

An Apache Portrait of the Whiteman

(j answers a knock at the door, and finds L standing outside.)

- J: Hello, my friend! How you doing? How you feeling, L? You feeling good?
(j now turns (to) K and addresses her .]
- J: Look who here, everybody! Look who just come in. Sure, it's my Indian friend,
L. Pretty good alright!
(j slaps L on the shoulder and, looking him directly in the eyes, seizes his hand
and pumps it wildly up and down.)
- J: Come right in, my friend! Don't stay outside in the rain. Better you come in right
now. U now drapes his arm around L's shoulders and moves him in the direction
of armchair.]
- J: sit down! sit right down! Take your loads off you ass. You hungry? You want
some beer? Maybe you want some wine? You want crackers? Bread? ...How
'bout it? ...Maybe you don't eat again long time. ...
[At this point, J breaks into laughter. K joins in. L shakes his head and smiles.
The joke is over.]
- K: *indaai' dogoy.3.3da!* ("Whitemen are stupid!")
- Basso 1979, 46-47

1Creating America

Herve Varenne

II American"?

"Whitemen" may not be stupid, but the Apaches are on to something when they caricature their American neighbors by overemphasizing the displays of openness, friendliness, and concern that Indians would not perform in similar settings. When the white men were still only a rumor among the Apaches, Tocqueville was writing that, in America, the "manner" of men who meet by chance "is natural, frank, and open" (1969, 567). Since then, many others have pointed out that in America people who barely know each other use first names, that they smile at each other and otherwise display signs of goodwill. Some, like Vidich and Bensman (1968), have also wondered at the way people who know each other very well as adversaries, if not enemies, will still, in public, smile, joke, and in all other ways not display their enmity.

If any pattern of behavior can be said to be "characteristically American," this is the one. Using first name with strangers, joking good-naturedly with political adversaries, is not typical of the "manner" of all men and women across the world. On the other hand, few if any general commentators on America have failed to mention the "importance of friendship." This unanimity is enough to make one suspect an artifact. But if, besides Apaches and Frenchman, Britishers (Gorer 1948, chap. 4) and others have noted with more or less insistence the importance of friendship and a friendly demeanor, it must be because of some experience they have had in the United States.

It is the nature of this experience that is at issue among those who are at work on America as a culture. If so many have felt a "difference" when they encounter the United States and its institutions, we can feel confident we are not pursuing a figment

of our imagination. What we cannot do, however, is rely on this common sense to tell us *what* was experienced. What else must we do with such observations? This is the methodological question we must start with. To do this, I think it will be useful to examine at some length what is implied when one talks about American friendliness, whether one is a native or an outside observer, whether one is using it to praise or to criticize. Friendliness is a relatively simple behavior, and a brief discussion of the American mode will help me introduce the kind of issues that must challenge all cultural anthropologies of America. What are Apaches, Tocqueville, Vidich and Bensman, and other observers of American greeting patterns saying when they argue that "openness" is "American"? Who are the Americans? What exactly are such observers saying? Are they saying that:

- Americans are friendly? Is friendliness in greeting the expression of the state of mind of (most? many? more than elsewhere?) people who live in the United States?
- it is common for Americans to greet people in a friendly manner? If we were to count instances of greeting behavior cross-culturally, would we find that people who live in the United States use first names most of the time? More than people in other countries?
- one should expect all people who live in the United States to either be friendly or act friendly? Or should we expect only people who have been born and raised there to exhibit the trait? Should we expect third-generation Americans to be more friendly than first-generation immigrants? What about blacks, southerners, women addressing men, and so on?
- friendliness is above all a problem that all those who live in the , United States have to deal with?

These are the kinds of questions that any general characterization of the typically American will raise, whether it concerns "individualism," "democracy," "conformism," "materialism," or any of the other "isms" that are applied to the culture.

I will eventually argue that only by asking the last question can we move in a fruitful direction. At present, let us continue our discussion of the methodological issues raised in characterizing Americans as "friendly" by further examining such greetings. This will provide us with a concrete basis for the more theoretical discussion that follows. Notice that the analysis of friendliness in greeting starts with the observation of an event that is somehow surprising. Tocqueville's remarks are made in a chapter where he contrasts his experiences in England with his experiences in America. Vidich and Bensman are surprised because they expected adversaries not to be friendly, even in public. Initially at least, what "American friendliness" refers to is *an event that contrasts with other likely events* in similar settings. Without a contrast the event would not be noticeable. // Perhaps it could be interpreted, as ethologists like to do, as something that all primates do to display nonaggressivity. One could then go no further, and we would have to dismiss a common intuition. Something more is going on.

To stress contrast is also to stress context. The event of using first names soon after meeting for the first time, an item of behavior sometimes used to justify a statement about American friendliness, does not stand alone. Whether or not the analyst is conscious of it, the analysis of the event depends on what happened before

and after the greeting. It also depends on what might have happened but did not. It is important that the first names are used soon after the two persons have met for the first time or that it is happening even though they are locked in a political fight for domination in their town. We must know that these two persons have last names, that each knows the other has a last name and what it is. This tells us that both are explicitly *not* using these last names. We also want to know what the participants can say about the use of first and last names (to each other, in interviews, etc.). Finally, we want to know what other people might do with the same event, particularly people who do not live in the United States.¹

Notice, at this stage, that we have ceased looking at the behavior itself, or at the setting itself, and are now looking at its historical and political context. We are looking at what the greeting is a response to and at the way it can be answered. We started with the two events that traditional , ethnography gave us (individuals using/not using first names); we now have two sequences involving several participants. The first step of each sequence starts with the same behavior:

STEP ONE

Two men meet for the first time;
we know that two different utterances make sense as responses:

STEP TWO

2a

*They use first names in direct
(though they know each
last names);*

2b

*They use last names in direct address
address (though they know each other's
other's first names);*

We now also know that this sequence can have two sets of contrastive endings depending on an overarching code for proper conduct:

STEP THREE

First names

(2a) Use

(2b) Do not use

3a. 1

3a.2

Character-
istically
"friendly"
culture
(America)

This is interpreted by
others (or by themselves)
as "friendliness"
and "openness."

This is interpreted by
others (or by themselves)
as "cold formality."

3b.1

3b.2

Character-
istically
"unfriendly"
culture
(Apache?)

This is interpreted by
others (or by themselves)
as "rudeness" and
"improper familiarity,"

This is interpreted by
others (or by themselves)
as a sign of "respect"
or "consideration."

It would not take much more investigation to find out that the third step in the sequence could take many other forms. In any event, this step is rarely the final one if the situation is of any political import. In an American setting, one possible step four would include a discussion of the "authenticity" of an appropriately friendly greeting: Did the people "mean" it? Were they only pretending? This could be followed by commentaries on how terrible it is that people would pretend, perhaps followed by hypotheses about the cause of such pretense. The ideal typical case I just drew is not completely artificial. It could be seen as a schematic summary of the process Vidich and Bensman (1968) followed as they moved from watching people greet each other in the streets of Springdale and maintain unanimity in political meetings, to a mention of the people's view of themselves as "friendly," to a stress on the shallow character of this friendliness, to a hypothesis that friendliness is an escape from the realization of powerlessness. Ted, my informant in the case I examine in chapter 10, followed a similar narrative structure as he told of his ambiguous encounter with a friend. Two things are important here. First is that the issues we must raise are fundamentally interactional, social. A greeting pattern obviously requires at least two actors. In fact, to expand on Arensberg's analysis of the minimal unit of culture study, we must consider that, looking over the shoulders of the couple greeting, there stand an "enforcer"-the political institutions that make one, or both, pay a price for a misgreeting-and an "interpreter"-the ideological institutions that are given the task of identifying a particular greeting as a token of a general type.²

The second matter of importance that must be emphasized at the outset concerns the early entry of matters of "philosophical" importance into the development of any discussion of a particular instance of greeting. Obviously, in most instances questions of "authenticity" are not raised by a "hello!" However, if any issue is to be raised, then authenticity or other symbols of the same type will soon become the topic. It is not so much that all greetings are "important," but rather that a close linkage can always be established by *the participants* between items of behavior that analysts commonly consider unimportant and some of the "major themes" of the culture. The reality of this linkage is central to the work being presented in this volume, and I will return to the issue presently. But let us first go back to our questions about "American" friendliness.

Observationally, we have the case of observers (some native, some professional) who watch people greet each other, using first names and maintaining an open manner, and who then question their authenticity. We finally have the case of some observers who give such a sequence as an example of the American. These observers suggest this sequence is not "conservative European" or, for that matter, "Apache" if the joke I used as an epigraph is a good suggestion for another way of handling greetings.³ Even if the sketch above were presented as the final stage of an exhaustive cultural analysis-and the material in chapters 8 and 10 suggests this would not be outrageous-the evidence would still be based on the single-case analysis that is at the core of ethnographic, anthropological approaches. Tocqueville and Vidich and Bensman imply that they have seen many instances of the use of first names. I could vouch that it is "prevalent" in all American institutions I know, from small-town churches to big-city universities and business corporations. I could even vouch for the "importance of

questions of authenticity." I could call upon the reader's own experience. But I could not be explicit about the boundaries of the population that could be characterized as friendly.

Many argue that the only analyses worth making are those that produce a probabilistic statement about the relative frequency of a trait within a specified population. If this is one's position, then it is clear that any generalization of a pattern to a population must be based on a rigorous comparative statistical analysis. Some who should know better sometimes write as if ethnographic approaches could provide the grounds for such generalizations, as they claim to validate their statements by claiming that "many" or "most" of their informants exhibit the trait. In fact, any probabilistic analysis must be organized by two principles that are of interest here because ethnographic approaches can never fulfill them: (1) the population to be characterized must be sharply bounded on a priori criteria (e.g., all the people who are citizens of the United States, or any specifiable subgroup within this population); (2) the behavior that is to be considered characteristic of the population must be so operationalized that it is clearly distinguishable from other events. Clearly, one could design a research project that would establish how often, within the boundaries of the United States, people use first names. This could be stratified by setting, race, sex, social class, national origin, citizenship, length of stay in the country, and hundreds of other "variables." Such a survey might suggest directions for research. But it would not answer the basic anthropological questions about the "place of this "trait" in relation to other traits in the production of everyday life-that is, about "cultural patterns."

It is well known that anthropology has developed itself in contradistinction to probabilistic kinds of research questions. Sometimes it has been because the field situation made it materially impossible to ask them (the natives would not sit for the questionnaires, the limits of the population were not clear, the "trait" could not be unambiguously operationalized, etc.). The rejection of quantification goes deeper in fact. In the United States people certainly do fill out questionnaires, even if they sometimes grumble about it. The only justification for ethnographic approaches in this country must thus lie in the radical assertion that the patterns of importance are not statistical events. Since all the authors in this volume use ethnographic, or quasi-ethnographic, methods and, by default at least, find themselves on the side of the more extreme form of the argument, I will now make the case for this argument.

America!

In brief, for me what makes it necessary to understand a specific behavior in terms of the concept of culture in its particularistic sense is any evidence that the behavior is the starting point for a particular type of "political" problem in the oldest sense: it must be a concern for the polity, that is, for the institutionalized social order. Whether or not the behavior is "prevalent" is irrelevant to this analysis. Some of the most interesting behaviors in any culture are rare events-think of voting, for example. What is characteristic of the culture a person has to deal with is the institutionalized pressure exerted on his behavior. It is the resources the person can find around him as he works out his response. Such constraints and resources are relevant anywhere they are active

and useful, and only there. The tautology is intended: the constraint is a structure, in Dumont's sense, and as such it is either there or not there (198Gb [1966],219). It is not more or less there.

Think, for example, of what it may mean to watch an American movie in France. The movie could not have been produced there. But it can start an interaction between itself and a French audience and, less abstractly, among members of the audience. The movie, given its particular form, has a certain power over the interaction it starts. This is the power that puts the French "at risk" of being American. But the rest of the interaction, for example, the conversation one may have about the movie with friends, is now going to be controlled by the French polity. At this point the movie can easily be transformed into a "French" cultural event as it becomes a token of "America," though it now is an America that Americans often will not recognize. Contrast this to the situation of someone who first walks the narrow hallways of Kennedy Airport. This person, perhaps a tourist or an immigrant, is in a position radically different than at home, since any misstep will now trigger an American institution—for example, the immigration officer who insists one stand in an "orderly" line. The person may personally "not understand," but even the revolt, if it leads to an interaction, will be responded to as an American event. It will be a token of "American racism" or of "foreigners with strange customs, who must learn."

The demonstration that there is an "American" way of doing anything must involve an analysis of the processes linking a complex set of behaviors that permit certain struggles, and games, to be conducted. It must be demonstrated, for example, that "friendliness" is powerful—so powerful, in fact, that it can be used to *lie* about the implicit relationship that is being established. We are on our way to our analytic goal when we can show that, while first-name greetings do imply "friendliness" and "familiarity," *they can also be used when there is no friendliness or familiarity, when the underlying relationship is antagonistic and when the actors are aware that they are struggling. It then becomes clear that friendliness is so powerful that people must fear it.*

Paradoxically, friendliness is never so culturally relevant as when one notices it is not there. Someone who can be said not to be acting friendly, someone we suspect of not being friendly, is acting in an American fashion, whatever his intentions, his national origin, or the extent of his personal "enculturation," to the extent that his friendliness is questioned. Any statement to the effect that someone is "not friendly" implies the existence of institutional pressures that make an absence of friendliness have consequences for the future of the interaction.⁴

"Absence of friendliness" cannot be operationalized. One cannot simply count people who do not smile when greeting strangers, since the absence of a smile is significant only if we are operating within the pattern that makes it a consequential event. A stern face is an item only when a smile is possible. This is to say that friendliness is a significant symbol, a pattern of behavior. It is itself related to complex patterns of other behaviors (e.g., those glossed as "individualism," "democracy," ~r "conformism"), all of which are politically consequential, from passing exchanges in the street to presidential campaigns and intellectual argument. I label this overall pattern "American" (rather than X, or "Nacireman"—American spelled backward, as

Miner [1975 (1956)] suggested we do) to follow commonsense usage. *I do not do this to gloss a statistical frequency of traits in the United States.*

Such a stance does not resolve the questions we may want to ask about the extension of "America." Even if we *agree* that America is a pattern, we can still wonder where we encounter it, how we can test for its presence, when it began to be consequential, and how it can transform itself. Cultural anthropologists have not given these questions the attention they deserve. It can first be said that these questions are of a different nature from the ones we started with. They assume that we *first* construct a plausible pattern and then compare actual events to the pattern to determine whether they make sense in terms of it. Such an investigation could produce relative boundaries, but it would not establish the properties of the structure itself. Establishing a pattern is a hierarchically superior task, since it is a precondition to testing its extension in space and time.

Cultural anthropologists also have not been very interested in answering questions about geographical and temporal extensions of patterns, because good rules of thumb for guessing at such an extension are available. If we accept that, as I have been suggesting, a cultural pattern consists in the relationship between routine everyday behaviors ("smiling") and the consequences these may have in many different domains, including the philosophical questioning of the behavior ("Does he mean it?"), one may assume—until proved wrong—that, for example, if personal authenticity is at issue then "friendliness" is also at issue. If we continue climbing levels of generality, we can plausibly argue that anywhere the dominant political institutions of the United States are operative, we are "in America" (*whether or not* we are physically in the United States). America is where the Constitution of the United States, its legal and customary interpretations, and the problems it raises are consequential.⁵

In brief, a behavioral sequence is "American" in a structural sense if it can be shown to be a transformation upon a form that is politically relevant in the United States. These forms include not only those that are related to "politics" in the narrow sense (the Constitution, the two-party system, voting patterns), but also those that have consequences in social action (greeting patterns, food consumption, dress, presentation of self in public). What allows us to say that a greeting structure is American is the demonstration that (1) it can be related to "democracy" (or "individualism," "authenticity," etc.) as a "cause" for it, a "sign" or "symbol" of it, or a "consequence" from it; *and* (something that may be most starkly evident to those who come in contact with the United States for the first time) that (2) it is a political act that defines the terms of an interaction, even before it is an expression of a personal feeling.

America and Americans

I began my discussion of friendliness with a list of questions. The first was "Are Americans friendly?" This, as far as I can tell, is the normal way of asking questions about culture in an American conversation. It is a question about people and about their mental states. It is a question about an individual, a person with feelings that may or may not be friendly. It is not a question about a social fact. The last of my questions was "Is friendliness a problem?" The preceding pages began showing what can be done if we decide to answer yes to this question and look at culture as the product of institutional processes that organize politically significant relationships. If

American culture is a political event, if it is the pattern or structure of the temporal unfolding of complex interaction between many people, then America constrains *all* human beings that relate to the United States, whether they live there or not, whether they "understand" what is happening to them or not, whether they are "American" in the usual sense or not. In this perspective, the personal constitution of the individual as a separate entity ceases to be a central tool for understanding the culture itself. What remains is the intuition of difference, contrast, and reproducibility we started with. To separate culture from personality (or cognition), America from Americans, is not to reduce culture. On the contrary, it is to recapture our interest in "prior customs" that "form the habits [of individuals]," as Dewey might have put it (1930, 55). But the customs that are "prior" to any historical individual are themselves *human* creations. To be interested, in patterns of customs-culture- is to be interested in what is particularly "human" about human beings.

"Humanity," in this context, concerns the ability to vary modes of ecological adaptation, to institutionalize these variations, and to reproduce them. Above all, producing varied adaptations to environments is a group event. No human being adapts "by himself." The modalities of the adaptation, that is, its pattern or "structure," become imperative to the members of the group only as a secondary step: we adapt to our group *after* our group has adapted to its environment. The fundamental questions concern the way a group pattern gets established, institutionalized, and then reproduced through individual members who are not, strictly speaking, "the group" and are not directly "wired in" with each other. Whether this adaptation comes to generate the personal psychological constitution of each member should be considered still another question.

As has been recognized from Dewey to Geertz, the institutionalization and reproduction of variable adaptations constitute a problem of "communication" or, in modern jargon, "semiotics" or "dialogue." What has not been so readily recognized is that communication or semiosis depends on patterns of signification (the recognition that a message is "meaningful," that its behavioral base "makes a difference" and has consequences) that are institutionalized by sociological processes. It is tautological to say that members of a group "share" a communication structure. They do so by the simple fact that they are in political relation to the group *whatever their psychological (or cognitive) makeup*.⁶ What makes a message a message is a response, any response. It is not the "meaning" "given" to the message by the speaker (or hearer). . Our problem is that questions about the structure of communication systems ("culture") and questions about the cultural constitution of persons ("personality") have been confused by most of those interested in human variability. When we look at the most immediate philosophical roots of American cultural anthropology, the movement toward psychological concerns is easy to understand, for such concerns have always been dominant in the pragmatist writings that, directly or not, shaped the anthropological tradition. Paradoxical'y, perhaps, it was all the more difficult for these concerns not to dominate, since in the statements of philosophers like Dewey, Mead, or Royce the emphasis was precisely on the sociocultural constitution of the personality. That such questions are very "American" does not make them less

important. 7 The problem for anthropology is that these questions made it lose sight of the previous question, that of the constitution of culture itself.8

The question this book addresses, then, is not "Americans" in their psychological plurality. It is America itself, the environment that may transform some human beings *into* Americans. Unless we adopt a radically mechanistic and deterministic stance, we must expect to find that most people who live "in terms of America" (rather than "in" it, since it is not a physical entity) are *not* "American." But we blind ourselves to the very humanity of our condition if we refuse to consider that individual lives are constrained. "America" is a gloss for a particular patterning or structure. It is not an object, nor is it a population.

The Integration of America

When Ruth Benedict talked about cultural patterns, she also talked about "integration." When her students and critics thought about integration, it was to make the concept a hypothesis about psychological sameness. This is not the place to argue whether Benedict "meant" to do this. But since the demise of the "culture and personality" school in the late forties, any claim to have described a pattern, or structure, in a holistic, integrated fashion has been greeted with the routine criticism that such an approach "cannot handle diversity" and that it assumes a "homogeneous" population. In fact, there are no grounds for expecting any population to be homogeneous in the traditional sense.

I would now like to move from criticizing the dominant ways of studying culture to presenting the position I consider useful. I will approach the issue of structural integration first formally and then from a point of view that preserves temporality and process. .

The Structure of Culture

In formal terms, the concept of structure as used here has nothing to do with the simple repetition of a single trait. A structure is, as Piaget and Bateson said repeatedly, a system of transformations (Piaget 1968) that operates because of internal differentiations (Bateson 1972, 317-18). Adapted to a theory of culture, such statements imply that we must expect internal differentiation, differences that make a difference, to be the very condition for the integration of a culture. A description of America must point out the significant differences that are the product of cultural structuring. To give a cultural account of America is to highlight the ways bureaucracy is not family, for example, machines are not men, Italians are not Jews, being ethnic is problematic with regard to being American.

In the past an interest in such differentiations often led to a focus solely on the "categories" themselves. If the category father is different from the category mother, what is the feature that distinguishes each category? In traditional semantic analysis this feature is treated as a substantive, univocal quality of the object the symbol simply refers to: father is differentiated from mother based on the reality of "sex." Sex itself is a substantive reality differentiated from "age," and so on. In sociology and psychology, this distinguishing feature is treated as a variable, a property an individual possesses that, hypothetically, makes him or her behave differently from other individuals. "

The structuralists I mentioned approach the problem differently. First of all, the categorical difference, to be effective, must have a behavioral base. The maintenance of the category bureaucracy depends on the performance of certain acts that can be differentiated from the performance of other acts that have the property of signaling "family." However, the differentiation is not produced through a replication of some objective, finite property of the category. Rather, the differentiation is the result of (symbolic) operations performed on the indefinite properties of the behavior or object. Neither bureaucracy nor family has absolute properties. It has been said of the family that "the more one looks at [it], the more it isn't there" (Leichter 1978, 567). It could also be said that in America the more one does not look at the family, the more it *is* there, as what one is looking at is *not*. The American cultural structure is *in* the operations that distinguish between the two: fatherliness is not motherliness, whoever performs whichever for whatever reason.

These principles would apply to the study of any culture. The issue of , integration through differentiation is in fact more complex in America because the culture is articulated around such categories as freedom, choice, individualism, difference, which to manifest themselves must be performed so as to contrast with the performances of despotism, obligation, socialism, and sameness. If my analysis holds, these must not simply be "ideas" or "values" to Americans. Above all, freedom or despotism must be something that they *do*, symbolically. For freedom to be relevant, Americans must construct an environment in which they will see the signs of freedom (and thus the signs of despotism). If we are to be able to choose, Beeman reminds us in his essay on advertising (chap. 3), a variety of objects must be offered for sale. Choice must have a concrete, material basis: it must direct industrial production. To demonstrate the existence of "freedom of assembly," there must be occasions for people to meet separately from others and do different things. As Moffatt suggests (chap. 8), the concrete problems people may have in a racially integrated dormitory reside not in the personality trait of "racism" but in the behavioral paradox that makes it impossible to distinguish the symbols of "freedom of assembly" (selection of a group of friends from among one's acquaintances) from the symbols of "racism" (segregation of some people among one's acquaintances with whom one is *not* friendly).

The manifestation of difference is thus itself a symbolic event within the cultural structure. It is characteristically American to be different in the sense that it is characteristic of an institutionalized environment. It is both a positive prescription and a danger. "Difference," like friendliness, is sacred and thus dangerous. It is an issue in interaction. As I have shown elsewhere (Varenne 1977), it is characteristically American for a small town to offer twelve different ways of worshiping God with your friends and acquaintances and twelve different ways of not worshiping God. Such a display makes for an integrated structure, even though the end product of the cultural process is people who can be seen by any outsider as "very different" from each other. The participants themselves are aware of these differences-not surprisingly given that the culture is tuned to highlight them.

Integration, from this perspective, refers first to the patterns that institutionalize domains of human life, link a set of symbols to each domain as "what it is all about,"

and then differentiate people by using these properties. America, for example, has institutionalized something it calls "ethnicity" (by insisting that the Census Bureau preserve appropriately symbolized statistics,⁹ that appropriately designed rituals such as parades be performed, that local or national political struggles be fought through , appropriately based groups, etc.). It has linked to the domain a set of other symbols and stories: ethnicity is a matter of descent (where your grandparents were born), it is a matter of life-style ("culture" in the popular sense- see Moffatt, chap. 8 for more on this), it has to do with the supposed human propensity for wanting to live with people who are "like" oneself. "Ethnicity ," with all its connotations, is institutionalized as a human universal. This analysis is then justified by demonstrating how "different" Jews are from blacks-something they have no choice but to be at moments when ethnicity is made interactionally, that is, politically, relevant. Gentiles are not welcome in Jewish parades (Myerhoff and Mongulla, chap. 6).¹⁰

Integration also refers to the patterns of patterns that establish linkages and correspondences between apparently disparate domains. "Ethnicity" is institutionally different from "religion" or "education." Yet as Schneider has suggested (1969), the matters highlighted in each domain correspond closely to those highlighted in others. Most of the American interpretations of the process that multiplies religious denominations are essentially similar to the interpretations that explain the multiplication of ethnic groups. The institutional constraints that maintain symbolic differentiation between the denominations are essentially the same as those that maintain the groups: demonstrations of differences in life-styles (spaghetti versus lox and bagels), rituals where the totems of each group are prominently displayed (infant/adult baptism, parades), rituals of cross-group solidarity (the hyphenation of ethnic identification as [ethnic *adjective*]-*American*, community church services), use of the differences in national politics, and so forth. Finally, the symbolic performances that establish the existence of a multiplicity of non melting ethnic groups and of a multiplicity of churches, along with any evidence that suggests that organizational difference in the United States is a fact and increasing, are also a justification of America as "the land of the free."

Structure in Process

Such structuralist arguments, however, do not highlight the historical processes that are continually at work transforming the relationships between the different domains and their properties. It is easy to present structures as if they were absolute facts that mechanically determine behavior. As Drummond emphasizes at the end of his analysis of the tension between man and machine in various forms of popular culture (chap. 4), even such apparent polar opposites as "man" and "machine" are not fixed referentially or semantically. The distinction between the two is problematic. For a man not to be a machine must mean that in some way he can be compared with a machine. Any new machine (the computer, for example), any new statement about the nature of man (out of biology, for example), challenges our performative understanding of both man and machine.

We must go further. The development of structuralism has been accompanied by a running commentary that challenges its analyses of human behavior in the name of the acts of speaking and behaving. I am thinking here of people like Bakhtin (1981),

phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty 1973 [1969]) or Ricoeur (1976), pragmatic philosophers and their modern descendants (Geertz 1973b; Singer 1984). In many different ways, they insist that at the moment of speaking, in what might be called the radical present, all social structures suddenly hang on the future activity of an individual that cannot be understood mechanistically. This radical present is a theoretical point, since all action takes place within a context that immediately responds to the act of the individual and thereby resocializes it. The experience of uncertainty, however, is one that we all have and that is well documented. As Bakhtin emphasized, the most serious of statements is only as strong as the laughter that may follow it. We have only to watch Hollywood movies to see that what used to be taken as the most sincere display of deep emotion will now be taken as parody. We may also come to the uncomfortable realization that our own displays of serious concern will soon be laughed at. In general terms this is simply a restatement of the relative arbitrariness of the signs we use to communicate. In time this arbitrariness will reveal itself, since things do change.

Outside the social sciences, the possibility that cultural arbitrariness will suddenly be exposed is evoked by the tale of the emperor's new clothes. For a while, people refuse to trust their eyes; instead, they trust the crowd. Culture has won over Man, but Man eventually wins in the person of the little child who asks why the emperor is naked. At that moment, it is implied, the consciousness of the kingdom is radically transformed, and enlightened rationality triumphs. In real life, I suspect, the child's mother would have said something like, "Of course the emperor is naked, but don't mention it or you'll get us in trouble!" If Bakhtin (1968 [1936]) is right, only the clowns in the marketplace could mention the emperor's nakedness, and only so long as they were not imprisoned. We reach the limits of the ability to perform the truly different when we encounter the highly institutionalized. At this moment the consequences of a performance other than the one expected will be so uncomfortable that few are likely to risk it. But this is true only if the performance is itself symbolically marked as a direct threat. If it falls in the gray area of the simply unusual, possible but never done before, somewhat challenging but not aggressively so, the institutional responses may try to incorporate it. The act that was unique now becomes legitimate. Other people may come to perform it, and everything *else* may change to accommodate this "new" event.

This analysis is *only* an extension of Saussure's view of *linguistic change*. *If he is right, all utterances deviate somewhat from the structural norm. They are effective in interaction to the extent that they are recognized as institutionally appropriate. Practically, this means that the difference is ignored. At any time, however, the difference may be institutionalized, and a variant is then born. As this happens, all other aspects of the system that were dependent on the original form of the utterance must themselves change so as to maintain the necessary structural differentiations. This model for change is not a critique of structuralism. On the contrary, structuralism was produced by the need to deal with the kind of change in which nothing can happen without consequences for everything else. The history of languages and, I would argue, the history of cultures is the history of such changes. We need a structuralist theory to understand them.*

A Hierarchy of Differences

One aspect of such a *theory* of change *that* is most important for understanding people in culture, Americans among *them*, is that it is hierarchical. *French* and Italian are "different" languages. *They* are *also* "the same" languages ("Romance") *at the same time*. The Romance languages are different from the Germanic languages, but at the same time *the* two sets are *the* same. And so on until we *have* defined a family of languages *labeled* "Indo-European." Dumézil and his students (Littleton 1966) *have* demonstrated that this linguistic analysis could be transformed into an "ideological" analysis, what anthropologists *call* a "cultural" analysis. I believe that such a hierarchical *analysis could* also be conducted from the *level* of a "national" culture (e.g., America) down to the level of regional, *family*, and even personal cultures.

If culture consists in institutionalized responses, it *follows that* cultural structures are constraining, strictly speaking, *only* to the extent that a particular item of *behavior* is responded to by a particular institution. To take an example from my recent work on *family* literacy (Varenne et al. 1982; Varenne and McDermott, 1986), there are different institutional responses . to the various kinds of reading Americans do in everyday life. In particular, *there* is a radical split between the reading we do in the course of such activities as shopping, deciding *which* television program to watch, or leaving a note on *the* refrigerator door and *the* reading we do as part of *school* activities—for example, "homework." The difference lies, we argue, in the fact that homework, whoever is doing it, whatever his social class or ethnic group, however "successful" he is, is an event controlled by the school, which responds to it in specific terms, making an issue of "competence" in particular. Competence is not an issue "at home" unless one is doing homework.¹¹

The implication of this analysis is that there is much less variation across families in doing homework than in other areas of family life. While doing homework, whether you are the child of recent immigrants from Laos or a daughter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the spotlight will be on your competence. It is "your" homework that is being done; you are in constant danger of making errors; these errors will themselves be spot-lighted. At home while not doing homework, it may make a lot of difference whether you are a recent or an old American, whether you are working class or middle class. Indeed, the constraints that constitute a "class" themselves respond to, and thereby control, only some of the family's activity. Two families of the same ethnic group, living within a block of each other in the same neighborhood, can differ radically on those items that are not directly controlled by the school, the church, or the political and economic systems. For example, these families may differ in the way they handle "intrusions" of other tasks into homework (the blaring of the television, the baby brother's requests for attention, the telephone). Such -intrusions are not directly structured by any institutional representatives other than family members. It is thus not surprising that families develop special ways of dealing with them.¹²

Within the family itself, members' ability to be "different" beyond what is prescribed by the systemic differentiation of roles is controlled by the response of the other members, who preserve the institutionalized patterns that constitute the family in its own arbitrariness relative to other families. In other words, the same kind of structural analysis that can be used to sketch a "culture," to ground the possibility of

such a pattern and place the limits of its power, can be used to sketch a family "style" and understand its power and limitations.

More important for our discussion of "variability" in the United States, this analysis argues for the need to sort out the "differences" we may find as we travel across the country, encountering its classes and ethnic groups. Greetings have a different quality in the South and in the Middle West, we are told. People in California are "laid back" whereas in New York City they are tense and aggressive. Black middle-class religiousness does not have the same expression as white middle-class religiousness. The dress styles that sell on the West Side of Manhattan will not sell *in* a Kalamazoo shopping center. What sells in Peoria may sell everywhere, but don't be too sure!

The list of such "differences" could go on forever. Regional differences, class and ethnic differences, family styles, all are relevant at a certain level of analysis. But none that we can document are cases of absolute variability until they have been analyzed further. In summary, an instance of "difference" may be a case of (1) the production of the structure as it differentiates to stabilize (bureaucracy/family); (2) the production of the particular aspects of American culture that requires displays of difference at appropriate times (Jew/Irish, Methodist/Presbyterian); (3) the production of a new institutionalized form allowed by the relative independence from institutionalized pressures of the particular instance (a family method to deal with intrusions into "doing homework"). An instance of "difference" could also be a true first occurrence, a "new" form that will challenge the old forms into a realignment that transforms the culture at some level. But we are entitled to be skeptical of anyone who claims to have found such a form.

In any event, it is probably the third type of differentiation that is of most interest to those who want to challenge any generalization to "America" of what happens in the United States. They present data from Indian reservations, obscure Appalachian valleys, recent immigrants, or marginal urban groups. Quite properly, they argue that the existence of such cases disallows any statement that a behavior trait is "typical" of the population. Claiming this would deny the relevance of the everyday life realities of these groups and thus prevent us from understanding them. It is a mistake, however, to stop our analysis with demonstrating what, at this level of context, may indeed look like absolute differences. We must also investigate instances where such differences are in fact active to get a feeling for their relative independence from the broader institutional forces: we should not mistake the differences between Jews and Irish as these are controlled by American interpretations of such differences for the differences that can develop because the internal organization of a particular situation is irrelevant to the general polity. It may be possible for people in the Appalachians to develop family or religious forms quite different from those institutionalized in the national media or the suburbs because they do not need to interact in those situations where national models on these matters are used. It is improbable that they would develop alternative economic relationships to the extent that they depend upon national and indeed multinational corporations for their livelihood. by such diverse writers as Meillassoux writing about the systemic relationship between European industrialization and African family systems (1981) or Drummond writing about the

relationship between the "nanny-takers" and "nanny-givers" of nineteenth-century England (1978), radical difference in everyday life-styles or ideologies can go hand in hand with social complementarity. In such cases, however, there is no doubt that one part of the group in interaction defines the relationship involved. The British aristocracy that hired working-class women to take care of their children defined them as nannies, whereas nowadays the Manhattan executive who hires a Dominican woman defines her as a baby-sitter to make her employment appropriate to the institutionalized images offered by the late twentieth-century imagination (Lubin 1984).

At this point I could invoke Bourdieu and Passeron's ideas of "symbolic violence" (1977 [1970]). In cases of economic exploitation of certain people by others legitimated through the use of appropriate symbols, Bourdieu's ideas are certainly applicable. My own goal is broader, however, since I consider that all human relations, even nonexploitative ones, are governed by similar principles. Culture, in my view, is relevant to the relationship of people to each other, individuals to individuals, groups to groups, nations to nations. Power considerations cannot be ignored. America is "typical" of the United States because it is powerful there in the sense that a change in the organization of America will probably necessitate a change in the organization of Appalachian family life. That the contrary would be true is doubtful. A French audience at an American film still independent enough from America to do things with the movie that would not often be done in the United States. But most of these transformations will not return to haunt people in the United States, because they will probably never have to deal with them unless they decide to open their doors as certain intellectuals may do in film studies. France, on the other hand, may have little choice but to open its doors. America, whether we like it or not, is hierarchically dominant.

[Whitehead] congratulated Russell on his brilliant exposition "and especially on leaving...unobscured...the vast darkness of the subject."

All science is an attempt to cover with explanatory devices-and thereby to obscure-the vast darkness of the subject. It is a game in which the scientist uses his explanatory principles according to certain rules to see if these principles can be stretched to cover the vast darkness. But the rules of the stretching are rigorous, and the purpose of the whole operation is really to discover what parts of the darkness still remain, uncovered by explanation.

But the game has also...[the purpose of making] clear some part of that most obscure matter-the process of knowing.

Bateson 1958 [1936], 280

2 Doing the

Anthropology of America

Herve Varenne

Toward an Anthropology of America: Dangers, Challenges, and Opportunities

The following is not a review of the work anthropologists have produced over the past half-century. But a brief discussion of the kind of work that has been published will help me place more accurately what is presented in this volume. In particular, I want to

explore the processes that have led anthropologists to focus where they have so far generally focused. Bateson, optimistically, warns us about the cover-up games scientists play. He challenges us to look at the uncovered darkness and wonder at the analytic operations that have prevented its covering. By doing so, he suggests, we may be able to clarify (cover up?) the process of knowing. Anthropologists of American culture have proudly announced that "by investigations of . . . simple societies [they are] able to equip [themselves] better for the analysis of more complex forms of human society" (Warner and Lunt 1941, 3). It is only fair that we also look for what can be missed when a society-any society-is studied "from an anthropological point of view." To do so, as Warner himself suggested, there is no better method than to look at what has been *done*, for "an account [of 'facts' and 'results'] is also an implicit statement of the changes taking place in the thinking and other activities of the researcher" (Warner and Lunt 1941, 6).

What anthropologists have done, above all, is to look at small towns, small neighborhoods, and subgroups that are clearly differentiated from the mainstream because of regional isolation, ethnic separateness, odd occupations, and the like. This was a great advance, for it made audible the voices of people who were easily forgotten by those for whom "culture" was a privilege of the elite, to be studied solely in the great literary, political, or religious texts of the time. However, there was also a danger in this democratization of cultural research when anthropologists failed to establish the connections that cannot fail to exist between the different voices as they struggle and as some win. This has made the anthropology of America slightly eccentric compared with the activities of the other disciplines that deal with the culture (sociology, history, philosophy, literature, "American studies," "popular culture," etc.). This makes the relevance of many anthropological analyses debatable: Is it really true, we may ask, that we learn something about the general issues that concern us—issues of political power, economic doctrine, racial strife, educational failure, life and death—when we read about drunks (Spradley 1970), rock stars (Montague and Morais 1976; Drummond, chap. 4), and Memorial Day rituals (Warner 1953)? My answer to this question is yes, but I am aware of the dangers involved. It is with these dangers that I want to start.

Dangers

As I see it, two major temptations confront anthropologists on their way to a proper anthropology of America. There is first the temptation of exoticism. There is also the temptation of parochialism. By the temptation of exoticism, I mean the movement toward those forms of life in the United States that to intellectual, middle-class eyes seem almost as exotic as the people anthropologists normally study. By the temptation of parochialism I mean the tendency not to place anthropological analyses in the context of the work on America that has been done by other disciplines. "America" is, by no means virgin territory, particularly for those interested in imagination and symbolism. There is much to be learned from the abundant work produced by the disciplines that have occupied the territory until now. Fifty years and more of work in what has called itself "American studies" is not to be dismissed, particularly when we come to realize how closely the evolution of this work parallels the evolution of

culture theory in anthropology.² There cannot be much use in rediscovering "individual-ism" unless we can also specify how our statement of the pattern is more useful than the traditional ones.

Anthropologists, however, generally do not start from, or return to, the performances that are the symbolic focus of American uniqueness. They rarely look at literature, art, or religious thought, the staples of work in American Studies and in much anthropology of the non-American. It may even be that this lack of interest in performances that other scholars find so interesting is a deliberate political act—as finding them interesting is for the others. Doing anthropology is often said to be an act of rebellion. Anthropologists are sometimes described, and like to describe themselves, as people who stand slightly outside their own culture, who are more comfortable with the foreign than with the familiar. They are "marginal natives" (Freilich 1970).

In this context, the familiar within which one is not comfortable is the kind of everyday life that is strongly marked rhetorically as *the* "American way": the suburb, the shopping center, genteel liberal Protestantism, polyester administration. More often than not, a student will choose to work in anthropology because the discipline offers an escape from America. If fate (in the form of funding agencies, faculty advisors, etc.) pushes this student into working within the United States, the temptation is strong to search for the most exotic within the nonexotic: the regional poor, the ethnic, the drug addict. It is then easy to recapture the dominant anthropological attitude: the researcher places himself between "his people" and an audience. He assumes that the audience will be shocked and that it must be educated to a proper understanding of the rationality of exotic life-styles. Alternatively, the temptation will be to look at items of the "popular culture,"—movies, the mass media, mass entertainment, and sports—precisely because they challenge elitist tendencies within the disciplines that hold mirrors to the United States and construct America. , It would be too easy to caricature the heroic stance that anthropologists can take when defending "their" people against ethnocentric, elitist attacks. There is a strong dose of hyperelitism in certain critiques of elitism. In fact, the work on what is exotic to middle-class consciousness within the , United States has the value of ethnographic research in general. As Geertz would say, it "makes available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus [allows us] to include them in the consultable record of what man has said" (1973b, 30). It is work that makes our imaginary museum more complete. Given the prejudice against lower-class and fringe ways of life, the demonstration that such lives have a complex structure at least partially controlled by the people themselves has a clear political role. Labov's research on Black English (1972) is paradigmatic of the work that will have to be done again and again. Similarly, there is a definite value in demonstrating that products the masses appreciate have in fact a definite expressive power (Drummond, chap. 4).

Pure ethnographic work, polemic demonstrations of rationality in difficult circumstances, and the demonstration of popular wisdom are not, however, enough to establish the anthropology of America. To understand US we must go back home all the way to those areas that *are* US "We" (anthropologists and other such intellectuals who like to place themselves at the margin) are not at the fringe, we are the center. An

anthropology of America must be an anthropology of the center. It must be an anthropology of the center because the center is an ethnological location and we want to enter it into our "consultable record" of what men said there.

Above all, an anthropology of America must be an anthropology of the center because, whether we like it or not, America is, if not "the" center of cultural life on the globe in this second half of the twentieth century, at least one of the two or three most powerful centers. To study the center of America is, by implication, to study the whole world, since in a very direct sense the whole world is constrained by what happens there. Indeed, one cannot understand the fringe, as fringe, unless one also understands what makes it a fringe. The problem for Black English, for example, is not that it is not a full language. It is that it is a language in relation to an institutionalized language. Without understanding the place of Standard English in the economic and political institutions of the United States, we will not see what hides behind the popular argument that Black English is not a "good" language. Above all, we may not understand why a linguistic demonstration that Black English is just as useful for personal expression as Standard English is does not have the political consequence, in schools and out of them, that we might expect such a demonstration to have.

To do the anthropology of the center of America is to do something that has immediate political implications. Such implications will always be critical, whatever the writer's political orientation. We need only look at Warner's heroic efforts at arguing that his class analysis is not an attack on the American political system (Warner et al. 1949, 297-98) to see how difficult it is not to be critical even against our will. There is, however, a methodological paradox in doing a proper anthropology of America. Whether or not Malinowski was able to achieve it, he will remain in the history of anthropology as one of those who taught that to learn about a people is to live their life *in* their own terms. To learn we must empathize. We are after the "native's point of view," initially at least, and that means we must mute our *criticism*, fight against our prejudice. Even if we do not like our natives, we must act as if we did.³

Above all, we must analyze the behavior of our American "natives" in terms of an institutionalized, cultural rationality. For American anthropologists this, interestingly enough, is what is most difficult to accomplish. Most anthropologists of America have probably been tempted to write something in the style Miner adopted for his analysis of American "body rituals" (1975 [1956], 1956). This parody of anthropological analysis is itself a caricature of what too often happens on the way "back home." Miner tells us that "The Nacirema [American spelled backward] are people who are...punctilious about care of the mouth." And yet they have "a rite involving a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures" (1975 [1956], 11).

The natives, of course, call this ritual "brushing the teeth." It is certainly cultural, and Miner is right to point this out. But must he also imply that the only value of the "ritual" is the value that magic has among all primitive men (1975 [1956], 13)? Given the struggle anthropology has conducted to show that men are never "primitive," that

all men are somehow rational within their constraints, must we now be told that Americans are primitive, irrational, and given to magical incantations?

Miner, I believe, does not want to suggest that Americans do not make sense. But he does not tell us how they do make sense. Above all he does not tell us how his observations about body rituals might possibly relate to the issues that must eventually interest anthropologists if they are to participate in the scholarly and political discussions that justify the work in its own context. How is brushing teeth related to democracy, capitalism, social class, children's failing in school? These are the questions addressed by the other disciplines that deal with America. Anthropologists cannot ignore them even if they do not answer them in the traditional vocabularies,

Challenges

There are two steps *to* a full return to US, at the center of America. First, we must actually go to what I would like to call the "symbolic suburbs" of the United States, those places where the dominant political institutions of America play themselves out most smoothly—at least superficially. There we must learn to listen as sympathetically as anthropologists try to listen anywhere else. We must do this not simply because the center is the center, but also because the analytic problems that confront us are fierce. As we listen sympathetically while nice suburban ladies tell us about their difficulties with their teenage children, as we try to transform what we have heard into an account that is relevant to what we are seeking, we soon discover that the traditional phrasings of anthropological theory are inadequate. We then discover that our analyses lead us to concerns that are shared by many in other disciplines, and that we have something to say. It is at this point that the real difficulties arise, for we still do not quite know how to contribute to the scholarly and political discussions at whose periphery we are now standing. Learning to participate in those discussions is the second step toward a full return to US.

Look, for example, at what happened with the publication of David Schneider's *American Kinship* (1980 [1968]). Schneider tells us that he talked almost solely to "white, urban, middle class informants." And yet he dares to use the word American. He tells us that, though the fieldwork that was the first stage in the work produced six thousand pages of notes, and though he has a compilation of all the quotations that support his generalizations, he refuses to incorporate them into the published analysis because he is afraid they might be taken as proof—which would be cheating, since there is no way he could specify how the examples were chosen (1980, 123-24). His analysis, like the analyses by all other cultural anthropologists, must thus stand on its internal coherence and on its fit with the theory of culture and action that underlies it.

One does not have to be a cold-blooded empiricist to realize that in making such statements Schneider is tackling many sacred cows. He is pressing the attack on many fronts at once, and the attack is all the more controversial because the field is middle-class America. Schneider's even daring to write about "American" kinship challenges any theory of culture we wish to espouse. The arguments we can use against him are not simply, the arguments of theory ("This doesn't make sense") or of ethnographic particularism ("My natives don't do it that way!"), they are the arguments of the participants: "My mother doesn't do it that way!" No analysis of American material can

hide itself behind the eyewitness defense, "I was here and you weren't." When we read Leach's critique of Malinowski's analysis of tabu among the Trobrianders (1958), only four or five of us can match it to a direct experience with the Trobrianders. When we have to consider the relationship between father as a "kinship" term and father as a "religious" term, the traditional disputes about primary meanings and metaphorical extensions take on a very different character. For an anthropologist to deal with American phenomena is thus always doubly dangerous: the professional critics are also the natives.

What is more, some of these critics have themselves produced an extensive body of writing that is not very different in genre from anthropological writing. Anthropologists are newcomers to the direct study of America, a field with a long history. As newcomers with a mission often do, they easily adopt a superior knowing attitude toward most of the work done on the United States in history, sociology, political science, and so on, as if this work were irrelevant to the kind of study now to be conducted. In fact, a vast amount of altogether good "anthropology" already exists not only in sociology, but also in history, American Studies, popular culture, and education. Anthropologists cannot reinvent the wheel and rediscover "individualism," for example. It will initially be difficult to improve upon complex statements on the relationship between individualism and the search for community such as those made by Riesman (1955; Riesman, Glazer, and Denney 1961 [1950]), Bellah (1970, 1975, 1985), Marty (1970), or McDermott (1976, 1983) in sociology, theology, and the history of philosophy. Anthropologists of America cannot ignore forever the traditional disputes in history about the early Puritan settlements and the extent to which they foreshadowed modern institutional organization (Higham 1974; Murrin 1972). They should know about the ongoing disputes about the role of nineteenth-century schooling in keeping American society open (Ravitch 1977) or closed (Katz 1971; Bowles and Gintis 1976).

Opportunities

If anthropologists cannot participate in these conversations, they will remain on the periphery. To converse with historians, sociolinguists, or literary critics, however, should not mean uncritically surrendering to the terms of the conversation as traditionally constituted. When addressing sociologists, for example, particularly with the dominant "empirical" forms, care must be taken not to succumb to the suggestion that all generalizations must be based on trait analysis. Unhappily, much ethnographic

41 Doing the Anthropology of America

writing carelessly suggests that the "proof" of the analysis lies in a statistical observation. This may work when addressing other anthropologists, but it is catastrophic in the context of American studies. Ethnographic work can only produce "bad" trait analysis ("four out of my sample of five say that x is y , for which I deduce that saying so is characteristically American"). Either we abandon ethnography or we deal with the need to make a general argument that is not statistical. Similarly, while historians have found it useful to organize their observations in the shape of community studies (Lockridge 1970; Zuckerman 1970), it is also the case that anthropologists can contribute to their theory of social action (Varenne 1978).

In such confrontations lie great opportunities. When traditional phrasings are applied to American phenomena, their inadequacy soon becomes overwhelming, and the search for new phrasings can only be good for all the disciplines involved. I have repeatedly discussed the difficulties involved in talking about America as a structure constraining all who live in the United States. Clearly, we cannot do it by a commonsense reference to "shared values." Few natives, few scholars in the other disciplines that deal with the United States, will accept it. As Moffatt shows (chap. 8), one of the features of Americanness may be the refusal to accept group identification apart from a projected act of individual agency (or "choice" as it is phrased in the language of advertising investigated by Beeman, chap. 3. How can "we" be described as "sharing values" if some of us are Democrats and others Republicans, some liberals and other conservatives, some white and others black, some Catholics and some Fundamentalists? That these questions can be phrased in the language of "scholarly" debate (e.g., Feinberg 1979) cannot make us forget that they are also asked outside such debates, and often in terms of this concept of "culture" that we believe is our own when it is clear that it is also one of the dominant symbols of the American conversation. We can try to escape the implications of the debate by talking about pluralism, regionalism, multiculturalism, ethnicity, and subcultures, but this only postpones the problem. No talk of black, Irish-American, Catholic, or southern (sub)cultures in the traditional modes can stand very long before being challenged by some person who can claim participant status and refuses the postulated generalization. At this point, either we proclaim the "death of culture" or we go back and try to reformulate our traditional intuitions about cultural determination and difference.

I addressed these questions earlier (chap. 1). Let me finish by restating, what I think will be the contribution of anthropology to the general conversations about America. Anthropology is about what has come to be known as "culture," a concept through which we attempt to capture the arbitrariness of human adaptations to the environment and the constraints placed on further action within this environment. Practically, this has meant a constant concern with variability and comparison and also with the details of everyday life. The fundamental insight is that variability of adaptation is not an abstraction. Rather, it is a constraint on the humblest acts. Given culture, we must analyze "how to ask for a drink in Subanun" (Frake 1980), for there is no way for us to know what is involved in getting the drink.

Given such a stance, Miner's interest in toothbrushing is not so far-fetched. It is not that his conclusions are strikingly new. Other observers of America have come to the conclusion that "the fundamental belief underlying the whole system [of body rituals] appears to be that the human body is ugly" (Miner 1975 [1956], 10). The simple fact of the custom does not allow the probabilistic statements he derives from it: "[The Nacirema] believe that, without the rituals of the mouth, their teeth would fallout, their gums bleed, their jaws shrink, their friends desert them, and their lovers reject them" (1975, 11). How would he know what the Nacirema really believe? The usefulness of the analysis lies rather in the demonstration that a detail of everyday life is powerfully constrained by arbitrary forces. There are Nacirema who do not brush their teeth or use deodorants; there are powerful voices that criticize the

use of these devices. But they are still used because using them is a rational response: black teeth and bad breath do put you at risk of having your friends desert you. In "another culture" this may not be so. But people in the United States, whatever their back-ground and personal belief system regarding the body, do not live in "another culture." They live in America. It is American culture that is consequential for them. And, in late twentieth-century America there are probably no dirtier four-letter words than "body odor."

We can go further. Besides translating Miner's reference to "magical beliefs" into a reference to an intelligent response to a constraint, let me suggest how we might in fact relate everyday rituals of the body to more general issues regarding American culture. First, brushing teeth is not simply an exercise intended to disguise natural bodily processes such as odor, decay, and fall; the process has a distinct mechanical aspect: to prevent odor, decay, and fall, it is necessary to treat the body directly, on its own terms, that is, "scientifically." The body must be treated as a machine so its processes can be disguised. Furthermore, the disguise of body processes is accomplished by attempting to maintain the body at what is considered the peak of its "natural" state: the ultimate goal is to keep teeth looking like those of a healthy sixteen-year-old. One does not disguise teeth by decorating them. One does not disguise the rest of the body by scarification, body paint, and so on. Thus it is not only that "Americans do not like body odor," it is that "body odor" itself is constructed through the activities that eliminate it.

We can go still further. It is well known that American culture is "dualist." It separates the body from the soul, the material from the spiritual, the evil from the good, the mechanical from the human, sex from love, and so forth. Such accounts are generally made in the philosophical mode. They rarely specify how such generalizations about American ideology are lived out in everyday life, except perhaps by suggesting, as did Miner, that it is a matter of "values." What anthropology can contribute, if it remains true to its ethnographic roots, is the demonstration that general themes are indeed lived in the routine of everyday life. I do not want to say that toothbrushing is a significant expression of the "great tradition" in America, but I do want to say that even the routine, apparently unimportant incidents of everyday life are constrained in very specific ways that raise the same issues that are raised when cultural consciousness is pushed to its breaking point at the most sacred, least routine moments.

In fact, the best in the anthropology of America has always done this. Warner's inquiries into the daily experience of class as his informants came home from cocktail parties, his unpacking of symbolic processes in parades (1959; Warner and Lunt 1941), Mead's linking details to "the American way to war" (1965 [1942])-debatable as it is in the form she uses-all point us in the right direction. The best of recent American anthropology continues to operate in this tradition. The power of ethnography has probably rarely been so well displayed as McDermott's linking the single gesture of a child volunteering to read in such a way to avoid getting caught not knowing how with the arbitrary cultural constraints that make it consequential to fail in school-a rational consequence in a meritocracy completely organized on individual competence (McDermott and Gospodinoff 1979; McDermott and Tylbor 1983). And while we

might wish Schneider had given more thought to what would constitute the "proof" of his analysis, it may be that we do have this proof in Garfinkel's analysis (1967) of what is at issue when an ambiguously sexed person attempts to pass for a culturally appropriate "woman."

Part of anthropology's role is to demonstrate that America is indeed integrated and that the intuitive generalizations we can make from limited cases or texts do correspond to active constraints on the conduct of every-day life. Democracy is not simply an ideal, relevant only to philosophical musings and ritual speech. It is also a constraint on everything that happens in the United States, down to the level of casual greetings. The role of anthropological research is to demonstrate the performative relevance of America—that is, the usefulness of thinking in cultural terms about behavior in the United States.

Anthropology, in fact, will do more for studies of America. Funny things can happen on the way back from everyday life. It may seem naive to say that democracy is relevant to everyday life in America. It certainly would be naive to say that American life "is" democratic. It may be much more disquieting to say that in confrontation with everyday life what emerges most clearly is the ambiguous nature of something like "democracy." Life everywhere is uncertain and problematic. The conditions of life can be described. Democracy is a condition of life in the sense that individual merit is always at issue in school, that personal involvement—"friendliness" (Varenne, chap. 10), "love" (Canaan, chap. 9)—is always at issue when people greet or court. Describing these conditions is the first task of anthropologists.

Such descriptions do not exhaust what anthropologists can contribute. Unless they blind themselves, they will also see their informants' struggles against the conditions and the first signs of transformations that are to take place. Toothbrushing may be something most of us do without about it, but it is also something that can be brought to consciousness thinking about it, but it is also something that can be brought to consciousness—when we go to the dentist, for example, or while watching commercial for toothpaste or denture adhesives or reading newspaper articles about fluoridation. At such times the questions about nature, machines, and the dominance of the spiritual over the material become concrete and easily contradictory. After all, if the body is to be invisible through being culturally manipulated into its natural state, we must treat it like a machine. To treat it like a machine we must know how it works, and this requires that we make the body visible. But making the body visible is precisely what we do not want. What are the makers of denture cleaners or adhesives to do? They must be offensive (mention odors and toothless gums) so we will not be (not smell and display youthful teeth that are not recognizable as dentures). But the more they make dentures a mentionable subject, the more they transform the institutional consequences of tooth loss. That we are so intimately concerned with the tension between man and machine may explain why, in our explicitly mythological life, the dynamic tension between the two is a dominant theme. Drummond's essay on James Bond and his gun, John Henry and his sledgehammer (chap. 4), is an example of the next step in the analysis that will allow us, eventually, to move from the small details of everyday life to the great concerns of history and philosophy and to do so in a manner that will transform these concerns. Using an approach related to Moffat's

(chap. 8), Drummond does not simply say that James Bond movies "are" American. He says that the possible responses to the expression of certain themes put those themes in danger of change.

The task outlined here is a huge one that the work of the contributors to this volume does not pretend to fulfill. Anthropological work on America is still preliminary. But what has been done holds the promise of break-throughs that could transform our understanding of America.