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(c) Journal

ISSN: 0044 - 8370

(ii)

FORMAT

The journal is published three times each year. Contributions are welcome from anthropologists and from people in other disciplines. Articles should be as short as is necessary to get the point over; as a general rule they should not exceed 5,000 words. Contributors are asked to follow the conventions for citations, notes and references used in the A.S.A. monographs.

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Communications should be addressed to The Editors, JASO, 51 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 6PF, England.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The cover charge for a single issue is 40 pence. The subscription rates are - Single issues: 70 pence or \$2 for individuals
£1.20 pence or \$3 for institutions.

For one year: £2.00 or \$4 for individuals
£3.50 or \$8 for institutions

All prices cover postage.

Back issues are available at the prices for single issues quoted above.

The following issues are out of print: Vol.II; Vol.III; Vol.IV; Vol.V 1, 2; Vol VI; Vol.VII:3; Vol.VIII:1, 3.

Cheques should be made out to the Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford and sent to JASO, 51 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 6PF, England.

THE STRUCTURE OF SUBJECTIVITY : PROBLEMS IN ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

I

We are familiar with the frequent criticisms that have been made of early 'Culture and Personality' theory as it was represented in the early thirties by Benedict, Mead and Bateson. Such criticisms were directed against the over-emphasis on the homogeneity of a given population, the failure to provide adequate statistical evidence for some of the more general assertions about dominant personality types, the ethnocentric values involved in their descriptions of these societies and the heavy dependence upon popular psychological categories when classifying human types. The common thread which strung these criticisms together was their emphasis upon the nature of the language which this group of anthropologists used to describe culture.

Thus we have comments like this, by Barnouw:

Because of Margaret Mead's way with words, her books are much more readable than the standard ethnographic monograph. But her literary approach carries certain dangers. Like an official guided tour, it leads the reader to view the culture in a particular way. This is most evident in Mead's description of the Tchambuli. Here Mead does not give us the news straight; she editorialises throughout, with her conclusions being constantly embedded in the ethnographic description. (Barnouw 1963:88)

The entire enterprise was dominated by a subjectivity that was cause for suspicion and many studies were done which threw justifiable doubt on the relationship between the data that was available on the societies studied and the impressionistic, if not cavalier, conclusions presented by these anthropologists. But here again we can see that the arguments often revolved around the use of language, as for instance in Jessie Bernard's criticism of Mead, where she attacks the use of certain adjectives:

Would everyone who saw what Miss Mead saw, agree with the observations upon which she based these conclusions? ... would everyone agree that women who devoted themselves cheerfully, happily, and efficiently to feeding and nursing children, growing and cooking food, to plaiting mosquito nets, women whose attitudes towards men were kindly, tolerant and appreciative were masculine? I for one found myself constantly confused between facts Miss Mead reported and the interpretations she made of them. I would not consider Tchambuli men effeminate on the basis of the data she presents, nor do the women she describes seem masculine. (Quoted in Barnouw 1963)

One of the responses to this kind of criticism was a move towards more empirical testing - research tests, thematic apperception tests, drawing tests, etc. - and also the beginnings of an attempt at theorising more stringently the terms of reference used in describing behaviour through a dialogue with psychoanalysis. The intuitive description of the emotional bases of society was seen to be inadequate.

One of the ways in which we can characterize this shift in emphasis is as an attack upon a particular use of language in the social sciences: a mode of description was being rejected as more subjective than any other. It is significant, I think, that with this shift in the use of description by the anthropologist came a shift in the object of his analysis and a move away from the representation of standardised emotional patterns within a culture towards an emphasis on child-rearing practices and the inter-action between the individual and the culture; it was a move away from description towards explanation.

The interesting point is, however, that the language of these anthropologists was not so very different from that of anthropologists working in more respectable fields such as kinship, politics, and religion. Literary description, based upon completely untheorised psychological and emotional categories, provided the backdrop to most traditional ethnographies. Perhaps the difference was that in other cases they were just a backdrop to the more formal relations posited between theoretical concepts, while for these early 'Culture and Personality' anthropologists these descriptions actually constituted and contained the object of analysis. One of the major failings of these anthropologists was that, although the processes of description and representation were clearly at the heart of their project, they did not make a real attempt to understand the nature of literary language. Bateson, who, as we shall see, was interested in the problem, appeared to accept the impossibility of finding a solution. The consequences were three-fold: these works could no longer be read without scepticism; their mode of description was rejected in favour of a more empirically based science which nevertheless was still dependent upon such descriptive conventions at a deeper level; and, finally, with this shift in the form of the discourse, the particular object of analysis was lost.

In this paper I shall attempt to indicate the remedy for some of these problems. The issue of subjectivity in description is clearly of importance to anyone involved in writing ethnography. An examination of these early attempts at description may throw into relief aspects of our work today which have been rendered mute by more dominating concerns. It is clearly not enough to isolate individual statements and evaluations as subjective, since such statements provide the very bedrock upon which the 'Culture and Personality' school was founded. These limited criticisms need to be replaced by a more comprehensive theory of language and the processes of signification in anthropology.

I shall take excerpts from two works, Mead's Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies and Bateson's Naven, as my object of study, but shall also refer in some detail to Benedict's Patterns of Culture as this has much in common with the other two books and as both Mead and Bateson explicitly acknowledge its influence upon them. I shall concentrate upon those passages where Bateson and Mead attempt to describe the 'ethos' of the society, 'ethos' being understood as the culturally standardized form of the emotional life of a society. (We shall see very shortly the difficulty that these anthropologists themselves had in defining precisely the object of their descriptions.) Firstly, I shall outline an epistemological framework within which I believe these three works to have been written. This will lead to a discussion of the way in which 'subjectivity' is constituted within that framework, and, finally, I shall discuss the implications that this kind of analysis of subjectivity has regarding the epistemological status of the objects of anthropological knowledge.

II

We can accept that the distinction between the 'reality' and its representation in ethnography is problematic. The underlying premise of this paper is that we never have access to pure 'data' - such access is always mediated by some theoretical construct, however crude. Nonetheless, we do have to admit that there is a radical distinction between the existence which we impute to our data and the written form of the ethnography. One of the interesting qualities of ethnography is that it is continually appropriating reality. It attempts through language to create a society so complete as to accommodate our disbelief. We can see this perhaps more clearly when we contrast ethnography with the sociology monograph based upon empirical research and packed with tables, statistics and structured samples, where the attention of the reader is continually drawn towards the relationship between the sociologist and his data, towards the actual mechanism of the production of knowledge. The traditional ethnography may contain statistics, case histories and so on, but these are derived from a world which has already been constructed for us by the anthropologist and for which the terms of its construction have already been accepted. The distinction between the two kinds of study is a subtle one but it is also important for it implies that in the ethnography our epistemology may be as much a construction within the narrative as it is a decision made on theoretical grounds.

The anthropologists that we are dealing with here seemed to recognize this fact implicitly in that they located the problems that they encountered in coming to grips with the concept of 'ethos' firmly at the level of representation. In 1942 Bateson and Mead collaborated on a photographic analysis of Bali in an attempt to experiment with new forms of representation, having admitted that they had failed to describe 'ethos' adequately through words alone. They summed up their previous attempts as follows:

During the period from 1928-1936 we were separately engaged in efforts to translate aspects of culture never successfully recorded by the scientist, although often caught by the artist, into some form of communication sufficiently clear and sufficiently unequivocal to satisfy the requirements of scientific enquiry. "Coming of Age in Samoa", "Growing up in New Guinea", and "Sex and Temperament" all attempted to communicate those intangible aspects of culture which had been vaguely referred to as its ethos. As no precise scientific vocabulary was available the ordinary English words were used, with all their weight of culturally limited connotations, in an attempt to describe the way in which the emotional life of these various South Sea peoples was organised in culturally standardised forms. This method had many serious limitations; it transgressed the canons of precise and operational scientific exposition proper to science; it was far too dependent upon idiosyncratic factors of style and literary skill; it was difficult to duplicate and it was difficult to evaluate. (Bateson & Mead 1942:xi)

It is interesting to note the reference to 'ethos' as one of 'those intangible aspects of culture'. It was as though it could only come into existence through being described adequately. Indeed this is one of the implications of the position that was being taken up.

In this period Bateson and Mead were concerned more with the process of description than they were with explanation, in representing 'ethos' as an entity in the world rather than in accounting for its existence. Naturally there were historical antecedents to this kind of study - the psychological portraiture of different peoples was nothing new - and Benedict, the inspiration for both Mead and Bateson, saw her work very clearly as slotting into the historical Boasian perspective of American anthropology at that time. Yet these traditions represented descriptive modes of discourse too and could not provide an explanatory structure within which the description could be located nor any theoretical concepts which would provide an epistemological basis for it. The result was that it was the form of the description itself which had to shoulder the burden of legitimating its own object.

Let us turn back to these attempts to represent the 'ethos' of society and see what evidence there was in the works themselves that the anthropologist was finding the concept problematic. Bateson was the only one of the three who was concerned explicitly to discuss the methodological problems associated with the concept of 'ethos', but there is evidence at an implicit level in the work of both Mead and Benedict that they found the concept difficult to justify theoretically. This difficulty is one of the principal clues to the epistemological framework underlying these works.

Benedict's concept of 'configuration' was the forerunner of the concept of 'ethos' which was coined by Bateson in Naven, and it was this concept which was acknowledged by both Bateson and Mead as being the core insight upon which they were trying to elaborate. A cultural configuration was, for Benedict, the result of a well-integrated culture selecting, from an infinite number of traits and elements of behaviour, just a few. Through this process of selection and emphasis, a patterning or 'configuration' could be discerned which was more than the sum of individual parts. Thus:

A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action. Within each culture there come into being characteristic purposes not necessarily shared by other types of society. In obedience to these purposes, each people further and further consolidates its experience, and in proportion to the urgency of these drives the heterogeneous items of behaviour take more and more congruous shape. Taken up by a well-integrated culture, the most ill-assorted acts become characteristic of its peculiar goals, often by the most unlikely metamorphoses. (Benedict 1961:33)

She explains this process of selection through drawing an analogy with linguistics. Just as, out of a chaos of potential sounds made by man, in every society a few are selected to act as significant units in order to provide the bases for a language which will be meaningful and intelligible, so, out of the infinite variety of human potential in any one society, certain aspects are selected and emphasised to produce a coherent and intelligible configuration.

Benedict herself recognized the inadequacy of this teleological and 'animistic' kind of description and protests a number of times that this process of integration is 'not in the least mystical'. In drawing an analogy between the distinctive configuration of a culture and the distinctiveness of style in architecture, she says:

When we describe the process historically, we inevitably use animistic forms of expression as if there were choice and purpose in the growth of this art form. But this is due to the difficulty in our language-forms. There was no conscious choice and no purpose. What was first no more than a slight bias in local forms and techniques expressed itself more and more forcibly, integrated itself in more and more definite standards, and eventuated in Gothic art. (Benedict 1961:34)

We can see here that even when she is most conscious of the forms of expression that she is using she finds that she cannot express herself in any other way.

What is perhaps more interesting is that these same forms of expression are adopted wholesale by Mead, albeit more colourfully. Mead really explores and emphasizes the metaphorical level of this kind of analysis:

When we study the simpler societies, we cannot but be impressed with the many ways in which man has taken a few hints and woven them into the beautiful, imaginative social fabrics that we call civilizations ... Each people makes this fabric differently, selects some clues, ignores others, emphasizes a different sector of the whole arc of human potentialities. Where one culture uses as a main thread the vulnerable ego, quick to take insult or perish of shame, another selects uncompromising bravery ... etc. (Mead 1963:2)

Apart from some references to Benedict's work, Mead does not attempt to talk directly and explicitly about the concepts of 'configuration' or 'ethos'. All her references to the concepts are implicitly expressed in this metaphorical vein. The notion of society as a fabric woven by universal man is perhaps the most dominant image in the book, but another widespread and obviously closely allied image is that of the society as a text or book which is being written by man, a drama unfolding with recurring motifs.

She refers, for instance, to the phenomenon of sex-differences in society as 'one of the themes in the plot of human society'.

Both of these writers, as we can see, experience some difficulty in expressing the object of their analysis theoretically; the one complaining about the inadequacy of our language forms, the other turning to the more explicit use of metaphor as an alternative to a more analytical exposition. This difficulty in expression does, I think, have important implications for the epistemological status of their analyses. Although they resort to this metaphorical use of language, if we are to believe Benedict, because there is no other option, the metaphors themselves structure the relationship which the reader, as the implicit knowing subject of the text, has to the culture being described. Just as, through the process of selection, language becomes intelligible, so, out of a similar process of selection, cultures 'become intelligible'; configurations, according to Benedict 'give form and meaning' to customs that would otherwise appear diverse and incomprehensible. It seems to me that Benedict here equates knowledge with 'intelligibility'; the role of the reader of her text is to 'understand' the configuration in the way that he might understand a language. He will then have knowledge of the culture. Similarly, if we take Mead's metaphors of the literary text or the tapestry, her reader is required to read society as he might a book, to find it intelligible, as he would a piece of literature or the pattern of a tapestry. Moreover, we should note that one of the qualities of the concept of 'intelligibility' as used by them is that it

assumes a prior notion of the object of intelligibility being represented to us. Literature, tapestries, architecture, these are all in their way 'representations'. The term 'configuration' itself indicates the way in which the society is 'figured to' the observer. An epistemological framework underlies these texts in which the relationship of the reader to the society is not created theoretically as that of the knowing subject to the object of analysis, but as that of the reader to a text or representation.

Let us turn now to Bateson's attempt to pinpoint the nature of ethos in Naven. He is more methodologically sophisticated than either Benedict or Mead and it is significant, I think, that he introduces the concept in terms of a theorisation of the relationship between description and reality.

He introduces us to his work with some conjectures as to the differences between what he terms scientific and artistic techniques of description. Each, he claims, is ultimately attempting to achieve the same end,

to present the whole of a culture, stressing every aspect exactly as it is stressed in the culture itself, (so that) no detail would appear bizarre or strange or arbitrary to the reader, but rather the details would all appear natural and reasonable as they do to the natives who have lived all their lives within the culture. (Bateson 1976:1)

The 'scientists', whose representatives in this case are the 'Functionalist School' of anthropologists, attempt to describe each society as a whole 'interlocking nexus' in 'analytic, cognitive terms' and, therefore, according to Bateson, tend to concentrate upon those aspects of the society which lend themselves to this type of discourse. The scientist's basic purpose, he says, is to make the unconscious and unknown explicit and comprehensible; for this reason he is unable to make use of the subtle and implicit techniques employed by the artist to communicate the emotional tone of a society:

He (the artist) is content to describe culture in such a manner that many of its premises and the interrelations of its parts are implicit in his composition. He can leave a great many of the most fundamental aspects of culture to be picked up, not from its actual words but from his emphasis. He can choose words whose very sound is more significant than their dictionary meaning and he can so group and stress them that the reader almost unconsciously receives information which is not explicit in the sentences and which the artist would find it hard - almost impossible - to express in analytic terms ... If we read 'Arabia Deserta' we are struck by the astonishing way in which every incident is informed with the emotional tone of Arab life. More than this, many of the incidents would be impossible with a different emotional background. Evidently then the emotional background is casually active within a culture, and no functional study can ever be reasonably complete unless it links up the structure and pragmatic working of the culture with its emotional tone or ethos. (ibid:1-2)

Once again we note the assumption that it is only through literary representation that we can come to grips with 'ethos', but here there is a sharper focus on the problem and one can see quite clearly the extent to which 'ethos' actually seems to be conceptualised as a literary convention. The 'emotional tone' that he is referring to here is clearly a literary creation - it can be analysed out in terms of just those poetic devices of rhythm, metaphor and intonation which he itemises above. He then assumes that this set of devices corresponds to an entity in the 'real' world.

The only indications that we have of the existence of 'ethos' are firmly embedded in the structure of the description.

This equation between society and representation is one which occurs again and again throughout these three texts at varying levels of explicitness and metaphor, and I emphasize it here because it seems to me to represent the basis of an epistemological position which is clearly an integral part of the description being constructed. If we were to take a very crude distinction between those who saw the source of knowledge as being the object in the 'real' world and those who saw knowledge as produced in theoretical discourse, our three anthropologists could perhaps be put into a third category in which the source of knowledge is not to be found in the theoretical implications of language but in its representational function.

Let me try to sum up some of the points which I have made in this section. I tried to emphasize the difficulty which each of these writers had in specifying explicitly the object of their analysis. Each of them adopted a slightly different approach to the problem, Benedict using analogy to convey the nature of a 'configuration', Mead using metaphor, and Bateson using the analysis of literary devices. Common to each of these strategies, however, was the inherent ambiguity concerning the distinction between reality and representation. If we follow through the implications of this ambiguity we see the shared epistemological framework underlying their work; it was as though they felt that through the techniques of representation they could encapsulate society to the extent that society was almost indistinguishable from the representation itself. 'Knowledge' for them was not something which was theoretically constructed; it was more closely allied to the 'understanding' of a text, and it was therefore in the production of 'intelligible' representations that 'knowledge' was ultimately located.

I should not like to defend this epistemological position myself, but I feel it is important nevertheless to make it explicit as a basis for our reading of the texts. The level of 'representation' in these works has a very particular epistemological function; one way of handling the forms of 'subjectivity' that we encounter in these texts is to understand the way in which it is constituted within the narrative at the level of representation. This is what I shall try to do.

III

In this section of the paper I shall be dealing with the text as a system of signs within which the object of analysis is constructed and through which the relationship of the reader to this object is controlled. In reading a text, the reader enters into what may be called a 'narrative contract', and has to accept the relationship posited by this system of signs between himself and the object of analysis. We shall refer to the reader in this relationship as the 'knowing subject'. One of the ways in which this relationship is controlled is through the manipulation of the 'persona' in the text, or, as I shall refer to it, of the 'narrative subject', the seeing eye. We shall concentrate on the way in which, in this kind of discourse, the attention of the reader is directed towards the relationships between elements of the analysis at the level of signification rather than at a theoretical level, that is the way his attention is directed toward the medium of the representation.

We shall see that one of the effects of this shift of focus is the fusion of the narrative subject and the knowing subject of the text.

I shall begin by looking at the way in which a description of a particular 'ethos' is built up in one of these texts. Let us take as our main example the ethos of Iatmul men as it is described by Bateson in Naven. The dominant theme that runs through the 'ethos' is felt by Bateson to be pride. It is interesting to note here that I refer to this as a theme, where perhaps I should refer to it as the dominant emotion. This ambiguity in my understanding of 'pride' as used by Bateson is, I suggest, representative of an ambiguity in the text. For the techniques of representation themselves continually shift the level of analysis from the object of reference to its representation, away from the signified to the signifier. One is led to the conclusion that pride exists in Iatmul culture in much the same way that its existence is constructed within the pages of a novel.

The analysis begins with a description of the men's ceremonial house. Bateson points out that the men are occupied with violent, spectacular and dramatic activities which are centred in the ceremonial house, in contrast with the women who lead more routine and practical existences around the dwelling house. He maintains that the contrast between ceremonial house and dwelling house is fundamental for the culture and thus that it serves as the best starting-point for ethnographic description.

Through drawing an opposition in this way between the two sites of activity, Bateson alters the significance of his description. He is not only describing a building in which certain activities connected with this will take place; the description of that building is also, at another level, a description of the ethos itself. He has drawn our attention back to the level of the signifier. Thus he writes:

The ceremonial house is a splendid building, as much as a hundred and twenty feet in length, with towering gables at the ends. Inside the building there is a long vista from end to end down the series of supporting posts as in the nave of a darkened church; and the resemblance to a church is carried further in the native attitudes towards the building. There is a series of taboos on any sort of desecration. The earth floor must not be scratched nor the woodwork damaged. A man should not walk right through the building and out at the other end ... he should turn aside and pass out by one of the side entrances. To walk right through the building is felt to be an expression of overweening pride - as if a man should lay claim to the whole building as his personal property. (ibid:123)

It is quite clear, I think, that this house is not merely a building in which the man's activities take place, one which evokes certain emotions in him. It is also a symbol for us of the ethos of manhood in Iatmul culture. The ambiguity is in the question of whether it is symbolic for him in the same way as it is for us. Clearly we have to accept that there is a distinction between this kind of simple metaphor and the structuring of the emotions of an Iatmul man; nevertheless Bateson is trying to draw a parallel between the two. Reality has become appropriated by the domain of representation and we, the readers, in our role as knowing subjects, learning about the ethos of Iatmul man, having become absorbed by the narrative subject of the text who stands inside this building, appreciating its immensity, its imposing atmosphere. It is impossible to convey these dimensions of spatial grandeur - the towering gables, the long vistas, etc. without submitting oneself to the conventions of space and time that dominate this narrative subject. It is, then, in this ambiguity between the levels of representation and reality as revealed in the ambiguity between the narrative and the knowing subject that we come to 'know' 'ethos'.

Let us follow the description through a little further. The behaviour that takes place in this ceremonial house is nothing like the behaviour expected in a church, despite the initial comparison. For here there is a mixture of 'pride and histrionic self-consciousness'. In describing this behaviour Bateson admits that in the absence of any 'proper technique for recording and any language for describing human behaviour and gesture' he has had to evoke concepts of emotion and to 'use terms which strictly should only be used by observers about their own introspections'. Thus:

An important man on entering the ceremonial house is conscious that the public eye is on him and he responds to this stimulus by some sort of over-emphasis. He will enter with a gesture and call attention to his entrance with some remark. Sometimes he will tend towards harsh swagger and over-consciousness of pride and sometimes he will respond with buffoonery. But in whatever direction he reacts, the reaction is theatrical and superficial. Either pride or clowning is accepted as respectable and normal behaviour. (ibid:124)

Bateson's protestations that we have not yet developed the right techniques for recording this kind of behaviour seem to me to miss the point. The manner in which he has described it here cannot be dismissed for it is integral to his purpose. Furthermore, I would argue that the concept of 'ethos' that he is attempting to describe is actually made present by the conventions he is employing in this kind of narrative. We rapidly move, in the passage, from the abstract 'universal' Iatmul man to a very particular one. The narrative definitely takes place from within the ceremonial house itself and we identify quite vividly with this hidden narrator who watches, interprets and evaluates. Once again we have been drawn away from our position as neutral observers and into the drama itself; we are sharing the emotional categories that are shared by the participants themselves - or are we? Again, I think, we have the same ambiguity. It is only a narrator who can move so adroitly from the experience of self-consciousness felt by a man entering the room to the observation of his behaviour as he does this, making the latter symbolise the former and thus setting up a chain of symbolic interactions between behaviour and emotion. It is only a narrator who can demonstrate this kind of omniscience, and it is only because our data is constituted on the level of signification that such symbolic interaction between the elements of the narrative becomes possible. It is only through standing in the position of the narrator in the text that we can understand these emotional categories. Far from sharing the emotional categories of the participants themselves we are sharing a mode of representation of them through a narrator. Here we have the same fusion between representation and reality which we encountered above.

I shall take one final excerpt from this section on the ethos of 'pride' among Iatmul men, and I choose this one because it represents ethos as a collective phenomenon whereas hitherto the passages I have dealt with have treated it either as a symbol or as an individual experience. This annotated excerpt deals with the debates taking place in the ceremonial house:

The tone of the debates is noisy, angry and, above all, ironical. The speakers work themselves up to a high pitch of superficial excitement, all the time tempering their violence with histrionic gesture and alternating in their tone between harshness and buffoonery. The style of the oratory varies a good deal from speaker to speaker and that of the more admired performers may tend towards the display of erudition or towards violence or to a mixture of these attitudes ...

As the debate proceeds, both sides become more excited and some of the men leap to their feet, dancing with their spears in their hands and threatening an immediate resort to violence; but after a while they subside and the debate goes on. This dancing may occur three or four times in a single debate without any actual brawling, and then suddenly some exasperated speaker will go to the 'root' of the matter and declaim some esoteric secret about the totemic ancestors of the other side miming one of their cherished myths in a contemptuous dance. Before his pantomime has finished a brawl will have started which may lead to serious injuries and be followed by a long feud of killings by sorcery. (ibid:126-7)

Bateson claims that the emotions manifested in this debate have their centre in pride. I find it difficult to accept this as an analytic statement about the events described; it seems to me to be much more of a literary gloss upon a pattern of images. The scene itself has been isolated as though by dramatic criteria with an introduction, a middle, a climax and even an epilogue, as we see the speakers work themselves up into a frenzy, dance threateningly during the speeches, declaim the esoteric secret which begins the climactic brawl, and finally embark upon a long feud. The pace and action of the passage follows this dramatic structure, the level of general pandemonium increasing and then reaching a steady plateau until the tension is suddenly snapped by the exasperated speaker who reveals the totemic secret. It is instructive to note, I think, that, as the drama approaches its climax and the men break into their threatening spear dances and unpleasant brawls look dangerously near to the surface, the 'hypothetical' nature of the scene appears to break down. The detail becomes more and more precise and particular, and it is unclear whether the scene is being represented in the more general ethnographic present or whether this is a particular event being described in the continuous present. Whereas we began the passage with the sense that this was to be an abstracted representation of an hypothetical event based upon the anthropologist's accumulated knowledge, we discover that the particularity of the description has taken over and we are once again identified with a narrative subject observing an event in process. It seems that it is only possible for us to appreciate this 'proud' ethos through this sort of staged drama.

This shifting of emphasis towards the level of signification is also typical of Mead's writing. Mead describes the Mundugumor tribe of New Guinea as a hostile, suspicious and violent people. It is through adjectives like these that she attempts to capture the ethos of the people, to create a moral atmosphere which will encapsulate every shade of feeling, behaviour and social structure. Ethos, for Mead, is something parallel to atmosphere, but if we analyse the representation of atmosphere in her work we begin to recognize it once again as a narrative construction based upon a particular formation of the narrative subject. Let us look first of all at the way in which she introduces us to the tribe.

We do not meet the Mundugumor in isolation; we move to them from our encounter with the Arapesh, a rather different, supposedly 'co-operative' society. A parallel is drawn between the narrator's experience of the society and the reader's experience of the text. Thus the book itself represents for us directly the period of time spent by Mead in fieldwork and we move with her from one society to another. The spatial domain through which she travelled is mirrored in the conceptual world of the reader by the transitions he must make in order to accommodate descriptions of such very different societies:

In coming from the gentle Arapesh people to a group of cannibals and headhunters we made a transition between two ways of life so opposed to each other that every step by which we gradually learned the structure of Mundugumor life was puzzling and astonishing ... Although the reader has merely to shift his attention from one set of values to another, while we had to shift our actual adjustments to the daily life of a native people, nevertheless he will find that transition as difficult as we found it. During our first few weeks among the Mundugumor there was much that was startling, much that was incomprehensible. The violence, the strangeness of the motivations that controlled these gay hard arrogant people, came to us abruptly, without warning, as we studied their customs and watched their lives. In this chapter I shall present some of these startling occurrences, and unexpected phrasings of life, as abruptly, as inexplicably as they were presented to us. So perhaps the reader will be better prepared to understand the pattern of their lives, as it emerged from the first shock and perplexity of contact. (Mead 1963:167-8)

Here the fusion between representation and reality is spelt out and it is quite evident that, through a structured parallel between the two, it is hoped that knowledge will be produced. First of all, note the extent to which we are required to identify with the narrator in this passage. She takes us with her not only through space but through time, into the temporal dimensions through which she, herself, experienced these people. Through these the reader as knowing subject is led to identify with the narrative subject who controls these dimensions. These dimensions of space and time are, therefore, epistemological categories as much as they are descriptive ones.

The pages that follow this introduction are, she claims, devoted to the reconstruction of the experience which she, the fieldworker, had on first encountering these people. It is, confessedly, an impressionistic set of images, but it provides the cement which is to fuse the rest of her analysis. It consists of a set of diverse images of suspicious relations with neighbours, cannibalism, bodies falling in the river and decomposing, hasty, skimped funeral rites, raiding parties on defenceless homesteads, crocodiles in the ditches, gluttonous meals, isolated houses, catty chitchat amongst the women, and choruses of angry voices floating through the air. The only relevance that these events have for the reader is at a purely phenomenal level as impressions that were made upon the observer in the village and it is interesting to note that none of these events in isolation convey anything about the 'etios' of the people; they are significant only in relation to each other, as an accumulation of images. The narrative subject weaves between them an intricate net of cross-references and it is in this net that we capture the 'ethos' of the people. In other words this ethos appears to exist only at the level of signification.

Mead goes on to describe the social structure of the Mundugumor and the atmosphere which she has created earlier itself provides a mechanism for linking and giving significance to the elements of the society. Mundugumor social organization is, she says, based upon 'a theory of a natural hostility that exists between all members of the same sex and the assumption that the only possible ties between members of the same sex are through members of the opposite sex'. Now one might ask here - theory for whom? She gives no evidence that any such explicit theory is held by the Mundugumor themselves. This 'theory' is another element in her impressionistic evocation of atmosphere and her use of the term is another example of her tendency to deal with representations and knowledge as equivalents. The dominant form of social organization among the Mundugumor is what she calls the 'rope', composed of a man, his daughter, his daughters' sons, his daughters' sons' daughters, and so on, and it is this formation which expresses for her, in its implicit

opposition between man and son, the theory of hostility endemic in the tribe. This form of organization is as much an expression of Mundugumor 'ethos' as it is its cause. The interesting thing about this kind of text is that there is no structure of determination within it; for the relationships between elements we are dealing with are symbolic ones. Thus the way in which this 'rope' of relationships is experienced by the Mundugumor is not represented as a further level of analysis of the ethos which they share, but rather as a further expression of that ethos; the distinction between levels of analysis is unimportant for her - what seems to be important is purely that an extra layer of imagery should be built up. In this way a whole range of 'unnatural' relationships are emphasized: brothers attempt to trade their sisters for wives, daughters climb into the sleeping bags of their fathers, mothers plot against their daughters and fathers against sons. Moreover this picture is built up skilfully using all kinds of 'dramatic' techniques. When we take a sudden close focus on a cameo scene of the mother fearing that her daughter will be exchanged for a new wife, we feel the strong undercurrents of her emotions and the immediacy of her experience in her compound:

The mother would like to see her daughter out of her way, and in her place a daughter in law who will live in her house and be under her control ... All her strongest motives, her dislike of the bond between her husband and her daughter, her fear of having that bond translated into the appearance of a young rival wife in the compound, her practised solicitude for her son - all are directed against letting her husband exchange the daughter for a young wife. (ibid.:180).

In opposition and strong contrast to this we have the father's experience; the father's jealousy of his son's rival claim to the exchange of daughter for wife.

Within his compound, as his sons mature, he sees a set of hostile camps developing; in each hut a disgruntled, superseded wife and a jealous aggressive son ready to demand his rights and assert against him a claim to the daughters. (ibid.)

Mead certainly demonstrates a vigorous creative imagination, but the obviousness of the literary conventions that she uses and the domination of the narrative subject who defines the timing and shape of the drama and peers inside the minds of the principal protagonists, prevents this passage from being what it might have been - an analysis of the effects of a particular social structure on the behaviour of individuals. What she does instead is to locate intelligibility, and thus the analysis, at the level of representation. We see this happening again and again; we are continually brought back from the beginnings of analysis to the narrative dimensions of time and space. Take this example of her description of the big men who take part in food exchanges in the village. These men are, she says, 'really bad', they are 'aggressive, gluttons for power and prestige'.

These are the men for whom a whole community will mourn when they die; their arrogance, their lust for power, is the thread upon which the important moments of social life are strung. These men - each community of two or three hundred people boasts two or three - are the fixed points in the social system. They build their compounds well and firmly. There is a strong palisade around them; there are several strong houses; there are slit drums too big to be moved about easily. (ibid: 186-7; my emphasis)

The description has been brought back to the level of the phenomenal: a few moments in social life, a strong barrier around their houses, these are the really significant elements in the description, for these are the elements which reveal to us the level at which it is to be read.

Both of the passages which I have referred to here are representative of the kind of 'subjective' analysis which could always provide an easy target for critics. The kinds of conclusions which Mead and Bateson come to are hardly empirically verifiable. Their work does, however, throw an interesting light on the writing of ethnography. In attempting to isolate the aspect of society that they called 'ethos' they had continual recourse to a particular form of descriptive discourse. One of the primary features of this discourse was the ambiguity inherent in it between the levels of reality and representation. In our analyses of these passages we saw this ambiguity clearly expressed in the extent to which we were continually directed back to the forms of signification in the text, and in the way the narrative subject of the text and the knowing subject seemed to be fused. It was as though the theoretical relationships were being worked out at the level of 'representation' rather than through analysis. Indeed, I think I have demonstrated that the concept of 'ethos' was a function of these techniques of representation and only had any real meaning within this rather limited form of descriptive discourse.

IV

In my introduction I stated that one of the possible differences between 'Culture and Personality' studies like those of Benedict, Mead and Bateson, and other forms of anthropology was that the former took the form of the description as the subject of their analyses rather than merely as a backdrop. I now feel that we can perhaps put this statement more strongly: the phenomenon that we have been examining in this paper has demonstrated one level of the appropriation of reality that any ethnography practises - it is simply that this level is normally mute whereas here it is the dominant voice that is heard. The very existence of the traditional monograph as the dominant vehicle for anthropological analysis entails that the theoretical work is taking place within this kind of framework of representations.

A second point I should like to make is that, although I have tried to emphasize the purely 'descriptive' status of a concept like 'ethos', this does not mean that it should be completely dismissed. Since it is a product of our representations of society it is clearly of ideological significance for us and it is important to ask why we have this sense of 'ethos' - why does this concept appear to us as it does?

Having seen to what extent this kind of concept is embedded in a set of narrative conventions, I should like to ask finally whether we, as anthropologists, should not be more conscious of the power that this kind of use of language has to transform our ideology. Perhaps we need to be more adventurous. Bateson and Mead attempted in a later collaborative work to explore different forms of representation through the use of photographs. I do not think this attempt was successful partly because, although they recognised the need for such experimentation, an adequate theoretical framework did not exist at that time which could demonstrate the reason for such a need. I should like to think that the kind of paper that I have written here will be seen as part of the much larger contemporary movement towards a general critique of scientific language. In this context that kind of experiment in representation might be much more fruitful.

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CONFECTIONS, CONCOCTIONS AND CONCEPTIONS

This article derives from an incident which took place while I was doing fieldwork in the North East of England, investigating the structure and experience of childhood. An old lady of my acquaintance, remarking on the quality of the paint used by the National Coal Board on their properties, grumbled that it was 'all ket - rubbish' and that it would peel off in a few months. Before this I had only encountered the word 'ket' among children who used it as their term for sweets,¹ especially cheaper ones. This difference in use intrigued me, particularly when I remembered that sweets, from the adult perspective, are literally the rubbish which children eat between meals.

Further close attention to conversations revealed that 'ket', or 'kets', was used by adults as a classificatory noun to mean an assortment of useless articles and also as an adjective, 'ketty' meaning rubbishy or useless. Confirmation of this usage comes from Dobson (1974) who defines the word as rubbish. However, Cecil Geeson cites the original meaning as: 'something smelly, stinking, unhealthy or diseased' generally applicable to the 'carcasses of animals dying a natural death and dressed for market without being bled.' (1969:116)² The Opies (1959) suggest that many old dialect words which have died out in adult language are stored in the child's repertoire but the example of 'kets' casts doubt on an image of passive retention. In this case the semantic content is not stored, but instead undergoes a significant shift. A word which, in the adult world, refers to despised and inedible substances has been transformed; in the world of the child it refers to a revered sweet. In this article I shall explore the seemingly unrelated uses of the term 'kets' in the worlds of adults and children and shall attempt to reveal and explain an inherent and consistent logic in such uses.

To talk about sweets and rubbish inevitably involves discussing the relationship between the worlds of adults and children. I have argued elsewhere (James 1979) that the social world of children, whilst being separate in relation to the adult world, is nevertheless dependent on it. This dependence is not passive, however. Instead there is a creative process of interdependence: children construct their own ordered system of rules by reinterpreting the social models given to them by adults. It is through this creative reordering of adult perception, often achieved through a process of inverting elements of the adult order, that the social world of children generates its own system of meanings. Hence, the true nature of the culture of childhood frequently remains hidden from adults, for the semantic cues which permit social recognition have been manipulated and disguised by children in terms of their alternative society.

By confusing the adult order children create for themselves considerable room for movement within the limits imposed upon them by adult society. This deflection of adult perception is crucial for both the maintenance and continuation of the child's culture and for the growth of the concept of the self for the individual child. The process of becoming social involves a conceptual separation between 'self' and 'other'. This process is often described in terms of 'socialization', a model which stresses the passive mimicry of others. I would suggest, however, that this process is better seen in terms of an active experience of contradiction, often with the adult world. It is thus of great significance that something which is despised and regarded as diseased and inedible by the adult world should be given great prestige as a particularly desirable form of food by the child. The transformation of 'kets' from rubbish into food is both logical and consistent with the child's culture.

Food for thought

The notion that food might be a subject worthy of discussion in its own right has long been ignored by social anthropologists. Past ethnographers have either made only fleeting references to what people eat or have submergged the topic under more general headings such as agricultural production, economics and ritual.

However, with the publication of Le Totemisme Aujourd'hui (1962) and Lévi-Strauss's provocative suggestion that animals are 'good to think with', the subject of food in relation to the social body has become increasingly central in the discipline (1969:162) (see Leach 1964 ; Douglas 1966 ; Bulmer 1967 ; and Tambiah 1969). In all these analyses it is argued that ideas people hold concerning the edibility of certain types of food are linked logically to other conceptual domains and that, by examining a people's food categories, a more penetrating and incisive explanation of other aspects of the social system can be achieved. Tambiah argues that 'cultures and social systems are, after all, not only thought but also lived' so that particular attention should be given to exactly what people let inside their bodies (1973:165).

More recently Mary Douglas (1975) has directly confronted the subject of food in her analysis of the major food categories in Britain. She identifies the two main categories as meals and drinks. Of the two, meals are more highly ranked and ordered, being internally structured into 'first, second, main (and) sweet' courses, whereas drinks possess no such structuring (1975:255). Meals are also externally structured by a temporal order - breakfast followed by dinner and tea - which parallels the weekly cycle, climaxing in Sunday dinner, a pattern repeated in the annual sequence of ceremonial meals. Drinks, in contrast, are 'not invested with any necessity in their ordering' (ibid:255).

Douglas further suggests that, besides these major categories of food, some 'food can be taken for private nourishment' but it is likely to be condemned if considered 'to interfere with the next meal' (ibid:254). It is here that she locates sweets, but hers is an adult perspective. Sweets, for adults, are regarded as an adjunct to "real" food and should not usurp the place of meals. For the child, as I hope to show, the reverse is true: it is meals which disrupt the eating of sweets.

Sweet thoughts

Sweets - as in 'Ye Olde Sweete Shoppe' - are an entirely British phenomenon. There is no equivalent abroad and the British sweet industry, in its production of a very extensive range of confectionery, seems to be unique. The concept of the sweetmeat is the nearest parallel to the kinds of confections available in other countries, but it is absent from the supermarket shelves and non-specialist sweet shops in this country.

The European sweetmeat dates back to the seventeenth century with the discovery of sugar. During this period sweetmeats were an integral part of the rich man's menu, forming part of the meal, as is often the case in other countries. Today, in Britain, the sweetmeat is best visualized as a home-made confection to be found on Women's Institute stalls or delicately displayed in tiny baking cases in a traditional confectioner's shop. Mass production techniques have replaced the sweetmeat with similar, but not identical, pre-packed products. However, although the sweetmeat has largely disappeared and the traditional sweet shop must now compete with cinemas, newsagents and slot-machines, the sweetmeat's

successor strikingly resembles its forerunner in many aspects. In this sense the sweet, for adults, may be closer to the major food categories than Douglas (1975) supposes. 'Kets', the child's sweets, are an entirely different matter.

Kets and Sweets

'Kets' and sweets must not be confused. Although the distinction may seem to be purely linguistic other more substantive issues indicate that 'kets' are a very distinctive kind of confectionery, belonging exclusively to the world of children.

The analysis presented below is based on observations made whilst working in a youth club in a small North Eastern village. The children referred to range in age from 11 to 17 but age group distinctions are relatively fluid due to the tight-knit nature of the community. A main focus of activity, for children of all ages in the youth club, is the buying and selling of sweets, primarily of the 'ketty' variety, although older children tend more towards other kinds of sweets. However, children almost always use the word 'kets', whilst adults prefer the word 'sweets'; occasionally, adults may jokingly refer to 'kets', especially if they are confections bought for children, but would never use this word for sweets they themselves are going to consume.

It would seem, therefore, that the term 'kets' usually is used for those sweets at the lower end of the price range and it is these sweets which children most often buy. It could be argued therefore that the distinction between 'kets' and other kinds of confectionery rests solely on economic factors. However, before assuming that children buy 'kets' because they are cheap and that children, in general, have less money to spend than adults, certain problems should be considered. Why don't adults buy 'kets'? For 10p., the price of a chocolate bar, they could buy ten pieces of bubble gum. Furthermore, although it is certainly true that children tend to buy the cheaper sweets, it is apparent from field data that the total amount of money spent by a child on sweets at any one time may be quite considerable. A typical purchase might be: four "Fizz Bombs" at 1p each; three "Liquorice Novelties" at 2p each and two "Bubble gums" at 1p each. The total outlay, 12p, could buy two small chocolate bars, which are also available at the club. This may be an example of getting more for one's money, but another factor should be taken into account. The spending power of children is obviously an important consideration for manufacturers, but if this were the sole criterion influencing production, why would manufacturers not produce miniature versions of the kinds of confections available in the higher price range? Some years ago it was possible to purchase slim bars of Cadbury's chocolate for one old penny and a slightly larger version for twopence. The equivalent products today are tiny "Milky Ways" and "Mars Bars" sold in bags as "Family Packs". Why do manufacturers not sell them singly? The answer seems to be that there is no demand for them.

Children, then, do not buy 'kets' simply because they are cheaper or have a lower unit price. 'Kets' have other properties, besides their cheapness, which make them important for the child. Manufacturers may not be exploiting the power of the child's purse directly, but more insidiously, the power inherent in the conceptual gulf between the worlds of the adult and the child.

Junk Food

In order to resolve such problematic issues concerning the attractions of 'kets' I carried out a statistical survey, dividing the range of confectionery into three groups. The term 'kets' was given to all those sweets costing less than 5p. An intermediate group was established for sweets costing between 6p and 10p and a third group contained all sweets costing 11p or more, including the more expensive boxes of chocolates. By isolating 'kets' as a distinct group according to price it was possible to examine further more elusive contrasts between 'kets' and other sweets, an investigation which suggested that the alternative adult meaning of the word 'kets' - rubbish - was indeed a powerful and persuasive metaphor. Much of the attraction of 'kets' seems to lie precisely in the way they stand in contrast to conventional adult sweets and adult eating patterns generally. This is apparent in their names, their colours, the sensations they induce, their presentation and the descriptions of their contents, as well as in the timing and manner of their consumption.

If adults regard 'kets' as rubbish, low in nutritive value and essentially "junk food", then it is quite logical that manufacturers should label their products in an appropriate manner. 'Kets' are often given names which emphasize their inedibility and rubbishy content in adult terms. Many have names usually reserved for mechanical and utilitarian objects which adults would never dream of eating. Children, however, will gleefully consume them. There are, for example, Syco Discs, Fizzy Bullets, Supersonic Flyers, Robots, Traffic Lights, Coconut Bongos, Diddy Bags, Telephones, Catherine Wheels, Golf Balls, Pipes, Jelly Wellies, Star Ships and Car Parks. Other kinds of sweets rarely have such names.

Not only do children consume what is inedible they also ingest many 'animals' whose consumption normally is abhorred by adults and which are surrounded by dietary taboos.³ Cannibalism, too, ranks highly. Thus children find themselves eating Mr. Marble, Mickey Mouse, Yogi Bear, Mighty Monkey, Snakes, Kangaroos, Spooks, Jelly Footballers, Dinosaurs, Lucky Black Cats, Dormice, Bright Babies, Jelly Gorillas and Fun Faces.

This rubbishy attribute of 'kets' is highlighted when the above names are compared to the names given to other more expensive kinds of sweets. These often describe the actual composition of the confectionery and frequently yield precise and detailed information for the consumer. Adults, it seems, like to know what they are eating. In this range there are names such as Munchie Mints, Butterscotch, Assorted Nut Toffee, Nut Brittle, Coconut Whirls, Rum and Butter Toffee, Caramel, Peppermint Lumps, Toffimallow, Royal Butter Mints, Liquorice Bon Bons and Chocolate Coconut Ice.

Although a few 'kets' possess descriptive names the unfamiliar eater should beware of assuming that the description refers to the taste. The names 'Seafood', 'Shrimps' and 'Jelly Eels' may lead to the expectation of a savoury sweet; they are, however, sweet and sickly. 'Rhubarb and Custard' and 'Fruit Salad' are hard, chewy 'kets' presenting a marked contrast to the sloppy puddings implied by the names. Such inversions and contradictions of the accepted adult order are an essential facet of the child's world so that 'Silly Toffee Banana' and 'Orozo Hard Juice' could only be 'kets'.⁴

'Kets' are mostly brightly coloured, as in the luminous blues and fluorescent oranges of the "Fizz Bomb" and the vivid yellows and reds of many jellied 'kets'. Some have contrasting stripes, with clashing colours as in the "Liquorice Novelty". Here, black strips of liquorice are festooned with shocking greens, reds and blues. All these harsh, saturated colours are absent from the "real" food of the adult world. Blue, especially, is banned; bright blue belongs to the realm of iced cakes and such concoctions are a highly ceremonial form of food, divorced from the everyday menu.⁵ Many sweets, also aimed at the child's market but not classed here as 'kets', are similarly coloured: for example, "Smarties", "Jelly Tots", "Jelly Babies" and "Liquorice Allsorts". Such bright and stimulating colours are not normally associated with the dinner plate.

In contrast, the sweets which are aimed primarily at an adult market have a more uniform and duller appearance. Most are coated in chocolate, presenting exteriors of shades of brown, significantly known today as "natural" - i.e. healthy - colours. In the more expensive boxes of chocolates the highly saturated colours of the 'kets' are present, but they are masked by a coating of chocolate and hidden from sight. Where chocolate is not used, the colours of these sweets tend towards pastel shades, soft, delicate colours inoffensive to the eye, as in "Sugared Almonds" or "Mints". The "Humbug", with its sedate black and white stripes, is a poor relation of the "Gob Stopper" and lacks its coat of many colours. For sweets to be suitable for adult consumption, highly saturated colours must be avoided, for such colours are not present in "real" food, and adults, unlike children, are conservative about what they class as edible.⁶

The eating of this metaphoric rubbish by children is a serious business and adults should be wary of tackling 'kets' for, unlike other sweets, 'kets' are a unique digestive experience. Many of the names given to 'kets' hint at this: "Fizzy Bullets", "Fizz Bombs", "Fizz Balls", "Festoon Fizzle Sticks", "Fizzy Lizzies" and "Fruit Fizzles" all stress the tingling sensation to be gained from eating them. Many 'kets' contain sherbert, and "Sherbits", "Refreshers", "Sherbo Dabs", "Dip Dabs", "Sherbert Fountains", "Double Dip Sherbert" and even "Love Hearts" all make the mouth smart while eating them.

In contrast other sweets provide little in the way of exciting consumption. The nearest rival among these sweets to the explosive taste of many 'kets' is the "Extra Strong Mint" - a poor rival to the "Knock Out Lolly". The stress on citrus fruit flavours and the tangy, often acrid, taste of many 'kets' contrasts radically with the preponderance for sugary or nutty flavours in adult confections. The ferocious taste of a "Fizz Bomb" is quite distinctive and lingers in the mouth for a long time, temporarily putting the other taste buds out of action.

Chocolate, which is a favoured ingredient in sweets aimed at the adult consumer, is rare among 'kets' but may appear as chocolate flavour. There is a range of 'kets' styled in the shapes of hammers, saws and chisels which, although appearing to be chocolate, are in fact made from a substitute. Similarly, "Cheroots" look like long sticks of chocolate, but have a gritty texture and are dry and tasteless. They lack the rich, creamy taste and smooth texture so beloved by the advertisers of real chocolate.

This marked difference in taste and texture between 'kets' and other sweets lies naturally in the ingredients used in their manufacture. 'Kets' are frequently unwrapped so that a list of ingredients is difficult to obtain but common substances include: sugar, glucose, edible gum, edible vegetable oil, citric acid and assorted flavourings. Other sweets, in contrast, proudly list their ingredients, frequently stressing their "natural goodness". For example a message on the wrapper of a "Picnic" chocolate bar states in large letters that the bar contains: 'Milk chocolate with peanuts, wafer, toffee and raisin centre'. In much smaller print it admits that the chocolate contains vegetable fat - thus lessening its nutritive properties and desirability - but stresses that there is a minimum of 20% milk solids which must not be overlooked.

It would seem, therefore, that sweets, as opposed to 'kets', are to be valued as a form of food. The "Picnic", as its name suggests, is to be regarded as a source of nourishment. These kinds of sweets are, like the sweetmeat, closely associated with our major food categories and many can be concocted at home from common household ingredients. Cookery books include recipes for sweets such as truffles, peppermint creams, coconut ice and toffee. 'Kets', on the other hand, are impossible to reproduce in the kitchen.

Thus sweets belong to the realm of "real" food, to the private world of the kitchen, and are bound to the concept of the meal. They have names indicative of their wholesomeness; their flavours echo the patterns of taste normally associated with the dessert - the sweet course - of the meal. Mary Douglas suggests that it is 'the capacity to recall the whole by the structure of the parts' which has insured the survival of the British biscuit in our diet and similarly it is this mimetic quality of the sweet which has kept it bound to the realm of "real" food (1974:747). 'Kets', in contrast, are, by their very nature, removed from the adult domestic sphere and belong to the public, social world of children. In name, taste and consumptive experience, 'kets' belong to the disorderly and inverted world of children, for in this alternative world a new order exists which makes the 'ket' an eminently desirable product.

Lévi-Strauss (1975) suggests that the differing culinary modes to be found in a particular culture may reflect its conceptual categories and it is in this light that the adult meaning of the word 'kets' becomes highly significant. If sweets belong to the adult world, the human cultural world of cooked foods as opposed to the natural, raw food of the animal kingdom, then 'kets' belong in a third category. Neither raw nor cooked, according to the adult perspective, 'kets' are a kind of rotten food. These rubbishy, decaying and diseased sweets are the peculiar property of children who are, from the adult perspective, a tainted group. Children are, from the adult point of view, pre-social, in need of training and correction through the process of socialization and thus it is quite consistent that it should be 'kets' which children regard as their most social form of food. Mary Douglas has argued that 'consuming is finding consistent meanings' and that goods are purchased and needed 'for making visible and stable the categories of culture' (1977:292-3). In this sense the literal consumption of different kinds of confectionery by adults and children reflects the inherent contradiction between their separate worlds.

Metaphoric Meals

Mary Douglas (1975) argues that the eating of meals involves a whole series of rituals concerning both the presentation and consumption of food. Food is served on different kinds of plates according to the kind of meal. It is eaten with cutlery of assorted shapes and sizes, which transfers food from plate to mouth. The use of the fingers for this act is frowned upon by adults and rarely should food enter the mouth by hand. Chicken legs become embarrassing to eat in the company of others and the eating of lobsters entails a battery of dissecting instruments. Finger bowls and serviettes are provided for the eaters of such foods to remove any particles adhering to the hands or lips. As Goffman suggests, 'greasy foods that are not considered to contaminate the mouth can yet be felt to contaminate the hands should contact have to be made without insulation by utensils' (1971:73). The more ceremonial the meal the more crockery and cutlery necessary to facilitate the eating of it.

Those sweets which are to be regarded as belonging to the realm of "real" food must be similarly distanced from the body, unlike the non-food 'kets'. 'Kets' are usually unwrapped, whereas other sweets tend to be heavily packaged, for the layers of paper provide the necessary separation between the inner and outer body. The phrase "a hand to mouth existence" - a poor and despised condition - emphasises the necessity for maintaining this purity. As with the eating of meals, the more packaging provided, the more ceremonial the sweet and the further it is removed from the 'ketty' sphere. The ultimate example is the box of chocolates, which is shrouded in paper. Like the eating of meals, these sweets must be insulated against contamination from external sources.⁷

The "After Eight Mint" is superlative in this respect. The clock face printed on the box is repeated on each tiny envelope which encases the sweet and it registers the time at which this confection should ideally be consumed. Its other name - the "After Dinner Mint" - secures the place of this chocolate as a highly ordered kind of confection inextricably bound to the concept of the meal. Douglas (1975) suggests that meals are externally ordered by time and that it is the temporal sequence of meals which is used to divide up the day. The "After Eight Mint" confirms the suspicion that the eating of sweets by adults should be similarly structured.

After the meal has been eaten, the sweets may be passed round. Their tray shaped box and insulating containers recall the crockery and cutlery of the meal and the hand is allowed minimum contact with the sweet. The most criminal of acts, frequently indulged in by children, is to finger the sweets for, as with the meal, food must scarcely be handled. To nibble a sweet and then to replace it in the box, again common practice among children, is never allowed amongst adults for that which has been in the mouth must ideally remain there.⁸

Just as ceremonial meals have a yearly temporal cycle so does the purchase and consumption of sweets. Boxes of chocolates are bought at Christmas, birthdays and other ritual occasions, as is apparent from television advertising: in the week before Christmas many of the usual sweet adverts are replaced by ones for the more luxurious boxes of chocolates.

One major ceremonial sweet, heavily packaged and adorned, is not, however, aimed at adults directly. This is the Easter Egg, given by adults to children. The Easter Egg bears all the characteristics of an acceptable adult sweet and encapsulates the whole ethos of the adult's conception of food. Firstly, it marks a ritual season. The silver-paper covered egg sits resplendent in a highly decorated cardboard box, frequently adorned with ribbon. Under the outer layers the chocolate egg can be found, already separated into two, to avoid much contact with the hand. It is easily pulled apart to reveal a packet of highly-coloured sweets, such as "Smarties" or "Jelly Tots", which although ostensibly similar to 'kets' are in fact much less 'ketty'. It is significant that Easter Eggs are never stuffed with lp "Bubble Gums". The Easter Egg is strictly ordered in both its construction and its consumption and is ultimately representative of the adult's, rather than the child's, conception of acceptable food.⁹

'Kets', however, are never subject to such constraints. Most 'kets' can be found piled high in a cardboard box on the shop counter, with no respect for variety or flavour, into which children's hands delve and rummage. Few 'kets' are individually wrapped and, if they are, the packaging is minimal. Children do not heed the purity rules of adults. They frequently share their sweets, offering each other bites or sucks of a 'ket'. The absence of wrappers leaves the fingers sticky; dirty hands break off pieces to offer to friends. 'Kets' are fished out of pockets along with other articles and "Bubble Gum" is stuck to the under side of tables to be reserved for later use.

'Kets' are not distanced from the body. Indeed, many are specifically designed to conflict with the adult's abhorrence of food entering the mouth by hand: "Gob Stoppers" are removed from the mouth for comparison of colour changes and strings of chewing gum continually pulled out of the mouth. Hands become covered in 'ket' and the normal eating conventions, instilled by parents during early childhood, are flagrantly disregarded.¹⁰

Indeed some 'kets' seem not to be designed for eating at all: "Gob Stoppers" fill the mouth totally, not allowing any of the normal digestive processes to begin. "Chews" produce an aching jaw - reminiscent of eating tough meat - and "Fizz Bombs" simply have to be endured. "Bubble Gum" is chewed vigorously but is never swallowed; instead it is expelled from the mouth in a bubble and held at the point of entry until it bursts, spattering the face with particles of sticky gum to be picked off piecemeal later. "Lollipops" are pulled in and out of the mouth and "Jelly Footballers" first decapitated. "Space Dust", perhaps the ultimate 'ket', has no rival. The powder is placed on the tongue where it begins to explode while the mouth remains open and the ears and throat buzz and smart.¹¹

The frequent examination of each other's tongues during the process of eating 'kets', together with the other eating techniques required to consume them, manifest a rejection of the mannered and ordered conventions of adult society. The joy with which a dirty finger probes the mouth to extract a wine gum contrasts strongly with the need for a tooth pick to perform a comparable operation at table.

'Kets' therefore are the antithesis of the adult conception of "real" food while, for adults, sweets are metonymic meals.¹² 'Kets' involve a rejection of the series of rituals and symbols surrounding the concept of the meal and are regarded as rubbish by adults. Because they are despised by the adult world, they are prized by the child's and become the metaphoric meals of childhood. Although children will consume sweets of any kind, it is 'kets' which the child will most often buy. Adults never buy them. The child's private funds, which are not controlled by adults, are appropriately spent on those sweets symbolic of his world. 'Kets', deemed by the adult world to be rubbish, are under the child's control.

As in the adult world, where food has an important social aspect, 'kets' and the owning of 'kets' are symbols of prestige for the child. Many 'kets' are sold with additional novelties such as football picture cards or tattoos. These items can be swapped, bartered or sold and used as symbols of friendship or as peace offerings among younger children. The child who has the most picture cards or who distributes 'kets' gains a peculiar kind of prestige and his social status is momentarily elevated, just as the provision and sharing of food operates as a social medium among adults.

The importance of these metaphoric meals for children cannot be overstated. 'Ket' times are in-between meal times and the eating of 'kets' begins almost as soon as the adult meal is over, lasting until the structure of adult society again disrupts their consumption. In our society such continual eating of sweets by adults would be classed as a medical disorder requiring a cure.

Not surprisingly, given the coherent and persistent structure of the child's culture, children have an immense knowledge of the varieties of 'kets' available and are always careful to distinguish between them. "Chewing Gum" is 'chut' or 'chewy' as opposed to "Bubble Gum" which is 'bubbly'. A lollipop is rarely simply called a 'lolly', but instead a "Kojak" or a "Traffic Light". Planning one's meal is a serious business.

Conclusion

'Kets', therefore, are the child's food, the food over which he has maximum control. By eating 'kets' rather than other sweets children force confrontations with the adult order, for 'kets' have been despised by adults. The esteem which is attached to 'kets' is emphasised by the ridicule and disgust expressed by the child towards adult food, which is food over which children have little control.

Children are highly articulate in their views on food and school lunches come in for high contempt. The authoritarian structure of the school frequently denies any self-expression by the child so it is significant that it is school dinners which are most abused. Mashed potatoes are known as 'Mashy Arty' or 'shit' when too salty. Mushy peas are likened to 'snot' and school rice pudding looks as if someone has 'hockled' (spat) into it. Semolina is like 'frogspawn'. Thus the foods which children are forced to put inside their bodies by adults are given the status of the excretions which pass out. The most graphic statement of all goes as follows:

Yellow belly custard, green snot pie,
Mix them up with a dead dog's eye.
Mix it thin, mix it thick,
Swallow it down with a hot cup of sick.

As Charlotte Hardman comments, children perceive the adults' 'weaknesses and responsibilities in connection with food and drink' and much time is spent in reducing 'adult order to humorous disorder' (1974:6). Food is used as weapons by children, but more vehement than the physical attacks with food are the verbal onslaughts directed by children against adults and their control of food:

Old Mrs. Riley had a fat cow,
She milked it, she milked it
She didn't know how.
She pulled its tail instead of its tit
Poor Mrs. Riley covered in shit.

The implied sympathy contained in the last line of this rhyme is not genuine for gales of laughter always accompany the relating of this event.

Finally, if food is equated with harmfulness by the child, it is logical that non-food should be *steemed. 'Kets' are regarded by children as being particularly beneficial but other substances are also considered to be worth investigating. Children frequently dare each other to eat the literally inedible. Sawdust, plant leaves and other natural substances are often consumed, but a particular favourite is the game called "Fag-Chewing". A cigarette is passed round with each child taking a draw until all the tobacco is gone. The unfortunate person left with the filter is then made to eat it or, at the very least, to chew it. Such activity is reminiscent of Jimmy Boyle's (1977) memories of a Glasgow childhood, where one child was ostracised until the others discovered that he could eat worms.

This ability to consume metaphoric rubbish is an integral part of the child's culture. Children, by the very nature of their position as a group outside adult society, have sought out an alternative system of meanings through which they can establish their own integrity. Adult order is manipulated so that what adults esteem is made to appear ridiculous; what adults despise is invested with prestige. As has been amply demonstrated in the analysis of other 'muted groups' (see Ardener 1972) and counter-cultural movements (see Young 1979), those groups who are excluded or suppressed may possess an alternative conceptual system for defining the self which reinterprets the social models of the wider society.

For children 'kets' are an important vehicle for defining the self. As I have suggested elsewhere (James 1979) regarding names, adult labels for children are destroyed and a new name - a nickname - is created by children out of the remnants. Similarly the adult, ordered conception of food is thrown into disarray by the child. Adults continually urge their offspring to eat up their food and lament that they are "fussy eaters", but children are only picky in adult terms. Indeed children stuff into their mouths a wide variety of substances; it is just that these are abhorred by adults.

The eating of 'kets' thus represents a metaphoric chewing up of adult order. Food belongs to the adult world and is symbolic of the adult's control over children. By disordering and confusing the conceptual categories of the adult world children erect a new boundary over which adults have no authority. Mary Douglas (1966) has argued that a corollary of the image of dirt as disordering and anomalous is that it can be associated with power. The eating of dirty, decaying 'kets' is condemned by adults and it is this very condemnation which allows the child to assume control over at least one of his orifices. By eating that which is ambiguous in adult terms the child establishes an alternative system of meanings which adults cannot perceive. It is this which allows the culture of childhood to flourish largely unnoticed by adults and, at the same time, to exist largely beyond their control.

Allison James.

NOTES

1. The term 'sweets' is roughly equivalent to the American term 'candy'.
2. Marie Johnson (personal communication) has pointed out that the Icelandic word for meat or flesh is kjot and an alternative rendering is ket. Norwegian for meat is similarly kjøtt. This evidence suggests therefore that ket, meaning diseased meat, is possibly derived from Scandinavia.
3. Children delight in eating the inedible and the recent success of Raymond Briggs's Fungus the Bogey Man (1977) is witness to this. Bogeymen have, like children, inverted the accepted food categories and for breakfast consume such delicacies as: 'rotton grapefruits, Oxfoot marmalade, Flaked Corns and Golden Waxy bits'.
4. The eating of such disordered food is consistent with the child's culture, but adults abhor such anomalies. On sweet wrappers and other foodstuffs there is a guarantee issued which states that: 'This product should reach you in perfect condition. If it does not, please return it' ('Twix' wrapper). 'Kets', on the other hand, offer no such guarantee.
5. It is important to note that bright, artificial colours do appear in "real" food but such foods are also classed as "junk". Many instant products - e.g. Angel Delight and cake mixes - have extremely bright colours. Bright colours appear often in food at children's parties - e.g. jellies, blancmange and cakes. Such food, like 'kets', is also regarded as being detrimental and essentially rubbishy.
6. Birren provides an example of the conservative nature of adult attitudes to food. He cites a Western baker 'who once tried to market bread in pastel tints such as blue and violet (and) found the venture a dismal failure' (1961:167).
7. This trend in packaging has recently increased. Vegetables are hygienically scrubbed to remove any trace of soil and sold in vacuum-sealed packs in supermarkets, insuring minimum contact with external sources. Similarly a recent advert for a brand of frozen peas claims as its most valued asset that the peas are frozen within five minutes of being picked, again minimising the risk of contamination.

8. Goffman substantiates this point with respect to food: 'Note that in this matter of markings (traces left by the body) knives function in an interesting way ... since they provide the means of taking without contaminating, as middle class children learn the first time their mother finds a teeth-marked crater in a cake, a loaf of bread or a piece of fruit. These craters are defiling, and it is very important to disinfect the object and its setting by cutting away with a clean knife until only a flat surface remains' (1971:72).
9. There is a smaller, less ceremonial Easter Egg on the market which seems to be aimed at the child market. It has some 'ketty' qualities, for the cream filled egg, although appearing to contain albumen and yolk, is extremely sweet to eat, and far removed from the taste associated with fried eggs, which it closely resembles.
10. A difference may be noted between "chewing gum" and "bubble gum". "Chewing gum" is often eaten by adults as well as children whereas "bubble gum" seems to be restricted to children. "Chewing gum" is heavily packaged and pale cream in colour, while "bubble gum" is far more 'ketty' and has only one wrapper. Moreover "bubble gum" is available in a variety of colours, e.g. pink and turquoise, the non-food colours.
11. "Space Dust" is particularly interesting. It has only recently appeared on the market and was initially very popular although costing 12p, well above the normal price range of 'kets'. It is brightly coloured and has all the necessary qualifications for being a 'ket', but children are ambivalent about it. One possible explanation for this is that "Space Dust" involves too bold a statement about the appeal of 'kets' for children and thus is often dismissed by them as being 'stupid' or 'daft'.
12. Adverts for sweets for adults fully substantiate this idea and the eating of sweets for adults is portrayed as (1) helping to achieve a desired end - e.g. A "Flake" gives a girl the world of motor boats and a "Bounty" provides 'the taste of paradise'; (2) substitute food - e.g. 'A Mars a Day helps you work rest and play'; or (3) an additional, nourishing extra which will not affect normal food intake - e.g. 'A Milky Way is the sweet you can eat between meals without ruining your appetite'. 'Kets' are rarely advertised but one advert for a "Fizz Bomb" shows cartoon children, with their eyeballs whizzing round in opposite directions. Far from stressing the utilitarian aspects of eating sweets - whether as a source of physical or mental strength - 'kets' are to be recommended as an unforgettable gastronomic experience.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

FIELDWORK AND THE BORDER COUNTRY

Raymond Williams' latest novel, The Fight for Manod (hereafter Manod), is the last part of a trilogy that started with Border Country and was continued in Second Generation. Although, in this sense, a conclusion, it is only in Manod that Williams begins to reflect on issues which have concerned him since the closing pages of Culture and Society. Several of these issues, I feel, are relevant to the practice of social anthropology.

The central themes of Manod concern the problems of 'commitment' and the idea of 'fieldwork'. These are problems of major importance in our discipline and their treatment in Manod highlights crucial issues in contemporary theoretical work. On a more general level, the movement initiated by Williams and other members of the New Left has made important and controversial inroads into the study of culture and society, manifest, for example, in the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Williams' own work on communications and the mass media, and the seminal contribution of New Left Review. These contributions, far from leading to debate among social anthropologists, have been more or less ignored. Why should this be?

Partly, I feel, this lack of attention stems from the notion that Williams' academic background is literary and that his range is confined to radical literary criticism. This notion is predicated, of course, on the feeling that social anthropology is concerned with 'theoretical' representations of society whereas Williams' work stems from 'literary' or 'fictional' accounts. It is, I believe, hard to maintain this distinction. Each form of representation requires conditions of existence that can be specified in more or less social terms. Williams' work is a testament to the certainty that truth and fiction are not clear-cut oppositions; as he shows in The Country and the City, so-called fictional accounts can provide us with important insights into historical conceptualisations of the 'social'. It seems to me important to reverse the question about truth and fiction and ask of social anthropology: why has theoretical representation been so privileged that it has been drained of all social context? In Manod the complexities of the writing push to the limit the notion that literary or fictional representation is distinct from theoretical representation. The book thus raises questions particularly pertinent to the current, 'theoretical' state of social anthropology. To illustrate these points it is necessary to provide a brief outline of the book.

The plot of Manod is simple enough. Manod is a tiny rural settlement in mid-Wales. An implicitly Labour government is involved in a massive scheme to develop Manod and its environs into a new kind of city. This city is to be based on the original dispersed settlements in an attempt to create not a unified and densely settled population but an organically linked series of local centres:

Each of the centres would go up to ten thousand. Between each, as you see, at least four or five miles of quite open country, which would go on being farmed. So what you get, as a whole, is a city of a hundred, a hundred-and-twenty thousand people, but a city of small towns, a city of villages almost. A city settling into its country.
(p.12)

The political capital is obvious: full employment and adequate transport and cultural facilities in an area chronically lacking these and a solution to the burgeoning problems of the inner city districts. The plan for Manod is the outline of a possible resolution to the extreme distance between the country and the city.

In this situation Matthew Price, a lecturer in social history in his late fifties, is asked to go to Manod, to stay there for up to a year, and to 'live the problem'. There are several reasons for choosing Price. His own work has been on the movements of populations and communities within Wales, a work which, it is claimed, has 'humanised' the historians' practice. He understands the area not only statistically but also in terms of its community. The other main reason for the choice of Price is his intimate connection with this border country, for he himself has been the subject of such migration between country and city, custom and education, Wales and England. Robert Lane, the Government official in charge of the Manod project, believes that these two factors make Price an excellent candidate for such participant observation.

Price, however, is not alone in this consultancy work. He is accompanied by the radical young sociologist, Peter Owen. Price has the respect of the political establishment and of the academics within that establishment, but Owen is different. His radicalism has taken the form of violent protest against the Vietnam war, rejection of an academic career in favour of working on car assembly lines, and survival by freelance journalism and writing. His connections with Wales are through his wife's parents; he sees this year's work as no more than a public relations exercise for governmental decisions already made.

These two take up residence in Manod and begin their work. The images that Williams uses to describe the countryside around Manod are dominated by age and damp and the endless migration of people that either die in old age or look for employment or residence elsewhere. The community is still there but only in certain specific aspects. Neighbourliness, however friendly, can be claustrophobic; community only manifests itself at the rituals of marriage and death. The social seems drained and restricted by decades of colonialism and economic decay. In this village perhaps the most remarkable quality is the resilience of community in the face of such diversity.

Beyond the community in a geographical and also, to a lesser degree, a social sense, the farmers of the area are engaged in a qualitatively new set of relationships that stretch far beyond Manod. Price and Owen discover the existence of an ever-increasing network of land deals between farmers and a small group of businessmen. Arrangements that change the patterns of landownership and the corporate status of the farmers involved are eventually traced by Owen to England and London, and then, via various holding companies - Afren Agricultural Holdings, the Mid-Wales Rural Community Development Agency - to a multinational, Anglo-Belgian Community Developments.

Once Owen and Price have discovered this, the period of fieldwork is brought to a halt. Price and Owen decide to confront the Government with their information. Beyond this, though, their responses differ. Owen resigns his post and proposes immediate publication of the unearthed facts, while Price attempts to fight the bureaucracy of government, still hoping to realise Manod in a humane way:

'But these advanced designs are at the moment only technical. Yet there is unique opportunity, just because they are technically different, to explore new social patterns, new actual social relations.' (p.194)

The conclusion of Manod is no conclusion at all. Price suffers a heart attack as a direct result of his decision to try and change Government policy. He takes up an academic post in South Wales. In the end the problem of Manod remains unresolved, an open-ended project subject to the vagaries and power struggles of party politics. And Price is no clearer about either his relationship with the border country of his past or the changes he still feels.

It is through the vehicle of these two central characters, Price and Owen, that Williams discusses the nature of commitment. Price, the older of the two, has moved from a position within the Labour Party to an independent stance. For him this is partly a result of the irreconcilability of his own views of the world and the social relationships that should be attempted on the one hand, and the monolithic technology of planning that fuels the ambitions behind the Manod project and party politics on the other. Price sees only faceless bureaucracy:

He stood on the island, looking along the streets of the Ministries, Buildings opaque from the street that are blind to the street. In the centre of the street stone men, cast men, metal horses. Stone helmeted features running with grime. An upraised stone arm, leading an empty charge. Power in stone. (p.9)

(It is perhaps worth remembering that in Williams' previous novel The Volunteers, set a decade in the future, there is only coalition government) Yet, working independently of party politics, Price is presented as a 'committed' man. Commitment here does not depend on a simple and clear-cut choice concerning adherence to party ideology; it involves, instead, the adoption of a critical distance, a rejection of planning that relies solely on technologies of power and pre-given hierarchies of participation. Commitment entails the awareness of an intimate connection between the public and the private domain. For Price, Manod is not only a receptacle for planning; it is a felt experience, something understood as a lived tradition. And Price understands that the choice between development and non-development is, in itself, false. Mid-Wales could adopt certain strategies of development - enhancing tourism, increasing subsidies and plough-up grants for farming, initiating cooperative-based local industries - which would maintain and stabilise the local population, but the plan for Manod envisages something more than an over-spill or a series of workers estates built around central massive factories. Manod is conceived as a new form of community, its industries developed around the latest ideas in alternative and intermediate technologies of fuel and power ('... a city built primarily to demonstrate the new energy and communications technology ...' (p.191)). Its aim is to integrate the farming populations instead of simply alienating them. These factors only increase the commitment of Price at a personal level. A potential has been suggested for the border country but it is a potential that could wreck a traditional structure of feeling. In the end Price is broken by the implications of that commitment.

The other extreme of commitment is embodied in the character of Owen. Owen's past contains both the Oxford of academic life and the Oxford of the car factory at Cowley. His parents are both militants, his father as a trade union member, his mother in the Labour Party. His anger is directed indiscriminately at an exploitative system. Yet there is in his anger a specific quality relevant to Manod. In conversation with Price he views Manod as an impossible project until power relations are radically 'changed at the centre'. He says:

'I grew up in the kind of place that is now the best they can imagine: a car works with housing estates all around it. And that's the real pressure. Here, like anywhere else, the factories would take their unquestioned priority.' (p.74)

Owen's commitment is one that blocks this governmental planning simply because it is rooted in an unacceptable set of power relations. But for Owen, too, there is a way in which the public and the private connect. In the simple fact that he is now married and that he sees a real need for settlement, he is forced to choose and to take sides over Manod.

The disjunction between these two modes of commitment is most vividly conveyed in a scene late in the book when Owen and Price sit in on a ministerial-level meeting. At this discussion the full implications of the proposed development and its radical departure from previous technologies are discussed. Both Price and Owen had not been fully informed of the nature of this development. Yet, while Price is prepared to stay and to disagree, Owen leaves the room in order to publish and expose to public scrutiny the facts that have been unearthed. In a sense, the uneasy alliance between Price and Owen and the tactics they adopt are symbolic of their disgust at the forms of calculation employed by the political parties. One refuses to engage at all, preferring the relatively familiar area (yet with its own canons of truth and falsehood) of the media. The other stays to argue but to argue in terms alien to the ministerial meeting. The Minister comments:

'You've reminded us all of the most basic considerations. In fact more than reminded. You've lifted our eyes.'

This almost biblican turn of phrase could be veiled sarcasm. Or it could represent the inability of established political groupings to enter into a dialogue that is not concerned solely with planning, production and economics.

Commitment is an ambiguous concept in social anthropology. Although central to the anthropologist's relation to his work it has yet to be discussed except in terms of naive subjectivity or outright cynicism. For Price the terms of his commitment are at least clear. He has family roots in the area of Manod; he has lived, even if distantly, in this border country. Within social anthropology the terms are less clear; consideration of commitment is at best restricted to mumbled introductions, at worst ignored in the name of a 'scientific' explanation. But there are certain questions we can, and should, be asking ourselves. How, for example, did we come to be doing fieldwork in a particular geographical and theoretical area? What theoretical work are we extending, and is our line of inquiry a development or merely an ornamentation? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, what are the predictable effects of our work on the people with whom we live and join in community?

Manod raises questions not only about commitment but also about the methodology of social anthropology. It is concerned with fieldwork. Lane, the senior Government official tells Price :

'What I'm suggesting is a different inquiry: a lived inquiry. That you should go to Manod. That you should live there as long as you need - it could be anything up to a year. That you would go informed; you'd have every access. But that you would go as yourself. To the place, to the people. That you would live the problem. And then that you'd come back and tell us.' (p.14)

For Lane, Price is the ideal candidate for such an anthropology since he has lived in the area of Manod and has attempted in his work '... to make a history human and yet still a history.' The *raison d'être* of fieldwork in this narrative is that it humanises the plans: it makes them come to life. It is not enough to examine representations of Manod, Price must also go, in the flesh, to give an expert opinion. In other words, his presence is the final guarantee that the plans, the estimates, and the calculations are correct.

It is hard to evaluate the status that Williams accords to fieldwork. Yet whether Williams approves of fieldwork or not, he recognises its inadequacy in the context of Manod. For what begins as the scene of a very personal journey - Price returning to his past in the present - ends up as a domain of multinational development in which it is Owen who takes up the investigation and returns from overseas with the results. The sub-plot of quarrelling farmers struggling to make a living and eventually entering into complex land deals is both a local concern and also the manifestation of supra-national interests. In this, participant observation and the practice of fieldwork are inadequate. Just as the century-old decay of Manod is inspired by economic and social relations beyond the area, so the changing patterns of land ownership and the threat of massive land speculation are the result of multinational machinations.

Yet, in the end, there is a problem for both Price and Owen. They know that fieldwork has failed, that it is insufficient to live the experience, or, more correctly, that the experience is no longer a localised one. But with the revelation of multinational connections none of the major characters can see what is to be done. To be sure, Owen promises publication and Lane guarantees an investigation, but this is hardly the problem. The problem is that the techniques of fieldwork and participant observation are inadequate to deal with specific kinds of economic and social relations. It is this that finally reduces Owen and Price to a position of inactivity.

This is a problem central to modern social anthropology. Williams raises many of the pertinent issues. He outlines the classic justification of fieldwork - that it provides a guarantee, through its very concern with humanity, of social reality; but he also shows how inadequate fieldwork can be in specific situations.

Faced with such a problem, we must rethink our conceptualisation of political, economic and ideological relations that are constituted neither in the community nor in the realm of a universal 'humanity' yet which have their effect both at the level of the community and at that of the individual. The sense that social anthropology has reached its limits when it comes to understanding social relations that transcend the community and that are not reducible to human subjects has resulted in the idealist responses of either a collapse into psychologism or the pretentious and absurd extravagance of a 'world system' that bulldozes its way through the specificity of the social formation. We cannot accept these two reckless responses. So the problem remains. This is the legacy which The Fight for Manod leaves to anthropology and it is this we should take up.

Steve Priddy.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Bridewealth Payments and Nuer Cattle

Dear Editors,

In his valuable article "Colonial Policy and Prophets: the 'Nuer Settlement', 1929-30" (JASO x:1), Douglas Johnson refers to a seminar paper¹ which I read at the Institute of Social Anthropology in Oxford, earlier this year. He cites my paper as an example of how the uncritical acceptance of Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic observations about the Nuer (in this case about the role of cattle in their economy) can 'distort' a general argument (in this case about the relationship between stockwealth and bridewealth in some East African herding societies). Because Johnson does not say what my argument was, nor explain in what way it was 'distorted', I would be grateful for the opportunity to comment on his remarks.

I distinguished in my paper between two patterns of bridewealth payment (which may be called Types A and B) and argued that these patterns were related to two different ways in which cattle may be said to make a vital contribution to subsistence among East African herders. Type A bridewealth has the following characteristics. It is an onerous payment which often impoverishes the groom; the amount paid is arrived at by means of formal negotiations between the parties; there is an ideal payment which is rarely achieved in practice; the bulk of the payment, and ideally all of it, is handed over before the bride and groom begin living with each other; and the stock of bridewealth are distributed by a senior kinsman of the bride in a way which is formally determined by a number of earlier marriages - those of the bride's parents, grandparents and great grandparents. Type B bridewealth has the following characteristics. It is not an onerous payment; there are no formal negotiations, there is no ideal amount save, in some cases, a nominal initial payment of half a dozen or so animals; the bulk of the payment is made by the continuous transfers to the bride's kin over the life of the marriage; and the animals are distributed by the groom directly to his individual affines.

I pointed out that among groups with Type A bridewealth, in contrast to those with Type B, cattle do not provide the major part of daily subsistence for the majority of the population. Their importance is, rather, as a standby in times of recurrent food shortage, due to crop failure, when they are not consumed directly but converted into grain. Since the exchange of one animal for grain may ensure a family's survival over, say, a six-month period of extreme shortage, it does not matter in these societies, how thinly cattle are spread about the population. I argued that Type A bridewealth is the main means by which this spreading is achieved.

My argument was based on a description and analysis of Mursi bridewealth (Type A) and subsistence but, in order to generalise my conclusion, I considered, in the second part of my paper, seven other groups of East African herders, including the Nuer (who are highly comparable to the Mursi culturally, linguistically and economically). Not only does Evans-Pritchard make it clear that the Nuer could not survive on the products of their herds alone, but he also states that their cattle 'probably do not greatly exceed the human population'² (The Nuer, p.20). Recent research on minimum herd size among East African herders² suggests that the Nuer would need getting on for ten times that number of cattle in order to subsist entirely on milk, blood and meat, and I therefore felt justified in citing Evans-Pritchard's estimate of their per capita stockwealth in support of what I took to be the uncontroversial assertion that cattle are not their major source of daily subsistence. I suggested that the real economic significance for a Nuer of acquiring a single animal of bridewealth was not so much that it 'has in it the promise of a herd' (Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer, p.89) as that it has in it the promise of several bags of grain in the event of a crop failure.

According to Johnson, however, I should not have accepted Evans-Pritchard's estimate at face value, but should have taken into account 'how the machine-gunning of Nuer herds by planes, the confiscation of cattle, the effect of two rinderpest epidemics in three years, and the hiding of cattle from government patrols and tax assessors might have affected his impressions'. The important words here are 'might have'. We have no way of knowing whether Evans-Pritchard took these factors into account when making his estimate, nor can we know exactly what difference they 'might have' made either to the real world or to Evans-Pritchard's impressions of it. I should perhaps have stressed the cautious tone in which he expressed himself, but then I take it for granted that any statement about per capita stockwealth, for any group of East African herders, by any ethnographer, must be treated with caution. The important question, for my argument, is whether Evans-Pritchard was so far out - that is by a factor of between 5 and 10 - as to undermine the correlation between the economic role of cattle and the nature of bridewealth payments upon which my argument was based. I don't believe that Johnson would claim this. Indeed, the figures for Nuer stockwealth from the Jonglei report to which he has kindly drawn my attention in correspondence do far more to corroborate than to question the accuracy of Evans-Pritchard's estimate.

But did I so phrase my argument as to make it hinge on the accuracy of a statement which Evans-Pritchard himself admitted was no more than an informed guess? I have two points to make here. Firstly, and as should be clear by now, there is no magical significance in the 1:1 human/cattle ratio. It just happens that this is roughly what Evans-Pritchard suggested for the Nuer and it is also what I estimate for the Mursi. But I also included the Jie, who have three to four times as many cattle per capita as Evans-Pritchard estimates for the Nuer, in the category of herders for whom cattle are important mainly as a standby in the event of crop failure. I also quoted the following remarks of Deshler about the Dodos, who are said to have four or five cattle per head of population:

The significant fact of Dodos subsistence is that annual food shortage is a severe problem ... grain supplies in dry years are not adequate to see the tribe through the drought period; ... livestock, largely cattle, are their one means of hedging against possible famine.

I believe that this applies to the Nuer (and the Mursi) as much as it does to the Dodos.

Secondly, my argument was in no way based upon Evans-Pritchard's observations about Nuer pastoralism. I could not avoid referring to the Nuer, for obvious reasons, but I devoted only one paragraph, of twenty-eight lines, to them in a typescript of thirty-six pages. I was and am surprised that my brief reference to Evans-Pritchard's estimate of Nuer stockwealth should have occasioned so much more interest and comment than either the general argument I attempted to sustain or my analysis of the Mursi case which took up half the paper. It was not I who made much of the Nuer. Indeed, as I left Oxford, following the seminar, I was both bemused and intrigued by 'the most evident symptoms of "Nuerosis"' which my paper had unwittingly revealed!

Yours faithfully,

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NOTES

1. The Economics of Mursi Bridewealth: A Comparative Perspective. 9/2/79
2. Brown, L.H. 1973. The biology of pastoral man as a factor in conservation. Biological Conservation. 3(2): 93-100.
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3. Native Cattle Keeping in Eastern Africa. In A. Leeds and A.P. Vayda (Eds.), Man, Culture and Animals. American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1965, p.167.

Editor's note: David Turton's article, under the title mentioned above, is due to be published in J. Comaroff (Ed.), The Meaning of Marriage Payments. London: Academic Press (in press).

BOOK REVIEWS

J.P. Parry. Caste and Kinship in Kangra. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1979. 353pp. £12.50.

Parry's book invites comparison with Adrian Mayer's classic Caste and Kinship in Central India. Partly for historical reasons, it is a better book, its better documentation reflecting the mass of scholarship (about half of Parry's exhaustive references) published between the writing of Mayer's preface in 1958 and Parry's in 1976. The increasing sophistication of this scholarship has placed Parry in a position to argue more carefully. What allows these advantages to blossom, though, is Parry's colourful, informal, ironic and wholly modern style. This style is not just attractive in itself; it is related directly to Parry's important theoretical contribution. I shall devote this review to characterizing the relation between the two.

Let me briefly, and quite unfairly, caricature a contrasting style manifest in the ethnographic conventions of an earlier generation. There, once the conditions of fieldwork had been discussed in a foreword, the anthropologist's presence was resolutely effaced, no doubt in keeping with the conventions of scholarly writing in general, but with the effect that an unquestioned, authoritative objectivity was achieved. The informants were quoted either en masse ("they said", "the people believed"), or anonymously ("a villager asserted", "a chief told me"). These quotations merely ornamented the discursive argument of the anthropologist, while their style of presentation fostered the view, which was perhaps spelled out explicitly elsewhere in the work, that the object of study was a collectivity with an irreducibly substantial, unitary, given existence the lineaments of which were discovered and described as an archaeologist might discover and describe a stone ruin. There was little place for the ambiguity, negotiability, and complexity of daily face-to-face life. In short this ethnography claimed to be objective in two senses: the observing subject was, as far as possible, suppressed, and the society studied was treated on the analogy of a concrete object comparable to other similar objects.

In contrast, Parry's ethnography might be characterized as ironic in the following senses. The observer is brought implicitly into the frame; the ambiguity and negotiability of everyday life is given a place not only in ethnographic representation but also in positive theoretical statements; and the object of study loses its (false) concreteness. The first two points are neatly illustrated in the following passage, which caps about fifty pages of discussion of the hierarchization of the circulating connubium and the putative presence of alliance in North India. Parry is trying to discover whether the affine of the affine of the affine, as reported by Vatuk, is actually considered an affine:

Faced with my intransigent insistence in taking her through some of the more mind-bending extensions Vatuk lists for Uttar Pradesh, Mata Ji's exasperated last word on the subject was to invoke the proverb 'nanan da narnoi tamak toi', 'the HZH of the HZ is just a drumstick (without a drum)'. Since nobody can hear him there is no need to bother about him. (p.309)

In other words, his informants, for certain clear reasons 'adamantly repudiated many of the terminological corollaries of such a principle [that there is a connection between those linked by more than two marriages]' (p.310).

The point is made, but much more is conveyed. The anthropologist has stepped into the picture: he has read Vatuk, and in that light he 'intransigently insists' on cross-examining Mata Ji. We learn something of his relationship with Mata Ji, a relationship close enough to bear the strains of insistence and exasperation. Most importantly we have a clear view of the nature of the anthropologist's evidence, and we are inclined to believe him because we believe that he has measured precisely the give in his informants' patience and, therefore, the significance of their assertions in this, to them, improbable matter. In other words, the Kangra of 1971, in which the anthropologist questioned his friends, is brought into the text, and brought in systematically throughout.

But it is not merely that Parry has a particularly vivid if informal style, for this style resounds in what we conventionally (and I am sure quite wrongly) distinguish as theory in opposition to ethnography. One of Parry's most important conclusions is that the segmentary principle should be taken much farther than it has been so far. He concludes that

... the whole system [of marriage] operates not in terms of firmly delineated groups which exist as substantial entities, but rather in terms of a whole series of shifting categories which are capable of almost infinite segmentation ... Each is simply a slightly different way of talking about the hierarchy, and in different contexts different frames of reference are appropriate (p.279).

The foundations of this argument are revealed as Parry continues: 'there are ... no corporate groups engaged in the exchange of women. There are simply a large number of harrassed fathers being bombarded with gratuitous advice from all sides ...' (p.280).

To illustrate the force of this let me compare it with a colourless theoretical paraphrase: "there are no corporate groups engaged in the exchange of women. There are simply a number of individuals." In adopting the paraphrase we have lost nearly everything essential to the point. The 'gratuitous bombardment from all sides' evokes Parry's rich ethnographic material, which argues that these fathers, far from deciding with perfect knowledge, are sometimes even willfully deceived; that their decisions are intersubjectively established and by no means wholly their own; and that all this occurs in a rich medium of often conflicting viewpoints and opinions. The detail that the fathers are 'harrassed' implies the presence of the anthropologist not as an objective observer, but as a wry commentator on a scene in which he too, however peripherally, is implicated (standing in the corner, as it were, while Uncle Chanda Singh tells Father what he really should do). In other words, Parry uses one well accepted anthropological generalization, segmentation, to dissolve another, marriage groups, but he does so by referring to a dense, colourful, difficult, dateable, polysemic and actual world.

We may be lulled into accepting this merely because this is how we think the world is: we like our characters authentic, not sincere, our plots vraisemblable, and our endings ambivalent. But the real key is that, however we like our stories, 'almost infinite segmentation' successfully represents a more complex world than the groups or categories of generalized exchange, and 'almost infinite segmentation' is best represented in turn by detailed reference to actual persons. It would be a serious misreading of Parry to take it that he intended the reader to be distracted or dazzled by these colourful references, but what he certainly did intend was that the "facts on the ground" (a phrase which in other writers suggests Mr. Gradgrind's tyrannically meaningless "hard facts") take on strength enough to turn anthropological discourse from its habitual course. I think he is successful in this.

A great deal of the book, however, is devoted to solving a problem which is created by this achievement: if there is nothing but a series of shifting categories, what principle determines the use of one category rather than another in a particular situation? Parry's answer, in general, is that the category is chosen for the context by the viewpoint of the speaker. There is a good deal of unresolved tension, however, between the position that the speaker is a maximizing individual plain and simple, and the position that the speaker is more complex and in some sense partly altruistic. Thus on the one hand Parry writes that, in marriage choice, fathers make decisions 'with a view to maximizing their personal prestige in the eyes of their neighbours and immediate competitors in the status game' (p.280). Yet the transactionalism of this statement seems an exaggeration, for Parry shortly after this passage points out that the "we" - - not the "I" - - of marriage transactions is a small segment measured meticulously against neighbours and agnates, while the "they", the bride-takers, tend to be a larger segment, a clan or a local sub-clan. This (and other evidence) indicates that at least a measure of altruism, of wider reference, tempers the maximizing of personal prestige.

The solution would be to have it both ways, in keeping with Parry's complex vision, and this, I believe, is what, in the last analysis, he does. Let me illustrate this from Parry's discussion of motives in household partition, a discussion in which an oversimplified economic explanation might so easily be proffered. He distinguishes three analytically separate sorts of explanation. The "underlying" cause is simply that all households are eventually disrupted by the eventual predominance of conjugal family concerns over the joint family. The "predisposing" causes are a thoroughly discussed series of economic events which may so imbalance the conjugal families' contributions to, and calls on, the joint family that partition may be favoured by one party or another. The "immediate" cause is quarrelling between members of different conjugal families. But not even the immediate cause is simple. Parry writes:

The direct causes of the split will appear to be the product, either of personal conflict between household members, or one of individual taking a unilateral decision to realise his short-term advantage by cutting loose from the joint household, or -- most probably -- of both (p.194).

H.L. Seneviratne. Rituals of the Kandyan State. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1978. 190 pp. £12.50.

This excellent book is a monograph in the strict sense: a detailed and perhaps exhaustive study of a narrow, well-defined topic. Its title is slightly misleading. It deals with the rituals surrounding the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy in central Ceylon. Possession of the Buddha's tooth relic was essential to legitimate a Sinhalese monarch from at least the twelfth century; the temple built to house it was connected to the palace and the king frequently attended its rituals. The Kandyan kingdom, which had ruled central Ceylon for three centuries, ended in 1815 when the city was taken by the British. However, most of the Temple's arrangements survived both this political shift and the next one, when Ceylon became independent as a united country in 1948. Change has come, but very gradually, for the most part unintended and even unobserved. The Temple's ritual complex thus holds a double interest: in it we can witness elaborate rites of a state long dead and we can also use it as a focus for studying changes in the distribution of power and the symbolic language of Sinhalese society. While Seneviratne's title suggests only the first approach, almost half the book - and the half that is likely to appeal to a wider audience - is devoted to the second.

After providing, with clarity and concision, the necessary introduction to Kandyan society, Seneviratne describes the orientation of the relevant buildings and their internal disposition, the elaborate organisation of the Temple functionaries, and the Temple's rituals, daily, weekly and annual. Only specialists in Ceylon studies may wish to attend to every word in these pages, but they are not to be slighted on that account. There are very few such painstaking and authoritative descriptions of ritual in the entire literature on South Asia, and this work may serve as a model of careful ethnography. The daily and weekly rituals, which Seneviratne characterizes as 'rituals of maintenance', are cast in the form of attendance on a king's person. That is at the same time to say that they follow the Hindu pattern of attendance on a god in his temple. The very name of the Temple is literally 'Tooth-relic Palace'. The last kings of Kandy came from Hindu South India, where kings were divine and temple worship treated gods like kings; but Tamil Hindu influence on Sinhalese culture is far older than this last dynasty. That the object of veneration is here not a god but the Buddha's tooth, and the chief officiants Buddhist monks, is anomalous from the point of view of Theravada Buddhist orthodoxy, but within a Dravidian cultural context it appears as a normal variation on a familiar theme.

The maintenance of the Tooth and the king's associated legitimacy and well-being led to righteous rule, which resulted in the harmony of nature and society as manifest especially by adequate rainfall. In the biggest annual ceremony, the Asala Perahâra or Pageant, a magnificent parade symbolically demonstrated in its arrangement the hierarchic integration of the Kandyan state under the king's hegemony, and at the same time helped to make that a reality by compelling the rulers of the outlying provinces to come and participate.

The king was captured, and a British writer in 1849 expected the Pageant soon to wither away. Not only has it survived; each year it grows grander and draws larger crowds. In the second half of the book Seneviratne asks how and why. A romanticized view of a glorious national past - what Dudley Senanayake called the 'tank and temple' mentality - is not the whole answer. Most of the Temple rituals now have

no function but to cater (to a very limited extent) to religious sentiment, and their performance correspondingly tends to be sloppy, whereas the Pageant now fills the national press for a week and has earned a place on the international tourist calendar because it has assumed new functions. In particular it gives the Kandyan aristocracy a chance to indulge in pomp (often at the expense of the sacred insignia of which they ostensibly appear as the humble guardians) and to use this display of their prestige to further their individual struggles for real political power. Dr. Seneviratne is very discreet, but there is quiet humour in his description of the tussles between aristocrats and bureaucrats over arrangements for conducting the Pageant. Finally, he does not rest content with having found a functional fit between modern society and the present Pageant but discusses the tension between contemporary demands for the abolition of privilege and the enactment of a pageant of inequality. Further changes are on the way. These latter chapters should greatly interest not only orientalist and conscientious tourists, but also all students of political and cultural change in the Third World.

Richard Gombrich.

Pierre Macherey. A Theory of Literary Production. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1978. 326 pp. £4.95 (paperback).

A Theory of Literary Production was first published in France in 1966 as an attempt to work through in relation to literature the implications of Althusser's early theorising of ideology (as outlined in For Marx). Many of the difficulties of the book can be ascribed to a wider discursive tradition whose precise concepts and elaborated mode of argument pose particular problems to strangers in the field. Anthropologists should not, however, be daunted by the prospect of exploring new fields of discourse, nor should they be ignorant of the insights to be gained from such an exploration.

One of the attributes of an ideological concept, according to Althusser, is that:

While it really does designate a set of existing relations, unlike a scientific concept it does not provide us with a means of knowing them. In particular (ideological) mode, it designates some existents but does not give us their essences. If we were to confuse these two orders we should cut ourselves off from all knowledge, uphold a confusion and risk falling into error.

The distinction which he drew here between the ideological concept which can represent an 'existent' but cannot 'think' it and a theoretical concept which can provide us with a scientific knowledge of such an existent is of crucial importance for all practitioners of social anthropology, a discipline which has continually striven towards the production of theory but which has remained shackled by the conventions of a tradition of literary representation. It is also a distinction which lies at the heart of A Theory of Literary Production. Macherey

examines the problems involved in describing and accounting for both the kind of knowledge which can be produced within one of the ideological apparatuses, literature, and the relationship of this knowledge to scientific knowledge. Evidently there are some common areas of interest here and one of the tasks of this review is to demonstrate the range of levels at which these two disciplines - literature and social anthropology - intersect.

Macherey's book is made up of three sections, the first concerned with the elaboration of a theory of literary production, the second with a critique of Lenin's interpretation of Tolstoy and a critique of structuralism as practised by Barthes (pre-1966) and Lévi-Strauss, and the third with analyses of the works of Verne, Defoe, Borges and Balzac. The second section is by far the most stimulating and challenging to the layperson for it is here that the concepts which have been so tediously refined (theoretically) and exposed (in the analyses) can be seen operating in practice, thrown into relief through their dialogue with alternative positions.

In his confrontation with structuralism, a confrontation which directly challenges the epistemological premises of post-Lévi-Straussian anthropology, we can begin to see the outlines of Macherey's own epistemological position. Structuralism, as Macherey sees it, is based upon the two concepts of 'order' and 'totality'; it implies a coherent structure latent within the apparent disorder of manifest reality. It therefore falls into what he calls the 'interpretative fallacy' of positing a hidden essence or meaning behind or within the object which is the source of our knowledge of it. Given this limitation structuralism cannot bring anything new to the object, it cannot transform it, but can only present us with a reproduction of it, a mimicry of reality. In contrast to this, Macherey's materialist position entails an understanding of the object in its difference from other objects, examining those absences and silences that limit its reality and that form the necessary conditions of its existence. According to Macherey, this theory thus provides the possibility of an 'authentic knowledge' of the object without 'denying its presence':

A science is not an interpretation of its objects, it is a transformation, an attribution of significations which the objects themselves did not initially possess. The transformation effected by theoretical knowledge leaves the object-reality intact; it does not probe its origins or its depths, it endows it with a new dimension. (p.150)

Taking as an example Lévi-Strauss' analysis of myth, he discusses the implications of the structuralist analysis which deals only with what is said, and ignores that which is not said, the result being, he claims, that the myth is construed in relation to an intention, and thus can only be the object of a psychology and not of a true logic. The contradictions which Lévi-Strauss claims are resolved by such myths can therefore only be located at the level of psychology; they are 'imaginary' contradictions. He adds: 'It is impossible to think the real presence of a contradiction, it can only be conceived as an absence.' (p.153)

It is these 'real' contradictions which cannot be thought that form the central focus of Macherey's understanding of literature. Literature, for him, is not a coherent totality, representing a hidden meaning; it does not simplistically reflect the ideology of its time. It is produced within history, from a particular social position, and as such

gives us a unique glimpse of society at that time. In this glimpse we encounter various ideologies produced within that society. Expressed in literary form such ideologies have their own 'flawed coherence', yet by reading them in relation to that which they elide, that which they do not mention, the contradictions represented by them in the text can be seen to be evoked by the real contradictions within society. Thus

The spontaneous ideology in which men live ... is not simply reflected by the mirror of the book; ideology is broken, and turned inside out in so far as it is transformed in the text from being a state of consciousness. (p.133)

It is this ability of literature to evoke the historical contradictions of an age through the medium of ideology which gives it, for Macherey, a unique epistemological status. Through literature the truth may be revealed, although it may not be theoretically known:

Thus we can gauge the distance which separates the work of art from true knowledge (scientific knowledge) but which also unites them in their common distance from ideology. Science does away with ideology, obliterates it; literature challenges ideology by using it. If ideology is thought of as a non-systematic ensemble of significations, the work proposes a reading of these significations, by combining them as signs. Criticism teaches us to read these signs. (p.133)

Macherey presents us with a challenging problematic. Anthropologists concerned with the "reading" of cultural phenomena cannot fail to take note of the complexity which the shift to an Althusserian epistemology can reveal. With hindsight however, given more recent developments within semiotics, A Theory of Literary Production does represent certain limitations and indeed the practice of social anthropology itself must call attention to the most important of these.

Even an 'Althusserian' anthropology engaged in the production of "theory" is embedded in a form of discourse not unlike that of literary representation, and certainly within the mainstream of anthropology the "truth" that is being revealed is derived from an uncomfortable blend of theoretical practice and literary creation. Clearly Macherey's work has a great deal to contribute towards our understanding of the real significance of our own work, but we in turn must question him as to the adequacy of a theory based upon the theoretical autonomy of 'literature'. Without a more comprehensive theory of the processes of signification within ideology and within theory the confusion between the two, indicated above by Althusser, cannot be wholly dispelled.

Joanna Lowry.

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