FROM INTERPRETIVE TO CRITICAL ANTHROPOLOGIES

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Creative anthropologies arise in particular historical conjunctures and national contexts. It is no accident, for example, as is often noted, that social theorizing in France (or in nineteenth century England) has been more universalizing than social theorizing in Germany (or in classical British social anthropology). German social theory in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was more attuned to historical particularities (and so laid the groundwork for the exploration of the notion of cultures in the plural). Third world social thought, for similar reasons to those in Germany, have often been historicist and dialectical, situating themselves with reference to a powerful Other (a first world, imperialism, dependency, etc.); and yet, this context has not necessarily meant that other problems, more internal, have not become equally compelling for the development of new anthropologies.[1]

I have been asked to talk about a style of anthropological inquiry in the United States which has come to be called "interpretive anthropology"[2], particularly about the role of Clifford Geertz, and thirdly about the way I situate my own work in relation to that anthropological style. "Interpretive anthropology" is a recent slogan (and perhaps substantive twist) for an initiative which

(1) The argument about third world social thought (and particularly third world marxisms) has been engagingly laid out in Abdullah Laroui, The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual (English translation 1976, Univ. of California Press). But consider the relative strengths of the anthropologies developed in India, Israel and Japan. On Brazil (and Germany and France) see Mariza G.S. Peirano, The Anthropology of Anthropology: the case of Brazil (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1981). A good introduction to the intellectual sociology of Germany is Fritz Ringer, The German Mandarins, Cambridge Unv. Press. On the contrast between French and German styles of social thought, see for instance Norbert Elias, The Civilizing Process, 1939, E.T. New York: Urizen, 1978). On the origins of social thought in the United States, see especially: C.W. Mills, Sociology and Pragmatism (1964, N.Y.:Paine-Whitman); Ernst Becker, The Lost Science of Man (Braziller, 1971); and the book by Haskell.

(2) Clifford Geertz entitled his 1973 collection of essays, The Interpretation of Cultures (Basic Books); Roy Wagner entitled an introductory text with the similar sounding Invention of Culture

seemed to crystalize at the University of Chicago in the 1960s under the leadership of David M. Schneider and Clifford Geertz, but engaging the active interest of practically the entire faculty[3]. At the time this initiative tended to go under the more general names "cultural" (as opposed to "social") anthropology or "symbolic anthropology"[4].

All of these tags — symbolic, cultural, interpretive — trace themselves back to the nineteenth century German debate over the role of Verstehen (understanding) in the methodology of the social sciences. The initial question was the perennial one: is there, in principle, a difference between the methods of the natural sciences and those of the human or social sciences? The effort was to combine, under the notion of Verstehen, the scientific goals of objectivity with the recognition that because men reflect upon what they do (and act upon those reflections) it is hard to treat them merely as objects. (That there may be patterns to behavior which are not fully conscious can be accomodated in this formulation). One can pick one's significant ancestors in this effort: Dilthey if you are a philosopher of the social sciences, Max Weber if you are a sociologist or anthropologist, Karl Marx if you are a

(Prentice-Hall, 1975), I used "Interpretive Anthropology" for a review article in 1977 (Reviews in Anthropology); and there is now a reader called Interpretive Social Science (edited by Paul Rabinow).

(3) Melford Spiro, Lloyd Fallers, Nur Yalman, Ralph Nicholas, Mckim Marriott, Raymond Smith, Milton Singer, Manning Nash, Raymond Fogelson, Paul Friedrich, later Victor Turner and Terence Turner, and still later Stanley J. Tambiah and Michael Silverstein and now Marshall Sahlins.

(4) The core course for graduate students, for instance, was divided (a term each) according to the Parsonian scheme into "cultural systems"; "social systems", and "psychological systems". David Schneider entitled his 1968 book, American Kinship: A Cultural Account. A cadet department staffed by Chicago people was started at Princeton calling itself a Department of Symbolic Anthropology, and sponsored a monograph series in symbolic anthropology. David Schneider later together with Janet Dolgin and David Kemnitzer edited a reader called Symbolic Anthropology. (Columbia University Press).

marxist, Wilhelm Wundt if you are a psychologist. But in all cases the general problem was how to capture in an objective way the intellectual, motivational and cultural elements that influence social action. The general answer was to conceive of men as acting within "socially constituted intersubjective worlds". Even subjective experiences are largely mediated by language, social participation (the reactions of others), and cultural symbols. Such mediation can be on several levels: conscious intentions or the intellectual level (which is what philosophers tend to restrict themselves to,' but also the uncounscious (as Freud impressed upon us), and those socially presented frameworks we call culture. Insofar as communication between individuals are understood (have agreed-on meanings), they are public, objective, and at least theoretically available for analysis. Such a formulation of culture and of the web of communication within which individuals live has three immediate implications. First, it gets way from all those social philosophies rooted in the experiences of the ego (e.g., Descartes, "cogito ergo sum") and forces an empirical and comparative method. Second, it gets away from genetic theories of society which would start with individual needs and desires (i.e., biologically reductionist theories rather than introspective ones); individuals are always born into society. And thirdly, most importantly for my purposes, viewing culture as relatively crystallized communication patterns makes the notion of culture highly dynamic. Individuals have different positions in society, different perception, interests, roles, and out of the negotiations and conflicts among them emerges a plural social universe in which many opposed outlooks may coexist and compete.

This general mode of formulating the task and the subject of the social sciences can be traced back variously to Vico in the siteenth century, or — as Hans-Georg Gadamer convincingly shows — to the rhetoricians of classical times[5]. The critical

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(5) Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, (English Translation, Seabury Press, 1975). This is a superb introduction and exploration of the issues I have all too briefly summarized in the preceeding paragraphs.

contribution of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been
to operationalize and make empirical the general approach. Two
sorts of observation may be made about this contributions: about
the refinements in methodological formulation, and about their
ideological or historical context.

Let's take the methodological first, and let me just
take four figures as representing some of the basic anthropological
contribution to empirical operationalization. One might start with
Malinowski, not only for his slogan and insistence on getting the
"native point of view", but more importantly and more specifically
for his insistence on native texts with a three-fold commentary:
word-for-word translations, free translations to convey the meaning,
and then most importantly commentaries including grammar, semantic
networks, cultural allusions, etc. Another figure who has recently
been rediscovered and rehabilitated in the anthropological "hall
of fame" is the Frenchman Maurice Leenhardt, for his attempt to go
even further than Malinowski by involving the natives in cross-
checking, discussing and elaborating the texts and descriptions
recorded in the ethnographic enterprise. There were two reasons
for this collaboration of the natives: first, of course, to expand
the potential for ethnographic comprehensiveness and accuracy, but
secondly, to open a dialogue with the natives, and to stimulate
them to reflect upon their own culture, to systematize, perhaps
to introduce change, to achieve a greater critical awareness for
them as well as for the ethnographer and his readers. This dual
access to ethnography is an aspiration of my own work. A third
important methodological contributor was Clifford Geertz in the
1960s. Geertz provided a conceptural step beyond the methodology
of Max Weber. Weber, in elaborating his notion of Verstehen, said
that we of course want to know the motivations and the intentions
of the social actors whose behavior we wish to describe and explain,
but that the business of getting inside other people's heads is
methodologically impractical if not impossible. Behavior, however,
is regular enough, that a stop-gap procedure will allow us to work;
the construction of "as if" models or "ideal types" based on the

analyst's subjective re_enactment (Nacherleben) or reconstruction
(Nachbilden) of typical motivations, fitted to institutional
structures which reinforce such motivations. (Thus Weber's
analysis of the Protestant Ethic as fitted to a particular social
stratum at a particular historical conjunction; or his similar
discussion of the type of personality that tends to get selected
in the lower reaches of a bureaucracy). A student of Weber's, A.
Schutz, who Geertz read and then all the graduate students at
Chicago read in the mid-1960s, attempted to work out Weber's
methodology of construction ideal types in more detail. In the
important paper published in 1966 "Person, Time and Conduct in
Bali", Geertz showed the pitfalls of relying upon an introspective
procedure, and reinforced the anthropological insistence that
social theory must be based on empirical ethnography. In this and
later papers, Geertz made the point for anthropologists (Gadamer
makes it more generally in a more systematic fashion) that
understanding (Verstehen) is not based on empathy or other
subjective psychological introspections, but rather on a process
of juxtaposing native frames of reference with those of the
analyst, itself a process of communication. This conception of the
ethnographic (and anthropological) task focusses attention on the
idioms, media, modes, tropes, and chanellings of communication. And
indeed the nineteen sixties was a time anthropologists looked for
help and inspiration to linguistics.

One final figure I would include for another kind of
contribution to the operationalizing of Verstehen is Claude
Levi-Strauss, and the techniques (rather than the metaphysics) of
structuralism. Structuralism was perhaps initially devised to deal
particularly with fragmentary remains of cultural systems: the clues
of which Levi-Strauss speaks so movingly in Tristes Tropiques,
where there was no history, and no other way to compose a sense of
the whole. Structuralism of course is also particularly suited to
"cold societies", where the attempt is to replicate the cultural
system and to deny change. As to how far it can be applied to
warmer and hot societies, Levi-Strauss himself has left an open

question. There are to be sure cold processes in hot societies, mythic processes where literary has already developed. Indeed my favorite structuralist at the moment is Marcel Detienne, who deals with mythic processes in Greek culture that have considerable stability over time; his demonstrations have added value since they are done in the bright light of many classicists (unlike the South American situation where only a few Indianist critics are able to dispute with full authority). In any case, there is a convergence between structuralism and the conception of an intersubjectivity which constitutes culture; this is how I would read Levi-Strauss' famous dictum that it matters little whether the myths think through his mind or his mind thinks through the myths. The criterion of objectivity in these structuralist analyses is provided by redundancy.

Let me sum up these methodological contributions: Malinowski's concern with the actual form and content of native understandings, Maurice Leenhard's concern with a collaborative effort, mutual arousal of critical awareness between native and ethnographer, and dual access to the product of ethnography; Geertz's (and Gadamer's) demonstration that at issue in understand-ing /ethnography is a public communicative process involving successive approximations and juxtapositions of frameworks, and Levi-Strauss' detection of structural codes.

Let me now turn to a comment on the ideological or historical context in which the 1960s saw the initiative called symbolic and interpretive anthropology. I want to focus on Clifford Geertz;he is probably the most widely read contemporary American anthropologist (outside the profession as well as inside); his visibility is perhaps indexed by the fact that for years he was the only social scientist at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton. But more importantly, Geertz' **career** seems almost an ideal typical crystallization of certain processes in which the 1960s appear almost as a replay of the 1920s. Social science often takes on the character of doubling or repetition, there is often a

return to an earlier era for inspirational texts; the doubling or
repetition is never just repetition, there is always a new twist or
a new working out; history is in this sense not circular but spiral.

Let me begin by juxtaposing the three intellectual
"generations" before World War II. Paul Ricoeur has referred to the
generation of the late nineteenth century as composed of "schools
of suspicion": Nietzsche's attack on Christianity as a slave
mentality; Marx's attack on utilitarianism; and especially free
trade classical economics, as a protective ideology for the English
bourgeoisie, Weber's analysis of the Protestant Ethic as socially
located at a particular stratum of society and powerful at a
particular historical conjuncture; and Freud's exposure of sexual
neuroses as a means of control and of repression as necessary for
culture. All these introduced the modern attitude of not taking
things at face value, and of viewing the grand systems of the
nineteenth century with suspicion (Hegel, Spencer, Comte). This
was also a time when industrialization and urbanization were creat-
ing a social environment increasingly felt to be beyond the
control and comprehension of the individual. It was the time of
the theories of characterizing the transation of society from
Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft, from mechanical to organic, from
status to contract, from comfortable wholism to alienating
individualism. The generation which followed the schools of suspi-
cion is the so called "Generation of 1905" who came to maturity
in the 1920s and 1930s: Robert Musil, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Walter
Benjamin, the surrealists. This was a generation which introduced
"modernism", which saw stable orders of meaning (ideologies, grand
systems) as artificial and repressive, which worried about
ideologies allowing empires to be amassed "in fits of absentminded-
ness" or wars to be wandered into as almost a matter of routine;
and which therefore reveled in subverting the conventions of
normalcy, juxtaposing exotica and fragments of reality in order to
challenge people. It was a generation of essayists who claimed that
one could have only fragmentary insights into truth.

There is a kind of parallelism for the situation in the
United States after World War II. As the victors of World War II,
in the 1950s there was a mood of optimism, a sense of boundless
power, nothing that the appropriate knowledge and energy couldn't
solve. It was the era of Parsonianism, that grand attempt at
synthesis of all social science, which ended in an endless (if
comprehensive) generation of classifications. It was also the
period of modernization theory: the feeling that the problems of
developing the world could be solved, that there was even a regular
sequence to development, and a take-off point for each country
into self sustained and independent growth.

In the 1960s this vision of systems came under attack.
There was in anthropology a mutual reinforcement between two
developments, quite different in origin. There was first of all
the politics of the 1960s, the reaction against the war in Vietnam,
a politics of protest, with anarchist, modernist elements. And
quite separately there was the development of the cultural level
of the Parsonian scheme at the University of Chicago which
inevitably led to the breakdown of the somewhat static conception
of the cultural system. As soon as Parsons' students and their
friends began to take seriously Parsons' claim that the cultural
system could be studied as an analytically separate object,
attention focussed on the process of communication which compose
culture and which are by no means as static or crystaline as the
rubric "system of symbols" seemed to imply. Geertz' career is
symptomatic: if you read the essays in Interpretation of Cultures
in chronological order, there seems to be a change in the
conceptualization of culture. At first it is compared to a computer
program, an information system that plays an important role in
the evolutionary process; in the mid sixties we get the essays on
"Religion as a Cultural System", "Ideology as a Cultural System",
"Art as a Cultural System", "Common Sense as a Cultural System" in
which the notion of a "system of symbols" gets considerable stress;
by the 1970s, perhaps already with "Deep Play" but certainly with
"Thick Description" one has a much more flexible and indeterminate

notion of the communicative process. It is both more sophisticated in terms of handling signification, and at the same time frustratingly recalcitrant to systematization. What Geertz is now writing about the ethnographic enterprise begins to resonnate with the "generation of 1905".

It was Robert Musil who argued that knowledge had outgrown ideology and one could only have piecemeal pragmatic knowledge. (Weber too had argued that reality was too complex for absolute description, that one achieved sociolngical understanding by comparisons for specific problems or purposes). The role of the writer, Musil continued, is to be a poet in the sense of imaginatively evoking experience. So too Geertz in _Islam Observed_ speaks of the anthropologist as a poet in just this sense. It was Wittgenstein who taught that language is to be understood the way we understand games: meaning is often in the way words are used, in their context, not in any illusion of fixed denotations. (It was incidentally he who scathingly reviewed in 1922 Sir James Frazer's notion that primitive religion could be an intellectual mistake). Wittgenstein, like Geertz later, spoke of understanding culture as being like the grasping of a posture or the seeing of a joke, depending upon a wide range of allusions and associations. Walter Benjamin wrote of language as being in large part metaphorical, of aiming not to be verifiable (like scientific statements, a peculiar and very restricted usage of language) but at characterizing experience, and of containing deep sediments of history, so that the process of understanding was one of unravelling meaning layer upon layer. So too Geertz, in Thick Description, would see the anthropologist's task as one of unravelling meanings, associations, connections; and in his more recent (and much less successful) essay on a Moroccan bazaar one sees the stress on linguistic tokens. [6]

(6) The essay is his contribution to the joint volume, _Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society_, with Lawrence Rosen and Hildred Geertz. See the interesting criticism by Vincent Crapanzano of this essay (_Culture and Economic Change_, 1982), where Crapanzano thinks Geertz has lost his grasp on the differences between referential meaning (thus the lists os _nisba_ names) and indexical meaning rules of use).

Like Benjamin, Geertz observes that the essay is the appropriate medium; like Musil he argues that systematic theory is either impossible or vacuous. The resonnance of the earlier period at times is direct: models of and models for, Geertz' enormously popular phrase for how symbols arise from and mould reality, is of course Dilthey's Nachbild and Vorbild.

Geertz is an enormously entertaining, instructive, even inspirational writer. Anthropologists of my generation were introduced by him to the problems of Verstehen, and to the tradition of German social theory read directly (not in the bowdlerized versions via a Ruth Benedict or a Talcott Parsons). The aesthetic of fragmentary insight (both in the 1920s-30s, and again in the 1960s-70s) is a regarding and salutary mode of critique, it has a renewing effect, reintroducing the joy of exploration and discovery[7]. But ultimately it is unsatisfying because it fails to respond to that obligation in anthropology to the scientific, the systematizing and generalizing side of the enterprise.

There is an ambiguity in Geertz' drawing of attention to the nature of the communicative processes: both understanding among social actors, and understanding across cultures (the ethnographic text) are constructed similarly; yet for scientific purposes we usually wish to maintain a distinction between the two. Complaints have been raised for instance about the essay "Deep Play" that the process of composing the description has been occulted: is this a composite of many cockfights? Or in the essays on personhood ("Person, Time and Conduct ..." and "From the Native Point of View"), are all Balinese, Javanese, Moroccans, Europeans this way? how long have they been this way? how did these differences come about? (Note for instance, the timeless description of the Balinese conceptions suddenly called into question with the figure

(7) *On the relationship between the surrealists and anthropologists in France, see James Clifford "On Ethnographic Surrealism".CSSH 1981.*

of Sukarno in the closing paragraphs of "Person, Time and Conduct").

On the one hand, there is a sense in which the more recent writings of Geertz have abandoned the important and critical questions of the social and historical limits or boundaries of given cultural forms. These are questions which can and should be addressed, as Weber did with the Protestant Ethic, Benjamin with the Trauerspielen or with Baudelaire, or Bakhtin with Rabeslaisian humor. There are symbols and cultural forms which possess greater power within a particular social formation[8], and one ought not to slide back into a position that anything which strikes the ethnographer's imagination is of equal utility for the ethnographic text as seems to be suggested in "Thick Description". Indeed any form of "thick description" or micro-analysis becomes trivial if not placed within larger macro-sociological and historical frame-works[9].

On the other hand, what Geertz has done in essays such as "Thick Description" and "Blurred Genres" is to focus on the way ethnographic texts are constructed, an issue of increasing interest to contemporary anthropologists. The term "Interpretive Anthropology" has thus placed a substantive twist to the old problems of Verstehen by focussing attention as much (if not more) on the texts created by anthropologists (why should we believe then, whence comes their authority) as on the operation of the cultural processes being described in the texts.

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[8] Indeed the very notion of "Deep Play" is of something which is so compelling to the actors that like moths to a flame they are attracted beyond rational degree. See for instance the way I have suggested the Karbala Paradigm functioned in Iran during the 1970s, and the way the legends of Khomeini functioned in the early 1980s.

[9] The recent essay on the Bazaar of Sefrou in Morocco does contain some suggestions about historical transformation; but even here, fellow Moroccanist Crapanzano finds the essay's attempts at historical specification to be sweeping generalizations undocumented and poorly integrated with the thesis about the current nature of the bazaar (op. cit.).

Let me conclude with a brief set of comments on the generation of Geertz' students and my own work in particular. If I may continue the conceit of the circular or spiral process of renewal in anthropology, perhaps we have returned to a particular strand of thought in the 1930s which refused to give up the search for macro-sociological and historical frameworks, while at the same time being concerned with the humanist issues of form and content in communication. One of the major sources of my own "renewal" is in the work of the Frankfurt School — especial by Adorno and Benjamin[10] — where there was an explicit effort to synthesize the inquiries of Weber, Marx and Freud and also Nietzsche's concern with aesthetics. (Indeed I've subtitled several of my recent papers as efforts in "critical hermeneutics")[11]. A similar source of inspiration for my generation has been the work of the French Annales School of historians, a school which appropriately enough has been itself open to contributions from anthropology.

My own anthropology aspires to be (a) dynamic, more concerned with cultural and social change than with cultural forms merely as texts[12]; (b) politically democratic, in Leenhardt's sense of trying to produce ethrographic texts which are rich enough to be meaningful to the people being described (and not only to the anthropological community or reading public in the West) and meaningful enough to engage them; (c) objective, in the sense of capturing public forms of discourse which are not idiosyncratic

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(10) A somewhat superficial acquaintance with the Frankfurt School was widely disseminated among New Left students in the 1960s largely through the work of Herbert Marcuse.

(11) "On Being Raised in the Middle East: Child Development, Socialization, and the Socialization of Affect"; "Legal Postulates in Flux: Law, Wit and Hierarchy in Iran"; "Symbolic Modes of Conduct: A Critical Hermeneutic Approach".

(12) From the observation that in order to analyze culture, it must be captured in a written form, the notion grew that understanding culture was analogous to reading a text. Both Paul Ricoeur and Geertz have elaborated this notion.

impressions but which other observers and participants can confirm,
involving therefore attention both to the modes of communication
utilized by the culture under discussion and to the forms of text-
construction available to a writer[13].

My dissertation attempted to begin with problems as
defined by Iranians, seeing the anthropological task to be one of
clarification, framing, comparative juxtapnsing. Religion and
feelings of persecution seemed to be among the central such
problems : rather than beginning with a definition of religion drawn
from anthropological theories, the effort was to allow different
Iranian actors to define its problematic. So, for instance,
planners, politicians and academics might talk of religion posing
problems for development; Shiites, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Bahais
might complain about the oppressive demands placed upon them by the
religion of others, by repressive ancient traditions, or by ignorant
clerics; and yet all the above might still claim that despite
abuse religion was something good. Concern with religious persecution
led to analysis of religiously phrased ~~rights~~ riots, and this in turn led
to political and economic forces. My recent book, to take a second
example, is intended to be rich enough in detail and Iranian
argumentation to engage Iranian readers, not only to gain their
feedback, but also to try to hold up a mirror for them, to engage
in a mutual raising of critical consciousness. In evaluating such
efforts, I can of course only speak of my hopes and aspirations.

Another area of effort worth a quick mention may be the
anthropology we are trying to build at Rice University. I of course
cannot claim that what is happening in the United States is what
is happening at Rice ;, what is happening in my anthropology, at
least, is happening at Rice. We have a dynamic young group which

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(13) A minor effort at innovation was my dual introduction to the original
      version of the book recently published as Iran: From Religious Dispute to
      Revolution, an "Introduction for Iranians" and an "Introduction for Ameri-
      cans". Middle Easterners seemed to like this device; Americans (a fortiori
      publishers) rejected it.

would like to explore the critical hermeneutic approaches I've referred to above[14], and to apply them to the United States, to fulfill the old promise of anthropology to bring home its tools and skills. One of the topics of continual discussion and reflection is new modes of ethnographic writing, including the nature of the old realist conventions of ethnography[15], the nature of authority which must be conveyed in an anthropological text, and the possibility of utilizing conventions of dialogue. Tyler, for instance, in a paper reanalyzing discussions about a ritual between himself and a native informant, argues that the notion of a true collaborative dialogue is illusion in an ethnography because ultimately one person holds the pen. I would argue on the other hand that dialogue (and multi-logue) is a viable option; that no dialogue is simply between two persons but any discourse involves a third composed of cultural forms, linguistic media, what Gadamer calls the sensus communis (consensu, common sense, in its richest meaning) — i.e. that there are always third parties to correct one or two discussants on matters cultural[16], and that a basic ethnographic task is to explore the range of opinions on any subject,

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(14) Steven Tyler, once a leading explorer of formal methods in anthropology (viz. his edited volume, Cognitive Anthropology), has more recently written a searching (and often amusing) critique of formalisms in linguistic and cultural anthropology, calling for a hermeneutic sensitivity (The Said and the Unsaid, Academic Press). He teaches courses on Hermeneutics and on Neurolinguistics. George Marcus, the chairman, has written reviews of new modes of ethnographic writing, teaching courses in both this and on intercultural communication. Julie Taylor, who has worked in both Brazil and Argentina, is concerned with symbolic forms, and teaches a course for instance on History as Symbolic Process. Joining us next year will be Tulio Maranhão, who brings an interest in hermeneutics and sociolinguistics, having worked through particularly the approaches of Habermas and Labov in a study of Cape Verdian Portuguese speakers in Cambridge, Massachussets.

(15) See George Marcus' forthcoming review in Annual Reviews in Anthropology, also his introduction to his edited volume on studies of elites (New Mexico Univ. Press, forthcoming).

(16) See also the recent work of Vincent Crapanzano on this same point, especially the introduction to Tuhami (University of Chicago Press, 1981), and "Text, Transference and Indexicality" Ethos 1981. Crapanzano draws particularly on Giraud's Desire in the Novel and the work of Lacan.

and evaluate their depth of support as a way of estimating also which opinions will dominate for how long.

The effort to develop an anthropology of complex societies and of the United States in particular is still in its preliminary stages at Rice. Marcus has written a series of papers on the ideology of kinship among Business dynasties, exploring the notion that the nature of legal instruments such as the Massachusetts Trust and the role of professional fiduciaries have transformed the understanding of "family" for people involved in the difficult attempt to keep dynasties from dissolving. A particularly provocative result of this research (based both on interviewing and archival research) is the suggestion that the professional fiduciary's ethic (disinterested service) is one of the key models for the ethic of America's "Establishment" at least until the Johnson years, an Establishment composed of sons of such business families, whose relation to philanthropy and public service was claimed to be analogous to that of the fiduciary to their families' fortunes.

My own contribution to our Americanist efforts so far has been an exploratory course on "American Culture"[17]. The overall framework was to explore the degree to which the United States can be understood (or is alleged to be) in terms of: (a) exceptionalism (e.g. the seventeenth century idea that God specially created America, the nineteenth century idea of the frontier as

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[17] I gather that in Brazil the effort to speak of a "Brazilian culture" was criticized widely some years ago as an ideological stance which would sweep under the carpet problems of integration, ethnicity, regionalism, etc. There was a similar period in mid-century in the U.S. when Americanization was an ideological force. Since the 1960s and the new celebration of ethnicity, this ideologization has been defused, and the question is an open one to what extent there are nationally operative symbols (viz. for instance Robert Bellah's notion of a civic religion). I suspect that Americans always operate on at least three levels; there is a national public code, there are also local, be they regional, ethnic, or religious; and there are personal codes. Thus while there might be a civic religion, belonging to particular churches often carries local indices of status, which may or may not carry over on a national scale.

burning off European decadence; or the notion that the natural
wealth of North America meant that American society would be sub-
ject to status conflict rather than European style class conflicts),
(b) the notion that when the American frontier fills up, America
will increasingly be subject to social tensions of the same sort as
Europe (America as an immature Europe); or the notion that America
is the most advanced society (it is Europe which must catch up);
particularly in terms of modern technology and communication, and
in terms of a new psychological structure (the much discussed
transition from an old inner-directed, guilt-controlled, Protestant
work ethic to a new other-directed, narcissistic personality
rewarded for skills in interpersonal relations). Among the topics
treated are symbolic politics (e.g. the Prohibition movement seen
as an effort of the old Republican small town elites to protest
their loss of power to new immigrant groups; the use of public
rituals such as the Tercentennary Parade in Newburyport, MA, or
the Reconquest dramas in Santa Fe, N:M., to deny but simultaneously
expose social conflict); the ways intellectuals characterize America
seen as reflecting changing characterizations of American Society
by intellectuals (historians, social scientists, literary critics)
as ideological indexes of social change (e.g., the study by Michael
KAMMEN of the American revolution which have progressively become
more conservative; or the periodic changes in opinion by historians,
say from the Progressives to the Liberals of mid-century); ethnicity
as expressed through autobiographies, and the mass culture debate.
I've found the last two topics particularly rewarding.

Recent ethnic autobiographies reveal a striking three-
level exploration of what ethnicity is all about, or at least how
it is transmitted as such a powerful element of consciouness. There
is first of all what might be called cognitive statements: all the
standard sociological analyses of the history of particular groups,
the socio-political context, the need for solidarities of various
sorts. Much more interesting, recent autobiographies explore
processes which are analogous to those of dream-work: that is, they
utilize a flux of images which operate differently from ordinary

language or rational discourse. Just as when a patient comes to a psychoanalyst and tells his dreams, there is a process of translation from modes of imagery into verbal form, a translation which is often approximate and which may introduce distortions and changes of a non-random sort. So too anxieties are often related is these autobiographies through myth fragments, partially understood customs, memories which do not form an articulated whole (such as an old time ethnographer aimed to present), but which are emotionally powerful and recurr in particular situations[18]. Thirdly, these autobiographies also play with processes like psychoanalytic transference, where the patient relates to another as he had to a previous person, but where he does not provide any verbal text of his actions (i.e. unlike dreams, where there is a text however distorted)[19] Recognition and exploration of these complex components in ethnic behavior is something that sociology has not been able to deal with, something for which perhaps anthropological tools of distinguishing indexical usages from referential language may provide some leverage[20].

The study of mass culture in an important sense goes back to the work of Adorno, Benjamin and the Frankfurt School. They posed the critical questions of how culture is produced and distributed, to what extent audiences and consumers can be manipulated, to what extent art forms can stimulate or deaden consciousness. In the urgency of concern with the rise of fascism and totalitarian controls, their suspicious critiques were powerful.

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(18) See for instance the autobiographical novel *Warrior Woman* by Maxine Hong Kingston, a Chinese American.

(19) See for instance *Passage to Ararat* by Michael Arlan, an Armenian American.

(20) Michael Silverstein has been a key figure in stressing to anthropologists the implications of the distinction between referential language and indexical usages. See for instance his essay in the Keith Basso and Henry Selby, ed., *Meaning in Anthropology*, where he challenges (particularly symbolic) anthropologists who have been looking to linguistics for methodological models, that linguists deal best with what may be the least interesting parts of culture. Two innovative anthropological uses of these concepts are Crapanzano (ft. 16) and G. Obeysekere's *Medusa's Hair* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Many of their judgments, however, in the light of a later day,
must be dismissed, e.g., that jazz and popular music is infantali-
zing and merely a means of reducing consciousness into passivity.
The course attempts to take a series of components of modern mass
culture — films, sports, music — and to explore to what extent
the music of Elvis Presley reflected the poor white southern
environment from which he came, the music of Sly Stone followed
the euphoric and then despairing mood of the black community in the
1960s, or rock in the 70s reflected struggles between creative
expressions and market commoditization; or why it is that American
fiction almost never uses the vehicle of a runner, while European
fiction often finds the struggle of runners an excellent vehicle;
what is it about the imagery of baseball that appeals to the
American mind, and why has the popularity of baseball declined in
recent years (is the pastoral imagery of spring breezes, May
showers, and new sprouted grass incompatible with enclosed
Astrodomes, artificial turf and television transmission?).

In all these efforts, one attempts to get beneath the
appearance of reality to systematic and competing social processes,
to explore the forms of communication in terms of which people act,
and to provide a tool for raising critical self awareness. While
the formulation of this style of anthropological inquiry surely
arises out of particular historical currents in post-Vietnam
America, the issues have international sources and resonnances
and perennial meaning. What will be of great interest is to see how
they are differently pursued in different countries, which are more
parochial, and which of wider collaborative or disputive interest.