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Yamani, Ahmad Zaki (1968). *Islamic Law and Contemporary Issues*. Jidda: The Saudi Publishing House.**A Confusion of Signs: The Semiosis of Anthropological Ireland**

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The direct word, as traditional stylistics understands it, encounters in its orientation toward the object only the resistance of the object itself (the impossibility of its being exhausted by a word, the impossibility of saying it all), but it does not encounter in its path toward the object the fundamental and richly varied opposition of another word (Bakhtin 1981: 276).

Who writes anthropology?<sup>1</sup> Who, in particular writes the anthropology of Ireland — a genre framed by a multiplicity of "words," "voices" texts and ideologies all straining to offer the final statement of this "object" of study, the people who live in one of the islands off the West Coast of Europe? Inevitably, the cultural convention will have to be adopted and it will be written that the author of this paper is "I," not a person but rather a pronoun, a deictic moving a reader towards somebody (—> Hervé Varenne), a real, singular human being, administratively, and uniquely, designated by a sequence of letters placed in an appropriate typographic location.<sup>2</sup> But how seriously can the grammatical implication be taken that "I," the designated material entity, is alone in writing this paper? Precisely because "I" is not alone, because this mode of referring to a complex act has been "adopted on the collective mode," to use Lévi-Strauss's criteria for what makes a text a myth (1971: 560), because identities are social and only become "individual" if the culture so constructs them, for all these reasons, I must, from now on, use the first person pronoun without quote marks. To do otherwise would be to choose meaninglessness, radical withdrawal. It would have no critical impact as the collectivity would never notice the absence.

That we, as anthropologists, are limited in our freedom to construct alternate ethnographic texts, just as I am limited in my freedom not to use first person

pronouns, is the main point of this paper. Ethnographic writing is not controlled by anthropologists but rather by the ensemble of texts that compete with it for authority and, in the process, create the anthropological voice in its specificity.

We have begun to learn this, most starkly perhaps in the recent writing on the doing of ethnography in the United States (Marcus and Fisher 1986; Varenne 1986). We know that, in the long run, the voices of our "natives" have to be taken as more than mere "data" for analysis. They reveal themselves as practically powerful alternate analyses with which we struggle. What this may entail is well illustrated by the conditions one finds oneself in when one is working on Irish matters. In the United States, a large portion of the population has a keen interest in things Irish for any statement about the country or its people challenges their legitimacy. In Ireland, a casual look at the "Irish interest" section of even the most suburban of bookshops is enough to make one realize that one's voice will be but one among many and must earn the right to be heard by, in some way, inserting itself in a position recognizable by some future interpretant. To be heard, a voice must place itself.

### *The Voice of Anthropology*

What is then this ethnographer's magic, by which he is able to evoke the real spirit of the natives, the true picture of tribal life? As usual, success can only be obtained by a patient and systematic application of a number of rules of common sense and well-known scientific principles... (Malinowski 1961[1922]).

My voice is that of an anthropologist, a type of social "scientist." As such, I lay claim to a particular knowledge of the way things are in Ireland. This claim is intelligible only if the audience recognizes the social scientific voice for what it is, whether or not it accepts its legitimacy. Anthropologists know certain things in certain ways. Like other scientists they are entitled to claim a more direct route to "reality" than others — philosophers, politicians, journalists, social critics, artists, novelists — who also try to transform their experience into a statement supposed to reveal something to some audience. To lay such a claim to "reality," social

scientists must adopt a certain style of research and reporting which constitutes the external signs that "science" is being conducted. Anthropology, however, has resisted these stylistic and rhetorical constraints, sometimes in the name of humanism, but often also in the name of science itself — and this is what I do here. Anthropology argues that there are other routes to systematic knowledge than the ones which sociology and psychology have demarcated. Against their surveys and statistical correlations, anthropology offers "participant-observation," a technique of systematic critique and analysis of the kind of experiences that people have in the course of their everyday life.

The strength of the anthropological argument lies in the fact that it makes sense to say that human action is intelligible only in the context of its occurrence. To understand any human behavior one must understand all the behaviors that occur around it — before it and after it, and in parallel to it — to the extent that it can be shown that these other behaviors somehow impinge on it.

### *The Stream of Anthropological Consciousness*

Peirce confronted [...] the problem of finding the locus, identity, unity, and continuity of the self among the rapidly changing "phenomena" of a stream of consciousness. His solution to the problem was to look in the sign-processes themselves for the answer. For Peirce, the locus, identity, and continuity of the self was not to be found in the individual organism [...]. It was, rather, an "outreaching identity," which connected the feelings, thoughts, and actions of one individual with those of others through the processes of semiotic communication. The self was thus both a product and an agent of semiotic communication, and therefore social and public (Singer 1984: 57).

For reasons that will become clearer further on, I have just presented one of the not so simple-minded versions of anthropological work, the version which, most

significantly, we present to the interested outsider, a prototypical reader, but also sometimes a curious informant, one who has been schooled, by teachers, journalists and the like, in the difference between literature and "science," and whom we are still trying to school into recognizing "science," or at least a voice of special authority, in a text that does not use the paraphernalia of objectivism.

In this paper, however, the reader I am constructing is someone who is already quite well versed in anthropology itself and the perennial debates about the epistemology of our trade: How do we know? What must we take into account as we try to know? What is there to know anyway? The quote marks I earlier placed around words like "science" and "reality" are the obvious signals of my ultimate design. Another signal would be a reference to the set of works which, in recent years, have analyzed the rhetorical implications of traditional ethnographic writing and have called for new forms (Marcus 1982; Fabian 1983; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986). Still, even if we are not addressing the unschooled reader, his ultimate presence, like the original presence of our informants, must be acknowledged. This, I feel, is something which recent work may not have emphasized enough as it has analyzed the conditions of ethnographic writing and called for "transformations both in the way ethnography is written, and in the ethnographer's awareness of for whom it is written" (Marcus and Fisher 1986: 164). The experience of those who are not "us," anthropologists, as they are confronted by the many texts of authority which they, and we, encounter, is our experience also. If we are to take seriously what such recent commentaries on Peirce as Singer's *Man's Glassy Essence* (1984) have taught us, then we must draw the consequences of the fact that the "self" of the anthropologist, the self of anthropology itself, is a *dialogical self*. Indeed it is a "multilogical" self, one that exists at the intersection of, in the case of an anthropology of Ireland, a reader, all other writers of Ireland, and all experiences of Ireland or Irishness that one may have had, in the United States, in Ireland, and elsewhere. The ethnographer, as author, is not a free agent.

What I would like to do here is sketch my education into Ireland and justify the anthropological tradition in the semiotic terms which, I hope to show, do help us to understand our collective situation. The need is not for another "new" anthropology — we are not gods that can create such beasts (only society can, or is it God?). The need, rather, is for a better understanding of the tradition that defines anthropology, so that we can fulfill the responsibility that is given to us to keep the tradition (and, possibly, in the process, to contribute to its evolution). In an Irish context this means that we must look at anthropological texts that present

themselves as pointing to Ireland in the context of other texts of reference. We must step out of anthropology, become an observer of anthropology in order, eventually, to return to the traditional anthropological task which we have in fact never left.

### *Anthropological Signs to Its Self*

I had gone into anthropology in search of Otherness. Meeting it on an experiential level was a shock which caused me to begin fundamental reconceptualization about social and cultural categories (Rabinow 1977: 29).

Anthropology, we know, is rhetorically constructed as a task where a representative of an archetypical *Us* (the Ethnographer) encounters an archetypical *Other* (the Native) who is a puzzle to be solved. The anthropologist, as hero, takes himself to a place that is most exotic to a privileged audience (other anthropologists and those assimilated to them) and reports back what he has found.

We have been told repeatedly, perhaps most forcefully by Fabian (1983), that this image is not representative of our situation as workers producing ourselves in the language we use, that is, in the texts which we write. For anthropology to produce proper knowledge (to be "scientific"?) it must not take a rhetorical stance that separates it from what it constructs as an *Other*.

This is true as far as it goes. I take this position as my starting point. It is also true that to highlight the way texts specifically marked for "anthropology" so construct themselves is not to free oneself from the underlying mechanisms. Fabian, who is so conscious of the need for an acknowledgement of co-participation, still subtitles his book "How Anthropology Makes Its Object," thereby implying both that anthropologists have not been aware of their situation — which is probably unfair — and that the task of transformation can be authored by anthropologists as independent, indeed heroic, agents. In fact we must investigate more systematically the source of the linguistic tools which constitute us, particularly the rhetorical forms that we are accountable to use and the texts which compete with ours.

I have dealt elsewhere with the issue of the implicit analytical power of rhetorical forms which are given to us by the American tradition.<sup>3</sup> Here, I want to

deal with the "natives" own voices as they speak about themselves (and us as anthropologists). What did these voices do to us? What are we to do to them?

The *Other* which traditional anthropological writing constructs is, of course, a particular type of other. This *Other* is not able to understand the anthropological task — except perhaps as a vague "making them (*Us*) aware of who we are." The *Other* is also unknown to *Us* — or at least "badly" known (for we typically reject the authority of reports by missionaries, explorers, development experts, journalists, tourist guides, etc., that we have not reconstructed). The *Other* is the result of a "discovery" of some sort. On his return "home," the anthropologist confronts, at most, a generalized feeling of either repulsion or romantic attraction that *We* supposedly attach to the kind of people about whom we know nothing, except that they are "not at all like us." To deal with this, he first has made general statements about the fact that *They* are not savages (whether degenerate or innocent) and about the fact that other texts from *Us* are improper for various reasons having to do with the social and political position of the author. The anthropologist can then proceed to construct a picture that is unencumbered by any competing image that his readers may carry and use to evaluate what he is painting. The anthropologist is the privileged reporter of voices. He is not the hawk of a line in a marketplace of ideas.

I will not escape here a construction of anthropology that may have been useful at the end of the 19th century but which anthropologists rejected in the practice of their craft, if not in their presentation of self. From the earliest they visited places, from Mexico (Redfield) to Indiana, U.S.A (Lynd), to Ireland (Warner, Arensberg and Kimball) that were not *terrae incognitae*, blanks on Western maps. Anthropologists have always insisted that they have something to say about such places, and they continue even as they are challenged by the other social sciences that have staked the field for themselves. This indeed is the position I have taken in my work on America and the position I will take in my work on Ireland. I will, inevitably, be reporting on voices and I will not pretend that these voices are speaking through me. At best I can signal their existence for those who want to go and listen and need an initial map to the marketplace and its various booths. The problem here is to understand how these other voices (who are not simply "voices of the *Other*") participate in constituting my own voice.

Before the anthropologist starts working in the country, and after he has written his report, Ireland exists as a complex discourse, an ensemble of statements and counter-statements in a multitude of media from high literature to cheap novels, polemical historical analyses and political speeches, powerful movies and the snap

shots which a tourist brings back home. Such images, *cultural* images in the strongest sense of the term, are not the unitary expression of a single author carefully crafting an univocal statement. They are the collective voice of a people. They are continually being produced and reproduced by a multitude of authors with various, often conflicting, interests who must take each other into account. In this sense, this image has a life of its own. What must concern us is not the product of the historical process. It is the process of expression itself. As we produce our own text, we become part of this process.

In the case of Ireland, such a statement is not a pro forma bow to current intellectual fashions in America. Minimally, anthropology is an intelligible task in Ireland. All major ethnographic texts have been sold, read, reviewed and criticized in dominant publications. Maximally, it is also the case that anthropology was invented in Ireland at about the same time as it was invented in the rest of Europe and for the same political purposes: curiosity, a demonstration of the superiority of the urban middle classes and, more explosively, for the legitimization of nationalistic movements, in France, Italy, Germany, the Balkans and Central Europe, which produced the Europe that bloodied itself in a series of major civil ("World") wars, the final ambers of which are still glowing in the north of Ireland.

Signs to Ireland

*Signs of Ireland*

*Peter:* Did you see an old woman going down the path?

*Patrick:* I did not, but I saw a young girl and she had the walk of a queen.

(Yeats [1902] 1952: 88)

Ireland is not an island off the coast of Western Europe. It is the "Emerald Isle," "the land of Saints and Scholars." It has the "terrible beauty" of Cathleen ni Houlihan (unless it is Kathleen Ni Hoolihan), the old woman who walks like a young queen once the first son has been offered in blood sacrifice.<sup>4</sup> It's color is green; its plant is the shamrock; its ancestors are St. Patrick, St. Brendan, Brian Boru (and O'Connell, Parnell, Pearse). The Irish, one is told before leaving, "are wonderful people, you will just love them." "You will have a wonderful time!"

They are to be depicted as old, drunk, and courageous in the face of misfortune for the tourists (Bord an Failte),<sup>5</sup> and for school children learning about themselves in *Peig: The autobiography of Peig Sayers* (1974). They are also to be depicted as young, eager, and well educated for potential investors.<sup>6</sup> With each of these signs comes a complex discourse in which it is endlessly debated:

- whether the Irish are, or are not really, Celt;
- whether the true civilization of Ireland was eclipsed for 700 years and must now be recaptured (the official nationalist stance);
- whether it is to be invented anew (Kiberd 1984);
- whether contemporary Ireland is what has been constructed with the various elements which successive invasions and dominant administrations have brought to the shores of the island (Sean O'Faolain 1980[1947]);
- whether — as is the consensus in much contemporary social science — the state of Ireland must be understood as the product of the economic upheavals which followed the Famine, the Land Reform, Independence, the Economic Revival and entrance into the Common Market (Brown 1985; Peillon 1982; Wilson 1984).

Whatever the cause, there is more agreement as to what was produced: A conservative, Catholic, small farmer who steadfastly works his own land, passes it on to one of his sons, and, in recent years, overeducates his other children to give them an edge as they emigrate to England or the United States.<sup>7</sup>

For an anthropologist, the initial temptation is to see all this as "data," a corpus of myth and symbols in relation to which the scientist takes the stance of the coroner at the beginning of an autopsy. This, it would seem, is the "native's point of view," to be taken into account, indeed to be reconstructed for an audience that knows little about it. In classical cultural anthropology, however, the native's point of view is made into something alien in which the anthropologist himself does not participate and to which he will be accountable when he releases his own statement for public consumption. When an anthropologist lands in a place like Ireland, the situation is different as several have found, sometimes in a very hard way.

The issue is not simply an ethical one. It is an analytic one as it becomes obvious that anthropological concerns are native concerns: whether it is overprotective mothers or a peculiar land tenure system that produces late marrying men, such issues are *Irish* issues before they are American, scientific, anthropological issues. In their everyday life, in their newspapers and novels, in the intellectual work that is done for local consumption, the kind of reality which people in Ireland see is, essentially, the reality which the anthropologist also sees. This is not to say that the anthropologist will not be recognized as a peculiar voice within the general conversation. It is to say, rather, that powerful persons will understand his statements and recognize his interests. They will, directly and indirectly, suggest concerns to him that he will then appropriate and come to think of as his own. Whatever an anthropologist may say, it will eventually be taken as no more than the statement of another voice within the chorus that constitutes the mythical corpus of Ireland. Even if it is rejected as "wrong," "irrelevant," "romantic," "improper," or whatever, it will not be treated as alien. It will be *intelligible*.

#### *The Anglo-Irish Signs of Ireland*

The great convulsion which society of all grades here as lately experienced, the failure of the [...], [...], [...], and a most unparalleled extent of emigration, together with [...], pauperizing [...]-laws, grinding officials, and decimating [...], have broken up the very foundations of social intercourse, have swept away the established theories of political economists, and uprooted many of our long-cherished opinions. (Wilde 1979[1852])

It is the case that the anthropology of Ireland as a location for a special mode of being European predates an official American anthropology which presents itself as having "discovered" the island sometimes in 1935. "Ireland," in fact, was first discovered by another group of "foreigners"<sup>9</sup>: Protestant Anglo-Irish who, starting in the middle of the 19th century, began to listen to the voices of their tenant farmers and wondered at the paradox of their own identity. Over 70 years they

produced a body of work, the evolution of which seems to prefigure the evolution of ethnography itself as it evolved from an antiquarian concern with collecting dying myths and rituals (Wilde 1979[1852]), to trying to understand the exotic Irish as they understood themselves (Synge 1979[1907]), to experimenting with new ethnographic forms (Joyce 1961[1921]).<sup>10</sup> The difference was that, for them, Ireland was not "the *Other*," it was, ambiguously, "*Us*."

Yeats, the prototypical figure of this generation, once wrote: "Gaelic is my national language, but it is not my mother tongue" (in Brown 1979: 157), thereby revealing his understanding of his position and the nature of this position.

Yeats spoke and wrote English. He, and all the other figures of the various movements of which he was a part, had the political will of identifying with an Ireland "independent" of England. It was a basic premise of these movements that this Ireland had to be "revived." For Ireland was a cultural substance, an entity to which a rhetoric of life and death could be applied in non-metaphorical ways. The existence of this entity, the fact that it was "alive" was the only justification for the call to independence and indeed the only argument that could be used against England. And yet it seemed obvious that Ireland was "dead" in the political centers of the island, but was still gasping at its periphery, in those areas where "Gaelic" was still spoken. Men, and some very famous women, went to the West coast and its islands to learn about something that could not be found in the drawing rooms of Dublin where the movement itself was most manifest. What was sought was something that was not in Dublin, a Gaelic *Other* that had to be brought forward and translated for the benefit of an *Us* that was Irish.<sup>11</sup>

The Gaelic, language and culture, was not a curiosity. It was not a museum piece to be laid alongside "answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said" (Geertz 1973: 30). Neither was it to be used to criticize the culture of turn of the century Dublin. The Gaelic was the reality of Ireland, if not of the selves of those who sought to revive it and, to a certain extent, succeeded in reviving it, albeit not all in the form they expected: one hundred years later, after more than 50 years of formal independence, English is still the mother tongue of the political forces in Ireland but Gaelic as been enshrined as the "Irish." The Constitution says "Irish is the national language..." *Irish*, not Gaelic. Re-written in modern political English, Yeats' statement would have to read "Irish is my national language, but it is not my mother tongue." And if, as Yeats and his contemporaries would have done, we equate language, culture and political legitimacy, Yeats' recognition that he did not speak what is now known as "Irish"

places him in a peculiar position. The voices that became dominant after formal independence made it meaningful to say of him, and of all the Anglo-Irish of the period, that he was "English" and not "Irish." The Gaelic *Other* whom Yeats had tried to recapture had rebelled and fought an apparently successful political struggle to establish itself as indeed the "real" Irish *Us* that controls social identities on the island.

The battle about the definition and political place of the Gaelic/Irish was first fought publicly in the famous riots which, in 1907, greeted the first staging of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. He presented himself as having stilled a personal artistic voice to let the Gaelic speak through the poor farmers of the West coast. Most literary critics of his work have agreed with Yeats that he succeeded (Kiberd 1984; McDermott 1985). Many other critics have disagreed. For Synge's play was the focal point of a fundamental debate: What should these farmers say? And what does what they are presented as saying itself say to those who overhear their reported speech? What will they say? What can one fear that they will say? What are the best methods to be used to control the use of the speech by the significant *Other* of a nationalistic movement — the "colonial" power? What, in the case of Ireland, should England overhear of what is said in the island to its west? The voices of nationalism that came to power gave a consistent answer: they specifically rejected the voices that had spoken through the Anglo-Irish authors who most specifically claimed to represent the current conditions of Ireland. Institutionalized Ireland stilled Yeats, Synge, Joyce and their peers in the institutions it controlled. In the national schools the children of Dublin were steeped in a minor literature that was specifically "Irish" and remained essentially ignorant of the voices that made Ireland famous. The actual language which the West coast farmers spoke, "Irish-English," the dialect of English heavily influenced by Irish (Gaelic), was deliberately ignored in an attempt to revive "real" Irish. In the process Irish-English dies, Irish ceases to be a medium of every day exchange anywhere in the island, and basic North Atlantic English thrives.<sup>12</sup>

The paradox goes even further. Those who challenged Synge's right to speak for the small farmers of the West were by all accounts not themselves small farmers. For them, too, Ireland was the *Other* that was really *Us*. They, too, had not learned Irish from their mothers and the language they actually spoke was, by their own account, "foreign." As Joyce (1969[1916]: 189) has Stephen Dedalus reflect during a conversation with a British Dean of Studies: "The language we are speaking is his before it is mine." The dominant nationalistic voice thus presented itself as belonging to someone else — as indeed it was once the Act of Union with England

was declared illegitimate. The only solution to recapturing an Irish self passed through a reconstruction of the speaker as, if not literally a small farmer himself, at least the legitimate representative and defender of such farmers and, through them, of a truly Irish inheritance.

In any event, there was something real and alive (though perhaps barely) on the island, something to own or to be owned by. As Brown notes:

The writers of the Irish Literary Revival..., for all their individual quarrels and disagreements with Irish Nationalism and with its most vigorous representatives, the writers and thinkers of the Irish Ireland movement, had accepted the fundamental tenets of that faith. Ireland was an historic nation with its sources in pre-history. Gaelic civilization had been a glorious flowering of the Irish spirit, reborn in the Rising of 1916; and a modern imagination drinking at the well-springs of that world, even in translations of its literature, could enjoy a refreshment so revivifying that the splendors of that old spirituality might be born anew in a Europe grown weak and infertile in an old age of rationalism, science and economic utilitarianism (Brown 1979: 157).

By 1916 G.W. Russell (AE) had a long tradition to lean upon as he sought "to discover...the ideas that lie at the root of [our] national character" (Russell 1982[1916]: 124). His definition of this character will be familiar to anthropologists: "In every nation which has been allowed free development, while it has qualities common to all humanity, it will be found that some one idea was predominant, and in its predominance regrouped about itself other ideas" (1982[1916]: 123). For Russell, as for all the theoreticians of European nationalisms, a population stably settled in a particular location develops a particular way of being human which becomes institutionalized if the political relations of this population to its neighbors allow. Let an oppressed people free, and its spirit will flower again. Such ideas, of course were not original to Russell or to the movement which he represents here, anymore than they were to Benedict or Mead (or Dewey who prefigured them in the United States). The roots of the idea are much deeper in European social thought and may have been more fully explored, in their political consequences as well as their scientific plausibility, by the German philosophers of the 19th century.

In the 1920s, once formal emancipation had been won, the Ireland that emerged "in fact" had more in common with the Ireland in which the nationalists had been borne (the Ireland of petty English provincial bureaucrats) than it had with the heroic Ireland for which Pearse had died. Or so at least it seemed to the sensitive authors of the period, such men as O'Faolain or Kavanagh. As Brown says of them: "Knitted with the common life of Ireland, the petit-bourgeois life of the towns, closer to the actual life of the small farms of rural Ireland than Yeats ever was, they knew of the drab, unadventurous, unromantic, puritanically Catholic, English-speaking, economically prudent reality" (Brown 1979: 157). Another voice, another "reality," but certainly not the voice of power as de Valera, who had lived for the other Ireland, established his place in the country and, indeed, the world.

#### *Anthropological Signs of Ireland*

Looking out from the right-hand window, there below was the bare hungry countryside of the Rosses and Gweedore; Bloody Foreland yonder and Tory Island far away out, swimming like a great ship where the sky dips into the sea. Looking out of the door, you could see the West of County Galway with a good portion of the rocks of Connemara, Aranmore in the ocean out from you with the small bright houses of Kilronan, clear and visible, if your eyesight were good and the Summer had come. From the window on the left you could see the Great Blasket, bare and forbidding as a horrible otherworldly eel, lying languidly on the wave-tops; over yonder was Dingle with its houses close together... I have never heard it said that there was any house as well situated as this on the face of the earth (O'Brien [1941] 1986: 21).

Let us look at what is generally known in the discipline as "the anthropology of Ireland." It is rather easy to caricature this work and perhaps I should refrain from

it. Caricature is always unfair and never descriptive. It is also powerfully evocative and, to the extent that my intent here is not to review in detail the anthropological literature, the above quote from Flann O'Brien's famous satire of another kind of work on Ireland is not inappropriate. Caricaturally, then, what anthropologists know of Ireland, they know of "a place called Corkadoragha in the townland named Lisnabrawshkeen." Of course, anything that is mentioned in this literature "concerns only Corkadoragha and it is not to be understood that any reference is intended to the Gaeltacht areas in general: Corkadoragha is a distinctive place and the people who live there are without compare" (O'Brien 1973[1941]: 7). Anthropologists have conducted their participant-observation in the house where Bonaparte O'Coonassa was born, a house that has "two windows with a door between them."

The passage I use as an epigraph to this part of the paper is a description of the view from O'Coonassa's house. Through the right hand window one can see the field sites of Fox (1978) and Taylor (1980, 1981) in Donegal. Through the door one can see the island where Messenger (1969) did his work. From the window to the left one can see Scheper-Hughes (1979). The house, clearly, is facing West, with Connemara and Donegal on its North and Kerry on its South. This locates it in the County Clare of Arensberg and Kimball (1940), Brody (1973), Cresswell (1969), the Co. Clare that remains the touchstone of Irishness.<sup>13</sup>

O'Brien wrote his satire as a caricature of the Ireland of Gaelic (Irish) enthusiasts. It was a satire of the Ireland that a generation of scholars and revolutionaries, and then a generation of politicians had constructed for themselves, first, and, second, as an external justification for an act of power. That it could also have been written about the Ireland of anthropologists is no simple coincidence. The Ireland that was to be useful in Dublin and London was the same Ireland that was useful in the hallowed halls of Boston, New York, Chicago or San Francisco.

One might say that the purveyors of anthropological Ireland were co-opted both by the politicians of Dublin, and by those of Queens or the South Side of Boston. W. Lloyd Warner describes as follows the process which led him to choose Co. Clare for Arensberg:

In the summer of 1931 I made a preliminary survey of the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State and chose County Clare as most likely to fulfill our needs — a county in which there was a blending of older Gaelic and modern British

influences, and one that was neither entirely Gaelic nor entirely English in speech (in Arensberg and Kimball 1940: ix).

Who, but nationalistic politicians, could have told Warner that he should pay attention to "Gaelic influences" in an anthropological study? Certainly, it is not chance that focused the attention of Warner on Clare. But it is not sure either that the only factors which operated are theoretical ones (structural-functionalism and the accompanying need for bounded communities). The recent critical literature has made much of these factors (Brody 1973; Gibbon 1973; Wilson 1984) and, indeed, it has become a kind of leitmotiv. But anthropologists keep returning to Lisnabrawshkeen. There is something else that focuses the anthropological imagination of, by now, three generations of scholars and it must be found in their interaction with the natives, of course, but perhaps not those natives that appear in the public work.

In the 1930s certainly, all political signs that might be seen in Dublin pointed to the West of the island, and, in the West, to small farmers (rather than large farmers or towns people) as the place where Ireland was to be found. 1932 had seen the accession to power of de Valera, the American born, Dublin educated, native English speaking, hero of the 1916 Rising who had been, since 1919, member of the Irish parliament for, precisely, Co. Clare.<sup>14</sup> De Valera's party, Fianna Fail, presented itself as the populist supporter of the small farmer who owns his land, lives a precisely "parochial" life in the confines of a parish that is the center of his social life, and eventually passes the farm freely to his appointed son. This small farmer had the absolute reality of a cultural model. To challenge it was to be both blind and a traitor. For the nationalists of the time, on both sides of the Atlantic, the small farmer of anthropologists, de Valera and, behind him, of Yeats, is what Ireland was, in the strongest sense of the verb "to be," and what it would be, once it had recaptured institutionally what it had always been. Co. Clare was the present of Ireland. It was also its past and, the revolutionaries turned statesmen hoped, its future. Arensberg and Kimball, from a certain point of view, "fell for" something which, at about the same time, various outsiders like Sean O'Faolain were describing as a dangerous myth.

For all we know, Arensberg and Kimball fell for it with their eyes wide open, perhaps hoping to contribute to the international justification for Irish independence: that Ireland was, "really," a live Gaelic, and above all *not* British culture. Either way they expressed something that was true to the Irish imagination of the time, if not to its pragmatic "reality." They gave something

that can now easily be read as a version of the national myth of Ireland as an unchanging traditional, rural and Catholic society that is on the verge of a great transformation that is a revival.<sup>15</sup> They powerfully captured something that spoke to and reflected a native point of view. They told us Ireland as Ireland was telling itself. That they may have missed other voices may not be surprising when we now realize how powerful were the forces that were stilling the modernist statements of Joyce, the socialist writings of Connolly or O'Casey, the anguish of O'Faolain or Kavanagh.

The discourse that framed Arensberg and Kimball is a discourse that is independent of them though, as some have noted (Scheper-Hughes 1979: 41), what they said could be incorporated into it. Anthropologists can be shown to be blinded by its verisimilitude so that they are never aware of the sign which led them down a particular road. They rarely are in a position to ask: were there other roads? where would they have led me? Clearly, the analytic task must now be to produce an account of the signs that point the way and of the mechanisms which blind us to the signs and to the roads not taken. But we cannot either expect any such account to make the signs vanish. Such signs and symbols as I am talking about now cannot be "deconstructed" by an individual, or even a group, as long they have political currency within a society. While they have currency any contribution that can be related to the dominant discourse will be so related. Any contribution to our knowledge of Ireland is necessarily part of this discourse, even if, or indeed particularly if, it presents itself as a critique of the discourse. Any one who is interested in the discourse will want to know the critique and then either dismiss this critique, or else modify the discourse.

### *Signs in Ireland*

I was living in a three-bedroomed house in Meadowbrook. I have three children. I needed extra space. You can think about the problem in two ways. You say "well, I either extend my house and put up an extra bedroom, or move." It was less bother to move, and anyway moving was better for tax and mortgage reasons. So you look around... But it's an awful pity that people do look at a

particular place as being a particular class. I can see outsiders saying "oh well, such and such lives in Oakpark..." (from an interview with a welfare administrator).

Anthropologists, once they have presented themselves as analysts of the Irish way of life, are thus pointed in a particular way. In the suburbs of Dublin, when I mentioned that I was "interested in Irish life," I was told several times "if you want to see the real Ireland, you must go into the country, to the West." Where else could they send me, if they wanted to make sense? My interest, however, was not in what was being pointed at but in the people who were doing the pointing. How do they do the pointing, what do they speak about when they are not pointing at Ireland, what are the tools at their disposal and whom did they get them from?<sup>16</sup>

Most foreigners will now enter the geographical space (Ireland?) that is supposed to be one of the referents of all these discourses in Shannon airport. I crossed the frontier in Rosslare, where the ferry from France lands and I drove on to Dublin. In the distance were low cliffs liberally sprinkled with white salt boxes: tourist cottages. A parking lot. A hotel in the international Howard Johnson style. The road to Dublin. More tourist cottages. "Look, look, a thatched cottage!" Endless "Bed and Breakfast" signs. A huge truck passes by at a roar. A litter of garbage around a few derelict house trailers: the resting place of 'travellers' as the old 'tinkers,' I will soon learn, are now known. Miles of gently rolling fields. "Dublin, 10 miles," the sign by the road says. "Dual carriage way." A construction area with a sign specifying that the improvements are funded by Common Market development funds. The traffic picks up. Red lights, packs of cars. "Dunnes stores, next left" proclaims a huge billboard. Further on, Quinnsworth, Superquinn, Roches Stores: the local and international purveyors of mass consumable goods. Arrows pointing to various suburbs: Dundrum, Rathfarnham, Dun Laoghaire, Blackrock. Gas stations: Esso, Shell, Texaco. Dublin below the tortuous road which, I will find out later, the civil engineers call the "Southeastern bypass": a sea of housing developments, "estates" as they are called in the British Isles, thousands of houses, all the same it seems at first — it will take me quite a while to see the differences that the people do see. At the bottom of the basin, where I already suspect that the center of the city lies, an indistinct blur broken by the spires of a few churches and some modern buildings. At the other edge of the basin, on the horizon, mysterious towers — the infamous

high rise "council flats" (low income housing) of Ballymun, the product of 1960s slum clearance enthusiasm now turned to slums themselves.

Later, in the center of Dublin, one will soon recognize the sights to which postcards, picture book renderings and literary evocations point: the Georgian squares, the Liffey and its quays, O'Connell street and the General Post Office, the Martello tower on Sandymount strand. In Dun Laoghaire, an actual street sign points to "James Joyce's Tower," the other Martello tower given eternal fame in the opening pages of *Ulysses*. There a museum teaches one to see Dublin, not as it may be now, but as it was for Joyce. "7 Eccles Street," Bloom's home, has been demolished to make room for a hospital: \*'Do not look at the hospital',\* says the subtext. "The door to the house that has been preserved in a nearby pub," says the text: \*'Go there to place yourself in Leopold Bloom's shoes,'\* is a subtext acted out every day by tourists who religiously follow the route Bloom took on June 16, 1904. Thus the best ethnographer of daily life in Dublin is made into an antiquarian, another purveyor of a "real Ireland" that is only a small part of the Ireland one can see and touch.

The Joyce museum will indeed direct one to experiences that one can have in Dublin. The Dublin it constructs is no more imaginary than the Ireland that Yeats, de Valera, or Arensberg and Kimball constructed. What the museum will not do is what one can think a new James Joyce might do, and that is make one see, as only a great novelist can, those aspects of everyday Dublin that may now be most real to a sensitive adolescent — and that would probably include... McDonald's (not the local pub of course, but the international "American" fast food chain).

Be that as it may, one can move through Dublin without following the signs planted by the Joycean tradition. One may not know they exist, or one may just not be in the mood to construct the appropriate Dublin (after all the children are restless, you are tired from all the driving and you wonder whether you will find the obscure street in Drumcondra you are looking for). Then what you may experience above all is a traffic jam, double decker buses belching black smoke, indistinct crowds and heavy coal smog in the air, hamburger joints and their attendant trash, boarded up shells of half demolished houses, all the signs of modernity gone slightly sour. Have you really come all this way to something that, you shudder to think, could just as well be Trenton, New Jersey?

Three months later, comfortably installed in one "very nice" house in one of the best estates of your suburb (or so is everyone telling you — particularly the voices whom you are most willing to trust), you realize that all the Irelands to which

point the many signs you have encountered can indeed be found on that big island to the west of Great Britain. Even in the most "modern" of suburbs there are echoes of Arensberg and Kimball, Scheper-Hughes, Brody, and also of course, of all those who have written about modernity. Co. Clare is right here, and so is London. Everywhere there is the Catholic Church. Everywhere, too, there is talk of matters sexual. AIDS and abortion are major topics. Strong families, broken homes, migration, drug addiction, delight in conversation, the pub and the singing of ballads (and of American "golden oldies"), saints of all persuasions, and even some scholars. Who is going to inherit the house? Who is to take care of the parents? How will the mortgage be paid? Should we send our children to private schools? Will the county council really let some travellers settle in the field across the road from us and lower our property values? How can we stop them? The signs to all Irelands are there, and so are experiences that, as seen from the point of view framed by the signs, justify their existence: if a widow can be found who talks about her 21-year-old, unemployed son as if he were 13, and if this son, living calmly with her, for all practical purposes, behaves like a 13-year-old, then there is justification in the signs that make of "over protective mothers" something which an ethnography of Ireland must deal with (even if only to argue, generally on dubious methodological grounds, that "things are changing as more people move away from the country and come into contact with modern attitudes").

### The Semiosis of Ireland

#### *Writing Ireland in America*

Que ce soit dans l'ordre du discours parlé ou du discours écrit, aucun élément ne peut fonctionner comme signe sans renvoyer à un autre élément qui lui-même n'est pas simplement présent... Cet enchaînement, ce tissu, est le *texte* qui ne se produit que dans la tranformation d'un autre texte (Derrida in Hollier 1972: 583).

Writing Ireland, I stated at the outset, is not a lonely task. Writing the anthropology of a culture that is one of those from which anthropology has been generated, is a dialogical, multilogical, *social* act. All descriptive texts carry, or are

given to carry, an ideological baggage. They place themselves, they are placed, they use and they are used, inside and outside the domains to which they may claim to belong. "Anthropology," wrote J.P. Dumont (1986: 363), "must be literature;" it must produce carefully crafted texts. The trick now, as he explains, is not to deconstruct its mechanisms so as to lay the pieces on the table. We have excellent examples of the yield of such work (Clifford 1982; Fabian 1983). The challenge, and I expand on Dumont's point, is to construct something that will, at the same time, be recognizable as ethnography and aware of itself as a social act, a voice participating in a multilogue. There are no better ethnographies of a provincial capital than the three Joyce wrote about Dublin, but nothing would be sillier than an attempt to write *Bloom Redux* (except perhaps an attempt to write about Dublin as if *Ulysses* had never been written).

An anthropological text, by virtue of its place within the social sciences, claims (or is made to claim) a voice of authority in the domain of the "real" (though perhaps not "the truth" — a term from which even theologians recoil). Science worries appearances (symptoms, facts, data) until they yield the real, structuring mechanisms that can then be written up, inscribed on our knowledge.

Anthropologists, as scientists, have learned, and taught each other, that, in the midsts of the cacophony of signs all claiming to reveal something of a living culture, the "real Ireland" will not stand up. Neither can it be "dug up," in a process that would combine archaeology with private eye sleuthing: it is not a matter of "scratching the surface" or "scooping up the dirt" to reveal the inner substance. The anthropologist, in his attempt to bring something back from his sojourn in the island that will interest a member of his privileged audience, or even of his peripheral audiences, cannot rely upon the flash of insight that will suddenly make Ireland intelligible. Neither can he rely on a patient work of "data collection," of measurements and systematic observations — however necessary it is that these be also conducted. The more he does so, and the more careful he is in contextualizing what he has seen, then the less he will be sure that he has something, some THING that would be Ireland. Eventually, if he does his ethnographical task well, he will, like his informants, find himself bound tight in a web of signifying relationships linking signs with experiences, grasping one strand, and then another as he attempts to navigate the waters of his own everyday life in the country. What I would write in Ireland, in answer to a year of editorials in the Irish Times and direct or indirect conversations with local intellectuals is not what I would write — am here writing — in the United States, in answers to years of participation in American anthropology.

What, then, am I doing?

The answer to this question is double. I have to answer it in terms of the two roles which I must take, first as the producer of an anthropological text, and, second, as the observer of this process of production in the midst of the various social groups that can claim me (from my informants eager to know what I wrote about them to a skeptical reader wondering whether he should read further). Until now, this paper has mostly been written from the point of the observer, observer of earlier observers, observer of various participants, observer of my own activity. Underlying all this however is my conviction that the observer stance cannot be institutionalized. Eventually the deconstruction of a text becomes the construction of another text. As human beings we can be anything but silent. The act of laying bare the signs of Ireland, the mechanisms of their production and the range of their power is a creative, constructing act which, for an anthropologist, must be anthropological.

#### *Towards a Modern Anthropology of Ireland*

Culture...is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, moral, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor 1871: 1).

From the point of view presented earlier, the institutional voice of anthropology is that of the scientific observer, that of the observer who has learned not to privilege one set of symptoms or signs over any other. The Ireland of American anthropologists will have to be built with the bits and pieces, if not shreds and patches, that come to the observer loosely bundled under the index entry "Ireland." Kathleen ni Hoolihan and Celtic nationalism, Superquinn and the Common Market, thatched cottages and the tourist office, Yeats, de Valera, pastoralism and its critics, Charlie Haughey and Margaret Thatcher, all will have, somehow to be dealt with. To isolate any is to collapse anthropology into, at one extreme, bad sociology as one contravenes the principle of contextualization which drives the discipline or, at the other extreme, bad literature as one contravenes the principle of observation. The Ireland we are shown is not a matter of simple signs but rather of complex interpretations, traditions, that constitute the reality of Ireland for major

groups in and out of the country. The Ireland of Irish politicians is one where large majorities of voters defeat referendums proposing that divorce be allowed. The Ireland of Irish feminists is one where deserted wives have no legal resources and abortion counseling is forbidden. For the Pope, Ireland is the last Catholic country in Western Europe. For the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (or is it "England"?), Ireland is a possible strategic risk and a drain on the treasury that may or may not be compensated by the markets it offers to British industries. The wife of the plumber struggling to pay the mortgage on a house they can barely afford constructs an Ireland that is not the Ireland of the traveller woman who begs at her door. Neither is it the Ireland of the managing director of Digital Business Computers as he flies home from a visit to corporate headquarters in Connecticut.

There is more, as the history of the earlier anthropologies of Ireland can teach us. The Ireland that was constructed by the first nationalists, an Ireland of glorious Celts and noble islanders, was later challenged by the Ireland of disappointed patriots, with its landscape of conservative small towns systematically putting out all creative sparks. The Ireland of the first anthropologists, the Ireland of local structural-functionalism, was challenged by the economic functionalism of much recent work. None of that work can be ignored. It is both "data" for future work and the frame which will limit what it can accomplish.

To the extent that this is true, that is to the extent that I have data from which an analyses of the differences between these Ireland could be written, then a modern ethnography of Ireland must be an ethnography of these voices and of their echoes in everyday life. It must be a modern version of what was called the "ethnography of speaking." We must report the formal qualities of various voices. We must also report the political relationships between these voices. As I began to show earlier, what is now most interesting in the work of the early discoverers of Ireland was not only the quality of their rendering of forgotten peasant voices, it was the political use to which these renderings were put. There is revealed what Bakhtin referred to as the centripetal force of language, what anthropologists generally refer to as "culture" — that is the "whole" that gives historical import to the part — the national language which places the various voices that one can hear.<sup>18</sup>

Ireland, I would say in my anthropological voice, is not "behind" the voices one can hear there. Ireland is not hidden by these voices. It is revealed in them. Anthropologists cannot take upon themselves the political tasks of deciding whether Ireland is "really" Celtic, Catholic or modern. Even less can they take explicit sides within such native controversies about whether it would have been "better" for the country to follow Synge, Connolly and Joyce in forging a national

spirit than to follow Yeats (Kiberd 1984). In other words the discipline cannot take upon itself the settling of controversies and hypotheses that are its "data," the signs and symptoms which it must use in the construction of its own analyses. What it can do is show how Ireland is, and in fact uniquely so, a place where Celtism is institutionalized in a Catholic context in a modern environment. Anthropologists do not have to decide whether Ireland is or is not a country of dying small farmers, unemployed blue collar workers, or petty bureaucrats. Anthropologists can show how these people are made to deal with each other, in the Dail, and in the imagination of the country and of those who like to think about it. Terms like "computers," "feminists," "mortgages," "Popes," "structural-functionalism" have currency in Irish discourse, whether intellectual or not. They provide a foundation that must shape the building that will rise above it, however baroque its decorations.

*Anthropology in Dialogue*

By maintaining that all thinking is by means of signs, that it takes the form of an inner dialogue structurally similar to and continuous with the outer dialogue of conversations with others, Peirce was able to develop a concept of personal identity that is not confined to the individual organism but that extends as far as his social and cultural consciousness and his circle of society. The individual's consciousness of self and others is a "double consciousness," in which the consciousness of others may precede the consciousness of self, and, in any case, develops with the individual's interactions with others and with the world as selves emerge from these interactions (Singer 1984: 83).

A building is not only the product of an interaction between an architect and the technology and economy that give him the means to express his authorship, and that limit what he can create. A building, is, also, an interaction between itself, as

constructed, and what people will make of it. As Peirce said, and I paraphrase slightly, "the interpretant [of a building, a word, a discourse, an anthropological monograph] is the future memory of this cognition [building, word, discourse, monograph], his future self, or another person he addresses, or a sentence he writes or a child he gets" (CP 7.591 in Singer 1984: 56). A semiotic construction is not simply an object that reveals its determining historical production, it is also a subject that is already failing to contain its indetermining use in future objects.

The point here, for one who is getting ready to embark upon the construction of a text on "Ireland," is that it is not enough to understand the constraints under which one works. One must also understand the constraints under which the work will be put, once it has escaped the writer. After twenty years of deconstruction of the claim to special, "scientific," knowledge, one must know that the signs that mark a work as "anthropological" are "arbitrary," that is, they reveal something else than the signs that would mark the work as, for example, the work of a government agency "selling" Ireland to American companies. Each work can use the other but, to the extent that they cannot "be" the other without ceasing to be themselves, the most they can do is point at the other to help the future reader not be taken by the apparent authority of the text. Neither text is "closer" to the reality of Ireland. Yet both texts construct an Irish experience.

The very arbitrariness of the anthropological means that it should be constructed in such a way as to point to itself as, precisely, "anthropological" and, indeed, "scientific." To deny the possibility of science to an activity that has become aware of itself as a semiosis, a process of signifying the world, is to prove oneself still the prisoner of the old objectivism that assumes that the world reveals itself to he who can free himself from the myths of tradition. It is only when the social conditions that have produced anthropology have ceased to be active that the arbitrariness of the activity will become relevant. Anthropologists do not control anthropology. The ones who fund us, who buy us and read us, do produce us. If we, in fact, want to say something to them that they do not already know, we must catch them by cloaking our statements under the signs that will, hopefully, be recognized as "anthropology," and, in this process, become, unwittingly perhaps, the natives of a discipline that may not really be "our own."

In the mean time, as De Valera said on St. Patrick's Day in 1943 :

Bail é Dhia oraibh agus bail go gcuire Sé ar an obair atá romhainn. Go gcumhdaí Dia sinn agus gur fiú sinn choíche, mar náisiún, na tíolocaí a thugh Pádraig chugainn. Go dtuga an

tUilechumhachtach, A thug slán sinn go dtí seo ón anachain is ón mí-ádh atá ar oiread sin náisiún eile de bharr an chogaidh seo, scáth agus dídean dúinn go dtí an derireadh, agus go ndéanfaí Sé gur fiú sinn cion uasal a dhéanamh sa saol nua atá romhainn.<sup>19</sup>

#### Notes

1. I must acknowledge here the contribution R. P. McDermott, Milton Singer, Larry Taylor and Tom Wilson have made to this paper. I apologize for the many ways in which I have not taken their suggestions into account. "I" am responsible. Very important to such a paper are also the people I met in Ballinteer. For their welcome, my family and I thank them from the bottom of our heart. As they told us many time, I tell them "God bless!"
2. For more on the place of pronouns in semiotic analysis, see some of the other papers in this volume, particularly the discussion by Singer.
3. In my work on rhetoric in American schools, I investigated the relationship between the various tellings of the school and the construction of social relations through the differentiated use of pronouns (1978, 1982, 1983, 1984b). I also showed the theoretical impact of the anthropological use of third person plural pronouns to refer to our objects — as in "the Irish, they ..." (Varenne 1984a, 1986)).
4. The two lines I used as an epigraph to this part of the paper are the last two in a play which some credit with inspiring the imagination if not the actuality of the 1916 insurrection and the subsequent struggles (Thompson 1982[1967]). Ireland's "terrible beauty" was first so described by Yeats also in a poem about the 1916 insurrection:

I write it out in a verse —  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly,  
A terrible beauty is born.  
(Yeats 1962[1921]: 87)

(Note that these quotes are presented less as "proof" of an analysis than as an invocation of ancestors through the recitation of myths).

- 5. For an analysis of the structure of current tourist oriented depictions of Ireland, see Torode (1984).
- 6. As may be seen in the advertisement which the Industrial Development Authority places regularly in European and American newspapers. The I.D.A. is generally considered by the Irish press the most successful agency of the Irish government. Some vocal critics disagree. The I.D.A., however, is very good at advertising its own work. It describes itself in the following manner:

The Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is the organisation responsible for promoting industrial development in Ireland. It encourages the development of manufacturing and international service industries both home and overseas, and administers the financial incentives available to industry in Ireland (from a pamphlet).

An analysis of this rhetoric remains to be conducted.

- 7. Significantly, the historical "facts" (poverty, migration, stagnation, development) are less in dispute than the interpretations, that is, hypotheses as to the "causes" of all these facts in various periods. Only recently has there been serious debates about the "facts" themselves — particularly the relevance of the small farmer and his fate to an understanding of Irish history. As for the Protestants, their place is, to say the least, ambiguous. In the mythical history they are the "foreigners," the "English" not to be considered when discussing "Irishness."
- 8. Irish ethnography was shaken by two *causes célèbres*, books by Messenger (1969) and Scheper-Hughes (1979) which were, we are told, badly received in the respective locales where Messenger and Scheper-Hughes worked. I do not know that the people themselves actually spoke in their own voices either for or against these books. Intellectuals and journalists in Dublin, and anthropologists (American mostly), have, however, spoken extensively and often very harshly (Kane 1982).
- 9. The issue of who is or is not a foreigner in Ireland is of course a profoundly political one. The significant Anglo-Irish about whom I am writing here thought of themselves as "Irish." Most American anthropologists of Ireland

are often classifiable as "Irish-Americans." In Ireland, both groups now find it difficult to make much of this "Irishness."

- 10. Joyce, of course, was Catholic. His position, as one who withdrew from Ireland at the height of the political expression of Irish independence, is ambiguous. His fate, in Ireland, is not so far removed from the fate of the Anglo-Irish.
- 11. Most, in this generation of discoverers of Ireland, were Protestant. They did not however look for Irishness in the Northeastern counties which, even before partition, seem to have been treated as the foreign land which they became. The Gaelic, and the Irish, was Catholic and, in the collective imagination of those who continued to make Ireland, it has remained Catholic. That Ireland could be as much Protestant as it is Catholic is something that cannot, apparently, quite be handled.
- 12. The situation, of course is more complex and the field is excellent hunting ground for those interested in linguistic variation and change (Trudgill 1984; Harris 1985). The issue, however, is not purely linguistic. There is no way anymore to measure "objectively" how many people in Ireland speak Irish as it has become a specifically political issue to which major economic resources are attached. Whatever is spoken in the official *Gaeltacht* (regions where Irish is officially spoken), it cannot be English without the central government losing legitimacy and the local settlements losing significant tax privileges. As for the Irish-English which Synge attempted to record, it was refused legitimacy. What the Irish "really" speak in Ireland, what is usually labelled "Hiberno-Irish," is as much a mystery as ever and no sociolinguistic map of regional and class dialect will affect this. Such descriptions will remain academic curiosities, as long at least as the current culture remains in power.
- 13. Some work has been done at some distance east from the coast, particularly in the North (Bax 1943, Harris 1972, Glassie 1982, Vincent 1983) but the emphasis remains rural. For the best recent review see Wilson (1984). There is almost nothing on Dublin, except for the work by Humphreys (1966) which had little impact on subsequent research. There are signs that things are changing (Curtin and Wilson in press; Kane 1986).
- 14. De Valera's childhood constituency was South East Dublin where the Anglo-Irish and the upwardly mobile Catholics lived and still live. He never tried to get elected there and, at the beginning of his political career, conducted a

search for a likely constituency, a search which took him both to Co. Clare and to the Falls in Belfast where he failed to get elected.

15. The best version of this myth was rendered by de Valera, in a famous radio address on St. Patrick's day 1943. For a discussion of various other versions of this myth, those told by Flaherty and Arensberg and Kimball, see Wilson (1987). It is still the case that a reading of Arensberg and Kimball as a myth is a reading produced by a collective appropriation of the authorial text (Lévi-Strauss 1971: 560). It is not to be assigned to the authors as agent. Arensberg and Kimball knew that they were not writing about all Irish people, or even all Irish farmers. The first generation of users of their text often forgot that. The next generation, of critics mostly, were not dealing anymore with Arensberg and Kimball as such, as they also knew, they were dealing with a tradition of interpretation, a culture which, through their criticisms, they established as a cultural fact.
16. These questions summarize the main goals of the research I conducted in Ballinteer, a southern suburb of Dublin. I spent ten months there with my family. The core data were the result of "participant observation," more or less focussed interviews, tape recordings of conversations and public representations in newspapers, television and governmental publications.
17. I place asterisks before a statement to indicate a statement that is not attested in my fieldwork.
18. I tried to show the yield of this conception of culture in an earlier article on the interpretation of everyday language in settings controlled by America (Varenne 1987).
19. 'God bless you and bless the work that lies before us. May God protect us, and may we always, as a nation, be worthy of the gifts that St. Patrick brought us. May the Almighty, Who has brought us safe until now from the calamity and misfortune that have befallen so many other nations in consequence of this war, grant us shelter and protection to the end and make us worthy to play a noble part in the new world of the future.'

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## Against Coping Across Cultures: The Semiotics of Self-Help Rebuffed

James A. Boon

In *Man's Glassy Essence* Milton Singer poses the self as object and subject of semiotic systems. He thus broadens and advances his life's project of comparing different value complexes — from entrepreneurship to symbolic constructions of personal identity — in India and the West, or more precisely (I wink) greater Madras and greater "Yankee City." With that characteristic combination of profound dignity and equally profound play, both essential to his erudition, Milton Singer has turned Americanized semiotics (from Peirce to Sebeok) and Indianized structures (from traditional to modern) towards each other, thereby cross-illuminating their respective civilizations.

I first had the privilege of playing jester to Milton Singer's philosopher-king when helping him teach "Comparison of Cultures" in Chicago in 1972 (wasn't it?). No experience in the classroom has ever matched it; it was pure pedagogical pleasure. I here resume my previous role of antic side-kick hoping to complement exemplary learning. Milton Singer has charted as no one else the high-epistemological side of comparative studies, Indic/Euro-American semiotics, and philosophies of social form. This paper pokes fun at the low-therapeutic side of some semiotics of self-help advanced in recent popularized accounts of presumed encounters between Anglo-American culture and a range of other "others," including India.

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Two extreme entries in the self-help sweepstakes in anthropology and Indic studies respectively are Colin Turnbull's tepid *The Human Cycle* (1983) and Gita Mehta's scalding *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East* (1981). I open with a cheeky critique criss-crossing these two books. I then turn to an apparently unrelated yet oddly parallel work, a quaint confessional by the long late Charles Hose called *Fifty Years of Romance and Research, or a Jungle Wallah at Large* (1927). My critical tactics include countering subjectivity with subjectivity, fighting froth with froth, undercutting current clichés with platitudes *passés*, and