

LOCA KNOWLEDGE

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FURTHER EVIDENCE
IN INTERPRETING
ANTHROPOLOGY
BY
Clifford G.

BasicBooks
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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Geertz, Clifford.

Local knowledge.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

I. Ethnology—Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Title.

GN346.G43 1983 306 83-70754

ISBN 0-465-04158-2 (cloth)

ISBN 0-465-04162-0 (paper)

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Printed in the United States of America

Designed by Vincent Torre

01 00 99 99...RRD-H.. 17 15 14 20

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"Je demande dans quel genre est cette pièce
ique? il n'y a pas le mot pour rire. Dans
terreur, la commisération et les autres gra
point excitées. Cependant il y a de l'intérêt
ridicule que fasse rire, sans danger que l'
composition dramatique où le sujet sera i
prendra le ton que nous avons dans les u
l'action s'avancera par la perplexité et pa
me semble que ces actions étant les plus
le genre que les aura pour objet doit être
étendu. J'appellerai ce genre *le genre sérieux*

Local Know

Introduction



When, a decade ago, I collected a number of studies under the title, half genuflection, half talismans, I thought I was summing things up; so was I had been saying. But, as a matter of fact, a charge. In anthropology, too, it so turns out. B, and I have spent much of my time since trying are the result; but I am now altogether aware to the origins of a thought-line than they do.

I am more aware, too, than I was then, of a thought-line—a sort of cross between a connection and an exegete's for comparison—has become this is simple history. Ten years ago, the proper should be treated as significative systems, possibly a much more alarming one for social scientists, be, to anything literary or inexact—than it is of the growing recognition that the established phenomena, laws-and-causes social physics, triumphs of prediction, control, and testability that is set in its name. And in part, it is a result of it. The broader currents of modern thought have upon what has been, and in some quarters still surprise.

Of these developments, it is perhaps the last. The penetration of the social sciences by the

as Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, or Ricoeur, such critics as Burke, Frye, Jameson, or Fish, and such all-purpose subversives as Foucault, Habermas, Barthes, or Kuhn makes any simple return to a technological conception of those sciences highly improbable. Of course, the turning away from such a conception is not completely new—Weber's name has always to be called up here, and Freud's and Collingwood's as well. But the sweep of it is. Caught up in some of the more shaking originalities of the twentieth century, the study of society seems on the way to becoming seriously irregular.

It is certainly becoming more pluralistic. Though those with what they take to be one big idea are still among us, calls for "a general theory" of just about anything social sound increasingly hollow, and claims to have one megalomaniac. Whether this is because it is too soon to hope for unified science or too late to believe in it is, I suppose, debatable. But it has never seemed further away, harder to imagine, or less certainly desirable than it does right now. The Sociology is not About to Begin, as Talcott Parsons once half-facetiously announced. It is scattering into frameworks.

As frameworks are the very stuff of cultural anthropology, which is mostly engaged in trying to determine what this people or that take to be the point of what they are doing, all this is very congenial to it. Even in its most universalist moods—evolutionary, diffusionist, functionalist, most recently structuralist or sociobiological—it has always had a keen sense of the dependence of what is seen upon where it is seen from and what it is seen with. To an ethnographer, sorting through the machinery of distant ideas, the shapes of knowledge are always ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements. One may veil this fact with ecumenical rhetoric or blur it with strenuous theory, but one cannot really make it go away.

Long one of the most homespun of disciplines, hostile to anything smacking of intellectual pretension and unnaturally proud of an outdoorsman image, anthropology has turned out, oddly enough, to have been preadapted to some of the most advanced varieties of modern opinion. The contextualist, antiformalist, relativizing tendencies of the bulk of that opinion, its turn toward examining the ways in which the world is talked about—depicted, charted, represented—rather than the way it intrinsically is, have been rather easily absorbed by adventurer scholars used to dealing with strange perceptions and stranger stories. They have, wonder of wonders, been speaking Wittgenstein all along. Contrariwise, anthropology, once read

mostly for amusement, curiosity, or moral broinations, for administrative convenience, has s of speculative debate. Since Evans-Pritchard a cles and Lévi-Strauss and his knowing *bricoleur* of, as I put it below, "the way we think now of anthropological materials, anthropological cal ideas.

My own work, insofar as it is more than archology much underrated), represents an effort to s of this discussion. All the essays below are ed God knows, misinformed) reflections on gene philosophers might address from more conject more textual ones, or historians from more in nature of social theory, the moral interplay o practical difficulties in seeing things as others status of common sense, the revelatory power tion of authority, the clattering variousness of the relationship between what people take as justice are treated, one after the other, in an stand how it is we understand understanding.

This enterprise, "the understanding of unde ally referred to as hermeneutics, and in that s enough under such a rubric, particularly if t. But one will not find very much in the way of of interpretation" (to give the dictionary defu lows, for I do not believe that what "herme into a para-science, as epistemology was, and t ciples in the world already. What one will fu pretations of something, anthropologizing fo be some of the broader implications of those in cycle of terms—symbol, meaning, concep ture—designed to suggest there is system in variously aimed inquiries are driven by a sel go about constructing an account of the imag

But if the view is settled, the way to bring make it work surely is not. The stuttering qual along these lines but of interpretive social sc (as is often enough suggested by those who l

desire to disguise evasion as some new form of depth or to turn one's back on the claims of reason. It is a result of not knowing, in so uncertain an undertaking, quite where to begin, or, having anyhow begun, which way to move. Argument grows oblique, and language with it, because the more orderly and straightforward a particular course looks the more it seems ill-advised.

To turn from trying to explain social phenomena by weaving them into grand textures of cause and effect to trying to explain them by placing them in local frames of awareness is to exchange a set of well-charted difficulties for a set of largely uncharted ones. Dispassion, generality, and empirical grounding are earmarks of any science worth the name, as is logical force. Those who take the determinative approach seek these elusive virtues by positing a radical distinction between description and evaluation and then confining themselves to the descriptive side of it; but those who take the hermeneutic, denying the distinction is radical or finding themselves somehow astride it, are barred from so brisk a strategy. If, as I have, you construct accounts of how somebody or other—Moroccan poets, Elizabethan politicians, Balinese peasants, or American lawyers—glosses experience and then draw from those accounts of those glosses some conclusions about expression, power, identity, or justice, you feel at each stage fairly well away from the standard styles of demonstration. One makes detours, goes by side roads, as I quote Wittgenstein below; one sees the straight highway before one, "but of course . . . cannot use it, because it is permanently closed."

For making detours and going by sideroads, nothing is more convenient than the essay form. One can take off in almost any direction, certain that if the thing does not work out one can turn back and start over in some other with only moderate cost in time and disappointment. Midcourse corrections are rather easy, for one does not have a hundred pages of previous argument to sustain, as one does in a monograph or a treatise. Wanderings into yet smaller sideroads and wider detours does little harm, for progress is not expected to be relentlessly forward anyway, but winding and improvisational, coming out where it comes out. And when there is nothing more to say on the subject at the moment, or perhaps altogether, the matter can simply be dropped. "Works are not finished," as Valéry said, "they are abandoned."

Another advantage of the essay form is that it is very adaptable to occasions. The ability to sustain a coherent line of thought through a flurry of wildly assorted invitations, to talk here, to contribute there, to honor some-

one's memory or celebrate someone's career in a journal or that organization, or simply to respond to oneself or to oneself asked of others, is, though rarely mentioned, a staple of contemporary scholarly life. One can avoid measuring out one's life with coffee spoons, but one must also, if one is not to become a leech, know when to get over again, the anthropological number ("vary"; "it takes all kinds to make a world") to build, particular response by particular response, particular analysis. All the essays below are such particular responses, connected and, it so happens, extraneous, invited and, in a perseverant attempt to push forward, or to complete a program. Whatever these various audiences—philosophers, sociologists, or the miscellaneous members of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (to which two of them were dressed)—asked for, what they got was "in my way."

The opening essay, "Blurred Genres," was written originally enough, as a lecture to the Humanities Department at Reed. The charge was to say something about the relation of "The Humanities" and "The Sciences." Anthropologists, considered amphibious between the two, being asked to address, and to which (full disclosure—maxim—if you don't know the answer, disclose it) I responded by attempting to cast doubt upon the force of the distinction. Grand rubrics like "Natural Science," "Physical Science," and "The Humanities" have their uses, but in sorting scholars into cliques and professionalizing and dignifying broad traditions of intellectual style, the work conducted under any one of them does not speak to one another and some genuine differences are conducted under the others. There is, so far as anything goes, no inertia in a novel means something; and inertia in a novel means something. They are taken to be a borders-and-territories map, or, worse, a Linnaean catalogue into which they merely block from view what is really going on. Men and women are thinking about things and things are being thought, and they are thinking.

So far as the social sciences are concerned, any attempt to define them in some essence-and-accidents, natural-kind way and locate them at some definite latitude and longitude in scholarly space is bound to fail as soon as one looks from labels to cases. No one can put what Lévi-Strauss does together with what B. F. Skinner does in anything but the most vacuous of categories. In "Blurred Genres," I argue, first, that this seemingly anomalous state of affairs has become the natural condition of things and, second, that it is leading to significant realignments in scholarly affinities—who borrows what from whom. Most particularly, it has brought it about that a growing number of people trying to understand insurrections, hospitals, or why it is that jokes are prized have turned to linguistics, aesthetics, cultural history, law, or literary criticism for illumination rather than, as they used to do, to mechanics or physiology. Whether this is making the social sciences less scientific or humanistic study more so (or, as I believe, altering our view, never very stable anyway, of what counts as science) is not altogether clear and perhaps not altogether important. But that it is changing the character of both is clear and important—and discomposing.

It is discomposing not only because who knows where it all will end, but because as the idiom of social explanation, its inflections and its imagery, changes, our sense of what constitutes such explanation, why we want it, and how it relates to other sorts of things we value changes as well. It is not just theory or method or subject matter that alters, but the whole point of the enterprise.

The second essay, "Found in Translation," originally delivered to the Lionel Trilling Memorial Seminar at Columbia University, seeks to make this proposition a bit more concrete by comparing the sort of thing an ethnographer of my stripe does with the sort of thing a critic of Trilling's does and finding them not all that different. Putting Balinese representations of how things stand in the world into interpretive tension with our own, as a kind of commentary on them, and assessing the significance for practical conduct of literary portrayals—Austen's or Hardy's or Faulkner's—of what life is like, are not just cognate activities. They are the same activity differently pursued.

I called this activity, for purposes rather broader than those immediate to the essay, "the social history of the moral imagination," meaning by that the tracing out of the way in which our sense of ourselves and others—ourselves amidst others—is affected not only by our traffic with our own cultural forms but to a significant extent by the characterization of

forms not immediately ours by anthropologists, who make them, reworked and redirected, early in the modern world, where very little that someone can find something out about is immersed in meta-commentary (what Trilling thinks about what the Balinese think, and what our consciousness is shaped at least as much by to others, somewhere else in the lifeline of the here, where we are, now to us. The instability lives (to say nothing of what it does to our epiphanies, I think, for much of the sense of once that seems to haunt us, as well as for our we are in any position, or can somehow get other ways of life at all. And it is the claim that links, whatever their differences in view of ing, trying to find out how to talk to content and those such as myself, trying to find out how native constructions—widow burnings and t are even further away from in assumption and Austen.

I referred to this conception of what culture they can do for us as "translation"—a trope Evans-Pritchard, at least—and, invoking a link that though obviously much is lost in this, troubling, is found. But just what it involves, left unexamined. In "From the Native's Point Trilling had in fact originally reacted, I did particularity, at least for anthropology.

Or at least for my own anthropology. The dress to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences giving me an award for my work, I thought sort of work it was. The publication of *Mali: Sense of the Term* several years before had found that anthropologists obtained their results usually called "empathy," to "get inside the skin" how widely this was ever believed ("The moon the United States," Bernard DeVoto growled *Powder Dry* came out, "the less we believe w

but with the *Diary* and its revelation of a man so deeply self-engrossed as to suggest he might have been better employed as a romantic poet, the question of how they did obtain them (as Malinowski and, DeVoto notwithstanding, Mead as well as clearly did) demanded to be addressed in less subjectivist terms.

The peoples I have worked among—various sorts of Moroccans and Indonesians; Muslims, Hindus, and one disguised as the other—can hardly be called savages by anybody's definition; but their approach to things differs enough from one another to put the issue into general focus. To demonstrate this, I first described, rather telegraphically, the concepts of selfhood I had found current in central Java, south Bali, and mid-Atlas Morocco and, even more telegraphically, the broader frames of thought and action in which those conceptions flourished. I then argued that what the anthropologist has to do to bring this kind of thing off is tack between the two sorts of descriptions—between increasingly fine-comb observations (of how Javanese distinguish feelings, Balinese name children, Moroccans refer to acquaintances) and increasingly synoptic characterizations (“quietism,” “dramatism,” “contextualism”)—in such a way that, held in the mind together, they present a credible, fleshed-out picture of a human form of life. “Translation,” here, is not a simple recasting of others' ways of putting things in terms of our own ways of putting them (that is the kind in which things get lost), but displaying the logic of their ways of putting them in the locutions of ours; a conception which again brings it rather closer to what a critic does to illumine a poem than what an astronomer does to account for a star.

However that may be, it is, this catching of “their” views in “our” vocabularies, one of those things like riding a bicycle that is easier done than said. And in the following two essays I attempt to do a bit of it, in a rather more organized way, for what under some descriptions, though not under mine, would be the antipodal extremes of culture: common sense and art.

Indeed, for many people and most especially for its champions, common sense is not cultural at all, but the simple truth of things artlessly apprehended; plain fact acknowledged by plain men. Thus, I began “Common Sense as a Cultural System,” first given as a John Dewey Lecture at Antioch College in the middle of a sixties uprising, by arguing, contrary to this (commonsensical) idea, that common sense was a cultural system; a loosely connected body of belief and judgment, rather than just what anybody properly put together cannot help but think. There may be things that anybody prop-

erly put together cannot help but think—that is, thinkable. And there certainly are some—that could be called disagreeable—that, though Wordsworth gave us a name for, the realist thugs shouted *viva la muerte* at Unimurci. Common sense has more to do with how to deal with things than with the mere recognition of them. Common sense is not a fortunate faculty, like perfect pitch or a good mind, like piety or legalism. And like piety or legalism (or, I suppose, logic), it both differs from one place to the next and has a characteristic form.

The rest of the essay then seeks to illustrate a few examples taken from the anthropological literature (from Edgerton on hermaphroditism) to display some features seen as distinctive of common sense: a distrust of subtlety, exaltation of the practical, and a certain oscillation between looking particularly at the particular and at the whole. The oscillation between looking particularly at the particular and at the whole is the attitude that permeates them. It is a kind of *modus vivendi* of analysis. Only here there is an attempt to make an issue: the construction of anthropological categories, their reference, and the conditions of their use.

When one turns to art these issues become, in a sense, more acute, for the debate over whether it is a “non-Western” or “pre-Modern” context has become a familiar one. Similar debates concerning “religion,” “science,” and “politics” have been peculiarly unrelenting. It has also been peculiarly unrelenting. Ever you want to cull a cave wall crowded with paintings of fixed animals, a temple tower shaped to a phallic form, a graphic scroll, or a tattooed face, you still have to ask, with, as well as perhaps the sense that to add knowledge to the day Book would be to spoil the series. The question of whether anything else is universal; it is whether one can find, in carving, New Guinea palm-leaf pointing, quattuorcento Moreccan versifying in such a way as to cause a light on one another.

The essay in which I tried to do exactly this, “Common Sense and Art,” was delivered at Johns Hopkins University as part of a primary symposium—Maurice Mauflebaum, Paul F. Tompkins, Umberto Eco, Thomas Sebeok, and Roman Jakobson.

(the occasion being a commemoration of Charles Peirce, whom the University had at one time fired), with the result that I was almost as much concerned with how not to talk about such things—in terms of some sort of mechanical formalism—as I was with developing my own approach. In particular, the identification of semiotics, in the general sense of the science of signs, with structuralism seemed to me important to resist. (Structuralism, as a sort of high-tech rationalism, seems to me important to resist in general.) And so I employed my cases—Robert Faris Thompson's analysis of Yoruba line, Anthony Forge's of Abelam color, Michael Baxandall's of Renaissance composition, and my own of Moroccan rhetoric—to suggest that the social contextualization of such "signifiers" is a more useful way to comprehend how they signify, and what, than is forcing them into schematic paradigms or stripping them down to abstract rule systems that supposedly "generate" them. What enables us to talk about them usefully together is that they all inscribe a communal sensibility, present locally to locals a local turn of mind.

Like common sense or religion or law or even, though it is, given our predilections, a touchier matter, science—art is neither some transcendent phenomenon variously disguised in different cultures nor a notion so thoroughly culture-bound as to be useless beyond Europe. Not only Sweeney's Law ("I gotta use words when I talk to ya") but the simple fact that thinking of Noh plays and operas, or *Shakuko* and *L'Otseu de feu*, in relation to one another seems a more profitable thing to do than to think of any of them in relation to canoe building or the *Code Civil* (though, remembering Zen and motorcycle maintenance, one ought not to be too sure) suggest that radical culturalism will get us nowhere. And the impossibility of collapsing these so very different things into one another at any but the most abstract, and vacuous, levels—"objects of beauty," "affective presences," "expressive forms"—suggests that a universalist tack is hardly more promising. The reshaping of categories (ours and other people's—think of "taboo") so that they can reach beyond the contexts in which they originally arose and took their meaning so as to locate affinities and mark differences is a great part of what "translation" comes to in anthropology. It is—think of what it has done to "family," "caste," "market," or "state"—a great part of what anthropology comes to.

The following essay, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma," written for a volume honoring the theoretical sociologist Edward Shils, focuses on one such usefully tortured category—along with "alienation," "ego," "anomie," and,

Introduction

of course, "culture," among the most useful social science—namely, "charisma." Original theological term having to do with a God-given odes; later it was adapted by Max Weber as a type of leadership grown all too familiar in our ever, an excessive currency has obscured its general edge off it almost altogether, transforming it for celebrity, popularity, glamour, or sex appeal to restore both the genealogy and the edge by in more or less Protestant late-Tudor England, late-Majapahit Java, and more or less Muslim

The juxtaposition of Elizabeth's tours through representation of Chastity, Peace, or Safety at S through his as the incarnation of the Sun and Earth-Circle, and Malay Hasan's expeditions expression of Divine Will seeks, like the similar in the earlier essays, to attain what generality trusts rather than isolating regularities or abstr that informs, or is supposed to, in this sort of upon the capacity of theoretical ideas to set up value depends. And it is this kind of analogy Virgin Queen, of a God King, and of a Com the concept of charisma, training our attention enables us to construct.

All this is perhaps acceptable enough for tr the symbolics of domination are so elaborate tending the comparison to modern states, as anecdotal conclusion, strains the analogy beyond more difficult question. One may doubt that h pletely demystified in such states, even that they issue that is raised by considering the matter a parative background—how far a mode of analysis long ago or far away can be applied to ourse The DeVoto Problem is all too real: what self-parody, plus a certain amount of ideological from anthropological discussions of modern u

In the final two essays—or, more accurately, mini-treatise—I turn to this problem. "The Wu

nally given as a bicentennial address to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences under the general theme "Unity and Diversity: The Life of the Mind," as a sort of dialectical counterpoint to one given by the artificial intelligence Herbert Simon. Taking the charge to heart this time, and thinking about what Simon would be likely to say, I distinguished between two reasonably different approaches to the study of human "thought" currently in vogue: a unific one, which conceives of it as a psychological process, person-bounded and law governed, and a pluralistic one, which conceives of it as a collective product, culturally coded and historically constructed—thought in the head, thought in the world. Rather than trying to adjudicate between them (in their radical forms—Chomsky and Whorf—neither seems especially plausible), I first traced the tension between them as it developed in anthropology—"primitive thought," "conceptual relativism," and all that—to become a driving, and often enough a distorting, force in ethnological theory. Then, turning again to notions of interpretation, translation, disarrayed genres, and analogic comparison, I sought to show that the enormous diversity of modern thought as we in fact find it around us in every form from poems to equations must be acknowledged if we are to understand anything at all about the Life of the Mind, and that this can be accomplished without prejudice to the idea that human thinking has its own constraints and its own constancies.

To do this, to produce a description of modern thought that can account for the fact that such assorted enterprises as herpetology, kinship theory, fiction writing, psychoanalysis, differential topology, fluid dynamics, iconology, and econometrics can form for us any category at all, it is necessary to see them as social activities in a social world. The various disciplines and quasi-disciplines that make up the arts and sciences are, for those caught up in them, far more than a set of technical tasks and vocational obligations; they are cultural frames in terms of which attitudes are formed and lives conducted. Physics and haruspicy, sculpture and scarification are alike at least in this: for their practitioners they support particular modes of engagement with life, and for the rest of us they illustrate them. Where they differ is that, though we know at least something by now about the sorts of engagements haruspicy and scarification tend to support, physics and sculpture, and all the other grand departments of the Life of the Mind, remain for the most part ethnographically opaque, mere recognized ways of doing recognizable things.

The remainder of the essay then consists of some reflections on the spec-

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ters ("subjectivism," "idealism," "relativism," conjure up to scare us away from an ethnographic thought; on some methods already at work in anthropology which such an approach, dismissing the specter of such an approach for the construction of a more liberal education than the Athenian gentleman could offer, still predominates. But it is devoted to a particular Life of the Mind subject, a particular issue within that subject, namely the relation of a rule applying in adjudicative processes, that the rule as *choses sociales*—is empirically tried out.

These essays, collectively titled "Local Knowledge: A Comparative Perspective," were given as lectures at the Yale Law School, and they are the only essays in this volume that have not been previously published. For something properly anthropological that would be of interest to apprentice lawyers, law teachers, and perhaps even to discuss a topic central to both Anglo-American and common law adjudication, the is/ought, what is/ought to be, and to trace its half-parallels in three other legal traditions encountered in the course of my own research in the Malayo-Indonesian. The notion was, first, to compare the ways in which it appears in the contemporary United States; second, to trace the different forms it takes in these other traditions; third, to offer a fairly thoroughgoing reformulation of it; and fourth, to discuss about the implications of such differences for the study of adjudication in a world where, no longer confined to the West, contrasting legal traditions are being forced into a new sort of confrontation.

Accordingly, the lectures describe, once again, the tension between looking at things in law as they are and them in anthropologists' terms; between modern legal systems and classical Middle Eastern and Asian ones; between the idea of normative ideas and law as a set of decision-making sensibilities and instant cases; between legal systems and legal traditions as contending ideas; and finally, the small imaginings of local knowledge and the

intent. It all looks almost experimental: an effort to assay the fact-law formula by seeing what remains of it after it has been rung through the changes of headlong comparative analysis. That much does and much does not is hardly surprising; that is how all such experiments without metrics come out. But what does remain (an accommodation of a language of general coherence and a language of practical consequence) and what does not (a social-echo view of legal process) are of perhaps a bit more interest.

In the last analysis, then, as in the first, the interpretive study of culture represents an attempt to come to terms with the diversity of the ways human beings construct their lives in the act of leading them. In the more standard sorts of science the trick is to steer between what statisticians call type-one and type-two errors—accepting hypotheses one would be better advised to reject and rejecting ones one would be wiser to accept; here it is to steer between overinterpretation and underinterpretation, reading more into things than reason permits and less into them than it demands. Where the first sort of mistake, telling stories about people only a professor can believe, has been much noted and more than a bit exaggerated, the second, reducing people to ordinary chaps out, like the rest of us, for money, sex, status, and power, never mind a few peculiar ideas that don't mean much anyway when push comes to shove, has been much less so. But the one is as mischievous as the other. We are surrounded (and we are surrounded) neither by Martians nor by less well got-up editions of ourselves; a proposition that holds no matter what "we"—American ethnographers, Moroccan judges, Javanese metaphysicians, or Balinese dancers—we start from.

To see ourselves as others see us can be eye-opening. To see others as sharing a nature with ourselves is the merest decency. But it is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others, as a local example of the forms human life has locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds, that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance a sham, comes. If interpretive anthropology has any general office in the world it is to keep reteaching this fugitive truth.

PART

Chapter I / Blurred

The Refiguration

Social Thought



I

A number of things, I think, are true. One is the enormous amount of genre mixing in intellectual life, such blurring of kinds, continuing apace. Another is that artists have turned away from a laws and instances toward a cases and interpretations one, looking for connections between planets and pendulums and more for analogies between anthems and swords. Yet another is that the sciences are coming to play the kind of role in culture that analogies drawn from the crafts and trades play in physical understanding. Further, I not only think they are true together, and it is the culture that is my subject: the refiguration of social thought.

This genre blurring is more than just a matter of the word and Nixon turning up as characters in novels and movies described as though a gothic romance.

philosophical inquiries looking like literary criticism (think of Stanley Cavell on Beckett or Thoreau, Sartre on Flaubert), scientific discussions looking like belles lettres *morceaux* (Lewis Thomas, Loren Eiseley), baroque fantasies presented as deadpan empirical observations (Borges, Barthelme), histories that consist of equations and tables or law court testimony (Fogel and Engerman, *Le Roi Ladurie*), documentaries that read like true confessions (Mailer), parables posing as ethnographies (Castenada), theoretical treatises set out as travelogues (Lévi-Strauss), ideological arguments cast as historiographical inquiries (Edward Said), epistemological studies constructed like political tracts (Paul Feyerabend), methodological polemics got up as personal memoirs (James Watson). Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, that impossible object made of poetry and fiction, footnotes and images from the clinic, seems very much of the time; one waits only for quantum theory in verse or biography in algebra.

Of course, to a certain extent this sort of thing has always gone on—Lucretius, Mandeville, and Erasmus Darwin all made their theories rhyme. But the present jumbling of varieties of discourse has grown to the point where it is becoming difficult either to label authors (What is Foucault—historian, philosopher, political theorist? What Thomas Kuhn—historian, philosopher, sociologist of knowledge?) or to classify works (What is George Steiner's *After Babel*—linguistics, criticism, culture history? What William S. Burroughs's *On Being Blue*—treatise, causerie, apologetic?). And thus it is more than a matter of odd sports and occasional curiosities, or of the admitted fact that the innovative is, by definition, hard to categorize. It is a phenomenon general enough and distinctive enough to suggest that what we are seeing is not just another redrawing of the cultural map—the moving of a few disputed borders, the marking of some more picturesque mountain lakes—but an alteration of the principles of mapping. Something is happening to the way we think about the way we think.

We need not accept hermetic views of *écriture* as so many signs signing signs, or give ourselves so wholly to the pleasure of the text that its meaning disappears into our responses, to see that there has come into our view of what we read and what we write a distinctly democratical temper. The properties connecting texts with one another, that put them, ontologically anyway, on the same level, are coming to seem as important in characterizing them as those dividing them; and rather than face an array of natural kinds, fixed types divided by sharp qualitative differences, we more and more see ourselves surrounded by a vast, almost continuous field of vari-

ously intended and diversely constructed works. They are not only, but also, relationally, and as our purposes prompt us, to have conventions of interpretation: we have not only, but also, enough jerry-built—to accommodate a situation centered, and ineradicably unidirectional.

So far as the social sciences are concerned, the oft-lamented lack of character no longer sets a more difficult task than it always has been to regard the social sciences, awaiting only time and aid from more than themselves, or us ignorant and pretentious usurpers of their titles, promising certainties where none can be. It is a distinctive enterprise, a third culture between the first and second, that is all to the good: freed from having to be anything, because nobody else is, individuals (thinking of behavioral or human or cultural) scientists have to work in terms of its necessities rather than its obligations. To what they ought or ought not to be doing. It is what I said about anthropology—that it's an intelligence that only seems more true now than when he said it was anthropology. Born uniform, the social sciences I have been describing becomes general.

It has thus dawned on social scientists that they are not to be a physicist or closet humanists or to invent some new object as the object of their investigations. Instead they are to be cautious, trying to discover order in collective life where there were doing was connected to related enterprises. Some of it done; and many of them have taken it as a tie—or, if that word frightens, conjuring up in their ordinary humbugs, and Teutonic professors, an "intellectual task. Given the new genre dispersion, many have taken structuralism, neo-positivism, neo-Marxism, macro-macro system building, and that curious sense and common nonsense, sociobiology. But the study of social life as organized in terms of symbols (as in *Mythologie, Darstellungen . . .* the terminology varies from *part, signification, Bedeutung . . .*) we must grasp its organization and formulate its principles, has become a task. The woods are full of eager interpreters.

Interpretive explanation—and it is a form of explanation, not just exalted glossography—trains its attention on what institutions, actions, images, utterances, events, customs, all the usual objects of social-scientific interest, mean to those whose institutions, actions, customs, and so on they are. As a result, it issues not in laws like Boyle's, or forces like Volta's, or mechanisms like Darwin's, but in constructions like Burckhardt's, Weber's, or Freud's: systematic unpuckings of the conceptual world in which *bourgeois*, Calvinists, or paranoids live.

The manner of these constructions itself varies: Burckhardt portrays, Weber models, Freud diagnoses. But they all represent attempts to formulate how this people or that, this period or that, this person or that makes sense to itself and, understanding that, what we understand about social order, historical change, or psychic functioning in general. Inquiry is directed toward cases or sets of cases, and toward the particular features that mark them off; but its aims are as far-reaching as those of mechanics or physiology: to distinguish the materials of human experience.

With such aims and such a manner of pursuing them come as well some novelties in analytical rhetoric, the tropes and imageries of explanation. Because theory, scientific or otherwise, moves mainly by analogy, a "seeing-as" comprehension of the less intelligible by the more (the earth is a magnet, the heart is a pump, light is a wave, the brain is a computer, and space is a balloon), when its course shifts, the conceits in which it expresses itself shift with it. In the earlier stages of the natural sciences, before the analogies became so heavily intramural—and in those (cybernetics, neurology) in which they still have not—it has been the world of the crafts and, later, of industry that have for the most part provided the well-understood realities (well-understood because, *certum quod factum*, as Vico said, man had made them) with which the ill-understood ones (ill-understood because he had not) could be brought into the circle of the known. Science owes more to the steam engine than the steam engine owes to science; without the dyer's art there would be no chemistry; metallurgy is mining theorized. In the social sciences, or at least in those that have abandoned a reductionist conception of what they are about, the analogies are coming more and more from the contrivances of cultural performance than from those of physical manipulation—from theater, painting, grammar, literature, law, play. What the lever did for physics, the chess move promises to do for sociology.

Promises are not always kept, of course, and when they are, they often turn out to have been threats: but the casting of social theory in terms more

familiar to gamblers and aestheticians than clearly well under way. The recourse to the analogies in the social sciences is at once evasive and bold. The rise of "the interpretive turn" is a revised style of discourse in social reasoning are changing and society is less and more a machine or a quasi-organism and more a drama, or a behavioral text.

II

All this fiddling around with the proprieties of explanation represents, of course, a radical imagination, propelling it in directions both like and unlike all such changes in fashions of the mind. To be obscure and illusive as it is to be precise and to be elaborate chatter or the higher nonsense have to be developed; and as so much more of the style is to be drawn from the humanities than from the sciences, the new styles have to come from humanists and their apologists, not from scientists and theirs. That humanists, after years of being treated as technologists or interlopers, are ill equipped to make an understatement.

Social scientists, having just freed themselves from dreams of social physics—covering laws, equilibrium, and all that—are hardly any better equipped to make sense of the muddling of vocational identities could not be. If they are going to develop systems of analysis as following a rule, constructing a representation, or forming an intention are going to play certain roles, or conceptions as isolating a cause, determining a function, or defining a function—they are going to need people who are more at home among such notions than the interdisciplinary brotherhood that is needed, not to mention the discipline. It is recognition on all sides that the line

into intellectual communities, or (what is the same thing) sorting them out into different ones, are these days running at some highly eccentric angles.

The point at which the reflections of humanists on the practices of social scientists seems most urgent is with respect to the deployment in social analysis of models drawn from humanist domains—that “wary reasoning from analogy,” as Locke called it, that “leads us often into the discovery of truths and useful productions, which would otherwise lie concealed.” (Locke was talking about rubbing two sticks together to produce fire and the atomio-friction theory of heat, though business partnership and the social contract would have served him as well.) Keeping the reasoning wary, thus useful, thus true, is, as we say, the name of the game.

The game analogy is both increasingly popular in contemporary social theory and increasingly in need of critical examination. The impetus for seeing one or another sort of social behavior as one or another sort of game has come from a number of sources (not excluding, perhaps, the prominence of spectator sports in mass society). But the most important are Wittgenstein's conception of forms of life as language games, Huizinga's ludic view of culture, and the new strategies of von Neumann's and Morgenstern's *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*. From Wittgenstein has come the notion of intentional action as “following a rule”; from Huizinga, of play as the paradigm form of collective life; from von Neumann and Morgenstern, of social behavior as a reciprocative maneuvering toward distributive payoffs. Taken together they conduce to a nervous and nervous-making style of interpretation in the social sciences that mixes a strong sense of the formal orderliness of things with an equally strong sense of the radical arbitrariness of that order: chessboard inevitability that could as well have been otherwise.

The writings of Erving Goffman—perhaps the most celebrated American sociologist right now, and certainly the most ingenious—rest, for example, almost entirely on the game analogy. (Goffman also employs the language of the stage quite extensively, but as his view of the theater is that it is an oddly mannered kind of interaction game—ping-pong in masks—his work is not, at base, really dramaturgical.) Goffman applies game imagery to just about everything he can lay his hands on, which, as he is no respecter of property rights, is a very great deal. The to-and-fro of lies, meta-lies, unbelievable truths, threats, tortures, bribes, and blackmail that comprises the world of espionage is construed as an “expression game”; a carnival of deceptions rather like life in general, because, in a phrase that could have come

from Conrad or Le Carré, “agents [are] a little a little like agents.” Etiquette, diplomacy, crib seduction, and the everyday “realm of bantering formation games”—many structures of play, signals, information states, gambles, and out “gameworthy”—those willing and able “thing” prosper.

What goes on in a psychiatric hospital, or a boarding school in Goffman's work, is a “r” where the staff holds most of the face cards tête-à-tête, a jury deliberation, “a task jointly p close to one another,” a couple dancing, love all face-to-face encounters—are games in which comic ought to know, any accurately improper thin sleeve of immediate reality.” Social con ship, sex roles, religious rites, status ranking, and acceptance get the same treatment. Life is ju

Or, perhaps better, as Damon Runyon once against. For the image of society that emerges from that of the swarm of scholars who in depend on him, is of an unbroken stream of g disguises, conspiracies, and outright impostu tions of individuals struggle—sometimes clever play enigmatical games whose structure is clear man's is a radically unromantic vision of thing and one that sits rather poorly with tradition is no less powerful for that. Nor, with its un ethic, is it all that inhumane.

However that may be, not all gamelike conu so grim, and some are positively frolicsome. V view that human beings are less driven by fo that the rules are such as to suggest strategi to inspire actions, and the actions are such a *le sport*. As literal games—baseball or poker o verses of meaning, in which some things can b can't castle in dominoes), so too do the analog ment, or sexual courtship (you can't mutiny a collection of games means seeing it as a gra

ventions and appropriate procedures—light, airless worlds of move and countermove, *life en règle*: "I wonder," Prince Metemich is supposed to have said when an aide whispered into his ear at a royal ball that the czar of all the Russians was dead, "I wonder what his motive could have been."

The game analogy is not a view of things that is likely to commend itself to humanists, who like to think of people not as obeying the rules and angling for advantage but as acting freely and realizing their finer capacities. But that it seems to explain a great deal about a great many aspects of modern life, and in many ways to catch its tone, is hardly deniable. ("If you can't stand the Machiavellianism," as a recent *New Yorker* cartoon said, "get out of the cabal.") Thus if the game analogy is to be countered it cannot be by mere disdain, refusing to look through the telescope, or by passionate restatements of hallowed truths, quoting scripture against the sun. It is necessary to get down to the details of the matter, to examine the studies and to critique the interpretations—whether Goffman's of crime as character gambling, Harold Garfinkel's of sex change as identity play, Gregory Bateson's of schizophrenia as rule confusion, or my own of the complicated goings-on in a mideastern bazaar as an information contest. As social theory turns from propulsive metaphors (the language of pistons) toward ludic ones (the language of passives), the humanities are connected to its arguments not in the fashion of skeptical bystanders but, as the source of its imagery, chargeable accomplices.

III

The drama analogy for social life has of course been around in a casual sort of way—all the world's a stage and we but poor players who strut and so on—for a very long time. And terms from the stage, most notably "role," have been staples of sociological discourse since at least the 1930s. What is relatively new—new, not unprecedented—are two things. First, the full weight of the analogy is coming to be applied extensively and systematically, rather than being deployed piecemeal fashion—a few allusions here, a few tropes there. And second, it is coming to be applied less in the depreciatory "mere show," masks and mummery mode that has tended to characterize its general use, and more in a constructional, genuinely dra-

maturgical one—making, not faking, as the a has put it.

The two developments are linked, of course. What theater is—that is, poiesis—implies that the social sciences needs to involve more than our entrances and exits, we all play parts, and may or may not be a Barnum and Bailey who be walking shadows, but to take the drama behind such familiar ironies to the expressive life seem anything at all. The trouble with glory—is that they connect what they compare with theater's idiom, some social science into the rather tangled coils of its aesthetic.

Such a more thoroughgoing exploitation of theory—as an analogy, not an incidental resource in the humanities not altogether common there has been the so-called ritual theory of diverse figures as Jane Harrison, Francis Festina Artaud. On the other, there is the sym as he calls it—of the American literary theorist Burke, whose influence is, in the United States and—because almost no one actually uses his reductions, ratios, and so on—elusive. The two in rather opposite directions: the ritual theory of theater and religion—drama as communion, the action theory toward those of theater and the platform as stage. And this leaves the balance in the theater is like what in the agora—his ideology are histrionic is obvious enough, as it are. But just what that means is a good

Probably the foremost proponent of the ritual sciences right now is Victor Turner. A re-formed anthropologist, Turner, in a remark on the ceremonial life of a Central African tribe of "social drama" as a regenerative process of "social gaming" as strategic interaction, has a number of able researchers us to produce a distinct school.

For Turner, social dramas occur "on all levels of social organization from state to family." They arise out of conflict situations—a village falls into factions, a husband beats a wife, a region rises against the state—and proceed to their denouements through publicly performed conventionalized behavior. As the conflict swells to crisis and the excited fluidity of heightened emotion, where people feel at once more enclosed in a common mood and loosened from their social moorings, ritualized forms of authority—litigation, feud, sacrifice, prayer—are invoked to contain it and render it orderly. If they succeed, the breach is healed and the status quo, or something resembling it, is restored; if they do not, it is accepted as incapable of remedy and things fall apart into various sorts of unhappy endings: migrations, divorces, or murders in the cathedral. With differing degrees of strictness and detail, Turner and his followers have applied this schema to tribal passage rites, curing ceremonies, and judicial processes; to Mexican insurrections, Icelandic sagas, and Thomas Becket's difficulties with Henry II; to picturesque narrative, millenarian movements, Caribbean carnivals, and Indian peyote hunts; and to the political upheaval of the sixties. A form for all seasons.

This hospitableness in the face of cases is at once the major strength of the ritual theory version of the drama analogy and its most prominent weakness. It can expose some of the profoundest features of social process, but at the expense of making vividly disparate matters look drably homogeneous.

Rooted as it is in the repetitive performance dimensions of social action—the reenactment and thus the reexperiencing of known form—the ritual theory not only brings out the temporal and collective dimensions of such action and its inherently public nature with particular sharpness; it brings out also its power to transmute not just opinions but, as the British critic Charles Morgan has said with respect to drama proper, the people who hold them. "The great impact [of the theater]," Morgan writes, "is neither a persuasion of the intellect nor a beguiling of the senses. . . . It is the enveloping movement of the whole drama on the soul of man. We surrender and are changed." Or at least we are when the magic works. What Morgan, in another fine phrase, calls "the suspense of form . . . (the incompleteness of a known completion)," is the source of the power of this "enveloping movement," a power, as the ritual theorists have shown, that is hardly less forceful (and hardly less likely to be seen as otherworldly) when the

movement appears in a female initiation ritual, a national epic, or a star chamber.

Yet these formally similar processes have done rather different things, and the conditions for social life. And though ritual theory, of that fact, they are, precisely because they are, a general movement of things, ill-equipped to deal with the rhythms, the commanding forms of theater, the essences of all sorts, shapes, and significances (to do much better with the cyclical, restorative than the linear, consuming progressions of tragedy as misfires rather than fulfillments). Yet the things of that fact that makes *A Winter's Tale* different from *Macbeth* from *Hamlet*, are left to encyclopedic documentation of a single proposition—*plus ça change, plus ça change*. If dramas are, to adapt a phrase in the mode of action, something is being made, the poems say.

This unpacking of performed meaning in various approaches are designed to accomplish. Here is just a growing catalogue of particular studies: Burke, some on Ernst Cassirer, Northrop Frye, Durkheim, concerned to say what some bit of a sermon, a riot, an execution—says. If rituals, in essence, tend to be hedged, symbolic action, tend to be foxes.

Given the dialectical nature of things, we need both sorts of approach are essential. What is now is some way of synthesizing them. In my study of the Indic polity in Bali as a "theater state" - cite play, but because it is mine—I have tried to do analysis I am concerned, on the one hand (to do everything from kin group organization, transition to mythology, architecture, iconography to a dramatized statement of a distinct form of conception of what status, power, authority should be: namely, a replication of the world

line a template for that of men. The state enacts an image of order that—a model for its beholders, in and of itself—orders society. On the other hand (the Turner one), as the populace at large does not merely view the state's expressions as so many gaping spectators but is caught up bodily in them, and especially in the great, mass ceremonies—political operas of Burgundian dimensions—that form their heart, the sort of “we surrender and are changed” power of drama to shape experience is the strong force that holds the polity together. Reiterated form, staged and acted by its own audience, makes (to a degree, for no theater ever wholly works) theory fact.

But my point is that some of these fit to judge work of this kind ought to be humanists who reputedly know something about what theater and mimesis and rhetoric are, and not just with respect to my work but to that of the whole steadily broadening stream of social analyses in which the drama analogy is, in one form or another, governing. At a time when social scientists are chattering about actors, scenes, plots, performances, and personae, and humanists are mumbling about motives, authority, persuasion, exchange, and hierarchy, the line between the two, however comforting to the puritan on the one side and the cavalier on the other, seems uncertain indeed.

IV

The text analogy now taken up by social scientists is, in some ways, the broadest of the recent refigurations of social theory, the most venturesome, and the least well developed. Even more than “game” or “drama,” “text” is a dangerously unfocused term, and its application to social action, to people's behavior toward other people, involves a thoroughgoing conceptual wrench, a particularly outlandish bit of “seeing-as.” Describing human conduct in the analogy of player and counterplayer, or of actor and audience, seems, whatever the pitfalls, rather more natural than describing it in that of writer and reader. *Prima facie*, the suggestion that the activities of spies, lovers, witch doctors, kings, or mental patients are moves or performances is surely a good deal more plausible than the notion that they are sentences.

But *prima facie* is a dubious guide when it comes to analogizing; were it not, we should still be thinking of the heart as a furnace and the lungs

as bellows. The text analogy has some unappreciatedly exploited, and the surface discourse-and-there-we-are of social interaction to on a page is what gives it—or can when aligned—its interpretive force.

The key to the transition from text to text as course to action as discourse, is, as Paul Ricoeur's concept of “inscription”: the fixation of meanings comes fly by as events like any other behavior inscribed in writing (or some other established medium) as evanescent as what we do. If it is so inscribed, as in the case of William Shakespeare's youth, anyway, but at least its meaning—to a degree and for a while remains. This is in general: its meaning can persist in a way that is not possible for the text itself.

The great virtue of the extension of the notion of text to social action is that it forces us to think on paper or carved into stone is that it forces us to think on this phenomenon: on how the inscription of social action on its vehicles are and how they work, and on how they differ from the flow of events—history from which they are thought, culture from behavior—implies for us. To see social institutions, social customs, social actions as “readable” is to alter our whole sense of what they are, to shift it toward modes of thought rather than toward the exegete or the iconographer than to the pollster.

All this comes out with exemplary vividness in the work of a comparative linguist, on Javanese shadow puppetry is called. *Wayang-ting* (there is no other suitable name) is a mode of text building, a way of putting symbols into expression. To construe it, to understand how it does so, one needs, he says, a new philology.

Philology, the text-centered study of languages, which is speech-centered, has of course long been used with making ancient or foreign or esoteric documents for whom they are ancient or foreign or esoteric. It has appended, commentaries written, and, when necessary, made and translations effected—all toward the goal of making the text as readable as the philologist can

at a meta-level; essentially what a philologist, a kind of secondary author, does is reinscribe: interpret a text with a text.

Left at this, matters are straightforward enough, however difficult they may turn out to be in practice. But when philological concern goes beyond routinized craft procedures (authentication, reconstruction, annotation) to address itself to conceptual questions concerning the nature of texts as such—that is, to questions about their principles of construction—simplicity flees. The result, Becker notes, has been the shattering of philology, itself by now a near-obsolescent term, into disjoint and rivalrous specialties, and most particularly the growth of a division between those who study individual texts (historians, editors, critics—who like to call themselves humanists), and those who study the activity of creating texts in general (linguists, psychologists, ethnographers—who like to call themselves scientists). The study of inscriptions is severed from the study of inscribing, the study of fixed meaning is severed from the study of the social processes that fix it. The result is a double narrowness. Not only is the extension of text analysis to nonwritten materials blocked, but so is the application of sociological analysis to written ones.

The repair of this split and the integration of the study of how texts are built, how the said is rescued from its saying, into the study of social phenomena—Apache jokes, English meals, African cult sermons, American high schools, Indian caste, or Balinese widow burning, to mention some recent attempts aside from Becker's—are what the "new philology," or whatever else it eventually comes to be called, is all about. "In a multicultural world," Becker writes, "a world of multiple epistemologies, there is need for a new philologist—a specialist in contextual relations—in all areas of knowledge in which text-building . . . is a central activity: literature, history, law, music, politics, psychology, trade, even war and peace."

Becker sees four main orders of semantic connection in a social text for his new philologist to investigate: the relation of its parts to one another; the relation of it to others culturally or historically associated with it; the relation of it to those who in some sense construct it; and the relation of it to realities conceived as lying outside of it. Certainly there are others—its relation to its *materia*, for one; and, more certainly yet, even these raise profound methodological issues so far only hesitantly addressed. "Coherence," "inter-textuality," "intention," and "reference"—which are what Becker's four relations more or less come down to—all become most elusive notions when one leaves the paragraph or page for the act or institution.

Indeed, as Nelson Goodman has shown, they are for the paragraph or page, to say nothing of statue, or the dance. Insofar as the theory of multiple contextualization of cultural phenomena (or structuralism) exists at all, it does so as a catalog of half-joined ideas.

How far this sort of analysis can go beyond matters as puppetry, and what adjustments it so, is, of course, quite unclear. As "life is a game" tends toward face-to-face interaction, courting is the most fertile ground for their sort of analysis, and we are attracted toward collective intensities, can be the same reason, so "life is a text" proponents of imaginative forms: jokes, proverbs, poems, are either surprising or reprehensible in this; one can't tell out where they seem most likely to work. But we rest on their capacity to move beyond their easy and less predictable ones—of the game idea to the drama idea to explicate humor, or the text idea to the triumphs, if they are to occur at all, are, in the others, still to come. For the moment, all I have done here: offer up some instances of trouble, and some pleas for help.

V

So much, anyway, for examples. Not only do genres obviously spill over into one another and forth between ludic, dramatic, and other humanistic analogies on the social sciences as they: speech act analyses following Austin as different as those of Habermas's "communicative" "archaeology of knowledge"; represent their lead from the cognitive aesthetics of Nelson Goodman; and of course Lévi-Strauss's higher

yet internally settled and homogeneous: the divisions between the play-minded and the strategy-minded to which I alluded in connection with the game approach, and between the ritualists and the rhetoricians in connection with the drama approach, are more than matched in the text approach by the collisions between the against-interpretation mandarins of deconstructionism and the symbolic-domination tribunes of neo-Marxism. Matters are neither subtle nor consensual, and they are not likely soon to become so. The interesting question is not how all this muddle is going to come magnificently together, but what does all this ferment mean.

One thing it means is that, however raggedly, a challenge is being mounted to some of the central assumptions of mainstream social science. The strict separation of theory and data; the "brute fact" idea; the effort to create a formal vocabulary of analysis purged of all subjective reference; the "ideal language" idea; and the claim to moral neutrality and the Olympian view, the "God's truth" idea—none of these can prosper when explanation comes to be regarded as a matter of connecting action to its sense rather than behavior to its determinants. The refiguration of social theory represents, or will if it continues, a sea change in our notion not so much of what knowledge is but of what it is we want to know. Social events do have causes and social institutions effects; but it just may be that the road to discovering what we assert in asserting this lies less through postulating forces and measuring them than through noting expressions and inspecting them.

The turn taken by an important segment of social scientists, from physical process analogies to symbolic form ones, has introduced a fundamental debate into the social science community concerning not just its methods but its aims. It is a debate that grows daily in intensity. The golden age (or perhaps it was only the brass) of the social sciences when, whatever the differences in theoretical positions and empirical claims, the basic goal of the enterprise was universally agreed upon—to find out the dynamics of collective life and alter them in desired directions—has clearly passed. There are too many social scientists at work today for whom the actualization of thought is wanted, not the manipulation of behavior.

But it is not only for the social sciences that this alteration in how we think about how we think has disequilibrating implications. The rising interest of sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, political scientists, and even now and then a rogue economist in the analysis of symbol systems poses—implicitly anyway, explicitly sometimes—the question of the rela-

tionship of such systems to what goes on in a way both rather different from what humans are capable of with families about spiritual life—than many of them, so it seems, would

If the social technologist notion of what is into question by all this concern with sense so is the cultural watchdog notion of what is without spirit dispensing policy nostrums governing approved judgments does as well. The reaction in social life can no more be conceived if can in terms of expertise. How it is to be carried out, or texts that we do not just invent or witness, the force they do remains very far from clear. If reasonings, on all sides of all divides, to get

Chapter 2 / Found in Translation: On the Social History of the Moral Imagination



Anthropologists have a number of advantages when addressing the general public, one of them being that hardly anyone in their audience has much in the way of independent knowledge of the supposed facts being retailed. This allows one to get away with a good deal. But it is, as most such things, also something of a disadvantage. If a literary critic discourses on *King Lear*, a philosopher on Kant, or an historian on Gibbon, he can begin more or less directly with the presentation of his views, quoting only here and there to drive matters home. The context can be assumed to be shared between himself and those he is addressing. He need not inform them who Gloucester is, what epistemology is about, or where and when the Roman Empire was. This is usually not the case for the anthropologist, who is faced with the unattractive choice of boring his audience with a great deal of exotic information or attempting to make his argument in an empirical vacuum.

Found in Translation: Social History of M

I want to avoid this choice, to the degree that it is a rather long, but I think most vivid quotation from a Western writer on what is probably Bali's most famous custom. It will serve as my text—my jumping-off point—which, with it as base and background, I will be relating in some responsible way to a certain aspect of the social history of Bali. I had some access to but most of my readers v

While I was at Hall one of these shocking sacrifices in a neighbouring State died on the 20th of December, a great pomp, three of his concubines sacrificing themselves on that great day for the Balinese. It was some years since I had witnessed one of these awful spectacles, a spectacle that had an odour of sanctity about it, and all the reigning nobles being present . . . and brought large followings.

It was a lovely day, and along the soft and sloping terraces which divide the lawn-like terraces of an endless succession of Balinese in festive attire, could be seen wedding parties. Their gay dresses stood out in bright relief against the background over which they passed. They looked little enough like the kindly festive-crowd bent upon some pleasant excursion, but bore an impress of plenty, peace, and happiness, and a sense. It was hard to believe that within a few miles of such scenes of any crime, were, for their affection's sake, and in the face of the most horrible of deaths, while thousands of th

But already the walls which surround the palace were in sight. Straight avenues, up the sides of a terraced hill, higher still, on the center of an open space, surrounded by a structure with gilded roof, rising on crimson pillars, a spot where the burning of the dead man's body is effected. In this structure is seat to rest upon a platform of stone, which is a second floor, covered with sand. In the center of a bam, gorgeous with purple and gold trappings, is destined to receive the body of the king for burial. The structure is decorated with mirrors, china plates, and gilding.

Immediately adjoining this structure is a square platform high, the whole of which space was filled with a fire, was to consume the victims. At an elevation of two feet from the ground is connected with this place, a covering of green plaited mat. The center of this bridge supports a small pavilion where the king sits while preparing for the fatal leap.

The spectators, who, possibly, did not number less than a hundred, incidentally, would be about 5 percent of the total population. The time occupied the space between these structures

a number of small pavilions had been erected for the use of women. This space was now rapidly filling, and all eyes were directed toward the [palace] whence the funeral procession was to come. Strange to say, the dead king did not leave his palace for the last time by the ordinary means. A corpse is considered impure, and nothing impure may pass the gateway. Hence, a contrivance resembling a bridge had been constructed across the walls, and over it the body was lifted. This bridge sat in the uppermost storey of an immense tower of a pagoda shape, upon which the body was placed.

This tower . . . was carried by five hundred men. It consisted of eleven storeys, besides three lower platforms, the whole being gorgeously ornamented. Upon the upper storey rested the body, covered with white linen, and guarded by men carrying fans.

The procession marching before the [tower] consisted first of strong bodies of lancebearers, with [gamelan orchestra] music at intervals; then a great number of men and women carrying the offerings, which consisted of weapons, clothing, ornaments, gold and silver vessels containing holy water, [betelnut] boxes, fruit, meat-dishes, boiled rice of many colours, and, finally, the horse of the deceased, gaily caparisoned; then more lancebearers and some musicians. These were followed by the young [newly installed] king, the Dewa Pahang, with a large suite of princes and nobles. After them came the . . . high priest, carried upon an open chair, round which was wrapped one end of a coil of cloth, made to represent a huge serpent, painted in white, black, and gilt stripes, the huge head of the monster resting under the [priest's] seat, while the tail was fastened to the [tower], which came immediately after it, implying that the deceased was dragged to the place of burning by the serpent.

Following the large [tower] of the dead king, came three minor and less gorgeous ones, each containing a young woman about to become a sacrifice. . . . The victims of this cruel superstition showed no sign of fear at the terrible doom now so near. Dressed in white, their long black hair partly concealing them, with a mirror in one hand and a comb in the other, they appeared intent only upon adorning themselves as though for some gay festival. The courage which sustained them in a position so awful was indeed extraordinary, but it was born of the hope of happiness in a future world. From being bondswomen here, they believed they were to become the favourite wives and queens of their late master in another world. They were assured that readiness to follow him to a future world, with cheerfulness and amid pomp and splendour, would please the unseen powers, and induce the great god Siva to admit them without delay to Swerga Surya, the heaven of Indra.

Round the deluded women stood their relatives and friends. Even these did not view the ghastly preparations with dismay, or try to save their unhappy daughters and sisters from the terrible death awaiting them. Their duty was not to save but to act as executioners; for they were entrusted with the last horrible preparations, and finally sent the victims to their doom.

Meanwhile the procession moved slowly on, but before reaching its destination a strange act in the great drama had to be performed. The serpent had to be killed, and burned with the corpse. The high priest descended from his chair, seized a bow,

and from the four corners of the compass discharged a serpent's head. It was not the arrow, however, but a flower which struck the serpent. The flower had been inserted at the point from which, in its flight it detached itself, and by some so managed that the flower, on each occasion hit its mark. The beast was then supposed to have been killed, and hitherto by men, was now wound round the priest's chair. The wooden image of the lion at which the corpse was burned.

The procession having arrived near the place of cremation, turned, always having the priest at its head. Finally it reached a platform, which, meeting the eleventh story, connected it with the tower. The body was now placed in the wooden image of the lion, which was made of silver, copper, iron and lead, inscribed with mystic words. The high priest read the Vedas, and emptied a vessel of water over the body. This done, the faggots, sticks and straw were placed under the lion, which was soon enveloped in flames. A strange scene over, the more terrible one began.

The women were carried in procession three times round the fatal bridge. There, in the pavilion which they entered, they waited until the flames had consumed the image. They showed no fear, still their chief care seemed to be to get ready for life rather than for death. Men were prepared for the horrible climax. The tail at the foot of the tower was uncoiled, and a plank was pushed over the flames, and a quantity of oil on the fire, causing bright, lurid flames to rise. The supreme moment had arrived. With firm and measured steps they crossed the fatal plank; three times they brought their hands to their faces, each of which a small dove was placed, and then, with a plunge, they fell into the flaming sea below, while the doves flew up, symbolizing their souls.

Two of the women showed, even at the very last, a little fear. They looked at each other, to see whether both were prepared, and then they plunged. The third appeared to hesitate, and to take a moment to look back, she faltered for a moment, and then followed, all three with a bound.

This terrible spectacle did not appear to produce any effect on the crowd, and the scene closed with barbaric music and dancing, never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it, and by those who felt a feeling of thankfulness that one belonged to a civilization which is merciful, and tends more and more to emancipate itself from cruelty. To the British rule it is due that this foul practice has been abolished, and doubtless the Dutch have, ere now, done the same. These are the credentials by which the Western civilization is distinguished from the savage and feudal barbarous races and to replace them.

I have little more that is interesting to tell of Bali.

I

This powerful, beautiful, and (not to neglect my own *métier*, which is supposed to be some sort of science) superbly observed passage was written in the 1880s by a Dane, L. V. Helms.¹ As a very young man Helms had apprenticed himself in a white rajah type merchant-adventurer straight out of *The Heart of Darkness* named Mads Lange—he played the violin, dashed about on half-broken horses killing down enemies, had various complexions of native wives, and died suddenly, quite likely poisoned, in his late forties—who ran a port-of-trade enclave in South Bali between 1839 and 1856, a time when he and his staff were the only Europeans on the island. I quote Helms at such length not because I intend to go into Balinese ethnography here, or even, very much, into cremation rites. I quote this passage because I want to unpack it, or, better (because it is a bit hermetic and my interests a bit diffuse) to circle around it as a way into what I take to be some of the central concerns of Lionel Trilling as a literary critic, if one can confine so various a man in so cramped a category. These are concerns which, from a somewhat different perspective, but no less cramped a category, I share with him.

If Trilling was obsessed with anything it was with the relation of culture to the moral imagination; and so am I. He came at it from the side of literature; I come at it from the side of custom. But in Helms's text, portraying a custom which possesses that mysterious conjunction of beauty when it is taken as a work of art, horror when it is taken as actually lived life, and power when it is taken as a moral vision—a conjunction which we associate with such a great part of modern literature, and over which Trilling, in his cadenced way, so conscientiously agonized— I think we can meet. It does not really matter much in the end whether one trains one's attention on Joseph Conrad or on suttee: the social history of the moral imagination is a single subject.

Single, but of course vast. As any particular work of literature brings out certain aspects of the general problem—How does collective fantasy color collective life?—so any particular ritual dramatizes certain issues and mutes others. This is, indeed, the particular virtue of attending to such exotic mat-

¹*Wandering in the Far East and Journeys to California in 1849 and to the White Sea in 1848* (London, 1882), pp. 59–66.

ters as the splendid incarceration of illustrious on a remote island some years ago. What is there notice is so different from what is brought to immo to what Trilling once called the shockingly perso- arive and artitudinizing present, that whatever d to connect the two experiences have a peculiar

My task in sufficiently focusing matters so that can be said is powerfully assisted by the fact the published piece—on the problems of teaching Jan- dents in the seventies, a heroic enterprise appar- what is surely the central issue here.² It has always basic assumption of humanistic literary pedagogy, tween ourselves and others removed in place or profound than are the surface differences separ- given the necessary scholarship and historical car- ucts can be put at the service of our moral life. discussions of my own (having to do, among othe- sense of self, which has—as I think you can gathe- high peculiarity about it), he wondered how far in fact valid. On the one hand, he seemed shaken- culturally distant was so readily available and dou- after all, really been able simply to understand, Icelandic saga about a countryman's gift of a bear- king coveted, through the customary device of pe- tryman's shoes. But, on the other, he seemed re- his faith that however alien another people's mo- might be, they were somehow connectible to the- mained convinced that he could bring those C- somewhat closer to Jane Austen, or perhaps m- to them how close, in some things anyway, the

Though this is not precisely the most comfort- wholly coherent one, it is, I think, the only one- fended. The differences *do* go far deeper than an- ism permits itself to see, and the similarities *are* easy other-beasts, other-mores, relativism to disc- and anthropologists—at least literary critics such

²Lionel Trilling, "Why We Read Jane Austen," *Times Liter-* pp. 250–52.

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