LIFE HISTORY AND UNDERSTANDING PERSONAL MEANINGS

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PERSONAL MEANINGS

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to examine why it is important to study an individual in his culture. A hermeneutical perspective then is offered as an example of one way in which an ethnographer may collect life history materials from a native person. Next, this hermeneutical perspective is developed as an interpretive scheme, the criteria of its uses are explored and then applied in a reinterpretation of Radin's presentation of Crashing Thunder, a Winnebago Indian. Consideration is given to how he used the life history form.

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CHAPTER I

HERMENEUTICS AND ANTHROPOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is twofold; first, I
will outline what is to be presented in this thesis, and
second, I will discuss the topic of hermeneutics and its
place in anthropology. Before entering into a discussion
using a terminology that may be foreign to many I introduce
a working definition of the concept of hermeneutics and
some of the related terms. I also provide a brief history
of hermeneutics, including some of its uses in anthropology.

Outline

Anthropological interests at the level of ethnology
normally have concentrated on the domains of culture and
society. However, when anthropologists turned to such
topics as meaning, thought, personal motives and adjustments,
beliefs and psychological variables that form the lives of
individuals, they did not turn simultaneously to an interest
in the individual qua individual, but to individuals as
model representations of cultures (Radin 1933; Sapir 1937).
In the main, emphasis on the specific individual was given
only lip service. Luckily, there have been important and

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notable exceptions to this state of affairs. Radin (1927;
1933), Sapir (1937) and, more recently, Hallowell (1955)
have made important contributions to an anthropology that
provides an understanding of the individual in his
culture.[1]

Each of these men has, in his own way, forged new
directions for anthropologists in their study of the
individual in culture. In my second chapter I will
provide a format for looking at the individual and in
doing so I rely heavily on the works of these men. First
I want to show that it is important to study the individual
in culture. What is to be gained by taking a position
that, as a focus of interest, stresses and highlights
specific individuals and specific events and not culture
per se? While the place and the context for the individual
is his culture, how does he actively participate in,
creatively act upon and adjust to it?

In my third chapter I attempt to answer these
questions by discussing one of a number of ways in which
an individual may be studied: the life history. Life
histories have traditionally been used to explicate the
events that make up an individual's life and the meaning
he gives to experience, actions and events.[2] I form a
context for life history, by suggesting the steps that an
ethnographer should be aware of when he works with an
individual of a particular culture. In this regard, I
propose an individual-oriented modification of the hermeneu-

tical approach and indicate what it might look like. I will also indicate how it can give to ethnography a self-reflective and interpretive setting for looking at and understanding the meaning of events in the life of a particular individual.

In chapter four I bring Crashing Thunder, the major figure in Radin's (1926; 1963) life history of a Winnebago person, into an interpretive scheme. I also attempt a reinterpretation of his life. Primarily I hope to provide an understanding of the meaning Crashing Thunder gives to certain actions and experiences in his life. To do this, I will have to indicate how an individual-oriented hermeneutics can be used to provide an interpretive context to Crashing Thunder's life events. I will show how Radin was contributing, by the nature of his focus on the subject matter, to a hermeneutic motion that opens to interpretation and mediation the life events of Crashing Thunder. Similarly, I will need to indicate how my reinterpretation of the meanings that Crashing Thunder gives to his life events is, indeed, hermeneutical. Lastly I will lay out his life events in a manner that sheds light on four major "critical turnings" in his life (Mandelbaum 1973:5). As I describe the major events that make up and effect his life I will also provide an interpretation of their meanings and significance.

The last chapter will be a summary and end comment in which I will attempt to summarize my thinking about

life history and the individual in culture.

My thesis is that the individual-oriented hermeneutic that I develop constitutes a useful and insightful contribution to the anthropological understanding of an individual in culture.

Hermeneutics

Hirsch (1976:18) explains that in Greek mythology the word hermeneutics "suggests a sacred origin, being cognate with Hermes, the messenger of the gods." The term "hermeneutics" comes from the Greek hermeneuo, I interpret, or I make clear (Gauld and Shotter, 1977:5). According to Hirsch (1976:18) "Hermes is the mediator between gods and men." In other words, he translates their infinite words into finite, the divine spirit into a sensible image. Everything that belongs to the realm of understanding may be attributed to him (Hirsch 1976:18). There is a similar sacred association with the Latin interpretatio, "and indeed the word interpres, meaning interpreter or mediator, is a normal epithet for Mercury, the Roman version of Hermes (Ibid. 1976:19).

In 1761 Friedrich Schleiermacher asserted that hermeneutics as the art of interpretation and understanding did not yet exist as a general discipline. It was Schleiermacher who introduced the discipline of "general hermeneutics" to the world. Before him hermeneutics was

almost the exclusive property of biblical interpreters.
There were, instead, only a plethora of special hermeneutics.
He criticized the procedure common up to that time of
using recognized disciplines like philology, theology and
philosophy to construct a view of textual interpretation
(Palmer 1969:154). Schleiermacher renounced this technique
and in its place he argued the need for starting with a
theory of the process of understanding. Hence Schleier-
macher's project of a "general hermeneutics" was born.
For him this was not a movement towards constructing a
universal methodology of interpretation, but rather a
movement toward describing the "fundamental operations of
understanding in both their mechanical and divinatory
aspects" (Palmer 1969:155). He rejected as outside
hermeneutics the science of explanation, for hermeneutics
is not the science of explanation but of understanding.
The aim is not for the formation of more precise methods
of explanation, but for the creation of the conditions
which enable understanding in dialogue to occur. This is
a matter of interpretation and not a matter of cleverly
managing the functions of explication. Clearly Schleier-
macher's contribution was to provide a new vision of the
phenomenon of interpretation itself.

Although many scholars still debate issues
concerning Schleiermacher's "general hermeneutics", other
more contemporary issues have come to command attention.
While a number of these issues touch upon different aspects

of this thesis, I believe another time and place may be more appropriate to discuss them. However, I will mention one important issue that cannot be neglected.

Modern debate in hermeneutics has again centered itself around the problem of authorial interpretation versus the interpretation of what a text says via an interpreter's reading of it. The argument for authorial interpretation as the only valid interpretation began with Schleiermacher, was kept alive by Dilthey and is carried on by E. P. Hirsch, who is one of today's leading exponents of the position. Of course there are many others who hold to this position. I mention these three men only as a way of indicating a trend. The other side is represented by Gadamer, Ricoeur, and a number of literary critics and writers including N. Fry, T. S. Eliot, and E. Pound (c.f. Hirsch 1976).

Briefly, the former argue that the identification of the meaning of a text or the meaning of human actions and experience must lie with the subjective interpretations of its author (Linge 1976:xiii). Similarly the text or, as the case may be, the meaningful actions of a person, must refer to and represent somebody's meaning and to banish the original author as determiner of meaning constitutes a rejection of a normative principle that is one of the only means of validating the interpretation (Hirsch 1967).

The latter argue, and this is the position that
I hold throughout this thesis, that understanding and
interpretation are "not reconstruction but mediation"
(Linge 1976:xvi). In other words, as Gadamer argues,
emphasis must be put on the interpreter's position in
the process of understanding. If this is acknowledged
then it becomes

> ...important to recognize that the
> hermeneutical phenomenon encompasses
> both the alien [world] that we strive
> to understand and the familiar world
> that we already understand (Linge
> 1976:xii).

In every case of interpretation the hermeneutical aspects
of it have to do with bridging the gap between the
familiar world in which the interpreter stands and the
meaning that resists assimilation into our own world.

Essentially Gadamer argues that the familiar
world of the interpreter is an integral part of the event
of understanding but, so also, are the procedures by
which the interpreter begins to assimilate the object of
study. The interpreter's recognition of this latter fact
constitutes an acknowledgement of his "own immediate
participation in traditions that are not themselves the
object of understanding but the condition of its occurrence
(Linge 1976:xii). This is the reflexive dimension of
understanding that has been ignored by those who argue for
a strictly authorial interpretation. Understanding, then,

>...is essentially a self-transposition
>or imaginative projection whereby the
>knower negates the...distance that
>separates him from his object and becomes
>contemporaneous with it (Linge 1976:xiv).

Gadamer's ideas are introduced here only as an entree into use of the word hermeneutics in this thesis. It is maintained here that the interpreter's own present situation is already constitutively involved in any process of understanding. Similarly, the interpreter's own pre-understanding (vorverständnis; the presuppositions and preconceptions to a knowledge about and a full, appreciative understanding of something) do not cut him off from the past, present or future of a text or a person's activities. Instead, the interpreter's own self-reflection, self-criticism and constant questioning of such pre-understanding as well as his position vis-a-vis the person with whom he converses, open that person's activities to his interpretation. As he questions and delves further into the person's activities he begins to affirm an intelligible juxtaposition of his own place and history with that of the other person and the phenomena being questioned. This is the basis of an intersubjective merging of interpreter (ethnographer) and (native) person.

Ricoeur takes this argument one step further and defines, as Rabinow does, the problem of hermeneutcs as "the comprehension of self by the detour of the comprehension of other" (Ricoeur in Rabinow 1977:5). Rabinow (1977: 6) suggests that

> The self being discussed is perfectly
> public, it is neither the purely cerebral
> cogito of the Cartesians, nor the deep
> psychological self of the Freudians.
> Frather it is the culturally mediated and
> historically situated self which finds
> itself in a continuously changing world
> of meaning.

This process of comprehension is the basis to a very general model of the development of knowledge called the "hermeneutic circle"[3] which is derived from the idea of hermeneutics as the "technique of understanding" (Radnitzky 1970:2,23). Radnitzky also suggests that it should be thought of as a spiral rather than a complete circle. In other words the development of knowledge is through a "tacking" process or a dialectical process which presupposes some foreknowledge about the object of study.[4] For example, what happens when an ethnographer begins to ask questions of and gets answers from a person of a culture within which he is doing fieldwork? Rabinow (1977:38-39) has aptly described how such an encounter is part of a dialectical process. While doing fieldwork in Morocco, Rabinow and an informant discussed a curing ceremony the former had just finished observing. I will quote Rabinow at length, primarily because this is one of a very few written accounts that speak explicitly of the ethnographic process as being a dialectical one.

Rabinow (1977:38) begins by indicating what kind of an effect this curing ceremony had on him.

As I began to question Ali about the
curing, my scientific categories were
modified--I understood more about curing,
its tacit assumptions, modes of action,
and limits--but my common-sense world was
also changed. I knew no curers in
New York. Thus the first time I witnessed
activities like this one they required
greatly heightened attention on my part;
they focussed and dominated my conscious-
ness. But as the fieldwork progressed and
I witnessed such performances a number of
times, I began to take them largely for
granted. They increasingly became part of
my stock of knowledge, part of my world.
Ali's curing activity no longer jolted my
consciousness, and I was free to focus
elsewhere.

Rabinow also provides information as to the effect

that this particular curing ceremony had on Ali as well as

on himself, as he found himself becoming further involved

in his relationship with the ethnographer. He (1977:38-39)

continues:

This highlighting, identification, and
analysis also disturbed Ali's usual patterns
of experience. He was constantly being
forced to reflect on his own activities
and objectify them. Because he was a good
informant, he seemed to enjoy this process
and soon began to develop an art of pre-
senting his world to me. The better he
became at it, the more we shared together.
But the more we engaged in such activity,
the more he experienced aspects of his own
life in new ways. Under my systematic
questioning, Ali was taking realms of his
own world and interpreting them for an
outsider. This meant that he, too, was
spending more time in this liminal, self-
conscious world between cultures. This is
a difficult and trying experience--one
could almost say it is "unnatural"--and
not everyone will tolerate its ambiguities
and strains.

Rabinow (1977:38-39) summarizes by suggesting that

This was the beginning of the dialectic
process of fieldwork. I say dialectic
because neither the subject nor the
object remain static....with Ali there
began to emerge a mutually constructed
ground of experience and understanding,
a realm of tenuous common sense which was
constantly breaking down, being patched
up, and re-examined, first here, then there.

This examination, although grounded in and
constantly mediated by everyday experience
of this new sort, is governed for the anthro-
pologist by his professional concerns.
Ultimately this constitutes his commitment;
this is why he is there. For the informant,
it is a more practical affair, both in the
sense that we can assume that his motivations
are primarily pragmatic and in the sense
that he is developing a practical art of
response and presentation.

As time wears on, anthropologist and
informant share a stock of experiences
upon which they hope to rely with less
self-reflection in the future. The common
understanding they construct is fragile and
thin, but it is upon this shaky ground that
anthropological inquiry proceeds.

Fieldwork is a dialectic between reflection
and immediacy. Both are cultural constructs.
Our scientific categories help us to recog-
nize, describe, and develop areas of inquiry.
But one cannot engage in questioning and
redefining twenty-four hours a day. The
scientific perspective on the world is hard
to sustain. In the field there is less to
fall back on; the world of everyday life
changes more rapidly and dramatically than
it would at home. There is an accelerated
dialectic between the recognition of new
experiences and their normalization.

From what I have said in this chapter and from
what Rabinow has stated, I suggest that for the ethnographer,
hermeneutics is an intersubjective, shared understanding

about the actual and possible meaning of events in the lives of people. But hermeneutics is not just that, for such a definition leaves the whole process somewhat static. There is also a movement or a motion involved that gives the process a dynamic and this comes with what Steiner (1975:296) calls "the act of elicitation and appropriative transfer of meaning" (my emphasis); a "hermeneutic motion."

Concerning my use and understanding of a "hermeneutic motion", I think that it is fair to claim that the "appropriate transfer of meaning" is shaped out of four distinct but interconnected processes. In this thesis the first process I speak of is moulded out of the primary conversations between a native person and the ethnographer. From this fieldwork experience the second process finds its impetus; fieldwork experience is transformed into a conversation between the ethnographer, the wealth of detailed information he has collected and the mainstream of theory in anthropology.

There is a peculiar reversal that exists between the "transfer of meaning" which defines both of these processes. Rabinow (1977:4-5) explains it as follows:

> ...as graduate students we are told that
> 'anthropology equals experience'; you are
> not an anthropologist until you have the
> experience of doing it. But when one
> returns from the field, the opposite
> immediately applies: anthropology is not
> the experiences which made you an initiate,
> but only the objective data you have

brought back...under no circumstances is
there any direct relation between field
activity and the theories which lie at
the core of the discipline...[many still]
cling to the key assumption that the
field experience itself is basically
separable from the mainstream of theory in
anthropology--that the enterprise of
inquiry is essentially discontinuous from
its results.

The reversal is another aspect of this thesis.

Fabian (1971b:230) suggests that

> ...the task of 'observation' is not a
> mere recording of givens: it is possible
> only through participation in the process
> of their production. In other words, it
> is entirely dependent on an intersubject*ve*
> field of communication between fieldworker
> and observed (my emphasis).

From this we can gain an important insight. The "things"

anthropology "studies are not primarily products or

objects, but production, process" (Fabian 1971b:230).

Rabinow (1977:5) argues "that fieldwork is a distinctive

type of cultural activity, and that it is this activity

which defines the discipline." If this is true then the

strength of the discipline must lie in its experiential

and hence self-reflective and self-critical activity. This

activity is constant both while the ethnographer is in the

field and at home.

The third process in the "transfer of meaning" is

exemplified in my reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder's

life. It consists of an analysis of the life history

form, a concentration on my selection and arrangement of

the events in Crashing Thunder's life and an analysis of
how I can use such material in an hermeneutical reinterpre-
tation of the events in Crashing Thunder's life.

There is a fourth process for which the "appropria-
tive transfer of meaning" has relevance. Few anthropolo-
gists have actually considered it in any explicit detail.
When the researcher has finished writing his ethnography,
a conversation is created between the informant(s)-ethno-
grapher on the one hand and the reading audience on the
other. From this conversation there develops a transfer of
meaning which is reflected in the interpretation that goes
on between the intention of the text and those who read it.

My thesis is relative to a particular audience.
That is, as a writer, I do not attempt to remove every
possible block to every possible audience's understanding
of this text. Inasmuch as I am reinterpreting for a
particular audience the life history of Crashing Thunder,
the substance of my reinterpretation is limited and so,
correspondingly, is its validity or correctness. It is,
then, not the exclusive valid reinterpretation, but one
of a number of valid reinterpretations. Another reinter-
pretation--especially one worked out at another time, and
so for another audience, and so clarifying other problems
and having another content--might be equally valid or
correct.

It must be remembered that the verification of the
validity of an interpretation takes place in human

intelligence and nowhere else. All verification, including that of empirical science, takes place here. But how do I know that my reinterpretation is correct and valid? By reflective critique. The more reflective, comprehensive and exigent my critique of the conditions I have set down for reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder's life history, the more independent my verification. If I am only half critical in my reinterpretive insights, if I am indulgent rather than constantly critical and tough-minded toward them, my readers may well find my reinterpretation vulnerable.

To reiterate: interpretation or reinterpretation, as the case may be, is verified nowhere but in human intelligence, there being no higher, or more final court of appeal. It would be mistaken, however, to suppose that this makes the verification subjective, unreliable, indecisive. If such were the case, it would hold for the verification of empirical scientific hypotheses, as well; something few are inclined to admit.

Throughout this thesis I address myself to the problems surrounding the first three processes. The fourth process is one which I only mention in passing. The interaction that is created between the native person and ethnographer and similarly between the ethnographer and his collected information is also mirrored in the relationship between the reader of this thesis and the text itself. The first process I speak of is dyadic, shaped out of the field experience between the ethnographer

and native person. The whole of chapter three deals with this situation. The second process is the merging of the field experience and the mainstream of anthropological theory. How can we as ethnographers find an interpretive scheme which does as little violence as possible to the understanding of events that make up a person's world and his interpretation of them? This and my own reinterpretation of the life history of a specific person are the subjects that I address myself to in the fourth chapter. This provides a third process, a process of my active participation in the reinterpretation of the meaning of events in Crashing Thunder's life. The fourth process is tied in with meaning at yet another level of abstraction. It is made up of an interpretive presentation of text directed at the reading audience.

The goal of this thesis is to draw the first three processes to points of intersection. Each chapter depends on what comes after it. In other words, each process must be considered a step and as such a part of a larger motion in which each step is retained but transformed in the one that follows. Subsequently, this work must be looked at as a whole. Each process in the interpretation of a person's life takes place as one proceeds through the work. The intersections of these processes combine to construct a bridge from the ethnographer and the native person to the ethnography to my reinterpretation and finally to the mind of the reader. I outline a movement from the doing of

fieldwork and the reflective and critical experiences of the ethnographer and native person, to the ethnographer's interpretations and final written accounts, to my analysis of those accounts, through to the reader's own interpretations of this text. Together these processes create a constantly transforming and personally mediated hermeneutic motion.

To my knowledge Evans-Pritchard was one of the first anthropologists to propose generally to the discipline an hermeneutical approach. Although he did not explicitly suggest the role of an hermeneutical perspective until 1973, shades of this approach may be found throughout his work (see Evans-Pritchard 1956, 1960:15-16, 20-21; 1962; 1965a; 1965b; 1973). Similarly, others have considered his work to be hermeneutical (see Horton and Finnegan 1973:31-35; Preston 1975a:256; Scholte 1975:256).

Fabian (1971a; 1971b), Diamond (1974), Scholte (1974) and Watson-Franke and Watson (1975) have outlined the various aspects of the philosophical foundation and reflection as well as some of the methodological and theoretical issues behind an anthropology that incorporates hermeneutics. Geertz (1976) has also discussed hermeneutics and incorporated it into his work. Unfortunately Geertz does not clearly define nor present his use of Dilthey's hermeneutic circle. His use of the concept remains, at best, vague because he, like many phenomenologists, does

not distinguish his "materials into distinct, although
mutable, levels of action, degrees of significance, and
kinds of importance as do most anthropologists" (Boon
1978:363). Rabinow (1977) presents yet a different but
more concise use of the concept of hermeneutics. He
explicitly sets out to present a picture of the hermeneutical
elements of the fieldwork setting. These elements are
applied when he incorporates them into his reflections of
Moroccan life, as I have already shown.

It has been only recently, within the last ten
years, that philosophical concerns surrounding the
hermeneutical dialogue have entered into anthropology as
a social science. The use of hermeneutics in anthropology
began with an emphasis on translation and interpretation
and a subsequent questioning of the issue of understanding.
Those aspects of understanding that are central to this
hermeneutical dialogue surrounded the ethnographer's
understanding of the native person, his society and culture,
and through this process coming to better understanding of
his own role and position in the elicitation of social,
cultural and individual meanings central in the life of
the native person. This includes an investigation into the
epistemological and methodological foundations of anthro-
pology. It also includes the construction of a type of
understanding via description and interpretation through
the fieldwork experience that incorporates the ethnographer's
position in the creation of his work.

Footnotes

[1]There are others who have been interested in the place of the individual in anthropological studies. For example, Dollard (1949), Kluckhohn (1945), Dyk (1938, 1947), Opler (1969), Mandelbaum (1973) are but a few notable examples. A simple reading of Langness' (1965) bibliography will provide a large number of other references.

[2]Throughout this thesis I will use the pronoun he or the term man when I refer to people of either sex. I do this intentionally for the sake of maintaining simplicity and clarify in this discourse. When the pronoun he or himself is used to refer to both sexes I mean he/she or himself/herself etc.

[3]Hirsch (1976:5) suggests that Dilthey first used the concept of the hermeneutic circle and Heidegger picked it up from him. Heidegger used it in arguing against Husserl's ideas of the phenomenological bracketing of experience. As Hirsch (1976:4-5) explains

> ...Husserl posited a number of functions
> of our minds which permitted psychology to
> overcome psychologism. He posited the mental
> function of intentionality, and he posited
> the mind's capacity to 'bracket' a domain
> of experience so that the domain could be
> contemplated over time. "Bracketing, then,
> is a simplified, visual metaphor for our ability
> to demarcate not only a content but also the
> mental acts which we attend to that content,
> apart from the rest of our experience. This
> demarcation...alone assures the potential
> sameness of objects in experience over time."

> For Heidegger, Husserl's ideas pertaining
> to bracketing suggested an excessively
> abstracted cognitive model that left out of
> account the fullness of the experienced life
> through which we know something in the world.
> So in place of brackets, Heidegger took as his
> model a more expansive epistemic form: the
> circle, the hermeneutic circle as expounded
> by Dilthey...The hermeneutic circle is based
> on the paradox that we must know the whole
> in a general way before we know a part,
> since the nature of the part as such is
> determined by its function in the larger

whole. Of course, since we can know a whole
only through its parts, the process of
interpretation is a circle...But since
we must in some sense pre-know a whole
before we know a part, every experience is
pre-constituted by the whole context in which
it is experienced. On this model, it is
<u>impossible</u> to bracket off one part of
experience and separate it from the whole
of experienced life. What we know at any
time is "pre-conceptually" known and consti-
tuted by the whole of our world, and since
that world changes in time, so must the
objects (for us) change which that world
pre-constitutes. The "artificial" brackets
have been swept away, and replaced with the
fulness of lived experience.

[4]By dialectical I mean a process that has to do
with partially unresolvable oppositions. Every individual
has his own field of vision, a horizon. It includes all
that he is aware of and it overlaps at least in part with
the field of vision of others. But the fields of vision
of two individuals from different cultures may oppose
each other's common sense world; what one might find true
the other false; what for one is good the other bad. To
the extent that such opposition cannot be cleared away by
appeal to further evidence, the opposition is dialectical
and to uncover such oppositions is the work of dialectic.

CHAPTER II

PERSONAL DYNAMICS AND MEANING: A CASE FOR
INDIVIDUALS IN CULTURE

Introduction

Few investigators have, in the final analysis,
succeeded in the effort to get behind their ethnographic
information in order to grasp and expand upon the signi-
ficance to the informant of objects, meanings and events
that are important to the understanding of the cultural
contexts of personal and interpersonal patterns of active
participation, creative formation, adjustment and the
associated aspects of emotional dynamics. Consequently,
many investigators have failed to understand or even to
perceive the importance of the world of meanings, ideas
and feelings that an individual abstracts from his inter-
actions with other people and with the physical world as
he conceives of it. For every individual there is the
necessity of a particular and partially distinctive kind
of psychological structuralization. This is characterized
by an integration between, on the one hand, active
participation in and adjustment to a physical world of
objects, persons and events, and on the other, to an "inner"

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world of fantasy, imagination and impulse (Hallowell 1955: viii).

I am interested, in this chapter, in the means to the accurate understanding of an individual's representation of experience with relation to the cultural contexts within which he operates.

The object of this chapter, therefore, is first, to formulate some of the lineaments of the relationships that characterize personal and cultural experience, and second, to ascertain some of the relationships between the active participation of a person in the formation of a meaningful world and the cultural adjustments he makes. How do these combine to structure an individual's perception of his world? As an extension of both of these points, I will argue throughout this chapter that an individual does not merely react, adjust or respond to his culture but that he also imaginatively, creatively and actively participates in the shaping and formation of a meaningful world, through his interactions with other individuals. Hopefully the frame of reference that emerges will provide a better understanding of the personal significances and interpersonal community that influence a person's relation-ship with his natural and behavioural worlds. There is very real damage done to our understanding of culture when we systematically ignore the individual and the kinds of subjective interrelationships he creates with other

individuals. To re-evaluate culture with this in mind is to bring culture patterns back to the living context from which they have been abstracted in the first place. (Sapir 1949:592)

The Individual and Culture

Sapir (1937:865) asks the question, in an article discussing some of the contributions of cultural anthropology to an understanding of human behaviour in society;

> When all is said and done, and in spite of the enormous documentation of the cultures of primitive groups, how easy is it to get even an inkling, in... psychological terms, of the tempo, the relative flexibility, the individual variability, the relative openness or hiddenness of individual expression, the characteristic emotional qualities, which are implied or 'carried' by even the most penetrating cultural analyses that we possess of primitive communities? It seems unexpectedly difficult to conjure up the image of live people in intelligibly live relationships located within areas defined as primitive. The personalities that inhabit our ethnological monographs seem almost schizoid in their unemotional acceptance of the heavy colors, tapestries, and furniture of their ethnological stage. Is it any wonder that actors so vaguely conceived, so absent-mindedly typical of something or other, can be bludgeoned by a more persistent intelligence than theirs into sawing wood for still remoter stages, say that dread drama of the slain father and the birth of totemism?

Sapir explains further that instead of arguing from a supposed objectivity of culture to the problem of individual variation, we must instead proceed in the

opposite direction.

> We shall have to operate as though we know
> nothing about culture but were interested
> in analyzing as well as we could what a
> given number of human beings accustomed to
> living with each other actually think and do
> in their day to day relationships. We shall
> then find that we are driven...to the
> recognition of certain permanencies in a
> relative sense, in these interrelationships,
> permanencies which can reasonably be counted
> on to perdure but which must also be recog-
> nized to be eternally subject to serious
> modification of form and meaning with the
> lapse of time and with those changes of
> personnel which are unavoidable in the
> history of any group of human beings (Sapir
> 1949:574).

The task in anthropology, as Sapir (1937:870) conceives

of it, is to "translate social and cultural terms into

that intricate network of personalistic meanings which

is the only conceivable stuff of human experience." Any

successful contribution to social or cultural analysis

will begin only when we start to "reveal the intricate

symbolic network which binds individuals together into

collectivities" (Sapir 1937:862). In other words, we

must concern ourselves with how a specific

> ...culture lends itself to the ceaseless
> need of the individual personality for
> symbols of expression and communication
> which can be intelligently read by one's
> fellow-men on the social plane, but
> whose relative depth or shallowness of
> meaning in the individual's total economy
> of symbols need never be adequately
> divined either by himself or by his neighbor.
> It should be [our] aim...to uncover just
> such meanings as these (Sapir 1937:868).

Subsequently, if culture is to have

> ...psychological meanings that are more
> than superficial, we shall have to recog-
> nize as many effective cultures as there
> are individuals to be 'adjusted' to the one
> culture which is said to exist 'out there'
> and to which we are supposed to be able to
> direct the telescope of our intelligent
> observatory (Sapir 1937:869).

Appropriately enough, anthropologists have emphasized the social group and its traditions in culture in contradistinction to individual variation of behaviour. They have aimed at discovering the generalized forms of activity and thought which constitute the culture of a community. But many times the conceptions of culture that are created provide the image of the individual as more or less a passive carrier of tradition or as a person who acts out the modes of behaviour which are inherent within the structure and tradition of a given culture. If the statements of an individual are recorded as such, then they assume the individual's typicality for the community as a whole. Hallowell (1951:165) argues that this is "the myth of the passivity of the perceiver" and it should be disposed of. This of course related precisely to the supposed "givenness" of culture. Together these are the most serious obstacles to a more competent understanding of the nature of culture and its relationship to the individual personality.

Culture, for those who assume that the individual

is a passive perceiver typical of his community, becomes
a self-contained 'superorganic' reality with forces and
purposes of its own. For example, Kroeber's notion of
the superorganic and his lack of interest in the person
in culture (see: Kroeber 1952:233-234), led him to
classify whole cultures by patterns or configurations of
traits, artifacts and quantities. Kroeber's method is an
eclectic mix of intuition and quantification. He believed
that "ethnology was a natural science whose subject matter
was composed of discrete, isolable, and objectively
determined elements, which could be traced and categorized
on their own terms..." (Diamond 1971:xxxiv). This
obviously does violence to any attempt to focus on the
interactions of individuals as the true locus of culture.

Similarly, Geertz (1973:5,12-16) warns us not to
fall into the trap of thinking that culture is most
effectively treated purely as a symbolic system---in its
own terms. In other words we should not think that culture
can best be treated by isolating its elements, specifying
the internal relationships among those elements and then
characterizing the whole system in some general way
according to the core symbols around which it is organized.
This will not get us any closer to the interworked
system of symbols and a contextual "web of significances"
within which objects and events may be interpreted. "This
hermetical approach to things seems to...run the danger...

of locking cultural analysis away from its proper object, the informal logic of actual life" (Geertz 1973:17).

Similarly, the recent majority of cognitive anthropologists continue to talk about the cognitive organization of phenomena divorced from events themselves as they are integrated with other events, feelings, and motivations. For the cognitive anthropologist, events are not to be integrated with the more refined and subtle context of understanding and interpretation that includes meaning, feelings, and motivation, since such contexts cannot be accounted for by the formal (normative) description of the phenomena per se, or in the principles underlying their taxonomic classification. Cognitive anthropologists are caught in the bind of their own taxonomies, and culture remains characterized only by an exhaustive enumeration of its parts.

Each of these conceptions of culture (culture as a pattern of conduct or culture as purely a symbolic system) become serious deterrents to the more dynamic study of the genesis and development of cultural patterns and contexts. Culture cannot be realistically disconnected from the organizations of events, ideas and feelings which constitute the ongoing life of an individual (Sapir 1949: 512). The true locus of culture is in the interactions of specific individuals and in the systems of ideas, the world of meanings, motivations and feelings which each of

these individuals may abstract for himself from his participation in these interactions. The logical development of such systems should be viewed as implicit commentaries on the validity or, (as the case may be), the nonvalidity of the more personal and intimate implications of culture patterns for the creative process that have a causal influence upon perception, thought, feeling and action, as well as the personal adjustment processes of given individuals; especially in their perception of the relationships that they share with each other and with their physical world of objects and events.

The method of describing a culture without any reference to the individual except insofar as he is an expression of rigidly defined cultural forms, produces a manifestly distorted picture. Investigators that do so end up applying to culture a type of reasoning that has applicability only in a theory of knowledge or a theory of culture history. Accordingly, they have secondarily individualized a theoretical synthesis, a priori, with insufficient examination of the individual and his acti-vities. The so-called individual in these cases remains excessively abstract. Sapir (1928:77) contends that this process destroys all confidence in the meaning of the concept of 'the individual'. Any attempt to do so would obviously be inadequate to the understanding of the emotional and perceptual dynamics that are a part of an

individual's experience. While missing the relational significances and activities of how an individual actively participates in and adjusts to his behavioural environment and the physical world of objects and events, many investigators miss the more implicit aspects of the relationships that exist between imaginative expressions and their representations in action and experience. They are not concerned with the reflections of personal experience and therefore are less concerned with the way an individual deals with and represents experience.

Sapir (1949:595) suggests that these culturalists should not be frightened of studying the individual nor of using the concept of individual personality. For example, he argues that the individual personality must not be considered as some sort of

> ...mysterious entity resisting the
> historically given culture but rather
> as a distinctive configuration of
> experience which tends always to form
> a psychologically significant unit and
> which, as it accretes more and more
> symbols to itself, creates finally that
> cultural microcosm of which official
> 'culture' is little more than a metaphorically
> and mechanically expanded copy (Sapir 1949:
> 595).

Unfortunately, the metaphor, although alive and well, is seriously misplaced. Those who adhere to it continually try and persuade us that culture is a neatly bundled package of forms of behaviour that are gradually,

piece by piece picked up, but without anything seriously

happening to the package, by the passively questioning

individual (Sapir 1949:596). Sapir (1949:592-593) explains

that those who support this idea of culture "are careful

to maintain objective ideals, abstracted as...these are

from the directly given facts of experience..." Culture,

from this perspective, is the mechanical, normative "sum

of the more striking or picturesque generalized patterns

of behaviour which he [the ethnographer] has either

abstracted for himself out of the sum total of his

observations or has had abstracted for him by his informants

in verbal communication" (Sapir 1949:593). In effect

these abstracted configurations are imposed structures of

what the idea and action patterns are of various individuals

within a society. Sapir (1949:593) argues that

> The cultures so carefully described in our
> ethnological and sociological monographs
> are not, and cannot be, the truly objective
> entities they claim to be. No matter how
> accurate their individual itemization,
> their integrations into suggested struc-
> tures are uniformly fallacious and unreal.

In other words, the description of a culture must

be done in such a way that we feel we are dealing with

real and specific people, with real and specific situations,

and with a real and specific tradition (Radin 1933:177).

If we cannot do this then it is we who end up "giving"

(intellectually imposing on) native individuals their

uniqueness, and that is something fundamentally different.

Radin was always suspicious of what he considered "to be

easily won insights into the most intimate patterns of

native behavior, in the absence of familiarity with the

language, long-term fieldwork, and grounding in the lives

of specific individuals, as distinct from 'generalized'

persons fleshed out from an ethnological skeleton..."

(Diamond 1971:xxxi). Subsequently we must realize that we

> ...are dealing with specific, not
> generalized, men and women, and with
> specific, not generalized events. But
> the recognition of specific men and
> women should bring with it the realiza-
> tion that there are all types of
> individuals and that it is not, for
> instance, a Crow Indian who uttered such
> and such a prayer, but a particular Crow
> Indian. It is particularity that is the
> essence of all history and it is precisely
> this that ethnology has hitherto balked at
> doing (Radin 1933:184-185).

For example, Radin (1914a:211) explains, in his description

of an Ojibwa shaman, that it must be

> ...remembered that success and efficiency
> of individual powers depends not so much
> upon the performance of a rite and the
> attitude of prayer, but upon the individual's
> emotional attitude--the power of...absorption
> while at prayer, in his religious emotion...
> then it will be easily realized how intense
> the religious life of these individuals must
> be...

In effect Radin's approach is a critical reaction

to any approach that robs cultural facts of their validity,

of their humanness, of that specific quality which makes

them imaginative expressions. Accordingly, Sapir (1937:
866) argues that we should not think

> ...of culture in the abstract nor of society
> as a hypothetically integrating concept in
> human relations, but rather of the actual
> day-to-day relations of specific individuals
> in a network of highly personalized needs,
> we must see that culture is the inevitable
> coin of the realm of behavior but that it
> is far from synonymous with those actual
> systems of meaning, conscious and unconscious,
> which we call personalities, and that the
> presumptive psychology of a culture as a
> whole is not equatable with any actual
> personalized psychology. Cultural analysis
> is hardly more than a preliminary bow to
> the human scene, giving us to know that
> here are people, presumably real, and that
> it is here rather than there that we must
> observe them.

Perception and Culture

Hallowell (1951:166) argues that the psychological
field in which all of human behaviour takes place is
culturally constituted, in part, but people's responses
are never reducible in their entirety to the stimuli
derived from an "objective" world. Similarly, the
psychological domain in which any and all of an individual's
behaviour takes place is not reducible to a culturally
constituted behavioural environment. There is a cultural
patterning of perception, and this is one of the most
fundamental aspects of the relationships that exist between
culture and an individual. It is through this patterning
that frames of reference are established as basic to the

objects and events of his physical world. Accordingly, an attempt must be made to conceptually integrate perception with the individual's ability to creatively shape and causally influence the behavioural environment and also recognize that cultural variables embodied changeably in individuals imply different modes of adjustment in different behavioural environments (Hallowell 1951:167).

What becomes perceptually significant to each individual person cannot be considered apart from a continuum that views the human individual as an entity that has the ability to creatively act, shape and adjust as well as being motivated, goal directed, and psychologically structured as a functioning person. From the viewpoint of personal adjustment and motivation, culture has an instrumental function that is coordinate with the function of perception. Accordingly, perception is linked to the complex personal needs which selectively influence culture, so that cultural variables are inevitably but not uniformly nor consistently constituents of human perceptions. Dynamically conceived, then, perception must be considered as one of the basic integral functions of an individual's creative ability to shape and mould his behavioural and physical environments as well as make an ongoing adjustment to them. Essentially what we need to know more about are the relationships that exist between the cultural consti-tuents of perception and the idiosyncratic aspects of the

individual, rooted in the personality structure of the
individual. As I have tried to explain earlier, interest
in cognitive aspects of culture, while necessarily of
importance, has led to an overemphasis upon them and a
concomitant underemphasis upon the relation of perceptual
and emotional processes to the basic aspects of behaviour.
Hallowell (1951:166) argues that

> ...once viewed in its total behavioural
> context perception cannot be isolated from
> action, that is, from motivated and goal-
> oriented behaviour. Consequently, the
> perceptual field of the [individual] must
> be structuralized in a manner that bears
> a direct relation to its activities, no
> matter what these may be.

In actual life situations, perceptual responses
never occur in a behavioural vacuum. Instead, the "goal"
of perception in its broadest sense "is the construction
of a meaningful behavioural environment--an environment
congruent with 'reality' on the one hand and the needs
and dispositions of the organism on the other..." (Hallowell
1951:168). In addition to enabling people to adapt them-
selves to a world of physical objects and events, perception
enables individuals to adjust to a realm of culturally
constituted objects as psychologically "real" as other more
objective, orders of phenomena. Motivation, feelings and
appropriate conduct must be judged with reference to an
order of reality in the contexts of culture patterns.

Consequently, groups of individuals are prepared for quite different patterns of activity through different modes of training and experience, through their orientation to different systems of values and through their motivations toward different needs. What is individually learned in the context of acquired experience in one society as compared with another constitutes an important set of factors with reference to the full understanding and interpretation of the behaviour of those individuals who have received a common preparation for action. The situations that arise in one society might never occur in another and what appears objectively to be the same objective situation is significantly different because its cultural context is very different. For example, Hallowell (1956:356) explains that

> Celestial and meterological phenomena, for example, or the plants and animals of man's habitat, even its inanimate forms never are separated as such from the concepts of their essential nature and the beliefs about them that appear in the ideological tradition of a particular cultural heritage. Man's attitude toward them is a function of their reality as culturally defined not in terms of their mere physical existence. Thus to treat the physical environment in which a people lives, independently of the meaning that its multiform objects have for that people, involves a fundamental psychological distortion if we aim to comprehend the universe which is actually theirs (my emphasis).

An individual's perceptions are not simply
processes by which he adjusts to the world at large.
What is of prime psychological significance is that an
individual does this

> ...(i.e. builds up a meaningful world with
> reference to the accumulated and socially
> transmitted experience of past generations)
> in terms of an organized schema for living
> in which, to some degree, a provincial
> world of articulated objects become defined,
> characteristic values and goals are represented
> and institutionalized means of reaching them
> are emphasized (Hallowell 1951:169).

Many investigators have failed to realize these
more subtle implications of ethnographic interpretation
and in effect they ignore the very information which has
the most important significance, namely the differences
in meaning and in the systems of ideas that similar objects
and events of the phenomenal world have for people of
different cultural traditions. The objects and events
of the external and internal worlds are what constitutes
the reality to which the individuals habituated to a
particular system of beliefs and ideas actually respond to
as meaningfully defined and experienced in a cultural
context. Hallowell (1956:359) suggests that "the tradi-
tionally sanctioned concepts which are reified become real
to the extent that they make demands upon human individuals
in the same manner that physical objects and persons make
demands."

Little emphasis has been put on the fact that the
existence of varying culture patterns carries with it the
psychological implication that the individuals of these
societies actually live in different reality-orders. While
the term reality, as Hallowell (1956:355-356) points out

> ...can scarcely be regarded as having any
> absolute meaning content, unless it be
> used in a metaphysical sense to connote
> the ultimate nature of the phenomenal world
> ...there remains a pragmatic usage of the
> term which is relevant to the comprehension
> of the determinants of human behavior and
> human psychology. Reality in this sense of
> the term does not primarily refer to
> discrete objects or persons as existents.
> The core of its connotations is functional.
> It defines the relations of human beings
> to the objects of their physical environment
> and other men in terms of the meaning and
> practical significance which these have had
> for them.

An individual will tend to interpret particular
objects, events and experiences in a manner which offers
a framework of empirical support to the cultural pattern.
The framework is the psychological counterpart of the
pattern and it is found in the locus of the reality-order
which lies in the relations of individuals acting upon
and adjusting to the culture patterns of their respective
societies. This must be our primary frame of reference
for an understanding of the behaviour of individuals.

Within any particular event, the kind of judgments
that are made, the nature of the discussions arrived at,
and the consequences in terms of motivation and conduct,

are related to both normative and idiosyncratic features.

Consequently, the dynamics of perception are not entirely

clear if we do not approach them in a fashion that

enables us to take account of how the individual acts

upon and adjusts to non-sensory as well as sensory aspects

of his culture. Hallowell (1951:178) suggests, for

example, that

> ...entities that have no tangible or
> material existence may become perceptual
> objects in the actual experience of
> individuals. That is to say, the reality
> of what to outsiders are only symbolically
> mediated and concretely elaborated images
> may receive perceptual support through the
> experiences of individuals for whom such
> entities are reified in an established
> system of traditional beliefs. Under
> these conditions...some persons will not
> only report perceptual experiences involving
> such entities, but will act as if they
> belong in the category of tangible or
> material objects.

Beings of a purely conceptual nature are an example of

intangible entities that are variously admitted to the

culturally influenced order of reality in which people

live. For example, "spiritual beings no more can be

ignored than can one's associates" (Hallowell 1956:359).

Sacred narratives in which spiritual beings play a role,

testify to the belief in their existence as do the more

empirical tokens presented by their appearance in dreams

or in other circumstances defined by the pragmatic realities

with which culture patterns present to individuals. To

treat the physical and behavioural environments in which a

person lives independently of the meaning that their multiform objects and events have for that person, involves a fundamental psychological distortion if our aim is to comprehend the universe which is actually his.

Summary and Conclusions

From a psychological point of view, individuals both creatively act upon and adjust to specific reality-orders, rather than to "reality" per se. Similarly, for the same individual, his beliefs are true and any under-standing of his behaviour must proceed from the premises implicit in his version of reality. Hallowell (1956: 361-362) argues that any interpretation of an individual in culture would be confusing unless first, we are ready to admit the relative connotation of his construction of reality; second, be ready to take different reality-orders at their face value; and third, be able to use them as a primary standard of reference with respect to the conformity or non-conformity of the ideology of individuals to them.

To dismiss all such beliefs of the individual as "imaginary" only averts attention from the influential role which they play in people's behaviour. In stricter psychological terms, such conceptualization, as is produced by the native individual, "involves imaginative processes,

but imagined objects may or may not be reified. Thus to point out that all conceptualized beings are imaginary objects is not equivalent to the assertion that such beliefs embody both imaginary and reified objects" (Hallowell 1956:358). These beliefs, in other words, are the culturally supported substantiations of a system of ideas.

In conclusion, humans have redirected the phylogenetic capacity for modifying the present moment, creating for themselves the self-reflective ability to reference past events and indicate future ones. Human experience is moulded in terms of immediate feeling, awareness and perception, in the conceptualization of past events and in the expectation and prospect of experience yet to enter the immediate sensory field.

Hence, through time, learned and shared responses have become patterned as cultural representations and are passed on from generation to generation. Humans orient themselves by reference to the superorganic information of their culture. Human experience, when placed within a culturally constructed environment, takes on meaning.

Essentially, human experience acquires meanings in a relational manner, that is, through meanings which are culturally patterned and brought into being through a negotiation with the experience of individuals. In other words, the meaning of individual experience is brought

about through an ongoing process of negotiation between
an objective, artifactual, superorganic system of informa-
tion called culture and the individual's possession of
forward movement, or an active, creative reshaping of an
individual's perception, thereby causally influencing
behaviour. "The individual abstracts for himself from
his interactions with other persons and with other
components of his environment" (Preston 1975:13). This
refers to the broader meanings of experience for the
individual that are shaped out of imagination, and
intuitive perception of new relationships, where none were
perceived before. We are dealing with a negotiation of
culturally patterned meanings that find form in an indivi-
dual's active participation within the behavioural and
natural environments and in the content of the creative
acts of his imagination. From this, meaning, feeling,
relations, recognitions, images, etc., play upon and
presume the life experiences of the individual. Cultural
logic is developed using the terms of this experiential
reality. Culturally meaningful relationships, then, are
an image for a reflection of a person's world that is
articulated through his actions and his experience. It
must be remembered, therefore, that not all of a person's
actions, knowledge and attitudes have developed independently;
many of them are not simply spontaneous and individual
expressions. Opler (1943:330) explains that "No matter how

personal in character such funds of knowledge and attitudes are, they resemble and overlap those of other [persons] and can be understood only in relation to the central tendency to which they are more or less adequate reflections." This is what Sapir had in mind when he spoke of the true locus of culture being in the interactions of individuals.

CHAPTER III

LIFE-HISTORY: MEANING AND REFLECTION IN THE PRESENTATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S LIFE

Introduction

Life history is the extensive recorded document of a person's life as it is told by the individual or by another person. It can provide anthropologists with a wealth of detailed information that can be used to emphasize the system of meaning and ideas that form an expressive understanding of an individual's life events and his experience of them. Clearly, it has proven to be one of the best ways of recording the salient facts about persons, including the dynamic and adaptive aspects of life experiences and the patterns of personal knowledge and conduct that make up life in society and culture.

In this chapter I will trace the most important aspects of the use of life histories as an interpretive approach for describing an individual within his culture; to see how a person copes with his culture and society, rather than how his society must cope with the total flow of individuals that compose it. I will include a discussion of the processes of interpretation and understanding

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of events in a person's life and then I will indicate how
both textual and contextual orientations to life history
materials are important aspects of interpretation in
general.

Life History and Hermeneutics

One of the major problems that face students who
want to use the life history form and develop a more
personalized or humanist convention (descriptive technique)
is how to get at a subtle and implicit interpretation and
understanding of the native person involved. I must
address myself, therefore, to the problems inherent in
the task of opening up the hermeneutical dimensions of a
relational, integrative description through the use of a
life history. Accordingly, the basis of my discussion
must turn to an exploration of the character of and
requisite conditions for the interpretation and under-
standing of human events and activities. It is also
important that the ethnographer become familiar with and,
indeed, recognize that he is a part of the process from
which a description, interpretation and understanding of
events emerges. The ethnographer must work in this way
to present the system of meanings and ideas that emerge
from the critical and intersubjective discourse about the
activities and events that make up a person's life as he

presents them in his own life history. The intersubjective
and dialectical relationship that is created between the
ethnographer and the person whose life history is being
recorded must be analyzed. Then the ethnographer may
be able to provide an interpretation of how these relation-
ships help shape an understanding of the life of the
individual; one closer to significance and wisdom because
it is closer to the personal understanding that the
individual himself places upon the activities and events
of his life. It is not an attempt on the part of the
ethnographer to think beyond the person's life, but to
think in response to and act with the individual in his
interpretation of the worlds of meanings, ideas, and
events that make up his life. Both the ethnographer and
individual are involved in a critical and reflective
understanding of the prominence of the meanings of
interrelated events that construct their relationship
and their lives.

Evans-Pritchard (1973:764) called for a closer
examination of the hermeneutic role of the integration of
description when he suggested that

> ...a turning-away from the pursuit of laws,
> whether synchronic (functional) or diachronic
> (evolutionary), will place emphasis on
> meaning rather than on process and hold that
> explanation is no more than exact description
> which bears its own interpretation. It is
> indeed true that 'meaning' is an ambiguous
> term, for what a custom may mean to the
> anthropologist (its latent meaning, or so he

> may think) may not be the same as what
> it meansto the people he is writing about
> (its manifest meaning); and it is
> necessary to present the one in the
> light of the other. Here I want only
> to draw attention to what follows: a
> shift in interests in systems and models
> towards a study of modes of thought,
> symbols, values and sentiments.

This, Evans-Pritchard (1962:26-28) contends, encourages a release from the philosophical dogmas and concepts of natural systems and laws modelled on constructs of the natural sciences and would provide the basis of a "relational analysis". For Evans-Pritchard the meaning of facts do not lie in themselves (where they can be analytically considered but in their interrelationship. The intention of anthropology must reveal this and hence their interrelational meaning (Evans-Pritchard 1960:20-21). To relate these facts to one another in such a way that, taken together, they are intelligible to the ethnographer and the native people, both together and singly, is the basis of an integration of description and the process of understanding through interpretation. This keeps theory at low level of abstraction. But for Evans-Pritchard (1965:34) description and interpretation must come before any scientific theoretical analysis.

This proposition for ethnographic description means that we as anthropologists should become more self-reflective and critical. A major part of this comment deals with the nature of anthropological inquiry as, itself,

a part of a "human praxis". That we subject accepted
anthropological traditions to an hermeneutic mediation
is the major part of how a critical and reflexive anthro-
pology can be created. As Scholte (1974:441-442) suggests,
anthropology urgently needs to take up a dialectical
position,

> ...one in which analytical procedures and
> descriptive devices are chosen and deter-
> mined by reflection on the nature of the
> encountered phenomena and on the nature of
> that encounter...In other words, if we
> assume a continuity between experience and
> reality, that is, if we assume that an
> anthropological understanding of others
> is conditioned by our capacity to open
> ourselves to those others...we cannot and
> should not avoid the 'hermeneutic circle'...
> but must explicate, as part of our activi-
> ties, the intentional processes of constitu-
> tive reasoning which make both encounter and
> understanding possible.

The major question for the anthropologist, then, should
not be how to avoid the hermeneutic circle, but how to
get into it with enough subtlety that we do not damage or
harm any aspect of human understanding.

Theuse of hermeneutics in anthropology (generally
as anthropology deals with interpretation [cf. Rasmussen
1971; Watson-Frank and Watson 1975]) is responsible for
facilitating the understanding of event-situations and
bringing them into a mutual context of understanding for
both the ethnographer and the native person. Understanding
the significance of personal events and their symbolized

content necessarily means a hermeneutical approach. It also demands constant probing to determine whether the techniques used to find meaning are themselves appropriate.

In hermeneutics, as, for example, in Gestalt psychology, the personal life under study always indicates more than the sum of its components (the life events). This relationship between the components and the whole is implicit in the idea of an "inner connectedness". The hermeneutical approach would say that the components (the life events) that make up an individual's life cannot be removed from the total individual life itself without showing characteristics of the whole, since the individual as a whole pervades its attributes, each part affecting the others (Watson-Franke and Watson 1975:249).

The recording of life histories is more than merely an appropriate way of discovering the total value context of an individual's life as it is exemplified in the various events that make up his life. Life history accounts provide potential insight into the relationship between a whole (here an individual's life) and its parts (the experienced events in each life situation). "Every verbal communication...is one life situation...in the context of a whole life, the historical and sociocultural background of which must be known to the listener...if he is to understand the communication" (Watson-Franke and Watson 1975:248).

Consequently, the ethnographer must look at the whole phenomenon in his historical and sociocultural contexts, but he must also integrate a knowledge of its components with himself and the native person through a process of hermeneutical mediation. It is in this way that the ethnographer may begin to understand the life events of the person in which he is interested. Accordingly, hermeneutical interpretations lays bare the false impression that understanding operates strictly within the limited context from which the phenomenon originates.

The hermeneutic circle, therefore, refers to both the relationships that exist between the parts and the whole of any given phenomenon, and to the inner connectedness in the process of understanding. With regard to the combination of these two components of the hermeneutic circle, Watson-Franke and Watson (1975:249) suggest that

> ...it is characteristic for the hermeneutic
> approach to break contexts; it is a dialec-
> tical process of enlarging the contexts of
> experience by working in concentric circles
> away from the original meaning of an event
> into its new context, though the event still
> remains a part of its original context...the
> continuous correction of contexts that
> embraces the complex interplay between
> questions and answers and results in a
> dialectically determined change in our
> pre-understanding.

In other words, the ethnographer already has some kind of knowledge and understanding of the native person

about whom he intends to write (i.e. a pre-understanding).
At the same time he is also restricted and influenced by
the implicit workings of his own socialization; no ethno-
grapher is free of this. A major position concerning
understanding in hermeneutics is that it is neither
possible nor at all desirable for the ethnographer to
step outside of this pre-understanding, to try and derive
an interpretation of the meaning of events in the experience
of a native individual. As a dialectical approach, the
ethnographer's position has to be interpreted into a
communicative event within a context. As Fabian (1971:34)
suggests:

> This should by no means be taken to advocate
> a passive, merely reflective attitude toward
> reality. On the contrary, a dialectical view
> of the constitution of knowledge is always a
> crucial one. It rejects a metaphysical separa-
> tion between subject and object (a separation
> which is implicit in most positivist-pragmatist
> philosophy). Therefore it cannot divide
> scientific activity into data gathering as a
> basically unproblematic part, and theorizing as
> a basically problematical part. Understanding
> based on <u>dialectical epistemology</u> is always
> problem-critical, for the simple reason that
> the first step in constitution of knowledge
> implies a radical reflection on the student's
> involvement in the communicative context to
> which the phenomena under investigation
> belong (my emphasis).

Questioning takes place in the form of a dialogue
which represents an exchange of ideas and actions, verbal
and nonverbal, between the ethnographer and the native
person, and within the ethnographer's own critical thinking

about these events, which in turn takes into consideration,
as well, the character of the questions that are being
asked and the mutual confidence that has developed. The
dialogue bridges the ethnographer's position with that of
the native person's in light of his broadening comprehension
of the phenomenon being studied. Accordingly, the
horizon of meanings, within which phenomena stand, is
approached critically from within both the ethnographer's
and native person's horizons and they do not leave their
own horizons behind, in the interpretive process, but
broaden them so as to merge them with that of the mutual
horizon that is built up around a shared event. This
process is an intrinsic part of an ethnographer's and
native person's experience. If successful, it structures
their conversation and actions into new and less
restrictive forms of understanding that serve to open up the
dimensions of new contexts of inquiry.

I use the term horizon in a manner somewhat
different than philosophers and phenomenologists like
Kuhn (1940) and Schutz (1970). Their use of the term is
most clearly identified with the transforming aspects
of experience of individuals. I am more interested in
the historically situated and culturally mediated indivi-
duals of two different cultures and the meaning they bring
to shared events and their understanding of them.

By horizon I mean a phenomenon characteristic of

all mental experience and cognitive and perceptual effort.
As a way of being able to explain what I mean by the term,
I describe it as having a central core and a circumference.

An individual's horizon has a circumference or a
frame within which all things real and imaginable may
appear. Like the frame of a picture, which forms no
actual part of the picture but helps to contribute to its
wholeness, the frame I speak of is a constructed fringe of
related, at the moment not central, perceptions, feelings,
memories, considerations, expectations, etc. (Schutz,
1970:319). An individual's horizon then is partly a
guiding notion which enables him to reveal "shades" of
meaning cast upon objects, persons and events.

Similarly, there is a horizonal core constructed
out of a mental awareness including perception, thought,
feeling, recollection, problem, expectation, imagination,
etc., that is central to the meaning of experience at a
particular moment. This core is responsible for an event
specific, objectifying act which holds the individual's
attention to it. It is a process which gives both a
mental and a material status to objects and persons as
they become part of the fabric of meaning of a particular
event for the individual. This enables the individual to
proceed from hour to hour and from day to day without
having to reconstruct from scratch his social relations
or personal meanings.

To explore the horizon means that we must investigate the individual's movement away from the core, the limit of one's field of attention and experience, with a view of integrating these in a continually broadening context (Kuhn 1940:107). What is advocated here is the discovery of the meaning of the significance of events for an individual in a context of his culture patterns against the ethnographer's background understanding of the native person in culture. Understanding takes place while contexts are embodied in the merging of horizons and new contexts and a new horizon with new meanings is created.

Hence, by its very nature, every person's horizon is "open". As the individual moves from the core to the circumference of the horizon, objects, events and the actions of people are opened up to various and less reified meanings. This is what happens, for example, when the ethnographer, through the questions he asks, strives to understand a native person and vice versa. Each person's horizon is opened; each is "caught" in a dialogue which will inevitably transform the boundaries of his own horizon and merge it with the other. The creative force which enables the ethnographer to find the questions worth asking, as the native person communicates the events of his life, is a process that involves critical self-reflection on the part of the researcher as the basis for the dialectical dialogue. This is provided through the earlier questions

that were asked and the communicative context that was created. In all respects this is a process that involves a self-reflexive, critical awareness.

Gadamer argues that the basis of the differences between using hermeneutics as a methodological tool ("which promotes sterility") and its use in the pursuit of understanding, is the imagination (Linge 1976:xxii). The ethnographer's capacity to see what is questionable in his subject matter and to be able to formulate questions which query the subject matter further, has much to do with processes of the imagination.

In effect, understanding, in the way Gadamer (1976: 13) conceives of it, does not allow either the ethnographer nor the native person to stand beyond the subject matter. Both ethnographer and native person can speak therefore of having "gotten into" or of having been "caught" in a discussion. The ethnographic endeavour is a grounded epistemological mediation that takes into consideration the crucial situation of ethnographic experience itself. Wolff suggests how fieldwork demands a "catch" and a "surrender" to the ethnographic setting.

> The intimacy of these...acts...entails a
> 'total involvement, suspension of received
> notion, pertinence of everything, and the
> risk of being hurt'...'catch' and 'surrender'
> ...suggest an important epistemological
> priority and unique ontological precondition.
> 'Man, in contrast to all other phenomena in
> the universe, can be done justice to only by
> surrender and catch--or invention--...rather

than by the customary varieties of describing,
defining, or reducing to instances of
generalization...This means that...any
ethnographic encounter demands the observer's
initial (that is premethodological) involve-
ment (Wolff, cited in Scholte 1975:439).

As Gadamer (1976:58) explains, "The real event of under-

standing goes continually beyond what can be brought to

the understanding of the other person's words by

methodological effort and critical self-control. It is

true of every conversation that through it something

different has come to be."

This brings me back to a discussion of contexts of

understanding. Understanding in context must include the

structuring of a dialogue, in the form of questions,

between the ethnographer and the native person, which is

created in such a way that it encourages breaking the

barriers of its own context. A truly creative dialogue

is characterized foremost by an attempt to phrase questions

appropriately to the context of events in a native person's

life that the ethnographer is constantly trying to interpret

and understand. However, this process of grasping the

question posed by the events does not lead to an openness

of a genuine conversation when it is conceived simply in

the scientific isolation of the "original" question, but

only when the ethnographer is provoked enough by the

subject matter to question further in the direction it

indicates. Genuine questioning always involves a laying

open and holding open of possibilities and potentialities that suspend the presumed finality of both the native person's and the ethnographer's current opinions. One can then understand the subject matter of the phenomenon that talks to the ethnographer and native person when they both locate it in their questioning. In their attempt to find ways of answering these questions they are, in their questioning, continually transcending the historical horizon of the phenomenon itself and fusing it with their own horizons, and consequently transforming their horizons.[1]

What is exhibited in this aspect of the hermeneutic circle, in every new achievement of knowledge, is a mediation or refocusing of the past, within a new and expanded context; in other words it is a shift in contexts. This dynamic character of knowledge is at the center of Gadamer's concept of understanding, as a "concrete fusing of horizons" (Linge 1976:xi). This is not absolute knowledge that Gadamer is speaking of, but the moving dialectical life of knowledge that is expressed in the description of what takes place in the merging of horizons.

In summary, it is personal knowledge which makes scientific observation possible in the first place (Polanyi 1960). The task of hermeneutics in ethnographic description is completed by bridging the personal nad historical distances that separate the ethnographer and the native person. The ethnographer's awareness of his own personal

and professional historicity brings with it an openness
to new possibilities and potentialities that are the
preconditions of genuine understanding. The merging of
the ethnographer's horizon with the horizon of the native
person (which takes place during the actual field
experience when the ethnographer is copying out the life
events of the native person which is when they are both
most actively aware of this process), has the potential
to make both of them aware of assumptions (which come out
of critical self-reflection intrinsic in the dialectical
dialogue that emerges out of the questioning that occurs),
so deep-seated in themselves that these assumptions would
otherwise remain unnoticed. This whole process becomes a
dynamic interpersonal experience which throws a reflected
light upon the fundamental conditions that underlie under-
standing in a context. Accordingly, understanding,
partly as a fusion of horizons, provides a concise picture
of what happens in every translation of meaning.

Similarly, questioning in word, gesture and thought
plays a major role in every translation of meaning. This
fusion of horizons, brought about by an interpersonal
relationship that is created by the dialectical dialogue
that ensues, between the ethnographer and the native
person, begins with a common question. In the relationship
between them, the ethnographer learns to translate and
combine the meaning of the native person's experiences into

his realm of experience and vice versa. This whole process requires the use of the imagination because, as such, it is the imagination that is the creative quality that allows for hermeneutical reflection.

Geertz's Suggestion

Geertz argues (1973:13-14) that what prevents researchers

> ...from grasping what people are up to is... a lack of familiarity with the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs ...[this] is what ethnographic research consists of as a personal experience; trying to formulate the basis on which one imagines...We are not...seeking either to become natives...or to mimic them...We are seeking, in the widened sense of the term ...which...encompasses very much more than talk, to converse with them...Looked at in this way, the aim of anthropology is the enlargement of the universe of human discourse... But it is an aim to which a semiotic concept of culture is peculiarly well adapted (my emphasis).

He argues for a textual, interpretive approach to the description of social activities, but the "texts" (i.e., what the native people say they are doing in everyday activities) must be viewed as "acted documents".

First we have to realize that what native people say they are doing or say they think they are doing in everyday activities must be cast in terms of the anthropologist's descriptions.

> Normally, it is not necessary to point out
> quite so laboriously that the object of study
> is one thing and that the study of it another
> ...But, as in the study of culture, analysis
> penetrates into the very body of the object--
> that is, we begin with our interpretations of
> what our informants are up to, or think they
> are up to and systematize those... (Geertz
> 1973:15).

This is what Geertz means when he argues that anthropological interpretations are fictions; "fictions in the sense that they are...something fashioned...not that they are false..." (ibid. 1973:15). To construct such descriptions is clearly an imaginative act.

Secondly, for Geertz (1975:5,14), culture is an acted document, it is the "webs of significance" that people themselves spin; in other words, "an interworked system of construable signs (...symbols)." Human behaviour must be looked upon as symbolic action--action which, like a line in writing, signifies something. Once its significance is realized then the thing that must be interpreted is the "what it is that is getting said" when people do things. Subsequently, if anthropological interpretation is the construction of "a reading of significant activities" then it should not be separated "from what happens; that is, from what native people say that they are doing" (Geertz 1973:18). In writing this down the "meaning of the speech event (the said of speaking), not the event as event, is transformed into an account" (Geertz

1973:19). Accordingly, the understanding of the form of native inner lives that is provided is "more like reading a poem--than it is like achieving communion" (Geertz 1976: 236-237). The dynamics of textual creations within and between native individuals and groups, studied from the point of view of different types of cultural "texts" ("the heart of that of which is the interpretation") is, for Geertz, the most important "stuff" at which to get.

With regard to the interpretive value of ethnographic description Geertz's statement remains questionable. The role he gives to the imagination in ethnographic description and interpretation leaves me with a curious feeling that it acts as a kind of inflexible mechanism through which the "stuff" of a dialogue, created between the ethnographer and the native person must be filtered. This is partly due to the role Geertz gives to the ethnographer's personal experience in the "enlargement of the universe of human discourse" that he contends must be created. The description of another culture must be moulded in terms of the constructions that the ethnographer imagines. As imaginative acts the ethnographer's descriptions are cast in terms of the interpretations to which people of that culture subject their experience, because that is what they are supposed to be descriptions of. Here it is the ethnographer that is professing them and necessarily he must begin with his own interpretations of

what his informants are doing.

It seems as if Geertz uses the role of the imagination as an independent or private heuristic device in the process of formulating the systematization of other people's symbolic capacities. Through systematization, the descriptions of the involvements of the native individuals within their culture are interpreted. My main criticism of this is that it leaves the role of the imagination psychologically sterile and somehow out of touch with a complete dialectical ethnographic encounter which should emphasize a unified praxis and a dynamic interpersonal experience between both the ethnographer and the native individual. If, as a more enlightened hermeneutic might have it, the imagination has to do with the process of interpreting new and different dimensions of meaning that emerge when the relationship between the ethnographer and the native person is understood, then in the changing contextual arrangements both individuals must be free to act creatively within the ensuing dialogue. The dialogue, brought about by more demanding and critical questions, creates a tranforming praxis. This transformation includes the activities of both the ethnographer and native person who are at one and the same time being transformed themselves. Geertz underplays the personal experience of the ethnographer in his relationship with the native person and hence loses what should be the full effect of a dialectical dialogue and the role of the imagination. I

must elaborate on these aspects of my criticism.

Geertz's project fails because he leaves vacant the very important role of the individual. Further, he is not subtle in his concern for the imagination and intuitions of both the ethnographer and the native person. Both of these aspects of interpretation are interlinked and have a great deal to do with ethnographic description.

In Chapter II I discussed what should be considered the true locus of culture. It remains in the interactions of individuals and in the world of ideas, meanings, motives and feelings which each individual may abstract for himself in his participation in these interactions. Because I am interested here in life history, I am concerned mainly with an understanding of an individual's life events in the treatment of a subject; in other words, the "increment of individuality which alone makes culture in the self and eventually builds up culture in the community..." (Sapir 1958:330). I think this is the crucial aspect which Geertz overlooks. Disregarding the individual means that Geertz dismisses the variations of mental proclivities and physical activities that bestow both a life and a strength to a system of thought and meanings. I think this has more general implications for ethnographic description and the researcher's place in the interpretation and understanding of the individual's life history.

In a critical article that Sapir wrote on a

series of North American Indian "life-scapes", interesting questions are posed. Sapir asks (1922:571)

> To what extent can we penetrate into the vitals of primitive life and fashion for ourselves satisfying pictures on its own level of reality? Can the conscious knowledge of the ethnologist be fused with the intuitions of the artist? It is difficult to think oneself into the tacit assumptions of so alien a mode of life as was that of an American Indian tribe. It is not that its patterns are elusive or unintelligible, for they are not, but that the attempt to sink these visible patterns into an atmosphere which is as unobtrusive as it is colourful demands an imagination of a peculiarly tolerant kind. Few artists possess so impassioned an indifference to the external form of conduct as to absorb an exotic milieu only to dim its high visibility and to make room for those tracks of the individual consciousness which are the only true concern of literary art.

In other words, Sapir feels that the appropriate mode of recounting these "exotic" forms of behaviour must include a measure of intuition and imagination, just as much as both intuition and imagination are paramount in providing a kind of knowledge that the ethnographer (be he an artist or a scientist) possesses about his own realms of experience.

The issue to which I think Sapir is speaking is the fundamental, simultaneous, intersubjective experiences of the ethnographer and native person. But he takes this intersubjective experience back one step to a personal recognition (on the part of the researcher) of the primary and tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1960) of both himself and

the native person. Each person is reflective of the
development of his logical faculties while at the same
time, because of the creative imagination that each of them
brings to bear in developing a dialectical dialogue, they
must also use the active mind that each of them possesses
(cf. Buhler and Marschak 1968:93). Creative expression
and expansion is the tendency to advance in the world and
to change it creatively through activities which include
both physical and mental interaction in a way that
influences perception, thought, feeling and action. Every
individual is subject to both of these processes
simultaneously. The individual for Sapir (1949:155-156)

> ...means not simply a biologically defined
> organism maintaining itself through physical
> impacts and symbolic substitutes of such
> impacts, but that total world of form,
> meaning and implication which a given
> individual partly knows and directs, partly
> intuits and yields to, partly is ignorant of
> and is swayed by.

Hence, with the reflective, logical and creative qualities
of the individual, we may be able to get at the intrinsic
"stuff" of symbols and symbolic discourse. Geertz (1973;
1976) speaks to these issues of symbols and hermeneutics
but his use of both remains sketchy and empty of the
creative and imaginative quality that is the essential
part of ethnographic description and interpretation. The
relations between the elements of experience which serve

to give events in an individual's life both form and meaning,
while known and understood at one level of meaning, are
also more powerfully "felt" or "intuited" than consciously
perceived at another level.

> In a sense [they are] well known to him.
> But this knowledge is not capable of
> conscious manipulation in terms of word
> symbols [as Geertz later claims it is].
> It is rather, a very delicately nuanced
> 'feeling' of subtle relations, both
> experienced and possible. To this kind
> of knowledge may be applied the term
> 'intuition'... (Sapir 1949:548).

Geertz does not deal with the problems of levels
or dimensions of interpretation and meaning and therefore
his understanding of the symbolic significance of native
individuals and the role of the hermeneutic circle remains
shallow. He is not willing to take the risk of getting
involved in the human discourse of events brought about by
critical self-reflection. To extend his metaphor, Geertz
settles for an understanding of the outline of the poem,
the poem's exterior shape. He is not taking an active
part in the reading of the poem which comes as he listen
and interprets with the poet. It is both of these
together (reading and listening) that give the poem the
vitality and life it needs, the meaning, feeling and
understanding that comes with mutual participation in
the communication of the poetic event.

Footnotes

[1]Gadamer suggests that history cannot be envisaged
as a "chain of static moments", but rather as a process
in which one horizon of action and understanding evolves
out of what came before, and present meaning is derived
from the former contexts of understanding. It then
follows, that the researcher approaches the individuals
of another culture, in their present context, which
includes both their (researcher's and native individual's)
own histories and all the changes that history has added
to present meaning. Interpretation, in this respect, does
not so much involve reconstructing something of a history
but rather it involves "bringing phenomena under study out
of the past and into the circle of present life and hence
into the sphere of present meaning" (Watson-Franke and
Watson 1975:249).

CHAPTER IV

REINTERPRETING CRASHING THUNDER: THE CRITERIA FOR A

HERMENEUTICS OF A LIFE HISTORY

Introduction

My major intention in this chapter is to reinterpret
the events that shape Crashing Thunder's life. To do this
the logic of a reinterpretational movement must be set
forth, from the reinterpretation of the actions and
experiences that comprise Crashing Thunder's life to some
understanding of their meaning for him. The first part
of this chapter sets the basis for a hermeneutical
perspective. While traditionally hermeneutics denoted the
science of the elucidation of the meaning of texts, it
recently has been widened to include the interpretation of
actions and experience as acted documents (see Gauld and
Shotter 1977:5).

Second, by providing the basis of the interpretive
relationship between Crashing Thunder and Radin I open
that dialogue to a hermeneutical reinterpretation of the
former's life. I set out the basis of the particular
perspective I use to reinterpret Crashing Thunder's life.
This includes studying certain questions that I have
brought to bear upon the use of the life history form and

on the selection and arrangement of life history materials.
The last section of this chapter is my reintepretation of
Crashing Thunder's life.

Human Action and Text

Although I have criticized Geertz for the way in
which he uses a hermeneutical approach, in fairness I must
state that he has provided a starting point for its use
in anthropology. Primarily, his contribution stems from
his concept of "acted document" (Geertz 1973:10). He
explains that these are constructed from native explanations
of what they say they are doing in everyday activities,
or, as he describes them, actions and experience considered
as "acted texts" (Geertz 1976:235-236). These are ideas
for which Geertz should be most highly praised. As acted
documents, human action and experience can be said to
provide the textual "winks" that speak directly to
epistemology (Geertz 1973:6-7).

Likewise Ricoeur (1971a; 1971b) has shown how
criteria used to analyse texts can also be used to analyse
human action and experience. To understand how this can
be done we must understand Ricoeur's use of hermeneutics.
Ricoeur holds to the idea of text freed from the notion
of scripture and writing. Radnitsky (1970:2:23) expresses
the same idea of a transposition of the meaning of a text

to the personal meaning and significance of action and experience. Similarly, Gauld and Shotter (1977:5) suggest that "the term "meaning"...can be assigned not just to words or sentences or other textual items, but to all sorts of non-linguistic entities or events." These are the text-analogues of which they speak. Roughly speaking text-analogues are "any sequence of human activities, or set of the products of such activities, to which, or to items within which, one can assign a 'meaning'" (Gauld and Shotter 1977:5). This use of text-analogue facilitates a movement which allows us to deal with action in the same way that those of the "older" schools of hermeneutics, who deal specifically with biblical interpretation, deal with an assemblage of texts but with full recognition that experience and action differ from a body of text.

For Ricoeur hermeneutics, at this level, is a set of rules which presides over an exegesis, that is, over the critical interpretation of a particular "text" or a group of actions as signs that may be viewed analogously as texts. In other words, a textual exegesis is extended "to all signs [actions] bearing analogy to a text" (Ricoeur 1970:8). In this way actions are symbols encompassing multiple meanings of expression and thereby require interpretation (Winner and Winner 1976:123).

Winner and Winner (1976:123) suggest, however, that Ricoeur does not hold to the notion of there being

a general hermeneutic. In other words, there is

> ...no universal canon for exegesis, but
> only disparate and proposed theories con-
> cerning the rules of interpretation...
> according to one pole, hermeneutics is
> understood as the manifestation and res-
> toration of a meaning addressed in the manner
> of a message (e.g., depth semantics);
> according to the other pole, it is understood
> as demystification, as a reduction of illu-
> sion (e.g., the French school of structura-
> lism)...A general theory of interpretation
> would thus have to account not only for the
> opposition between two interpretations of the
> interpretation, the one as recollection of
> meaning, the other as reduction of illusions,
> but also for the division and scattering of
> these two great 'schools' of interpretation
> into 'theories' that differ from one another
> (Ricoeur quoted in Winner and Winner 1976:
> 123).

The former approach places confidence in the object

of interpretation to which the subject will address itself;

(e.g., a particular native person's actions to which the

ethnographer addresses himself). The latter approach

doubts the primacy of an object of interpretation,

contests it, tears off its mask and reduces its disguises.

Meaning here is always the result of a combination of

elements which are not themselves significant; it is

always reducible. The object of study is a sort of inquiry

into syntactical arrangements. For example, as Ricoeur

(1970:74) suggests to Levi-Strauss

> ...you dispair of meaning; but you
> console yourself with the thought that
> if men have nothing to say, at least
> they say it so well that their discourse
> is amenable to structuralism. You retain
> meaning, but it is the meaning of nonmeaning,
> the admirable syntactical arrangement of a
> discourse which has nothing to say.

Ricoeur's allegiance therefore lies with the former group because the latter one does not contribute to rendering manifest a "live" semantics. For example, the structuralists are not interested in the "live" semantics of a myth--in other words, the restoration of its meaning in terms of its various messages--but rather, they are interested in the myth's power of resolving a structural illusion. They place emphasis on the myth's form or, analogously, to syntactical arrangement, not its content. The resolution remains static, a rearrangement of its internal parts, rather than dynamic. Such analysis is not concerned with the <u>actualization</u> of semantic dimensions but rather with logical rules and explanations.

The approach to which Ricoeur subscribes involves, at a conscious level, self-interpretation on the part of the receiving subject, encouragement of reflection, and an attempt at overcoming some of the cultural distance and estrangement between the ethnographer and native person. This is the actualization of semantic dimensions. In other words, the meaning of actions and experiences that address themselves to the subjects interpreting them

keep <u>open</u> the interpretation. The actions are never closed
in the sense that there are always other interpretations.
Ricoeur suggests that what is at stake here is the mytho-
poetic core of imagination found in the restoration of
meaning or understanding which comes through interpretation
(Winner and Winner 1976:123).

With the leads of both Geertz and Ricoeur, I want
to consider the process through which events that make up
Crashing Thunder's life take on meaning. I can then move
closer to a reinterpretation of those actions and experiences
which make up the events in Crashing Thunder's life which
will eventually provide me with an understanding of the
meaning of his life events.

The events in an individual's life are created
out of his actions and experiences. These actions and
experiences form life-events that a native person in the
telling of his life to the ethnographer critically reflects
upon and interprets for himself. In his interpretation
these events are given meaning. But an individual's
actions and experiences do not merely mirror, in shared
events, the circumstances of their happening and thereby
the meaning of these communally shared events. Rather,
they open up for interpretation a world which it bears
beyond itself. An individual's actions and experiences
must be seen in terms of the role they play in the formation
of an open, interpreted, acted document. The meaning of

the document is created in and is a reflection of the interpretation of a person's life by that person and by the person studying that life.

The ethnographer's presentation of that life begins with the native person's own interpretation of his actions and experiences. The meaning of events in the native person's life is a result of a merging of the two persons (for example, Radin and Crashing Thunder) together in a conversation that involves reflective and critical questioning on the part of both partners. This process "opens up" the interpretation. In the conversation between the ethnographer and the native person events become open to new interpretations which determine their meanings. This is another way of saying that significant events in a person's life are open to interpretation through an intersubjective dialogue. These events, then, are open to those who want to join in the interpretive movement of their reading.

I must now ask how I may join in this interpretative movement. Accordingly, in providing my reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder's life I must see how I can organize, in a significant fashion, the actions and experiences out of which the events of his life are formed. I must also reflect upon my part in interpreting meaning of those events; that is, I must critically question and examine my own part in the formation of the meanings that emerge as

I reinterpret the events that make up Crashing Thunder's life. My reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder's life events is a modeling, as it were, of the live relationship between events and the process of my producing a reinterpretation of those events.

The conditioning of my understanding and subsequent reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder's life lies in the dialogue that I create. This dialogue is created out of my ability to bring into question my own pre-understandings. The pre-understandings that concern me, with regard to my reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder, include one of form of presentation and one of personal selection of material. Both pre-understandings are complex reciprocal variables that reflect and shade each other in the creation of my reinterpretation of the meaning of events in Crashing Thunder's life.

The problem hermeneutics sets out to solve is specified by inquiry into the questions that the researcher brings to bear on the object of interpretation. My reinterpretation, therefore, will be determined to a large degree by the questions that I bring to the actions, experiences and events that make up Crashing Thunder's life. Similarly, questions regarding the bias of form of presentation and selection of material must also be considered. I am therefore faced with the putting of questions and the hermeneutic develops through this process.

My comprehension of the events in Crashing Thunder's life becomes an interpretation of the nexus of thoughts between Crashing Thunder and Radin, Radin's autobiography of Crashing Thunder, and my reinterpretation of the events that make up Crashing Thunder's life.

There is a distance between the actions and experiences that form the events in a person's life as he himself interprets them, the formation of the meaning of those events which is the result of the intersubjective, interpretive dialogue between a native person and the ethnographer and finally the various reinterpretations of that dialogue. I see this distancing providing three unique levels of abstraction in interpretation. The first is at the level of the individual himself while he reflects upon the actions and experiences in the construction of what he considers to be the meaningful events in his life as he interprets them. The second level of abstraction is by ethnographer in his active participation in the recovery of meaning of events in the native person's life. This is a product of the dialogue between the two persons both who have a stake in the interpretation that is created. The third level of abstraction is my reinterpretation of the meaning of those events. Reinterpretation in this sense is possible because the individuality of Crashing Thunder, as described by Radin's interpretation of the events in his life, and my own reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder's

life do not stand opposed to each other as two facts which cannot be compared.[1] This provides the basis of hermeneutics as participation.

Very generally, then, the task of an anthropology that incorporates hermeneutics will be found in the elucidation of meanings of actions and experience that make up the life events of a person. Instead of replacing everyday common sense accounts of human action and experience the hermeneutical approach aims at enlarging and refining upon such accounts. Once we have made Crashing Thunder's life intelligible we may then be in a better position to examine it in terms of more general terms.

Many feel that the way in which hermeneutics is used makes it look and sound like a cure-all of the descriptive human sciences, while others have come to call it simply, good ethnographic sense. While I will partially agree with the latter statement, the former is one with which I earnestly disagree. To clarify my position, I will first provide the criteria for a bad hermeneutics as opposed to a good hermeneutics. I have for the sake of this argument used the terms structural hermeneutics (cf., Rasmussen 1974; Ricoeur 1969) and personal hermeneutics.

On the one hand, structural hermeneutics, as Ricoeur (Winner and Winner 1976:123) suggests, is formed

primarily on the basis of the "reduction of illusion",
the deconstruction of text. For example, for those who
try and reduce myth to its underlying logical principles,
as Levi-Strauss does in his structural study of myth; or
for those who try to interpret a phenomenon as a reflection
of a religious experience of the sacred as opposed to the
profane, as Eliade would present material; or for those
who attempt to explain behaviour as psychic phenomena, as
in Freud's interpretations; etc., a reductionist framework
for interpretation is used. The theory that each of them
has formed is imposed as a framework upon the subject
matter being interpreted. To the extent that these
theoretical frameworks may be said to be the result of
interpretations, they may also be said to be consequential
or derived, the result of a reductionism. This, primarily,
is because of the willingness of those who adhere to such
interpretive schemes to reify the labels they have become
accustomed to using to describe a phenomenon they do not
otherwise understand. To interpret structurally, or in the
form of the sacred and profane dichotomy, or psychiatrically
what, for example, native people believe and understand
as empirical, is a reductionism whereby empirical "illusions",
or the unverified, are defined and explained in relation to
the structural rules or the psycho-analytical framework
that has been used for such interpretations. Such inter-
pretations remain static because they do not break the

boundaries of their own internal logical dimensions.

A good hermeneutics, personal hermeneutics, on the other hand, is related closely to specific persons and specific events. Its main purpose is in the restoration of meaning addressed in the manner of a message. In effect, this relies upon a transfer of meaning in relation to the events and actions that form an individual's life, and which addresses itself to the person interpreting them. This transferring process gives hermeneutics a movement that can be detected in the act of opening personal events and actions to interpretation by both the person who experiences them and the person who wants to understand them. This restores meaning to the messages.

A good hermeneutics, in this respect, opens up meaning because it relies on two crucial processes for its understanding: one, intersubjectivity and two, a dialectical dialogue. The importance of both of these aspects of the hermeneutic circle here need not again be emphasized. It is sufficient to say that I believe that the validity of a personal hermeneutic can best be understood in the manner in which the intersubjective relationship is stated. This is crucial, and it relates directly to the quality of the dialectical relation that is fashioned as the researcher addresses the native person about the actions and events that make up the latter's life.

The dialogue that ensues is the beginning of the

transfer of meaning where one person addresses the other, and vice versa, in a manner that brings both the ethnographer's and the native person's own preunderstandings about the phenomenon and each other to bear upon it. This promotes, on both of their parts, critical self-reflection, a quality of a dialogue that encourages more refined questions. In this way the dialogue, which I have called dialectical because it usually brings to an interface two different cultural traditions, remains grounded in the phenomenon in question. The context is an intersubjective transfer of meaning which becomes actualized or opened up by the participants in that world. This develops in accord with the recognition of the intention of both participants and in relationship to their activity with each other.

In this instance, reliance remains at the level of the dialogue and its interpretation, and not at the level of a theoretical assumption. The investigator, here, opens his understanding of the specific individual's interpretation of specific events, behaviours and actions. Accordingly, this leaves open to interpretation the mental and physical activities of an individual.

The Questions of Form and Selection in Reinterpreting A Life History

Earlier in this chapter I stated some of the questions that I, as a reinterpreter of the meaning of events in Crashing Thunder's life, must bring to bear on the information I have to work with. These questions centered specifically around the use of the life history and the selection and arrangement of life history materials. These questions, I suggest, are primary aspects of a hermeneutical analysis.

In this section I will turn to the literature concerning life history and analyze some of the methods, uses and criteria for life history. I suggest the possible benefits of the life history form in interpreting and translating the life of an individual in culture and indicate how I personally select and arrange the events in the life of Crashing Thunder to construct my reinterpretation. This in itself is part of the hermeneutical analysis of which I am using. Questions about my procedure are, indeed, part of my interpretation. These questions form part of a hermeneutical analysis because in my attempt to select, choose, and arrange events in Crashing Thunder's life I am contributing to the reinterpretive context that helps give meaning to those events. My reinterpretation is constructed out of this questioning process. Three

major questions bear directly upon this analysis.

Why Study the Life History Form?

The life history form is a powerful and effective
way in which to descirbe and interpret the personal
experiences, feelings, motives and perceptions in the life
of an individual. Similarly, many of the more orthodox
forms of ethnographic description and interpretation, often
represent individual variability or, for that matter,
attempt a comprehensive study of a person within the world
that he lives. Within this form I include studies in
kinship, political process, religious systems, belief
systems, economic systems, symbolic systems, material
culture, the relationships of any one of these to the
other, or any attempt to describe and interpret in a
holistic fashion the different aspects of society and
culture. In either case ethnographers commonly recognize
that they have only the individuals of a society with whom
they may do their fieldwork.

Usually what happens in the latter cases, when the
ethnographic accounts are completed and monographs are
produced, is that the ethnographers find they have trans-
formed the descriptions and interpretations of the
behaviour, personality, etc., of a native person from its
"raw state" into an example that they can use as part of

their more general explanation of the society or some
aspect of the culture. Sapir (1949:593) argues that

> If we make the test of imputing the
> contents of an ethnological monograph
> to a known individual in the community which
> it describes, we would inevitably be led to
> discover that, while every single statement
> in it may, in the favorable case, be
> recognized as holding true in some sense,
> the complex of patterns as described cannot
> without considerable absurdity, be inter-
> preted as a significant configuration of
> experience, both actual and potential,
> in the life of the person appealed to.

I maintain that these orthodox forms of description
and interpretation per se are not suitable for the
depiction of the lives of actual individuals nor, of
course, are they intended to provide any descriptive and
interpretive continuity to the life of a specific individual
for the sake of studying that particular life or its place
in society or culture. In other words, an individual as
ordinarily dealt with in most orthodox ethnographic mono-
graphs takes his place as part of a generalized represen-
tation with which the ethnographer can use in his attempt
to describe and interpret social life or culture.
Emphasis is not placed on the endlessly different meanings
that physical objects, events and interpersonal relations
have for a specific individual in society, per se but
rather on abstracting certain configurations of ideas,
meanings and action patterns of society or culture.
These forms of description and interpretation express the
common characteristics of the group or culture; make

explicit the normative rules for the inner workings of a
society or culture; describe and interpret aspects of culture
in an attempt to show its integration and consistency in
terms of shared mental, behavioural, material properties,
describe the psychological types or sets and their relation-
ship to cultural types; etc. Each form is meant to suggest
a certain sort of social or cultural integration and consis-
tency, define the internal rules of society or culture,
etc.; the list of ethnographic purposes goes on forever.
My point is that in such ethnographic accounts the individual
loses much of his status as an individual. Geertz (1973:51)
suggests that in such a case

> Individuality comes to be seen as eccentricity,
> distinctiveness as accidental deviation from
> the only legitimate object of study for the
> true scientist: the underlying, unchanging,
> normative type. In such an approach, however
> elaborately formulated and resourcefully
> defended, living detail is drowned in dead
> stereotype: we are in quest of a metaphysical
> entity, man with a capital 'M', in the
> interests of which we sacrifice the empirical
> entity we in fact encounter, man with a small
> 'm'.

These types of descriptions leave inarticulate or at least
elusive, any sense of reality of an individual's life. Of
course they are not meant to be used for representing or
understanding emotion, feelings, and motivations, conscious
or unconscious, of the individual; his characteristic
adjustments and his active participation in and reception

to the contemporary pressures of his natural environment, his way of dealing with situations in the physical world of objects and events and with other individuals.

The collection of a life history is one of the most suitable ways of being able to present the world of personal meanings and system of ideas of an individual. As an interpretive form it can provide the continuities and discontinuities of an individual with relation to the events that make up his life, the culture patterns that he adjusts to and the other individuals with whom he interacts. The portrayal of the various combinations of these things as told or written by the person who experiences them may create a valuable description of life events. In this way the life history document acts as an expressive focus which can vivify individual experience and thereby reveal the manner in which he adjusts to and acts upon his physical, mental and sociocultural worlds both at the conscious and unconscious levels.

The representation of individual experience becomes much clearer to the ethnographer (or any reader) when it is seen from the vantage point of an individual's own life, as his interpretation of life events. Seen from the eyes of an individual, ritual, economics, politics, religion, language and psychology no longer seem a maze of excessive complications. Rather, within the context of personal life history, these things begin to take on contexts and

meaning and become alive and human again. Accordingly, the
subtle nuances of native feeling and motive can better
be understood by the ethnographer and he is able to
participate in and understand more intimately the different
aspects of the individual (Sapir 1922:369).

With regard to life history documents, Sapir (1922:
570-571) suggests that we can truly see

> ...how compelling an imaginative treatment
> of primitive life might be. It would almost
> seem that bare recital of the details of any
> mode of life that human beings have actually
> lived has a hidden power that transcends the
> skill or the awkwardness of the teller...
> [and] a great deal might be done to capture
> the spirit of the primitive by adhering, so
> far as possible, to its letter--in other
> words, by transcribing, either literally or
> in simple paraphrase, personal experience
> and other texts that have been written down
> or dictated by natives. In any event, the
> accent of authentic documents always reveals
> a significant, if intangible, something about
> native mentality that is over and above their
> content.

The personal life history document may be defined,
then, as any self-revealing record that intentionally or
unintentionally yields information regarding the structure,
dynamics and functioning of an individual's mental, social
and physical life. To assemble a knowledge of an individual
in regards to the complexities of his physical and mental
worlds should be an essential first step in any description
of an individual in culture. If we start too soon with
any more abstracted analysis and classification we run the
risk of tearing both physical and mental life into fragments

and begin with false cleavages that misrepresent the salient organization and natural integrations in the personal life of an individual. In order to avoid such hasty preoccupation with these abstractions we need to concern ourselves with the individual's life in all of its idiosyncratic proclivities and as it is lived by him. We must always bear in mind the concrete life in order to prevent ourselves from "straying into esoteric and chimerical bypaths" (Allport 1942:56). However, to believe that an abstract and more general knowledge of the rules and models of cultural behaviour or personality, as are reflected in the individual, can preceed the knowledge of particular expressions of individual behaviour is an unfortunate blunder.

In other words, and to restate my major point, one of the chief faults with the uses of orthodox ethnographic descriptions is that they are used to generate abstracted models of human behaviour with little regard for the personal life of the individual. In life histories personal lives arenot divorced from the descriptions of life because that is what the descriptions are of; in the life history document we find the needed subjective "touchstone of reality". Life histories emphasize the importance of presenting the individual's evaluation of his experiences and provide the contexts within which he undergoes his experiences. These investigators have not

yielded the kinds of findings deemed traditionally valid by other ethnographers because of what the latter suggest is a difficulty of getting beyond an idiographic emphasis on individual subjectivities. Primarily this is because much of the emphasis of orthodox, nomothetic ethnographic description

> ...has been on self-sufficient and self-contained single study in which the researcher's hypothesis is tested against what is discovered in that one piece of research. A life history, like life itself, is not so self-sufficient or self-contained, nor can it be deployed to prove or disapprove any one hypothesis (Mandelbaum 1973:179).

An interesting paradox emerges when a well trained ethnographer's scientific training and aspirations create doubts and misgivings as to the representativeness of any individual's subjective accounts, especially when presented in the form of a life history, and especially concerning the validity of subjective records. But at the same time he acknowledges to himself that in the case of the individual that confronts him he finds the vivid and irreducible "stuff" that constitutes such knowledge. As a result the ethnographer takes these subjective accounts as trustworthy as compared with the generalized canons of his science. It seems, rather, that he finds the life history document more absorbing, more enlightening, and fundamentally more real. Unfortunately, many ethnographers replace these

subjectivities with a form of description that systematically maps out the general cultural and social configurative patterns of behaviour. Such a replacement reduces such subjectivities into either normative instances of generalization or into non-useful information. Mandelbaum more than adequately describes this process. He (1973:178) explains that

> When an anthropologist goes to live among
> the people he studies, he is likely to
> make some good friends among them. As he
> writes his account of their way of life, he
> may feel uncomfortably aware that his
> description and analysis have omitted
> something of great importance. His dear
> friends have been dissolved into faceless
> norms; their vivid adventures have somehow
> been turned into pattern profiles or
> statistical types.

Kluckhohn (1945:162-163) argues that "until anthropology can deal rigorously with the 'subjective factors' in the lives of 'primitives' their work will be flat and insubstantial." It is for all of these reasons that I think the life history form is conducive to a hermeneutical perspective. Unless ethnologists can learn to delineate the emotional, perceptual and motivational structures and content of the individual, as the individual presents it in his own words, they will learn very little of the systems of personal meanings and ideas of native individuals. It is Dollard's (1935:262) contention that by and large ethnologists "have abstracted somewhat fictive

social structures from the visible realities of everyday
life and have become so preoccupied with these abstracted
patterns that they have lost sight completely of the
individual." In effect, what this produces is a discontent
in the minds of those ethnologists who are searching for a
useful and more intricate grasp on the character of an
individual's life. It is one thing to itemize, outline
and provide normative or statistical models of the form or
function of behaviour in a society and quite another to
give a significant account of the personal meanings and
feelings of an individual in his day to day activities.
Radin (1963:2) insists that the life history is

> ...likely to throw more light on the work-
> ings of the mind and emotions of primitive
> man than any amount of speculation from a
> sophisticated ethnologist or ethnological
> theorist.

For the sake of illustration I will review Lowie's
The Crow Indians as an example of the kind of orthodox
ethnography that I have been discussing. While the des-
cription of the Crow Indians Lowie gives us is nothing less
than excellent, it still falls far short of the kind of
ethnography Radin emphasized. Radin suggested that we must
build up our knowledge of culture by studying some of the
particular individuals within culture. This did not mean
that ethnologists were to collect accounts of culture from
a particular individual, but rather to collect a personal

life account from an individual so that we see his interactions with other persons and examine how he creates for himself a world of ideas and meanings.

The kind of detail we get from Lowie's ethnography is about Crow normative culture. There is a section in his monograph on tribal organization, another on kinship and affinity, one describing the life cycle not of one specific person but generally about Crow Indians. Other chapters have to deal with subsistence activities and the division of labour, literature, Crow tales and mythology, club life, religion, wars and finally the sun dance. The chapter on Crow tales and mythology comes the closest to the actual stories of particular individuals but usually these are of mythological figures. They are told by specific Crow Indians and Lowie uses such accounts as examples of a more general description about mythology. The tales also sometimes describe the adventures of certain individuals but nowhere, however, do we get any indication of a description of a particular living individual, his interrelations with other individuals and the world of ideas, meanings and significance that he creates from such interactions.

Similarly, Radin's The Winnebago Indians is an equally excellent account of Winnebago culture and only somewhat less generalized than Lowie's work. The culture is described from the descriptions of material culture, archaeology, social customs, social organizations, ceremonial

organizations, religion, the peyote cult, etc. However, there is a partial attempt to adopt the use of personal narratives and other personal documents. This incorporation of personal documents is an early use of a form of description Radin (1933:183) called "reconstruction from internal evidence." The form of the reconstruction was to be shaped out of the personal life history itself.

Hence, in Radin's Winnebago monograph (1915-1916), which I consider generally to be an example of an orthodox ethnography, we find traces of what later came to command most of his ethnographic efforts, the use of personal documents.

To What Uses Have Life Histories Been Put and What is the Purpose of Restudying Radin's Life History of Crashing Thunder?

Both Kluckhohn (1945) and Langness (1965) have suggested the various interpretive uses to which the life history document can be put. They include in their studies interpreting life history materials in terms of culture structure, status and role, community studies, acquisition of culture, culture change, psychological analysis, personality formation and analysis, deviance, etc. Each of these uses certainly has its place in the inter- pretation of a native person and they all may be put to hermeneutical inspection. However, here I am concerned

with the way in which Radin used the life history. It is
with Radin's example that I take my first steps in the
reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder's life. Radin was
one of the first to set the stage for the interpretation
of a person's life. Here I want to outline his purpose
in using the life history and show how my purposes parallel
his and his mine.

Radin (1883-1959) spent a considerable time through-
out his career (close to fifty years) working on the
Winnebago materials which he had gathered mainly in the
years 1908 to 1913. These were complemented with a number
of shorter field trips after this period. As David Sapir
(1961:65) suggests, Radin "knew [Winnebago] ways thoroughly
and spoke their language as well as a white man could hope
[sic]."

Radin was a pioneer in the use of life history
materials. Kluckhohn (1945:87) explains that in 1913
Radin

> ...published a brief Winnebago autobio-
> graphy in text and translation, accompanied
> by brief ethnographic annotations. In two
> pages he gave a cogent statement of the
> need for such documents to supplement the
> more usual data supplied by anthropologists.
> This was followed, in 1920, by a considerably
> longer Winnebago autobiography, given in
> English, though originally written down in
> native syllabary. In 1926 this autobiography
> was republished, addressed to a popular
> audience, with additional material which had
> been obtained from the informant on other
> occasions. This volume, Crashing Thunder,

undoubtedly marks the beginning of rigorous
work in this field by professional anthropo-
logists. Radin gives an acceptable account
of how the material was obtained; he insists
upon the necessity for literal translation
and the editor's refraining from all changes;
his carefully segregated interpretative
remarks are not superficial but penetrating.

Most anthropologists (Dollard 1949; Kluckhohn
1945; Langness 1965) agree that Radin's study of Crashing
Thunder is a cultural study, that he "was interested only
in culture and not in the individual per se, the 'individual-
in-culture' or in personality" (Langness 1965:8). The
document, they believe, has greater value for the student
of culture than for the student of persons-in-culture"
(Kluckhohn 1945:87). I agree that the autobiography of
Crashing Thunder could be taken as a valuable inside view
of the Winnebago culture as Dollard and these others
suggest. However, I disagree with his assertion that
Radin's purpose was not to analyze and interpret a human
life.

It is interesting to read Dollard's reasons for
not taking Radin's life history material as an interpretive
document of a human life. Dollard (1949:260) explains
that

> ...there is very little attempt at analysis
> and synthesis of the material...The editor's
> comments, while revealing and sympathetic,
> are few and are characterized by a literary
> and impressionistic admiration rather than
> by a laborious theoretical construction of
> Crashing Thunder's life experience.

In other words, Radin's life history of Crashing Thunder
is an attempt at "impressionistic" description but not an
attempt at constructing a scientific theory of Crashing
Thunder's life experiences. But to argue that Radin was
not interested in a theoretical construction of some aspect
of Crashing Thunder's life experience as being proof of his
disinterest in the individual in culture is incorrect. It
also means that Dollard did not read Radin's Method and
Theory of Ethnology very carefully.

Radin (1962:2) does announce his objective, in
writing Crashing Thunder's life history, "the aim being
not to obtain autobiographical details about some definite
personage, but to have some representative, middle-aged
individual of moderate ability describe his life in rela-
tion to the social group in which he has grown up." In
other words, Radin is not interested in pushing one personage
over another but neither is he interested in the general
patterns of social and cultural life per se. Instead he
is interested in a particular individual as an individual
in relation to his society. So Crashing Thunder is
presented as one person caught between two cultures. It
is the story of one person's quest for a good way of life.
Radin provides us with a view of personal disruption in
Crashing Thunder's life with the onslaught of a new
ideological focus of the peyote cult. Religion, in this
case, is seen primarily as an individual rather than a

social experience. David Sapir (1961:67) suggests that

for Radin "it is the particular performance of the particular

raconteur that is of utmost importance..." (my emphasis).

We get more than a clue as to what Radin means to

do with life history materials if we look at the way in

which he considers how a life history is to be collected.

Radin (1926;1933) stresses the value in any ethnographic

account of starting from "internal evidence". First the

task is to describe and interpret the life of a person

during a specific period. Second, we must also provide

the history as it is necessary for the elucidation of the

particular period. Third, we must remember to stay as

close to the evidence as possible. For example, David

Sapir (1961:60) suggests that Radin's

> ...concern with facts is evident in every-
> thing he wrote. He seemed hesitant to
> make abstract generalizations and what
> ones he did make were always supported
> by considerable data. I remember once
> having quite an argument with him in
> which he staunchly supported the 'five
> foot shelf anthropologist': at least
> they got in all the facts...

For Radin the life history seemed the best way of combining

these three aspects of study. These aspects of Radin's

work puts it in line with what I consider to be a hermeneu-

tical perspective. But how did Radin do his work; what

makes his work hermeneutical and what can I gain from it in

terms of my own purposes?

Radin explains that in his use of a life history
we are given the unique opportunity of being able to
combine both the textual and contextual aspects of the
events that make up an individual's life. The text, of
course, is the personal document itself, while the contexts
are the ethnographic materials that mark the person's life
and the ethnological descriptions that can be translated
from native texts (e.g., myths, folktales, various indivi-
dual narratives. Through the extensive use of ethnographic
descriptions in the forms of the many Winnebago texts he
had collected and in his specific footnoting Radin formulated
the interplay between the individual and his culture.
Together the text and the contexts were arranged in such a
way as to represent the individual in his cultural context
for the general reader. In his Autobiography of an
American Indian Radin used this material to provide the
cultural context for a study of the life events of
Crashing Thunder.

Radin (1933:183-252) insisted that the reconstruc-
tion of an individual's life and his place in his culture
could be accomplished only if we start from internal
evidence. This is made clear in Method and Theory of
Ethnology and in his book Crashing Thunder: The Auto-
biography of an American Indian. Radin stresses the text;
it is the text that constitutes the major part of the life
history documents that he collected.

With regard to the very first Autobiography of a
Winnebago Indian (1914), Sapir (1927:303) rejected Radin's
idea of leaving the text in its entirety without any
contextual background annotation. He explains that Radin
revised, added to and republished his 1920 work which
became the Crashing Thunder of 1926. Sapir (1927:303)
reports that

> The new material in this book consists
> chiefly of myths and ethnological descrip-
> tions translated from Winnebago texts
> recorded by Dr. Radin. These insertions
> in the original narrative somewhat hinder its
> flow; but they are so packed with interesting
> data that we can readily pardon the writer
> for sacrificing something of the literary
> form of his document. As a matter of fact,
> there are many implications and allusions in
> the text of the narrative that require just
> such supplementary materials as Crashing Thunder
> presents.

I will now attempt to examine what are the possible
significances of using life history materials with the
type of systematic contextual annotation that Radin provides
in his study of the individual, Crashing Thunder. To do
this I will indicate to what extent I think Radin's work
is, in fact, good hermeneutics and then I will explain how
I consider my reinterpretation of the events in Crashing
Thunder's life to be hermeneutical.

It is my contention, of course, that Radin in his
work with Crashing Thunder was doing not only good ethno-
graphy but good hermeneutics. He was doing good ethnography

because in his interpretation he was staying as close as possible to the events that make up Crashing Thunder's life. One of his main goals in such an exegesis was to show the great advantage that accrues to our understanding of native individuals when it is studied in this way; i.e., from a life history reconstruction.

Radin (1933:252) points to two great dangers for ethnologists:

> ...first, that it is easy for the ethnologist, lord as he must feel himself of all he surveys, to persuade himself that he knows more about a given culture than he actually does, and, second, that of falling into speculation for its own sake.

We all might take a lesson from Radin's thoughtful message. In fact, it does make very good ethnographic sense. However, Radin not only adheres to this message, as in the case of most ethnographers who strive in their own work to remain as close to it as they can, but he also extends this ethnographic lesson to include the best of what I am calling a contribution to a personal-oriented hermeneutics.

When we look at the end result of Crashing Thunder's autobiography, we still have, "Crashing Thunder, an individual". In other words, he has not become, what becomes of persons in many of the various orthodox accounts extant, a "type". He does not become generic, another

standard representation, or reduced to the level of a

"norm", or a deviant of it. Instead, the description is

an interpretation of a specific individual while simul-

taneously in extensive footnoting we get ample description

of the culture. The two together texture very well the

individual in culture. The same can be said for the

events of Crashing Thunder's life. They do not become

transformed as they do in orthodox ethnographic style, to

the level of generalized events, or to the level of

specific examples. Instead, it is through the specific

events of Crashing Thunder's life that we get a picture

of the vitality of his life experiences and meaning takes

on a personal representation that is open to various

interpretation.[4]

In this way Radin enlarges upon Crashing Thunder's

accounts of his life. He systematically stays away from

imposing any specific theory upon either Crashing Thunder

or the Winnebago. Radin does not overpower Crashing

Thunder's life with the imposition of his own elegant and

clever theoretical production. Instead he remains aware

of the many problems of description, interpretation and

translation. For Radin these three aspects are part of the

process of enlarging the field of discourse about the

meaning and significance of events in Crashing Thunder's

life. Through the life history, Radin also has been able

to interpret the meaning Crashing Thunder gives to events

in terms that we as members of another culture can under-
stand and appreciate.

This brings me to my last point. I have provided
what it is that shapes a personal hermeneutic and have
briefly indicated how Radin created one. His major
criterion is that the ethnographer stay as close to events
that shape the native person's life as possible. Accord-
ingly, for me to do reinterpretive justice to the specific
individual, Crashing Thunder, I must stay close to those
events and the interpretations that both he and Radin give
to them. Underlying this is an attempt to open up to
hermeneutical reflection the meaning of the actions and
experiences that form the events that shape Crashing
Thunder's life. But as I said, in doing this, I bring to
bear my own preunderstandings and the reinterpretation of
the events that make up Crashing Thunder's life is brought
into a dialogue with Radin's copious footnoting of cultural
description and Crashing Thunder's own interpretations.

How Did I Come to Rearrange and Select Radin's Life History
Material in the Way that I Did?

While life history information is sometimes profuse
and overly jumbled, depending on which of the several
possible methods is used in the collection, selection and
arrangement of material (see Kluckhohn 1945; Langness 1965),

there are ways in which it can be channelled into a

meaningful reinterpretation without doing a lot of damage

to the original life history narrative. Mandelbaum (1973:

180) suggests three ways of doing this.

> They are in noting (1) the dimensions or
> aspects of a person's life; (2) the
> principal turnings and the life conditions
> between turnings; (3) the person's charac-
> teristic means of adaptation. The dimen-
> sions provide categories for understanding
> the main forces that affect a life. The
> turnings mark major changes that a person
> makes and thus demarcate periods of his
> life. A focus on adaptation directs our
> notice both to changes he makes and to con-
> tinuities he maintains through his life
> course.

Together these procedures provide an organizing scheme for

the interpretation and understanding of subjective experience

of the life events that make up the personal history of an

individual. They also provide a useful framework that can

overcome many of the restrictions that are intrinsic and

fundamental to the intention of the more orthodox ethno-

graphic form. I must begin with a fixed point, but this

point in time must be one that has been given form and

substance by the native individual of the group described

and not by an alien observer. This I do. Similarly, any

internal reconstruction has to begin with an intensive and

continuous study of an adequate body of texts, be they

myths, other narratives or ethnological description. By

using Radin's extensive footnoting I have been able to add

helpful contextual relevance to my reinterpretation.

In providing an outline for the selection and arrangement of material and, therefore, a format for a reinterpretation of human action and experience as acted document, I will form some meaning of the events that make up Crashing Thunder's life. As I have suggested, analysis must be placed within the context of the discourse of action and experience which includes, for my purposes, four essential critical turnings. These four "turnings" will serve as a framework for my reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder's life events. Situational events will be arranged in a way that emphasizes the crucial experiences that form them and that shape his life. I will use Mandelbaum's (1973:180) procedural suggestions and arrange this material in terms of the critical turnings that make up Crashing Thunder's life. This will consist of exploring those events that are critical to the way Crashing Thunder, as an individual, deals with and represents experience in his world. My primary concern is with providing some insight into the events that are initial to those critical turnings in his life.

The interaction and engagement of the different meaningful relationships that Crashing Thunder gives to events and the contextual dimensions within which those events can be understood will also be examined. In my examination of the critical turnings in Crashing Thunder's

life, I also will provide a picture of his adaptations to
the new critical roles that he creates for himself.
Throughout my examination, I will discuss many of the
dimensions and extensions of meaning in the discourse of
Crashing Thunder's experience that form his life events.
My intention is to reinterpret some of the more important
personal events that are formed out of the discourse of
Crashing Thunder's experience. This will give me the
opportunity to understand more clearly the quality of those
events that provide meaning to his life.

Radin's primary intention in presenting Crashing
Thunder's autobiography was specifically to capture the
latter's personal world of rich and varied experiences.
These experiences are presented by Crashing Thunder in a
particular way. There is a base theme that Crashing
Thunder begins with that structures the narrative through
to the end.

When Crashing Thunder was a small boy, he heard
what had been prophesied about him. He accepted this,
and the events that subsequently shaped his life provide
an ongoing attempt on his part to impress upon the world
around him the truth of this prophecy. Interestingly
enough, however, he sees no reason at all for dwelling upon
it to the exclusion of all the other pertinent facts in his
life. As Radin (1926:xvii-xviii) comments:

> This is all the more remarkable in view
> of the fact that he was a somewhat
> unusual man both in character and in
> intellect. Few people in any community,
> civilized or uncivilized, have ever had
> so full an experience with life in all
> its ramifications...Yet no man has ever
> so successfully refrained from dramatizing
> these experiences in the interest of an
> imaginary audience as did this (person)...
>
> The rhythm of his life, like that of the
> generality of mankind, was a succession of
> climaxes and anti-climaxes, and so he
> portrays it (my emphasis).

In this analysis, I would like to stay as close as

possible to this "succession of climaxes and anti-climaxes"

and re-emphasize the critical turnings that took place in

his life. There are four critical turnings and they are as

follows: (1) Crashing Thunder's first lie and early

disillusion; (2) his disillusion in learning the secrets

of the Medicine Dance ceremony; (3) the sudden awareness of

his spirit power when he cures his niece's condition; and

(4) his conversion to the peyote cult. Around each of

these critical turnings, there are a myriad of important

events that mark the changes and continuities he makes in

the course of his life. These are set as forces that

affect him.

What I must do now, and indeed this will be the

focus of the next section, is to reinterpret some of the

important aspects of Crashing Thunder's life. In this

we will see if a reasonable reinterpretation of the life

events in his life history can provide an understanding

of him in his cultural setting.

Reinterpreting Crashing Thunder

First, I will provide a general overview of who the
Winnebago are and where they live, the condition of
Winnebago culture about the time of Radin's fieldwork
(which will include a brief comment on the Peyote cult and
its effects on the Winnebago) and finally a brief intro-
duction to who Crashing Thunder was.

At the time of contact, from Vimont's description
of 1640, the Winnebago were located "on the shores of the
second Freshwater Sea (Green Bay)...This was on the
information of Nicolet who had visited the region about
1634" (Kinietz 1975:308). In 1671 Dablon located Winnebago
living on Green Bay (Ibid., 1975:309). Radin (1970:77)
also describes Winnebago traditions which speak only of
Green Bay as their original habitat, but that

> Within 50 years of the landing of Nicollet
> the places were entirely shifted. Winnebago
> villages are found scattered all along the
> Fox River and Lake Winnebago, the Sauk and
> Fox and Kickapoo are on their way farther
> south, and the Potawatomi are in possession
> of the southern shore of Green Bay and the
> western shore of Lake Michigan. Later still
> we find the Winnebago extending all along
> the Wisconsin River and west of it to the
> Mississippi, and, at the same time, occupying
> the territory south of Lake Winnebago through
> the region of the Four Lakes, the shores of
> Lake Koshkonong and further down along the
> Rock River into Illinois. Their eastern
> boundary was determined by the Potawatomi.

Generally the Winnebago occupied the south side of Green

Bay extending inland to Lake Winnebago and south along

Lake Michigan (Murdock and O'Leary 1975:184). They

possess a plains Indian culture and speak a Siouan

language related to Iowa-Oto. They numbered 2,832 persons

in 1970 (Ibid., 1975:184).

At the time of Radin's fieldwork the Winnebago

lived on two reservations, one in northeastern Nebraska

and the other in west-central Wisconsin. This was only

one of the many changes in original Winnebago culture

that Radin would have noticed. Similarly, by the time

Radin visited the Winnebago in 1908, direct native-to-

white culture change included the Winnebagos' use of

Euro-American foods, houses, clothing, and many of the

other aspects of Euro-American culture which now have

become part of the Winnebagos' lives. With the decline

of traditional subsistence techniques, which included

hutning, fishing, some agriculture and gathering, many

Winnebago took up trapping for the fur market. By 1944

they were spending most of their summers harvesting

various Wisconsin and Nebraska farm crops as farm labourers,

but still maintained their trapping practices during the

winter. There were still a few Winnebago who lived a

semi-nomadic life at this time (Oestreich 1944:124).

Changes in personal attitudes were observable among

the Winnebago early in this century. Young people were

generally more "progressive" and better educated than the
older and more conservative elements of the Winnebago
tribe. This led to a contrast in attitudes between the
"older" and "younger" generations (Oestreich 1944:120).
Oestreich has not picked a particular age to denote older
or younger. Instead she suggests that in 1944 somewhere
between the ages of 45 and 50 seems to be a dividing line.
Those who are more "progressive", more acculturated, were
younger than 45 or 50 while those who were more conservative
in 1944 tended to be older than 45 or 50. Oestreich pro-
vides one such example of this change in attitudes.

> The young people, through contact with
> the older generation, or by taking
> part in tourist-trade ceremonials, are
> apt to know the old dances and songs, but
> seem to feel that these things are point-
> less or merely a means of making a living.
> They have been living in an unstable,
> changing society since birth and follow
> along in the uncertain Indian-white pattern
> of culture with no particular ambitions
> or interests in what it may eventually
> produce in their own futures.

On the other hand,

> Many of the older people...can remember
> when the Winnebago retained enough of
> their original culture to have a fairly
> complete and working social organization.
> They blame all the misfortunes of the
> tribe on the young people, who according
> to the old people, do just as they please
> in matters of morals, ethics and religion,
> and they furthermore have no respect for
> the opinions of the older members of
> the tribe...A few realize that the unhappy

> plight of the younger generation is but
> one of the many changes in their society
> brought on by the breakdown of tribal
> organization due to contact with white
> religion, liquor, and government (Oes-
> treich 1944:120-121).

Another type of change is found in the Winnebago modification of some aspect of white culture with a number of elements of their original culture to suit their needs. One such example is the introduction of the peyote religion and the Native American Church with the teachings of Christ and a translation of the Bible. Oestreich (1944: 122) believes that "The Peyote religion is basically Christian, stressing the literal acceptance of the Bible and the strict following of Christ's teachings."

Radin (1914b; 1937; 1970) believed otherwise. His reasons for doubting the Christian basis of the peyote cult are found in his study of its introduction into the Winnebago culture.

John Rave was the first person to introduce the peyote to the Winnebago. He was introduced and converted to it in 1893 while in Oklahoma. Soon after, he returned to his Winnebago home and began to "convert" people to peyote. To judge from Radin's (1914b:9) interpretation of Rave's words, "his first belief in the peyote had nothing of the nature of a conversion to a new religion. It seems to have been similar to the average Winnebago attitude toward a medical herb obtained either as a gift

or through purchase. There is only one new note--stimulation by a narcotic." Radin believed that other than the actual use of the narcotic everything else seemed to have been typically Winnebago, and in consonance with their shamanistic practices.

Rave's testimony and that of others seems to have emphasized the curative aspects of the peyote. Rave suggested that the peyote cured him of a disease. When his wife finally consented to take peyote she was similarly cured of the same disease. Rave gives a number of instances in which venereal diseases and consumption were cured by the use of peyote. Rave relied principally upon the great curative powers of the peyote as its major benefit. Most of the Winnebago who were converted by Rave suggested that it was the particular curative effects of the peyote that convinced them to take it. In other words, there was little of a "new" religion connected with it at first (Radin 1914b:9,13).

In fact a quick glance at the peyote ceremony indicates a number of old cultural elements being continued. For example, Rave would paint the face of an initiate with 'holy water'. While this has the appearance of the Christian baptism, it is more likely a continuation of a prominent feature in the shaman's treatment of a disease. In fact Rave spoke of the practice as such (Radin 1914b:2). Rave also would use the rattle and sing peyote songs while

the initiate would eat the peyote; another part of the
shaman's practice. Rave's attitude throughout, both from
his own testimony and from that of others, seems to have
been practically the old attitude of a Winnebago shaman.

It also "must be regarded as significant that
other of the characteristics of the old religious experiences
have become associated with the peyote--the hearing of
voices, a visit to the home of God, the gift of song, etc.
In a similar manner, the power of a shaman, such as the
foretelling of events, reading the thoughts of others,
etc., have been connected with it" (Radin 1914b:21). On
the whole, then,

> ...the extension of the Winnebago cultural
> background seems to have been so instantaneous
> that as far as the specific cultural traits
> of the Winnebago are concerned there was no
> introduction of a new element. This view
> does not, of course, interfere in the least
> with the fact that to the Winnebago themselves
> the presence of peyote represented the intro-
> duction of a new element (Radin 1914b:9).

Before turning to the topic of the introduction
of Christian element into the peyote ceremony it might be
useful to understand why it was that the conservative
Winnebago disliked Rave's introduction of the peyote
religion. At every phase of the peyote cult's development
Rave had to contend with the hostility of the conservative
members of his tribe.

To review: In the beginning there was very little

difference between the beliefs relating to peyote and
those connected with the old Winnebago medicinal plants
(Radin 1914b:17). Similarly, to one Winnebago

> ...the eating of the peyote gave the same
> magical powers as were formerly associated
> with membership in the Medicine Dance; to
> another, the visions were direct blessings
> from God, directing him to perform certain
> actions. To a third, faithfulness to the
> teachings of the peyote cult became asso-
> ciated with a certainty of reaching God,
> of being able to take the right road in
> the journey to the spirit land...In its
> totality, the atmosphere of the peyote
> cult became thus highly charged with the
> old Winnebago background (Radin 1914b:15-16).

But if the only thing Rave's converts brought to
the cult as specific additions were more Winnebago; and
with that, the emotional and cultural setting of the
traditional religious background, then why was there so
much hostility toward the peyote from the conservative
Winnebago? Radin (194b:17-18) believes that they were
not against it because they thought that it was of alien
origin but because "the teachings of the peyote departed
from those of their ancestors, and that the peyote people
were aping the habits of the whites."

Radin (1933:202) suggests that all the overt
Christian dogmas were introduced into the peyote cult
between 1905 and 1910 by a Winnebago named Albert Hensley.
Hensley had been brought up in a devout Episcopal family
and brought many of these Christian elements to the cult.

For example, he introduced the Bible so that it became one of the sacred objects in the cult, the reading of the Bible, the Christian exegesis, etc. Radin (1914b:10) explains that Hensley

> ...revolutionized the entire cult by
> introducing the reading of the Bible
> and positioning the dogma that the
> peyote opened the Bible to the under-
> standing of the people; and by adding a
> number of Christian practices, such as,
> perhaps, the interpretation of giving public
> testimony and Bible interpretation. He
> too had been in Oklahoma for a long time.
> He brought with him many peyote songs,
> generally in other languages, and
> dealing with Christian ideas, upon which
> subsequently Winnebago songs were modeled.
> He introduced likewise either baptism
> itself, or an interpretation of baptism,
> and induced Rave to attempt a union with
> the Christian church.

To Rave all this was of no special consequence. As long as the peyote remained supreme and the ritualistic procedure which he had originated was not questioned everything would be fine. Hensley could introduce these elements as long as the fundamental interpretation of the peyote itself was not challenged. The Bible, in other words, could be interpreted in terms of the peyote but not vice versa. To Rave, "the peyote was the principal element; and if Hensley chose to insist that the Bible was only intelligible to those who partook of the peyote, why, that naturally fell within its magical powers" (Radin 1914b:11).

Finally Hensley, a much younger man than Rave, conceited, quick-tempered, subject to epileptic fits, dogmatic, having a strong mixture of Puritan Protestant ideas, questioned Rave's idea of peyote being the principal element of the cult (Radin 1914b:11). Hensley thereupon seceded, taking with him a number of followers, most of which by 1911 had rejoined Rave's group of peyote-eaters. From then Hensley ceased to be any kind of force, although Rave retained a number of Hensley's additions. The peyote religion continues to be an important factor in the lives of many Winnebago.

Despite this constant and long-continued process of change which included the change in subsistence techniques, the onslaught of Christian missionaries, the peyote religion, the influence of various government agencies, etc., a surprising amount of traditional culture remained intact. Oestreich (1944:123-124) found many examples of Winnebago clan organization, the religious societies, the Medicine Lodge which, in 1944, still played an important part in people's lives.

Crashing Thunder, otherwise known as Sam Blowsnake, the individual from whom Radin collected an autobiography during the period between 1908 and 1913 was a Winnebago. He was brought up during a time of great culture change for the Winnebago and subsequently was caught between two cultures. He was a member of the Thunderbird clan and

became a member in the Medicine Lodge. Later he joined
the peyote-eaters, but his life is best told by him.
Crashing Thunder begins his autobiography with his early
youth.

1. Early Youth and the Lie: The First Critical Turning

Shortly before he was born, Crashing Thunder informs
us, his mother had been told by one of her uncles, a very
prominent member of the tribe, "You are about to give
birth to a child who will not be an ordinary individual"
(Radin 1926:1). Crashing Thunder begins the story of his
life with this statement. Although he makes this the
theme of his life story, he does not attempt to prove or
disprove the prophecy. In effect, we are taken into his
confidence from the very beginning. We will see that he
never confuses his reputation, his own explorations of
himself, with his "real" self. At all times, he accepts
and mostly approves of himself in an honest way. As we
go through his life events we will be able to see how he
keeps the three separate until the final merge at the time
of his conversion to the peyote cult. At the time of his
conversion he recognizes it at once as a fundamental
religious experience, the visionary experience "which his
marked non-suggestibility when a child prevented him
from then obtaining" (Radin 1926:xx).

Early in the autobiography, Crashing Thunder pro-
vides a complete description of the seasonal round of
subsistence activities while he was a young man. The
Winnebago still held to a traditional hunting and
gathering way of life. Crashing Thunder's father, a famous
hunter, always hunted and trapped during the winter period.
After they had hunted for a considerable time in one place,
they would move. They usually travelled on foot, carrying
all of their equipment. This is the way they would live
until spring time when they would move close to a stream
where Crashing Thunder's father could hunt, trap muskrat,
mink, otter, beaver, etc., and fish. In the summer, his
family would move to a community where other Winnebago
also would return. Summertime activities centered around
picking berries. "[G]enerally the people [would] go out in
bands and settle here and there" (Radin 1963:10). At this
time of the year families would move from one band settlement
to another visiting, staying for days or sometimes weeks
at a time. In the fall of the year, people would pick
berries, and when hunting season opened the larger
communities would break up again.

During the fall and early winter, while he was
still very young (no actual age is given), Crashing Thunder
was instructed by his father to fast. In fact, his father
repeatedly urged him to fast, saying:

> Do not be afraid of the burnt remains of
> the lodge center-pole (he is talking about
> the charcoal with which people fasting
> would blacken their faces). Those which
> are the true possessions of men, the
> apparel of men, and also the gift of
> doctoring--these powers that are spread
> out before you--do try and obtain one of
> them (he was accustomed to saying to us)
> (Radin 1963:4).

Crashing Thunder considered himself to be:

> ...a good-tempered boy...At boyhood my
> father told me to fast and I obeyed.
> In the winter every morning I would
> crush charcoal and blacken my face with
> it. I would arise very early and do it.
> As soon as the sun rose I would go out-
> side and sit looking at the sun and I
> would cry to the spirits (Radin 1963:3).

Both Crashing Thunder and one of his brothers used to fast

together.

One year, at a special sacred location, at the

"place where all the leaders used to give their feasts", a

lodge was built. It was built on a special spot under

the tree where a black-hawk's nest was located. It was

in this lodge where Crashing Thunder and his brother were

to fast. Crashing Thunder stated that "(i)t was said that

if anyone fasted at such a place for four nights he would

always be blessed with victory and the power to cure the

sick" (Radin 1963:6).

The two placed their family's war-bundle in the

lodge. Radin (1963:6) explains that each family possessed

at least one war-bundle.   This particular family

> ...possessed one, and most of the 'power'
> resident in this particular bundle was
> supposed to have been bestowed by the
> thunderbirds and night-spirits.   Perhaps
> that is why a black-hawk's nest was
> selected for the fasting-lodge, the
> black-hawk being regarded as a thunder-
> bird (Radin 1963:6).

Crashing Thunder explains the visionary experiences

a Winnebago boy is supposed to have, as follows:

> 'The first night spent there one imagined
> oneself surrounded by spirits whose whisper-
> ings were heard outside of the lodge,' they
> said.   The spirits would even whistle.   I
> would be frightened and nervous, and if I
> remained there I would be molested by large
> monsters, fearful to look upon.   Even (the
> bravest) might be frightened, I was told.
> Should I, however, get through the night,
> I would on the following night be molested
> by ghosts whom I would hear speaking outside.
> They would say things that might cause me to
> run away.   Towards morning they would even
> take my blanket away from me.   They would grab
> hold of me and drive me out of the lodge, and
> they would not stop until the sun rose.   If
> I was able to endure the third night, on the
> fourth night I would really be addressed by
> spirits, it was said, who would bless me,
> saying, "I bless you.   We had turned you
> over to the (monsters, etc.) and that is why
> they approached you, but you overcame them
> and now they will not be able to take you
> away.   Now you may go home, for with victory
> and long life we bless you and also with the
> power of healing the sick.   Nor shall you lack
> wealth (literally, 'people's possessions').
> So go home and eat, for a large war-pearty is
> soon to fall upon you who, as soon as the sun
> rises in the morning, will give the war shoop
> and if you do not go home now, they will kill
> you."

Thus the spirits would speak to me. However if I did not do the bidding of this particular spirit, then another one would address me and say very much the same sort of thing. So they would speak until the break of day, and just before sunrise a man in warrior's regalia would come and peep in. He would be a scout. Then I would surely think a war-party had come upon me, I was told.

Then another spirit would come and say, "Well, grandson, I have taken pity upon you and I bless you with all the good things that the earth holds. Go home now for the war-party is about to rush upon you." And if I then went home, as soon as the sun rose the war whoop would be given. The members of the war party would give the war whoop all at the same time. They would rush upon me and capture me and after the fourth one had counted coup, then they would say, "Now then, grandson, this we did to teach you. Thus you shall act. You have completed your fasting." Thus they would talk to me, I was told. This war party was composed entirely of spirits, I was told, spirits from the heavens and from the earth; indeed all the spirits that exist would all be there. These would all bless me. They also told me that it would be a very difficult thing to accomplish this particular fasting (Radin 1963:6-8).

During this sacred time and at this sacred place both boys fasted. On the first night nothing happened to Crashing Thunder. He did not hear or experience any of the activities of the spirits. The second night, even after the late night visit from his father who sang medicine songs and narrated the sacred fasting stories concerning fasting precepts, precepts concerning social position and the values of medicines and precepts concerning marriage, there was still no spirit vision. The third night was identical to the second:

> I stood beside him (his father) without
> any clothing on me...and holding tobacco
> in each hand I uttered my cry to the spirits
> as my father sang. He sang war-bundle songs
> and he wept as he sang. I also wept as I
> uttered my cry to the spirits. When he was
> finished he told me some sacred stories and
> then went home (Radin 1963:8).

The fourth night produced no better results. Then, as the
fifth day dawned upon Crashing Thunder he told his elder
brother that he had been blessed by the spirits:

> However I was not telling the truth. I
> was hungry and I also know that on the
> following night we were going to have a
> feast and that I would have to utter my
> cry to the spirits again. I dreaded that.
> So I went home. When I got there I told
> my people the story I had told my borther;
> that I had been blessed and that the spirits
> had told me to eat. I was not speaking the
> truth, yet they gave me the food that is
> carefully prepared for those who have been
> blessed (Radin 1926:26).

This is the very first critical turning in Crashing
Thunder's life and it can be said to have affected his life
up until his conversion to the peyote religion. The vision
was the essential and salient religious experience which
ideally every member of the Winnebago tribed obtained in
early youth. Crashing Thunder, Radin (1963:8) explains,
expected some definite inward change and because he did not
personally receive it, he considered himself as not having
been blessed. Further,

[M]most youths got it. It was something
of a disgrace not to. Yet he did not.
In spite of his dishonesty persuading his
father that he had been properly blessed,
he never deluded himself about the matter
(Radin 1926:xx).

This experiential state of dreaming and vision is

integrated into the cultural pattern in that each Winnebago

boy is expected to have some kind of subjective experience

that can be called a vision. The cultural representations

re-enacted in the visions are themselves brought into

being through reflexive negotiation with the experience of

each individual youth. In this respect it is in this special

fasting event that the visionary experience becomes meaning-

ful.

Up until the moment of his lie, Crashing Thunder's

life had been very much like every other Winnebago youth's

life. But now he was different and, as I will point out

shortly, he begins to live and act out his lie. Most

important, though, is that he recognizes the lie for what

it is. "What neither life nor his own nature could do...

was to delude him into believing that he...had had an

experience when he knew he had not yet had it" (Radin 1926:

xxiii). While it seems that he did not believe that he

was anything other than what he was, i.e., a liar, the

truth of this fact seems to have deeply affected him.

There are a number of other examples that indicate

to us that from the very early years of his life, Crashing

Thunder is not strong-charactered enough to admit his

failure openly. Instead, he falls into other deceptions.

He deceives his parents and he deceives his associates.

All of this is exemplified in Radin's (1926:xxiii)

suggestion that from the first time he and Crashing Thunder

sat down to create this autobiography, the latter showed

"an unusual insistence in separating what he has actually

experienced from what he should have experienced. Here is

the major psychological split that can be exemplified from

his actual experiences during this period in his life. I

think this bears some comparison with the tendency of

"saved" people to detail their former weaknesses in contrast

to their received, blessed, new condition. To a much

greater extent, though, I believe from what Radin suggests,

that Crashing Thunder was intelligent, introspective,

and self-reflective and that it was these qualities that

made him such a gifted consultant.

Crashing Thunder describes how he acquired the habit

of eating rapidly and how he acquired the particular habit

of taking the sleeping blanket away from those with whom he

slept. He describes these events with meticulous care. For

Crashing Thunder, his life during this early period meant

something very specific, and he describes in some detail

the significant experiences of his early childhood.

Two other experiences predominate at this time.

Crashing Thunder remembered when he first began to have a

memory of events in his life and afterwards, the first

stirrings of sex. He describes with some delight the time

when he "secretly got the desire to make myself pleasing

to the opposite sex" (Radin 1963:5).

> ...[T]here were four girls who always
> carried the wood. When these girls went
> out to carry the wood my older brother
> and I would play around with them a good
> deal. We did this even although we
> were fasting at the time...When the girls
> with whom I used to play (in secret) moved
> away I became very lonesome. In the evenings
> I used to cry. I longed for them greatly,
> and they had moved far away (Radin 1963:6).

There are other experiences that Crashing Thunder

more humorously recounts.

> It was at this time that I desired to court
> women and I tried it. However, I did not
> know the proper thing to say. The young
> men always went around at night courting.
> I used to mix with the women in the day
> time but when I went to them at night I
> did not know what to say. A brother of
> mine, the oldest, seemed to know how to
> do it. He was a handsome man and he offered
> to show me how...When girls get their menses
> they always have to live apart. It was to
> such a one that we went. We were very cautious
> about the matter for the girls were always
> carefully watched as their relatives knew
> that it was customary to court them at such
> a time...
>
> Once I went to see a young girl and
> arrived there before the people had retired,
> so I waited near the lodge until they would
> go to sleep. As I lay there waiting,
> listening to them, I fell asleep. When I
> woke up it was morning and as the people
> got up they found me sleeping there. I
> felt very much ashamed of myself and they
> laughted at me...

> On another occasion...I was crawling into
> a lodge when someone woke up as I was about
> halfway in. I immediately stopped and
> remained quiet and waited for the people to
> fall asleep again. However in waiting, I
> myself, fell asleep. When they woke me up
> in the morning I was laying halfway inside
> the lodge, asleep. After waking me up they
> asked me whether I would not stay for break-
> fast, but I immediately ran away...I used
> to go out courting and be among the lodges
> all night, and yet, most of the time, I did
> not succeed in speaking to any of the girls.
> However I did not mind that for I was doing it
> in order to be among the girls and I enjoyed
> it. I would even go around telling people
> that I was really keeping company with some
> of the girls. I used to say this to some of my
> men associates. In reality, however, I did
> not get much more than a smile from one or
> two of the girls, but even that I prized as a
> great thing (my emphasis, Radin 1963:11-12).

In the same way that he confesses to being unsuccess-

ful with having a vision quest, he confesses as having been

unsuccessful with the young women of his tribe. While

knowing the truth behind both these lies he still pretends

to being successful. Similarly, although Crashing Thunder

never explicitly stated it, it is believed that any contact

with menstruating women, or any of the objects in any way

associated with them, will destroy the power of individuals

that are temporarily sacred (Radin 1963:5). Crashing Thunder,

as a fasting youth, was regarded as such. So any contact

with a menstruating woman would have rendered him powerless

as an initiate seeking a vision. Whether he states this or

not, it could have had an effect on him. On the one hand,

he does not speak directly of any connection between the two

events and neither does Radin, which leads me to suggest

it was not particularly important to Crashing Thunder. He

seems to suggest that it was an event feared more by his

parents.

> At that time my parents greatly feared
> that I might come in contact with women
> who were having their menses, so I went
> out secretly. My parents were even afraid
> to have me cross the path over which a woman
> in such a condition had passed. The reason
> they worried so much about it at that
> particular time was because I was to fast
> as soon as autumn came; and it was for that
> reason they did not wish me to be near menstruat-
> ing women, for were I to grow up in the midst of
> such women I would assuredly be weak and of
> little account. Such was their reason (Radin
> 1963:5).

On the other hand, in the narrative, Crashing

Thunder relates this event first just before he speaks

about the importance of the fast that he experienced. The

set of events, as he relates them in retrospect as a middle-

aged man, might have had some effect on him, but, again, it

is never explicitly suggested. If we are to suggest any

relationship between his "pollution" and subsequent failure

to have a vision it will have to come directly from the

juxtaposition of events in his life at this period of time

as he describes them.

It is my suggestion that there is an insufficient

amount of information that can correspond to Crashing

Thunder's experience of either his dealings with menstruating

women or with his failure to have a vision. Consequently, any meaningful correspondence between the two events must remain open. Similarly, I do not want to reduce Crashing Thunder's experiences to singular event-to-event relationships with their subsequent interpretation of the meanings of each event. If I cannot form direct relationships from what Crashing Thunder says and does then I will suggest possible correspondences between events and their meaning for Crashing Thunder. But, these are open suggestions and should be considered only as possible connections taken usually from my reading of Radin's ethnographic works.

2. Events Leading Up to the Medicine Dance and More Deception: The Second Critical Turning.

Once when Crashing Thunder was still young he became very ill. It was incumbent upon his brother-in-law, Thunder Cloud, the husband of his oldest sister, to cure him. It had been said that Thunder Cloud was living his third life as a human being on earth. He was indeed a powerful shaman and medicine man,[2] who could do both harmful and beneficial things to and for the Winnebago. More importantly, though, among Crashing Thunder's family he was feared as being bad, "a poisoner" who had come from the spirits in the form of a reincarnated man and, if displeased with people, would poison them. Thunder Cloud

claimed control over Crashing Thunder's household and the
latter's "family would do nothing without consulting him"
(Radin 1926:13).

Radin (1963:13) explains that Thunder Cloud did
have a remarkable influence on Crashing Thunder. Crashing
Thunder reinforces Radin's statement.

> My brother-in-law thought a good deal of
> me. He was a holy man and a shaman. One
> day he said to me, 'Brother-in-law, I am
> going to bless you although you will have
> to fast for it. I was once blessed by four
> spirits, brothers called Good giant-Cannibals.
> They said that they had never before blessed
> any one. They promised me that if I ever got
> into any difficulty they would help me. They
> blessed me with long life. Now this blessing
> I will give to you. If, for four nights, you
> fast without a break, these giants will speak
> to you.' Thus he spoke to me. Then he con-
> tinued, 'These four brothers are called
> Good-giant, Good-heart, Good-as-he-walk-about,
> Good-where-he-lifts-his-foot-from' (Radin
> 1926:78).

Radin (1963:13) suggests that "it was not uncommon
for an older man to bestow his blessing upon a younger
man. As indicated here, the young man would in any case
have to fast for it. However, it was a foregone conclusion
that he would receive it in such a case."

It was at this time in Crashing Thunder's life that
he began to participate in the war-bundle feasts. It was
absolutely essential in order to obtain a blessing or
derive any real advantage from participation in a ceremony
to be "lowly at heart, and also keep one's attention fixed

firmly and exclusively on the fast or the ceremony. [A person's] thoughts are not supposed to wander for a moment" (Radin 1963:15). Interestingly enough Crashing Thunder confesses that while throughout the ceremony he

> ...was not in the least conscious of any
> dreams or blessings. All that I was aware
> of was that all the people around me were
> taking pity on me. Throughout it all I
> had my mind fixed on women. In doing these
> things I imagined that I had risen greatly
> in women's estimation. Even though I tried
> to render myself pitiable in the sight of
> the spirits yet through it all, my thoughts
> were centered upon them. I was never lowly
> at heart and never really desired the
> blessing of the spirits. All that I thought
> of was that I was a great man (Radin 1926:86).

Crashing Thunder felt that since his thoughts were so scattered in different directions he could not hope to obtain the desired blessings. Some spirits are more difficult to approach than others. Blessings from the black-hawk, regarded as the chief of the thunderbirds and as one of the most difficult spirits to obtain blessings from, were customary in Crashing Thunder's family. He explained his lack of success as due to his failure to "concentrate" his attention properly. Instead his thought and attention were directed towards women and his own self-image as a great man in the eyes of women.

While his attention was being deflected elsewhere during ceremonies, his interests began to turn towards the ways of the white population in the area. For example, when

Crashing Thunder's family was camped close to a town, he used to get in the habit of visiting the white communities. Here, he explains, he "used to steal a great deal." Similarly, when his father's trapping and hunting activities brought him into an area close to the various small farming communities, as they did over the years of his youth, he and his family would go into towns to sell craft products.

> We also used to circulate a petition asking
> for any help people cared to give us. When-
> ever they went on this kind of trip I always
> went along with them, for sometimes people
> would take pity on us and give us some old
> clothes. Sometimes we would even get a
> good meal at some farmer's house..Whenever
> the older people went to town circulating
> petitions for help we youngsters always went
> along. We always took our bows and arrows with
> us for the Whites wanted to see how well we
> could shoot. Often they placed five-cent
> pieces on some object at a considerable
> distance and had us shoot at them. We
> generally hit a number. I would also let
> my brother shoot twenty-five cent pieces
> that I held between my fingers and he never
> hit my fingers. We would often make as much
> as five dollars in this way and this money we
> always gave to our parents (Radin 1926:88).

Contact with the white population was an influence that seems to have provided an important, useful conceptual model for him to exploit in his adult years. These "theatrical stunts" and some of the native performance "arts" like the Medicine Dance were used by Crashing Thunder as a means for a livelihood in the country fairs and circuses that travelled this area of the United States during this period.

There was also another event that had an effect on Crashing Thunder. He was adopted by his "grandfather."[3] This grandfather

> ...had just lost a son, a young man and
> the last of his children. They had all
> died...After that I stayed with my grand-
> father. He thought a great deal of me and
> I got along very well in every way. He was
> a great man, one who had great knowledge of
> medicine (Radin 1926:89).

It was at this time that Crashing Thunder was introduced to white education. A school had been built at Tomah, Wisconsin, and Crashing Thunder wanted very much to attend. Crashing Thunder was given the permission of his grandfather and he spent a year in the white school system. Shortly thereafter, his grandfather died.

Upon his death, a Medicine Dance was to be held and Crashing Thunder's father was picked to represent the dead man in a Medicine Dance performance. Crashing Thunder was asked to take his father's place. His father was getting old and thought that he could not control his urge to drink liquor. He, therefore, thought himself unable to live up to the teachings of the Thunderbird Clan lodge. Crashing Thunder accepted and was duly initiated into the Medicine Dance to represent his grandfather.

There were four preparatory nights before the Medicine Dance performance during which the "nephew" (the initiant is always called "nephew") learns a great deal

about sacred affairs. As Crashing Thunder explains, he "was anxious not to be an ordinary person any longer but to be a medicine man" (Radin 1963:19). Each night they instructed him in many of the songs and myths of the medicine society, especially in those directly related to the medicine dance performance. The morning of the day of the medicine dance Crashing Thunder recalls that

> ...they preached to me and they told me
> that the most fearful things imaginable
> would happen to me if I made public any of
> this affair. The world would come to an
> end, they said. Then again they told me
> to keep everything a secret, and that if I
> told anyone, I would surely die. After that
> they showed me how to fall down and lie
> quivering (on the ground) and how to appear
> dead. I was very much disappointed for I had
> far more exalted idea of it (the [ritual]
> shooting). 'Why, it amounts to nothing, I
> thought. I also thought then that probably
> many of the sacred things of which they told
> me were not true either. However, I kept on
> and did as I was told to do for I had been
> taught to deceive in the ceremony in the
> wilderness. As soon as I was proficient in
> the act (of feigning death), we started back
> (they had been in the countryside during these
> four days)...
>
> They told me that I would become just like
> them in body, but I did not have the sensation
> of any change in me. All that I had felt was
> that I had become a deceiver in one of earth-
> maker's creations...
>
> We are simply deceiving the spectators.
> When we were through, those in my band told me
> that in two years I would be able to imitate
> the sounds of animals as much as I wanted to,
> for I had taken the place of a great medicine
> man...I was told that I...would be a great medi-
> cine man immediately. That pleased me. I was
> given a grey squirrel skin for a medicine bag
> and they told me that it was alive and that I
> could make it cry out loud. I had heard them

do it and had always envied them in this
regard (my emphasis, Radin 1963:20-22).

As if this were not enough of a disillusionment,
this whole experience was given added emphasis when
Crashing Thunder was

> ...told that if a person initiated into the
> Medicine Dance did not regard the affair as
> sacred, that this was a sign that he was to
> die soon. This frightened me a great deal,
> for I had been thinking of the whole matter
> in a light manner and I felt that this was
> an indication that I was really going to die
> soon. I therefore did my best to consider
> it a sacred ceremony, but in spite of it all
> I did not succeed (Radin 1963:22).

After this event Crashing Thunder went to live with

another "grandfather" and from him he was taught all of the

pertinent details of the Medicine Dance. Before long,

Crashing Thunder had learned all of the sacred songs and

dances the old man knew. After that, when Crashing Thunder

was invited to a Medicine Dance he would do all the singing

and dancing. From that time on, he regarded the Medicine

Dance as a sacred affair and he began to take part in the

ceremonies "for the greatness it possessed" (Radin 1963:22).

But this boasting was complimentary with the urgings of sex

which figured prominently in the Medicine Dance ceremony

and Crashing Thunder "boasted the greatness of the ceremony

in the presence of women in order to make a good impression

on them" (Radin 1963:22). As if this were not enough, he

began to travel with the fairs and circuses as an "Indian song and dance" performer. He explains that he "was fond of dancing and now (he) had a chance to go around and dance all the time and even get paid for it. I had money all the time" (Radin 1963:22). Crashing Thunder never did go back to school but rather began to get involved in the white man's world in other ways.

At the age of twenty-three he was convinced by the grandfather he was living with to get married to a certain girl. As Crashing Thunder explains:

> I had courted women ever since I was old
> enough to do so. Every time I did any-
> thing I always thought of women in connec-
> tion with it. I tried to court as many as
> I could. I wanted badly to be a beau, for
> I considered it a great thing. I wanted
> to be a ladies' man (Radin 1926:127).

We have seen in Crashing Thunder's childhood how his interest in women took on its various forms and substance. Now we are given the opportunity to see the development of his courtship patterns and the various experiences that he had with women and with drinking liquor.

Shortly after his marriage to his first wife Crashing Thunder left her. This was primarily a family matter, and he did it to satisfy his grandfather. This event was a consequence of traditional Winnebago beliefs, as explained to Crashing Thunder by his grandfather.

> 'Grandson, it is said that this girl you
> have married is not a maiden but really a
> widow, and I am not pleased with it, as
> this is your first marriage and you are a
> young man. I suppose you know whether
> this is true or not whether she is a
> maiden or not?' 'Yes', I answered. 'You
> can stop living with her if you wish', he
> said (Radin 1963:24).

Crashing Thunder did stop living with her. This was the
beginning of a period of other less formal involvements
with many women and his subsequent introduction to the use
of liquor. He also began to work with the various
travelling shows and fairs that journeyed through this
area of the United States.

His experiences with liquor and women were varied
and extensive and he quickly acquired a liking for both.
This was also the time that his relatives first saw him
drunk, an activity he attempted to keep secret. After his
first few experiences with liquor he decided that he did
not want to drink any longer. That year he went back to
his family's hunting camp. In this camp he found not only
his family but also his grandfather and one of the two
women that he had lived with during the period in which he
had travelled with the shows. This woman Crashing Thunder
reports

> ...used some medicine on me...A medicine
> feast was made and my scalp was operated
> upon. It was said that she took one of
> my hairs and put it in a medicine bundle
> of hers. It was said that she did this

> in order that I might not leave her, and
> that if I left her I would get a headache,
> and perhaps even die. Thus they said.
> However, this was discovered, and my
> scalp was operated upon and the hair she
> had taken was washed in medicine. Conse-
> quently nothing happened to me.
>
> After this I began to try and live with
> as many women as I could, for I had gotten
> the notion that I was a lady-killer. So I
> tried to live with as many women as I
> could (Radin 1963:26).

This was also the period of Crashing Thunder's life
during which he began to drink liquor steadily. One major
event reinforced his steady drunkenness and continued
dissipation. It was at about this time that his older
brother was murdered. Crashing Thunder relates this event
in the following way:

> We had grown up together and were hardly
> ever separated from each other. I felt
> heartbroken over the matter. I longed to
> kill the one who had murdered him. I felt
> that I would be better off if I were dead
> myself. That is how I felt. After that I
> began to drink much more. I wanted to die
> drinking, that is what I used to say, while
> I was drinking so heavily. Up to this time
> I had drunk only secretly, but now I drank
> heavily and openly. After a while I became
> a confirmed drunkard. I had by this time
> quite forgotten that I wanted to die, and
> really enjoyed the drinking very much
> (Radin 1963:26).

It was during this period of his life that he began drinking
with women, and when they and others he drank with were
drunk he would steal from them. He no longer drank secretly
but rather he drank openly. He also learned how to box

and would give the people he drank with severe beatings.
People, including his family, were frightened of him for
these reasons. He was about six feet, two inches tall
and weighed two hundred and fifty pounds (Radin 1926:134).

Summing up his perception of himself during this
period of his life, he considered himself to be arrogant.
He wandered around visiting different women. In one
instance that lasted some months, he was cohabiting with
four women at the same time. He was a self-confessed liar,
braggart and thief. He had four children born to him, each
from a different woman. Even so, he continued to court
women and drink; all his money went to such pursuits.

3. The Recognition of Power: The Third Critical Turning

At this time Crashing Thunder realized that he was
a heavy drinker but at the same time this served his
purposes for he

> ...began to boast about being a holy man.
> I claimed that I had been blessed by spirits
> and I kept on claiming this again and again.
> I was, of course, not telling the truth, for
> I had never felt the stirring of anything of
> that kind within me...Generally when I was
> just about drunk and on the verge of getting
> boisterous, yet still conscious of what I am
> saying, I would make this claim. Then I would
> say that I was blessed by a Grizzly-Bear
> spirit, that it had blessed me with the
> power of being uncontrollable; that I had been
> taught certain songs and these I would sing
> at the top of my voice. I used to imitate
> a grizzly bear and begin to exert my power.
> Then the people (around) would (try to) hold

> me. It generally required a large number
> of people to control me. Now I thought this
> (exhibition of mine) an act worthy of praise
> (my emphasis, Radin 1963:27-28).

Radin (1963:28) believes that although Crashing Thunder

knew that he was lying about these experiences of obtaining

the Grizzly-Bear spirit that there is much more to this

experience than simply calling it a lie. The power of

being uncontrollable was the characteristic gift of the

grizzly-bear and Crashing Thunder was correct in using this

as an interpretation of his drinking activities. In other

words, there is more to this connection than Crashing

Thunder realizes. For example, he also makes other

comparable claims:

> After a while I began to claim that I
> was blessed by many spiritual beings.
> Some time after I said that I was one of
> the giant beings called Good-Giants,
> that I was the second-born one of these and
> that my name was Good-Heart; that I had
> become reincarnate among human beings,
> dwelling with them. All this I would
> claim and they would believe me (Radin
> 1963:28).

Although this claim is an unusual one, it seems it is not

untypical of Crashing Thunder's world of experiences.

Radin (1963:28) comments that:

> (i)n the light of this statement,
> remembering that his brother-in-law
> (Thunder Cloud) had actually turned over
> to him the blessings he had obtained
> from these cannibal spirits, it seems
> reasonable to believe that S.B.
> (Crashing Thunder) is unjust to himself
> in insisting that he lied about these
> blessings.

Crashing Thunder recalls an incident that adds an interesting perspective to the effects of his so called "pretended blessing". Once when one of his nieces complained to him about the problems she encountered each time she gave birth to a child, each time she bore a child she barely managed to escape death, he told her of the powers he had and then told her what to do to prevent her from having such problems. In fact, in his estimation, he had "told her a tremendous falsehood. I said all of this because I was hungry. Then they gave me enough to appease my hunger.[4] I had nothing else to say" (Radin 1963:29).

Some time after this event took place Crashing Thunder was told that the woman was in excellent condition as he had claimed she would be if she followed his instructions. She had had an easy delivery and was in very good health. He explains further that he

> ...was surprised. Perhaps I am really a
> holy man, I thought.
>
> After (this incident) I boasted even
> more (of my powers), for now I really
> thought I possessed sacred power. I
> therefore talked as those do who have
> knowledge of all spiritual beings that
> exist. I also spoke with the authority
> of a medicine man (Radin 1963:29).

This particular event gives focus to the question of two sets of relationships, one between Crashing Thunder and the spirits and the second between him and the nature of the acquisition and efficacy of spirit power. Apparently Crashing Thunder had not received the power to help a woman have an easy time of childbirth. He had not fasted for it, purchased it, nor had he been given it as a gift (Radin 1963:29). There is an important point to be made here about the nature of the relationships I have just described. Radin (1963:29) suggests that Crashing Thunder

> ...wanted to help (his niece), and, while
> strictly speaking he had no right to call
> upon the spirits who had not blessed him,
> yet every Winnebago had more or less the
> right to offer tobacco to any spirits he
> wished. (This was part of the offering
> Crashing Thunder made to the spirits for
> his niece)...To the practical minded among
> them there seems to have been the feeling
> that if you were to offer tobacco and
> murmur the proper prayers and be sincere in
> your desire for help, although the latter
> was absolutely necessary, the spirits
> would be likely to help you; that, as a
> matter of fact, they are constrained to
> help you. All this S.B. (Crashing Thunder)
> did. His success would have been accepted
> by any Winnebago as a proof that the spirits
> had harkened; for some it would have been
> regarded as a proof that he had been blessed.

But Crashing Thunder was genuinely surprised, for he
believed that he had not yet, up to this point in his life,
obtained the major warrant of the experience of being
blessed. In other words, he had not yet been blessed; that
is, he had not yet had a vision, a stirring of something
that was within him that could be externalized and expressed
in some form of power.

This is comparable also with what I explained
earlier about Crashing Thunder's pretended acquisition of
the power of the Grizzly-Bear Spirit. His drinking did
have a strong inner effect on him although he did not know
how it should have been interpreted. Whenever a Medicine
Dance was given he would drink a good deal "and (frequently)
...would knock people unconscious..." (Radin 1963:29).
This he said was caused by the Grizzly-Bear Spirit, although
he did not believe it himself. Generally Crashing Thunder's
drinking began as a simple pleasure but it began to take on
added dimensions of meaning, first as an escape mechanism,
(he wanted to drink himself to death when he heard of his
brother's murder), second as a means for acquiring money,
(he would steal valuables from the people he drank with),
and finally as a spiritual blessing of the Grizzly-Bear
Spirit, (the "pretended" acquisition of special powers that
would help him in acquiring more status, power and prestige
in the eyes of the tribe and especially the women).

All of these experiences are inextricably woven

together as they texture his life. Crashing Thunder could not be tricked into thinking that any of these events were formed out of anything but superficial orders of experience. But might there be more to Crashing Thunder's experience than mere superficiality? Radin (1963:29) explains that Crashing Thunder's desire to appear powerful and important in each of these events played a minor role and was relatively unimportant. Crashing Thunder had done all that was technically required of him during his life to actively gain support for his endeavours and therefore many of the people believed him. Yet underlying this is the very serious suggestion of success in each of these events; that is, there was the sign of acquired during power in what he did for his niece, and there was the sign of the Grizzly-Bear Spirit as indicated in the violent acts he performed while he was intoxicated. Radin (1963:29) suggests, as a result, that Crashing Thunder was now "beginning to realize that power from the spirits could be obtained in another way."

Steager (1976:192), in a paper that he wrote on necessity, ambiguity and confusion in myth, has this to say about deception which applies altogether to Crashing Thunder. The suggestion is that for someone like Crashing Thunder,

> ...like ourselves, things <u>must</u> be what
> they seem--that is the only determinant
> logical way in which the world can be
> put together. This at least is what we
> place reliance upon, but there is always
> the possibility that we might be mistaken
> ...if we are mistaken and things can be
> other than what they seem, we cannot know
> that this would be for it would be invisible
> to us. All that we would see would be the
> intrusion into the world of misguided
> actions, poor judgment, inexplicable changes
> in mood, misfortune, tragedy, etc. Now all
> of these are the constant companions of
> human life and raise the spectre that
> determinacy just might be always coming
> apart, necessity unravelling into the snare
> of delusion (Steager 1976:192).

In other words, what happens when the meaning of events remain obscure and elusive to Crashing Thunder's realm of experience? What happens if the personal significance of particular actions and events result in experience being interpreted in an ambiguous way? This is where a particular event in Crashing Thunder's life makes an exceptionally remarkable statement about Crashing Thunder personally and about an interpretive indeterminacy to the meaning he gives the events that make up his life.

In Crashing Thunder's case the events that formed and shaped his life, up to this point, had taken on an added dimension of meaning. In other words, their appearance remained for Crashing Thunder somewhat different than their significance. This was due primarily to his failure to have a vision, so that what events meant for a "blessed" Crashing Thunder created a gap between events as he saw them (their

appearance) and events as they were if he had correctly interpreted them (their significance). For example, his ability to cure his niece of the complications she usually had while giving birth to children left Crashing Thunder baffled and surprised. He, in effect, had misinterpreted these events and their outcome was something very much different than he had planned on.

The indeterminacy in Crashing Thunder's experiences indicates that events can become other than what they appear to be and what they appear to mean, which is different from what he thought they signified. Crashing Thunder relied on what his experiences seemed to mean to him and what events seemed to be, and he risked misrepresentation and misinterpretation. The result was a dilemma that he could not logically reconcile with these experiences.

From the event of his very first lie about the vision through to the deception of the Medicine Dance ceremony, which had a devastating impact upon him, Crashing Thunder learned a model of deception that became a general standard for him. In other words, misguidance, deception, trickery, theft and fraud provided a standard, an ethic and a value, upon which he could rely up to this point. This was evident when he went to work for the circus. During this time he often drank and fought. He did all this because he considered himself to be wild. He grew his hair long and "told people that...Trickster had

instructed me to do this and that he had blessed me"
(Radin 1963:30). Crashing Thunder became a wife stealer,
a thief and an adulterer.

> By this time I was spending all my time
> drinking...Whenever I saw a person drunk
> I would steal whatever he had for that was
> what I was (a thief). If I saw a woman
> drunk, I would steal her, for that was
> what I was (an adulterer). What I was
> looking around for mainly was to induce
> a woman to live with me, for in this way
> I was able to get money from her. If any
> women wanted to marry me while staying
> with me, she would give me all the money
> she had. This is the kind of work I was
> doing. I would often, in this way, induce
> two or three (women) to live with me
> (Radin 1963:34).

In the interpretation of his own activities
Crashing Thunder could not provide the safeguard against
the possibility of things becoming other than what they
seemed. He never really had the power (that comes from
having a vision and being blessed) to express internal
control or to knowingly and actively direct events. His
experiences were bred of indeterminacy, ambiguity,
deceit and deception, while in the experience of the
event of curing his niece he created even more of the same
for himself. At the level of personal adjustment and
experience, a unique and complex integration occurred
between events that form a 'life world', molded out of
confusion, deception and delusion, and the possibility of
events being other than what they are. Mirrored in this,

expression of the events that make up his life united with the potential that these events have in relation to his interpretation of them. Upon this the imagination works and begins to transform for Crashing Thunder his understanding of the significance of events. His interpretation of events and the choice of contexts he preferred to use, which were constructed through an act of the imagination, promoted ambiguity rather than understanding. Crashing Thunder, in effect, has been left unprotected, understanding only the superficiality of his experiences and the appearance of events.

Similarly, we also see Crashing Thunder relying on Trickster. In Trickster, Crashing Thunder finds a figure upon which he can model his behaviour. Radin (1963:30) suggests that Trickster is "not one of the bona fide spirits", but neither is it true that Crashing Thunder had been blessed by "real" spirits. Instead, as he acts from his early youth, Crashing Thunder's activities are formed out of lies and deception. He journeys through life doing the kinds of things Trickster is good at doing; i.e., stealing women, stealing people's valuables, adultery, etc. But finally, with the surprising success of the curing event Crashing Thunder had produced, Trickster seems to have tricked him. After his timely deception and trick of telling everyone that he was a holy man who had been blessed with many special powers, he suddenly found that

the events in his life were taking on new meaning. In
effect, the meaning he gave to his experiences had lied
to him and for the first time in his life, so far as we
(and he) can tell, he was fooled.

It was also about this time in Crashing Thunder's
life that he decided that he should collect war honours.
His father and grandfathers had raised him so that he
should desire them, so that he should not be like those
who wear skirts (effeminate) (Radin 1926:148; 1963:35).
This was one of the main reasons he gave for joining the
Medicine Dance, so that he would not be ridiculed as being
effeminate. He and a friend decided that it was time to
obtain some external emblem of their bravery. Crashing
Thunder asked of his friend at the time:

> '[d]o we not always try and wear feathers
> at a Warrior Dance? Well, then, let us
> try to obtain war honors so that we can
> wear head ornaments.' So did we both
> speak to each other...We decided to kill
> a man of another tribe, we meant to perform
> an act of bravery (Radin 1926:148-149).

Four men led by Crashing Thunder went together
to Potawatomi territory. They took ropes along because
they were also going to steal horses, and if they came
across a man, they would kill him. Horse stealing was
also considered a praiseworthy feat. Crashing Thunder
explained that one of the strong reasons why he wanted to
do all of this was because he had admired the people who

had told stories of their experiences doing such things.

The rest of the story is best told by Crashing Thunder.

We proceeded to a place where horses of
other tribes used to pasture. Just as we
got there we saw the owner of some of these
horses and killed him. My friend killed him.
Then we went home, and secretly I told my
father all about it. I said to him, "Father,
you said it was good to be a warrior and you
encouraged me to fast and I did so. You
encouraged me to give feasts and I did so.
Now we have just returned from a trip. We
were looking for war honors and the young
people who were accompanying me decided that
I should lead them. I told them that it was
a difficult thing to lead warriors, my
father had always told me, and that I had
always been given to understand that a person
could lead a war-party only in consequence
of a specific blessing received from the
spirits. I was not conscious of having
received any such, I told him. Thus I
spoke. However, they made me an offering
of tobacco as they asked me, and I accepted
the tobacco saying that I would at least
make an offering of tobacco for them. Then
I offered tobacco to the Thunderbirds and
asked them for rain, that we might walk in
the protection and power of rain. This offering
we made in the morning and it rained all that
day. Then we went to the place where we
knew that we could find horses. When we
got there we met the owner of the horses
and spoke to him. We accompanied him to a
carpenter shop nearby, and there killed him.
I struck his dead body, counted coup first,
and announced my new name, as I gave a
war-whoop. I shouted 'Big Winnebago has
counted coup on his man.' Then the others
counted coup also. We searched his pockets
and found medicine and money in them. The
money we divided among ourselves. After that
we cut out his heart, for we had heard that
hearts were used for medicine. That is why
we cut out his heart. He had a gun and that
we took away from him and hid."

> Then my father said to me, "My son, it is
> good. Your life is no longer an effeminate
> one. This is the manner in which our ances-
> tors encouraged us to live. It is the will
> of the spirits in control of war that has
> led you to do this. Of your own initiative
> you could not possibly have done it" (Radin
> 1926:149-151).

After these events Crashing Thunder begins to drink to excess again. He finally got delirium tremens and while sick he had a vision of a drunken ghost. His ghost vision was terrifying to him. Ghosts of men he had known appeared to him. They were all on horseback and they were all singing a song with a theme: "We all must die sometime, so of what value is anything, I think" (Radin 1963:41). Upon gaining sobriety, Crashing Thunder found that he was now also a poet and his song became a popular drinking song among many.

His dissipation continued for two more years and then he was arrested with three other men for the murder of the Potawatomi man. While they were in prison awaiting trial (the trial date kept getting postponed and systema- tically set back), the more upsetting and bothersome prison became.

Winnebago men try not to exhibit emotions, first of all because it is a true sign of effeminacy, and second, because of the ridicule he would be open to, which every male Winnebago dreads (Radin 1963:45). As Crashing Thunder explains, it is the latter instance of

which he was most mindful.

I was very tired of it (being in prison)
but I kept that secret, because we used
to tease one another. Sometimes I would
feel like crying, but I would act as though
I did not care at all. I was married at
that time and I longed to see my wife and
was terribly wrought up, but I told the
others that I did not care in the least...
sometimes one of the women would visit us
and the others always said that I was the
only one who did not seem to care. (As a
matter of fact), I could hardly stand it, but
I kept my condition quite secret...

One day my wife came to visit me. I
talked with her through the iron grating.
They allowed me to talk to her for a long
time. All I could do was to desire her. I
wanted her badly. When the wives of the
others came they felt just as I did...

Some time after this, we found out that
my wife had married again. I did not feel
like eating, but I tried hard to do so,
because I thought that the others would
notice it. Then I said, "I am glad to
hear that it is reported that my wife has
married again. When I get out of prison,
I will pay the one who has (married her),
for he is going to take care of her until
I get out. I had been quite uneasy about her
for some time, and now I feel quite relieved,
for she is going to be taken care of." Thus
I said. But the truth of it was that I was
about as angry as I could be. I made up my
mind that I would take her away from whomever
she might be living with. Then I thought I
would make her feel as sad as I could. I
thought that I would disfigure her and leave
her; or take her away in the wilderness, whip
her soundly, and then leave her there. I
could not think of anything else and I did not
even know how the food tasted. I often felt
like crying. At night I would not be able to
sleep, for I could not forget it. I would try
to dream of her when I went to sleep at night.
Sometimes I would dream of seeing her and then
in the morning I would tell the others about it
and I would feel better. I never thought of

any of my relatives who were really the ones
who felt deeply for me. I was not even that
(grateful). I only thought of the woman
(Radin 1963:46-47).

It was shortly after this that Crashing Thunder was
set free from prison. Upon his release he immediately
took to drinking and womanizing. It was sometime later
before he got back together with his former wife.

4. Peyote and Conversion: The Fourth Critical Turning.

Crashing Thunder's first introduction to the
peyote eaters was when shortly after his release from
prison, he found out that his parents had been converted
to a peyote cult in the region. His immediate reaction to
the news was one of intense animosity toward the peyote
eaters, primarily because the peyote followers insisted
that all of the traditional Winnebago ceremonies were
wrong and that they must be abandoned. In fact these
peyote eaters actually destroyed war-bundles, medicine-
bags and other Winnebago sacred objects (Radin 1963:48).
Crashing Thunder had been warned by other conservative
Winnebagos against the degrading effects of eating the
peyote.

Peyote eaters were said to be foolish because they
cried when they felt happy about anything. They threw
away their medicines, they gave up the blessings they
received while fasting and they gave up all the spirits

that blessed them in their fasts. They also stopped

giving feasts and stopped making offerings of tobacco and,

instead, they burned their holy things. Above all they

claimed that they hold nothing except Earthmaker (God) as

holy (Radin 1963:49-50). Crashing Thunder felt ashamed of

some of the things the closest members of his family had

done. However, he did sit and listen to them. In fact

even early in his introduction to the various members of

the peyote cult he

> ...was rather fond of them...They would
> give me a little money now and then and
> they treated me with tender regard. They
> did everytying that they thought would make
> me feel good, and in consequence I used to
> speak as though I liked their ceremony.
> However, I was only deceiving them. I only
> said it because they were good to me
> (Radin 1963:50).

He comments further that he knew that they were being kind

to him so that they could influence him to join.

Crashing Thunder finally decided that he would

take peyote. He explained that he thought that he was

fooling them and that they thought that they were converting

him. He told them that he believed in peyote only because

they treated him so nicely (Radin 1963:51).

His first experience was not a particularly

influencing one. The peyote, he observed, weakened him

and he listened attentively to the singing and recalled

that he liked it very much. He felt different from his

normal self, but he saw nothing wrong with himself.

What is of extreme importance here is that Crashing Thunder is again in an expectant mood. He is waiting for some strong visionary experience, but, as in his former fasts, nothing powerful happened. Nothing truly different was happening to him. He watched the proceedings with some anticipation. People began to cry and he became frightened. He also noticed that when he sat still and closed his eyes, he began to see strange things.

His next peyote experience came to him the next night. He ate peyote and watched his brother-in-law and sister "give themselves up"; that is, the actual rite of standing before the leader who preached to them and offered prayers. This in itself was generally a very dramatic moment (Radin 1963:56). Both of them asked Crashing Thunder to stand before the leader with them. Although reluctant to do so, he finally stood up.

> ...I stood up. The leader began to talk and
> I (suddenly) began to feel sick. It got
> worse and worse and finally I lost con-
> sciousness entirely. When I recovered I
> was lying flat on my back...I felt like
> leaving the place that night, but I did not
> do it. I was quite tired out. "Why have I
> done this?" I said to myself...So I thought
> and then I tried to leave, but I could not.
> I suffered intensely. At last daylight came
> upon me. Now I thought that they regarded
> me as one who had had a trance and found
> out something (Radin 1963:56).

Here again we see Crashing Thunder's use of his very first lie about his fasting vision. He is still unconverted. But having gone through what he thought the ceremony was supposed to accomplish in his own being, that is, having become unconscious, he quite willingly would have let them imagine that he had the vision that they told him he would have. He carried this to its logical conclusion. He cut his long hair and destroyed his courting medicines in accordance with his new religion. Finally, he began to cry as he handed over the last remnants of his old religion, his medicine bundle.

From these experiences we can see that at least externally he had become a member of the cult. He is on the verge of conversion as we can see from his crying as he gives up the powerful symbols of his old belief system. As Crashing Thunder comments,

> The fact that he (my brother-in-law) told me that I understood, pleased me, and I felt good when day light came. (As a matter of fact), I had not received any knowledge. However, I thought it was the proper way to act, so I did it (Radin 1963: 57).

Of course this only confirms for him the kind of experiences he had been receiving all his life. He really did not expect to gain anything more. He had not yet experienced any inward change and did not really expect one.

One night Crashing Thunder was urged to eat a large amount of peyote, and he did. The only experience he had was that of being very tired, and suddenly,

> ...I looked at the peyote and there stood
> an eagle with outspread wings. It was as
> beautiful a sight as one could behold.
> Each of the feathers seemed to have a mark.
> The eagle stood looking at me. I looked
> around thinking that perhaps there was some-
> thing the matter with my sight. Then I
> looked again and it was really there. I
> then looked in a different direction and
> it disappeared. Only the small peyote
> remained. I looked around at the other
> people but they all had their heads bowed
> and were singing. I was very much surprised.
>
> Some time after this (I saw) a lion lying
> in the same place (where I had seen the eagle).
> I watched it very closely. It was alive and
> looking at me. I looked at it very closely
> and when I turned my eyes away just the least
> little bit, it disappeared. "I suppose they
> all know this and I am just beginning to know
> of it", I thought. Then I thought. Then I
> saw a small person (at the same place). He
> wore blue clothes and a shining brimmed cap.
> He had on a soldier's uniform. He was sitting
> on the arm of the person who was drumming, and
> he looked at every one. He was a little man,
> perfect (in all proportions). Finally I lost
> sight of him. I was very much surprised
> indeed. I sat very quietly. "This is what
> it is", I thought, "this is what they all
> probably see and I am just beginning to find
> out."
>
> Then I prayed to Earthmaker (God): "This,
> your ceremony, let me hereafter perform"
> (Radin 1963:58).

Radin (1963:58) points to a number of things in his observations of Crashing Thunder's experience. First, apparently Crashing Thunder had one of the splendid colour

visions which are frequently induced by ingesting peyote.
Radin (1963:58) observes that Crashing Thunder's eagle
vision and his vision of the little soldier man are

> ...the customary visions in fasts. Such
> (spirits) appeared to S.B.'s (Crashing
> Thunder's) brother when he was fasting.
> This unquestionable reminiscence of the
> old fasting experiences suggests that
> ...he...was also influenced by the old
> conceptions.

Altogether, these three visions gave him the sense of inward
change for which he had sought during his vision fast, in
subsequent fasts and in the Medicine Dance ceremony.

He had another vision:

> As I looked again, I saw a flag. I looked
> more carefully and (I saw) the house full
> of flags. They had the most beautiful
> marks on them. In the middle (of the room)
> there was a very large flag and it was a live
> one; it was moving. In the doorway there was
> another one not entirely visible. I had
> never seen anything so beautiful in all my
> life before.
>
> Then again I prayed to Earthmaker (God).
> I bowed my head and closed my eyes and began
> (to speak). I said many things that I would
> ordinarily never have spoken about. As I
> prayed, I was aware of something above me
> and there he was; Earthmaker (God) to
> whom I was praying, he it was. That
> which is called the soul, that is it, that
> is what one calls Earthmaker (God). Now
> this is what I felt and saw. The one
> called Earthmaker (God) is a spirit and
> that is what I felt and saw. All of us
> sitting there, we had all together one
> spirit or soul; at least that is what I
> learned. I instantly became the spirit
> and I was their spirit or soul. Whatever
> they thought of, I (immediately) knew it.

> I did not have to speak to them and get
> an answer to know what their thoughts had
> been. Then I thought of a certain place,
> far away, and immediately I was there.
> I was my thought.
>
> I looked around and noticed how every-
> thing seemed about me, and when I opened my
> eyes I was myself in the body again. From
> this time on I thought, thus I shall be.
> This is the way they are, and I am only just
> beginning to be that way. "All those that
> heed Earthmaker (God) must be thus", I
> thought. "I would not need any more food",
> I thought, "for was I not my spirit? Nor
> would I have any more use of my body", I
> felt. "My corporeal affairs are over", I
> felt (Radin 1963:59-60).

Radin (1963:59) suggests that the power of knowing before-

hand what a person was thinking of was an old Winnebago

belief and is one of the specific gifts one receives when

he joins the Medicine Dance. In fact it is called a

magical gift for members of that organization. Here,

Crashing Thunder experienced this power, and it flowed

directly from his predication of a corporate soul, with

which his individual soul is temporarily identified (Radin

1963:59). Similarly, the power of transporting one's self

at will to a distant place is an old Winnebago conception

which members of the Medicine Dance were supposed to

possess. "Thought, feeling, etc., were regarded by the

Winnebago as objective realities, or, to put it more

correctly perhaps, as things that existed just as definitely

as what was perceived directly through the senses (Radin

1963:60).

This experience of separation from the body was important for Crashing Thunder and he speaks further about this experience.

> On one occasion they had a peyote-meeting
> which lasted two nights. I ate a good
> deal of peyote. The next morning I tried
> to sleep. I suffered a great deal. I lay
> down in a very comfortable position. After
> a while a (nameless) fear arose in me. I
> could not remain in that place, so I went out
> into the prairie, but here again I was seized
> with this fear. Finally I returned to a
> lodge near the lodge in which the peyote
> meeting was being held and lay down alone.
> I feared that I might do something foolish
> to myself (if I remained there alone), and
> I hoped that someone would come and talk to
> me. Then someone did come and talk to me,
> but I did not feel better, so I thought I
> would go inside where the meeting was going
> on. "I am going inside", I said to him. He
> laughed. "All right, do so", said he. I
> went in and sat down. It was very hot and I
> felt as though I were going to die. I was
> very thirsty but I feared to ask for water.
> I though(t) that I was certainly going to
> die. I began to totter over.
>
> I died, and my body was moved to another
> life. It began to move about; to move about
> and make signs. It was not I and I could not
> see it. At last it stood up. The regalia--
> eagle feathers and gourds--these were holy,
> they said...My body spoke of many things and
> it spoke of what was true. Indeed it spoke
> of many things. It spoke of all the things
> that were being done (by the pagan Indians)
> and which were evil. A long time it spoke.
> At last it stopped. Not I, but my body
> standing there, had done the talking. Earth-
> maker (God had done his own talking. I
> would be confessing myself a fool if I
> were to think that I had said all this,
> it (my body) told me (Radin 1963:64-65).

Crashing Thunder finally returned to his normal

state. Some people thought he had gone crazy while others considered it a good sign. The peyote eaters called this state the "shaking" state. While this condition was regarded as important to the peyote cult, even more importantly, it was considered a "holy" among the conservative Winnebago (Radin 1963:65).

Crashing Thunder provides another example:

Once we had a meeting at the home of member who was sick. The sick would always get well when a meeting was held in their home, and that is why we did it. At that meeting I got into the 'shaking' condition again. My body told (us) how our religion (peyote) was an affair of Earthmaker's (God's) and even if one knew only a portion of it, one could still see (partake of) Earthmaker's (God's religion (Radin 1963:66).

There was one further consequence of Crashing Thunder's conversion that is important to mention. Whenever he went to a peyote meeting his thoughts still remained fixed on women. He thought that if he were to marry a woman that these thoughts would leave him and then he could concentrate completely on the ceremony. As he thought these things and prayed to Earthmaker he had a vision:

Suddenly I saw something. This was tied up. The rope with which this object was tied up was long. The object itself was running around and around (in a circle). There was a pathway there in which it ought to go, but it was tied up and unable to get there. The road was an

excellent one. Along its edge blue
grass grew and on each side there grew
many varieties of pretty flowers. Sweet-
smelling flowers sprang up all along this
road. Far off in the distance appeared a
bright light. There a city was visible of
a beauty indescribable by tongue. A cross
was in full sight. The object that was
tied up would always fall just short of
reaching the road. It seemed to lack
sufficient strength to break loose (of
what was holding it). (Near it) lay
something which would have given it
sufficient strength to break its
fastenings, if it were only able to get
hold of it.

I looked at what was so inextricably
tied up and saw that it was myself. I was
forever thinking of women. "This it is
with which I was tied", I thought. "Were
I married, I would have strength enough to
break my fastening and be able to travel
in the good road", I thought. Then daylight
came upon us and we stopped (Radin 1963:61-
62).

This vision is clearly the description of Earth-

maker's lodge as seen from a distance after one has

crossed the four hills as depicted in the myth of the

journey to spirit-land in the Medicine Dance. This myth

was well-known by S.B. (Crashing Thunder). Crashing Thunder

finally found a wife. Wtih the help of an old peyote man

he found a young woman just out of the government school.

He married her and was still living with her at the time he

wrote his autobiography.

Finally, as Crashing Thunder explained,

> ...since that time (of my conversion) no
> matter where I am I always think of this
> religion. I still remember it and I think
> I will remember it as long as I live.
> It is the only holy thing that I have
> ever been aware of in all my life (Radin
> 1963:61).

After this he gave up chewing or smoking tobacco, he gave

up drinking and finally he learned from the peyote

> ...that all I had done in the past, that
> it had all been evil. This was plainly
> revealed to me. What I thought was holy,
> and (by thus thinking) was lost, that I
> now know was false. (It is false) this
> giving of (pagan) feasts, of holding
> (the old) things holy, the Medicine Dance,
> and all the Indian customs (Radin 1963:67).

By the end of Crashing Thunder's narrative he

completed all physical and emotional severence of ties

that bound him to his former mode of life. He explains

in his last few statements that he is now completely happy

doing the work of the peyote cult.

Footnotes

[1]Another way in which this exercise could have been carried out is if I had collected my own life history material. This would have subtracted one step from this exercise, that of reinterpreting Radin's life history material. Similarly my observations about fieldwork and the collecting, arranging and presentation of material would have been extended by personal experience in the writing of a life history. Fortunately I can rely upon Radin's most eloquent autobiography of Crashing Thunder and his work on the collection, arranging and presentation of life history materials.

[2]By Medicine-man, Crashing Thunder means only that Thunder Cloud was a member of the Medicine Dance (Radin 1963:17).

[3]By grandfather, Crashing Thunder means a particular relationship that every Winnebago bears to old men (Radin 1963:17). In this case the man was an uncle of Crashing Thunder's father.

[4]It is interesting to note that what made Crashing Thunder give up on his vision quest was that he was getting hungry. Here again he lies to his niece and uses the excuse that he is hungry and he is rewarded both times with food. He may have had Trickster's appetites, it seems, but maybe not all of his other attributes.

CHAPTER V

AFTERWORD: SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

In Summary

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to show
that there is a value in featuring the individual in
culture; in other words, showing that the individual can
be the major emphasis of an ethnological endeavour. The
individual's place, I have tried to show, is not as a model
representation of culture (i.e., a generic individual who
becomes the food for explanations that express the typical
dispositions of more or less anonymous, generalized
individuals) but as an individual-as-individual.

I attempted to provide reasons for studying the
individual in culture by explaining the various pitfalls
of thinking of him simply as an adjustment to his culture.
Instead, I tried to show how an individual does not just
react or make external and internal adjustments to events
that make up his life but also that he has a causal
influence upon perception, thought, feeling and action.
To think of a person simply as a type of individual that
can be used in a general fashion to talk about culture has
limited value because it oversimplifies the subtlety and
complexity of human interaction that comes from studying

an individual in culture, and thereby restricts the range of an individual's meanings, motives and feelings.

There are probably a number of different ways in which the individual could be viewed. However, I feel that the way I have chosen best illustrates the value of studying a single person. I picked a life history for this purpose. I am firmly convinced that the events that make up a person's life and his experience of those events as well as the outward sign of this experience reflected in his behaviour, show a complex and meaningful integration. In this respect, very few systematic descriptions of a person's activities, as given in ethnological monographs, etc., have allowed much insight into the mental adjustments and attitudes and the meaning of personal experiences and events in a person's life. I asked why it was that so little effort had been given to gaining insights into the personal side of an individual's life. I realized that this is primarily what anthropologists began with in the fieldwork that they did; that is, with the systematic collection of information from individual informants. But, that after the article, monograph, book, etc., was completed, I saw little left of the individual the investigator began with.

I suggest that much of the reason behind this state of affairs is that many investigators, in their analysis, neglect to preserve the level of events and the meaning and significance of experience and events as they affect a person.

This is usually because they feel that the importance of such things as they affect a person is subsidiary to the study of more general patterns, rules or aspects of society or culture as such. Guided by some norm of ethnographic description these investigators provide models of explanations that regard the individual as secondary to the study of anthropology. Thought, action, meaning and life events are seen simply as expressions strictly defined in terms of the model of cultural form or context that are being used to study phenomena. Any significance that was given to the individual remained peculiarly distant from the phenomenal level of their activities. By overestimating the importance of their models of explanation, these investigators hold to the concept of an individual's personal meanings, thoughts, actions and events, as reactive, passive and invariant. By doing this they leave little room for trying to understand the effects that specific individuals have on the construction of a phenomenal world of meanings, thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Again, these investigators maintain that the mental and physical activities of the individual are already more or less determined by culture. What they are not aware of, of course, is that perceptual and cognitive operations under- lying the creation of ideas, meanings, feelings, etc., are simply more indirect, idiosyncratic and metaphorical than those that facilitate communicative clarity and precise

formulation in a theory.

This led me to look at life histories as a possible way in which to gain an understanding of the events and experiences, their significances and meanings, in one person's life. Events and experiences can be described and interpreted without taking them out of the context of the person's life. The clarity of the description and interpretation of events and their meanings seemed to make good ethnographic sense. However, I also needed to find a way of looking at a person's life at a level of abstraction that did the least amount of violence to the quality of a person's life and my interpretation and understanding of that life. To this end I needed to apply a personal hermeneutic to the life of an individual.

A personal hermeneutical approach to life history is important in that it works against theoretical over-simplification or reductionist interpretations of events that make up a person's life. To provide an example, which I will use for illustrative purposes here, I could explain all of a person's present adult behaviour and the various meanings that a person gives to this behaviour and an interpretation of those meanings on the basis of the rigidifying effects of early childhood experiences. This is, of course, based on a Freudian notion which assumes that the major principle governing man's functioning is the homeostatic tendency to return to or maintain a rather

steady or low state of psychic and organic tension. Hence, any meaning that the person gives to events, if he deviates from what is considered to be the normal well-balanced behavioural environment of adult life as a member of his culture, is considered to be a product of a neurosis, a psychosis, a regression in service of the ego, etc. Once this theoretical construct has been given status and impor-tance as a way in which to explain meanings in events, actions, motivations, feelings, etc., of a person, he has then been labeled (indeed, he has been rendered and reified) by the terminology of the theory. Alternatively, rather than a psychoanalytic reduction, I could have used Crashing Thunder as the typical artifact of cultural disintegration, embodying the failure of the Winnebago culture to provide the context for a proper vision.

The other side of this situation is that the investigator has already decided what it is that is making the individual in question act and behave in the way that he does or give the meanings to events, feelings, motives, etc., that he does. In fact, what the investigator does not negotiate for himself or does not care to engage with for himself is the existence in a large measure of the intuitive, preformal interpretations that make up his interpretation and understanding of feelings, thoughts, motives, ideas and the meaning of the native person's events or how the latter defines his activities for himself

within his own empirical world and behavioural environment.

A personal hermeneutic provides a format within which the investigator may come into contact with the way in which he is thinking with and about the native person with whom he is exploring a particular set of phenomena that make up the latter's life events. This brings to bear upon them both a self-critical (intersubjective) reflection and a dialectical process that emerges from a dialogue that appears out of the questions that are being asked about a phenomenon. Hermeneutics, in this respect, opens up for personal interpretation and understanding the meaning of the events, actions and experiences that make up this person's life.

With a personal hermeneutic in mind, I held up Radin's edited autobiography of Crashing Thunder, a Winnebago Indian, to reinterpretation. Through this life history I attempted to bring Crashing Thunder's interpretation of the meaning and significance of experience, actions and events in his life into a context of understanding that would recognize that I too was a part of the interpreting process, trying to gain some understanding of the experiences and events in Crashing Thunder's life. More importantly, I attempted to stay as close to the events of Crashing Thunder's life as possible. It is in this attempt, I think, that a close interpretation of the meaning of experience and events in Crashing Thunder's life takes on its most

important significance. The interpretation stays close to events and not to a theory and certainly not to speculation.

First, in interpreting Crashing Thunder's life history I emphasize four crucial events that seem to have provoked him into acting in his world in the way that he does. I used Mandelbaum's (1973:179-190) concept of "turnings" to emphasize these particular events and then studied his life as it could be seen in relation to these events. The first three critical turnings are as follows: (1) his early failure to have a fasting vision and the lie he subsequently tells his family suggesting that he did have a vision; (2) the deception he experiences when he finds out the disastrous secrets of the Medicine Dance; (3) his evident ability to cure his niece of her problem of bearing children.

The first two turnings form a contextual model that Crashing Thunder acts upon for the better part of his first forty-five years. In other words, he has lied about his vision but his lie has been matched with the deception of the secrets of the Medicine Dance. Throughout his life he lives with his lie and deception while he becomes successful at swindling people out of their money, stealing money, taking other men's wives, drinking and fighting, stealing women, etc. He tells the people that he is like Trickster, in fact, that he is blessed by Trickster.

He also tells the people that he is a holy man, that he
has been blessed by the spirits, because he has had a fast-
ing vision, because he is a member of the Medicine Dance,
because he is given special spirit powers from his brother-
in-law, a powerful shaman. In actual fact he has had no
inner experiences of change whatsoever, and neither has he
been blessed. Although he realizes that he is lying, many
Winnebago believe him to be a true holy man. Accordingly,
when he "pretends" to cure his niece and she is cured by
his power, he is taken completely by surprise. For the
first time he begins to think that maybe he has spirit
power, but he has not been blessed nor has he had a proper
vision. For the first time Trickster, it seems, has
tricked him. In effect, Crashing Thunder's interpretation
of the significance and meaning of his experiences and the
events in his life become ambiguous and they can be seen to
take on an appearance much different than what they really
do signify. Crashing Thunder now begins to wonder about
some of the interpretations he has given events.

Finally, a number of years after this encounter
with his niece, he is initiated into the peyote religion.
He receives the powerful and important visions that eluded
him throughout his life. This brings about the fourth
critical turning and the subsequent transformation of his
personality. He settles down with one wife, quits chewing
and smoking tobacco, fighting, drinking, etc., and proceeds

to do the work of his new peyote religion. Crashing
Thunder explains that this "is the only holy thing that I
have been aware of in all my life" (Radin 1963:61).

My reinterpretation of Crashing Thunder's life
events is grounded in those same events. I try to interpret
them in light of the ongoing context of his life. To
step out of this format would put me into the realm of
speculation for speculation's sake and out of touch with the
world of Crashing Thunder's experience. What would be put
in jeopardy is the value of interpretation. In this manner,
I stay close to the actual life of the individual and I am
able to bring to our understanding some of the meanings of
Crashing Thunder's experiences and events. Not only do we
get a picture of Crashing Thunder in the context of a
Winnebago culture, but we also are able to see some of the
ways in which he acts upon and transforms for himself his
life and, in effect, his culture. But Crashing Thunder's
life is not just anchored in the physical and social
patterns of adjustment but also in the implicit mental and
imaginative actions that he is able to bring to bear on his
event specific world. At the level of experience and
imagination a unique and complex integration occurs between
the world of objects and actions and the world of meaning,
thought, feeling and motive. The impetus of this integra-
tion is in Crashing Thunder's every action which is not only
in reaction to his world, but also in his creatively acting

upon phenomena to make up his world, which, in effect,

shapes events and the meaning of events that make up his

life.

In Reflection

One of the major questions that underlies this

thesis is how can we as anthropologists release ourselves

from the philosophical dogmas and the concept of natural

systems and laws modeled on constructs of the natural

sciences? Evans-Pritchard (1962:26-28; 1973:763-764)

suggested that it was important for the discipline to do

so. This was the guiding premise from which he fashioned

his idea of a hermeneutical approach for the discipline.

Similarly this is the approach that I use in this thesis.

Descartes suggested that man is a "rational soul,

set over and against the extended physical world, and only

contingently related to it" (Gauld and Shotter, 1977:3).

He further stated that

> ...if we rightly use our capacity for
> rational thought...we may in time achieve
> control over the material world of which
> we are the detached observers...
>
> [We become increasingly the]...Masters
> and possessors of nature. By conceiving the
> physical world as made up of elementary and
> separable particles of matter in blind but
> lawful interaction, and by developing methods
> of controlled experimentation with which to
> investigate them, we have greatly increased
> our power to control at least certain aspects

of that world. But in what terms are we
to conceive and understand the knower
whose knowledge has been so strikingly
advanced, the 'rational soul' whose
intellectual activities, directed upon
the natural realm of which he is not a
part, yet have rendered him master and
possessor of nature? (Ibid. 1977:3).

Natural scientific knowledge in the Cartesian

tradition has grown to be an ideal of all knowledge. In

fact there would probably be something to this view of

natural scientific knowledge in anthropology if it were

not for the great care and concern which marks the pages

of the best ethnographies. For anthropologists, in spite

of what they might say and do, work as persons in the midst

of other persons. While this is true, many anthropologists

choose to forget it. For example Kroeber (1948:841)

believed

If there is one a priori postulate on
which all anthropologists are unanimous,
it is that they wish to study men's
physiques and men's cultures as other
natural scientists study stars or rocks
or lightning or elements or trees or
animals or what goes on inside animals.
Man, to every anthropologist, is an
animal in the given world of nature:
that and nothing more--not an animal with
a soul or immortality or destiny or any-
thing else attached to him before hand,
but an animal to be compared as to structure
and to function on equal terms with other
animals; and with the unshakable conviction
that any special traits and qualities which
may ultimately be assigned to him are to
eventuate from inquiry instead of being
presupposed...There is no room in anthro-
pology for a shred of ethnocentricity, of

homi-centricity; for if prevaluation in
favor of our civilization, our religion,
our philosophy, our standards; nor room
either for reservation of this product or
that belief as being too noble or too fine
to be studied by the ordinary methods of
natural science.

That is why alone among what is customary
to call the social sciences, anthropology is
recognized by astronomers, physicists,
chemists, geologists, and biologists as a
sister natural science--or at any rate as
a potential one. Our accomplishments may
not yet be as precise or as sure as theirs:
but we are shooting at the same kind of marks
in a similar way.

It is my contention that Kroeber's descriptive

reports are not simply those of a rock collector. Perhaps

it could be argued that in spite of Kroeber's unfortunate

metaphors he was really trying to say that the anthropologist

must leave behind all that he takes for granted in his

culture while studying another culture. It then could be

said that Kroeber was merely suggesting that the anthropolo-

gist must suspend his particular common sense notions of

the world or at least be aware of them and how they effec-

tively help fashion his descriptions out of which his

report is shaped.

If this is what Kroeber was saying then I could

at least support him. But I think that this precisely is

what he does not mean. This is an important point to

understand. I think it is an illusion that the anthropolo-

gist views people of another culture strictly in terms of

that culture itself. It is this illusion that keeps the anthropologist from the self-reflective understanding of his practice. A closer look indicates that Kroeber is calling for and asserting a crude kind of cultural relativism. In this way he asks us to realize that our standards may be no better than those of the people we judge. He invokes a personal detachment or neutrality, a position founded upon the assumption that the method of natural science is adequate to the understanding of every-thing--the joys and sorrows of a person, his life experiences, the birth, growth and death of those he associates with, and the meaning he finds in all of these things. This kind of detachment is really sensitive to nothing because it attempts to objectify everything. Similarly I find it strange, indeed, that after rejecting our civilization, our philosophies and our religions as embodying prevaluations which might bias our view of others, we then are required to employ the ordinary methods of our natural science. What Kroeber conveniently left out is the thinking mind of the scientist himself.

Anthropology has developed as a discipline since the time of Kroeber and others like him, yet it is his shade which still haunts anthropology when it seeks to deny the very self-knowledge necessary to allow it a hermeneutical perspective. To accept a critical, reflexive anthropology we must embrace the place of the practising

anthropologist. We must accept that the anthropologist is more than remotely involved in the recovery of the meaning and significance of events in the life of a native person. Such work requires a discipline of committal to openness and expectation, the actual discipline of inter-subjectivity. This subject has not been fully explored in anthropology and deserves much more attention.

We open ourselves in a dialogue with a native person when, as ethnographers, we work with that person in recording the events of his life. There is a lot to be said for life history in this regard because it lets the subject speak for himself; because the ethnographer refuses to independently frame the other's life. This attempt is hermeneutical if the significance and meaning of actions and experiences of the native person are grasped by both the native person and the ethnographer and is indeed in a sense a matter for negotiation between them.

Radin was one of the first anthropologists to understand, recognize and use this kind of approach. As Diamond (1974:428-429) explains,

> One can understand why Paul Radin, alone
> among the anthropologists of his genera-
> tion, insisted that the only acceptable
> ethnology is life history, told by members
> of an indigenous society themselves. Radin
> defined this as both the method and the
> theory of ethnology...in this perspective
> he severely criticized the Boas school,
> especially Mead and Benedict. Radin's
> view is necessarily incomplete (he himself

continued to ask critical questions through-
out his career), but what is more pertinent
is that his view was exactly the reverse of
the objectifying trend; he spotted it, and
tried to combat it early on.

Much more study needs to be done on Radin and his contem-
poraries. The work of Radin and indeed the man himself
also deserve much more attention than has been given them
in the past.

Finally, I consider this thesis to be an overview
of some of the root notions in the development of an
hermeneutical approach in anthropology. While I have
mentioned my own moments of discovery, I have concentrated
on the benefits of using an hermeneutical approach, focusing
on its use in the ethnographic setting; its use in the
analysis of the life history form; its use in the selection
and arrangement of life history materials; and its use in
my reinterpretation of a particular life history. These
aspects of its use intersect each other to form a process
called a hermeneutic motion. This motion has gone virtually
unrecognized in anthropology for a very long time. We all
take part in the process when we describe and interpret.
It simply is up to each of us to come to some understanding
of the process and its place in the discipline.

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