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Introduction

An Overview

If one were to seek out the principal theme that binds most sociocultural studies of two generations of South Asian anthropologists, the one that is bound to surface over and over again is caste. I do not intend to review in any way this literature on caste, except to allude to its somewhat paradoxical nature. By focusing on the caste system, scholars who consider it a uniquely Indian institution (Bouglé 1971; Dumont 1970) and those who see it as an extreme manifestation of its rudimentary or vestigial counterparts found in other cultures (Berreman 1960; Watson 1963) have both in their own ways subscribed to the creed that to understand caste is to understand India. Caste studies, by becoming autonomous, closed systems of inquiry—ends in themselves—have prevented scholarly inquiry from escaping its confines and taking into account symbolic constructs more pervasive and regnant than caste, and more natural to the cultural matrix of South Asia than the “naturalized” one of caste.

This is not to deny that several principles have been identified as underlying or generating the caste system, the

most popular being that of purity versus pollution (Bouglé 1971; Dumont 1970; Dumont and Pocock 1959; Moffatt 1979). Unfortunately, these present but half the truth, inasmuch as they are chosen from within an artificially enclosed analytic system called caste. The inability to go beyond or beneath caste arose from the failure to see that jāti, meaning "genus" (the source concept of the ill-translated "caste") is not applied to human beings only, but to animals, plants, and even inorganic material, such as metals and minerals, as well. What is more, jāti itself is a development from a generative system of thought that deals with units at both the suprapersonal as well as the intrapersonal levels. There is no better term than *substance* to describe the general nature of these variously ranked cultural units. In other words, differentially valued and ranked substances underlie the system known as the caste system, which is but one of many surface manifestations of this system of ranked substances.¹

Having said this much, I must hasten to say that the ranking of substances itself is among the least of my concerns in this book. Steve Barnett has written two commendable essays using ethnographic data gathered in Tamil Nadu which deal directly with the issue of rank and substance² (1976, and with Fruzzeiti and Östör, 1982). My

¹The first notable exception to the traditional approach described above came in working papers written around 1969–1970 by Ronald Inden and Ralph Nicholas on Bengali kinship (published in 1977). Somewhat later, between 1970 and 1972, Inden's Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Chicago on marriage and rank in Bengali culture and Marriott and Inden's joint essay on caste systems were written (published in 1976 and 1974, respectively). Susan Wadley's study of Kanimpur religion (1975) as well as Kenneth David's dissertation on bound and unbound castes (1972) also point to inadequacies in the "purity-pollution" paradigm, and so does the excellent essay "From Varma to Caste through Mixed Unions" by S. J. Tambiah (1973).

²In this regard, Barnett's insistence on the difference of his use of "substance"—derived from, and faithful to, Schneider's analytic terms (biogenetic substance and code for conduct)—from the more culture specific usage in this and other recent studies (Marriott and Inden 1974, 1977; Inden and Nicholas 1977) is hereby recognized. (See Östör, Fruzzeiti, and Barnett 1982: 228.)

interest focuses on certain other properties of substances, namely, their ability to mix and separate, to transform and be transformed, to establish intersubstantial relationships of compatibility and incompatibility, to be in states of equilibrium and disequilibrium, and to possess variable degrees of fluidity and combinability.

I intend to trace these properties of substance³ not through studying some esoteric form of ethnochemistry but by looking at certain phenomena in the cultural world of the Tamil villager, phenomena that are part of daily, ordinary, routine life. These phenomena are a Tamil's attempt to cope with the substance of his village, or *ūr*, his house, or *vīṭi*, his sexual partner, and his own body under conditions of sickness and health, and finally, to search for *the substance* from which all these various substances derive.

The last-mentioned quest for the one undifferentiated, primordial substance of perfect equilibrium may be an extraordinary one, but the awareness of such a substance is neither extraordinary nor esoteric. This is made clear by the following creation myth, told to me by an elderly villager in the presence of a number of other villagers who threw in their own versions, corrections, and modifications as the narrative unfolded. The myth is intended to serve the function of a prolegomenon to the thesis developed in this study.

God (Katavul) was everything. In Him were the five elements of fire, water, earth, and ether [*lākāsan*], and wind. These five elements were uniformly spread throughout [the three humors] phlegm [*kaṇṇi*], bile [*pitṭam*], and wind [*vāyu*]. They were so evenly distributed that even to say that there were phlegm, bile, and wind would be wrong. Let us say that they were in such a way that one could not tell the

³My use of the singular *substance* as well as the plural *substances* somewhat interchangeably is intended. It is in keeping with the Hindu world view (to be discussed later) that the various substances are but manifestations or permutations of a unitary, primordial substance.

difference between them. Let us say they were nonexistent. Similarly, the three primordial qualities, or dispositions (*kuṇams*), or *rajas*, *sātrikaṇ*, and *tānitaṇ*, neither existed or did not exist. That is why we still call God *Kuṇātitaṇ* [He who transcends all qualities]. Even the question as to their existence did not arise. Then something happened. The five elements started to move around as if they were not satisfied, as if they were disturbed. Now, as to who disturbed these elements or why they were disturbed, no one knows.

At this point, a second villager interrupted the narrator to suggest that the one who caused this mysterious disturbance was Kāmam, the god of lust. The narrator found his suggestion unacceptable, because Kāma had not even come into existence at that time. But his friend insisted that Kāma himself was distributed throughout Śiva's body, as are the humors, the elements, and the kuṇams. After considerable debate, it was agreed that it did not make sense to speak of Kāmam existing when he was as evenly distributed throughout Katavul's body as floating atoms (*aiṇus*). Then the narrator continued.

Let us say that what disturbed them was their *talai erutti* [codes for action or literally, "head writing"].⁴ When the elements started moving around, the humors started separating from one another and recombining in new proportions [*lalavukaḷ*]. These new combinations resulted in the three kuṇams. Now the kuṇams and humors and elements all started to move hither and thither.

Then came the separation, as in an explosion, and all the jātis of the world—male jātis, female jātis, vegetable jātis, tree jātis, animal jātis, Vellāla jātis, Para jātis—were

⁴Tamilis believe that at the time of birth Katavul writes a script on every individual's head and that the course that each individual's life takes, to the very last detail, is determined by this script. This script, or writing of God on one's head, is known as *talai erutti*. In the present narration, my informant ascribes "head writing" even to the particles that constituted the primordial being (Katavul).

formed, and they started meeting and mating and procreating. This is how the world came into being.

I then asked him, "What happened to Katavul, then, in this explosion?" He replied:

Oh, He is still here. Not as before, but He is still there, more perfect than any of us. He has more equilibrium [*lānaitinilai*] than any of us. In Him the humors are more perfectly and uniformly [*camanilaiyākaḷ*] distributed. That is why He does not fall ill, as we do. Our humors keep moving, running from here to there and there to here, all over our bodies and out of our bodies and into our bodies. . . . But even in Him the elements, the humors, and the kuṇams move around, try as He might to keep them in equilibrium [*śiāṇal āṇānaḷ*]. That is why He is unable to do the same kind of thing for too long. If He meditates for more than a certain number of years, the amount of sātvīkām begins to increase. So then Kāmam comes and disturbs Him, and then He goes after Śakti⁵ or Asuras.⁶ This results in an increase in His *rajas* kuṇam. When *rajas* kuṇam increases beyond a certain limit, He must return to meditating. But most of the time, He is involved in *līla*.⁷ All our ups and downs are due to His *līlas*. But that is the only way He can maintain a balance [*camanilai paṭuttalām*].

This creation myth, in drawing on the world view of the villager, reveals several central cultural beliefs.

1. All differentiated, manifest substantial forms evolved or devolved from a single, unmanifest, equilibrated substance.

⁵That is, seeking the goddess Śakti to indulge in sexual pleasure.

⁶He goes after the Asuras ("demons") to make war.

⁷*Līla* may be translated as the play or the sport of the gods. One villager translated *līla* by the phrase "doing something for the heck of it" (*vēra vela ilatāla cumṇā irukka muṭiyātāla cevatu*).

2. What triggered the "first"⁸ movement (action, or *karman*) of the generative process is an unknown, hence presumably inner property, such as the codes of and for action that are "written" into all substances. This is like the "dissatisfaction" of the five elements that one informant equated with desire, which replicates at a higher level of organization the inception of other disequibrated entities.
3. Different entities in the manifest world have different degrees of substantial equilibrium. Katavul's bodily substance is in a more equilibrated state than is the bodily substance of human beings.
4. As a result of disequibration, men and even gods must continue to strive to restore equilibrium to their bodily substance. This equilibrated state within the body is the key to health and well-being.

Seen in the light of the above myth, much of a villager's activities takes on a new meaning and a new purpose. These activities, including the most ordinary and routine ones, are aimed at restoring lost equilibrium. The restoration of equilibrium among the multitude of qualitatively different substances (or rather, qualitatively different substance complexes, compound substances, or composite substances) in the phenomenal universe is not easily accomplished. The process is invariably complex. At times, certain substances attain equilibrium with respect to other substances only when they are qualitatively different; at other times, qualitative similarity is required for bringing about equilibrium; yet again, there are times when two substances are able to achieve equilibrium between themselves only if one is higher in some respect than is the other, and not vice versa. Thus a balanced (equilibrated) meal in a South Indian home must consist of all six different flavors,

⁸Strictly speaking, given that Hindu ontology is based on cyclical time, there is no absolute first event. The choice of an event as "first" is an arbitrary one, one of convenience. For a similar myth obtained in rural Bengal, see Davis (1976).

whereas a marriage will be harmonious (in a state of equilibrium) only if the partners in marriage belong to similar, if not identical, jātis; however, the male in any marriage must be older than the female (i.e., rank higher with respect to age) if healthy (equilibrated) sexuality is to be achieved, and so on. Clearly, these are but a few of many more possible ways in which states of intersubstantial equilibrium are attained.

While I hope that someone will undertake the compelling task of enumerating and delineating precisely the various types and dimensions of possible modes and means for achieving intersubstantial equilibriums, in this study I do not intend to embark upon such an enterprise. Part I and Part II are divided according to two broadly differentiable types of action. In Part II, action will be directed toward bringing about (or restoring) a state of ultimate, perfect, and unlimited equilibrium of substance. Orthodox Hindu concerns with salvation as release from *samsāra*, the cycle of births and deaths, the merging of the individual soul (*ātman*) with the universal soul (*brahman*), are all closely related to the ethnography of Part II. In Part I, by contrast we shall encounter people's actions aimed at restoring substantial equilibrium between substances in domains or contexts that are limited by time, space, and place, among other things. The concerns of Part I implicate equilibrated states of a lower, less inclusive, marked order, whereas those of Part II implicate an equilibrium of the highest, unmarked, and most inclusive order. Stated differently, concerns with intersubstantial equilibrium in limited, lower-order, and less inclusive contexts stand in a metonymic relationship to the all-encompassing equilibrium attained in salvation—salvation being not unlike the equilibrated state described to us as having existed in the primordial being at the beginning of time in the creation myth above. From the more inclusive perspective, then, context-specific, equilibrium-directed actions are mere rudiments or facsimiles of actions aimed at achieving the ultimate equilibrated order that transcends all contexts.

More specifically, insofar as the above-mentioned lower-order, less inclusive states of intersubstantial equilibrium are concerned, I focus on a particular expression of this equilibrium, that of intersubstantial "compatibility." The preoccupation with *limited* equilibrated states is evidenced in almost all of a Tamil's daily activities. Such preoccupations are most often expressed in terms of compatibility. For example, be it with respect to the food one chooses to eat or not to eat or the way one chooses to build one's house or not to build it or the kind of partner one opts to marry or not to marry or the day and time of the year one selects to perform a certain ritual or not to perform it, concern with equilibriums or equilibrated states is expressed in terms of compatibility. "Will this food be compatible with my body?" one asks. "Will this house, if built in such and such a way in such and such a place, be compatible with my horoscope?" "Will the time of the day that I set out on a given business venture be compatible with my mental state at that time or not?" The Tamil word most often employed in such instances, which I have translated as "compatible," is *ottuzarital* which also connotes fitness or appropriateness. This concern with compatibility of substances is complemented by specialists' as well as laymen's knowledge of numerous fine distinctions made of the phenomenal universe, distinctions characterized by differentially ranked and valued substances, be they Brahmin and Parayan, male and female, bitter earth and sweet earth, bile and phlegm, or consonant and vowel. Disequilibrated or incompatibly conjoined substances are "ill," or "imperfect." This knowledge I have referred to operates at every level of existence and aims at restoring intersubstantial compatibility, if not ultimate equilibrium.

The knowledge required for the attainment of ultimate and perfect equilibrium is of a special kind. In contradistinction to the knowledge that is at the service of states of limited equilibrium, this knowledge blurs all categorical distinctions until the very distinction between self and

other is transcended. The process of this transcendence will be illustrated in Part II, whereas the four chapters of Part I that follow this Introduction will be concerned with relationships of compatibility and incompatibility between and among substances encountered in everyday life.

Apart from this broad organizing principle, the arrangement of the chapters of Part I and Part II was basically motivated by a whim, a certain pretension to some measure of architectural finesse. It is not new. Brenda Beck has already written an ethnography on South India, which is basically a replicate of the Chinese box principle (1972). Mine was intended to portray a series of enclosures, concealing the "person" at its core, where I wanted ultimately to arrive. The organization of these chapters in this manner was not intended to be a simulacrum of any cultural reality. Almost fortuitously, however, this organization facilitated understanding of the fluidity of enclosures in Tamil conceptual thought, whether the boundaries of a village, the walls of a house, the skin of a person, or the sign vehicle of a sign. Another related benefit was my ability to appreciate the cultural reality of the *nonindividual* person. Or to put it in terms that anticipate the next chapter, one begins to know a person by knowing the "personality" of the soil on which he lives. So to the question, "Wasn't the person at the core the real person? the answer is like "the exhortation of the Majorca storytellers: *Aixo er y no era* (it was and it was not)" (Ricoeur 1977: 224).

Chapter 2 concerns a person's compatibility with territorial substance (*ūr*). The territory that affects a person's bodily substance is the village in which he is born and, to a lesser extent, the village or town or country he chooses to live in. These effects are manifest in significant events as varied as the ups and downs of personal fortune, happiness, state of health, or anxiety about the afterlife. We shall also see that *village* is too flabby a term to render a culturally, though cryptotypically, crucial distinction between an *ūr* and a *kirāṇam*, the former denoting the quality or disposi-

tion of a territorial unit, especially with regard to its effect on and effect by its inhabitants, and the latter denoting a territorial unit, usually a village, which has clear demarcating boundaries. Kirāmam would lend itself with ease to distinctive feature analysis, whereas ūr calls for a pragmatic analysis (à la Silverstein 1976) in order to unpack its meaning.

In chapter 3 I close further in on the core person by attempting to understand, in cultural terms, the nature of the relationship between houses and those who own or build them. Once again it will become evident that this relationship, as in the case of villager and village, is understood in substantial terms. The inhabitants of a house or an ūr are concerned as to whether they are compatible with that house or that ūr; furthermore, there is sufficient evidence that this compatibility is expressed in the idiom of compatibility of substance.

Chapter 4 will sketch the way in which a male and a female exchange substances in sexual intercourse as well as sketch the formation of the nature of the fetus that results from the combination of these sexual—fluid substances. A healthy child is the result of a mixing of compatible substances, not only those of male and female but also of other substances, such as the gaze of auspiciously positioned planets at the moment of birth. Furthermore, it will be shown that not only is the health of the child determined by the compatibility of the sexual fluids but the health of the sexual partners is likewise determined. In the final chapter of Part I, we will focus our attention not on interpersonal exchange of substances but on certain very essential intrapersonal substances whose equilibrated state is quintessential for the well-being of a person. In this chapter we will learn how action, or karmam, itself operating as a substance, mixes with a person's prior kunam⁹ substance and qualitatively alters the balance of kunams for better or for worse. This intrapersonal flow of substances will be ex-

⁹Provisionally defined here as "quality" or "disposition."

plored through the analysis of a popular rite of divination.

In Part II, the knowledge of diversity is replaced by the knowledge of unity, and the quest becomes one for perfect equilibrium and conjunction through a transcendental experience of the undifferentiated tranquillity of inner unity. A pilgrimage of villagers in which the anthropologist partook becomes the ritual means to effect this experience. For most pilgrims this experience proves to be only a moment's revelation; for some, it leads to a permanent release from the differentiated, manifest world and a total immersion in one's essence, which is the universal essence, the undifferentiated primordial substance. From previewing the organization of the text and outlining its main argument, I would like to move on to consider the theoretical matrix in which the text is embedded.

This book was not born with a great title but had to struggle through several intolerable ones before settling on the present one. The last abandoned title read, *Kalappūr: From Person to Place Through Mixed Substance: The Semeiosis of a Culture*. The trouble with that title, apart from its ponderousness, was that it failed to include some of the other, even more interesting, topics discussed in the book, such as houses and boundaries, disputes and color symbolism, marriage and compatibility, sex and divination, sickness and health, food and flavors, ghee and semen, and much more. While all the key terms in that abandoned title spelled out the major abstractions that have helped frame the book, the omitted details—some large, some small—are the ones that have given the volume life. Hence the present compromise, a title that neither says too much nor too little, constructed with the hope that even the reader who fails to see the whole point of the exercise in abstractions will, after having read this book, feel adequately acquainted with life and living in a tiny Tamil village in South India and will be able to partake in the imagination of its people and the genius of its culture. Before we steep ourselves in the ethnographic description that perfuses the main text, it is

only proper to delineate some of the major theoretical terms and assumptions that constitute the discursive context of the text. The reader may, however, choose to skip over the rest of this introductory chapter save the last section, entitled "About This Research," continue to read from chapter 2 through the end, and then return to these unread pages and read them as postface.

The Culture Concept Revisited

The first concept to be considered is "culture." Weber understood culture as "the finite segment of meaningless infinity of the world-process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance" (Weber 1949: 81). There are at least two anthropological theories of culture that influence this study: the first comes from the writings of David Schneider, and the second comes from those of Clifford Geertz, both, of course, belonging broadly to the Weberian tradition filtered through Talcott Parsons. I follow Geertz and Schneider, as well as Ward Goodenough, in understanding culture not to be an adaptive mechanism accounted for in behavioral terms. "Culture" is to be clearly distinguished from its use by those whom Keesing has characterized as adaptationists (Keesing 1974). "Culture," as it is employed in this study, also needs to be distinguished from its understanding in what has come to be known as cognitive anthropology, which found its earliest formulations in the writings of Conklin (1955), Goodenough (1956, 1964, and 1965), Frake (1961 and 1962), and Wallace and Atkins (1960). For the cognitivists, culture is not unlike the semantico-referential grammar of a language (see Silverstein 1976), Chomsky's "competence" or de Saussure's "langue," a set of codes to be learned and lived by. The cultural domain of the cognitivists corresponds to Schneider's "norms," which are like patterns and templates in that they are "more or less complete, detailed,

[with] specific instructions for how the culturally significant parts of the act are to be performed, as well as the contexts in which they are proper" (Schneider 1976: 200). To be sure, the present study, as any cultural study ought to, will have a great deal to say about norms and rules of and for behavior. This is not to be equated with culture, however.

Culture, or more precisely, a culture, is understood herein to be constituted of those webs of relatively regnant and generative signs of habit, spun in the communicative act engaged in by the anthropologist and his or her informants, in which the anthropologist strives to defer to the creativity of his informants and self-consciously reflects upon the *différance* inherent in this creative product of deference. This definition requires parsing, and to this task I now turn.

The notion that culture is a web of significance we owe, once again, to Max Weber, whom Geertz paraphrases in his semeiotic definition of culture when he says that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (1973: 5). I emphasize the communicative act in order to underscore the proposition that culture is public. This is, however, not to say that it may not exist in someone's head as well, a posture that Geertz seems to take in his dissent with the positions of Goodenough, Lévi-Strauss, and Schneider, when he says, "Culture . . . does not exist in someone's head" (1973: 10). Schneider's rhetorical response, "For if culture is not internalized by actors, where can it be, except in the heads of observers?" (1976: 206), is equally one-sided. Insofar as culture's manifestation is to be found in the communicative act, verbal or otherwise, it is a function of "private" semeiotic structures to open up, to engage with other "private" structures, in public. The moment of cultural creation is one in which the private and the public, the internal and the external, become mutually immanent. I shall postpone my discussion of the anthropologist's part in the communicative act of culture making until I have explicated my use of *signs* for the usual *symbols* that occur in most definitions of culture.

At the very outset it behooves me to explain why I have substituted *signs* in place of the customary *symbols* that cultural anthropologists prefer to employ in their definitions of culture. In the preparation of this book, I have sought to use as systematic and analytically coherent a semiotic terminology as I possibly could. The semiotic terminologies employed by symbolic anthropologists have proved to be either inadequate or riddled with needless inconsistencies. The writings of David Schneider (1968 and 1976), Clifford Geertz (1973), and Victor Turner (1967 and 1978) represent the former, while Leach (1976) is an example of the latter. Fortunately, we have in the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce, the father of modern semiotics, the most thorough, coherent, and comprehensive classification of signs available to date. As will become evident, I shall use but a very select portion of his semiotics in the present work. In my opinion, even this limited use of a systematically developed semiotics is preferable to the use of an unsystematic one.

In Peirce's scheme, a symbol is but a kind of sign, the icon and the index being among the better known of his other sign types. Before we explore further Peirce's more detailed classification of signs, however, let us examine the semiotic sign in general, as Peirce defined it for us: "A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*" (2.228).¹⁰

The most obvious feature of the semiotic sign is its triadic structure. When it is juxtaposed with de Saussure's

dyadic sign, the difference becomes even clearer. De Saussure understood the sign to be a dyadic relation between a signifier and a signified, a concept and a sound image (de Saussure 1959: pt. 1, chap. 1). Milton Singer (1978) has analyzed in some detail the distinction between what he calls the semiological (de Saussurian) tradition and the semiotic (Peircean) tradition in the study of signs, symbols, and culture. He makes the point that by adopting the semiotic perspective of the sign, we are, thankfully, precluded from executing a cultural analysis that neglects the empirical subject as well as the empirical object.

More significant, the *symbol*, used in its non-Peircean, dyadic, de Saussurian sense, yields a view of culture as a hermetically sealed, "autonomous entity of internal dependencies" (Ricoeur 1978: 110). This phrase of Ricoeur, which was used to characterize structuralism's view of language, is even more devastatingly appropriate when applied to semiological studies of culture. The semiotic sign, including the symbol, defies any such closure. We shall have more to say about the openness of the semiotic process. Let us turn now to consider the semiotic constitution of reality.

The Semiotic Constitution of Reality

In the definition of the sign by Peirce which we have already presented, it is clear that the sign is one correlate in an indivisible triad: *sign*, *object*, and *interpretant*. "Nothing is an object which is not signifiable; nothing is a sign which is not interpretable as signifying some object; and nothing is an interpretant that does not interpret something as signifying an object" (T. L. Short 1982: 285). Apart from establishing the indecomposability of the triadic sign, this view of the sign contains within it elements that are likely to disturb the idealist as well as the materialist. This is good: At best, such a disturbance should be enlightening; at worst, sobering. This disturbance is thrown into clear relief in another, somewhat later formulation of the definition of the sign: "A

¹⁰All references to Peirce's *Collected Papers* (vols. 1-6, edited by C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss, 1932; vols. 7-8, edited by Arthur Burks, 1958) will appear in the text accompanied by the conventional volume and paragraph number.

Sign, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its *Object*, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant*, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object" (2.274). From this definition it becomes clear that the representamen—the artifact, sign vehicle, or event, which we commonly identify as the sign—is the First, and the object is not the First. This is what makes Peirce's realism a semeiotic realism, the only kind of realism, in my opinion, that is capable of preventing anthropology from falling victim to either behavioristic positivism or to ungrounded idealism. For the best synthesis and explication of Peirce's complex and at times confusing thesis, I refer the reader to the study of Peirce's scholastic realism by John F. Boler (1963).¹¹ For the purposes of the present study I shall content myself by quoting from Boler and Peirce on Peirce's position. Boler claims that Peirce's realism is in fact a synthesis of epistemological realism on the one hand and epistemological idealism on the other. Epistemological realism maintains that "we cannot think whatever we want: something forces our opinion and is, at least to that extent, independent of our minds" (p. 10). "We find our opinions are constrained; there is something, therefore, which influences our thoughts, and is not created by them" (Peirce 8.12). This is "the real," the thing independent of how we think it (Boler 1963: 14). As for his epistemological idealism, we find Peirce maintaining that "since an idea can resemble or represent only another idea, reality itself must be 'thoughtlike' or of the nature of an idea" (Boler 1963: 11; see also Peirce 6.158, 5.310, and 8.151). Peirce eventually comes to define reality as what will be thought in the ultimate opinion of the community (Boler 1963: 15; see also Peirce 5.311 and 5.430). Thus, in his

¹¹More recent, splendidly lucid, and critical evaluations of Peirce's realism are to be found in the following: Robert Almeder (1980), Bruce Altshuler (1982), Karl-Otto Apel (1981), and Thomas Olszewsky (1983).

definition of reality, Peirce's epistemological realism is present in the insistence that an individual's thinking must comply with something other than itself; his epistemological idealism is likewise maintained in the notion that the "other" is the ultimate *thought* of the community (7.336, 5.316, and 5.408).

It must be made clear from the outset that Peirce's community is a community of inquirers—not any defined community of inquirers but an indefinite community of inquirers. Furthermore, this notion of the community is inextricably linked with his concept of truth and the increase of knowledge. Since he was a scientist himself, this community of inquirers, for Peirce, was for the most part a community of truthfully, faithfully, charitably, and open-mindedly communicating scientists. I say, "for the most part" because there are passages in Peirce's writings where he formulates his vision of a community in such a fashion that it transcends all manner of anthropocentrism, including that of human scientific inquiry. The following passage is a striking example.

The catholic consent which constitutes the truth is by no means to be limited to men in this earthly life or to the human race, but extends to the whole communion of minds to which we belong, including some probably whose senses are very different from ours, so that in that consent no predication of a sensible quality can enter, except as an admission that so certain sorts of senses are affected. (8.13)

For the cultural anthropologist whose primary interest is in understanding the culture wherein he or she carries out field research, the community of inquirers or believers is a far more limited community, a historical community. The "community's thought," in Peirce's language, is a partial isomorph of the anthropological concept of culture.

The fusion of epistemological realism and epistemological idealism of a Peircean sort may also be found in Marshall

Sahlins's discussion of value in the context of his critique of historical materialism. Sahlins writes,

No cultural value can ever be read from a set of "material forces," as if the cultural were the dependent variables of an inescapable practical logic. The positivist explanation of given cultural practices as necessary effects of some material circumstance . . . [is] false. This does not imply that we are forced to adopt some idealist alternative, conceiving culture as walking about on the thin air of symbols. It is not that material forces and constraints are left out of account, or that they have no real effects on cultural order. It is that the nature of the effects cannot be read from the nature of the forces, for the material effects depend on their cultural encompassment. The very form of social existence of material force is determined by its integration in the cultural system. The force may then be significant—but significant, precisely, is a symbolic quality. At the same time, this symbolic scheme is not itself the mode of expression of an instrumental logic, for in fact there is no other logic in the sense of a meaningful order save that imposed by culture on the instrumental process. (p. 206)

In the triadic structure of the sign, the *object* is a Second. The *object*, though empirical, need not be a material thing. Peirce uses the term in its Latin Scholastic sense, meaning, that which is "thrown before" the mind, that toward which one's attention is directed.

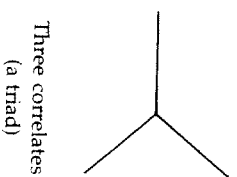
The *interpretant*, as already implied, is the third correlate of the sign. More precisely, it is a correlate of one sign to which the represented object is addressed and by which its representation is interpreted. In general terms, the interpretant is the locus of interpretation, that by which a sign is contextualized, that which makes signification part of a connected web and not an isolated entity.

Without an interpretant, the First and the Second, the *representamen* and the *object*, will forever remain unconnected, existing apart from any *meaningful* reality. Equally true is that without an *object* and *representamen*, there will be

nothing to connect and ergo no interpretant. In other words, for a sign to function as a sign, there must be present in it all three correlative functions. Objects may exist in the universe as individual empiricities or existent facts, but they do not become real until and unless they are represented by a sign, which representation is interpreted as such by an interpretant. This process of signification is as real in nature as it is in culture.

The Texturing of Culture

Another theoretical implication of the triadic structure of the sign and its role and place in culture concerns texture. What I do have to state with regard to cultural texture will, by necessity, be a brief prolegomenon, intended as a seed for future research. Let us for this purpose invoke that familiar image of culture as constituted of signs, held together as in a web. Admittedly, such an image remains inadequate for capturing the dynamic and processual aspect of culture. At best it is a representation of a captured instant in the cultural process. While in this captured, or arrested, state, if we were to take a semiotically primed analytic microscope to one of these web's most elementary and irreducible units, it would look something like figure 1.



Three correlates
(a triad)
Figure 1

Terrence Deacon (1978), from whom I have adapted this schematization, uses it to illustrate the three correlates of a sign that make it a single triad. When four or five correlates

are entailed in the sign relationship, they may be schematized as in figure 2, constituting a relationship of two or three triads. When five or more correlates are entailed, the complex of triadic structures may take more than one form, not unlike those of chemical isomers or polymers. This is illustrated in figure 3.

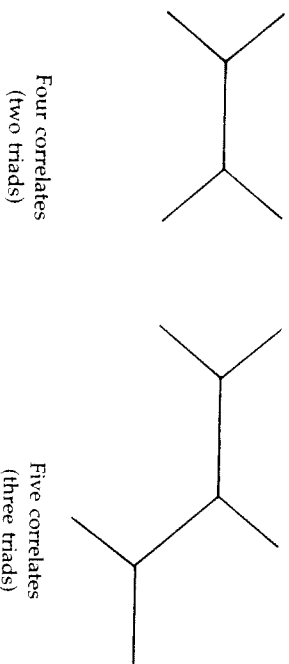


Figure 2

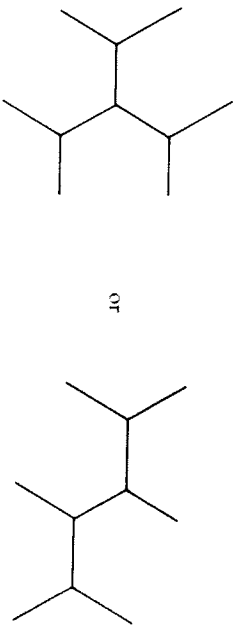


Figure 3

Two points emerge from this: one, that all complex forms can be decomposed into a triad, which is the irreducible structure of the sign, and two, that even when as many as five correlates are involved in a sign relationship, their interdetermination need not be of the same configuration—which is another way of saying their overall significant effect can be quite different. The textural complexity of semeiotic relationships is something that semeioticians and

cultural anthropologists have not even begun to systematically explore. A large portion of such an exploration must, by nature of things, go beyond semantics, even beyond pragmatics, and must implicate and include the aesthetic dimension of culture. The extremities represented in the diagram as endpoints are, in fact, heuristic fictions. For no polyadic relation has reachable endpoints. For this reason, every semeiotic study of however small a cultural aspect must, by definition, remain open and incomplete. This brings us to the next theoretical point that may be abstracted from the triadic structure of the sign.

The Dialogic Sign

The sign, or representamen, addresses somebody. In the definition already cited, we saw Peirce elaborating on this opening statement by saying that the sign "creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign that it creates" he called "the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*" (2.289). The phrase "or perhaps a more developed sign" ought to have been rendered, "or perhaps a more or less developed sign." Signification does not derive exclusively from the representation of the object in the sign and the mediate representation of the object in the interpretant being the *same*. Neither does signification become a reality only when the representation in the interpretant is "more developed" than the representation in the sign. The only criterion for significance to come into effect is that there be something shared between the interpretant and the sign or representamen. Having this in mind, we may rewrite the second definition of the sign already cited (2.274) with the following parenthetical modification: "A *Sign*, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its *Object*, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant*, to assume the

same [or similar] triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object" (2.274). I stress this amendment because, as I shall show, a certain measure of nonidentity between representamen and interpretant becomes quintessential if we are to understand culture as a creative process enriched by agreement as well as disagreement, understanding as well as misunderstanding. Having this in mind, we may better appreciate the openness of the semeiotic process as presented by Peirce in the following definition: "A Sign is anything which is related to a Second thing, its *Object*, . . . in such a way as to bring a Third thing, its *Interpretant*, into relation with the same Object, and that in such a way as to bring a Fourth into relation with that Object in the same form, *ad infinitum*" (2.92).

In these definitions of the sign, we may see laid bare the atomic structure of the sign, wherein is embedded the very essence of the dialogic of all communication, especially that of human communication. In this irreducible structure of the sign obtains the most elementary dialogue. In this definition of the sign, we find the sign (or representamen) inviting, as it were, the interpretant to "perceive" or "understand" the object as it (the sign) "perceives" or "understands" the object. Insofar as the interpretant is incapable of "perceiving" the object in a manner identical to that in which the sign "perceives" it, a dialogue is initiated in which other interpretants are welcome to participate, every interpretant in itself being capable of acting as a sign to further interpretants, and so on. In any dialogue, if there is total agreement between two interlocutors, further dialogue becomes unnecessary, if not impossible. In fact, if two people were to be sequestered from everybody else, the probability of their dialogue ending in silence is likely to be high. It would certainly not be unfair to trace the petrification of many a marriage into mute numbness to the cessation of dialogue caused by a superfluity of agreement. Fortunately, men and women, as social beings, are not

confined to a single dialogue but sojourn in and travel through polylogues (to steal a term from Kristeva), a process that helps maintain a certain measure of anisomorphism between sign and interpretant. There must remain some measure of such an anisomorphism for the dialogic process to breed or invite (depending on the point of view one takes) further interpretants and further signs to partake in the open and ever-expanding semeiotic process.

In this irreducible structure of the sign, we also have the most elementary unit of reasoning, an invitation to reason, to converse, to convene. I shall have more to say on *convent* and its cognates *conventant* and *convention* when we discuss the Peircean symbol below. For the present, I would like to expand on what I mean by "reasoning." To phrase it differently, dialogism may be considered to be a special kind of reasoning. Peirce's own definition of the term *dialogism* is worthy of note: "A dialogism is an argument which may be analyzed into constituent arguments; each of the constituent arguments is characterized by having only 'one premise and two alternate conclusions'" (cited in Kevelson 1982: 161). While syllogisms are characterized by a single conclusion contained in its major and minor premise, "the dialogism is a process of reasoning which attempts to account for the method by which new information is discovered, processed, and integrated into a continually evolving, open-ended system of reasoning, which parallels the actual method of creating human discourse" (Kevelson 1982: 161). Furthermore, Kevelson notes that dialogism presents

a means of breaking up, or dividing, an argument into a number of arguments, each of which has only one premise but two, alternative, disjunctive conclusions. Each of the conclusions can then become a premise, or Theme, of subsequently evolving arguments. Conceivably, . . . arguments based on the structure of the Dialogism may be evolved indefinitely until one finds, for the time being, some satisfactory conclusion. (Kevelson 1982: 162)

The structure of the basic syllogism is:

All men are animals, and all animals are mortal;
Therefore, all men are mortal. (Kevelson 1982: 161)

The structure of Peirce's dialogism is:

Some men are not mortal; therefore,
Either some men are not animals, or
Some animals are not mortal. (Kevelson 1982: 161)

The reader who is interested in pursuing Peirce's dialogism may do so by reading Kevelson's paper and being guided by it to the pertinent original papers of Peirce. I will close this discussion with a point about the openness of a dialogue that finds its elemental structure in the openness of the sign itself. Every representamen is a premise that proffers a conclusion, which conclusion, however, is not identical to the one impressed upon the interpretant. Thus, if the elemental triadic sign is arrested, as it were, at any given instance in its evolution, two disjunctive conclusions may be manifested. Herein lies the openness both of the dialogic and of the semeiotic processes, characterized by indeterminacy, dynamism, and an evolution toward a greater refinement of debate. Furthermore, this very dialogic attribute of the sign makes the creation of culture in the communicative act that is engaged in by the anthropologist and the informant both possible and interesting. I shall reserve for later discussion the role of the anthropologist in the creation of culture and move on to consider the next unit idea in our definition of culture, signs of habit.

Signs of Habit

We have said that the signs that constitute a culture are regnant and generative signs of habit. I have adopted the concept of habit from Peirce. By appreciating Peirce's concepts of belief and doubt, we can arrive at an understanding

of his concept of habit. "Man is a bundle of habits" (6.228). Belief is habits become conscious (4.53). Becoming conscious of habits is a distinctively human attribute, making reflection, and even critical self-reflection, possible. Doubt is what blocks, interrupts or shocks belief. Doubt is the privation of habit (5.417 and 5.512). Whereas habit and the consciousness thereof (belief) sustain a state of calmness and satisfaction, doubt creates quite the opposite. Doubt is "an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves" (5.374).

Signs of habit, therefore, are largely, if not entirely, unconscious. This is not to imply that they are passive modes of behavior, however. On the contrary, they are active determinants of action. "The feeling of believing is more or less a sure indication of there being established in our nature some habit which will determine our actions" (5.371).

Peirce's "habit" is very similar to what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*, "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, [which] produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle" (1972: 78). Within the dominant epistemological framework of Western thought, wherein nature and culture are seen as a set of binary opposites, "habits" may be seen as *natural*. Peirce, the monist that he was, did not subscribe to this dominant framework. For this reason, he was able to consider matter as "not completely dead, but [as] merely mind hidebound with habits" (6.158). Or, as Apel puts it, for Peirce, "laws of nature are taken to be petrified habits" (1981: 34). Habit taking, for Peirce, is not an instinctual process, if instinct is to be construed as a noninferential, "natural," process. "Intuition" is another concept attributed to human cognition as if it were the foundation or the "natural" basis of all knowledge. Peirce's opposition to the doctrine that cognitions are or can be intuitive cuts across the rationalist-empiricist divide. Neither logical principles

nor sense data are foundational, in the sense of being non-inferred. Rather, all knowledge is mediated, and mediated through signs. (This is neither the place nor the time to engage in an elaborate defense of this claim, but the interested reader may refer to William Davis [1972] and Almeder [1980] for an elegant undertaking of such a task.) Therefore, the process of habit taking is an inferential process, albeit one that is tacit or even unconscious, so much so that it is equated with such "natural" immediacy as intuition and instinct.

If knowing is a *process*, then knowing is a process in time. Citing Peirce (5.284), Davis observes that "no experience whatever is an 'instantaneous affair, but is an event occupying time and coming to pass by a continuous process.' Instances are mathematical fictions" (1972: 10). Even something that appears to be so immediate as pain is not intuitive but is, rather, the product of a "process of comparison, since the mind judges pain, like tone, by the *frequency*, not intensity, of nerve impulses. (But time is required to judge the intensity of pure quantity too)" (1972: 10).

Nerve impulses and other perceptual judgments are almost exclusively indexical signs, that is, signs whose significance is a function of the necessary contiguity of *object* and representamen. Humans, as social beings who make their own history, by contrast, are immersed in a life-world of symbols, that species of signs that owe their significance to convention. Symbolic signs, however, are no less constitutive of habit than are indexical signs, and they are equally prone to settle into the unconscious grooves of habitual dispositions. On this point Bourdieu observes, "the 'unconscious' is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second nature of habitus" (1972: 78–79).

In our exposition of the structure of the sign, we said that the representamental First and the objective Second are meaningfully brought together in the interpretational Third. In a later chapter we will consider Peirce's phenom-

enological categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness in greater detail. For now, it suffices to know that whereas Firstness designates that category of pure quality or even a pure qualitative possibility considered in abstraction from everything else, and whereas Secondness represents sheer existence, brute fact, or actuality, Thirdness is that gentle force that mediates First and Second, bringing them into significant relationship. *Habit* represents Thirdness almost to perfection (5.538). Habit appeases the irritation of doubt and, conversely, makes belief possible. Commenting on this mediating function of habit, or rather, habitus, Bourdieu correctly observes that "the habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be nonetheless 'sensible' and 'reasonable'" (1972: 79).

I must hasten to remind the reader that the "habit" of Peirce or the "habitus" of Bourdieu do not pertain to the dispositions of any one individual. As has been mentioned earlier and as will be seen below, for Peirce, what was of significance with respect to his doctrine of truth, knowledge, and inquiry, was the community. He spoke not of individual opinions but of the final opinion of the community of inquirers. He spoke not of individual interpreters but of a community of interpretants. In a similar vein, Bourdieu speaks of a "community of dispositions" (1972: 79). We may speak equally well of a "community of habits."

One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the *objectivity* secured by consensus on the meaning (*sens*) of practices and the world, in other words the harmonization of agents' experiences and continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from the expression, individual or collective (in festivals for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings), of similar or identical experiences. The homogeneity of habitus of what—within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation)

implied in their production—causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted. (1972: 80)

Signs of habit that are constitutive of a culture are also regnant and generative. This means that these signs or significant constructs peruse the cultural life of a people and are generative of other, more conscious, ideological signs as well. The anthropological method works backward, so to speak, from the consciously articulated and manifestly acted-out signs to the unconscious repository of the signs of habit.

I hold with Schneider that some signs (his “symbols”), or significant constructs, constitute a system of meaning that is generative of other signs in the culture in question. That is, these other signs bear distinct traces of the parent constructs or signs of habit, and these regnant signs of habit pervade the culture’s significant texture. The systematicity of these pervasive and generative signs of habit should not, however, be exaggerated. I differ with Schneider in his assertion that the “culture is a total system; it does not have loose ends and unintegrated parts that do not articulate with other parts” (1976: 219). Here I must concur with Geertz that a “hermetical approach to things . . . seems to run the danger (and increasingly to have been overtaken by it) of locking cultural analysis away from its proper object, the informal logic of actual life” (1973: 17). The systematicity of a cultural system is relative, even weak, a point best illustrated by Geertz’s own metaphor of the octopus, in which cultural organization

is neither the spider web nor the pile of sand. It is rather more the octopus, whose tentacles are in large part separately integrated, neurally quite poorly connected with one another and what in the octopus passes for a brain, and yet who nonetheless manages to get around and to preserve himself, for a while anyway, as a viable, if somewhat ungainly entity. (1973: 407–408)

The act of postulating *signs of habit* as the distinguishing feature of a culture may lead one to conclude that to subscribe to such a view entails, as a necessary corollary, a subscription to the view that culture is a sequestered and immunized system of signs, invincibly coherent. Such an assumption is unwarranted for several reasons. First, the signs of habit that we are concerned with in the life of a community of social and historical human beings are predominantly symbols. In a symbolic sign, the representamen and object are held together by convention and not by contiguity (as with indexes) or by similarity (as with icons). Therefore, regardless of how habit-fraught symbolic constructs become, the very fact of the arbitrary and convention-dependent bond that holds the three correlates of such signs makes them more vulnerable to destabilization and change than are the indexical habits in nature. Second, signs of habit are integrally linked to and find actualized expression in nonhabitual, consciously enacted and articulated signs (mainly symbols). They are not safely sequestered but are vulnerably exposed to the daily traffic of signs. Third, the conscious-unconscious divide is not to be understood as impermeable. Signs of habit do not lurk in the arcane recesses of a domain comparable to the Freudian unconscious, nor are they cryptically inscribed onto a palimpsest awaiting decoding by a structuralist. Rather, they are so much a part of the light of day that they go unnoticed and are brought into consciousness only through conscious reflection—and even then, most often only when an individual is “shocked” into doing so by a stranger, who might happen to be an anthropologist. The possibility of such a communicative encounter is a fourth point that undermines the view of a hermetically sealed set of signs. This fourth point also leads us directly into the last portion of our definition of culture, the communicative act in which the anthropologist and informant(s) engage. Before we tease out this part of the definition, however, we must return once more to the semiotic sign and its triadic structure.

Sign Types and the Multimodality of Signification

When we temporarily departed from our discussion of the sign structure a few pages back, we had already established the triadic constitution of the sign as made up of representamen, object, and interpretant. We are now in a position to generate ten logical sign types from the fact of these three correlates.

In unpacking the structure of the sign, Peirce traces a sign from its point of logical and ontological deployment to its interpretive execution. In order to do this, he divides a sign into three subcategories, abstracting and isolating each correlate for the purpose of analysis (a method that he calls "prescinding").¹² Thus, he invites the reader to examine the representamen as if it existed independently of the other two correlates, fraught with the potentiality of signification and yet freed for the sake of analytic scrutiny from the sign relationship. He does the same for each correlate. These correlates, thus prescinded, may be represented as in table 1.

TABLE 1

	Relationship of sign to object (second)		Relationship of sign to interpretant (third)
	Sign, or representamen (first)		
First	Qualisign	Icon	Rheme
Second	Sinsign	Index	Dicent sign
Third	Legisign	Symbol	Argument

¹²"Precision and abstraction are two terms for the same process; and are now limited not merely to separation by the mind, but even to a particular kind of mental separation, namely, that by *attention* to one point and *neglect* of another. That which is *attended* to is said to be *prescinded*; and that which is neglected is said to be *distracted from*" (Peirce 1982: 518). In the same section from which this quote has been taken, Peirce goes on to distinguish among Precision, Discrimination, and Dissociation.

The first column contains three modes of representamen, the second, three modes of objects, and the third, three modes of interpretants. Each column, or subcategory of a sign, can be further divided horizontally into three modes. The first row contains representamen, object, and interpretant as relative Firsts, the second row contains them as relative Seconds, and the third row as relative Thirds.

The representamenal First is called a *qualisign*. It is a sign whose representative capacity lies in its quality. Redness, for instance, in Tamil Nadu may signify fertility in some contexts. But as pure potential or possibility, it remains a *qualisign*. When redness becomes embodied in a *sāri*, it is a *sinsign*, a representamenal Second. But as soon as it is thus embodied, it calls forth or invokes a more general order or general possibility of representation: a bridal *sāri* thereby invokes a convention. This is a *legisign*. Elsewhere Peirce distinguishes these three modes of signs as tone, token, and type.

Similarly, the object, too, when examined independently of the completed sign structure, may be seen to present itself as a First, a Second, or a Third. Terrence Deacon (1978) explains it like this. If for the moment one can ignore the interpretant and examine the manner in which the object and representamen are brought together, the kind of relationship these two bring into the sign relationship, then one may see three modes of relationships. If an iconic sign is examined, it may be noted that some quality of the object is represented in the icon. The iconic sign and the object must in some way resemble each other; they must share some quality. Examples of iconic signs range from a piece of the cross to diagrams, maps, blueprints, and onomatopoeia.

An indexical sign, by contrast, is a sign in which resemblance or shared quality does not define the relationship between object and representamen, but, instead, contiguity or concurrence defines their significant link. Smoke and fire, red limbus and acidity, and deictics in language—all of these are examples of indexical signs. Indexical signs are

what we call facts. They are "obvious," even more obvious than icons to their users. In regards to indexical sign functions in language and culture, the reader is referred to Michael Silverstein's seminal paper, "Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description" (1976), in which he not only shows the preponderance of indexical signs in language and culture but also demonstrates how an understanding of the functioning of indexical signs in culture emphasizes the indispensability of context in any significant linguistic or cultural analysis.

A symbol is not related to its object either by contiguity, by shared quality, or by resemblance. Convention alone links a symbol to its object. *Covene* and *covenant* both derive their meaning from the Latin *convenire*. In a symbol the conventional sign, object, and representamen are brought together within the sign relation by virtue of an agreement and not by virtue of any quality intrinsic to either object or representamen. Words are of the order of symbols. The object to which a word refers is of a general nature; symbols are not indicators of any particular occurrence of a thing but of a "kind of thing" (Peirce 2: 301).

This is an appropriate point to interrupt the exegesis of Peirce's theory of signs and return to examining the reasons for my insistence on the substitution of *signs* for the customary *symbols* in my definition of culture.

David Schneider, even more so than Geertz, claims to be interested in the native's point of view, in native categories. In cautioning the field-worker against going to the field with a rigidly defined frame of analysis, he says: "The more clearly the field worker has in mind what he is after the less likely it is that he will discover what the natives' cultural categories are; how the natives define them, construct them and manipulate them; or what they mean to the natives" (1968: 10–11). From the analyst's point of view, a culture may be a system of *symbols* and meanings. But from the native's point of view, his culture is constituted of indexical and iconic signs in addition to symbols. Schneider is quick

to respond: "The study of culture symbols (and presumably indexes and icons as well) and the study of culture as a system of symbols and meanings are very separate and different affairs" (1976: 206). Such a study is, however, metacultural and not cultural. Making the symbolic system (I use *symbolic* intending its full semiotic connotation) the locus classicus of one's analysis or "cultural account" is done at the expense of not appreciating what the cultural system, with its rich panoply of iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs, means to the natives themselves and *how* this cultural system means to them. This is what, I believe, distinguishes Geertz's cultural interpretation from Schneider's cultural account. The difference is not merely a matter of prose style; the difference lies in the fact that Geertz, though he does not systematically develop or explicate his interpretive method, appreciates the fact that signs in culture (he, too, calls them *symbols*) are not only symbolic but indexical and iconic as well, a fact that Schneider finds clearly ignorable with respect to his cultural account. Look, for instance, at Geertz's definition of religion. Even though he does not use *symbol* in the precise Peircean sense but uses it as a substitute for the Peircean *sign*, the indexical function in religious beliefs is clearly brought out: "Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem *uniquely realistic*" (1973: 90).

A second defect or danger built into the Schneiderian symbolic analysis is in the anthropologist being called upon to flaunt his dubious privilege of what Richard Rorty critically called (with respect to epistemological philosophers) the role of cultural overseer who knows everyone's common ground, "the Platonic philosopher king who knows what everybody else is really doing whether *they* know it or not" (Rorty 1979: 317). An interpretive cultural account, by

contrast, sees understanding to be “more like getting acquainted with a person than like following a demonstration. . . . We play back and forth between guesses about how to characterize particular statements or other events, and guesses about the point of the whole situation, until gradually we feel at ease with what was hitherto strange” (Rorty 1979: 319). Such an understanding can be attained only through an appreciation of the multimodal nature of signification in a culture and not by arriving at a unimodal (symbolic), privileged, metacultural account.

Back to Peirce’s taxonomy and the third correlate, the interpretant, again remembering we are, for the purpose of analysis, prescinding the interpretant as interpretant qua interpretant. The interpretant is classifiable by the manner in which the sign represents itself in the interpretive context; as a sign of possibility, a sign of fact, or a sign of reason. The first is called a rheme, the second, a *dicent sign* (or *disign*), and the third, an argument. As a sign of possibility, morphemes in language—suffixes, prefixes, infixes—are instances of linguistic rhemes. Deacon (1978) also cites the lines or boxes of a diagram or a pointing finger as it is involved in a gesture as examples of rhemes. What distinguishes a rheme as a rheme and not a *dicent sign* is the attribute that one cannot determine the truth or falsity of a rheme. A rheme is pure interpretive potentiality whose very appropriateness is not determined until it is actualized in use, in a context, in an instance, at which time it becomes a *dicent sign*. An appreciation of rhematic signs is crucial for an understanding of grammatical process (see, for example, Sapir 1921, chap. 4) and is no less important for understanding cultural processes. In order to be sensitive to rhematic signs with all their potentiality and possibility, one has to have acquired a keen feeling as to when an allusion, a suggestion, the drift of a conversation, the tenor of a discourse, or the color of a joke are pregnant with meaning. A field-worker begins to *experience* the culture in which he studies as soon as he begins to cultivate such a sensitivity. I

underscore *experience* in order to distinguish it from understanding. For instance, I consider Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as works of literary art that come close to being truly cultural accounts. What is true of these works is also true of culture. Understanding these works is not the point; in fact, many devotees of Joyce are honest enough to confess that they don’t understand him. What is important for them (and what ought to be equally true of the anthropologist with regard to the culture in which he studies) is that they experience the novel. Understanding, when and if it does come, is a bonus and worthy of commendation, if the one who does understand can also explicate.

Since a rheme signifies only a possibility, as I have said above, its truth or falsity is not even an issue. The most one can discern is its appropriateness or inappropriateness in a *dicent context*. As a rheme it promises to convey some further information regarding a fact or event. A *dicent sign*, contrastingly, can be understood as either true or false. Sentences, propositions, judgments, a diagnosis are all *dicent signs*. But as Deacon states it, “The truth or falsity of the *disign* cannot be ascertained without reference to the argument context to which it presents itself. Thus, although a *disign* is either true or false it can supply no reasons as to why this must be so” (1978: 158; see also Peirce 2: 309–310).

An argument is a sign of inference. It is “a Sign of the state of the universe . . . in which the premises are taken for granted” (Peirce and Welby 1977: 34). An argument is constituted of three inferential modes, the first two being the well known processes of induction and deduction, and the third, the lesser known one of abduction outlined for us by Peirce (7: 202; see also E. V. Daniel 1981). Truth as truth and the true nature of belief are established in the argument context. The argument provides us the canons upon which our view of the world in its most indubitable sense is based.

Argument, as a significant locus of truth and belief, may be illustrated by an example. A. J. Ayer (1968) employs to clarify quite a different aspect of Peirce’s philosophy, which

nonetheless suits our purposes equally well. Ayer points out the impossibility of a person's taking two sheets of paper and writing on one of them all propositions that are true and on another all those propositions that he firmly believes, with the proviso that the two lists be mutually exclusive. It is both imaginable and probable that some of the propositions our friend firmly believes in are quite false and that many propositions he does not believe in are quite true.

He could not say, or rather he could not judge that "Such and such propositions, which I firmly believe, are false" or "Such and such propositions are true, but I don't believe them." In each case it may well be that both components of the conjunction are true, that the man does firmly believe the proposition which he mentions and they are false, or that they are true and he does not believe them. But while we can say this about him, he cannot significantly say it about himself, or rather, he can say it only retrospectively. (Ayer 1968: 15)

The argument as an interpretant, then, is a sign that makes indubitability possible. The *argument* in fact is the non-arguable basis that makes argument possible. Schneider's regnant and generative signs belong precisely here, at least insofar as they are used by and are meaningful to those who find embedded in these signs their beliefs and their truths.

Of course we do remember that the separation of the three correlates, their prescinding, has been an artifact of our analysis. In fact, for a sign to be a sign, it must partake of all three correlates, one from each column in table 1. The result is that we have ten sign types¹³ defined in accordance with the particular combination of the three aspects of the sign.

¹³These ten divisions of signs are listed below with examples that readers may work through. The brief notes that follow the sign type and example are intended to explicate the logic underlying each sign type.

a. *Rhematic iconic qualisign* (e.g., a feeling of "red," a sensory quality).

An examination of table 1 and the sign types provided in footnote 13 makes it evident that not all combinations of the three aspects of the sign are logically possible. Thus, a sign that is in itself a qualisign (and not a sinsign or a legisign) cannot be an index or a symbol, for an index already presupposes a sinsign, and a symbol presupposes a legisign.

As a qualisign, its representative power rests on its uninstigated qualitative possibility; it is iconic because its eventual signification will depend on its having some quality in common with the object it stands for; it is rhematic because as pure possibility it would be meaningless to ask of it whether it were true or false. Even the question as to its appropriateness or inappropriateness is not relevant, since it has not occurred in a dicent context.

b. *Rhematic iconic sinsign* (e.g., an individual diagram, mimicry).

It is a sinsign because it is an existent fact and not a mere possibility. It is an icon and a rheme for the same reasons as in (a), except that the iconicity in question is a current fact rather than a future possibility.

c. *Rhematic indexical sinsign* (e.g., a spontaneous cry in the forest).

All as in (b) above, except for its being an index, which means that its link with the object for which it stands is not by virtue of the quality it shares with that object but by virtue of its contiguity or cooccurrence with the object.

d. *Dicent indexical sinsign* (e.g., a fever, mercury in a thermometer).

All as in (c) above, except that the interpretant is a dicent sign, by which is meant that its interpretation is no longer a mere possibility, a guess, but a fact; the nature of the link between representamen and object has been established by its instantiation.

e. *Rhematic iconic legisign* (e.g., a typical diagram).

As a legisign its representamen quality belongs to a general law or type; as a legisign it also embodies a sinsign and a qualisign as well. That is to say, each instance of it embodies a definite quality that renders it fit to call up in the mind the idea of a like object. Insofar as it has not been deployed in an interpretive context, it remains a rheme.

f. *Rhematic indexical legisign* (e.g., ditches in language, a pointing arrow).

All as in (e) above, except that the occurrence of the representamen token is connected spatiotemporally with a contiguous object that it seeks to represent.

g. *Dicent indexical legisign* (e.g., a Fahrenheit thermometer, a clock, a street cry).

All as in (f) above, except that the interpretive context is, as in (d), an established fact.

h. *Rhematic indexical legisign* (e.g., a common noun).

The deictic *that* is a rhematic indexical legisign, since it directs one's attention to a single object rather than draws attention to a general concept. A common noun, by contrast, because it is symbolic, does precisely this; it signifies a general concept. The theme and the legisign are as dealt with above.

i. *Dicent symbolic legisign* (e.g., a proposition).

With a common noun, as a rheme, its truth value is not an issue. A proposition, as a dicent sign, claims to be really affected by its object: "It is raining" is supposedly a proposition claiming to be representative of some real event. It is,

Neither can it be interpreted as a dicent sign or as an argument. Likewise, the highest level of interpretant that a sign sign could entail is that of a dicent sign. This scheme thus yields a maximum possibility of ten sign types.

Let me hasten to assure a reader who is unfamiliar with Peircean semiotics (and impatient with neologisms to boot) that he or she is in no way required to recall the terminology developed here with respect to the sign types. At most, I will invoke the more general triad of signs abstracted from this scheme, which are commonly referred to by virtue of the kinds of relationships that obtain between the representamens (more familiarly identified as signs) and the objects, as icons, indexes, and symbols—working definitions of which will be provided below. It suffices to know that not all signs are, from a culture's point of view or even from a cultural point of view, symbols, characterized by and for the users of these signs as defined by their arbitrariness. Peirce's three trichotomies just begin, and only begin, to reveal the complexity of signification. Even a rudimentary appreciation of this fact is bound to enrich any interpretive cultural account attempted by an anthropologist.

Before we leave this necessary digression into the nature of the sign and continue with the rest of our definition of culture, I would like to abstract the following moral from this exercise.

By the rhetorical device of analytical alliteration, I have attempted to make the point that a sign is irreducibly triadic, and so is meaning, whose constituent elements are

of course, appropriate to ask whether a proposition is true or false. Truth or falsity themselves, however, are matters that can be settled only with respect to an argument context, with its entire convention about what is true and how it can be rationally established.

1. *Argument symbolic legisign* (e.g., a syllabism).

Peirce is clearest on this: "An Argument is a sign whose interpretant represents its object as being an ulterior sign through a law, namely, the law that the passage from all such premises to such conclusions tends to the truth" (2.262).

signs. A hermetic structure of relationships, abstract and free-floating, even if it is called a grammar, is meaningless. To be meaningful a grammar must be grounded in the interpretant. The meaning of a message—any message—is not defined by its internal relationships alone. A message means something only when it means to someone, and this transaction often entails a *some/where* and a *some/when* as well.

I must again hasten to reassure the assiduous reader who has taken pains to examine the examples offered in each class of signs and has understandably wondered why a particular example should not belong or also belong somewhere else. Such puzzlement is clearly justified: Most, if not all signs are mixed. Signs, including symbols (especially symbols), are polysemic. This point, which has become almost a truism, was most lucidly made for the first time, to my knowledge, by Edward Sapir (1921), and has been put to maximum and effective use by Victor Turner (1967, 1969 and 1974) and by Victor Turner and Edith Turner (1978). Turner, however, by his selective attribution of polysemy to ritual and religious symbols, implies monosemy to other symbols, especially those signs that he calls "signs." Here I believe Turner to be wrong. Any mathematician who has struggled with the problem of trying to arrive at a univocal sign will testify to the impossibility of such a task. A sign, by its very nature, is polysemous. Turner is correct, however, in that some symbols, especially ritual and religious ones, tend to display their polysemic attributes with far greater élan than do others. The aspect of the sign that I have tried to bring forth is not its polysemy or its multivocality but its polychromy or multimodality. Iconic as well as indexical aspects may be concealed within the same sign. A sign runs in a bundle of cables, so to speak, not in single strands. A sign whose significant capacity is effectively determined by the copresence of a symbolic and an indexical mode of signification has been called a "duplex sign" (Jakobson 1957) or a "shifter" (Silverstein 1976). A polychromatic or multimodal sign can be likened to a jewel, with as many as

ten facets, if not more, each facet having three angles. In the experience of human interpreters, often only one facet will tilt toward the observer-interpreter, catch light, and throw it back; the other facets merely refract light. The reflecting facet, then, becomes the dominant mode. This does not, however, deny the existence of other modes of signification; modes that are sometimes expressed subjunctively and at other times remain potentialities. Different contexts help bring to light different aspects or modes of the sign.

A satisfactory cultural account must evidence a sensitivity to the multimodality of the signs in that culture, a sensitivity to the significant color that comes to be dominant to those who traffic in these signs in their daily lives, and a sensitivity to the partially or fully concealed modalities that refract the significance emitted by the dominant modal facet. I shall pay particular attention to this polychromatic attribute of the sign in chapter 4.

I wish to abstract one other point from this excursion on sign types in anticipation of a theme that I shall develop in the text and leave as a hypothesis for further examination. I will argue that some cultures choose, in general, to display one particular sign modality in preference to others. Specifically, I will argue that in Hindu India, iconicity is valued over symbolization, whereas in the modern West, the quest for indexical and symbolic signs is valorized.

The Sign in Culture and Self

Culture is the product of human beings' trafficking in signs, mainly symbols. It is public. It does not exist in peoples' heads as a structure or template to act by or live by. This much Geertz has argued quite eloquently (1973, chap. 1). The semeiotic position calls for much more. As Singer has argued in a recent paper (1980), a semeiotic perspective requires one to consider not only the signs of self but also the fact that the self is a sign or, if you prefer, a web of signification. It is easy for us to accept that the self is not an inert physical substance. Given the pervasiveness of

Cartesian thinking in our contemporary culture, however, it is very difficult for us to admit that the self is not a "permanent Cartesian mental substance with the powers of introspection, intuition, and universal doubt which is dispelled by the unity of the 'I think'" (Singer 1980: 489). In other words, our positivist regime demands of us an admission, overt or covert, that pure objectivity is possible, that universal and analytic categories are what they claim to be (Quine's seminal 1960 essay notwithstanding) and that it is feasible for or even incumbent upon the anthropologist to divest himself of all nonanalytically supported mental baggage and approach the object of his study with an open and scientifically clean mind.

Man himself is a sign. As a semeiotic sign or symbol he is not a closed, completed entity. He is ready and open to connect with, to enter into dialogical relationships with other selves and other signs; when he does so connect, he significantly reconstitutes himself. As a semeiotic sign he is never actual: he is always virtual. The following quotations from Peirce will make this point clear:

We have already seen that every state of consciousness [is] an inference; so that life is but a sequence of inferences or a train of thought. At any instant then man is a thought, and as thought is a species of symbol, the general answer to the question what is man? is that he is a symbol. (7.583, quoted in Singer 1980: 487)

Another statement most pertinent to our investigation of the cultural concept of the self in Tamil culture is Peirce's explication of the dialogical conception of the self, a conception to which Ricoeur (1978) and Habermas (1979) return from different angles almost three-quarters of a century after Peirce.

A person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is "saying to himself," that is, is saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one

reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought is whatever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. The second thing to remember is that the man's circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism. (5.421)

Or, as in Spivak's quotation from Proust:

It was not one man only, but the steady advance hour after hour of an army in close formation, in which there appeared, according to the moment, impassioned men, indifferent men, jealous men. . . . In a composite man, those elements may, one by one, without our noticing it, be replaced by others, which others again eliminate or reinforce, until in the end a change has been brought about which it would be impossible to conceive if we were a single person. (Derrida 1976: x)

These understandings of the self are in far greater concordance with what Marriott finds to be true with respect to the concept of the person in India than is the dominant, perennially integrated and bound Cartesian understanding of the self. Marriott finds the term *individual* to be a highly misleading one for an adequate understanding of the concept of the person. He considers "dividual" a far more apt characterization of the Hindu person (1976a). We shall return to this point time and again in the main text.

The Anthropologist, the Informant, the Conversation

A sign is never at rest; its dialogic structure makes this impossible. It is dynamic. The same is true of culture—as a web of signification it is one with the process of signification itself. Thus, culture ultimately is an open-ended process. This point may be best illustrated by Peirce's view on the process of reasoning, which for him is a form of semeiosis, a trafficking in thoughts, a trafficking in signs.

Thus every reasoning involves another reasoning, which in its turn involves another, and so on ad infinitum. Every reasoning connects something that has just been learned with knowledge already acquired so that we thereby learn what has been unknown. It is thus that the present is so welded to what is just past as to render what is just coming about inevitable. The consciousness of the present, as the boundary between past and future, involves them both. Reasoning is a new experience which involves something old and something hitherto unknown. (7.536)

Reasoning, for the field-worker, entails a conversation with informants. This conversation is also the locus of the cultural process. Lévi-Strauss went so far as to equate the craft of anthropology with this conversation: "For anthropology, which is a conversation of man with man, everything is symbol and sign, when it acts as intermediary between two subjects" (1966: 115). For Lévi-Strauss, however, this conversation is where the structure of culture, which is the structure of the mind writ large, is manifest. The preoccupation with the quest for structure is so hegemonic in Lévi-Strauss's writings that a monologue and a monologic take the place of a truly dialogical conversation, except in *Tristes Tropiques* (1974), where this quest is slightly relaxed and he finds man conversing with man. The semiotic point, however, misses Lévi-Strauss. His semeiology stops short of involving the interlocutors themselves as integral parts of the sign system, as interpretant signs.

The conversation the anthropologist engages in is a special kind of conversation. To begin with, as I have already remarked, it is a conversation with informants. As Schneider made it clear over a decade ago (1968: 8–9), the anthropologist does not interact with respondents as do sociologists, or with patients as do psychologists. This much is easy for most anthropologists to accept. But many anthropologists still believe in "samples," helped along by low-level mathematical techniques in probability and statistics. Informants do not come in samples; they are largely

self-selective. They may not meet the criteria of statistical significance. How many Hitlers were there? How many Gandhis? Cultural anthropology, from a statistical point of view, is partial. It is partial toward those "natives" who allow the field-worker access to their web of signification, who extend him or her the opportunity to connect with it, even though by such generosity they are subjecting their web to signification to creative transformation.

Yet the cultural anthropologist is not completely insensitive to the question of how representative an informant is of those among whom s/he lives and with whom s/he is most frequently involved in culture-making processes. Loquacity alone does not make an informant representative. For that matter, the conversation we have been referring to in this chapter need not be and is not limited to a conversation in verbal signs alone. There are ways in which a sensitive anthropologist can and does evaluate consensus.

For instance, the data in chapter 4 on sexuality are not the kind of data that can be obtained from the mouth of the average villager. As good fortune would have it, my informant was able to self-select himself to draw me into a world that remains strictly private for most villagers. There were times when our discourse on matters of sexuality involved other villagers as well, who, as soon as they understood that I was comfortable in the web of signification that my main informant was spinning, participated in it, at times at a furious pace, throwing in a comment here, a refinement there, an objection somewhere else. I on my part would not always play the uninformed interrogator but used this opportunity to deploy in their midst the Arunta theory of procreation or the Trobriand notion of the "unimportance" of intercourse. Bemused skepticism and critical objections followed. Animated debate ensued. A cultural discourse was created. Whether or not the theory of sexuality that finally emerged—the "said" that I redeemed from the "saying"—was already there in their heads is irrelevant. Of interest is the fact that a cultural discourse was created, a

discourse in which more than a few interested members in the community became entangled—and entangled with ease.

The positivist question likely to follow goes something like this: Can we not go back and reconstruct a questionaire (a culturally sensitive one, of course, now that the discourse has been figured out) that confirms consensus in a reliable manner, perhaps along the lines of componential analysis or propositional analysis (D'Andrade 1976 has provided us with a paradigmatic one)? Apart from the fact that sensitive data proffered in informal discourse are often not elicitable through formal techniques, there is a more serious reservation with respect to such formal techniques, a reservation that is dimly prefigured in an early paper by David Schneider (1965), in which he gently critiques Goodenough's componential analysis of Yankee kinship. For a fuller appreciation of the inadequacies of formal analysis of this ilk, I refer the reader to two studies. One is a short and pithy paper by Michael Silverstein (1976) in which he takes on the tradition of semantico-referential grammarizing (of which cognitive anthropological theory and techniques are a part) and points out its inadequacies; the other is a more expansive study by Pierre Bourdieu (1972), which deals with the same issue in antipositivistic terms.

In my own work the impotence of cognitive anthropological or propositional analytical techniques with respect to certain kinds of cultural data was brought to the fore with respect to the data of chapter 2. There I deal with two lexemic items that in the formal, lexicographical (or in Silverstein's terminology, the semantico-referential) mode were translated as "village." The two terms were considered equivalent, if not synonymous. Keen observation of the context of their use, however, revealed that these two terms, *lir*, on the one hand, and *kirimim*, on the other, concealed within them two entirely different and distinct symbolic systems. No amount of formal, cognitive anthropological techniques could have elicited this difference.

These terms were somewhat similar to Whorf's cryptotypic categories. The analytic point with respect to the positivistic penchant for fixing facts or opinions by means of formal techniques, such as propositional analysis, may be made by restating the essence of Silverstein's argument, forwarded in his 1976 paper. Silverstein refers to a semantico-referential grammar, which includes the transformational generative grammar in linguistics and the cognitive anthropology and structuralism in anthropology. In these approaches the meaning of a message or a sign, 0 , is taken to be a function of a semantico-referential grammar, G . This G is formal, its structure determinate and fixed. Silverstein shows, with countless and provocative examples, that such a theory of meaning is very inadequate. He argues instead for expanding meaning so as to make it the equivalent of a pragmatic grammar, G' . From a pragmatic point of view, $0 = f(G') = f(G, x, y, z, l, t, \dots)$, where x is the speaker, y the hearer, z the audience, l the location of discourse, t the time of discourse, and so on. Clues to the subliminal pervasiveness of a certain symbolic construct emerge when the researcher is willing and able to transcend a limited, semantico-referential grammatical perspective and open up to the constellation of a greater array of pragmatic variables. Such clues more often than not reside not in verbal symbols but in shifters or duplex signs (Jakobson 1957; Silverstein 1976) that are indexical, or in rhematic iconic qualisigns that may be betrayed in a gesture, a joke, or a preference for a sãri of a certain color or a shirt of a certain material. Unfortunately there are rarely systematically or sequentially formulatable questions that can lead the investigator to these clues or to the underlying significance they may potentially reveal. It is a blessing to arrive at such a formulation, as I have done in chapter 2 with respect to the distinction between *ur* and *kirãmam*. Even then, the formulation may not have application beyond the immediate problem and context. More often than not, one's second question will be determined by the first response. Such is the nature of a conversation; such the nature of dialogue.

The conversation of the anthropologist is special in yet another way. I have said earlier that the positivist believes that the researcher can and must divest himself or herself of his or her own presuppositions of the order of things, while the semeiotician maintains that such a task is impossible. Yet the craft of anthropology at its best requires the fieldworker to relax his or her own symbolic constructs, to subject them to or prepare them for a process of disarticulation. In all his writings Victor Turner has shown us time and again how within a culture itself, liminal and liminoid processes loosen and disarticulate symbolic constructs of societies. The same ought to be true of fieldwork. Of course, different field-workers succeed to different degrees in this attempt at repose, and even the same field-worker is able to slacken the hold of his existing web of signification more successfully in one context than in another, even when among the same people. The hallmark of an anthropologist in the field is the willingness to try. Roy Wagner sees the whole matter thus: "Whether he knows it or not, and whether he intends it or not, his 'safe' act of making the strange familiar always makes the familiar a little bit strange. And the more familiar the strange becomes, the more and more strange the familiar will appear" (1981: 11).

Culture making: A Creative Art

If Geertz maintains, for whatever polemical reasons, that culture is not in people's heads (1973: 10) and if Schneider feels constrained to respond by asking rhetorically, "If not in people's heads, then where else?" (1976: 206), a genuinely semeiotic point of view will hold that culture is both inside and outside peoples' heads, in their past as well as in their present, and has implication for the future. It is to be located in the creative act of communicating. Wagner calls it "the invention of culture." The anthropologist "invents 'a culture' for people and they invent 'culture' for him" (1981: 11). The anthropologist's invention or creation is the result of two, or rather three, simultaneous activities. To begin with,

he concedes to the distinction and difference between his own culture and their culture. He also concedes to the fact that only a miniscule part of his cultural repertoire will be employed to initiate the "conversation" with the "native." One is reminded of Sapir's analogy relating language to an utterance or sentence, "It is somewhat as though a dynamo capable of generating enough power to run an elevator were operated almost exclusively to feed an electric door-bell" (1921: 14). Perhaps another analogy, another way of looking at the same process, will help. It is as if two gaseous planets whose veritable molecules were signs were drawn together and were only capable of illuminating and being illuminated by the sides that were mutually exposed, while the other parts, the greater parts, remained eclipsed in darkness, in disuse, bracketed away. This separation of the exposed from the unexposed, the illuminated from the hidden, the proffered from the reserved marks the first "conversation"-motivated activity.

The second activity is marked by the deconstruction of the proffered, or presented, part. Given that our metaphor holds our planets to be gaseous and capable of interpenetration, we shall also assume that they are capable of substance exchanges and mutual transformations. In our semeiotic idiom we may say that there are certain webs of signification of the native into which we may sink with ease and form easy semeiotic links. Let's return to our planet metaphor, however. Insofar as the anthropologist presents a segment of *his* planet of signs, he does so (or ought to do so) with the willingness—even the wish—to see its deconstruction, a process that will be facilitated by the third activity.

This third activity entails the simultaneous presentation of the native's planet of signs. In this admixture both bodies are obviously going to undergo transformation. The trick, however (and this is where the issue of deference comes in), is to minimize the transformation of the native's planet and maximize that of one's own. The creation or invention that

the native presents as culture and the anthropologist interprets as a culture is precisely this area of admixture, this area of significant intercourse, this area brought together into mutual interpenetration in the communicative act, an act that is, as I have intimated in my definition of culture, a creative one, in which both anthropologist and informant(s) are involved, but in which the creativity of the informant(s) is given preeminence.

Now imagine our interpenetrating semeiotic planets slowly rotating, so that every cubic area of each planet is at one time or another commonly shared by both planets. This, after all, is something that ought to happen in the best of all possible worlds; every possible nook and cranny of the anthropologist's world is subjected to creative deconstruction through a genuine communication and communion with that of the natives. We do not, however, live in the best of all possible worlds, even though there is no harm in trying to make our world into one.

I must hasten to disabuse the reader who sees in this scheme "the myth of the chameleon worker, perfectly self-tuned to his exotic surroundings, a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience, and cosmopolitanism" (Geertz 1976: 222), even though I would not scoff as readily as Geertz does at those field-workers who are blessed with "more-than-normal capacities for ego effacement and fellow feeling" (p. 236), provided that they are not mere pretensions. The problem with the myth, however, is that the chameleon, for all its extraordinary mimetic achievements, emerges finally with its identity intact. This feat, from a semeiotic standpoint, is an impossibility.

In essence, what I have attempted to convey by this metaphor is the implication and import of that age-old, incomparable *sine qua non* of anthropological field method known as participant-observation. In these days of positivistic hyperbole, where grant applications provide special sections for listing techniques and even apparatus, the import of this apparently weatherworn hyphenated con-

cept recedes to arcane recesses of a plan of study. My intention in this book is to restore the concept to its rightful place.

I intend as well to show that the hyphen that divides participation from observation is a stubborn one, an unrelentingly vigilant sentry forever keeping the two apart. The best an anthropologist can hope for is that with every participatory experience s/he will have enhanced his or her observational understanding.

I am not yet done with the metaphor, nor with the chameleon. Beyond experiencing and understanding, the anthropologist is called upon to tell his or her story to folks back home, to intellectuals and to academics and to those who simply enjoy reading anthropology. The story s/he tells them is a cultural account. This cultural account (I agree with Geertz) is an interpretive one. Now, the problem with going all native does not lie so much in this activity's pretensions to "more-than-normal capacities for ego effacement" or in claims to being a "walking miracle of empathy" but rather in that the more native one becomes, the less of a story one has to tell—or for that matter, the less need one will have to tell a story.

Let me illustrate this point semeiotically. Interpretation is not unlike metaphor. Stated differently, interpretive possibility may be said to inhere in its metaphoric structure. I am fully aware—even painfully aware—of the unsettled and unsettling debate on what a metaphor is. I am going to have to pretend (and have the reader pretend with me) that all the controversy and refinement is mere impertinence (in every sense of that term) for our purpose at hand and that the following basic view of metaphor will suffice. (For the reader who insists on my taking a stand, let me say that I am broadly on the side of such metaphorists as Ricoeur [1977], Max Black [1962], and Beardsley [1972] and am aware of the excellent alternatives that stand in opposition to these studies, those by John Searle [1979] and Donald Davidson [1978].)

Basic both to the structure and to the event of metaphor is the fact that in a metaphor two signs are involved. To begin with, in their premetaphoric representation they are disparate and belong to distinct significant contexts. In metaphor the two signs are brought together because of some quality they share. That is, the two signs are partial icons of each other. When they are brought together in a metaphor, such as the line from T. S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" "Streets that follow like a tedious argument" or the phrase "Love is a red rose," they are icons of each other in that qualities are common to my love and a rose or to a particular kind of street and an argument. Complete isomorphism, however, does not exist between the pairs of icons, for if that were the case, they would not be metaphors. As in a Venn diagram, there is a shared semantic and sensory area and an area that is not shared. While the isomorphic attempts to create semantic and sensory homogeneity, the anisomorphic reminds one of the referential heterogeneity. Furthermore, this anisomorphism reminds one of the icons' symbolic content. This ambiguitating mixture of sense and representation (in Ricoeur [1978], Ferge's opposition between *Sinn* and *Vorstellung*), however, directs one's attention to it—a mechanism that gives it metaphoric force. This attention-directing function is predominantly indexical.

If we move back to our metaphor of the interpenetrating planets, there likewise we find iconicity as well as aniconicity; and it is this duality that makes an anthropological account possible, and this anthropological account or interpretive product is structurally, as well as in terms of *Sinn* and *Vorstellung*, metaphoric.

Nor am I done with the chameleon: Metaphors are iconic. Thirds in that the convention or symbolic function inherent in the metaphor is quite evident. An image or a statue, in contrast, is an iconic Second. Its iconicity is more dominant than in the case of the metaphor. Its separation from its object, however—ergo its contiguity with it (in reality or in

the mind)—remains apparent, and hence its indexical function is conspicuous. Enter our chameleon, a splendid example of an iconic First. In the case of protective coloration in nature, the representation (the color of the animal or plant) blends in so perfectly with the background, its iconicity reaching a hue of such perfection, that it masks all rather than conveys any information (Deacon 1978). The case of the field-worker gone all native is no different. A cultural account is by definition an interpretive account, and as an interpretive account it must be capable of conveying information even as a metaphor does.

Interpretation entails a movement, a movement that brings the interpretive subject and the interpretive object together into partial coalescence. The movement, however, as I have indicated elsewhere (Daniel 1983*a*), can take place in two ways. On the one hand, the anthropologist can draw the interpretive subject to himself with barely a movement on his part. The proverbial armchair anthropologist belongs to this kind, and so, I am afraid, do the structuralists, among others.¹⁴ In some instances, we may say with retrospective wisdom, arrogation of native categories has been so extreme and complete that situations of iconic Firstness were created with hardly anything left worth calling interpretation. On the other hand, the anthropologist can consciously move toward the interpretive subject, divesting himself or herself, in the move, of his or her own native symbolic constructs. The latter is clearly the preferred, non-ethnocentric movement. However, noninformative iconic Firstness achieved in this direction is not desirable either. I believe this is where ethnosociology and interpretive anthropology part ways.

¹⁴Notable exceptions are to be found in applications of structuralism by those studying aspects of their own culture. In such instances we see a de facto incorporation of a cultural interpretant into the analysis. I think here of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1972) and Veena Das's paradigmatic study of the *Diamantia Purina* and the *Grilijasutra* in their pragmatic contexts (1977).

There have been several criticisms of ethnosociology since it was first formulated in several working papers in the early seventies and found its first attempted application in Ronald Inden's Ph.D. dissertation (1972, revised and published in 1976). The first programmatic statement on ethnosociology was presented in 1973 at the Ninth International Congress of the Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences by McKim Marriott, revised and published in the same year in which Ronald Inden's dissertation was published (1976). The unsurpassed essay on the caste system by the same authors appeared in print in the 1974 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, intended, I presume, to be yet another application of the ethnosociological method. In 1976, in a response to a critical letter in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, Marriott, after defending his ethnosociology, recommended, "[It] would not be a bad objective for [Western social scientists] to make themselves—the knowers— somewhat like those South Asian objects that they would make known" (1976*b*: 195). Marriott, admirably and with gallantry, has attempted to turn things around. Enough of Weberizing and Durkheimizing Indian ethnological data. How about Mannizing and Paninizing Western culture, including the culture of science, for a change?

There have been several critical evaluations of ethnosociology, Trautman's (1980) and Good's (1982) being the latest. Even though their criticisms make sobering and constructive contributions, Trautman, implicitly, and Good, explicitly, miss the crucial, critical point. The issue is not whether one is able to locate the distinctive features of a culture via componential analysis or some such formal technique, or whether the application of generalized social systems theory conforms to the rigors of analyticity, or whether ethnosociological theory, by being no less culturally constituted than the classical Hindu lawbook *Mānūdharmaśāstra*, falls short of the exacting standards of a universal model. The issue is rather that anthropology and

sociology are part of Western man's concerns and are constituted of Western cultural symbols. Regardless of how much we may ethnocize anthropological theory, anthropology will be part of the Western or westernized intellectual's symbolic system. When I was a schoolboy, the school was very "British," even though it was in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). As good former British subjects, we were supposed to have a thing called a hobby. It was supposed to help one find a job later in life. We collected butterflies, stamps, and labels of jam tins imported from South Africa. A boy in my neighborhood who went to a Hindu school collected empty bottles and newspapers. That was his hobby, but he did not know it. He sold them and shared the money with his mother. He is now the owner of the local soda company. As for hobby qua hobby—this has yet to take root in Sri Lankan culture; the neighborhood boy's activities failed to connect with the web of significations we were part of. The same goes for anthropology and sociology; and I dare say that nuclear physics is far more at home in South Asia than is social science. The desire and need to study other peoples and to invent other cultures with them remains a preoccupation of Western man. Ethnoscology, in the full sense intended by Marriott, is an anachronism.

This leads me to yet another point, that of understanding a culture in its own terms. This is a noble goal and must be pursued by what I have already characterized as a concerted move toward the interpretive subject and by deference to the creative input of the native. This goal, however, cannot be pursued to its limit. It must stop short of iconic Firstness if the integrity of anthropology is to be retained, or if it does reach that stage, there must be a way to retreat a bit so as to restore metaphorical potentiality and interpretive possibility. Thus, to be meaningful, an ethnoscology must define itself paradoxically: as hoping to reach a goal it hopes never to reach.

I, for one, doubt that the ideal state of iconic Firstness can be reached. Traces of one's own symbolic constructs will

remain. In chapter 7 I have recorded my experience of a pilgrimage that I undertook with seven fellow villagers. The experience was so intense, physically and emotionally trying, that I found it increasingly difficult to get out of the participating side of the hyphenated concept participant-observation, onto the observational side. At times I thought my merger was going to be complete. Even during moments of greatest emotional and physical consummation, however, traces of my past remained, so that I was only afforded traces of what I was after.¹⁵

There is one more term in my definition of culture which I have yet to deal with. It is the "misspelled" word also borrowed from Jacques Derrida, *différance*. I shall defer its analysis until the end of this study, the more appropriate context for such an undertaking.

In dedicating this introduction to those who read introductions, I have attempted to pass on to the reader the burden of deciding whether this should be first or afterward. (Not a very responsible thing to do, I grant you.) In fact, I ought to have dedicated this to the two groups of readers of the text in its introduction-free, prepublished, manuscript version: one group commending me for not spoiling the reading experience with an introduction and instead plunging the reader headfirst into ethnographic thickness, the other group urging me, for clarity's sake and for the sake of those twice removed from the Chicago jāti of anthropology, to write such an introduction. Furthermore, this section, not unlike most introductions, is a fiction insofar as it pretends to have been written prior to the writing of the text—when in fact it was written after the

¹⁵ I use the term *trace* in the sense that Jacques Derrida has used it. "Derrida . . . gives the name 'trace' to the part played by the radically other within the structure of difference that is the sign. (I stick to 'trace' . . . because it 'looks the same' as Derrida's word; the reader must remind himself of at least the track, even the spoor, contained within the French word.) Derrida's trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already-absent present, of the lack at the origin that is a condition of thought and experience" (from the translator's preface to *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida, 1976: xvii).

reading of it (see G. C. Spivak in Derrida 1976: x). Bearing this in mind, for the conscientious reader who has read this as an introduction, I leave these words paraphrased from Hegel: Don't take me seriously in an introduction. The real anthropological work is what I have just written, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*. And if I speak to you outside of what I have written, these marginal comments cannot have the value of the work itself. Don't take introductions seriously. The introduction announces a project, and a project is nothing unless it is realized (from Derrida 1976: x). For those who have read this after reading the text, I would like to leave you with the following: Having read the text and then the introduction, you realize that I have written *sous rature*, which Spivak has translated from Derrida's original as writing "under erasure": "This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.) To [adapt] an example from Derrida . . . : ' . . . the sign~~s~~ that ill-named ~~thing~~ . . . which escapes the instituting question of [anthropology] . . . ' " (Derrida 1976: xiv).

Such is the nature of culture. Such is the nature of interpretation.

About This Research

The field data on which this study is based was gathered between March 1975 and September 1976, when my wife and I carried out anthropological field research in the village of Kalappūr (a pseudonym). *Kalappūr* means "place of mixed substances." This village with a population of over two thousand persons is located in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, twenty-three miles northeast of Tiruchirappalli. Supplementary data were gathered from significant informants in Sri Lanka during the three months preceding our stay in India and the two months after we left India.

Following customary ethnographic practice, the names of informants provided in this book are, in all instances, not the actual names. Pseudonyms have been attached to informants whose identity I have found it discreet to conceal.

Since what follows is an interpretive account, it is only fair to offer the reader some significant biographical data. I am a native Tamil speaker, born in the Sinhalese-speaking south of Sri Lanka to a South Indian Tamil father who changed his name from something divine to something daring in order to marry my mother, a Sri Lankan Anglican whose mother tongue was English. My father's English was poor, his Sinhalese ineffective; my mother's Tamil was excruciating, her Sinhalese reserved for the servants. (They have been married for almost half a century.) For me, at least, anthropologizing began early.