

# Yanaconas

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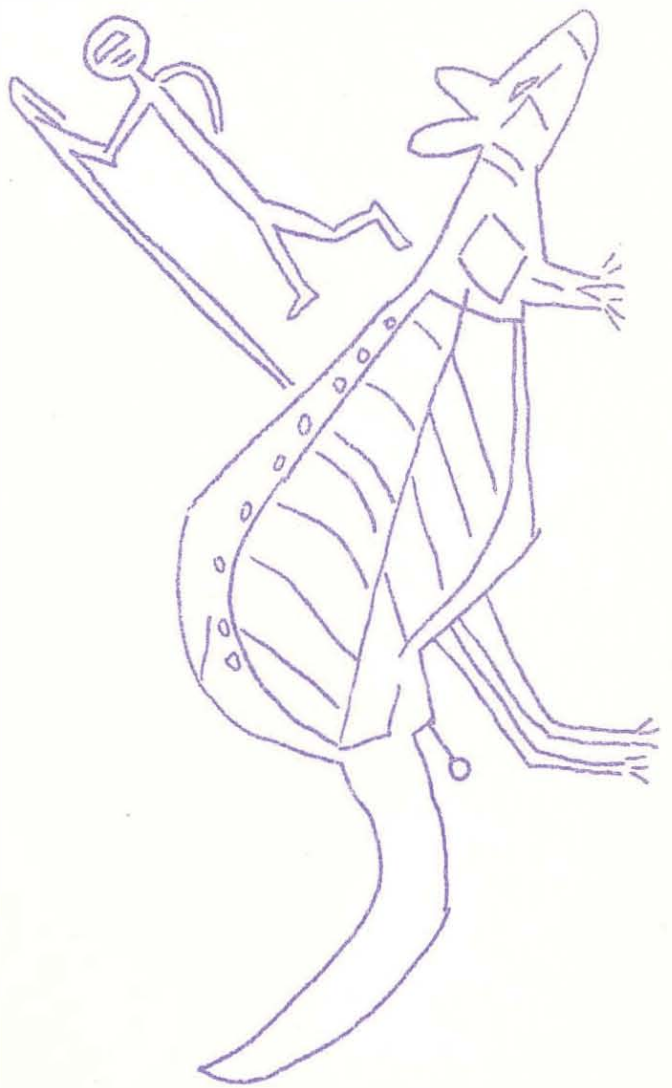
" Poetic Time: An Untried Idea "

by Dee F. Green

" A Student's Dilemma "

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## A STUDENT'S DILEMMA

James Shoenwetter

Graduate students in this department are ( or very quickly become ) well aware of the distinction involved in viewing culture in the holistic sense and viewing it in the partitive sense. More recently a less emphasised concept has come to our immediate attention: the distinction between viewing culture in a unified, transactive way and viewing it in a mechanistic, positivistic way.

In large part we students have tended to ignore the more airy problems of theory that the use of either of these pairs leads to, for we are more directly concerned with the problem of gathering unto ourselves the facts and phenomena of anthropology. This is probably for the best, for it must be admitted that we will do far better to discuss theory on the basis of understood fact than to jump into it unsophisticated and unwarned. However, we include at least two " practising anthropologists " among our student body ( persons who have no little amount of field and publication experience behind them ) and I wonder if we as a group can much longer retain the luxury of naïvete . We should, I believe, face the fact that the way in which an anthropologist interprets phenomena of behavior is greatly influenced by what he considers the nature of culture to be. Since we as students have been directly exposed to the two points of view mentioned in the above paragraph we are at least obligated to examine the relationship between them critically.

The question I wish to raise here is : are the distinctions involved mutually compatible ? It is logically sound to consider culture to be comprehensible on either the holistic or partitive levels ( or both levels ) if one entertains the possibility that culture is a transactive phenomenon (1). In my personal analysis , the question boils down to whether culture is or is not accumulative.

The important characteristic of a transactive phenomenon is its existence as an event. While an event may be described in terms of aspects of itself for purposes of study, whether such aspects be things or other events, an event does not have an accumulative or aggregative nature. One cannot discuss the event of physical maturation, for example, in accumulative terms. One can describe the norms of different aspects of the event of maturation-infancy, youth, adolescence, etc. but aggregating these norms does not make for a complete description. If the event we are talking about is culture we can discuss it in terms of its holistic and partitive aspects, and this will no doubt prove profitable on many occasions, but we must maintain the reservation that the phenomenon itself is not, and should not be treated as, cumulative.

On the other hand, if a phenomenon is accumulative it is thought of as composed of a number of distinct things which ( if one adds up their aggregate plus the interrelationships that exist among their number ) make up a whole. It is logically defensible, indeed quite judicious, to conceptually separate the whole from its parts. If the whole we are talking about is culture, we should at least recognize the distinction between the whole and its parts and be careful not to misuse the two concepts.

I have already arrived at the position that if culture is transactive it cannot be accumulative. The converse is much less easily indicated: that if culture is considered as having two levels of interpretation it must be accumulative and cannot be transactive. I believe this can be shown by two arguments. First it can be shown on logical grounds if we are agreed on exactly what is meant by the division of culture into holistic and partitive levels; and second, it can be shown by observation of the way in which the holistic level of interpretation is used.

I am becoming increasingly convinced that if one considers only two levels of cultural interpretation, the holistic and the partitive, the assumption is implicit that culture is cumulative. In so considering one is faced with three choices when a phenomenon presents itself: the phenomenon is cultural or not, it is cultural on the partitive level, or it is cultural in the holistic level. Though the holistic level is not made up merely of the totality of the partitive levels, it is made up of the totality of cultural phenomena. This is an accumulative conceptualization. But what if there are more than two levels of cultural interpretation? If one allows that there is something else involved ( something which is of culture but not in culture ) the holistic - partitive conceptualization seems to break down altogether. This is quite evident when we consider the phenomenon of personality. Personality is recognized as having some physiological characteristics at the same time as it has cultural characteristics. Science has not proven that the cultural and the physiological aspects of personality are separable. If personality is a feature of culture on the holistic level the physiological must be taken in along with the cultural; hence those aspects of the inorganic which are relevant to the physiological must be included too, and before long everything in the universe will find some niche in the holistic level of interpretation. If personality is not a feature of culture in the holistic level, what are we to say about the cultural aspects of personality? We can say that they are of culture but not in culture, and then the holistic-partitive conceptualization has broken down. Thus it appears that if the holistic-partitive concept of culture is to be used it must be composed only of two levels and it then implies an accumulative conceptualization of culture.

We can also observe the way in which the holistic partitive dichotomy is used to determine if, in practice, culture is considered cumulative. The champion investigator of culture in the holistic level is White. He maintains that culture is a stream of events, but then goes on to discuss these events as if they were things, not

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actions. The notion that culture is an accumulation of things is especially evident in his evolutionary construct, for he maintains that once the cultural ball gets rolling there is no ( and can never be any ) way to keep it from progressing on its own course by the constant addition of elements (ii).

Thus I have come to the conclusion that one who accepts the holistic vs. partitive view of culture cannot profess to the transactive view at the same time. The next logical step should be to discuss my own opinions on which of the two conceptualizations of the nature of culture, transactive or non transactive is the better. I hesitate to do this for three reasons. First, the argument I have presented may not be tenable; I expect that future issues of YANACOMAS will find some debate on the matter and I would prefer to wait before announcing my decision. Second, I have observed but one culture myself and feel hardly sophisticated enough on the basis of my small amount of academic effort to make a sound judgement. Finally, and least important, it seems a little impolitic to publically commit myself on this point before april.

(i) I am accepting the assumption that culture exists as an entity. If it does not then we as anthropologists need hardly worry about a scientific theory of culture in the first place.

(ii) I anticipate that some of the Whorfians in our midst may seek to destroy my argument on the grounds that I am limited by my language to thinking in terms of either things or events. I recognize that other systems of logic and conceptualization are possible, and perhaps even better suited to these questions than the Greek derived logical schema ordinarily used in Western science, but if they are a necessary prerequisite to answerint the problem I am at a complete loss. I admit that I have little patience with the proposition that a given question must find me willing to reorganize my total thinking processes ( and possibly even my language ) in order that it be entertained at all. It is my opinion that if a problem can be stated accurately in a western language it can be adequately resolved by a process of western logic which is adapted to such languages, However subtle and tortuous that process may be.

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POETIC TIME: AN UNTRIED IDFA

Dee F. Green

Sapir ( 1921 ) in an article in the Journal of English and German Philology suggested that " time " might be used as a means of classifying free verse forms. Although Sapir was apparently not thinking in terms of anthropological application, nevertheless in conversations with Dr. George W. Grace and others I have come to the