, to *say* more, or produce new texts that further expand on certain properties of the original text. Thus is analysis made thick. What I want to raise to consciousness is the process by which we select properties to highlight and the mechanisms by which two texts produced under very different circumstances, with different participants, and for different explicit purposes, are made coherent with each other.

I am not claiming here that analysts are the only ones to perform such tasks. Indeed, analyses such as we conduct are but baroque expansions of common, perhaps universal, performances. In any event, Connie had no difficulties producing texts that are clearly recognizable as ''interpretations'' in an American context— however strange they may appear once we shift out of our commonsense expectations about such texts.

As I mentioned earlier, for various reasons, after the first round of interviews we were left with the impression that Ray and Connie had a marriage that was not

without its minor difficulties but that, using a commonsense vocabulary, was essentially solid. This made the case altogether safe, but uninteresting in the context of the controversies that move the literature on "marriage in America."

Two years later, we found out that Ray and Connie had gone through a not too amicable divorce that she initiated.

I have deliberately not introduced this "information" until this point in this article, partially to replicate the history of our work, and partially to fight the tendency to see every utterance we have looked at until now in the context of this divorce. I now surrender to this tendency and reanalyze these utterances in this context. In fact, the following is less an analysis than a summary of what an analysis could produce. Given that such an analysis is not the goal of this article, I present it as a kind of short story expanding on Connie's point of view according to literary canons:

### An American Marriage

> Ray and Connie got married after a short period of courtship. It was his first marriage, her second. He was a successful psychiatrist, she was a struggling nurse raising a son in genteel poverty. She was swept off her feet and found herself installed in a comfortable East Side luxury apartment. She and Ray had two children. Catastrophe struck when Mike, their first son, became brain damaged following an accident when he was three. This developed the tendency that Ray had to withdraw from involvement in household affairs. Eventually Connie talked to him about it, emphasizing the women's liberation aspect of it. She went back to school to complete her doctorate. He agreed to increase his participation. Ten years had passed since the wedding. One of his first acts of his increased participation at home was that of shopping for a piece of furniture appropriate to Tiffany china they had bought as symbolic of their wedding ten years earlier. This china "closet" was a reaffirmation of this marriage. Connie resisted accepting it on such grounds and repeatedly emphasized Ray's incompetence. In fact, she resented his efforts at invading her domain—even though she had asked him to do it. In the following year she began reconsidering an earlier decision to stay with the marriage and work on the relationship. She eventually decided that she could not grow in the marriage and asked for a divorce.

To this story we could add our observation of the radical differences in personal styles, which are clearly audible on the tape and on which hearers always focus. Women in particular find Ray's style of speaking difficult to bear; they qualify it variously as pedantic, condescending, distant, uninvolved, "typical of a professional who cannot step out of his role." The above story could be interspersed with illustrating anecdotes presented as "proof." We would then have the case study of an upper middle-class marriage breaking on the shoals of "miscommunication," "the failure of men to understand the needs of modern women," "the destructive power of urban life," etc.

Connie herself had no problem producing such a story. After finding out about the divorce, I asked her to talk to me about it and the early stages of our analysis. She disagreed with details. In particular she thought our analyses of the china closet episode were overblown:

*Text 3a*

> Connie: It was not a big issue and if it, somehow in the blowing up of the data, appears to be just one more symbolic representation of conflict, I think that's just a coincidence because I'd never thought of the ****china closet as *really* big deal in my life. . . . And I would say in general this was a fairly harmonious thing. . . . The china cabinet was just a minor thing that revealed no more than anything else.

She had no problem, however, participating in the conversation:

*Text 3b*

> Connie: When Ray came along, he was obviously willing to give me almost anything I wanted, always praising me and everything, he seemed like a very good risk. ************A lot more fun than the groveling life I had been leading but basically I think that what made me unhappy in the marriage was that once I got into the marriage and we closed the door from all the big parties, he just didn't relate to me. . . . He doesn't talk looking a person in the eye, and I just thought that he wasn't available. He just went inside himself whenever we were together so it was just no relationship, very very distant relationship, so I felt like he wasn't there. He sort of evaporated.

This statement contains the beginning of the story and a summarization of the rationale for its ending. This rationale is a social psychological fact: "he wasn't available," "it was no relationship." Almost completely missing are the behavioral proofs of the reality of the fact (except for "he doesn't talk looking a person in the eye"). In the interview with the fellow student (and fellow divorcée in her early 40s), the full possibilities offered by the coherence system was exploited:

*Text 4a*

> Connie: I remember a few years ago I saw this early and I thought we would correct it by my saying, "You don't have to do that," but the thing that would happen would be that I would walk into the living room and say hello to the guests and he would say, "Look at her, look at my wife, isn't she sweet, doesn't she have beautiful taste?" you know, just totally silencing me and coating me with this ** artificial layer of personality so that, you know, nobody cares whether ***** I'm dressed or not ** and it just went on.
>
> And I think last spring he said, "Oh Connie, when I see you down on the floor wiping that mess off the kitchen floor I feel so bad. I wish I could afford to have enough help so you didn't have to do anything." ******** What kind of confession of life is that? You're not doing me any favors to even think like that, you know, "Why don't you get down and help me if you care that much!"

> V.O.: Was that the worst kind of abuse?

> Connie: I would like to think that that's not too much the case but I do think he's been a very bad public relations man for me. I do think his idea of who I am is quite screwed up. It's really not straight at all, so that when he speaks of me to other people where I'm there or not he's distorting me so he doesn't really give them a chance to know me so they get an inaccurate picture, a picture of a weaker person, a much weaker and a much less interesting person, well, just not me. Not real. So I would say that was the worst abuse.

Figure 2 summarizes the coherence system that organizes this text. In summary, the sequencing of utterances has the following form:

- *Facts*
    This is what Ray did to me ("He would say to people . . .").
                        THUS
- *Real Facts*
    This is what he was doing to me ("he was silencing me").
                    IN CONSEQUENCE
- *Effects*
    This is what happened to me ("people did not know me").

### The Structure of Scholarly Discourse Analysis

I use Labov and Fanshel's work at this stage not because they are a particularly interesting case of universalization of a particular, cultural, sense-making system. I use this work, rather, because Labov and Fanshel, to their credit, have systematized the process of their analysis more strictly than anyone else. In summary, they move cautiously from

1. a verbal "text" carefully transcribed (i.e., the words) and the paralinguistic "cues" that qualify this text (i.e., such things as tension, hesitation, silences, etc.); to

---

Connie: I remember a few years ago
             I saw *this* early and I thought we would correct it by my saying
                  "you don't have to do *that*"

the thing that would happen:

I would walk into the living
    room and say "hello" to
    the guests and he would
    say "Look at her! Look at
    my wife. Isn't she sweet,
    doesn't she have beautiful
    taste?"

last spring I think he said
    "Oh, Connie, when I see
    you on the floor wiping
    that mess off the kitchen
    floor I feel so bad."

he was totally silencing me
he was coating me with this
    artificial layer of
    personality
he was a very bad public
    relations man for me
his idea of who I am is quite
    screwed up
he was distorting me

HE DID SUCH THINGS AS [ . . . ] "——————" HE WAS [ . . . ]
                        (SO THAT)

**Figure 2**
**Pattern of explicit emergence in exchanges about "loneliness in marriage"**
**(in interview with friend/researcher).**

2. an "expansion" of this text, in which implicit information is made explicit, whether this information is carried by exophoric reference (reference to matters never made explicit in the speech adjacent to the text but available to the participants either through shared history or a shared situation) or by the paralinguistic cues; to

3. a statement of the "interaction" where "what is being done" is specified.

For Labov and Fanshel, the statements produced at each step of the analysis have different status. The transcription is a "text," the interaction is an "(inter-)act."

Strictly speaking, however, what we have are *three* texts, linguistically and paralinguistically (i.e., visually in the case of a printed table) marked respectively "text," "expansion," "interaction." Stylistically these texts are strongly differentiated. The "text" is marked by the attempt to evoke "real" speech (through the use of a strange punctuation and odd orthography). The "expansion" is marked as information through the use, among other things, of verb tenses of stasis and completed actions (present and preterit).[14] The "interaction" is marked by the use of present progressive verbal forms, the verbs themselves being chosen from a set of "speech act" verbs: Rhoda is, now, "referring," "asserting," "questioning," "challenging."

What is fascinating, however, is not the possibility to perform three texts using different stylistic conventions. It is, rather, the assumption that the three texts are intimately connected both as being restatements one of the other, and as being in a ranked relationship with the "interaction" being closer to the real act that was once performed. The form that the act originally had is made irrelevant to the statement of this act, with the effect that the halting utterances of a young woman in difficulty are transformed into the universally useful language of a chess game of assertions, challenges, and defenses.

## The Concrete Logic of Intertextuality

Much has been written about intertextuality in French post- or neostructuralist literary criticism (Genette 1982; Kristeva 1978; Riffaterre 1979). As Genette suggests, Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologics* (1969–82) can be seen in this tradition, as "myths are used 'to read other [myths]' " (1982:452 [slight paraphrase]). Intertextuality is also being discovered, or rediscovered, in American neopragmatism (as I like to refer to the various Peircean voices now coalescing into a tradition), through the appropriation of the Bakhtinian corpus (McDermott 1985; Wertsch 1985).

The emphasis in this work has consistently been on the open nature of texts as they are made to relate to new texts produced later, in often radically different historical situations and for different ostensible purposes. It is not that texts contain the seed of the texts that can be produced from them as it is that texts don't resist being used; indeed, that they allow themselves to be used, and then transformed, by the later texts that become their contexts, that is, their cotexts. Thus did Tolstoy's *War and Peace* transform any reading we might make of Napoleon's

campaign into Russia. And the battle of Waterloo is now placed between Stendahl's and Hugo's tellings.

I have just mixed examples where history and literature interact to expand the relevance of the notion of intertextuality outside the domain of literature narrowly defined.[15] As McDermott (1985) has been doing while working on the various voices of the Irish literary figures of the turn of the century, notions of polyphony and intertextuality can highlight the relationships between social structural struggles and the relative apparent ability of various potential speakers to articulate their position vis-à-vis other speakers. The work I am presenting here moves in the same direction, as it emphasizes the way major ideological forms enter what can both be seen as the least marked of our relationships (everyday talk is not focused on as such—thus Connie's impression that "nothing had happened" and our feeling that a simple reproduction of the talk is not enlightening) and the most emotionally charged of these relationships (to the extent that "family," and particularly "marriage," is presented as being the arena where we are the most "free" to create our own patterns). Text 1, the transcript of an uneventful evening at the Harveys', cannot be read except in terms of the various other texts that I have presented, including the article you are now reading.

My reconstruction of the process of "intertextualizing" Text 1 is in fact artificial. There is no way that I can quite reconstruct, for any audience, a "primary" encounter with the text. Certainly, in everyday life, texts are instantly transformed by new texts that use them in a constant process. Those of us who have worked with Text 1 for a long time have long lost the ability to see it "in itself," so to speak. I suspect that an active reader of this article will construct from Text 1 variations on Text 3 even before they have reached my account of these latter texts. I suspect that many will have produced texts that are not parallel with Text 3 and will have to work through the discrepancies: "How can Connie see *this* as the problem?!" "How can Varenne say that?!" Some will want to "correct" their interpretations, others will resist. In either case, they will have experienced the process of making texts out of texts and the openness of this process.

To emphasize openness and the role of the reader/interpreter in the production of "next" utterances and actions has been popular in recent anthropology, as people have reacted against mechanical determinism whether its source was social or cultural. We are now convinced that action is never simply "realization" of structures. It is not "rule-governed" in any simple sense. I have shown that the constructivist stance is necessary to understand the progression of talk *within* a scene. I am now reaffirming that the progression of talk *across* scenes is itself best understood as a production in uncertainty. We all know that there is no way that we can reconstruct in a definitive manner "what really happened." No text can make it impossible to create a new text from itself. No text can establish final authority.

To emphasize openness can also, however, make us lose sight of another aspect of the human experience. All utterances can be followed by any of all the possible utterances human beings can produce. Some sequences, however, have

different power over subsequent utterances than others. Most possible utterances would produce a puzzled ''what did you say?'' Many would produce a variation on ''don't change the topic!'' or ''not in front of the children!'' and only some maintain the conversation on the course that had been its own. As Sacks (1975:64–65) and others have pointed out, most of the things that are not said within a conversation are truly ''absent'' from it in that they are not made relevant: nobody complains that certain words were not said or uses their absence against the speaker. The ''pattern'' of a conversation, or a set of intertextualized conversations, consists of the complex of what is said and, among what was not said, of those things that some speaker might hold an earlier speaker accountable for not having said *without changing the grounds of the conversation.*

In other words, any initial utterance, when heard in a particular, well-institutionalized setting, has the power of establishing an order that subsequent utterances cannot escape, whatever their form or content. Utterances never remain independent from each other if they have been brought in contact. They begin to respond to each other, and this movement of response establishes a new order. Thus we go from utterance to conversation and then from conversation to intertextual orders that I suspect correspond to what we have talked about when we have talked of ''a culture.'' The process of culturation of experience consists of the operations that establish coherence in an emergent set of utterances that slowly limit possibilities and thereby produce a conversation with a particular form. As Bakhtin himself says, in one of these passages that are not often quoted:

> [Systems of linguistic] 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 heteroglotonational language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia.

> [We conceive of language] as ideologically saturated. . . . as a world view . . . insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization. [1981:271]

In summary, we must see the various texts we have looked at, both singly, and in the relations which are established between them, as uncertain constructions in emerging coherence. Participants must work to make these conversations; they cannot know what is coming or what will be allowed to be said explicitly by those who have power over the building activity. Eventually, however, we can look back with them at what they have constructed and describe the order of this fact. Participants then work at linking conversations. At this stage, they cannot know either what is coming, that is, what will be allowed as an explicit connection. But, eventually, we can once again look back with them and describe the intertextual order that they have established.

### The Construction of America

Let us look again at the intertextual logic established between the texts we examined in a perspective that will bring us back to our departure point: the con-

struction of America. Until now I have emphasized the peculiar way in which the actual form of any original text as improvised in settings typical of everyday life is systematically stripped of its explicit content in a search for "what was really said," "what really happened." The texts produced as statements of "what really happened" must have different content from the original text in order to mark themselves as what they are not supposed to be. Not that the specific content is prescribed; rather, it is the content *as it constructs a form* that is at issue—and this is a jural or normative matter. The secondary texts, to be secondary texts, must exhibit a definite and specific interactional and topical structure. They are produced in settings where the work of everyday life is not being performed, where this work is suspended, so to speak—interviews, therapy sessions, gossip sessions, scholarly papers. They are the embodiment of the request "let's talk about this" or "what do you make of this." They are moments when people are "having a talk," "really talking to each other," "communicating," "learning about the organization of the world." It is as if everyday life talk is not talk. It does not say what is to be said. It does not refer to the reality. It is not, in an American word, "meaningful."

In contrast, the texts produced "when one is having a talk," that are not doing anything but talking, are particularly meaningful, and people from many different backgrounds in the United States seem to be very eager to participate in the production of such texts. Indeed, any attempt to resist this movement and remain focused on talk that is not part of a talk is likely to be itself interpreted as "meaningless formalism."

Texts of the "really happening" in the realm of the "meaningful" are not, however, ultimate texts of overall reference. They are oriented to descriptions of particular events happening to specific, named, persons, "I, Connie, vs. you, Ray." There also exist other texts—we might call them overtexts—that take such texts as their own pretexts, as exemplary of a general quality that is presented as the eventual truth, the "really 'really happening,' " if I may say so. There are many such competing texts. Some might take such texts as Text 4 as somehow related to advanced industrialization, urbanism, capitalism, liberal democracy, etc. I do not want to even try a list of these texts; rather, I want to examine how they relate themselves to other texts produced in the United States. I do this by looking at one of the dominant overtexts, the text that names what we have seen as instances of "individualism."

The following four excerpts are quoted here at length to highlight the organization of the beginning of *Habits of the Heart:*

*Text 6a*
#### The Pursuit of Happiness

*Brian Palmer*

Living well is a challenge. Brian Palmer, a successful businessman, lives in a comfortable San Jose suburb and works as a top-level manager in a large corporation. He is justifiably proud of his rapid rise in the corporation, but he is even prouder of the profound change he has made recently in his idea of success. "My value system," he says, "has changed a little bit as the result of a divorce and reexamining life values.

Two years ago, confronted with the work load I have right now, I would stay in the office and work until midnight, come home, go to bed, get up at six, and go back and work until midnight, until such time as it got done. Now I just kind of flip the bird and walk out. My family life is more important to me than that, and the work will wait, I have learned.'' A new marriage and houseful of children have become the center of Brian's life. But such values were won only after painful difficulties. [This is followed by an expansion of Palmer's story]. [Bellah et al. 1985:3—first page of book]

## Text 6b

"I found that being a single parent is not all that it is cracked up to be. I found it an extremely humbling experience. Whereas I go into the office in the morning and I have a personal secretary and a staff of managers and a cast of hundreds working for me, I come home and just like every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the world, I'd clean up garbage after these big boys of mine. I'd spend two hours preparing and cleaning after dinner, doing laundry, folding clothes, sweeping the floor, and generally doing manual labor of the lowest form. But the fact that my boys chose to live with me was a very important thing to me. It made me feel that maybe I had been doing something right in the parenting department." [This is followed by a further expansion of Palmer's story]. [1985:4]

## Text 6c

Brian's restless energy, love of challenges, and appreciation of the good life are characteristic of much that is most vital in American culture. [End of Palmer's story, followed by the story of Joe Gorman, the story of Margaret Oldham, and the story of Wayne Bauer]. [1985:6]

## Text 6d

Brian, Joe, Margaret, and Wayne each represent American voices familiar to us all. The arguments that we have suggested would take place among them, it they ever met, would be versions of controversies that regularly arise in public and private moral discourse in the United States. One of the reasons for these differences is that they draw from different traditions, which will be described in the next chapter. Yet beneath the sharp disagreements, there is more than a little consensus about the relationship between the individual and society, between private and public good. This is because, in spite of their differences, they all to some degree share a common moral vocabulary, which we propose to call the "first language" of American individualism in contrast to alternative "second languages," which most of us also have. [1985:20]

The rest of the chapter is an expansion on this last passage and constructs the book as one concerning "our American traditions" (1985:25) and "our present predicament" (1985:26).

I am using this passage because it reproduces the sequence of intertextual retellings that I have followed here in an almost iconic fashion, and then goes further. The overall chapter is constructed by starting with one person and that person's life, emphasizing a kind of conversion experience. This life is then told at greater length, with a continual movement between the telling of biographical details ("I'd clean up garbage after these big boys of mine" [Text 6b]) and the telling of how these details are framed ("I found it an extremely humbling ex-

perience'' [Text 6b]). While we are not offered examples of the talk that occurred while the garbage was being taken out, it is clear that Brian Palmer was making a cross-reference to it while he was being interviewed. The two stories are then framed further in a two-step progression that, first, makes us see Palmer's story as ''characteristic of much that is most vital in American culture'' (Text 6c) and then as an instance of the '' 'first language' of American individualism'' (Text 6d). There is not discussion of whether Palmer's story is in fact ''characteristic'' or whether ''individualism'' is an appropriate term to use. *Habits of the Heart* assumes that this is so in order to make a further point (Americans are in a predicament because of an overemphasis on individualism) that will not concern us here.

Many disagree with Bellah and his team on the matter of the characterization of America. Some sociologists complain about the absence of the usual ''scientific'' apparatus (surveys and statistics). Anthropologists wonder about the absence of field observations. Social scientists from the left wonder about the deemphasis of economic forces in a text about what shapes life in the United States. I would personally prefer that a clearer distinction be made between human beings alive in the country and America. This is, in fact, the major point of my recent work.

What interests me, however, within the confines of this article is that the people on which Bellah is relying to respond to his book, the people who are included in the ''we'' who are caught in a predicament, are in fact responding in a variety of ways that is made possible and constrained by the overall shape of the intellectual (philosophical, scholarly, and political) conversation within which texts about individualism (rather than texts about the meaning of specific acts for specific persons or texts concerned with the performance of a daily task) make sense. Connie may disagree with Ray on the matter of appropriateness of the china cabinet. I may disagree with Bellah on the usefulness of labeling people (rather than intertextual patterns of conversation) as ''American.'' But the interactional, communicational process we use to construct our respective conversations is of the same type: we take words that others have uttered and we make something else with them, either within the same frame or, intertextually, across different frames. Thus had Connie taken Ray's word in Text 1, and then, intertextually, in Text 4. Thus did I take their words, and then Labov and Fanshel's, and finally those of Bellah and his team. And thus will my words be taken. This is the essence of the cultural process.

## American Culture and Its Operators

Strictly speaking, ''America'' is conversationally relevant only in some of the overtexts that are produced in the United States. These texts may, in some cases, serve as blueprints for specific cultural performances, and it can be shown that certain details of everyday life, that is, aspects of other conversations than the ones in which the overtexts are produced, are direct ritual enactments. The power of these overtexts of America, the power of ''America'' in short, however, lies in the intertextual order that is established between the various texts.

This order consists first in the choice of what it is that is taken from one text to be used in the new text. The central stylistic feature of a text of America is, as we know very well, the extra emphasis that is placed on the singularity and separateness of the person of focus. It is not chance that made Labov and Fanshel use terms first proposed by Bales (1950), a psychologist of "small group interaction." Connie's vocabulary is equally psychological in that it only considers what Ray did to her psyche. He almost made her crazy, as I would controversially summarize her interpretation, but he did not beat her physically, starve her, dishonor her family, steal her dowry. He was not even simply unfaithful, as far as we are told. He was just "a very bad public relations man for me."

This emphasis on the "I" of the speaker has been documented *ad nauseam* in the literature on American culture. I could emphasize the way in which the individualism that is emerging in these interpretative structures is an individualism of self-actualization, a possible transformation on the Puritan individualism of personal responsibility that may have been typical of earlier periods in American history. It would thus seem that the people who are responsible for the over-texts of America are still choosing some of the same items to take from the speech of others, but are now organizing them differently.

Be that as it may, the point is that the relationship of "America" to "everyday life in the United States" is not referential. The two are not equivalent. They are separate, though interrelated. Bakhtin said it well when he demonstrated how we always speak with words that we have borrowed from the marketplace. Our social environments, our "constraints," are also our resources in our struggles for expression. It is Bakhtin, indeed, who has reminded us that many voices are heard in the marketplace, including those of the clowns, visionaries, revolutionaries, and "illiterate peasants," which, I propose, we all carry within ourselves even if we do not dare give them voice.

The corollary of this insistence on *bricolage* and borrowing (stealing?) from the marketplace must be the recognition that, while human beings "operate" on the world, they are not necessarily the "operators." This is stated by Bakhtin in the following way:

> No living word relates to its object in a *singular* way; between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate. It is precisely in the process of living interaction with this specific environment that the word may be individualized and given stylistic shape. [1981:276]

To the very extent that we live in a world of many voices, to the extent that we ourselves speak many different languages, none of our utterances stands by itself. The other words that can be used to retell our words are never far, and some of them are more powerful than others. These words of power, eventually, are the cultural operators that systematize our production within a particular historical period.

These are the grounds on which I base my position that, when one pursues the connections that a text is made to make with other texts, one cannot escape the great texts of individualism, at least when the first text enters in the politically dominant conversations found in the United States. The texts of individualism are the cultural operators in the sense that Boon gives to the term in that they transform all other texts that are placed in their context. They connect experiences and texts within an overall scheme that establishes the grounds of their significance.

What is important here is that the original texts do not have to be internally individualized to be captured by America and made relevant to individualism. After all, the texts of America are often explicitly texts of non-America: America is constructed as different from the rest of "other cultures." Even in anthropology, it is common to conduct complex research projects to demonstrate that some group "does not have our concept of individualism," thereby making of individualism a reference point, whether individualism is or is not a reference point "in the local overtexts of power"—as I would rephrase the traditional "from the native's point of view" phrase (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961; Shweder and Bourne 1984).

Some of us are concerned about proceeding in this manner. We are generally less concerned about restating the voices that we hear while conducting our work in the words through which we can exercise our own intellectual power. How else can *we* be meaningful? The solution, I would argue, is not to lapse into silence. Certainly, we cannot silence our contemporaries who are involved in similar restatements. Rather, we must see, in this power, a case of the general conditions under which all human beings construct their lives. The one care we must take is not to confuse our summaries with the people or events that are the pretexts for our own texts.

There are no Americans in the United States, there are none in the world. Rather, all human beings on the planet are at risk of being held accountable for (not) being American. America is *when*ever words and experiences are transformed, made communicable and politically powerful, in the manner that we know as "individualism."

We cannot wish *that* away.

## Notes

[1] I must emphasize that I have chosen these texts because they are among the best in their respective genres. I deeply respect the authors for their respective strengths: Labov and

Fanshel for their technical expertise and the standards that they have helped establish for discourse analysis; Bellah and his coauthors for their recognition that the social sciences are always, whether authors want it or not, "public philosophy"—that is, a statement that will be appropriated by the public within contemporary political conversations (1985:Appendix).

[2]The reference here is to Lévi-Strauss on the process through which myths are produced with the jetsam and flotsam of history, a process similar to the activity of the person who constructs a home implement out of the remains of earlier projects (1966:16–36).

[3]As it will become abundantly clear, my critique of traditional ways of conducting cultural and discourse analyses has the shape of the analytic discourses, the properties—and limitations—of which I identify here. As Goffman once dramatically performed in a lecture/paper on "The lecture": "One necessary condition for the validity of my analysis is that I cannot avoid its application to this occasion of communicating to you; another is that this applicability does not, in turn, undermine either the presentation or the arguments" (1981:163).

[4]The information I am giving the reader about the family and its circumstances is skeletal on purpose. However artificial the exercise, I am trying to reconstruct the experience of "learning about the other," and then "making something"—or, rather, "some *words*"—about what we learned. As I emphasize throughout, this process is typical of everyday life as much as it is typical of "research."

[5]Note that the form of this prompt reveals that she realizes that (1) Ray is addressing her, and (2) reporting on an action that (3) took place in the past. Her question concerns only the nature of the action that he took.

[6]An asterisk before a quote indicates a statement that I made up for analytic purposes.

[7]There is something odd about this statement, given that Connie is not a professional cabinet maker and that the closet is a "proper" one.

[8]For a further discussion of this issue in the context of the same data, see Varenne 1987.

[9]Of course, there may have been intervening conversations when Connie's disapproval was more explicitly stated.

[10]Connie ended up taking the tape with her and working extensively on the transcript. Her help was invaluable, and we are extremely grateful to her for it.

[11]As we looked for someone willing to give us a tape of their familial life, we were quite concerned that we get an "intact" family. As we started to hear difficulties in the interactino between Ray and Connie, difficulties they might not have made explicit to themselves, we felt it our responsibility to protect the family, possibly from itself, by not following our tendency to go for interpretations that emphasized difficult psychodynamics. One may wonder why such interpretations can initially be feared. Labov and Fanshel, for example, are so convinced that this is so that they refuse to analyze familial conversations (1977:352–353). The best "reason" I can give is one derived from the conclusions of this article: it has to do with ideology and the rhetorical patterns through which power can be exercised in America.

[12]This kind of vocabulary itself clearly indexes this conversation as occurring in an academic setting.

[13]Clearly, of course, I have not pushed the formalization of the characteristics of each text as far as it could go. It is not my intent to do this here.

[14]Other analytic summaries are even more marked for information through the use of phrases describing in detail who, where, when, etc.

[15]Riffaterre goes so far as repeatedly to distinguish "everyday" from "literary" language, on the supposition that the former is strictly referential, functionally utilitarian and closely tied to the real world, while the latter is so divorced from this world that it has to be understood differently. My argument here is that everyday language has all the characteristics that Riffaterre identifies in literary language.

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