

Part I -- Chapter Two

Language and the *Objectification of Experience*

Our evolving 'theory of natural discourse' had some explanatory utility, it appears, at the level of individual impairment of function. The brain-damaged patients, whom Professor Damasio treated and whose histories he reviews in his book *Descartes' Error* (1994), suffered effects of two kinds: the production and display of feeling was destroyed while, at the same time, the recognition and processing of feeling in others was blocked.⁽¹⁾ We have interpreted this social-neurological trauma as a massive disabling of the discursive function. The social boundaries of the individual were abnormally retracted, his and her capacity obstructed for empathetic 'interaction' with the 'other'. For these individuals the world was *exclusively* constituted. It presented itself as an 'objective entity'.

Twin Pillars...

But the clinical reality which Damasio describes is merely the *microcosm* of a much larger pathology. It should be hardly necessary to state that 'objectivity' is the lens our industrial society employs to view the world. So exclusive is this perspective that it pushes other approaches to reality off the table. The 'objective construction' is, it seems, the *only* understanding Western Culture aspires to (and allows).

Although the issue is most complex -- offered here is the briefest outline -- the view which begins to emerge is that language, the English language in particular, may be a significant *latter-day contributor* to the shaping and propagation of this one-sided cultural disposition. Despite its late appearance, the English language has played an important role in the strengthening and consolidation of certain features of meaning -- mythic precepts if you will -- the ultimate effect of which has been to *inhibit* discourse in modern social relations while perverting, at the same time, our understanding of life process in general. In association with what amounts to a comprehensive *assault* on the living organism 'objectivity' has been raised to the level of an unchallengeable article of faith... Meanwhile, the 'individual' has been enshrined as the end-all-and-be-all of natural process. These amount to twin pillars in a mytho-philosophical edifice which has been erected *in place* of discourse and in fundamental denial of its adaptive purpose in nature and in the human sphere. The modern contribution of the English language to this perversion of function is easy to point to in its surface aspects, though its roots in living community are unquestionably ancient and multi-faceted, as the present chapter will seek to demonstrate.

The concept of 'objectivity' shares cultural-cognitive space with a number of related values. Among these are certain assumptions underlying the notion of 'criminal justice'--the idea, for example, that the external circumstances of a crime, viewed as an isolated act by an essentially isolated individual, provide an appropriate basis for the determination of culpability and for the meting of punishment. The 'objective actions' of an individual are the focus of both biology and human law at its best and worst. The same

operational paradigm is evident in the pursuit of education, medicine, and in the disposition of rewards and punishments in a wide range of human institutions and endeavors.

Movement without Content...

Let me offer an instructive example. The role of language in all this is indicated by the sudden appearance, in nineteenth century English scientific narration, of the word 'behavior', a lexical item which had enjoyed, until then, little or no visibility outside the humdrum speech of British and American domestic interactions. The word had been confined largely to situations which involved the training of the young. At the turn of the nineteenth century parents and teachers expected children to conform to a certain standard of conduct. Proper *behavior* was regarded as the most important single objective in the ethical training of a child which, once achieved, would govern the actions of the individual into adulthood, or so we were told.

Yet, before the century reached its closing decades the word 'behavior' had acquired a rather different constituency. It gained new currency among researchers and educated sectors of the public. Scientists would begin to speak of the 'behavior' of chemicals and other non-living materials in the natural environment, now clearly with no sense of moral sanction or hint of prescription. This odd transformation, and apparent re-direction, of the lexical resources of the language is sufficiently noteworthy to require explanation. Among the many instances which may be cited of the influence of English on the culture at large, it would be difficult to find an example which better illustrates the role language can be called upon to play in the implementation of a mytho-political program.

Recall that in the beginning of the nineteenth century the biological sciences *in particular* were in crisis, deeply challenged from within. The devotion to a strictly materialist understanding of natural process had seemed to create a serious problem for the new evolutionary sciences. The new conception, with its apparent rejection of 'divine agency' as a plausible explanation for the emergence and maintenance of life on earth, had no longer a separate space for 'intent' or 'meaning'. To be sure, the young romantics in this new generation of scientists did not view this as a problem. They had broken anyway with the Cartesian *separation* of the physical and the metaphysical (i.e. the material universe and the act of creation). Intent or meaning, however manifest, was to be discovered--in hindsight the revelation is hardly surprising--in the place where it had resided all along: namely in the *bodies* of organisms collectively and individually. In the romantic conception *meaning* was taken for granted. It inhered in biological process (and seems, moreover, to have been democratically dispersed).

Thus a conflict ensued which consumed the energies of artists, philosophers, and scientists in England and elsewhere. On the one side were the romantics, to whom all surface evidence of life was the reflection of *internal process*. Life was *animated*, i.e. imbued with meaning or *soul*. And emotion was the language in which internal process, or meaning, found surface representation. What was romantic emotion if not the expression of *meaning*?

Allied *against* the romantics was an assortment of scientists and philosophers who were visible in British and Anglo-American intellectual life especially (and in service, I shall argue in later chapters, to modern

industrialization, its technologies, its institutions and mythic objectives). These persons embraced what would eventually turn out to be the simplest solution of all: the internal workings of nature, to the extent these can be said to *exist* in a practical sense, are of no relevance, or possible interest, to scientific inquiry. If we may reduce this intellectual position to its simplest possible formulation: meaning attaches to the *observation* of nature, not its *production*.

Meanwhile, in scientific circles, and in the corridors of academia, the terms 'romanticism' and 'romantic' underwent a comprehensive devaluation. The 'romantic conception of life' was variously 'impractical', 'visionary', and/or (the strangest of all these disparaging epithets) *sentimental*. The concept of *sentimentality* seemed somehow to combine *emotional excess* with the implication of *superficiality*!

The concept of 'behavior' helped the latter assortment of scientists, and their many apologists, to skirt the immense obstacle posed by the fact that the actions of organisms do give the appearance, unfortunately (even to the most inexperienced observer), of being internally directed. Thus the value of the word 'behavior' as a potential instrument in the furtherance of (what would eventually become) the prevailing *ideology* of inquiry. It effectively addressed the actions of living organisms *without*, at the same time, raising a multitude of vexing questions associated with subjective intent and purpose.

As an English noun, 'behavior' has consistently referred to the *external actions* of an organism. For the centuries preceding the appearance of this word in the narrative language of science, 'behaving' had meant bringing one's actions into accord with certain conventions which society deemed desirable or 'proper'. (The internal [but at the same time 'objective'] counterpart of proper 'behavior' was, of course, 'character', a word which would likewise make its entry into the sciences of the modern period, though much later, to denote, among other things, the effect of a gene, or combination of genes, on the 'body'.)

But here we approach something like the core meaning of the word in question. For probably hundreds of years, 'behaving' had meant suppressing one's 'inner nature', what one might call even the *feral* side of one's nature, in favor of some externally represented system of preferences, some code of civilized conduct. It seems now scarcely possible that this word, so burdened with suggestions of ethical norms and social propriety, would tolerate such an extensive re-drawing of the semantic field within which it applied. Especially when one considers at whose bidding the new usage emerged: practitioners of the modern sciences, who had begun to congratulate themselves on their capacity for 'value-free' analysis and 'objective interpretation' of the data!

Yet it did, and for reasons which seem transparent in retrospect. Once the implication of 'proper deportment', or lack thereof (in the conduct of the human individual specifically), had been, not exactly suppressed, but at least successfully side-tracked in the popular imagination, what remained of the word's semantic content would prove serviceable to the new modes of inquiry which had come to prominence in the mid-nineteenth century, not just in England but also in North America and elsewhere. The useful part of the 'old' meaning was the overriding assumption of *denial--denial of the lively object's inner state*.

Indeed, this new usage was given a very wide stage. It came to apply to the actions not just of humans but of nearly everything else in the universe of the modern imagination; a universe which was becoming, in the

construction of science, as devoid of internally expressed meaning as the world the romantics had turned their back on in the late eighteenth century, the mindless universe of the European Renaissance. The rediscovery of the word 'behavior' is a small episode in that larger story of philosophical reaction; but it is a noteworthy episode nonetheless.

Testing the Hypothesis...

The tangent we have probed turns out to be productive, so let us continue. To better understand the transitional moment in question--the historical event which may be termed science's 'break with romanticism'--let me ask you to conduct an experiment. Assemble, if you will, a narrative in the 'first person' which describes that important person's outward response to some sequence of events. However, try to avoid language which may seem natural to that person as a means to communicate his/her feelings: nouns which reflect 'experience' or verbs which imply internally directed action. Adopt a perspective which is *external* to the reality described (to the admittedly somewhat limited extent that this is possible). Couch the description in the 'first person singular' but use what might be sensibly termed the 'objective' part of the English lexicon, words such as 'appearance' and 'conduct' or, to test the meaning of the lexical item directly at issue, the word 'behavior'. You can devise your own constructs but the following may serve to get you going:

My behavior, upon my second appearance in Paris, was startlingly at variance with my subsequent conduct in New York City in the closing days of September...

Such an exercise proves immediately instructive. To adopt the external perspective, in describing one's own actions, is to deny one's *experience*, the basis of *action* in a universe of living relationships. (The usage is *marked* in the first person and thus stands out. As a further experiment change the three occurrences of 'my' to 'his'. The alienating effect is not noticeable in the third person where the denial of experience is *unmarked*, or expected! There will be much more on this topic in the main body of the text.) My *appearance*, my *behavior*, my *conduct*, *startlingly at variance*...? The English language supplies such structures in abundance. Used with the 'first person' as referent, such words and phrases inevitably create the sense of a *dissociated reality*. They assemble a world which lacks *connection*, even though connection is what the actions in question are presumed to be about. With them we concoct, it seems, the discourse of a zombie. The meaning of what the organism experiences as 'life' -- its subjective relation to the world -- *is missing*.

The ascendancy of the 'behavioral approach'...

It is not surprising, therefore, that the word 'behavior' was eagerly adopted for use in the scientific narratives of the late nineteenth century. With its surreal implication of objective distance, this word became the perfect instrument to describe the actions of objects in which internal feelings (and preferences) were assumed to play no role. Thus the word came into use initially in the narrative language of physics and chemistry, areas of immense popular appeal, where causal relations were presumed to exist on the visible exterior, where the 'interactions' of things (another of these new words) were available for surface inspection and could be dealt with without the need to postulate the existence of 'inner states'. Stripped of its superficial association with human mores and social convention the word 'behavior' was a convenient means to designate the predictable actions of chemicals and other non-living objects in the physical universe. Argyll could speak (*Reign Law* 1866) of the "*behaviour* of different substances toward each other" (emphasis added) without awakening confounding images of 'internal causation' or (worse yet) 'will'.

It was only a matter of time--the beginning of the twentieth century to be precise: we discover the word now in use to denote actions by *living* organisms as well, actions which were however repetitive, seemingly unconnected to the 'inner life' of the organism in question, 'mindless' like the movement of pebbles on a beach. (It stretches the truth only slightly to say that such actions had been this all along for 'behaving humans' of 'character'!) The movements and actions of living entities were seen in important *relationships*, to be sure, but these were the predictable relationships of a world which was alienated from the observer, a world which existed *at a safe distance* from the point of scientific vantage.

We approach the apparent crux of the matter: what the emerging science of the late nineteenth century found useful in the word 'behavior' was its affirmation and clarification of a central exclusionary constraint (albeit one which is rarely formulated). This held that *volition*--i.e. the presence of 'conscious intent' at some fundamental level of awareness--is *not* a necessary inference when it comes to the study of sentient beings and their actions. In the perspective of the new men and women of science, living nature was as 'mindless' as it was in the philosophical heyday of Rene Descartes!

Inspired by the writings of John Watson, the so-called 'behavioral sciences' of the next century would carry this mythic denial of internal process to an extreme, soon converting *all* experience (including the experience of the human being) into a relatively more or less complex set of reflex actions. This amounted to the total elimination of the internally constructed image in favor of some external representation of the 'body' (and its presumed relationships), a near inversion of a chief principle of Cartesian logic but one, significantly, which has left intact the cardinal principle of the *separation* of the two (which Antonio Damasio has called 'Descartes' Error').

It is hardly necessary to state that the systematic derogation of the *interior perspective* is an important element in what can be called the 'mythic program' of Western Culture. In this group of essays I devote a separate chapter to this topic. (For further amplification of the function of the word 'behavior', in the emergence of the new view of evolution in post-romantic science, see the section on Darwin in *Part II* --

The world from within...

The mythic framework, within which this extraordinary project went forward, will be the principal concern of the chapters which follow. But allow me, in preparing the ground for this wider understanding of the topic, to address some important preliminary issues which previous material touched on but left unexplored. First of these is the matter of 'objectivity' itself. To be sure, in the practice of science, as in the bias of the culture at large, 'objectivity' exists as a certain well-delineated perspective, a certain approach to the world of living 'nature'. But what is the basis of the 'objective construction' in the object's *own perspective*?

Recall that the normal functioning of the social being allows for two contrasting but necessarily interconnected representations of the world *as it exists out there*. It tends to divide perceived reality into a portion which the organism regards as an extension of its *personal identity*, an area of shared experience which I referred to, in Part I -- Chapter I, as the extended domain of the biological *self*. However, in sharp and logical contrast to this area of *subjective interest* is that portion of the reality external to the organism which is separate, or excluded, from *discursive interaction*. Discourse is our designation for a general biological process by which internal representations of meaning are expressed, or emoted, by one organism, picked up and internally reconstructed, more or less simultaneously (even in the case of human language), by another. Discursive interaction is a process largely of *assimilation*, a momentary (often enduring) expansion of the personal 'self' which seems to challenge the individual biology of the organism and its presumed limits. It constitutes the basis of community and much collective action. And when this process fails, as described in the concluding pages of the last chapter, connections are severed and the organism comes out of sync with its social environment. Left intact is the mere surface reality of the organism's existence, its *objective experience*. The afflicted organism now exists in a world defined by the sensory apparatus alone. All is *veneer*, structure without content.

The low-flying hawk...

Can collective process exist *outside* the actions of individuals functioning discursively in community? Probably not. The understanding advanced in these pages of discourse in its 'normal' presentations is circular. My view is that phenomena which *appear* often as 'collective actions' are not truly collective in either their nature or origin. They are *not collective* in a specific sense: that is, they are the effect of circumstances and relationships which exist *beyond* the reach of the discursive function. And in the absence of authentic discourse, which is, finally, the indispensable foundation of communal process, the response of an assemblage of organisms to an 'objective stimulus' can not be considered collective in any reasonable sense of the term.

The fact that most of us pay our taxes at the same time every year is not an example of a 'collective action' as the concept is invoked in these pages. It is not directly contingent upon the expression of emotion in and by our neighbors and ourselves. That is, it is *not* the result of a mutually assimilated feeling of fear (let us say), but is the manifestation of an emotion which has its source *outside* the defining structure of community. What forces us to pay our taxes is the fear *individually* of a 'reality' which lies *beyond* the plausible reach of the discursive imagination, though this alien and fear-inspiring 'reality' may well require

(somewhat in the manner of the 'low-flying hawk' discussed in the preceding chapter) a direct response from us as assembled individuals. However, please note that the discursive function has been *disabled* in the particular instance. The fear in question tends to be an emotion *in isolation*, functionally distinct from the shared fear which spreads throughout a chickenyard upon the sudden appearance of a dark shape in movement against the sky, an object with wide wing expanse which casts, perhaps, a terrifying shadow on the ground.

Isolating, marginalizing...

Human discourse exists, at least in theory, independently of language, a point the previous essay sought to emphasize and to clarify. Nevertheless, language exerts a powerful influence on human discourse. It provides the very means by which the discursive parameters of a community are set and social experience is mediated. I intend to show that this influence has been partly deleterious. Language has marginalized discursive functions which were formerly complementary. It has denied the subjective content of discourse and seeks to replace this with the surface detail of a remote and alienated universe. I hope to demonstrate that the effect of language has been to turn discourse *away* from its original adaptive purpose. Language has tended to isolate the individual organism and destroy it as a socially organized entity. Thus, before we attempt to address the impact of English specifically, on science and a wider range of human undertakings, we must consider the subsurface of the particular complex of events, its wider pathology as it were. What are the minimal conditions of spoken language? Are there dangers to discourse which hide in these primitive evolutionary structures?

The intrusion of the socially disruptive...

The presence of a *first person*, which has, as its referent in the real world, a human individual who performs as speaker, appears to be the minimal requirement for spoken discourse of any kind; while some participation by an important *second person*, or group of persons, is a strong secondary presumption. So far so good. In its origins at least, language affirms the adaptive purpose of discourse. It appears to exhibit a pre-eminently *social* function. It joins individuals in what one may assume is collective purpose and action.

But there are suppositions of quite another sort which underlie and shape the production of language specifically. The necessary division of speech into *first* and *second person*, while implying joint action, tends, at the same time, to be *disruptive* of the social purpose or has, at least, the *potential* to be immensely disruptive. (No-one has suggested, to my knowledge, that natural language can arise in the absence of the *second person*. While the first person introduces speech itself, the product or 'embodiment' of an adaptive action, the second person reveals its biological *purpose* which, in this case, is a presumed social value. Notwithstanding the fact that a prominent field in the study of language devotes itself to the structure of the individual 'sentence', it is entirely nonsensical to view linguistic discourse as something other than a collective act. Natural language, like sexual 'reproduction', as Evelyn Fox Keller has helpfully reminded us, arises in the *pairing* of organisms in a presumably common cause, not in the vocalizations of isolated

individuals.)

First, implicit in the arrangement described at the top of the paragraph above is the assumption that discourse is *human-centered*. In terms of the social situation, and its practical definition, the first person of linguistic discourse (if not the second person likewise) is assumed to be a *human being*. This poses an immense obstacle to the adaptive purpose in the sense that the use of language, when all is said and done, appears to rest on a principle of social *exclusion*. The very existence of language tends to skew human sentiment *against* the rest of nature. We speak, and the mere act of speaking separates us from non-human living beings. (This argument assumes that the concept of discursive interaction, as embodied in the word 'social', may be applied interspecifically. To the extent that social encounters reveal linguistic differences, language has the capability to create divisions which are intraspecific as well. We speak *in a certain way* and the mere act of speaking tends to separate us from those who speak *differently*.) Historically, this bias may have been offset by a countervailing *animist* construction, touched upon earlier, which provided for the extensive participation of non-human elements in the framing of a collective discourse. (Modern languages reveal traces of this ancient cultural dispensation and may, in fact, provide the best evidence for its primitive character.)

Secondly, since the *first person* occupies the *discursive vantage point*, it follows that the world, as seen from this important location, is a construction--to a very considerable extent--of that *same entity*. By the very terms of linguistic discourse, the *second person* becomes a creature of the *first*. The apparently subordinate relationship of the one speech role to the other thus poses a *danger* to discourse, if by discourse we mean a socially purposeful interaction amongst organisms and two-way exchanges of significant information. This danger was likely mitigated in the experience of early humans through structures which provided for 'give and take' or which were, at least, not inhibitive of significant 'give and take'.

Thirdly, linguistic discourse presupposes a *separation* of speech roles. Language imposes, by its very nature, a *serial construction* on collective action. First 'I' speak, then 'you' speak. The linguistic function, though collective in its underlying purpose, *tends* to be divided in its actual performance. Only on the stage and in other ritual settings do persons speak *in unison*. Natural speech arises from separate acts, the product of separate 'minds'. (The assumption of a major role for language, in the ultimate appearance of social forms which favor sequence and singularity of social purpose, seems inescapable.) That this was perceived as a danger to two-way exchange may be inferred from the fact that various formal devices have arisen for *minimizing* the sense of separation which arises from the serial construction language imposes on discourse. Languages appear to have provided, situationally, for the formal *collapse* of personal distinctions.

The first and second person *plurals* of most modern languages, e.g. the 'we' and historical 'you' of English (the 'wir' and 'ihr' of modern German), are evidence of past attempts to come to terms with disjunctures which were inherent in the separation of speech roles. Many languages, including those ancestral to the modern languages of Europe, employed so-called 'duals' as a special mechanism to accomplish the impossible: to *join* the second person singular to the first, or to bring others, perhaps those who were not even present, into the speech act itself.

The usurpation of function...

However, such 'solutions' pose an obvious danger *in themselves*: the individual who functions as *first person* may attempt, through devices similar to those described above, to maintain his or her *discursive edge*. Masking his/her actual intent--through the use of mechanisms which are ostensibly *inclusive*--the first person may seek, in fact, to do away with discursive reciprocity altogether. The 'we' of the medical care-giver (or the patronizing adult) is the reflection, perhaps, of an ancient stratagem. The use of 'we', in this ostensibly inclusive sense, *preempts* any serious response on the part of the patient (or 'child'). The first person brings the second person into the speech act while, at the same time, denying her/him an actual voice. It is potentially lethal to the social purpose of discourse when role-reversals are institutionally blocked and the flow of information becomes *one-directional* as in modern advertizing and in other modes of public 'communication' where the individual is the mere object of the discourse. A task for science would be to consider the ultimate effects of such a massive disabling of an adaptive function. It is revealing that neither biologists nor linguists address such questions.

(The options, quite simply, are to view the disabling of a function positively--as *adaptive in itself*--or as the manifestation of a *social pathology*. The concept of 'pathology' depends, to be sure, on assumptions of value and perspective. But so does the notion of evolutionary 'success' which is a core assumption of Neo-Darwinian analysis. The issue is complicated, of course, by the fact that innovations which are 'adaptive' in the short-term often prove to be 'maladaptive' in the larger evolutionary picture. We are forced, it seems, to pay for our short-term 'successes'.)

Distancing...

Finally, and far less subtle in its effects, we see the contrary tendency in language, the tendency to *exaggerate* the natural separations the speech roles impose on discourse. There seems, as we reflect on language development in the historical period especially, to be a notable pressure to *increase*, situationally, the *distance* between the roles in question. That is, language invariably attempts (for social reasons which are not integral to the main thrust of the present argument) to move the second person to the *periphery* of discourse, *away* from its center. This move is accomplished, typically, through the substitution of a *plural form* for the more intimate *singular* and/or a more remote *third person* for the *second*. English 'you' is a *distancing element* historically. It is a second person *plural*, as is French 'vous'. German 'Sie' is not merely a plural formation: it arises, grammatically, out of the domain of the *third person*, which has the practical effect, as we shall see below, of taking the second person *out* of the discourse altogether. Less extremely, many languages have responded to a perceived need for social 'distancing', by invoking the third person *singular* as a form of address.

Spanish 'usted' uses a third person singular verb form. In certain prescribed social situations eighteenth century German used the grammatical singular 'Er', or 'Sie', as a form of address. English dialects exist today in which adults address children and adolescents with the alienating 'he' and 'she'. In English, playful sarcasm sometimes makes use of the distancing third person forms of address. 'What is Jane [the name of the person being addressed] up to today?'

Though not germane to the immediate issue, it should be noted that the need for 'distance', in the

actualization of the roles of speech, may have arisen with the emergence of agriculture. The structures referred to here as 'distancing elements' likely came into existence at an historical moment when social relations themselves were undergoing 'objectification' (and a process of attenuation), when humans had begun to 'interact' with each other *less as whole organisms* (who were, at once, capable of representing themselves as 'feeling individuals' capable of reconstructing the feelings of the other) and *more as surface entities*. This major transitional event in human discourse likely paralleled the larger concentrations of human population (with its perceived need for social stratification) which agriculture appears to have facilitated⁽²⁾.

The potential for *separation*, for the creation of distance among the critical elements of discourse, increases markedly with the entry of the *third person*--i.e. the persons, things, and objects *on which* discourse is (or may be) focused. Here the pronounced likelihood of separation arises from the fact that the so-called 'third person' is not a 'third person' as such. That is, the third person is not an active *participant* in an imaginable three-way exchange but rather something, or someone, which enters discourse on the *horizon* of experience, not necessarily at (or even near) its immediate center.

The first and second persons of discourse entail much *deictic* reference. For example: the meaning of the words 'I' and 'you' is revealed only in the physical context of the discourse. I know who 'you' are because I am talking to 'you'. 'You' are physically present. Likewise, 'you' know who 'I' am because 'I' am standing in front of 'you'. 'You' and 'I' make up the 'center' of the discourse, and this relationship is underscored through our physical presence.

The third person, by contrast, represents a major linguistic (and social) innovation. The third person does not involve *deixis* in the uncomplicated sense outlined above. To be sure, in some instances the referent (which may be a human being but can, as easily, be some other object in the external environment) is revealed primarily through deixis. That is, you know what it is that I am talking about because I *point* to something which lies within your field of vision and thus within your capacity for direct experience. The speaker may use, in addition, *other* deictic references which are helpful (often redundantly), demonstratives, for example, such as 'this' or 'that'.

A symbolically ordered universe...

However, the third person referent is not necessarily *present physically*. The third person is not, of necessity, available for pointing to and experiencing directly. Thus, it happens that in human discourse the entry of the third person may necessitate its 'naming'. It is my contention that this introduction of a third person reference (in the form of a 'named' object or relationship), amounts to an *early phase* in the construction of a symbolic (and ultimately 'objective') reality. Though the 'naming' of a 'thing' ultimately entails its *isolation*, first 'named' were probably systems of complex relationship. To say 'mother', or 'sky', was not 'originally' to pronounce the name of an 'object', considered as an isolated entity, but to evoke a significant *relationship* (see Part II -- Chapter V and the discussion of metaphor). This may account for the fact that common roots have now strikingly different surface representations (e.g. 'mother' and its cognate 'matter'; or 'sky' and its surprising cognate form 'house' which I shall discuss in Part II -- Chapter VI). Only as a much later development, in its seemingly inevitable rush to leave metaphor (and relationship) behind, does language develop the capacity to assemble the world in an entirely 'symbolic' fashion, in terms of

conceptually isolated 'objects' and their 'names'.

Symbol and metaphor...

The terms 'symbol' and 'metaphor' are both useful. In conventional usage symbols denote 'objects' (typically in a one-to-one relation), whereas metaphors tend to delineate complex 'relationship'. The lexical cognates 'house' and 'sky', for example, are to be derived, historically and linguistically, from a root metaphor which designates a particular relation of the organism to the perceived universe, though each is free to serve, naturally, as a 'symbol' for something else. The use of symbols may be more or less arbitrary, as in the language of mathematics (and in the letters of the alphabet), but may also be consistent with a body of metaphor which has wide recognition across a population of organisms.

I examine the lighted screen of the computer monitor in front of me. The words and sentences, as I compose them, consist of strings of orthographic 'symbols' which may, in fact, be essentially arbitrary in many of their surface aspects. However, the presentation as a whole, in the creation of which my body has offered itself as a participating element, draws on a central metaphor of our culture. Though this has not been my 'intent' or particular expression of preference, the display I am helping to assemble promotes a certain relation to the world. The individual letters of the alphabet, their serial arrangement, the interspersion of spaces and punctuation, the distinctive format of the display--all this has to do with a set of cultural preferences which affirm (quite obviously) a visual representation of experience, an affirmation, to the literal exclusion of every sensory alternative, of the mythic notion that only what we *see* is to be believed. The visual image with its enormous and overriding cultural value is the expression, or physical 'embodiment', of a root metaphor in our collective experience. (The emergence of 'symbol' [and subsequent denial of 'metaphor'] will be treated extensively in the concluding portions of *Part Two* -- Chapter Five. There we shall see this transitional event as the crucial mile-marker of modern human culture.)

Precondition for hegemony...

Though initially manifest, perhaps, in the innocuous reporting, by a first person to a second, of some action by a third person ('x says...', 'y wants...'), the third person reference was soon to encompass the whole of the world which was external to the discourse. The difficulty this posed to the social purpose of discourse was that the images the third person ushered in were not derived, necessarily, from the participants' exposure to the *real world* but were, in fact, a construction of the discourse itself. The third person was, in a real and socially significant sense, a passive creature of the discursive will and purpose (much as, internally, the second person was a partial assemblage of the first). The invention of the third person offered abundant opportunities for division and heteronomous manipulation by those at the center.

It appears likely that the third person of human discourse made its effective appearance in the context of a major social transformation, a sweeping shift in consciousness which altered the collective construction of the world while greatly expanding the function of language. For with the appearance of the grammatical *third person* the world was/is no longer *directly engaged*. The world came/comes to exist *outside* the discursive reality of experience. It had/has the potential to become artifact *entirely*, something *quite*

separate from the increasingly restricted universe of persons and objects which were/are directly available to the senses. Such a comprehensive (and progressive) alienation is certainly a worthy subject for further investigation. I find its implications provocative if greatly disturbing.

Integrative failure...

We now return to the specific theme with which we began this chapter. Language brings to discourse a construction of the world which has been extensive in its impacts. Though *all* the properties discussed above--properties which are latent in the terms of the discourse and thus probably endemic in human experience--have been significant contributing factors, the 'third person' of the linguistic paradigm -- we shall be discussing eventually the English language in particular -- has had an uncommon mission in the shaping of the world-view which science now embraces as its own and seeks to build on.

To reduce a complex subject to a few suggestions (which are scarcely adequate), the grammar of English had effectively prepared science for the denial of internal experience which 'objective inquiry', in the service of the larger cultural agenda, appears to require. The northern dialects of West Germanic had long since destroyed the bonds which formalize, in the normal perceptions of the speakers of many other languages, the sense of a *connection* between living and non-living structure, between humans and non-human nature. The grammatical ties which would join living organisms to each other have been largely severed in the dialects of English. English no longer tolerates the grammatical gender distinctions which speakers of other languages (in Europe and elsewhere) take for granted. Structures which evoke the sense of a shared identity in nature (an identity which is biologically based) maintain, in numerous other languages to which English may be compared,⁽³⁾ a conceptual framework for the integration of experience, for the sense of a *wholeness in nature*. Speakers of English lack exposure to this integrating influence--at least at the significant level of mytho-grammatical awareness. Nor is this salient feature of our language to be considered an expression of 'egalitarianism' (in the metaphoric guise of grammatical leveling).

On the contrary. Unlike Finnish, for example, which strives, pretty much, to eliminate gender across the board (and can thus truly be said to be *gender-neutral* in the fundamental psycho-linguistic reality of the situation), English goes out of its way to maintain the designation 'she' in situations where a cynic might discern an expressly political purpose, in representations of *nature* as either a stubborn and uncontrollable entity--winds, storms, driving rains, the raging sea--or where the material referent stands in an explicitly 'artifactual' relation to male creativity: large engines, airplanes, ships, trucks, etc. It appears we tread on ground which is sacred; for it is extremely rare to hear mention of the distributions discussed in this important regard, though their presence in the culture is conspicuous and pervasive.

The basis of 'personification' in English...

On a recent trip to the US I was in a hospital waiting room for fifteen minutes, or so, and entered into conversation with two gentlemen whom I did not know but who turned out, to my surprise, to be from my home town in Northern Wisconsin. It was February. Storm clouds had gathered and it was starting to snow. In no more than a few minutes of harmless banter, the pronoun 'she' was used four or five times to refer to the threatening weather and its adverse effects: "She looks like she's starting to snow..." (the weather),

"she's gonna be slippery driving home..." (the highway), "she's getting cold..." (the temperature), etc. It would be too much to see invidious intent in such ordinary usage. Nevertheless, the automatic, seemingly reflexive, use of such 'personifications' (which are, in reality, not personifications at all) strengthens harmful divisions which the culture by no means considers trivial. Intended or not, their effect is to degrade the human female, not humanize nature.

Finnish do not know the distinctions expressed in English by the seemingly harmless pronominal pairings 'he-she', 'him-her'. As strange as this may appear to speakers of Indoeuropean, who may believe that such third-person distinctions are only *natural* after all, in Finnish this position in the paradigm is represented by only a single form: 'haen' (and a bewildering multiplicity of case variants). Finnish does have the third person pronoun 'se', meaning 'it', but this form is often used interchangeably with 'haen' whereby third person distinctions, in the singular, collapse altogether.

What are the implications of the fact that English, by contrast, tends to move the form 'she' into the category of use normally occupied by the form 'it'? If Finnish identifies nature with general humanity, then out of what structures of the collective imagination does English (harmlessly or invidiously) identify 'nature' with the human female?

Swedish, like English, has collapsed the grammatical distinction between *masculine* and *feminine nouns*. However, it preserves the old *neuter* classification which results, essentially in a two-gender system (in which sex, however, plays little surface role). The *non-neuter* classification includes most designations for people and a host of other animals, with whom Nordics have traditionally identified, as well as certain large plants: oak, birch, and spruce, for example, which had religious meaning in pre-Christian arctic culture. The effect of this classification was to connect users of the language (at the mytho-conceptual level of perception) to objects in the natural world for which the traditional culture expressed a marked affinity. The sweep across the lexicon is actually quite extraordinary. Swedish words for *supper, old age, car, railroad station, farmer, flowers, thunder, village, violin, fruit, springtime, garden, birds, honey, dogs and cats, frost, rocks, huts, and grammar* all belong to the personal, or *non-neuter*, classification! On the other hand, many *living* objects, especially *parts* of living objects--e.g. *heart, evergreen needles, blood, eyes, ears, legs, heads, fingers*--are thought of as *neuter*. (A corpse [Swedish *lik*], an object which is clearly no longer 'whole' in the original Germanic meaning of the word, is also *neuter*.) In Swedish the word for 'child' (barn) is neuter: the *child* was perhaps thought of, traditionally, as 'not yet complete'⁽⁴⁾.

The weakened presence...

Consider the world as represented in the distribution of some common English pronouns. The presentation below attempts to capture, in its progression from left to right across the page, the sense of an *attenuation* in the grammatical bonds which would connect humans to each other and (ultimately) to nature.

<i>Human Referent</i> ----->			<i>Non-Human Referent</i>		
I	(thou)	you	he	she	it
(who	that	which			what)

The pronouns of English maintain a division -- more clearly demarcated here than in any language available for comparison -- between the world of human discourse and the world of material 'nature'. They strive to create the sense of an increasing distance between two ends of a continuum which begins with the subjective 'I', the all-important locus of action in the English universe, which by-passes the singular second person altogether (see *Epilogue to Part One -- Chapter III*) and then moves to the outer edge of the discursive reality where not much, in fact, appears to matter on a personal level.

Structurally reinforced in ways I shall enumerate, the sequence *I (thou) you he she it* has the practical effect of moving the varied objects in the external world progressively *away* from the center of the discourse, *away* from the all-important vantage point of the speaker. The precision and extraordinary economy, with which English achieves this end, is nowhere equaled in the European community of languages. I want to emphasize, at the risk of being repetitive, the correspondence between the position on this continuum of these simple referential elements and the *discursive reality* of the culture at large which this language expresses (and of which modern science is both progeny and principal advocate).

Though counter-examples spring readily to mind (which are in themselves revealing), the English pronouns 'he' and 'she' tend, by and large, to designate human beings. The very fact is instructive that a large class of *special cases* (already alluded to) are called *personifications* by English and American lexicographers. The very label demonstrates the bias I am discussing. It seems we can 'animate' living nature *only* by imputing to 'it' human qualities. (One must keep in mind always the question whether the 'personification' of nature is not actually a degradation of the 'person'.) This quality of the English imagination has been previously discussed and will be elaborated further in subsequent pages.

An ideologically committed speaker of English might protest: how can one attach importance to such a trivial observation? Is it not *perfectly natural* that the language system 'we all use and depend upon' should choose to separate human beings from mere 'animals'--as well as from trees and rocks and the rest of the material debris which litters the surface of the earth?

The difference is immediately revealed when we compare English to other languages which might have competed with it for world attention. The 'er' and 'sie' of German, which the linguistically unsophisticated might take to be semantic equivalents of 'he' and 'she', are, in fact, equivalents in only the most approximate sense. (The pronominal 'es' of German, by contrast with English 'it', which may appear, likewise deceptively, to be an actual counterpart of the German, is limited essentially to referents, human and non-human, which have neuter gender; although it may be used as an anticipatory element in a sentence; or as a pronoun to designate an antecedent structure which is somehow abstract or syntactically complex, functions it *does* happen to share, in a general way, with its English 'equivalent'.)

These High German counterparts of 'he' and 'she' may have, as their respective referents, *any number of objects* in the human or non-human universe. In German the sole requirement is that the pronoun have the same gender as the 'object' in question, a named antecedent (usually) in the immediate context of the discourse. Viewed together, the pronouns of this close 'cousin' to English reveal a vast network of *material relatedness* in nature, a sense of *connection* which is conceptually *vivid* (if 'merely' grammatical in its surface manifestations).

An animist residue...

German romantic poets exploited this feature of their language to the hilt. Consider Eichendorff's famous lines (nearly untranslatable into English):

Es war als hätt' der Himmel
die Erde still geküßt,
daß sie im blüten Schimmer
von ihm nun träumen müßt.

It is night (we learn later in the poem) and there are stars in the sky. Earth is asleep but dreams of the day-light hours when the sun kissed *her* surface. I once heard linguist Roman Jakobson discuss this opening quatrain of the poem. He said the grammar of the language had put Eichendorff in a bind. Conventions of the day did not allow him to mention *directly* such an action as the 'sun kissing the earth' because, alas, in German both nouns are *feminine*. (It may be mentioned, not entirely irrelevantly, that in Germanic languages the 'weaker' of the two most prominent heavenly bodies--the 'moon'--is masculine.) Naming the active agent would have put a 'Lesbian construction' -- these were the famous Russian formalist's very words -- on the central metaphor of his poem, a 'problem' which would not have arisen if Eichendorff had written in French or Spanish, he pointed out, languages in which the word for the 'sun' is masculine -- and the weaker 'moon', in better observance of patriarchal myth, is feminine (he might have added but did not).

So Eichendorff depicted this relationship in terms which were acceptable to the sensibilities of his nineteenth century German-speaking audience. The concept 'Himmel' (English 'sky'), fortunately masculine in Germanic languages, saved the poet from a near disaster! This notwithstanding, the ancient affinity between sun and earth would not be suppressed. It continued to serve as a powerful *background element* in his poem. Eichendorff invoked here a metaphor which may be as old, and as complex, as human sexuality itself⁽⁵⁾.

Barren and isolated...

Nor is German the exception among languages spoken in Europe. The exception, indeed, turns out to be English, this geographically isolated 'sister' to languages spoken in the Germanic uplands of Central Europe. One might assert, with only a touch of hyperbole, that *English* has accomplished the near-impossible: it has reduced the complex and variegated world of external 'nature' to a single pronominal representation--the barren and isolated 'it' of the English imagination.

The division of worlds is maintained in the distribution of the pronouns 'who' and 'what' (with 'that' occupying, in its function as a demonstrative and relative pronoun, a grammatical and conceptual space halfway between): '*Who* was at the door?' but '*What* is crossing the road?'. ('The man *who* came to dinner' but 'The mouse *that* roared'.) In general, 'he' and 'who' (not 'she' which is a matter of functional significance) are reserved for the important world of human interaction⁽⁶⁾. The following sentence would likely strike a native speaker of English as *eccentric*: 'The insect, *who* bit me, was no bigger than a gnat'.

The fact may be noteworthy that the grammatical gender of Indoeuropean rarely extends to the *second* and *first person*, the functioning elements of discourse which obviously lie closest to its center. In Romance languages, grammatical gender does affect *adjectives* which have first and second person antecedents--'Encantado!' is the old-fashioned Spanish response for men ('Pleased to meet you!') and 'Encandada!' for women--but never does the distinction affect the form of the pronouns themselves. In general, grammatical gender (and the more explicit forms of social separation) is reserved for the *third person*, the vast world at the *horizon* of our experience. Thus an exclusionary principle, which significantly informs the modern perspective, may inhere in the narrative function itself.

Reduced capacity for experience...

Join with me in exploring some further implications of this complex issue. Consider, initially, the fact that *all* languages possess the capacity to specify, with ease and a relative lack of ambiguity, the perspective *from which* the actions of an organism are viewed, evaluated, reported, contemplated, etc. As one might expect, the pronouns of a language are significant contributors in the framing of this perspective. The sentence

I feel good

and its approximate equivalents in numerous other languages, identifies not just the speaker, the source of the utterance, but establishes also the presumed source of the *experience*. The *first person pronoun* establishes that the 'feeling' (of well-being) flows out of the same state of individual awareness as the words themselves. However, though the speaker and the subject of the experience happen to be *one-and-the-same* in the particular case, such structural congruence is not necessary to the integration of discourse.

Notice that the same situation prevails when the speaker transfers his/her attention to selected persons existing on the discursive *horizon* of experience. The sentence

He feels good

points to a third person as the source of the narrated experience, though it gives rise to a notable compounding of perspective. The speaker, whose identity is not known in the absence of contextual clues, continues, in theory, to express the primary experience of the discourse. But this experience is not identical to that of the *subject of the sentence* as represented by the pronoun 'he'. The perspective of the first person narrator, whatever that may entail and however it finds expression, is distinct from the presumed perspective of the third person, i.e. the characters and events which are narrated. This is not to suggest that first and second person narration does not exist. First person narration is, in fact, quite usual in story-telling. While second person narration, as the construct below illustrates, appears to be merely a variant form of third person narration:

It is Friday September 16, eight a.m. *You* are driving north. As *you* approach the corner of fifth and Madison *you* see somebody stumble out of an alley onto the sidewalk...

Here the use of the second person, combined with present tense verb forms, has the effect of reducing the discursive distance which normally separates audience and the characters and events of the narration. The

device, popular in TV crime shows of the fifties and sixties, was intended to make the audience feel all this was happening to *them, right now!*

In narrative language multiple perspectives are common-place, each nested in the other. In the sentence

He feels good about his *wife's willingness* to help out

the narrator imputes an experience to the 'grammatical subject' of the sentence who is given, in turn, the chance to impute experience to yet another who is located even further down the discursive 'road'. (The metaphor is apt. The horizon is extended through the compounding of perspectives which can be visualized as a 'road' which brings the events and persons of the narration ever further from the discursive vantage point.) Though himself an 'object' on the horizon, who is further from the center than the unspecified 'second person' (or 'audience'), the third person is nonetheless a human being to whom the narrator has granted a nearly full capacity to 'feel', and to experience the world, and to recognize, besides, that same ability in others. Now consider the sentence

It feels good.

If the 'grammar' were straightforward, and the sole indicator of narrative perspective, then 'it', or the entity 'it' represents, would be granted the same capacity for experience as the antecedents of 'I', 'she', or 'he'. However, this is not what happens. The substitution of 'it' for these personal pronouns has an effect which is truly astonishing. In its *unmarked* meaning--that is, in the meaning which surfaces immediately in the absence of elaboration--the sentence '*It* feels good' shifts the entire locus of the experience *back to the narrator* (and back to the important world of human experience). The 'feeling', which we readily grant to a second or third person *as human being*, is only awkwardly extended to the 'it' of the grammatical imagination. In the world, as constructed by the English imagination, the pronoun 'it' suffers a greatly reduced capacity for genuine experience. The thing we call 'it' has little value as a subject *in itself*. Its referent, if the referent indeed exists in the *real world*, is merely an object *to which we react*, an entity with surface aspect and little else. It is, at most, an item in the material world which 'feels good' to the *touch*.

The strange case of 'shall'...

In the Standard British English of the nineteenth century and later, the words 'I shall...', used in the traditional formation of the future tense, were widely felt to convey a certain *semantic content* having to do with a specific attitude, or *internal disposition*, of the speaker, toward the action in question. The sentence

I *shall* leave tomorrow for Paris

was not just another example of *futurity* (as, for example, in the relatively neutral *Iré mañana a Paris* of Spanish grammatical convention or the German *Ich werde morgen nach Paris reisen*) but seemed, all things being equal, to invest the speaker's assertion with a strong *volitional, or subjective, underpinning*. That is: it was the speaker's expressed *intent* to leave for France.

Now consider the surprising consequence of exchanging the *first person pronoun* for the *second*:

You *shall* leave tomorrow for Paris.

It always intrigues me to consider the semantic effects of substitutions of this kind. In the first sentence we have an example of *futurity*, complicated (semantically) by a certain amount of 'determination' on the speaker's part (as a dictionary might describe the implication). But in the second example, what was a mere complication of the grammar becomes the source (and focus) of a quite different message (now socially disruptive): one in which the *first person* of the discursive interaction coerces and (perhaps) threatens the *second*.

In other words, through a simple manipulation of the grammar 'you' and 'me' are thrown into a social relation of the *dominated* and the *dominating* respectively. Meanwhile, futurity is merely incidental to the process. The feature of *intent* becomes the vehicle by which an important mythic precept is articulated: the expression of 'will' and 'feeling' is the sole prerogative of her/him who *speaks*. (I am happy to report that the language itself has detected and resisted this pressure. The word *shall* has now little productive existence outside the language of the law. It has been replaced altogether by one of two alternative forms: by the subjunctive *should*--the so-called 'moral imperative'--which greatly softens the haughty and legalistic tone of the present indicative, or by the auxiliary *will*, which has now largely taken over the conjugation of the future tense.)

From within or without...

Though the verb 'feel' may be unique, in its ability to form a minimal pair of the kind adduced earlier ('he feels good'/'it feels good'), there are others--all pertaining to the senses--which have the same 'reversible' property. (*Seem, look, taste, smell*; not audition, interestingly, which requires separate verbs to accomplish the same alteration of perspective, e.g. *hear* as opposed to *sound*.) They are 'reversible' in the sense that they possess the capacity to represent internal structure from a vantage point which lies, alternatively, *inside or outside* the boundary of the organism (though the 'feeling' has an inevitable surface representation regardless of the perspective in the specific case).

These verbs furnish us with a somewhat larger body of material to test the peculiar disposition in question. To begin a phrase with 'I feel...', 'I seem...', 'I look...', 'I taste...', 'I smell...' is to provide the 'second person' with a particular expectation: namely, that the experience, about to be described, has its vantage point in the subject of the sentence *or*, which comes down to the same thing in the case in question, in the speaker him or herself. As strange as this may seem to common-sense perceptions, changing 'I' to 'it' in the cited sequence of examples--try this if you will ('it feels...', 'it seems...', 'it looks...', 'it tastes...', 'it smells...')--does nothing to change the discursive vantage point! It remains with the speaker though the subject of the phrase, in the completion anticipated by the listener, is a 'third-person' pronoun.

In other words, English transforms a grammatical subject--which may, in another conceptual environment, represent the near totality of the world external to the human being--into a mere *object* of human sensory experience. Such an objective transformation is a source of the 'feelings' and 'images' speakers of English assemble with regard to the external world and its complex relationships. In English-speaking countries those who 'feel' otherwise are forced into silence, or become poets, or must mount extraordinary campaigns to promote their contrary and eccentric positions. The 'objectification of nature', which modern science sponsors as its own, has deep roots in the English language. It has been a feature of English dialects for

many centuries, certainly since long before there was an 'objective science' to talk about.

(One is hard-pressed to defend a meaningful distinction between what I have called the *objectification of nature* and what our culture values as *objectivity* in science and social dispensations. I tend to use the two appellations interchangeably -- as expressions of the same mythic-ideological constraint. They each reflect the denial of internal process and provide thus the rationale for the 'management' and expropriation of nature and its resources.)

One searches unsuccessfully for a comparable example from German. The verb 'fühlen' is far more restricted in its usage than its English cognate. The meaning conveyed by 'he feels good' requires, in German, either a reflexive or an alternative construction altogether. The pairing 'er fühlt sich wohl' and 'es fühlt sich wohl' certainly turns up no surprises. The feeling expressed is that of the grammatical subject in both cases. German appears able at least to *imagine* a world in which all living entities possess the capacity to experience and to 'feel', though the language (and culture) may rank them and treat them 'objectively' in other respects. This idea is stated succinctly in the familiar aphorism 'alles was lebt fühlt' or 'everything which lives *feels*', a sentiment which may sound quaint to the sophisticated ear of the speaker of English.

A living example...

Indoeuropean, though hardly an early arrival on the linguistic scene, seems nevertheless to have possessed (I am inclined to say *retained*) the lexical means for the designation of a kind of social knowledge based on the direct assimilation of 'feelings' in others. The verb 'to know', in the sense of 'to be acquainted with', is derived from an ancient root which appears to have encompassed the full dimension of discursive interaction among living organisms. Additional reflexes of this ancient form are *can*, *kin* plus the loanwords *gnosis*, *genus* and their numerous variants. We have, besides, Scottish *ken*, Spanish *conocer*, German *kennen*, *können*, Swedish *känna*, for example, all derived, comparative linguistics assumes, from the same root. The reconstructed Indoeuropean form *en-* (or *no-*) appears to have entailed a good deal more than the mere *cognizance* of *surface identity*, though this is nearly the full measure of the meaning of its modern English reflex. (Actually, the verb 'to know' does suggest additionally a state of mutual interaction, if only superficial. To say you *know* someone still implies, I hope, that he/she knows *you*.) If the ancestral meaning can be adequately reconstructed, on the basis of forms existing in surviving languages, or in ancient languages known through written records, the root had 'originally' the double meaning of sensory apprehension, on the one hand, i.e. the ability to perceive and evaluate sensations which emanate from important sources adjacent to the perceiving organism. But it seems also to have designated the peculiar property of the living organism to bring its own 'inner life' to the surface, to produce something *from within*. The Indoeuropean form appears to have embraced the remarkable capacity of the living organism to produce representations of internal process which find their *own way* in the world, representations of feelings, ideas, structures of the imagination, even the production of progeny. Perhaps the English verb 'generate', a cognate (by way of Latin) with the indigenous form 'know', captures some part of this ancient meaning.

In the evolution of the Indoeuropean form, from which these structures have evolved, we see a near total elimination of the part of the meaning which pertains to the expression and apprehension of *feeling*, a development which seems to have taken place somewhat across the board. If a map of Germanic were to be constructed, in which modern meanings of shared roots are compared across linguistic boundaries, the

forms in question would stand out as distinct isoglosses. German shows traces of the meaning which English has lost altogether (but which Scandinavian, interestingly, has preserved nearly intact).

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn,
Im dunklen Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn?
(Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*)

If one sets out to translate the German of Mignon's haunting lines into English, one runs immediately into the problem alluded to in the above paragraph: what may seem, at first, to be a reasonable approximation of the italicized word -- English 'know' (or 'knowst') for its German cognate 'kennst' -- may, in fact, be the poorer choice. The verb 'kennen', in conjunction especially with a singular form of address (which, thanks to complex political and social process, no longer exists in English), evokes the sense of an affinity which goes quite beyond the mere memory of surface 'interaction' which English 'know' weakly suggests. The lush southern landscape is vivid in the young girl's imagination; it is not just an objective reconstruction of surface impressions from the distant past.

Moreover, as the German form provides a striking contrast to English derivatives of the same Indoeuropean root, so does the Scandinavian form stand out against its German counterpart. Perhaps because it was geographically peripheral to many of the processes described in this book, Scandinavian retains a much closer approximation to (what we may assume was) the 'original sense' of the reconstructed Indoeuropean. The literal (and primary) meaning of Modern Swedish *känna* (< Old Norse *kenna*) is 'to experience' or 'to feel'.

Grammatical 'Mood'--a reflection of internal process...

Though a subordinate relation of the one speech role to the other may be implicit in the use of language, speaking is not to be viewed *necessarily* as an attempt by the first person to gain control of the social situation, though the act may well appear to serve the interests of the speaker primarily. The speaker gives surface expression to an internal state of discomfort, let us say, which the second person may be in a position to help remedy. Though not spelled out, the words may urge a certain course of action upon the second person. However, this is not in itself a threat to the discursive exchange, its fundamental authenticity and integrity. The representation of 'feeling', by which the first person's intent is revealed, may remain intact. Also intact may be the latitude the first person provides for a potential response. The second person may be free to 'assimilate' that feeling, or not.

The matter of the action one wishes to urge upon another enters discourse often by inference, disguised as a declarative representation of an *internal state*. I reveal, for example, the fact that 'I am hungry'. But my fervent hope and expectation is that the second person, the driver of the car (let us say) in which I am presently a passenger, will properly interpret this representation and take measures to exit the freeway at a proximal time and in an appropriate location.

The ways in which such exchanges play out depends heavily on the history of the relationship, a matter there is no need to pursue at the present time. However, I want to emphasize that this masking of an 'ulterior purpose' does not, in itself, indicate the failure, or weakness, of the discursive interaction in which we two are engaged. A threat to the discursive function looms only when structures emerge the express purpose of which is to *block the expression of feeling*, be this from the vantage point of the first or second person, i.e. from the vantage point of production or assimilation of feeling. However, even in what may appear to be an extreme case much will depend on the particular *history* of the social interaction.

As it happens, language provides explicit means by which feelings surface (or are, conversely, short-circuited). Here we approach the intriguing area of the grammar traditional linguists call 'mood'. 'Mood' is revealed in the use of forms of the verb which convey, in and of themselves, a particular attitude on the part of the speaker toward the discourse and its varied content. This 'attitude' is comprised of certain assumptions which, though crucial to the discourse, are not necessarily directly expressed.

For example, the 'indicative mood' tends to accompany what the speaker believes are assertions of fact: I *walk* when the sun *shines*. Or it accompanies inquiries about presumed matters of fact: When *do* you *do your walking*? The attitude which underlies the indicative form of a declarative sentence is the belief that the assertion is valid or, in the case of interrogatives, that the facts can be validly determined. Verb phrases in the indicative mood carry the conviction that, for the speaker, the world exists (or *has* existed, or will *come* to exist) in a particular way. All this is, of course, the expressed content of the 'mind' of the particular speaker, subject always to rejection by those who hold different 'opinions'.

By contrast, the 'subjunctive mood--or, at least, the formations referred to frequently as expressions of the 'subjunctive mood'--is regularly invoked for a wide range of situations which appear to be contrary to fact: I *would walk* if the sun *were shining*. Or to indicate doubt: For all I know the sun *could be shining* in Florida at this very moment. Or to indicate conjecture or inference: She *would be* about forty years old because she went to school with my daughter. Or to indicate desire or wish: I *would enjoy taking a walk* this afternoon--oh, if only I *could take a walk* this afternoon! Or to indicate possibility: it *might be raining*; or a guarded probability: It *would likely be raining* there right now. Or an absolute necessity: It *would have to start raining* for me to change my mind. The boundaries between these usages are hardly more distinct than the uncertain conditions they are traditionally invoked to deal with and describe.

Also somewhat indistinct semantically are the boundaries between *subjunctive* and *indicative*. The difference between 'It *has* to be raining in Chicago (right now)' and 'It *would have* to be raining there' is probably (*would likely be*) insignificant. The issue is most complex and needs to be dealt with fully in another context.

A grammatical denial of internal process...

Don't miss out! Call me when you get back! Send for your free sample! Remain seated until the aircraft comes to a complete stop! Grab your share in cash and prizes! Get a life! Report for jury duty! Save up to 50%! Own one and you'll understand! Drop by for a drink! Stand up and be counted! Don't take no for an answer! Give me a break!

Here we approach the third category of what Classical Grammarians often call 'mood', namely, the

imperative. Strictly speaking the imperative does not conjecture, wonder, wish, infer, postulate, hypothesize, or inquire. Nor does it make statements the speaking person believes are matters of fact (or are not matters of fact) though such statements may be imbedded in the structure of the sentence as unsupported claims.

The *imperative* demands an action by the listener of a specified kind and expects no response from that person other than a straightforward performance of that action. It feels no need to explain the injunction itself or to apologize for the abrupt tone of the delivery; nor does it ask the second person to submit a list of reasons why the action should not be undertaken. The imperative assumes a direct causal relation between an essentially disembodied verbal 'command' and the action it requires. And what the second person 'thinks', or 'feels' about the matter, is without relevance. (*Their's not to reason why...*)

The use of the imperative amounts to an explicit denial of internal process. In its purest (and text-based) forms there is no opportunity for *assimilation*, which we have considered to be the crucial element in the appearance of discourse as an adaptive strategy in biological and cultural evolution. Assimilation depends upon the expression of an internal content. The imperative seeks above all else to suppress this expression (or 'emotion') of feeling. Although the precise response of the second person will depend on the larger history of the relationship--on the nature of the assumptions the second person shares (and does not share) with the speaker--the imperative does not raise any of this to the surface for review and clarification but assumes, instead, that the surface structure of the moment provides all which is needed to justify the action in question. The imperative is isolating. In violation of the social purpose of discourse, it brings the participating elements of the 'discursive interaction' into an association which is, for each, stripped of meaning entirely. All one can really say about such an 'interaction' is that it is complementary and 'mutually objective', which is not saying very much.

Within the framework of a discourse which puts a serial construction on participation, the linguistic imperative serves as a model for a 'social interaction' which denies meaningful reciprocity and the expression of feeling. Informed by a highly elaborated set of mythic elements, its propensity is to divide the human population into subjects and objects. In ostensibly *fluid* societies (such as ours in the West) the membership of the categories is assumed to be in broad flux, left to the strivings and imaginings of individuals. This has been a source of inspiration for many. It provides, at the same time, a moral rationale for the fact that some of us are better situated in life than others. One comes to realize, in the harsh light of the grammatical paradigm, that there exist, in the human population, 'first persons' and 'second persons', with social rewards dispensed accordingly. The imperative 'mood' provides important support for what must be considered a central metaphor of our culture.

Avoidance of the imperative...

Actually, more surprising than the presence of the imperative in nearly all the languages on earth is the fact, far less attended to in its functional meaning, that the users of language display strong resistance to its alienating structures and effects. Even English, which has carried this usage into a wider range of social situations than perhaps any language known (and has certainly spearheaded its application in commercial advertizing), provides an astonishing assortment of *alternative constructions*. In these formal avoidances of the imperative the subjunctive and the indicative, in both its declarative and interrogative forms, each

participate:

I'm sorry but I'm going to have to excuse myself for a few minutes. Is that your T-shirt on the floor in the living room? I'm getting a little hungry. Would you be able to see me at ten in my office? I would like to know what's going on if you don't mind...

However, such attempts to provide the social paradigm with greater depth of mood and dimension, if this is how 'modal mixtures' of the kind illustrated above may be interpreted, often fail in their modest purpose and can have, in fact, the opposite effect. There is simply too much in the language, and in the culture at large, which militates *against* any softening of the stark outline of the social reality. The notion of an active *subject* and a passive (yet nevertheless responding) *object* is so rooted in our cultural assumptions that the mechanisms we invoke, however spontaneously, to blur this distinction often come across as artificial, or groveling, or excessively formal, or simply sarcastic.

Avoidance and confrontation...

Despite the great emphasis our linguistically inspired culture places on the autonomy of the individual, the English language itself appears untroubled by the concept of a world in which the great majority of individuals function as the 'direct objects' of actions initiated by others, action by other humans (individually or collectively) or by non-human entities or forces of some kind.

The tree struck *the man* on the head, killing him instantly. I had planned to meet *John* at the bus-stop. He sought *the small boy* in all corners of the neighborhood. God loves *his children*. He pulled *her dog*, nearly dead, from the cold waters of the pond. She found *a new husband* on a lonely road in the Upper Peninsula.

These mundane examples involve human individuals (in one case a dog) who function as the 'direct objects' of verbs. I bring these disconnected segments of language to your attention for a specific reason. It happens that languages exist in which surface grammar of this sort would be quite impossible. Consider the Spanish sentences below with what may appear, at first glance, to be their exact English equivalents:

El hombre mató la vibora. (The man killed the snake.) La vibora mató *al* hombre. (The snake killed the man.)

In the English 'translations' of the Spanish sentences it makes little difference 'who did what to whom'. All is *surface action*, made grammatically explicit, with no hint of a system of values against which 'snakes' and 'men' can be seen as culturally differentiated *entities*. In the reporting of the event, as the English grammar construes it, all is mere 'behavior' and the players are eminently interchangeable. Though the language is explicit in its identification of the 'actor' and the 'acted-upon' and in its characterization of the 'action' in which the two are engaged as grammatical 'subject' and 'object', it remains remarkably circumspect on what lies beneath the surface. The language reveals nothing about the cultural 'attitude' toward the event in question, the killing of one living entity by another. It may seem, to initial perceptions at least, that the English grammar has no mythic agenda.

It can be readily shown that this is a false perception. Though unstated, the message the English language conveys is precise and unambiguous: beneath the surface phenomena of living reality there is *nothing at all*, at least nothing of primary meaning to human experience. It is the abiding power and efficiency of such a sweeping proposition that it is *unmarked* in its linguistic presence and function.

Consider the Spanish 'versions' of what common sense would take to be the same events. Here much more than the mere 'behavior' of the entities reveals itself for surface inspection. To be sure, the Spanish 'hombre' may end the life of the deadly 'vibora' with the same dispatch the 'man' in the English narration killed the 'snake'. But upon switching the positions of these nominal elements in the sentence, we discover that while the poisonous 'vibora' may venture to kill the 'hombre' in question, the Spanish world-view permits it to do so *only indirectly*. Direct 'cause-and-effect' appears to overwhelm the Spanish sensibility. Thus, though the physical outcome may be the same, the *direct relation* between the killer, as grammatical subject, and the victim, as grammatical object, is effectively blocked as a cultural paradigm--this through the tiny preposition-like particle 'a' (in the phrase *al hombre*) which seems to specify, at most, the *direction* of the hostile venture.

Its mytho-conceptual function is to create 'distance' between subject and object.

In other words, the second sentence is no ordinary inversion of the first. In Spanish, to visualize the snake as 'killer' and the man as 'victim' entails a formal structure of its own. The meaning which accompanies this special dispensation derives from an unmarked proposition which is crucial to the shaping of the consciousness and world-view of native speakers: the human being, whether expressed as first, second, or third person, is emphatically the *subject* of the discourse, never its mere *object*. (One might say, for the purpose of useful comparison and contrast, that the affirmed social reality, the unmarked condition toward which the corresponding English constructions strive, is a uniformly *objective* universe.)

Speakers of Spanish go to some length to avoid situations in which human beings, or living entities very closely associated with human beings, appear as the *direct objects* of the actions of verbs:

Buscó sus libros [She sought her books], but *Buscó a sus padres* [She sought her parents]. *Me encontré un libro enfrente de la casa* [I found a book in front of the house], but *Me encontré con mi amiga enfrente de la casa* [I met my friend in front of the house]. *Espero el bus* [I am awaiting the bus], but *Espero a mi amigo* [I am awaiting my friend]. *Tiró la pieza de madera afuera de la piscina* [He pulled the piece of wood out of the pool], but *Tiró a su perrita afuera de la piscina* [He pulled his little dog out of the pool].

The entities which appear in English, invariably, as the *direct objects* of verbs -- that is, the 'parents', the 'friend', the 'little dog', in the examples of above -- appear here as the objects of *prepositions* or what may be called 'distancing elements' (Spanish 'a' and 'con'). Avoided, at what we may presume is a fundamental level of the social dynamic, is the sense of... I risk much, perhaps, by invoking the concept 'presumption'... which seems to inhere, for the speaker of Spanish, in the very relation of grammatical subject to grammatical object. Whether nature or artifact, human or animal, the 'actor', in Spanish, dares not to exhibit *too direct* a level of control over the entity 'acted upon'. How else is one to describe this peculiar hesitance of the Latin sensibility? In evident contrast to the 'hands-on' engagement (and exploitation) of 'nature', which industrialized society promotes in its deeds and nearly ubiquitous propaganda, we detect in the Spanish language and cultural ambiance the seemingly opposite tendency: a wide-reaching and socially

integrated predisposition to *hold back*.

Roy's horse...

The way we think about the world is not normally considered to be reflected in the grammar we use, certainly not in structures as ordinary as the surface relations of subject to object, or passive to active voice. I lived for a while in rural southern Indiana and was enchanted by the discursive power, and breadth, of the regional dialect. A neighbor, speaking of her husband, once told me:

Roy got hisse'f kicked in the head by a horse an' ain't been right since.

She often expressed impatience with this man with whom she had lived for nearly fifty years. Much of the trouble between them went back to an earlier period in their marriage, but it was certainly the 'accident' which gave meaning, and focus, to her many grievances and discontents. The 'accident', then only fifteen years in the past, was a magnet which seemed to draw to itself all the troubles of the family, past and present. Roy had been an extraordinary failure, both as husband and farmer, though she thanked God he did not drink.

In considering the language she employed to describe the event in question, one must bear in mind that there were linguistic alternatives which the speaker avoided. She could have assembled a neutral version of the same event. She could have said, quite simply, that *A horse kicked Roy in the head*--or that *Roy was kicked in the head by a horse*. But to use the *unmarked syntax* of the language--that is, the simple passive or active forms of the verb--would have left far too much unstated, information she considered crucial to the telling. The use of the unmarked form of the verb would have placed her husband and the horse in an 'objective' relation. Such a representation of the facts did not exactly fit the picture of the event she chose to carry with her in life. More satisfying of her personal needs, and probably much more at home in her regional idiom, was a somewhat elaborated form of the same verb: the common reflexive 'to *get oneself* kicked...' This is the device--it has numerous forms and variations in standard and sub-standard English--by which the ultimate responsibility for an action, which has affected others, is transferred from the ostensible *actor* to the entity which was presumably *acted upon*. (Variations range from the '*proceed* to get oneself...' of the more or less standard language to the rural idiom familiar to me since childhood: 'to go to work and get oneself...' The preference for verbs of motion in these elaborations of mood does not necessarily imply physical *movement*. One can say 'You said you would wait up for me but then you *went ahead* and fell asleep' or, more quaintly, '*...went to work* and fell asleep'.)

In any case, the effect of this dispensation of her dialect was to put the blame for the tragic incident *where it belonged*, on Roy. (In her original account of the event--my memory is not clear on this point--the verb may have undergone yet further elaboration. She may have said that Roy 'went' and got himself kicked by the horse. This would have added extra strength to her conviction that her husband, the principal victim of the accident, was also its cause. I never knew, nor did I ask, what happened to the horse.) This was the mean side of the issue, an intensely personal area where redress for past grievances was bitterly sought and

somehow achieved, if only linguistically.

The right to do what to whom...

However, the matter may have had a larger and more interesting frame of reference. It was stimulating for me to learn recently that the cultural side of this same issue has been explored in some depth by anthropologist-linguist Gary Witherspoon, not in connection with the English language, or English-speaking North Americans, but in relation to the speech of the Navajos with whom he has lived and whose language and culture he has studied for many years. The entities, 'real' and 'abstract', which populate the complex universe of the Diné appear to be extensively ranked on their capacity to *act upon the external environment* and to effect change, a capacity which is partly but not entirely inherent in the 'nature' of the object or organism. The subject/object relation so dominates Navajo thought and ritual that it was not surprising to Witherspoon to discover that certain rules governing the elementary structure of the narrative sentence are concerned, in first order, with this ranking.

Thus, in Navajo a 'man' can 'kick a horse' but a 'horse' can not 'kick a man'.

...in the Navajo conception of the world human beings are more intelligent than horses, and thus horses cannot will and carry out actions against [a human being] without the action being stimulated or caused by his careless, inadvertent behavior (*Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* [University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor; 1977], pp. 72-73).

In a narrative representation of a surface event in which a 'horse' has seemed to 'kick a boy' Navajo syntax makes explicit the fact that

...the boy is the prime mover of the action and also is the recipient of the action; the horse is only the agent or means by which the action is accomplished. The resulting semantic context [of such a sentence] is more like the English reflexive than it is like the English passive. The sentence might better be translated 'the boy had himself kicked by means of the horse (p. 73).

Although my neighbor's immediate purpose was to fix blame for what had turned out, in many respects, to be a bad life, the structure she chose to express her bitterness may have had something of the larger cultural dimension Witherspoon noted in Navajo. Her idiom likely brought values to the surface which were the collective property of her rural culture. Her language probably reflected the belief that horses, though capable of powerful actions, are *not internally directed* to the extent we may believe is evident in humans. In their interactions with humans horses were thus not *responsible* to the same extent.

The idea must remain somewhat speculative because the speaker and, in fact, the culture she represented no longer exist to provide either supportive evidence or evidence to the contrary. But my uncertain memory of the speech of the region is the following: while a man could have proceeded to '*get himself* kicked by a horse', a horse could not reasonably have been said to '*get itself* kicked by a man'. I would make the further speculative suggestion that in this dialect of the southern Indiana hill country a horse could easily have '*got itself* stung by a bee', or '*got itself* struck by lightning' in open pasture, but that a tractor, or truck, with a

mal-functioning transmission would not have been able to '*get itself fixed*' in time for hay season. There was likely a chain of being, of sorts, defined by the relative capacity of the object, or entity, to control or influence the actions of other objects and entities. In other words, exhibited in some of the dialects of English, if not in the linguistic system regarded as 'standard', are hints of the same ranking of elements which Gary Witherspoon sees in Navajo language and culture. But it must be emphasized that the properties we speak of are pervasive and essentially *unmarked* in the universe of the Navajos. By contrast, in an English narrative context such distinctions are produced as the explicitly *marked* expression of the system, a system which is typically silent on the issue of who may control whom or who may be ultimately 'responsible' in a physical interaction.

The sentence as defective...

It may be of interest (and surprise to some) to learn that the *imperative mood* has little distinctive form and identity in Central American Spanish outside the second person singular, a form of the verb used only rarely: and almost never outside domestic interactions involving children. (One outstanding exception: in imitation of English and North American practice, the second person singular is now widely used in commercial advertizing.) The presumed need for an *imperative* is typically met through application of the *subjunctive mood* in an amazing assortment of variations on what appears to be a simple theme. Where English gives orders, Spanish makes modest suggestions--mild recommendations which are themselves usually clothed in hesitance, doubt, and uncertainty, qualities of *mood* a *rising intonation* often further underscores.

The meaning conveyed through *rising intonation* is often unmistakable, though the utterance as a whole may be unintelligible to those not familiar with the linguistic code. What is the nature of this feature of meaning which has such power to cross the boundaries of culture and language? Its root meaning is simple and straight-forward enough: rising inflection underscores the tentativeness, or incompleteness, of the particular segment of speech. Linguistics has been slow to investigate such structures for the reason that they require a wider focus than most grammarians are willing to consider.

You're not going to be able to *do much today*.

To conclude an utterance with *rising intonation* (indicated above through italics) is to end on a note which explicitly probes the feelings of the second person. In the presence of such structures the grammatical content of the utterance becomes obviously dependent upon a larger unit than simply the 'sentence'⁽⁷⁾. Intonation and other so-called *suprasegmentals* tend to direct our attention away from the isolated sentence, which has been the linguist's working preference by-and-large, and forces us to consider language as *discursive interaction*. (Certain linguistic features, such as stress and tone, are not thought to be placed on individual elements in the linear sequence but to be *superimposed* on the larger segment: they are thus 'suprasegmental'.)

To finish a declarative sentence with rising intonation is so typical of spoken *Spanish* that North American movies and television for decades adopted it, along with very little else from the complex and distinctive phonology of the language, to produce the stereotypical 'Mexican accent' in English dialogue. Though an unpardonable simplification, perhaps, the perception was nonetheless well-founded. Mexican Spanish especially extends the phenomenon of rising inflection far beyond the functional boundaries of the *interrogative mood*, its natural home in English and many other languages. Rising intonation is common in Spanish declarative sentences *of all kinds*, even in rare occurrences of what one assumes is the 'imperative'. Native speakers of English often employ the more conclusive *falling intonation* in similar situations. This may strike a speaker of Spanish as presumptuous and overbearing. To use falling intonation in combination with the socially disruptive grammatical imperative is to pre-empt the *last word*.

A surface tenuousness of expression...

I have become increasingly aware of an interesting pattern in spoken English. It is probably not a new development, though I do not know what its origins can be, if they are not to be found in the rules of primitive discourse we have been discussing. I have noticed, in the speech of girls and young women especially, an exaggerated *rising intonation* in many declarative sentences couched in the *first person* (in social contexts which normally 'require' the *falling pattern*). An extreme example follows:

'I plan to attend *college in the fall*, probably *Indiana*. I've been thinking about *biology*, or maybe the *pre-med program if my grades work out*'.

In the surface tenuousness of the language we detect some personal insecurity perhaps. We naturally rush to the support of the speaker. We want to help her acquire greater confidence. We may feel she needs to be more 'assertive'. She must develop a more positive approach to future plans, her continuing education, her job prospects, etc. Upon reflection we may ascribe the *mode* of delivery--in reality the apparatus of a complex grammatical *mood*--to the social inequities of our culture and their oppressive effect on girls and young women in particular, all of which is true and amply evident in the social environment speakers of English tend to share. (In some cases the pertinent pattern is accompanied by distinct facial alterations: elevated eyebrows, corners of the mouth turned tentatively upward, the beginnings of a forced smile yet not a smile.)

However, before we get too carried away, before we prescribe 'assertiveness' training for her (or some similar program of self-reconstruction), let us look beyond our initial perceptions and consider what the young person may have accomplished in the hypothesized instance. Through implementation of a complex array of expressive devices, the speaker has managed to *widen* (not restrict) the base of a modest discursive interaction, no small achievement for a speaker of English. She has successfully solicited (and perhaps assimilated) our feelings, opinions, concerns about many matters of practical interest and value to her. She has gained not only our empathy but possibly even our *participation* in her planning for the future.

Thus, before asking her to adopt an alternative way of 'being in the world', and 'interacting' with others, it may be wise to examine more closely the model we would urge upon her. Before asking young women (and young men) to abandon their sense of caution, reserve, their sense of personal limits (as well as their intuitive understanding of the importance of collective action), if these are indeed some of the factors, besides 'insecurity', which have come into play in the hypothesized instance, we should ask ourselves why

many of the seemingly *secure* members of contemporary society--the ones we *really* have cause to worry about--are pushy, overbearing, competitive, aggressive. We must wonder additionally why such socially alienating qualities are generously rewarded by our culture.

Autonomous structure, spontaneous evolution...

The paired examples cited on a preceding page--*Buscó sus libros/Buscó a sus padres* and so forth--may have conveyed, incorrectly, the impression that the use of the 'direct object' is quite ordinary, in Spanish, so long as the thing or entity *acted upon* is non-human or inanimate. I must add that in general practice Spanish seeks to *avoid* the juxtaposition of 'subject' and 'object', much preferring to view the effects of our actions, including the effects of actions on a world we presume is inanimate, as manifestations of internal process. Thus the widespread use of the verbal *reflexive*, a remarkable linguistic residue of animist perceptions which we detect not just in Spanish but in many of its neighbors on the European continent. We see it in French and German where its use is very widespread indeed. In its general avoidance of the third person reflexive, Standard English stands out as the exceptional case.

I have my home in a part of the world where knowledge of English comes to the population mostly through the slogans of advertizing and television. Spanish is spoken to the near exclusion of other languages, save for a handful of Indian languages (ignored, for the most part, by the Spanish speaking population) which struggle, at the present moment, for survival in the remote mountains and hinterlands.

While I was editing the first draft of the present chapter (those portions having, coincidentally, to do with the Spanish avoidance of the imperative and the subject-object relation of the grammar), a woman appeared at my door with small jars of *achiote* to sell, the mysterious product of her own household. Tiny amounts of this substance, made from the seeds of a native plant bearing the same name, impart a subtle flavor and spectacular color to meat and vegetable dishes. I asked her how she prepared this traditional ingredient and she gave me, instead, practical suggestions for its culinary application. (Perhaps she did not understand me. Perhaps the process was a secret.) Allow me, in any case, to quote certain portions of her response, first in the original Spanish:

...se coloca la semilla de achiote con un poco de agua para que largue el color rojo... y luego se agrega algo de aceite.

Note that this substance, magical in more than one sense of the word, possesses not merely the capacity to act, but to act of its *own volition*. A literal translation of my neighbor's words might be that the *achiote seed* (collective and *feminine* in gender, readers of Chapter VIII will remember) "...places itself in a little water so that it can release its red color" (my inadequate version of the Spanish subjunctive). Nature is a theater and we are but spectators! The mode of conceptualization developed in this intriguing, if ordinary, example of the discursive function (and its complex overlay of metaphoric implication) is carried still further. At a later stage in the process we note that some olive oil has begun to "...add itself [to the mixture]", for what

secret reason my guest did not state.

The typical *non-literal* English translation would couch her words in the imperative: 'Put the *achiote* in a little water to release its red color!' Here the substance appears as the direct object of the verb and the second person is turned into the *object of the discourse*! For though the implied subject of the English sentence is 'you', 'you' are but a silent, manipulated actor in the sequence of events. All reason, motivation, will, and inspiration for the required action has been transferred to the *discursive center* of the tiny drama now unfolding. In observance of the lighting diagram, which is implicit in the grammar of the English language, the *first person* is the character principally illuminated. It is the *first person* who tells us 'how it is' and 'how it must be'. In the perspective of the English grammar, the material universe exists for the single purpose of being *acted upon*.

This idea is quite alien to speakers of Spanish for whom the world presents itself as conceptual *subject*, autonomously structured and spontaneously evolving. Anne Stevenson has called our attention to lines by Mexican poet Octavio Paz in which the reality external to human consciousness appears not in a direct relation to human creativity (as in the writings of Wallace Stevens, Stevenson reminds us) but as an autonomously functioning organization:

Time, with no help from us,
invents houses, streets, trees...

Addressing his wife, who lies beside him asleep, the poet conjures the sense of the material world as somehow self-directed and the human observer as essentially passive:

When you open your eyes
we'll walk, once more,
among the hours and their inventions.
We'll walk among appearances
and bear witness to time and its conjugations.⁽⁸⁾

Needless to say, it is the 'English' perspective which prevails in the world of practical affairs. It is the English perception of 'external reality' which provides the model for serious material and economic attainment, not the Spanish. Areas where Spanish is spoken are not now, and are not destined to be, in the vanguard of what Westerners euphemistically refer to as 'industrial progress'. Naturally the resources of these regions are eagerly expropriated while, as a secondary benefit to the global enterprise, their impoverished populations do serve a marginally significant purpose. They function as consumers of commodities few can afford (but which all seem eager to purchase).

Personal division...

In primitive discourse the exchange and assimilation of *feeling* is normally immediate and more or less spontaneous. For this reason a 'personal construction' of the interaction becomes, upon reflective inquiry,

far less tenable than it may seem in connection with evolved human language where the expression of feeling is often self-conscious in its articulation and where discourse may appear inherently divided. To be sure, primitive discourse may reveal delays and hesitations in the varied responses of the individual. And these may be thought to provide evidence of personal division in the community of organisms. In general, however, the organism's feelings do not surface as deliberated, or as divisive, or even as expressive of the organism's 'individuality'. Not at least to the extent this quality is uniquely manifest in the world of *human* social interactions where the spontaneity of the exchange is often impeded, or blocked altogether, where discourse is badly fragmented and the individual is formally isolated.

Moreover, language has contrived spacings between representations which serve to accentuate 'personal identity'. This effect is exaggerated in written 'communications' which tend to strip discourse of its visceral input and continuity, as suggested in our introductory chapter. Authentic discourse, by contrast, seeks to remove personal barriers to assimilation and to *fuse* participating organisms in common purpose. Authentic discourse is pre-eminently *social discourse* as we learned in the same chapter. It is a mighty effort, on the part of the true 'biological self', to *extend* its personal reach.

It is not difficult to imagine a lively linguistic state which preceded the arrival of the formally delineated 'person'. This is not to suggest that 'personal divisions' did not exist at this hypothetical evolutionary moment. I do not intend to explore the treacherous waters of language 'origin' except to say that there likely existed a time, probably quite early in the evolution of human language, in which 'person' was not yet specified linguistically, though it had, no doubt, marked representation in numerous other locations in the discursive system. At this hypothetical time, the 'personal pronoun', which would gird and validate the social hierarchies of the historical period, had yet to make its appearance. We may assume that verbs were not yet differentiated on the basis of 'person', nor is it likely that they were initially distinguished with respect to aspect, tense, and mood.

In the imagined scenario a picture of face-to-face interactions emerges in which the vocalization of feeling, in all its variable shades and subtleties, was still extensively dependent upon the much humbler structures in whose company this singular property of human behavior first evolved. Where necessary, person may have been delineated through contextual information not normally thought to be linguistic in nature. The systems of gesture and signing, which seem to emerge automatically among groups of people (hearing and non-hearing individuals alike) seem to obviate the need for entire categories of spoken grammar. (That signing is a natural capability needing little direct external guidance is attested by the achievement of the people of Martha's Vineyard where a significant proportion of the population was subject to hereditary deafness. Here a complex system of signing evolved which was *expressive* in its origin and notably free of arbitrary symbolization.) This they do through the use of complex sets of signals which are not at all organized along the expected lines of vocally articulated language. In these modern demonstrations of what was certainly an ancient human competence the signer's hands play a conspicuous role but movements of other parts of the body are significant, especially the shoulders, face, and eyes, which seem to comprise an alternating if not continuous point of focus in discourse across cultures. In such 'mixed systems' there appears to be little need for the linguistic specification of individual persons, present or not. A mere glance in the general direction of a referent who is present peripherally, perhaps only distantly visible, or a movement of the body in the direction of the place a referent is *apt to be discovered*, seems to suffice.

The emergence of 'pro-forms'...

For these reasons, the moment was an event without evolutionary parallel when personal divisions, which are explicit in the grammars of modern human languages, first surfaced to linguistic awareness. In what unusual circumstances might such an extensive re-designing of the machinery of human discourse have occurred?

I have tentatively assumed that 'person', in the period which *preceded* its linguistic specification (and the complex grammatical elaboration this specification entailed), was *marked* as a structural element of discourse, necessary only for emphasis or occasional disambiguation. 'Person' probably retained its marked status when *pronouns* first became available and when elaborated verb forms appeared to reinforce these distinctions. 'Person' remained the *special case*, invoked to clarify, provide emphasis, remove doubt. The unmarked time-frame was the *present*, as it is still today in languages and cultures world-wide, and the mode of expression was likely the *collective*. What 'you' and 'I' were doing and thinking, as separate individuals, was no doubt important. But it remained the *special case*: as *marked*, in the collective imagination, as the thoughts and actions of those external to the discourse of the moment. It seems at least plausible that the elaborated validation of personal reference, within which the *subject-object* relation of the modern sentence would be eventually consummated (and which we shall soon discuss), made its first tentative appearance against the background of an earlier and much wider system of linguistically articulated relationship, one which was more general in form, inclusive in function, *unmarked* in most of its detail: the surface manifestation of enduring human experience *to that cultural juncture*. Modern syntax may be an amalgam of these two ancient (eventually competing) structures.

The 'original moment'...

The fact that the verb and pronoun systems of Indoeuropean languages appear, from the perspective of the modern investigator, as 'defective' may reflect their origin in separate chambers of the ancestral grammar. In English, for example, the full conjugation of the verb *to be* requires the participation of surviving inflections of three stems which comparative linguists assume were 'originally' independent. It may be of particular interest that the oldest extant Germanic form of the Indoeuropean substantive verb *es-* (from which is derived English *is*, German *sind*, Greek *esti*) possessed only the *present tense*--and only the *subjunctive mood* besides the *indicative*! In Germanic languages the presently 'defective' paradigm must be completed with the assistance of two stems which have separate origins: forms with stem *wes-* (English *was, were*, German *war*) and verbs with stem *beu-* (English *be, been*, German *bin*). Pronouns themselves appear to be derived from parts of the grammar which were functionally independent at some time in the distant past. (Why is it that *I* and *me*--subject and object--are derived from separate stems? Does this have something to say about an early distinction, which we have now lost sense of, between the person as subject and the subject as object? Curiously, both stems, along with the interposed form of the substantive verb itself, are reflected in the first person conjugation *I a-m*.)

I have no answers to the questions raised by such 'defects' in the underlying grammar of the languages many of us speak. Indoeuropean was a late arrival on the evolutionary stage -- five or six thousand years, at most, before the present time -- whereas the major pivotal events of the transition in question pre-date *for sure* the closing millennia of the pleistocene and likely took place many thousands of years earlier than that.

There is a general sense, however, in which languages spoken in historical times, and even today, reveal evidence of the discursive context in which 'person' was first specified linguistically. (This may be, for the moment, the best window we have on the wider cultural transformation which likely occurred at this depth in time.)

Joseph Greenberg's pioneering studies on the general typology of language, in particular his characterization of 'language universals', contain information which may be helpful in the context of the present discussion⁽⁹⁾. Greenberg has shown that discursive systems exist in which the linguistic component has no marked expression of tense or mood. Speakers of such languages are either entirely indifferent to tense and mood, which does seem rather difficult for one to accept, or prefer to treat these structural nuances elsewhere in the discursive system, i.e. outside the province of the individual sentence (and perhaps outside language *itself*). Nevertheless, such systems, though trimmed to the bone in comparison with the standards and lauded 'efficiency' of most modern languages, invariably have *subject* and *object* in some kind of formal relation and, in addition, an assortment of *pronouns* involving three persons and two numbers at least, this without apparent exception! To divide time, it appears, we must first divide the social space in and through which the experience of time is recorded.

Ethel, Bill, Alice...

Some light may be shed on this matter by considering pronouns as a pivotal event in the evolution of language, a cultural mile-marker before which tense is unlikely to have developed. Imagine a community in which there are persons named Mary, Ethel, Paul, John, Bill, and Alice, and these are the only people with these names. Using English as the hypothetical language of the exchange, imagine a conversation in which Mary (#1 in the segment quoted below) tells Ethel (#2) that

(#3)		(#4)		(#4)		(#5)
Paul	saw	John	on the street.	John	said	Alice wants to
		(#6)				
talk to	Bill	about the party.				

A narrated structure containing no pronominal referencing is intelligible, with a bit of extra effort on the part of the listener, so long as the named persons and events move forward from the speaker in a strictly *linear fashion*. The segment quoted above, if placed in the proper discursive context, may not be terribly wide of the mark as an illustration of typical contemporary English dialogue, though the extent of the imbeddedness does appear to be rather extreme upon analysis. (Alice's expression of desire [1] is imbedded in something John said to Paul [2] which is imbedded in a report by Paul to Mary [3] which is imbedded in an exchange between Mary and Ethel [4] which is, we must assume, further imbedded in the discourse of a community [5]!)

Note, however, the immensely disturbing effect which *back-referencing* has on intelligibility in such instances. In the construct below, the number of referents has been reduced from six to four which *should*, all things being equal, have the effect of *simplifying* the transmission. The effect is the opposite, however. Back-referencing makes the utterance all but unintelligible. Mary (still #1) speaking to Ethel (#2):

Paul saw John on the street. John said Alice wants to
 (#6)
 talk to Bill about the party.

I will explain, in a moment, why I did not intend this syntactically elaborated sequence of 'proper nouns' to serve as an illustration of the structures pronouns would *replace* in the evolutionary transition referred to earlier. The reason I included them in those examples--and the reason I include them now--is that a 'proper noun' may well function linguistically as the *opposite* of the pronoun. A pronoun may be said to signify a nearly *pure* relation. By contrast, a proper noun amounts to the most conceptually isolating designation imaginable for that cluster of complex relations which form the core of the functional self, next only to one's social security number perhaps. An utterance such as the above, though it is linear and admirably straight-forward in its construction, is so devoid of lateral connection that it depends for the essential structure of its meaning on knowledge which, though no doubt latent in the discourse, is not revealed by it. Consider the following version of the same event, filled in, this time, with some of the relational detail which lends coherence to discourse (as to life). A mother (#1), speaking now to her daughter (#2), says that

(#3) Dad saw (#4) your boss on the street. (#4) He says his
 (#5) neighbor wants to talk to (#6) your husband about the party.

It is possible that elements of the type 'mother', 'boss', 'neighbor'--note that we exclude 'proper nouns' which are probably of much later vintage--were the literal antecedents of pronouns in the evolution of language, though such words have little to say about the placement of persons in relation to the physical context of the discourse. Their clarifying function lies rather in their partial delineation of complex relations existing between persons themselves. Together with pronouns, the designation of such kinships, affinities, and relationships provides a needed coherence in the narration of events, especially where the events described are remote, where the representations of actions and feelings are highly imbedded, and where back-referencing is frequent. It is reasonable to suppose that the emergence of the narrative function, if not eventually the tense system itself, would depend upon the prior existence of pronouns and related systems of reference.

Past time--the residue of a narrative present...

To be sure, the narrative function was not then, as it is not now, tied necessarily to marked expressions of *tense*. Here we approach a matter which lies somewhat outside the intended scope of the present discussion. Let me say, briefly, that the present indicative may easily have served, for an indeterminate length of cultural-evolutionary time, as the structural vehicle for the representation of what we now call 'past events'. The narrative 'mood', conceived as a structure for the representation of a time which is parallel to the present but not identical with it (nor even overlapping with it), appears to be eminently at home in the 'present' or in some modified representation of the 'present tense'. My own native English, spoken in Northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, shares a narrative 'mood' with many other British and American dialects which generalizes the *third person singular present indicative* '-s' across persons and number: "I go-es out the door and run-s into guess who...?" In the Standard Language past tense forms of the verb may well be the marked residue of an ancient narrative 'present'!

Whatever the detail of the attendant circumstances, the emergence of personal division was an event of unparalleled magnitude in the evolution of human language. Herewith was manifest the first powerful effort to sever human discourse from its ancient moorings and physical dependencies. To language was bequeathed the job of dismantling the practical boundaries of contextual reference. Through the instrument of language, human discourse emerged to a space lying *outside* its former province, there to assume a point of vantage from which the real world of experience could be perceived *as object*. Meanwhile, the first person, or 'ego', broke through the 'restricting confines' of the expanded *self*, an event which reaffirmed, at the fundamental level of the personal biology, the ancestral myth of *separation*. In the embrace of two naked lovers, Nobel laureate Octavio Paz sees rejoinder: the state of discursive intimacy which existed/exists *prior* to the emergence of language (and its differentiating pressures), a time when

...there [was/is] no thou, no
I, no tomorrow, no yesterday,
no names...[\(10\)](#) [emphasis added].

The 'language' of two human bodies, engaged in intimate physical interaction, dispenses with pronouns, marked tense, and the naming (and thus isolation) of 'objects' in a material universe. All was/is relationship, present and proximal.

Uncomfortably close...

In human cultures dominated by spoken (or written) language the *first person* is the mythic center of the social enterprise, the stable source of the discursive energy of the community. In comparison with this first person, and his/her exclusive power to initiate, all other discursive elements emerge as mere *potentialities*, somehow dependent, for their actualization, on the mere possibility of their participation and on the identity assigned them in the grammatical paradigm. For it is the first person of linguistic discourse who creates and implements the social program. The first person is the *manager* of the collective process, though the function is alternately down-played or enhanced, accommodating or exclusive. By its agency, but depending upon the degree of largess it dispenses, all else in the universe of discursive 'Möglichkeiten' either exists in a functional state or does not, either is permitted to come to the fore or is suppressed.

The means by which this mytho-grammatical paradigm is maintained, and alternately strengthened or subdued, is the topic in these concluding pages of the present chapter. In particular, I want to show that English grammar has developed certain features of personal division which, taken together, make the language nearly unique in the European community. In assembling this picture of English and its influence on global culture I will make reference once again to linguistic dispositions and peculiarities discussed in previous pages and earlier in the present investigation. However, as I revisit terrain already familiar to the reader, I shall be endeavoring, at the same time, to bring better definition to the interpretation of the cited tendencies and their effects.

For example, we must be careful to view the *alienation*, or *distancing*, between persons, which we have assumed takes place to some extent as a social corollary of the personal divisions of the grammar, as a phenomenon which is structurally distinct from the social problematic arising (apparently) from the

grammatical relation of *subject* to *object*. The latter constitutes a source of special tension in many cultures--we have discussed some of its effects in Spanish, in the culture of the Navajos, and in a particular dialect of American-English--and can lead, by way of a path which needs much better lighting (we shall discover), to the nearly opposite social condition: one in which the relations between persons and objects may appear, at times, 'too close for comfort', to give the issue an epigrammatic focus.

Profoundly ambiguous...

For it is precisely the 'closeness' of the relation -- perceived, on the one hand, as a danger and, on the other, as an adaptive value -- which gives *subject-object* its power to shape culture for good and bad. The subject-object relation of the grammar is the formal residue of a primitive process by which the organism strove to initiate, and maintain, *sensory contact* with a universe which was sometimes familiar, sometimes alien. What has been called the subject-object relation of the grammar is, in fact, a latter-day linguistic representation of an ancient physical process: an *action* by an organism closely affecting, or having at least the potential to closely affect, the being and/or actions of an adjacent organism or entity.

As we discovered in Chapter Three, this ancestral experience of *physical contact* with the world was inevitably and deeply ambiguous. It harbored and affirmed, simultaneously, two contradictory ideological precepts, each originating in the ancient crucible of biological myth: the notion of the self as inclusive of the adjacent reality; but also as something separate from it. This contradiction, which the advanced organism still 'feels' (with higher or lower levels of intensity), follows from the fact that the subject is an experiencing as well as an acting entity, whereas the object, directly 'acted upon' and the stimulus for the experience of the subject, enters experience only through a process of subjective assimilation. Object is somehow incomplete, dependent upon subject.

It should be apparent that I combine herewith two quite different (if complementary) meanings of the same words. The first is the traditional grammatical usage inspired by Aristotle, i.e. the sense of the subject as the part of a sentence, or clause, of which an action is predicated; and the object as that part of the predicate denoting the entity 'acted upon'; or, alternatively framed, the person or thing toward which the action of the verb is directed. The other meaning implicit in my use of these terms is the modern and more general philosophical usage: the sense of the subject, or subjective self, as the entity in the discursive relationship which *knows and experiences* (a meaning extensively elaborated since the European Renaissance), and the sense of the object, which occupies a definitely secondary position in the relationship, as the part of the external reality to which the knowing subject importantly responds.

Ancient process brought up to date...

In reply to the discriminatory effects of this structural imbalance, women have long felt that the culture generally, and men in particular, regard them as essentially 'objective' phenomena, as surface structure without much content. Running through the history of usage of this English borrowing from Latin is the sense of the 'objective' entity as *passive* in its construction, something 'placed before the eyes' of the knowing subject or 'presented to its senses', something thought of, or perceived, but rarely thinking or perceiving in its own right. By reason of this clearly false implication of the grammatical-cum-semantic model, the collective understanding of the social process is seriously impaired, distorted perhaps beyond

reconstruction along alternative lines. The cycle of assimilation, on which discourse and the function of community importantly depends, is short-circuited before a single phase reaches completion.

The unmarked subject...

It may be significant that the word 'subject' is more comprehensive in its meaning than the word 'object'. Like the masculine pronouns of English, upon which grammarians of the eighteenth century conferred a 'generic status' (later to be recognized and confirmed by an Act of British Parliament no less), the concept of *subject* enjoys the wider semantic field and potential application we associate with unmarked features of the language and culture. A living *subject* is both perceived and perceiving, both 'acting' and 'acted upon'. The living 'subject' in the police search happens also to be its *object* semantically. The 'subjects' we study in school are also the semantic *objects* of our interest as scholars.

The striking difference between the respective meanings of these English words is evident when we compare the phrases 'subject of chemistry' and 'object of chemistry'. Upon first consideration, it may appear that one word can be substituted for the other with little significant change in the underlying relationships. This proves not to be the case, however, and the difference is radical indeed. The word 'subject' answers the question 'What *is* chemistry'. (That is, 'chemistry' is *in apposition* to 'subject', the 'head' of the phrase in the underlying structure.) By contrast, 'object' answers the question 'What does chemistry *possess*?'. In other words, the word 'object' is an *object* in an underlying *subject-object relation* and means *purpose* or *intent*.

The word 'subject' appears to be an invertible element with respect to the position it assumes in the syntactic structure which immediately underlies the particular surface segment. It may serve as a *subject*, as in the phrase cited above. Or it may serve as a semantic *object*, in the phrase 'subject of the Crown', for example, where it, too, answers the question 'What does the Crown *have or possess*?'⁽¹¹⁾ With regard to the outline of the semantic-grammatical model, which now appears on the horizon of our discussion, it may not be rash to say: once an *object*, always an *object*. So fixed is the meaning of this important 'word-concept' in the English imagination.

The 'thing' to which the subject is opposed...

But the word evokes yet another dimension of meaning which is crucial to our understanding of *subject-object* as a formative paradigm (and a probable cause, I have argued, of social tension). This is a meaning which is or, at least, *should* be immediately evident, given the fact that it is located near the semantic surface of the word. Yet this aspect of the meaning appears easy to overlook, perhaps because it is invisible in a cultural environment in which *objectivity* is a pervasive and nearly exclusive value. I am referring to the word 'object' in the sense of what Germans call *Gegenstand* with its implication of an 'objective state' existing in explicit *opposition* to 'subjective' modes of being.

This meaning was present in medieval Latin *objectus*, and is reflected, of course, in the English verb 'object', in the noun 'objection', as well as in common phrases such as 'no object'. The immediate relevance of this observation is: the 'action of subjects' upon 'objects' may acquire meanings which strain the social

connections in a specific way. In the discourse which arises as the actualization of the *subject-object* relation of the grammar the first element may attempt, in fact, to assert control over the 'object', or over those parts of the material universe it chooses to define as 'objects'. The knowing subject *confronts*, and may seek subsequently to *dominate*, an objective reality which it regards as empty and essentially unfeeling beneath its surface aspect. (In Jewish-Christian myth the creator gives meaning to a material nature which is otherwise "void" and "without form" [Genesis 1:2]. In the patriarchal conception of 'reproduction' and the 'family' the male organism 'inseminates' the empty female as one fills a glass with precious liquid. One must not overlook the derivation of the verb *inseminate*, from Latin *semen* meaning 'seed'. In patriarchal myth the male role in so-called 'reproduction' is considered structurally analogous to planting a 'seed' in the ground.)

There is, of course, a serious problem in this. For in the absence of a countervailing sense of personal and collective responsibility, such a striving is easily manifest as wanton and arbitrary wielding of power. This is the persistent difficulty for which the Navajo sensibility, spawned perhaps in an early awareness of the social dangers of emerging hegemony, sought compromise solutions (and which the older animist perception, which continues to enjoy a vestigial if fragmented existence in Spanish and other languages and cultures still vibrant in the Indoeuropean homeland and elsewhere, seeks to circumvent on fundamental principle).

In summary, a structural imbalance seems intrinsic to language 'as we know it' (the traditional and seemingly necessary caveat). The first element in the subject-object relation, always present in language (if Greenberg's findings may be so interpreted), is empowered with the capacity to *know and to feel* as well as the capacity to act; whereas the objects of the universe adjacent to this 'knowing entity' are permitted merely to act and to respond. The notion of a passive yet responding object, an object without the capacity to feel and express feeling, yet possessing nonetheless the capacity to function as stimulus for the *feeling subject*, puts biological discourse on the poorest of possible footings. Moreover, this condition is aggravated grievously by the imbalance of power, noted above, and the opportunities (which come the way of the 'knowing and feeling subject') to assert control.

Distance--a social problem-cum-need...

But the problematic reveals a second aggravating factor only lightly touched on thus far. Negatively affecting (in the long haul) the adaptive purpose of discourse is the fact that the subject-object relation of the *grammar-semantics* of the culture may foster a degree and intensity of 'closeness'--owing to its origins in the biology of physical discourse--which the evolving community, becoming the while laterally more complex, does not necessarily regard as functionally suitable across the board. A 'need' inevitably arises for 'distancing mechanisms' of one kind and another to ensure the appropriate degree of proximity in the particular instance.

In this vein we must ask, again, why the practitioners of science have shown so little interest in such questions. To be sure, if we take into account the fact that the contemporary culture of inquiry is one which, on principle, *ignores* the functional basis of observed 'behaviors', then little additional explanation would appear to be necessary. The grossly defective epistemology of that culture, though initially puzzling, may be the mere reflection of that egregious selective bias. As I have maintained *passim* in this group of essays,

inquiry appears to cease when the mythic underpinnings of the culture are significantly exposed and endangered.

But let us peer further into this intriguing (if forbidden) area. The need for social 'distancing' may have come out of the ancestral organism's initial *contact* with the world, the same source of experience which, refined and greatly elaborated, would become the foundation for the discourse of advanced life-forms. We can assume that this initial sensory encounter was problematic (as it has been for organisms ever since). The feelings it gave rise to were, no doubt, a complex mix of gratification and awareness of success, on the one hand, and the sense of danger or failure on the other. Together they comprised an original 'binary', of a kind, and may have existed alongside other similarly constituted oppositions in the construction of experience. The sense of *ambivalence*, which initially emerged from such inherently contradictory sets of encounters, may have an explanatory utility for the sciences which would address such matters--this across a rather wide range of specific and individual variation. It may account for the advanced organism's extreme vulnerability to social pressures of one kind and another. Similarly, it may underlie our *resistance* to the same pressures. That is, we feel an intense need to *embrace* the world which lies adjacent to our individual bodies. But we tend, at the same time, to *shrink* from this primitive experience (as out of fear or apprehension).

But though the perceived need for 'distance' (and our awareness of the appropriateness of 'distance' in the given social instance) may be complex and abstractly constituted, the expressive flexibility of the body surfaces appears to be more than the equal of the process in all its demands and subtle variations. Whether primitive or advanced, simple or relatively elaborated in its physiological detail, the visceral exterior of the organism is an instrument which is elegantly attuned to the needs of the particular social system; highly responsive, in addition, to imaginative process where such is in place. This is no wonder, of course, because the surface of the body contains most of the points of potential contact with the 'other'. It functions as the mediating element in all meaningful discursive interaction which includes, as we have attempted to demonstrate, all vocalization and human language.

(Antonio Damasio has informed us that the appearance of the 'mind', and the ability of the organism to manipulate 'images', was an event of momentous evolutionary significance. See discussion in the foregoing chapter and also Damasio, p. 89-90. The *ultimate* arbiter is naturally the regulatory apparatus of the community which the latter puts together, in part, through the collective genius of myth. Myth, I shall argue in a later chapter, is assembled from binaries similar to those mentioned above. But these controlling mechanisms are also interpersonal and situational in their construction. Thus we discover them to be normally in flux, wherein may lie their adaptive capability in evolutionary process.)

Discursive distance as physical proximity...

It may be redundant, if not circular, to state the obvious fact that the systems we employ to regulate social 'distance' are concerned, first of all, with the *bodies* of individuals, in particular the expressive exterior surfaces of these bodies and how these relate to the external world. The permissible degree of proximity between our body surfaces and the constituent make-up of the world we seek to establish connection with, in the particular instance, is the reflection of structures which are anything but simple. The prospective encounter evokes feelings which depend upon personal and collective preference and upon whether prior

experience has conditioned us to view that portion of the universe in objective or *non-objective* terms. (As I have insisted in both previous and present chapters, this distinction raises an issue of immense practical significance. Living organisms approach the two categories of stimulus quite differently and with strikingly different consequences!)

The regulation of contact takes place along various lines and according to rules which depend upon function in the particular case: i.e. whether the approach serves the growth process of the *individual*, or whether its immediate purpose is to maintain the *communal structure* in the midst of which the organism pursues its particular ends, if the two can be considered separately. Infants of many species appear to require nearly constant handling, stroking, and petting to insure the normal pattern of neuro-physiological development and maturation. It is widely assumed, for example, that humans deprived *as babies* of such 'discursive stimuli' can never function properly *as adults*.

At the same time, infant mammals must be weaned, partly to accommodate new arrivals to the community. Physical contacts with the mother and other attentive adults must be systematically reduced while, at the same time, the boundaries of these initial discursive contacts are extended to include peers and others. New experience must begin to replace (and enhance) the old, if communal discourse is to take place and the young of a species are to develop into normally functioning adult individuals. (In modern human society the practical and perhaps *optimal* distances between ourselves and others with whom we attempt to initiate and sustain discursive relations, and between ourselves and the material world with which we would have normal physical contact, have been greatly disrupted through the use of tools and the application of alienating technologies. (More on this in *Part II -- Chapter Five*.) To what long-term socio-neurological effect one can only speculate, given the absence of research into such matters.

Among primates the distancing process is not necessarily the same for young females as for males. Franz de Waal has observed that among populations of pygmy chimpanzees, or bonobos,

...sons and daughters both start life fully dependent on their mothers..., but whereas a daughter begins to distance herself from her mother at puberty, a son remains attached and continues to enjoy his mother's attention (de Waal-Lanting, p. 168).

This echoes the observations of famed primatologist Takayoshi Kano who notes further that the young female bonobo begins to 'distance herself' from the entire community into which she was born:

As females approach adolescence they become less social than males. They occupy the periphery of the group and often sit alone in a tree... At some point during the daughter's adolescence, the mother-daughter relationship is completely severed (Kano, p. 169, quoted by de Waal-Lanting).

Eventually, the young female leaves her maternal community altogether and establishes an intimate discursive relationship, partly sexual in its expression, with an older female of a neighboring group who becomes, for her initially, the center of a new communal association; while she herself, in the course of time, rises in social status:

...the lowest-status females are recent immigrants from other communities... Upon transfer into

their new group, they single out one particular resident female for special attention: they try to groom her and invite her to sexual contact... close friendships are established if the resident reciprocates. This contact helps the immigrant become accepted into the close-knit female community. After having produced her first offspring, the young female's position becomes more stable and central until, when she grows older and climbs in status, the cycle is repeated, with young immigrants now seeking a good relationship with her (de Waal-Lanting, pp. 73-74).

As much variation in discursive intimacy is to be observed between individuals of different species as *within* populations of the same species. In comparative studies of non-sexual discursive contacts among bonobos, on the one hand, and chimpanzees, on the other, researchers have discovered striking differences with respect to sex, which is perhaps not surprising given the contrasting social organizations of these two closely related species and the role the gender of the animal plays in each.

Nor are these differences reflected consistently when one moves from one population to another within the same species. In one population of bonobos, grooming (thought to be a good gauge of social intimacy) was found to be most frequent between the sexes, followed by contacts among females, with the least amount of observed grooming appearing to take place among males. This turns out to be nearly the reverse of the pattern observed among chimpanzees where, in one population, a significantly higher frequency of close contacts was noted among males, with females *staying away* from each other on the whole.

However, data from another population indicate that male bonobos have as intimate an association with each other as male chimpanzees. Also, though female bonding, as measured by grooming, seems not to occur with great frequency in East African populations of chimpanzees, where the studies referred to above were conducted, such behavior is seen to be quiet common in West African populations and also in zoos, it appears. (See de Waal-Lanting, pp. 66-67.)

From chimp to human sensitivities...

Many animals invite and tolerate a degree of physical intimacy which, if attempted by humans in ordinary social contexts, would shock and probably greatly offend. To be sure, where humans fall on such a scale depends immensely on the culture in question with also considerable variation between the sexes, as among the bonobos. In general, human females appear to tolerate a degree and intensity of 'closeness', in their non-sexual discursive contacts with each other, which their male counterparts would find awkward and/or unthinkable. Mutual grooming, though common among women in a rather wide range of social circumstances, is rarely observed among men, regardless of the culture.

If you are a male reader of these pages, consider the complex social and personal repercussions of approaching your male supervisor in the morning and removing pieces of lint from his shoulder or lightly stroking and rearranging his hair while you discuss the day's agenda. In many Western cultural settings, close contact among adult human males is limited to formal and strictly regulated embraces, hand-shaking, back-slapping, etc., which are notable for their abruptness and *brevity* -- key concepts in any description science might attempt to assemble of such interactions. Contacts which *linger* are emphatically proscribed. For human males, many of the external mechanisms for intimate discursive contact remain in place --

vestiges perhaps of ancestral experience -- but one must not appear to savor them.[\(12\)](#)

Saunas and Swedes...

The issue has a light side. A neighbor of mine was once asked what the anticipated capacity of a bathhouse was which he was constructing. "There will be room for *five Finns*," he responded immediately... but then added, with a calculated glance in my direction, "...maybe *three Swedes*."

I can not vouch for the significance of the statistic in the particular case, but my neighbor's words may have some validity as a general observation. There is certainly much cultural variation in the amount of 'space' humans require in their interactions with others, and the variability likely increases dramatically when the individuals in question are disrobed. Finns have long believed that clothing is a barrier to discursive intimacy. (It is sometimes said that in Finland leaders and government officials save discussion of the knottiest problems of business and state for the *sauna*.) If this perception is correct, then the removal of clothing may create social problems for those not accustomed to the ritual of *sauna*, problems which may be mitigated somewhat through the creation of additional 'distance' between bathers.

Human discourse appears traumatized by its *physical origins* and has sought, by degrees, to alienate itself from this ancestral moment as from a distasteful personal experience. I have suggested in other contexts (pp. 88-89 and pp. 96-97) that an early function of language may have been to sever discourse from the material dependencies of context (if we may so interpret the early appearance of pronominal structure in the evolution of human language). Embarrassed by its inevitable and necessary association with the human body, language has sought since to isolate itself from its natural medium and milieu through the erection of barriers which are explicitly artifactual. To be sure, these have come to include *far more* than clothing. But clothing -- since we have approached the topic anyway -- may not be a bad place to pause for consideration of the alienating process as a whole.

The linguistic system of personal reference had accomplished an extraordinary feat given the surface modesty of the innovation. The invention of the *third person* allowed discourse to assume, for the first time, a position *outside* the physical area of experience. Language had now the potential to become something separate from the discursive context in which it made its inaugural appearance. It was no longer simply an elaborated form of *vocalization*, no longer a mere *adjunct* to the complex process by which lateral transference had taken place since organisms first began to 'feel' their way in the world. Discourse had now the capacity to become something *apart* from its original being and essence, something separate from *feeling* itself. From a position outside the layered complexity of natural existence, discourse acquired the ability to conjure representations of experience which were *objective*, 'free' of the encumbrances and distractions of the world as internally constituted. Covering the 'body' was more than a symbolic act, undertaken in mythic denial of internal process. It sought to hide the very means by which feeling was transferred. It strove to subvert the capacity of the individual organism for *assimilation*, then (as now) the only basis for cohesion in community.

The Measure of the 'Man'...

One is tempted to stop short of making the grandiose claim that the single purpose of clothing was to block natural discourse (though this is the position I shall eventually assume). The usual understanding, which many of us accept and continue to feel comfortable with, sees clothing *as protection*. But (one reasonably asks) protection from what? From 'nature and the elements', we are told (which comes, in fact, much closer to the truth than the conventional wisdom may realize).

The usual story is as follows: the invention of clothing has allowed an adventuresome organism to investigate and claim residence in 'hostile environments' where the naked human would have little chance to survive. Here the myth of the intrepid organism engaged in battle against a hostile nature surfaces with embarrassing and painful transparency. (One must also consider the following fact, inconvenient though it may be: the environment turns hostile, in many cases of this kind, only *after* the arrival of humans, rarely before! The disappearance of forests, for example, and the loss of its abundant benefits to human community, appears [from earliest times] to have been artifactual in many cases. To be sure, adverse conditions force us to adapt. But these inclement circumstances are often of our own making! There will be more discussion of this interesting question in a later chapter.)

In the typical representation of the initial contact of the West with exotic culture, we see 'naked savages' greeting heavily garbed Europeans, usually bearded. Two explanations for this difference of 'habit' typically present themselves, one perhaps less enlightened than the other. Maybe the savages knew no better. Maybe their natural ignorance had blinded them to the fact that they were uncomfortable and that their bodies needed protection from the sun and rain (if not the cold). In this understanding, the European visitor is seen as having solved a 'problem of nature' by reason of 'his' greater cleverness and foresight. 'He' has invented clothing, and much else besides, to 'protect his fragile body'. (One of the striking omissions of nature--so goes the reasoning of the popular mythology--is the so-called 'fragility' of the human body, a 'defect' we have managed to overcome through our unsurpassed 'intelligence'. In actual fact, the human being is something of a brute, certainly one of the strongest and physically hardiest of mammals.)

The depraved savage...

The other view, scarcely an improvement over the above, was the position adhered to by Christian missionaries who came to the newly discovered world as the spiritual flank of a colonizing effort. To them, the nakedness of the savage was the natural corollary of a general cultural depravity, the deplorable (if understandable) reflection of a primitive level of moral development. The culture of the savage was defective in so many obvious respects--technology, science, the arts. It was hardly surprising to discover that 'his' moral and religious attainment left something to be desired. Fortunately, the colonizing project was a 'package deal' which included the conversion of the spiritually needy native to Western religion and moral values. In the view of the missionary, the savage did not need clothing so much to hide his body from the tropical sun, as to protect his soul from the raging fires of hell and eternal damnation. (Nevertheless, the use of clothing may have served an important secondary function in the view of the white colonials. Perhaps his nakedness, not his innate laziness, was to blame for the fact the savage avoided work in the best part of the day. As Noël Coward observed early in the 20th century, only 'mad dogs' and fully clothed Englishmen went "out in the mid-day sun".)

Communal nakedness, and its inevitable association with Pagan ritual, has long occupied a special place in the English catalogue of moral depravities, especially (most curiously) where members of the *same sex* were concerned. In the English imagination, the picture of *naked males*, engaged in common ritual action, brought more than a tinge of homophobic revulsion (and titillation) to the surface. As Will Roscoe has pointed out,

...the English viewed the sexual landscape of America with fear and loathing. The Puritans considered themselves akin to Abraham entering the land of the Sodomites; they arrived prepared to do battle with the instruments of Satan, the native inhabitants (*Changing Ones*, p. 68).

Later, when the surviving remnants of Native communities were corralled and placed on reservations, their Anglo-Saxon stewards, inspired by Wesley, Calvin, and the Great Moral Awakening⁽¹³⁾ went out of their way to prohibit use of the traditional 'sweat lodge', cultural cousin to the Finnish 'sauna'.

Practical reason...

Alternatively, there is the 'enlightened' perspective on the same issue, the view of *many* anthropologists perhaps. This construction sees the 'nakedness of the savage' (and presumably the clothing of the European visitors) in strictly utilitarian terms, as a function of practical need (or the lack). The 'natives' of far-away places -- inhabiting a world which is essentially friendly to humans in their natural physical state -- had simply no *reason* to adopt clothing. Such an explanation, at once more rational and seemingly less encumbered by myth than the former, had the virtue of by-passing an embarrassing question of the relative *competence* of the savage (and the related question of *native intelligence* which notions of cultural competence invariably come down to).

Nevertheless, there are serious problems with this relatively more sophisticated construction. First, the utilitarian explanation tends to ignore the question of why the European visitors *persisted in doing*, in the new environment, what the natives seemed to have no need to do and *why* (more importantly) they were concerned, to the point of obsession, that the natives themselves adopt clothing. But there may be more wrong with these explanations than the foregoing suggests. The rational structures, which we use to 'explain' the lack of clothing of natives, may seriously misrepresent the historical facts. The European voyages of exploration encountered, even in their earliest years, a much wider spectrum of climatic variation than the typical explanations accommodate with ease. Contrary to popular myth, the 'naked savages', who greeted seafaring Europeans on the shores of their exotic homelands, were at home in a diversity of environmental settings. They were themselves not exactly unacquainted with the 'hostile forces of nature' which European ingenuity had learned so effectively to defeat. To be sure, low ambient temperatures might not have been the most pressing issue to the naked folks encountered in those early years. Nevertheless, the sun, wind, and rain of the American tropics and sub-tropics would have provided all the excuse needed for natives to arm themselves 'against the elements'. Weather conditions in the West Indies provided nearly as much reason to devise 'protection from nature' as the low winter temperatures the European visitors had left behind. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the earliest 'explorers' -- soon to become the conquistadores -- came mostly from Spain and Italy where summers were warm and where winters were extremely moderate.

When Captain James Cook and his crew first investigated the island of Tasmania in 1777 they discovered a community of humans (since exterminated almost to the last individual⁽¹⁴⁾) who seemed to manage without clothing of even the most scanty kind, though their natural environment was 'hostile', certainly in comparison with Southern Europe (if such a comparison is helpful in the present context). Located one-hundred-and-fifty (150) miles *south* of the State of Victoria on the Continent of Australia (at approximately the same degree of latitude south as my hometown in northern Wisconsin), Tasmania was no South-Sea Paradise. Its air was raw and damp much of the time. Today, temperatures in the coldest part of the year (June through August) lie within a few degrees of the mean temperatures in Central England for December through January! Yet a small population of human beings, unclothed and unhoused, had managed to survive in this environment since the end of the Pleistocene when the sea rose to isolate them from the Australian mainland and all the rest of humankind. (And this these individuals accomplished in the near absence of a material culture. The toolbox of the Tasmanians must surely rank among the skimpiest known to twentieth century science.)

The fear of nature...

My intent, clearly, is not to suggest that the human organism is endlessly adaptable in its natural state. There are extensive environments on earth in which human community can not sustain itself without clothing and shelter of some minimal kind. (The original occupation, by humans, of Northeast Asia and their subsequent push into the Americas, over the Bering Peninsula or on some other northern route over water, could not conceivably have taken place before the invention of clothing. Thus perhaps the delayed occurrence of this transit relative to the early date of the human penetration of the Southern Hemisphere.)

My intent, rather, is to explore the possibility, indeed the likelihood that the 'original purpose' of clothing was not to give a shivering humanity protection against the *weather*, vaguely or concretely envisioned. I would suggest that clothing served originally a purpose which was more specific than this but, at the same time, more broadly ideological. Its main function, I have proposed, was to *block contact* between the sensing organism and the sensed reality of nature. The 'original' function of clothing happened, indeed, to involve the need for *protection against nature*; but the reality of 'nature', which the innovators were principally moved to defend themselves *against*, was the exterior boundaries of their own *bodies*, in particular the traumatizing capacity of the body surfaces to function as the mediating agent in a wide range of discursive interactions. As an obvious consequence of their social benefit, the latter were potentially threatening to dreams of hegemony and its isolating strategies.

Any strictly utilitarian explanation for the primitive introduction and use of clothing tends to lose force when one considers the wide range of circumstances in which it can be imagined, reasonably and advantageously, to be removed but is not. No-one would argue that there is a 'need', at *any* time of the year, for clothing in heated buildings, public or private. Yet those who move about naked in their own homes are considered social eccentrics; while those who deliberately or inadvertently 'expose themselves' to others, especially children, risk arrest and incarceration. There is surely no practical 'need' for clothing on beaches and in other recreational circumstances. Clothing is not needed to enjoy picnics, barbecues, church socials and beer-fests, concerts and the opera, lectures and poetry readings, street dances, summer carnivals, outdoor weddings, gardening, or long walks in Central Park in the months of May through September. Yet any organized attempt to discard clothing in public settings, of this or any other kind, invariably evokes

outrage and strong opposition in both liberal and conservative sectors of the population.

Before pausing for a much needed break, let me repeat that the wide-spread perception that nakedness is 'indecent' reveals the power of myth, not 'practical reason' whatever that may be imagined to consist in...

[Return to Top of Page](#)

[Return to Part I Chapter One](#)

[To Part I Chapter Three](#)

[Return to Main Index Page](#)

© Karl Magnuson MMII

Footnotes

1. The subtitle of Damasio's book is *Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*.
2. Here one might anticipate a discussion of Jared Diamond's book, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: the Fates of Human Societies* (Norton, 1997) which would review (among other things) the role of agriculture in the denial of internal process and the emergence of social hierarchy. Diamond presents a finely delineated and preeminently 'objective' account of this historical development.
3. French or Spanish for example. Or *High German*, for that matter, a language family which has close kinship to English yet evolved in a strikingly different discursive direction. It may be significant that 'romantic idealism', which claimed for 'nature' itself the role of creator, had its strongest defenders in German-speaking parts of Europe.
4. In Arctic Culture and religious perception life process was manifest in a continuous *striving toward completion*. Stages of growth comprised successive levels of 'integration'. For the individual organism, life *began* in the joinder of 'soul' and 'body' and continued, through stages of progressive assimilation, to *death*, that ultimate moment of separation in the natural cycle. In this view the 'soul' appears not to have been in permanent residence, in the body of the individual, until age two or thereabouts. If a child died, before this initial phase was *completed*, he/she had no lasting identity. The 'soul', meanwhile, remained in close proximity to the household, ready to occupy the body of the next newcomer to the family. In rural Finland of the 19th century the name of a dead child was not discarded but typically held in reserve for the one(s) who followed. My paternal grandmother's first two children (both boys) died in infancy but the third (also a boy) survived into adulthood. All three had the same name.
5. The poet's failure to name the first of the twin objects of his attention may be explained in other ways. In metrically stressed syllables he avoids, as perhaps too 'dark' for his present purpose, the *back* mid-to-high vowels of his language: 'o' and 'u' in particular, and their lax counterparts, plus the diphthong 'au'. All but the first of the twelve metrically prominent syllables of the verse favor the much brighter *front* mid-to-high vowels--'e' and 'i' in particular, and their lax counterparts, plus the diphthong 'äu' and the fronted 'ü' in both its tense and lax forms; so one might conclude that the poet rejected the word 'Sonne', with its lax 'o', in the general interest of *phonological homogeneity*.

6. By interesting further comparison with German, the translation Franz Schubert picked for his setting of Shakespeare's famous song was "*Was ist Sylvia*."
7. Among the few who have recognized this dependency: D. C. Brazil, *The Communicative Value of Intonation in English* (in Discourse Analysis Monograph, 8) English Language Research, University of Birmingham.
8. Anne Stevenson, *Between the Iceberg and the Ship: Selected Essays*, Ann Arbor; The University of Michigan Press (1998), pp. 113-115. The lines quoted are the translation of Elizabeth Bishop and the poet himself.
9. One article in particular deserves careful inspection: "Some Universals of Grammar with Particular Reference to the Order of Meaningful Elements," in J. H. Greenberg (ed.), *Universals of Language*, 2nd edition, 1966, Cambridge, MA, and London, MIT Press, pp. 73-113. It must be emphasized that Greenberg makes no historical claims on the basis of these findings.
10. The original Spanish of the quoted material is "...no hay tú ni yo, maana, ayer ni nombres..." Octavio Paz, *Piedras de Sol*.
11. Further pairs comes readily to mind in which the first element is unchanged and the second varies: 'the language of Faroese' where 'of Faroese' is appositional and 'the language of diplomacy' where 'of diplomacy' is possessive. Note: if we refer to the 'object of Faroese' we have in mind, somehow, the 'purpose' or even 'intent' of the language, though this may stretch the imagination. In any case, we do *not* have in mind 'object' as the 'head' to which Faroese relates in apposition.
12. In Latin countries (and perhaps elsewhere for all I know) a special technique has evolved for dealing with the difficult social situation which arises when two males ride the same motorbike. Under no circumstances is the male passenger allowed to hold on to the male driver. His arms either dangle, paddling the wind -- an admirable display of self-confidence and muscular control -- or he holds on, for dear life, to the seat beneath him.
13. The 'Moral Awakening' comprised the vulgar backdrop (in England and North America) for much late-nineteenth century prudery and religious philosophizing.
14. The island (named after the Dutch navigator, Abel Tasman, who explored it in 1642) served as a penal colony between the years of 1803 and 1853. In the brief period of a few decades, the English managed to kill off the approximately five thousand members of the native population, leaving only a few individuals, of mixed ancestry, to survive into the twentieth century.

[Return to Top of Page](#)

[Return to Part I Chapter One](#)

[To Part I Chapter Three](#)

[Return to Main Index Page](#)

© MMII, Karl Magnuson, All rights reserved