and is no doubt very necessary in the United States context. But when one of the debaters at an open meeting of the Association of Black Anthropologists wryly defined their organizational problem as being whether to come into Master's house or stay out in the garden, one could see what she was driving at.

Whether a community is most itself in its great ceremonies or in its mundane everyday transactions is a matter for unending debate. It was something of a relief to visit, two days later, the anthropology department at Princeton University, because this must be typical of anthropology departments all over the world. It is housed in one of the more modest buildings in Princeton, which is among the wealthiest American universities. The campus magazine for that week (*Weekly Nassau*, 5 December) included an article on the contrast between rich and poor departments. The rich department selected for study is the new $29 m. 'state-of-the-art' molecular biology facility. The poor department is ... anthropology, which is also one of the smallest with only 7 and a half faculty. The publications record of the staff, says the reporter, is outstanding, but there are problems in small staff numbers: a student who has recently switched her major from anthropology to art history observes that professors are 'always coming and going [because of their fieldwork]', and 'the department is very much its own little island'.

Gananath Obeyesekere, the department head, is pictured with his eyes rolled upwards, alongside a photograph of the apparently meagre departmental library with its nearly bare shelves. His arguments in favour of the subject are reported: 'Students need to be shaken from the world in which they live ... The administration is fully aware and determined to do something for Anthropology'. The student who switched, Leslie Wu, asserts that 'it's not anthropology I left. I really liked the professors. I found anthropology as a field to be very flexible since it's basically the study of life. It's the department that I left ... It has to shout to be recognized and that's a shame because it shouldn't have to shout.'

Jonathan Benthall

1. St Clair Drake's interesting 'Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience' (*Anthrop. & Educ. Quarterly*, IX.2. Summer 1978, p.85ff.) is an article of considerable topical interest because it shows that the complicated relationship between social anthropology and the anti-racist movement has a long background in the USA.

Authenticity

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The article is based on a paper given at an invited session, 'In and Out of Boundaries', organized by the Society for Humanistic Anthropology at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting last December in Washington, D.C.

May I spell out three initial presuppositions.

First, I take 'authenticity' to be a cultural construct of the modern Western world. That it has been a central, though implicit, idea in much anthropological enquiry is a function of a Western ontology rather than of anything in the non-Western cultures we study. Our search for authentic cultural experience - for the unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional - says more about us than about others. Explaining anthropological notions of authenticity will give us yet another example of the startling degree to which anthropological discourse about others proves to be a working-out of our own myths.

Second, authenticity is a cultural construct closely tied to Western notions of the individual. Following Tocqueville (1835) and Dumont (1977) I take individualism, which I define broadly to include an approach to the physical universe as well as to the human world, to be a defining aspect of modern culture. 'The individual' has a central place in our understanding of reality.

Third, the bonds uniting authenticity and individualism remain tight in both commonsense and anthropological ideas about culture, even though we usually consider discussions of culture to focus on collective aspects of human existence rather than on individual persons. This is because cultures are imagined as discrete, bounded units, each unique - like a personality configuration, as one suggestive simile has it - and all of equal value, at least in the abstract. Cultures, in our common sense, are the individuated entities of world society, just as, in our commonsense understanding of political reality, nations are the individual actors of international or world politics. This perspective is especially transparent in nationalist and ethnic ideologies, of which anthropological theory is a closely related though more sophisticated variant (Handler 1985a). Thus nationalist ideologies as well as anthropological thought attach authenticity to cultures just as the larger 'consumer culture' that we live in attaches it to individual human beings. I am suggesting that the same constellation of cultural ideas which allows a soft drink to be marketed as 'the real thing', with the suggestion that those who choose it thereby gain a real or authentic existence, underlies the anthropological search for cultural authenticity.

Any discussion of authenticity should begin with a profound exercise in culture history, Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1971). Using a comparative hermeneutic which anthropologists will find congenial, Trilling interprets 'sincerity' and 'authenticity' in relation to each other, showing how both concepts emerge (as an overworked verb images it) with the emergence of the modern world from the medieval, and, further, how authenticity replaces sincerity as a central element in the individualist world view.

Trilling defines sincerity as 'the absence of dissimulation or feigning or pretence' (p13), and, elsewhere, as 'a congruence between avowal and actual feeling' (p2). According to Trilling,

> the intense concern with sincerity which came to characterize certain European national cultures at the beginning of the modern epoch would seem to have developed in connection with a great public event, the extreme revision of traditional modes of communal organization which gave rise to the entity that now figures in men's minds under the name of society (p26).

Thus Trilling links sincerity to modern notions of

individual and society, those new ideas with which Westerners used to imagine themselves and their place in historical and, ultimately, natural reality. As Cassirer remarks, in a comparison of Enlightenment conceptions of natural science to those of the Middle Ages, 'the world cease[d] to be a "cosmos" in the sense of an immediately accessible order of things' (1932:37). To elaborate: in the medieval world view the cosmic order was understood as ordained and encompassed by God, as a hierarchical whole in which humans and all other features of the natural world are subordinate parts whose ultimate reality has been assigned to them by God, and depends upon their relationship to the other parts of the whole. By contrast, individualism allows people to locate ultimate reality within themselves. And their social world is no longer part of the divine hierarchy, but 'society', a human construction seen as the sum of individual energies and desires. To quote Cassirer again, on the modern ontology of 'nature':

> Nature ... implies the individuality, the independence and particularity of objects. And from this characteristic force, which radiates from every object as a special center of activity, is derived also the inalienable worth which belongs to it in the totality of being. All this is now summed up in the word 'nature', which signifies the integration of all parts into one all-inclusive whole of activity and life which, nevertheless, no longer means mere subordination. For the part not only exists within the whole but asserts itself against it, constituting a specific element of individuality and necessity. (p41)

As we shall see, this idea of the part, unit, or individual asserting itself against the rest of the world as a locus of ultimate meaning and reality underlies modern notions of authenticity.

But to return for the moment to 'sincerity': Trilling takes the social changes accompanying the rise of individualistic culture - changes that we summarize with the phrase 'unprecedented social mobility' - as the relevant backdrop to the birth of 'sincerity'. With individualism (in which, as Dumont [1977: 4] reminds us, every person is considered equally representative of an abstract 'humankind') and with unprecedented mobility, persons are no longer necessarily defined by their position in the social hierarchy. They can rise or fall, and, more important, their humanity transcends their social place in any determination of who or what they 'really are'. Thus, as Trilling (p16) points out, the term 'villain' once 'referred to the man who stood lowest in the scale of feudal society', whereas in early-modern novels and plays, the villain is 'a person who seeks to rise above the station to which he was born'. In other words, as the feudal cosmos gave way to the ideas of society and individual, persons were no longer content to define themselves, or to be defined by others, in terms of their social rank.

Yet such socially determined definitions of a person's identity did not disappear overnight, but survived, as it were, to do battle with more modern conceptions of the individual. The result was the concern for sincerity that Trilling notes. In the medieval world each human being 'expresses' not individuality - an inviolable self - but 'a social condition' (p37). By contrast, once it became important to focus on the individual self apart from social status or position in the divine hierarchy, people were led to ask about the congruence between one's outer position, or the role one played, and one's inner or true self. Hence the concern for sincerity, of which the quintessential definition is given by Shakespeare:

> This above all: to thine own self be true
> And it doth follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.
> (*Hamlet* I.iii.79-81)

Trilling suggests that the conception of sincerity expressed here is ultimately 'public' or social in the sense that sincerity is demanded not for the sake of the self but for that of others, that is, as a means to honest social relationships (p9). And he points out that such sincerity is today no longer highly valued precisely because it privileges social relationships rather than individual selfhood. Indeed, the early-modern obsession with sincerity is more an obsession with insincerity, and, according to Trilling, is closely linked to another newly important idea, the idea 'that everyone in society ... acts a part, takes a "position", does his dance, even the King himself' (p31). That a king can be imagined as playing the social role of king suggests how greatly the modern outlook differs from the medieval, in which, presumably, the king simply *was* king, by virtue of the essential being God had granted him.

Society, then, is the locus of role-playing and of insincerity. As Rousseau puts it, discussing the emergence of a fully-formed civil society, 'It now became the interest of men to appear what they really were not.' (1755: 86). And, as Trilling points out, sincerity itself, when practised *because* it is a social virtue, recommended to us by the Poloniuses of the world, leads to insincerity: 'we play the role of being ourselves, we sincerely act the part of the sincere person, with the result that a judgement may be passed upon our sincerity that it is not authentic' (p11).

So we arrive at 'authenticity', which has to do with our true self, our individual existence, not as we might present it to others, but as it 'really is', apart from any roles we play. We should here recall Cassirer's interpretation of the modern ontology of 'nature', in which every object or thing in the universe is seen as 'a special center of activity', a 'specific element of individuality and necessity'. Each thing is authentic because it is, it exists, on its own as well as in a larger universe of equally independent entities. To describe authenticity, Trilling borrows a phrase from Rousseau, 'the sentiment of being'. We moderns are characteristically anxious about being, about 'reality', or, more particularly, about our lack of reality, about our lives which seem, as the popular term has it, 'unreal' (cf. Lears 1981). To quote Trilling again: 'That the word [authenticity] has become part of the moral slang of our day points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual existences' (p93).

Now it is precisely anxiety about existence that characterizes nationalist ideologies, whose fundamental premise is always that 'a' nation, bounded and distinctive, exists. Such anxiety is particularly apparent where national or ethnic groups find themselves in a struggle for recognition, seeking either national sovereignty or equal rights within a larger polity. Thus, to give some examples from 19th century Europe, we find Mazzini asserting that 'The [Italian] nation has not as yet existed; therefore, it must exist in the future.' And Renan: 'The existence of a nation is a plebiscite of every day, as the existence of the individual is a perpetual affirmation of life.' And Hyde: 'this failure of the Irish people ... has been largely brought about by the race ... ceasing to be Irish without becoming English' (all quoted in Kohn 1965: 119, 139, 147). All such rhetoric, which seeks to prove the existence of a nation, will proceed to define

the cultural and historical substance or attributes upon which national existence can be said to rest; and though there are differing theories concerning which attributes are most potent in the constitution of nationality, all look to the existence of such socio-historical facts as proof of national being.

In this short article may I now make a large leap from nationalism to anthropology, and claim that anthropologists construct the 'cultures' they study in similar fashion, by describing the cultural substance or social facts that will establish the existence of the cultures they enclose within the covers of their monographs. Moreover, for both anthropologists and nationalists, authenticity is a function of what has been called 'possessive individualism' (Macpherson 1962), a dominant variant of modern ideology, whose most persuasive early proponent is Locke, and which makes individual existence dependent upon the possession of private property. Here we should contrast Rousseau's general critique of the fundamental insincerity of social life to Tocqueville's more pointed analysis of social mobility and materialism in 'democratic', or modern, society. Tocqueville argued that an egalitarian social order gives rise to a mad scramble for upward mobility in which people seek the appearance of wealth and high status by obtaining material possessions which are, as we would say today, cheap imitations of luxury items. 'The hypocrisy of virtue', Tocqueville said, 'is of every age, but the hypocrisy of luxury belongs more particularly to the ages of democracy' (1835: v.2, 53).

In the ideology of possessive individualism, the existence of a national collectivity depends upon the 'possession' of an authentic culture; as people told me in Quebec, where I learned about nationalist ideology, 'we are a nation because we have a culture' (Handler 1985b). And an authentic culture is one original to its possessors, one which exists only with them: in other words, an independently existent entity, asserting itself (to borrow Cassirer's words) against all other cultures.

In modern society, the temple of authenticity is the museum, where we display the objects or pieces of culture that stand for the cultures of their possessors-creators. We have fine-arts museums to represent our own culture, which we consider to be a 'high' culture, and ethnographic museums to represent the less advanced cultures of others. Trilling points out that modern art is required, not to please, as in earlier aesthetic theories, but to provide its audience with examples of authenticity: 'As for the audience, its expectation is that through its communication with the work of art, which may be resistant, unpleasant, even hostile, it acquires the authenticity of which the object itself is the model and the artist the personal example' (p100). Contact with authentic pieces of culture in museums or, better, the possession of such objects in private collections, allows us to appropriate their authenticity, incorporating that magical proof of existence into what we call our 'personal experience'. For those who cannot stomach art, or afford it, there is always the ethnic restaurant, where we can physically ingest the authenticity of others in order to renew our own.

In summary, the concept of 'authenticity' is as deeply embedded in anthropological theory as it is in the self-conscious ethnic ideologies of many of the groups that we study. Our critical awareness of 'authenticity' will help us to bring new perspectives to bear on the study of others, and on ourselves studying others.

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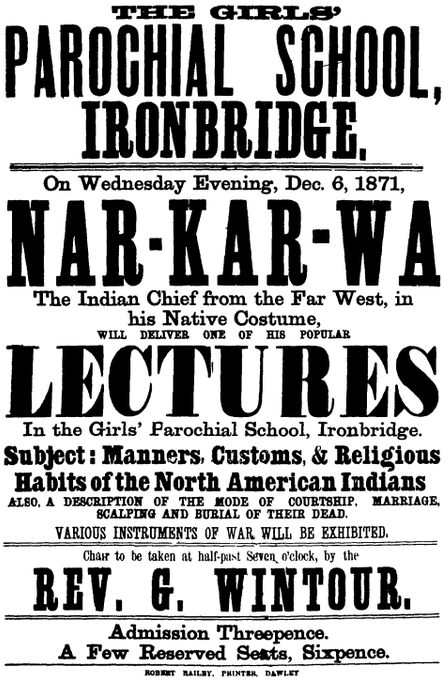
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