

# **Eye Juggling: A Methodology for Interpreting Stories**

## **Eye Juggling Outline**

### **Sweat House Approach**

With modifications and additions, as an excerpt from: Rodney Frey. 1995. *Eye Juggling: Seeing the World Through a Looking Glass and a Glass Pane*. University Press of America: London, and other sources.

## **Gathering Huckleberries: Preparations for the Journey**

Before we begin, let's first prepare to gather some huckleberries. Over the years I've had Cliff SiJohn, a Schitsu'umsh (Coeur d'Alene Indian) elder and spiritual man, visit with my students and speak on a variety of topics dear to him, on the "Indian ways" of his family. Among the topics he'd inevitably address would be the significance of gathering huckleberries. He'd talk of the importance of mending the cedar baskets and preparing for the long trip to the mountain, of knowing when the berries were ready, and upon arriving on the mountain, of picking the berries with such care so as not to harm the bush. Cliff would then speak of the critical importance of sharing those hard-earned berries with those who are in need, with those who couldn't make it to the mountain, and of properly storing the huckleberries for future use. My students and I would come to learn of the nourishment only the huckleberries could provide.

Then, as if changing the subject, Cliff would ask the students, "Why are you in school, taking these courses, what are you going to do with this education?" After letting each student respond, Cliff would pause. Breaking the silence and looking out into the class, as if speaking to each student individually, Cliff would affirm, "You know, your education is a gathering of the huckleberries. With your huckleberry basket firmly strapped to your side, gather what your teachers, what your textbooks, what your fellow students and friends, what your life-experiences, in and out of the classroom, have to offer you. Be attentive, listen, with all your mind, with all your heart (patting his hand on each). With great care place those berries in your basket. Cherish them. And then when you or someone you care for is in need, facing a challenge, needs a little nourishment, needs a little guidance, a little help, pull out some berries and use them. Cherish your education, cherish your huckleberries."

## **The Eye Juggler**

There is an old man, with long, black braids. He stands there, beside that tall cedar tree, singing a song. As he sings that song, what should happen..., his eyes pop out of his head. He continues singing that song and his eyes go up the side of the tree to the top branch. There those eyes look to the east. Then they turn and look to the south. The old man with empty sockets in his head continues that song. From the top of the tree the eyes look to the west. And then the eyes turn once more and look to the north, the fourth direction.

As the old man with long, black braids sings that song, who should come along the path there but Coyote, down on his luck. He sees the old man standing there and decides to pay him a

visit. He's been out there in those hills a long time. But as Coyote gets a little closer he realizes that there is something odd about this old man. He's seen some strange things out there in those hills but nothing like this. The old man is singing his eyes to the sky!

Now Coyote, who's been down on his luck, realizes a good thing when he sees it. If he had this trick, he could go to town, stand on a street corner and sing his eyes out. He could juggle his eyes, and become . . . an "eye juggler!" He would certainly become rich then. That's what Coyote is thinking.

By now the old man with the long, black braids has completed his song, and his eyes have come down the side of the tree back into his head.

"Old man, teach me this trick," Coyote says.

"This is no trick, but a way of seeing the world. When I send my eyes to the sky, I look in the four directions and only the four. In that way I show respect to that which I see. Never try to see too much," the old man says.

"That's fine, but teach me the song anyway," Coyote says.

Well, the old man with the long, black braids has a difficult time saying no to anyone, so he agrees to teach Coyote how to sing his eyes to the sky. And it turns out that Coyote is a pretty good student and he picks up that song.

But once more the old man with the long, black braids says, "when you sing your eyes to the sky, look in only the four directions. Never try to see too much."

"Sure, sure," Coyote says, and he's off. With that song, Coyote is eager to try out his new trick. He goes that way, into the forest and searches for a tall tree. No short tree will do. He searches here and there, trying out all the trees around. None will do. Over that hill, there he goes, now along that ridge, further into the forest Coyote wanders, looking for the tallest tree.

After a long and exhausting search, the perfect tree is found. It towers high, touching the clouds. Coyote begins singing that song, the one I told you about. And what should happen..., his eyes pop out of his head and go up the side of that tree. It works! From the top of the tree the eyes look to the east, to the south, to the west, and finally, to the north. "I'm going to be famous and rich. I'm going to be . . . an eye juggler!" Coyote says.

At the end of the song, the eyes come down the side of the tree and back into Coyote's head.

It's late, and you don't want to get caught in that forest at night. It's dangerous. So Coyote begins walking back to his camp. He goes that way. Then this way. But everything is so strange to him. Did he come this way or that? He goes to the top of a high ridge and looks everywhere. Nothing is familiar. He's lost! What's he to do?

Then Coyote remembers his special song. "I'll send my eyes to the sky again, and they'll see a way back home." Coyote sings that song. Just as before his eyes pop out of his head, and go to the top of the tree. One eye looks this way, the other that way. In all the directions those eyes look . . . , and then some. And they see the way back to the camp. He'll be safe now.

So the song is sung to its conclusion. It's sung . . . , and nothing happens! The eyes remain fixed at the top of the tree.

He must've left out a word from the song. So very carefully, Coyote sings that song again. But when the song ends, the eyes are still in the top of that tree.

It's a hot afternoon, and the sun is beating down on those exposed eye balls, and they begin to swell up.

Coyote tries climbing the tree. But he can't see so well, and about half way up he misses a branch and falls to the ground.

Flies in great numbers are landing on those exposed eye balls.

He searches around on the ground and picks up a stone there and that stick here, and throws them to the top of the tree. But when they fall, the eyes remain there, and the stone and stick land on the head of . . . Coyote!

The crows have found those eyes and are about to have a little afternoon snack.

Coyote lays there, at the base of the tree, crying huge tears from his empty eye sockets.

Just then, Mouse runs across Coyote's face. Maybe he's after a whisker hair for his nest. But as Mouse runs across the face of Coyote, the tail of Mouse falls into the open mouth of Coyote and Coyote immediately closes his mouth tight on the tail of Mouse. Coyote pulls from his mouth that which he's captured. That Coyote is quick!

Now how many working eyes does Mouse have? And how many does he have?

"Mouse, younger brother, give me one of your eyes, or that'll be it!" Coyote says.

Now Mouse thinks this over. He's a family man, with several wives and lots of kids. He has responsibilities. His life is very valuable. So very carefully, Mouse pulls out one of his eye balls and hands it to Coyote. True to his word, Coyote lets Mouse go.

Now that eye ball is pretty small. But Coyote puts it into one of his empty sockets. It fits alright. And what should happen . . . , he can see!

One slight problem. Every time Coyote moves his head, ever so slightly, that eye ball rolls around and around inside that head, and everything looks wobbly and blurred.

But the first thing Coyote sees is Buffalo standing over there. How many working eyes does Buffalo have and what size are they, and what does he have? So Coyote takes out his rifle and goes over to Buffalo. "Buffalo, younger brother, hand over one of your eyes, or that'll be it!" Coyote says.

Now Buffalo thinks this over. And just like Mouse, he's got several wives, lots of kids. He's a family man, with responsibilities. So very carefully he pulls from his head one of his eyes, and hands it to Coyote. True to his word, Coyote lets Buffalo go.

Coyote tries to put the eye in, but it's a pretty good size. He turns and twists, but is just won't stick. It falls to the ground, and gets all dirty. Coyote brushes it off and tries again, and again. It just won't stick. So he goes over to a tree and begins pounding his head against the eye ball against the tree . . . , and eventually it sticks! But that eye ball just hangs there . . . , half out. And the other one, well, it just rolls around and around and around in that head.

There goes Coyote. You'll certainly recognize him if you come across him in that forest there.

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## Stories

This Cheyenne story is often told to help explain why some people just don't see . . . eye to eye! The story's theme is, of course, about differing ways of seeing the world. With the "Eye Juggler" setting the tone, I invite you to an adventure in eye juggling.

My premise is rather straightforward. As a humanity, *we are the stories we tell*. In her *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, Ursula Le Guin states, “[t]o learn to speak is to learn to tell a story (1989:39). At the very core of our interactions with one another and the worlds around us, we are *homo narrans* – we are storytellers. “Story” refers to the fundamental symbols and values, and the distinguishing cultural character pervading a portion or the entirety of a society and its various institutions; what I have come to term, “cultural story.” Story can be inclusive of both mythic and historic significances, as well as aesthetic and empirical meanings. And embedded within our cultural story is the single most important influence on the behaviors we exhibit and the worlds we create, our “values.”

In the stories we share with one another, we define the primary qualities of how we came to be, our origins, and what we can become, our destiny. In the stories, we define who we are, what the world is and how we are to relate to that world. Our ways of knowing and our ways of motivating are found in our stories. Through the stories, we learn and re-affirm our basic cultural values of time and space, causation and being, and give meaning to all aspects of our lives. In the stories, *we are*.

We carry forth our stories and with them create our social institutions, our ways of behaving toward each other. Family, church, school, recreation, art, government, economy, science, technology, work are all animated, structured and given meaning through our stories. We celebrate our stories at every opportunity: in Sunday worship at church or at a football stadium, in a graduation commencement or each Friday after work at the local bar, in a class or family reunion, in a hard-earned job promotion or vacation cruise to the Caribbean. We tell our stories at each juncture in our lives: at birth, at each birthday, at marriage, at divorce, at our death. Our lives are inundated with our stories.

We carry forth our stories and with them create our view of the world about us and our ways of behaving toward it. How we define a landscape, the rush of water in a river, a sunset, a thunderstorm, the howl of a coyote, the flight of an eagle, the ant that walks across the kitchen table – all are predicated on the stories we tell. Our aesthetic, our religious, our economic and our scientific images of plant, animal, earth, star, and of their origin, dynamics and destiny are framed in our stories. The lives of others are inundated with our stories.

Simply put, our humanity and our world are defined in the stories we tell each other. Without stories there can be no human being, and there is no world.

It follows then that to understand how humanity sees itself and the world, we must learn something about the stories humanity tells. Through an appreciation of the stories, we have access to what is most essential to humanity. To understand “wilderness,” for instance, is to go into someone’s story of wilderness, and not into a wilderness area. “Wilderness” does not have existence “out there,” in nature, but in the symbols and values embedded in someone’s story of it.

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Before you can begin your eye juggling, you must learn the old man’s song and equip yourself with the language and method of eye juggling. The difficulty in comparing and attempting to understand an assortment of varied stories and contrasting value systems is in formulating and applying a methodology that does not compromise and distort the integrity of that which we seek to describe and understand. Too often the language we use to describe what is

other than our own only clothes the other in the familiar. Eye juggling involves an appreciation of *symbols* and *values*, and the application of *interpreting* skills. Together, they provide a method for better clarifying and appreciating the values of others, as well as your own values.

The relationship of *story*, *symbol*, *values-teachings-principles*, and *interpretation* is not unlike that of the elements of the metaphor of "landscape." Let's take the example of the [Palouse landscape](#) of eastern Washington and north-central Idaho. *Story* is analogous to the defined landscape itself, its particular and unique characteristics and boundaries - the Palouse. In turn, *symbol* is analogous to the visual, natural surface features of that landscape, the rich soils of rolling hills. *Values*, *teachings* and *principles* are analogous to the underlying geological processes and events that formed the natural features and gave the landscape its character, and, in the instance of the Palouse, wind erosion and the Missoula Flood of some 15,000 B.P. And in our metaphor, *interpretation* would then be analogous to traveling the Palouse landscape, entailing your full engagement in the process of traveling, of being very observant of the terrain, its overt symbols and underlying values. As the natural features, i.e., *symbols*, of a landscape, i.e., *story*, are influenced by their geological processes, i.e., *values*, *teachings* and *principles*, to *interpret* and acquire a sense of the meaning of a story, you need to focus on the symbols of that story, as they will point the way to the underlying values and meaning of the story. Keep in mind, that to interpret is also to acknowledge your own participation in a landscape, of being a part of it and not removed from it, and realize the implications and effects you have on the landscape you are traveling. In the act of interpreting, there can be no neutral, outside observes. We will rely upon the tools of the humanities and social sciences to inform our interpretive method. We'll discuss these notions and their implications more fully later.

## Symbols

We had just come out of the downpour as we sped south on the Interstate Highway. Except for the sun's radiance from the west, the sky remained dark blue. Then we saw it, bright and clear, not more than a quarter mile to the east. With all its vivid colors, the rainbow emerged from the ground, arced and re-entered. It was a perfect [rainbow](#).

But the perfect rainbow had something special to offer that afternoon. As we continued south, the rainbow seemed to move with us. We passed a wooded area, then a deep coulee, now a ranch house; at each site the rainbow touched down and moved across. We slowed the car to sneak a picture with the camera; the arc of color slowed as well. We sped up; it sped up. A hill rose a few hundred feet from the car; the rainbow touched down so close that we could almost run our fingers through its vibrant colors. We soon realized that this was our own rainbow. No one else would see it as we saw it. Others who traveled that road may also have seen a rainbow, even at the very same moment we saw ours, but theirs was not ours. It was a gift to us alone. And we gave thanks to the Rainbow.

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A symbol can be defined as a specific *unit of reference* that refers to a particular *referent*. The unit of reference can be an object, a behavior, or a sign. The referent can consist of a concept, phenomenon or process. Simply put, a symbol is something that stands for something else.

In the story of the Rainbow, the word "rainbow" is the unit of reference that refers to an arc of vivid colors, a phenomenon, the referent. In the Eye Juggler story, the referents are concepts rather than phenomena, and are thus much more abstract and open to interpretation. "Look in the four directions and only the four," and "never try to see too much" are certainly units of reference expressed in explicit words. We can further isolate the images of behaviors such as "eyes as easily at home in the tree as in the head" or "eyes becoming stuck on the top branch and forever lost" as units of reference. Taken together, these units of reference may refer to the concept of "living in balance and not in greed with the world," the referent.

To enhance your understanding of symbols and your interpretative skills as an eye juggler, five critical dimensions of the symbol need to be briefly discussed.

FIRST, symbols presuppose *displacement*. The unit of reference refers to something that is separate from the temporal and spatial immediacy of the person who is symbolizing. The word "rainbow" can refer to something separate from the direct experience of seeing a rainbow. While you may have an image of that something in your mind, that image is not dependent on you directly experiencing it as you refer to it. The implications are far reaching. As a consequence of displacement, the human is forever free from the constraints of what is experienced and defined in the immediate and can contemplate distant places and times to create an endless inventory of images and meanings. And as I will suggest in the Epilogue, the human also is forever estranged and set apart from the natural world as a result of displacement.

SECOND, symbols entail *meaning*. Attached to any symbol is significance. The meaning associated with "rainbow" might be the anticipation of good fortune or the possibility of finding "a pot of gold" or simply the understanding of the colors of the spectrum formed by the refraction of the sun's rays on raindrops. While displacement allows the human to expand beyond the immediate, the meaning attached to symbols gives a significance to that expanded world. You may never have experienced eye juggling for yourself, but you may have an understanding of its meaning as the result of the "Eye Juggler" story. The meaningful world is thus limited only by what the human can imagine. As an eye juggler, it will be your challenge to discover the meaning embedded in the various story texts presented in this workbook.

THIRD, symbols can be transmitted in time and through space, i.e., they can be *learned* and *shared*. You may never have experienced eye juggling, but you have now learned something about it. The eye juggling may have occurred long ago, but you can know it in the present. The individual human is not limited to the sum total of his or her direct and idiosyncratic experiences, but is potentially able to be inclusive of the collective experiences of an entire human society and history. As eye jugglers and with great interpretative skills, we can gain access to much of the meaning of world views quite distinct from our own; all because symbols can be shared and learned.

FOURTH, the meaning attached to the symbol is autonomous of and not bound by the unit of reference, i.e., any given symbol can refer to anything. The meaning of a symbol is *arbitrary*. The word "rainbow" can refer to the anticipation of good luck or it can refer to evil and the devil or, for some, the word may have absolutely no meaning at all. There is nothing innate within the unit of reference that would necessitate and bind the word "rainbow" to a certain meaning. It is this quality of arbitrariness that distinguishes a symbol from a sign. The meaning associated with a

sign is tightly bound to its unit of reference. For instance, to cup one's hands and draw them to one's mouth is a unit of reference indicative of drinking or thirst. But, as a symbol, the word "cup" can refer to a container or possibly to the act of drinking or to a virtually endless assortment of meanings.

As a function of this arbitrariness, any given symbol can have an assortment of differing meanings and that assortment can occur simultaneously. Further, the processes of creativity and imagination are made possible. New, never before conceived of meanings can be brought forth, e.g., eye juggling! With the spontaneity of creativity and imagination, language is rendered "open-ended."

But also because of this arbitrariness, the interpretation of story texts is made that much more difficult. The meanings of symbols, especially symbols originating out of world views different from our own, are never overt nor explicit and are always open to misinterpretation.

FIFTH, symbols define the parameters of and assign the meaning to the phenomenal world of objects and of images, i.e., that which symbols refer to is *brought forth* and *created*. The meaning of an object or image does not rest in that object or image alone, but is the result of a complex interaction involving the object or image, human sensory perception, and human mental conception. Conceptualization, in turn, is influenced by the particular cultural and historical paradigms of the specific human who is conceptualizing.

What is it that constitutes the phenomenon, "rainbow"? Certainly the mist of the rain and the light of the sun are critical elements. But a certain interaction is also necessary. The light must refract off the mist. And do we not also need a human *perceiving* of that particular interaction of light and mist? Would a "rainbow" exist without a human physically seeing it, and seeing it in only a particular relationship and angle to the light and mist? And do we not also need a human *conceiving* of that particular interaction? Would a "rainbow" exist without a concept of it, without a symbol rendering it a meaningful phenomenon, assigning a particular significance to it? The "rainbow" was recognized, "as we sped south on the Interstate Highway," and assigned a particular significance, "our own rainbow," "a gift to us alone" and "we gave thanks to the Rainbow," rendering that phenomenon meaningful.

This is not to suggest that there is nothing unless it is symbolized. While lacking a particular symbol for "wall," the physicality of a wall still has an abrupt existence when encountered. While clouded in considerable mystery, a spiritual archetype is not denied because it lacks a particular icon. It is simply not revealed. And most assuredly the light and the mist, and the experiencing of them has an existence, is something. But that "something" is fundamentally meaningless. If there is not a particular symbol of that phenomenon, for example, "rainbow," can that phenomenon have meaning? Thus typically and most importantly, that which is not symbolized is *not readily recognized* and is *not given meaning* by the human.

While symbols define and, in a sense, limit how we relate to the world by establishing parameters of meaning, symbols also remove cognitive barriers and expand the realm of possible human experience. If a new symbol is brought forth, is not a new meaningful phenomenon also brought forth? Because of their arbitrary, autonomous character, symbols can create new and varied ways of rendering meaning and experiencing the world.

Let me offer as an illustration the symbol "wilderness." What you consider as "wilderness" has a specific range of meanings, which defines how you relate to that which you signify by this symbol. For example, "wilderness" may be understood as a pristine, natural area, not to be tampered with by humanity. Therefore, it may be difficult for you to imagine other ways

of relating to that which you signify as "wilderness" phenomenon. But that difficulty does not preclude the possibility of other people assigning altogether different meanings to the symbol, "wilderness." For example, "wilderness" can be understood as a vast natural resource, to be used to satisfy human economic needs. And of course the difficulty in imagining other ways of relating to this phenomenon also does not preclude the possibility of altogether new meanings being created and assigned to the symbol. For example, "wilderness" might be thought of as the chaos found in the inner city. As with any symbol, "wilderness" has a multiplicity of possible meanings, any and all of which you have an ability to learn from another person or to create anew for yourself. These newly established meanings are thus incorporated into your understanding and usage of the symbol "wilderness." Subsequently, you would probably relate and act in new ways to that which you refer to as "wilderness." For example, now the possibility exists, however unlikely, that instead of going into an Alpine meadow or an "old-growth forest," you would venture into an "inner city" to receive a "wilderness experience!" That which is "wilderness" takes on new meanings and is related to in new ways. Any symbol can therefore at once limit yet expand how you relate to the world.

And as we engage the particular symbols emanating out of the religious traditions, added to this complex interaction of referents, perceptions and conceptions are spiritual meaning and animation – are the *mi'yep* and *súumesh* (Schitsu'umsh) or *wu wei* and *ch'i* (Taoist). Tin Shed referents have the potential to be infused with and an extension of all that which is spiritually animated and significant, all that which is most *real* for their adherents. In being linked to the *mi'yep* and *súumesh*, to what can be called "the sacred," what is normally veiled and hidden, spiritual symbols have an ability to reveal what is most real and access what is most powerful. Hence in the Apsáalooke assemblage of verbal symbols, of *dasshússua*, when a name is spoken, a vow stated, a story told, the world is brought forth and made. To experience the sacred symbols, as prayer, as song, as ritual actions, in the preformed ceremonies of a religious tradition, these symbols have the capacity to "make the world."

I am reminded of the vividly poignant story shared by N. Scott Momaday (1970). He relates how he was working on the closing passages in what would become his Pulitzer Prize winning *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969). Late one night, he was dwelling on an old Kiowa tale and on a time far removed from his own. It was 1833, under a night sky of meteor showers, and he imagined and wrote, so completely, about a "living memory" of an old woman, Ko-sahn. Absorbed in the words, Momaday spoke her name aloud, and there, stepping right out of the language, standing right before him, was the "ancient one-eyed woman." And they commenced in a most astonishing conversation!

By extension, the spoken *dasshússua* symbols of the Apsáalooke are not unlike those engraved in and form the character of a painted wooden mask, as donned by an Iroquois *Face* dancer or a Kwakiutl *Hamatsa* dancer. And while dancing the story of these Spirit People, the dancer is transformed into the Spirit People, the Schitsu'umsh Jump Dancer into a Blue Jay. The spoken *dasshússua* symbols are not unlike the distinct patterns of sand and color applied by a Diné (Navajo) healer as he lays out a "dry painting" in the floor of a ritual hogan, in it embodying the *Yei*, the Holy Ones of the Creation Time, imbued with *Hózhó*, "beauty and harmony." In the ritual act of sitting upon the *Hózhó* symbols, on the dry painting, the *Yei* swirling about and a patient's illness is purged, a healing order restored. The Apsáalooke Medicine Bundle and its sacred objects are laid out so precisely on the floor, channeling the *baaxpée* from the Creator and



Medicine Fathers, through the Eagle-feather fan into the patient, pulling out the affliction, tossing it to the east with a flick of the feathers.

At this point of our inquiry, I would like to pause a moment and reflect on any insights that the nature of spiritual symbols might have on a better appreciation of their own meaning and efficacy. As you might continue to be asking, among other questions, “Really Frey, how is it that a special cluster of symbols – the words of prayer and the ritual movement of Eagle-feathers – can heal a sick person, can change the weather, can draw water from a tree stump?” It is worth reflecting upon are the insights offered by Mircea Eliade (1907-1986). He was the renowned interpreter of religious experiences, from the Indigenous Australian, to the Asian Hindu, from the Ancient Egyptian, to the Abrahamic Muslim. Perhaps he can guide us a little farther into the Tin Shed.

While a prolific writer and mentor to numerous scholars, let me offer but a glimpse of Eliade’s eloquent enunciations. For Eliade, reality and the religious experience start with the sacred (1954; 1958; 1959). The sacred is understood as having *being*, has existence, as having *power*, the animating force to create the world, and as having *reality*, what is most meaningful, providing a “celestial archetype” emanating from “supraterrrestrial planes.” The sacred oscillates in, around and through two interrelated ubiquitous transcendent spheres of existence: the cosmic center, the *axis mundi*, and the primordial time of the Gods and Heroes, *in illo tempore, ab origine*. The “religious symbols” used in ceremonies and pilgrimages, in the oral narratives and songs, in the dances, regalia and masks, in the temples and atop mountains are the languages of the sacred, of the Gods and Spirits. These revered symbols are derived from the sacred, their source and inspiration, while also a revelation of it, revealing what is normally veiled and hidden in everyday existence. When humans participate in and use these religious symbols, in their rituals and storytellings, communication is re-established with the *axis mundis* and *in illo tempore*, and the sacred shines through, its meaning and power, its existence flows forth into the world, materialized, in what Eliade calls a “hierophany.” Reality is manifested, derived from the transcendent, reminiscent of Plato’s allegory of the cave.

But the use and application of the religious symbols must be deliberate; as Eliade insists, they must be aligned with and parallel to the sacred archetype, the perennial “bones” of creation. The rites of initiation, the world renewal ceremonies, the re-tellings of the creation accounts must repeat the perennial sacred, align with the “bones,” if that sacred is to spew forth and into the lives of the participants. As we will explore, are not the Apsálooke Sundance Lodge and the behavior of its dances, the *Ashkísshe*, in replication of the cosmic Center, as the water flows from the Tree? Are not all the bones of the primordial Creation included in the re-telling, as Coyote and the First People swirl about and the blue in a lake perpetuated, as the world is renewed? When the sacred symbols of prayer, song and ritual are aligned with the *axis mundis* and *in illo tempore* can not a hierophany shine through? In response to our uncertainties, is not Eliade worth reflecting upon?

Symbols ultimately liberate the human from the temporal and spatial constraints imposed by the immediacy of existence, and allow humans to live in an expanded world of their own fabrication and imagination. From the most minute and seemingly insignificant to the most grandiose and pervasive, all of human thought, activity, and expression are invariably symbolic. A glance of the eye or the spatial proximity with another person, the particular clothing worn, the numbers of a mathematician, the images of an artist, the design of a building, the spoken word, the written word, the stories you are about to “read” – all are clusterings of symbols. Implicit within our storytelling humanity, our *homo narrans* nature, is our *homo symbolicus* nature.

## Values – Teachings – Principles: The Bones

The particular cluster of symbols that is of concern to us is values and teachings, equivalent to the Schitsu'umsh term, *mi'yep*, as well as fundamental ontological principles. In your eye juggling, it will be the values and teachings and principles embedded deeply within the story texts that you will attempt to discover and interpret. I will define values - teachings as *learned, relatively enduring, emotionally charged, epistemologically grounded and represented moral conceptualizations that assist us in making judgments and in preparing us to act*. In other words, the priorities we set and the choices we make are significantly based upon the values and teachings we hold. My usage of the concept is inclusive of the personal values and teachings of an individual as well as the collective values and teachings of a community. In addition, there are underlying ontological principles embedded in a story. A story is given its very reality based upon fundamental ontological principles, principles upon which "reality" is itself constructed and perpetuated. Thus re-phrased, the symbols of a story are expressive of the underlying values, teachings and principles of a story, collectively known as the "bones" of a story.

All values/teachings are *learned*. Not unlike the acquisition of a particular language, values are transmitted and inculcated through an intricate web of societal agents and interactions. Primary to this web are family members and social peers, formal schooling, leisure, work and religious activities, and such rites of passage as baptism, confirmation and marriage. And interwoven throughout this web is the oral and/or written word, the stories of a people. The influence of this web is particularly important during childhood when the basic value parameters are established. In turn, these parameters help orient the subsequent acquisition and the reaffirmation of values throughout a person's life-span.

Because values are learned, they can be forgotten, and they can be learned anew, though usually only with great effort. But values can be changed. Humanity is neither innately predisposed to certain values; nor is the content of values genetically determined. My concern here is not to suggest how an individual forms his or her particular values. Furthermore, these comments are not meant to preclude the insights of such theorists as Noam Chomsky, Erik Erikson or Jean Piaget. The possibility that humans have certain biologically-based maturation levels and predispositions influencing the acquisition of language and personality must be considered in any discussion of the acquisition of values. Suffice it to say, the formation of an individual's value configuration is an extremely complex process.

Values and teachings are relatively *enduring*. Values are grounded in the cultural heritage of a society and pervasively housed within the institutions of the society, the web. And values are well established from childhood. An individual may decide to forego a particular value, only to be confronted by it at each juncture within the web of society and to be grounded by its parameters formed early in life. The values of a society or of an individual are not easily altered.

Values and teachings are *not* necessarily *consciously* known by either the individual or the society. Not unlike our everyday linguistic grammar, values are seldom overtly articulated, even

though we depend upon both in comprehending another's action and in generating our own. Your search for your own values and the values of others is accomplished only with great effort.

Values and teachings tend toward *consistency*, i.e., like values attract like values. The assemblage of an individual's or of a community's values strives for affiliation, compatibility and integration among those values. If a particular value is not consistent with the assemblage of values already held, it is not easily integrated and is often ignored and excluded.

This is not to suggest that we will always find consistency among the values held by any given individual or expressed in a given community. Values *strive* for consistency. The particular assemblage of values of an individual or community is typically inclusive of disparate and often mutually contradictory values. It may even be the case that a particular configuration of values not only accommodates but espouses seemingly contradictory values. At issue is not the inconsistent disposition of the individual values in question, but the overall structure of the relationships and the character of that integration among all those values. To understand any given value, one must also consider the larger gestalt in which it is embedded. Such a contradiction will be observed when we discuss the Crow Indian values of oneness and unity, and differentiation and uniqueness. The apparent inconsistency is dissolved when the specific contextual integration, in this instance, the imagery of the "circle" and "wagon wheel," is taken into consideration.

Values and teachings enshrine and impart a society's concepts of the *morally desirable*. Values set forth the social criteria for and the cultural assumptions upon which good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral, noble and vile are established. Values and teachings provide a code and form the basis for all moral judgments, whether directed at others, nature or the self. Values and teachings guide human conduct, providing a "road map" for action. Of course, what one may value as proper, another may value as immoral and improper. As a consequence, values are often at the focal point of conflict.

Values and teachings are inundated with *emotional* feelings and are held with strong conviction. There can be no passively neutral values. Fear, sympathy, hate, love, anger, passion, contempt: all are expressions of this subjective dimension of values. Values are most assuredly felt.

Because of this affective component, values and teachings are thus more than a code of conduct. By infusing judgments with passion, values and teachings establish the desirable. Good and bad are not simply laid out; "good" is passionately desired and "bad" is ardently avoided. Values are the great *motivators* within a society and the individual; the drive directed toward all sorts of ends. From how a "rich man" is defined to what is most "feared" in life: all are grounded in values. But it is also this passion that certainly can inhibit an appreciation of values different from one's own. Emotions can cloud a clear vision.

Values and teachings establish a *disposition to act*. Values influence our behaviors by preparing us to act in certain morally-oriented ways. When a certain behavioral response is called for in a given context of social interaction, what that behavior may be is based in part upon the values held. I suggest "in part" because values, while primary among those influences, are not the sole influence on our behaviors. Other influences include the level of individual self-esteem, social role definitions, societal laws, spontaneous collective behavior and the persuasiveness of others, for instance. Consequently, identified values alone are not necessarily accurate predictors of behavior. While they closely parallel one another, the values we hold and the behaviors we exhibit are not the reverse sides of the same coin, each synonymous with the other.

Any given value and teaching is based upon and expressed in terms of certain *epistemological criteria*. Upon what standard of knowing is a particular value acknowledged and represented? How is a particular value validated by the holder of that value? In what terms is a value framed and publicly presented? To assert, for example, that "wilderness is a vast, as yet untapped natural resource to be harvested" implies a value based upon and expressed in terms of epistemological criteria that is "economic" in nature. "Wilderness" is *known* in terms of a "commodity" that has "production value," and that can be distributed and consumed.

While there is a range of possible epistemological criteria on which values can be grounded, for our interpretative purposes, only three will be isolated: literal-denotative, metaphoric-connotative, and anagogic-implicative. This typology owes much to the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy 1934. Each epistemological criteria is to be understood as complementary to and not exclusive of the others, i.e., each is a "legitimate" path to knowledge. Each of us typically rely upon all three ways of knowing, though often emphasizing one mode over the others. How a people have come to know the world, in turn, influences a people view of that world, their ontology. While some cultures see themselves as a part of the world around them, others view themselves as fundamentally separate from a world "out there." In turn, knowledge may be either intuitively "received" from "agents" emanating in the world or empirically "discovered" thorough a rigorous application of human logic. As a result the significance and meaning of a "flower," a "rainbow" or for that matter, "reality" itself can differ radically and completely.

Because of its elemental importance, such epistemological differences will also resonate throughout and manifest themselves in each of the various topics considered during this course. In order for us to better appreciate the underlying distinctions between various religions, and understand them on their own terms, without imposing our values, approach each based upon their respective epistemologies.

Each way of knowing is understood as complementary to the others, and none are somehow "superior" or "true" compared to the others. No one criteria, in and of itself, is more appropriate or morally superior than another. Each category has validity, equally contributing to the human condition, although in differing ways. This is not a developmental sequence through which an individual progresses from one stage to the next.

*Literal-denotative* values are those which are promulgated on the *physical senses* and have *explicit*, literal meanings. The types of senses on which these values are based are those overtly acknowledged as viable and generally shared among a given group, e.g., sight and sound. These values are understood to be grounded on and have legitimacy because of something that has a reality in the experiential world.

Let me offer two examples of literal-denotative value statements that focus on "wilderness." "Wilderness is made up of a given number and type of trees, animals, plants, in a specified physical terrain." As referred to in the Old Testament, wilderness is a "desert" and "waste," a "cursed" land, full of "thorns and thistles." In both instances, the value statements are based on literal meanings, accessible through the senses. You can touch the trees and feel the thorns. The words descriptive of "wilderness" attempt to elicit precise, literal representations. The word "tree" has a more or less precise physical counterpart in the "wilderness." Empiricism and religious fundamentalism, for example, are associated with literal-denotative values.

*Metaphoric-connotative* values are those based on mental *conceptualization* and have *implicit*, metaphoric meanings. These values can range from the logically oriented, i.e., based on

a consensus of shared rules for thinking, to the irrationally focused, i.e., formed without a consensus of shared rules for thinking and based upon fallacious assumptions. They are often predicated on and are legitimized because of a deduction from or a comparison to other values. They are not dependent upon being grounded in the experiential world. Metaphoric-connotative value statements offer more figurative and abstract images, often images of qualities, and are much less literal in their representations.

Let me illustrate this type of value with three different examples. "Wilderness is the antithesis of civilization." "Wilderness is a land of no use." "Wilderness is where the birds fly free and the beauty of the flowers glows with the colors of the rainbow." These particular wilderness value statements are deduced from and implicitly compared with other already held values, i.e., values of societal civilization, economic use and aesthetic beauty. They have little direct and no literal counterpart in an experiential "wilderness," but refer to images of abstract qualities. Rationalism, literary criticism, faith, and racial prejudice, for example, are all founded on metaphoric-connotative values.

*Anagogic-implicative* values are those which are derived from *intuitive* or *mystical* experiences and have *implicit*, metaphoric meanings. It is often the meaning of the "essence" within something overt and material, the "inner forms." While emanating out of and legitimized by an experience, unlike literal-denotative values, that experience is much more private and contemplative in nature, e.g., divine revelation, and not contingent upon certain senses that are generally shared by all in the community. Although this is not to suggest that in any given community all members could not have access to such an experience. Similar to metaphoric-connotative values, anagogic-implicative value statements offer figurative, abstract images, and meanings. But these are images that are normally hidden from humanity and often esoteric in nature, e.g., the image of an animal's soul.

An example of an anagogic-implicative value statement would be, "Wilderness is where God and all true wisdom are to be found." Another example would be, "The image in the stone is that of the seal, revealed through the stone by the seal to the stone carver as he sat in the great solitudes." Both statements offer figurative meanings, i.e., images of God and of a seal-spirit, and are derived from a mystical or intuitive ways of knowing. Anagogic-implicative values are not dependent upon empirical or logical processes. Artistic and religious inspiration, for example, are associated with anagogic-implicative values and teachings.

The *ontological principles* refer to fundamental qualities and components that create and perpetuate the very fibers of what is considered reality, that is most real, what is experienced as existence and has being. They define how time and space are structured and composed. Examples of ontological questions would be: is reality ultimately created by material or spiritual forces? Is my being an indistinguishable participant of existence, subjectively interwoven within it, or can I stand back from the world and view it from afar, objectively?

Together, the values, teachings, principles make up the **bones** of a story - the underlying forces and currents that usher forth and manifest a story. From an Indigenous perspective, the oral traditions, including the stories, are understood as "living beings," a "person" with "flesh and bones." The flesh is the re-animation brought to a story through the techniques and styles of telling of raconteurs and elders, allowing a story to be engaged by listeners. The bones are the enduring and underlying structures that give substance and form to the flesh and thus the story. The bones are inclusive of the narrative's storyline, its essential and perennial teachings/*mi'yep*, as well as its ontology principles. The bones were first established and then embedded into the oral

traditions and the landscape by the Creator and actions of Coyote and the other First Peoples. The responsibility of the elders and storytellers is to keep all the bones intact within an oral tradition, while bringing that story alive, rendering the listeners, participants, through the use of storytelling techniques. The responsibility of the youth and story listeners is to discover the bones within the story for him or herself. While enduring, the bones can be forgotten, only to be re-discovered, re-membered, as in the process known by the Greeks as anamnesis. The ingrained values, teachings and principles expressed throughout our stories form much of the basis for who and what we are. They help us to interpret and comprehend the behaviors of others as well as to guide our own behaviors through the maze of human existence.

### **Humanities and Social Sciences, and their Integration: Background**

Before we begin addressing how to interpret a story, how to do some “eye juggling,” let me provide some background on the history, philosophy and methodology of eye juggling. Eye juggling is grounded in the distinction of the humanities and social sciences disciplines, yet is expressed and applied through an integrated manner. Let’s explore the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, and their interdisciplinary integration before moving on.

While the disciplines and approaches of the humanities and the social sciences each seek to understand and appreciate the human condition, they rely on contrasting ways of knowing and methodologies to doing so. What distinguishes the humanities from the social sciences, for example, is not so much a subject matter, but rather the mode of approach to any given question and the resulting analysis or interpretation. A creative playwright, a behavioral psychologist, and humanities professor could each be dealing with the same subject, for example, gender identity, but do so using different methodologies and approaches.

**Social Sciences Background and Method:** While much more nuanced than suggested here, the social sciences are something most of us are familiar with, is ultimately premised on such ontological principles as Aristotelian materialism and Cartesian dualism, and perhaps best expressed in the scientific method. This is the story of great men, of the “Godfathers of Science,” identifiably starting with the Greeks, and such thinkers as Pythagoras (580-497 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC).

To illustrate the influence of but two, albeit two pivotal contributors of the many instrumental to the development of science, let’s first start with a glimpse into the story of Aristotle. From his detailed observations made off the island of Lesbos and other areas in the Aegean Sea, Aristotle recorded some of the most accurate and early descriptions of aquatic life, including the catfish, angler-fish, paper nautilus and octopus. He was among the first to classify fish distinct from the mammal species. While discredited until its rediscovery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, his account of the hectocotryl arm of the octopus was two thousand years ahead of its time. While searching for “universal forms” like his teacher, Aristotle diverged from Plato (427-347 BC) in locating the universal in the particular concrete entities existing in the observable natural world. Plato had argued that universals existed as Forms or “ideas,” distinct from particular material things, as models or archetypes of those objects. As illustrated in Plato’s allegory of the cave, our protagonist, while chained within the cave, understands that which is directly observable and reflected on its walls to be what is real. But upon being freed from the chains and encountering the bright sun outside the cave, what had been thought to be reality is now revealed to be a mere

reflection, an illusion, derived of the sun's light and the Forms casting shadows on the walls. The great truth of the Forms is realized. On the other hand, Aristotle insisted that universal Forms were encapsulated intrinsically within the tangible. If a universal could not be predicated in an object, argued Aristotle, as for example observed in an octopus, surely it could not exist. Forms remain the unconditional basis for all overt phenomena, accessible through the observable, in essence, what are to be found on the walls of the cave.

Aristotle's approach to universals and the particulars, his methodology, implies an ascent from particular phenomena to the knowledge of their ultimate attributes and Forms, an inductive approach. Plato stressed the opposite approach to methodology, a descent from *a priori* knowledge of universal Forms to a contemplation of particular imitations of these, in essence a deductive approach. While Aristotle's "natural philosophy" certainly included rigorous philosophical-based inquire as well as politics and poetry and other fine arts, it also was the critical first step toward becoming what we would refer to as material reductionism and John Locke's (1632-1704) inductive empiricism and, in this sense, anticipating the scientific method of today. Among his many works that have had such an impact on Western Civilization, his *Nicomachean Ethics* is widely considered one of the most important historical philosophical works, influencing a range of subsequent thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and the development of Christianity, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and the foundations of modern political science, and Francis Bacon (1561- 1626) and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and the beginnings of modernity itself.

René Descartes (1597-1659) adds another plot or two to our story, approaching what is knowable from quite a different stance than that of Aristotle and Locke. Yet these are contributions to our story that are not only complimentary, but essential to the overall story of science, as we have come to know it today. For this French philosopher he starts with the assertion that we as humans have ultimate knowledge of our own existence because we are thinking beings – *cogito ergo sum* – "I think, therefore I am." The foundation of knowledge consists of a set of first, "self-evident" principles, *a priori principles*. The mind is not an empty cabinet, a "blank slate," but filled with universal, though not readily knowable, principles. For Descartes, access to these first principles is not based on "the fluctuating testimony of the senses," on empiricism, nor is it contingent on the "blundering constructions of imagination," on aesthetic or spiritual awareness. He distrusted sensory evidence as much as he avoided any undisciplined flirtations of thought. The first principles are those anchored on "conception which an unclouded and attentive mind gives," on conception "wholly freed from doubt," principles derived from clear and logical thought. One can even begin with a set of assumptions that are only hypothetically true, all of which need not be verified by observation, need not exist in fact. They need only be hypothetically correct. Keeping to our oceanic examples, one can hypothesize that a shark is a fish structured for rapid, agile swimming. This assertion need not be proved empirically. From these first principles, other truths can be deduced by a meticulous application of logical rules and axioms. Mathematically-rigorous formulas can be applied in order to arrive at conclusions. If one designs a human submergible as a "shark," it logically follows that the submarine would likewise be rapid and agile. Knowledge is not so much what corresponds to experience, as it is a coherency within and among their principles and deduced statements. And so the deductive and rational methods are born, their strength and legitimacy residing in their ability to objectively think about the natural world and deduce statements of truth about that world. Descartes published his approach to knowledge in 1637, in *Discourse on Method*.

René Descartes made another important contribution to the unfolding story of science. Descartes reasoned that if the mind is capable of clear, objective thinking, then it cannot ultimately be reducible to the influences of the material world. “Mind” and “matter” are the basic constituents of the universe. The defining characteristic of “matter” is extension and movement, i.e., the possession of dimension such as time or space. The defining characteristic of “mind” is thought, i.e., the activity of thinking. Regardless of the way “matter” is extended, e.g., straight or curved, it must be extended. Regardless of the way “mind” thinks, e.g., abstracting or imagining, it must think. Each is absolutely different from the other, requiring nothing but itself to exist. Neither has the properties of the other, nor is causal of the other, and neither is reducible to the other, yet all in the universe is reducible to one or the other, to either “mind” or “matter.” Cartesian Dualism thus adheres to the understanding that the natural world of “matter” is independent of the “mind,” and, conversely, that the “mind” is independent of the “natural world.” Objectivity is possible. The world of the “other” and of “man” himself has become “objects,” for study, in which independent ideas and symbolic representations of them are possible – scientific hypothesis and theory. The “science of man” was ushered forth.

The evolving story of science continues with other great men and their contributions, such as that of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). Following the lead of Pythagoras and looking into the heavens, Galileo placed an emphasis on observable, quantifiable variables and their relationships, a reality of discrete numerically-based chunks, i.e., statistics – “the language of nature is numbers.” Continuing the story of rigorous observations, Isaac Newton (1642-1727) sought to establish universal generalizations – “laws” to describe, explain, predict and ultimately control the natural world – the “laws of motion.” As the unfolding narrative sought to bring maximum benefit to human welfare, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and his utilitarianism, articulated a science that ultimately holds the keys to unlocking the power of nature over nature. Collectively all these stories bring forth the scientific method, of a dualism that separates us from nature so that we can understand it, predict it, and ultimately control nature. Of “pure” and “applied” sciences, seeking to improve our comprehension of the subatomic and astronomic, and advance the condition of human health and wellbeing. And of the objective researcher, one who is in a non-reflexive relationship with the objects of their studies. Science is thus most often associated with rational-deductive and empirical-inductive modes of thought, all premised on certain ontological principles, such as the mind/body dualism and objectification, material reductionism, quantification, gradation and secularization. Scientific endeavors can be equated operating within a broad sweep of the positivist paradigm.

Reality is ultimately “understood” as separate and apart from the viewer, as if viewed from behind a great “glass pane.” It is a tangible world made up of discrete, quantifiable material “objects” interacting together with a great regularity and order through lineal time, devoid of any spiritual animation or significance. It is a world made knowable and verifiable through deductive and inductive tests of logic and empirical observation, and of experimentation, all of which can be measured in terms of reliability and validity. While traveling the story of science, systematic analysis of dependent and independent variables, anticipatory predictions of cause and effect, and manipulations of the physical world can all be attempted and made. This is knowledge of explanation, axioms and theory of things and their forces.

The social sciences are thus embedded within the scientific paradigm, premised on critical ontologically principles that can be traced back to Aristotelian Materialism (to Aristotle of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC), and to the Cartesian Dualism (René Descartes of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century). The social



sciences uses the tools of empirical deduction and rational induction, based upon objectivity, with formally accepted standardized styles of texts and categories, applying such legitimizing tests as reliability and external/internal validity, with the goal of replicating phenomena and generating new knowledge through an analysis, for pure and applied scientific purposes, to explain human behavior (as groups and/or individuals).

As a branch of science, social sciences research emphasizes empirical methods that seek to explain causality of events. This method can be expressed in either a quantitative design, which approaches social phenomena through quantifiable evidence, often relying on statistical analysis to create valid and reliable claims, or in a qualitative design, which emphasizes understanding of social phenomena through direct observation, communication with participants, or analysis of texts, and may stress contextual and subjective accuracy over generality. The discipline of social sciences thus includes physical anthropology-archaeology, economics, geography, linguistics, political science, psychology, public administration, and sociology.

A social science professor would be as an objective observer behind a thick glass pane. With qualitatively or quantitatively designed methods, the social scientist would attempt to rigorously and empirically observe and/or measure the behavior of individuals and/or groups in their interactions, and would seek to provide a descriptive or predictive model that analyzes and explains the events observed (as groups and/or individuals). A social scientist would seek to generate new knowledge. In analyzing a rite of passage, for example, a psychologist would ask, how does this ritual contribute to self identity and enhance self esteem, while a sociologist might ask how does this ritual contribute to group social solidarity and build community?

**Humanities Background and Method.** The humanities are a discipline that can be traced back to the playwrighting and poetry of William Shakespeare and personal essay and memoir writing of Michel de Montaigne, both of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The humanities continue the ontological premise of Cartesian Dualism, though there are some noticeable cracks and small holes in the glass pane. The humanities still seeks to provide an imagery of what is on the other side of the glass pane, but substitutes the role of material reductionism and formal objectivity with an emphasis on the role of various forms of human thought, from rational thinking, to imaginative and reflexive thinking, the latter resulting in the subject and object tending to become interwoven and indistinguishable, hence the cracks in the glass pane.

While not a black and white distinction, the interpretative methodologies of the humanities disciplines are thus typically distinguished from the positivist and empirical methodologies of the natural and social science disciplines, and the creative and imaginative endeavors of the arts (e.g., performing arts, music, visual arts). Such humanities interpretative methodologies, for example, include hermeneutics, literary criticism, phenomenology, and in the discipline of ethnography, “thick description.” The legitimizing tests in the humanities can include such criteria as authenticity and trustworthiness. Some the earliest examples of texts that that can lend themselves to a humanities interpretation can be found in American Indian narrative cycles of Coyote and Salmon (since time immemorial), the Sumerian Gilgamesh (2500 BC), Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey (850 BC), the Jewish Torah (880-600 BC), the Hindu Bhagavad Gita (600 BC), the Synoptic Gospels (100 AD) and the Muslim Koran (609-32 AD).

Thus distinguishing the sciences from the humanities are two critical humanities attributes: an interpretative methodology and the goal of wisdom. To “interpret” certainly seeks to render something meaningful and understandable, serving to inform, enlighten, instruct. Likely first expressed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Middle English, “interpret” is derived from the Latin, *interpretārī* –

“someone who serves as an agent, a negotiator.” Hence, to interpret certainly seeks to (1) generate new knowledge, rendering something meaningful, be it culturally or historically distant, be it something more immediate but veiled in some fashion. But to interpret also seeks to (2) render that knowledge accessible, applicable, relevant, that is, linking and integrating. Indeed, “negotiating” known and knower. Indeed, an element of rendering knowledge empathic, of projecting the knower into the known! To successfully interpret is to successfully be self reflexive.

The Idaho Humanities Council states that “through [the] study [of the humanities it seeks to] yield wisdom.” Wisdom is that deep understanding that goes beyond knowing; to thicken and extend our understandings; to apply; to engage that knowledge in civic life, both locally and globally; to address the challenges faced by humanity; to take up the “big questions.” The humanities enable us to reflect upon our lives and ask fundamental questions of value, purpose, and meaning in a rigorous and systematic way.

The discipline of the humanities includes cultural anthropology/ethnography, communications studies, cultural studies (such as American Studies, International Studies, American Indian Studies, Religious Studies, Women's Studies); they include the languages, law, literature, history, philosophy; and they include the reflection and theory in creative writing, in the performing arts of music, dance and theatre, and the reflection and theory in the visual arts of painting, sculpting and architecture.

In applying an interpretative methodology acknowledging there are cracks and small holes in the glass pane (versus an objective, empirical methodology), the goal of the humanities professor is to provide understandings and appreciations of the meaning and purpose of human experiences and interactions, framing those appreciations by asking and exploring the “big questions,” and perhaps generating some “wisdom.” In interpreting a rite of passage, for example, an ethnographer or historian of religion might ask what are the symbolic meanings of the various components of a rite of passage, and how do these meanings render an appreciation of what it means to be a “human”?

**Interdisciplinary Integration:** Throughout your educational pursuits, you will be presented with an array of multiple and diverse perspectives and worldviews, along with distinct and differing methodological and epistemological specializations, such as those brought to bear in your ISEM 101 Integrative Seminar with the application of the multiple and inter-disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. And in addition, as in any academic endeavor there can also develop a disconnection and schism between your academic pursuits and your social and personal life as engaged outside the classroom, in co-curricular activities. It is thus especially important that in the Integrative Seminar (ISEM 101), you also acquire skills in *integration* and *interdisciplinary cohesion*. Out of the potential chaos and contradictions of diversity can arise a larger inclusive unity, as well as ability to better think and act critically and creatively, and, in turn, problem solve.

Integration is a deliberate educational act. Most forms of integration include both *thinking divergently* and *thinking convergently*. Integration does not represent one discipline predominating over another, in its application and resulting interpretation of a given issue or topic. Integration does not represent a simple synthesis or amalgamation, a sort of blending of divergent disciplinarily approaches into one approach (given the disciplinary integrity and value of each discipline).

One integrative model to consider is entitled, “*Sailing the Five C’s*” –

compartmentalization, contextualization, competency, connection and civic engagement. It is an integrative process that entails:

*Compartmentalization* acknowledges and distinguishes the epistemological and methodological differentiation of differing disciplinary tools, e.g., knowing the difference between the humanities and social sciences; the theory, analytical methods, and interpretive standards of these different disciplines are more or less equally valued and employed.

*Contextualization* distinguishes our human diverse and differential cultural, historical, intellectual and social environments, as well as the differential components and levels within any given natural environment. And within the rich diversity in the human and natural condition begin to identify and distinguish the many different issues, dilemmas and challenges that are to be addressed. Contextualize the issue.

*Competency* in knowing the distinct epistemological and methodological tools, and when and in what specific contexts and situations to apply those tools. Different tools for different purposes.

*Connection* in applying the multiple disciplinary tools to differentiated contexts to make connections, to see the “bigger picture,” to address issues, to make interpretations and/or analysis; the specific question or problem addressed can be understood and interpreted from the differing disciplines, often leading to shared integrated understandings and interpretations, as well as to the possibility of new questions being asked.

*Civic Engagement* entails taking on civic responsibility and applying these interdisciplinary tools to solve problems and effect positive change in the lives of others.

We seek to develop and utilize a most adaptive approach to integrating multiple disciplines and diverse perspectives, and in so doing, attempt to address life’s challenges. Critical and creative thinking as well as problem solving all depend on your ability to both *think divergently* – compartmentalizing and seeing the rich diversity and multiplicity in the human experience and natural environments – as well as to *think convergently* – integrating and connecting that rich diversity in new and novel ways. Our eye juggling methodology is an interdisciplinary integration of the humanities and social sciences academic disciplines.

## Interpreting

In the words of the famous American baseball player, Yogi Berra, "what gets us into trouble is not what we don't know, it's what we know for sure that just ain't so."

\* \* \* \* \*

We are constantly presented with story texts, be they the stories we observe in the actions of others, the transcribed pages of a life history interview, the sacred parables of a holy book, the spire atop an architectural wonder, or even in a passing conversation with someone in your community. How do you go about eye juggling a story text? How do you interpret the values embedded within someone's story? Our eye juggling method

As we had mentioned previously, if behavior is not a direct corollary of values and teachings, then you can not automatically observe values in someone's behavior and actions. And if values are not necessarily consciously articulated, then you can not readily ask someone what his

or her values are and expect him or her to offer a concise treatise on them. Then how do you come to understand another person's spiritual values and teachings?

As we have established, values and teachings are clustering of symbols. As such, the symbolic is indicative of values and teachings. Values are found ingrained within such symbolic expressions as artistic forms, ceremonial rites, architectural structures, legal enactments, written history, written literature, or oral literature, all of which are story texts. Values and teachings are also to be found embedded in speech patterns and hand gestures, in clothing and even hair styles, in all the behavioral actions expressed, all of which are story texts. These are among the types of texts that will be the focus of your eye juggling.

It is somehow appropriate to point out that these texts are also the types of symbolic expressions, channeled through various societal institutions, which directly contribute to the acquisition and enculturation of any person's values. Much in the same manner in which another person acquires his or her values, so will you learn of those values and teachings.

The **goal** in interpreting the values of another is to identify and see from the *perspective of the other*, to eye juggle with the eyes of the storyteller within the story, and to avoid the indiscriminate imposition of your own perspective on that of the other, to avoid being biased and *ethnocentric*. In seeking an appreciation of the perspective of another, attempt to understand how a particular value was meaningful as originally constructed and brought forth, i.e., consider the "cannons of construction." What might be the intended meaning of a particular value as held by those first associated with that value? Following this consideration, attempt to understand how, though time and circumstances, subsequent meanings, interpretations, embellishments, and additions may have been layered onto the original value. Rendering these distinctions is particularly insightful when attempting to interpret values "closer to home," those associated with one's own cultural heritage. In addition, seek to appreciate the multiple and varied meanings associated with any given value, as that value attempts to address critical issues relating to aesthetic, economic, historical, religious, philosophical, political, psychological, and/or social sensibilities, dilemmas and/or challenges. This is a challenge accomplished only with great diligence. To view the story texts from the inside out, several basic interpretative techniques can be applied.

The folklorist Alan Dundes points the way in our interpretation of stories (see Dundes 1966). For Dundes, interpretation involves the clarification of three key elements: the text, the texture and the context of the story. The *text* refers to the identification of the symbolic meanings embedded within a text, e.g., what is actually being said, what are the world view themes or moral lessons of the story, what is referred to by the key symbols? The *texture* refers to how the text is being presented, e.g., what is the style of the writing or the techniques of the telling, what are the interactions with the readers or the listeners, what are the linguistic components and structures, such as particular phonemes and morphemes, intonation and pitch, pause duration, and phrase repetitions? How something is stated affects what something means. The *context* refers to when and where the text is being presented, e.g., to whom, when, where, in what social situation and for what cultural purpose is the story directed? A comprehension of the context requires development of an understanding of the entire cultural configuration within which the story is embedded. The suggested interpretative techniques which follow are predicated on the distinctions between the text, texture and context of a story.

**Text and Coding.** Story texts are of many varied types and expressions, at virtually every juncture of our interactions with others. They certainly include oral and written narratives,

such as the stories told by a [Coeur d'Alene Indian elder](#) or conveyed in the Hindu [Upanishads](#). Stories also include song traditions, as well as visual arts, clothing styles, and even architectural structures, such as [Coeur d'Alene songs](#), [Chinese landscape paintings](#), [Sami clothing](#), or the [design of a Mosque](#). Behavioral and ceremonial expressions, from rites of passage and pilgrimages to the etiquette exhibited while eating a meal are certainly story texts. Witness the rich meaning as exemplified in the actions of Crow Indian [Sundancers](#), the places encountered by a Muslim pilgrim while on a [Haji to Mecca](#), or in one's [table manners](#). Even the scientific [theory of evolution](#) is to be understood as a story text. They all tell of a story, embedded with symbolic meaning and values, and available to be "read" and interpreted as texts.

As you approach a story text, first engage and "read" it for "pleasure" and then read it for "study." Your initial reading should not be particularly analytical, but rather an attempt to imagine yourself within the story, as one of the characters. Listen for the voice of the "storyteller" within the story. *Familiarize* yourself with the landscape of the story. Then re-read the text, this time more thoroughly and carefully, paying attention to both the details as well as to the "big picture."

Throughout the entire interpretative process, apply our definitions of "symbol" and "value." Attempt to identify and isolate the key symbols within the text of the story. They will help point the way to the underlying values of the text. Ask yourself what meanings and images are being referred to in each individual phrase and passage. Who are the central characters of the text? How would you characterize their actions? Are there any lessons to be learned from those actions?

Within any given text, you may find a variety of seemingly disparate units of reference that, in fact, refer to a singular, affiliated meaning or image. Often a related image or symbol will be reiterated throughout a text in a variety of ways in order to convey a specific common meaning. Look for the repetitions. In addition, key units of reference are often presented as contrasting pairs or opposites. Symbolic meaning is frequently brought forth and conveyed as juxtaposed components of binaries. For example, the unit of reference, "left," is made meaningful by contrasting it with "right," or in the examples "female" with "male," and "evil" with "good," and so on. Look for the paired contrasts.

As you begin to see reoccurring patterns of key symbols and their underlying values within given text, as well as in associated texts, develop your **coding system**. Identify the key terms or symbols from an initial story texts you might be engaging, and begin to build a list of "code" words or labels that mark the varied ways any given value might be linked with and expressed by a grouping of symbols. Keep in mind that your initial coding labels are transitory, subject to modification and change as you engage additional texts for interpretation. Apply your coding system to additional story texts associated with the domain of research you are investigating. Are the coding labels applicable and assist you in revealing the patterns of underlying values? Do your coding labels need to be modified?

**Context.** To successfully interpret a story text of any kind, one must have an appreciation of the historical and cultural context around which it is framed. Meaning is always context bound. A values of a religious, political, economic, or social context will frame and help define the meaning of any given story text. Attempt to identify with type of context the story is framed within. Ask yourself how the referent meaning of a specific passage relates to the other images and meanings of the entire text. Attempt to see the gestalt of the text, not just the individual units of reference. What may be the larger implications of what is being referred to in the text? When

and where is the story likely to be found? To whom is the story's message usually directed? In considering the context of a given text pay attention to how that text is embedded within a larger aesthetic, economic, geographic, historical, religious, philosophical, political, psychological, and/or social association of influences. In all, attempt to ground the text of a story in its particular religious, cultural, and historical context. But don't get so bogged down in the detail of the story or an unfamiliar term or concept, that you can't see the context. Try gaining a sense of the "*big picture*." It's easier to identify the trees if you know which forest you're in.

As part of the context, any given text is predicated and based upon a certain way of knowing and validating the world conveyed in the text. Ask yourself what sort of epistemological criteria is being alluded to in the text? As we have discussed, three common ways of knowing include literal-denotative, metaphoric-connotative and/or anagogic-implicative epistemologies. Which form or forms might you have embedded in the text before you? To know the epistemological basis of a story is a giant step toward knowing the meaning of that story.

**Texture.** Observe and listen to the texture of the story text, that is, not only what is being said, but how it is said. Are you reading a written text, or listening to an oral narrative, or viewing an artistic image? How does each form of expression affect the meaning of the text? If it is an oral-based text, pay special attention to the contextual setting and the textural components, e.g., raconteur's intonation patterns or use of repetition.

As you approach a story text, you are in fact interpreting it on two distinct levels. Certainly focus on the story that is being portrayed, *what* the story is. But also consider the presentation of that story, *how* the story is conveyed and portrayed. For instance, in "The Lesson" story text an account of early human evolution and culture, you might identify as a value embedded within the story, "survival." A value motivating early humanity was its desire to physically survive in a harsh environment. But you might also interpret in the presentation of that story, the value of relying on the "physical facts." How the story of human evolution is presented is predicated on valuing empirical evidence. As you may then discover, there is often a correspondence between the two levels. *How* something is stated is inextricably related to *what* something means.

For those story texts which originally emanated out of an oral-based tradition, they should be accessed by first listening to them. Have another person read those particular sections aloud to you, paying attention to the pauses and word phrasing within those texts. An oral performance will help enunciate implicit meanings within certain types of story texts, while a written format and a subsequent reading of them is much more appropriate for interpreting other types of texts.

**Engagement and Reflexivity.** Most important of all to the interpretative process is to re-engage the story text a second time; leave the text for another activity; return to the text, reading it aloud this time. Dwell in the text. Gain some perspective; hear it in many voices. When all is said and done, to interpret is to soil the pages of the text. Interpretation is accomplished only after a *great labor*. And most telling, to interpret is to allow the words of the stories to be lifted from the pages of the text and for you, the interpreter, to dance with them. Listen for the words of the storyteller within the story. Interpretation necessitates an intimacy with the images and characters within the story text.

But even before you can begin dancing with the stories of others, you must know something of the stories within yourself. You must juggle your own eyes. To properly interpret another's values you need to be *aware of your own*; otherwise their values simply become

extensions of your values as you inadvertently cloud your interpretation with your own values. As you engage in someone else's landscape, engage in your own, engage in *reflexivity*.

When life in the Mexican village of [Tepoztlan](#) was first described by the American anthropologist Robert Redfield (1930), it was a "folk life" characterized as cooperative and integrated, made up of content, well-adjusted people. When Oscar Lewis (1951) restudied the same village, tension, schism, pervading fear, envy and distrust characterized Tepoztlan. Had some twenty years brought so much change? Or had Redfield and Lewis, however unwittingly, each brought something of their respective cultural milieu into their studies? For Redfield, had it been the optimism of an age of prosperity in which "the War to end all wars" had just been fought and a League of Nations established? For Lewis, was it the tension and fear of an age of Cold War, the "Bomb" and global conflict?

This is not to suggest that you must somehow "empty" yourself and view from a "void" so as not to bias your interpretation. One cannot see well without eyes accustomed to viewing. What is suggested is that you acknowledge and distinguish what is indeed your story from the story of the other. Your story should not become their story.

It may even be the case that the acknowledged qualities and perspectives of your own story may help assist you in revealing the meaning of another's story. Your own eyes (as well as the eyes of another) can offer insights. To have appreciated your own walk in the forest is to better appreciate the meaning of someone else's walk in a forest. To have appreciated your own story of divinity is to better appreciate the meaning of divinity in someone else's story. But of course, access to the meaning of another's story of a forest walk or of divinity is not contingent upon your possessing a comparable story. There would be very little interpreting and understanding of another's story if such were the case.

In 1930, the British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard initiated what would become the definitive study of the [Nuer](#), an east African Nilotic people. The first in a series of works, *The Nuer: A description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people* (1940), quickly became a classic in the field. With the outbreak of World War II, Evans-Pritchard was forced to relinquish his research and return to England. While there, he became a Catholic. With the war concluded, Evans-Pritchard resumed his studies among the Nuer, and in 1956 published *Nuer Religion*. While describing the same people, albeit differing domains within the same culture, in comparing *The Nuer* with *Nuer Religion* it is as if two different writers were at work. In *The Nuer*, it was a humanity defined in terms of the praxis and functional qualities of its social existence. While in *Nuer Religion*, it was the symbolic and ideational qualities that defined this humanity. Was it his own newly acquired religious sensitivities that allowed Evans-Pritchard to gain access to and then to better appreciate Nuer spiritual sensibilities? And in the instances of Redfield and Lewis, could not the times from which each viewed the world have actually helped reveal differing aspects of the same village life in Tepoztlan? While you do not want to bias your interpretative endeavors, you should not abandon your values. When you have *acknowledged your own values*, the view through the lenses of those values can help reveal the values of others.

As previously mentioned, perhaps the most effective way to discover and acknowledge your own values is to juxtapose what is other and different alongside what is immediate but often veiled. The contours of your own values will be made that much clearer. Read through the various story texts. Ask yourself how you feel about the various images presented and issues raised in those texts. Is there a sense of familiarity or is there an uneasy distance? Most importantly, ask *why* is there a familiarity or uneasiness? Which of your own values is

subsequently being exposed? In traveling the unfamiliar territory of the other, the climate will quickly let you know if you are dressed properly. Observe what you are wearing.

If you are to interpret properly, you must thus be accountable for the values you bring into the interpretative process. Attempt to minimize the unintentional clouding of your interpretations by the coloring of your own values. But also allow your own acknowledged values to assist in navigating the unknown territory of the other. And then try to clearly see that territory; try to see from the perspective of the other. It is thus essential to consider your own *reflexivity* – what you bring to the interpretative process. Use it. But don't let it blind you. In your interpretation, *identify and articulate* to your audience what you bring to the table, what personal values helped inform and guide your interpretation.

The goal of interpreting from the perspective of the other, however, is an *elusive goal*. In the final analysis, you can never fully know the meaning of someone else's values. Your interpretations are always *isomorphic*, i.e., an approximation of, but not identical with, that which you are interpreting. The interpretation of values can never be empirical. This should not discourage you from being rigorous in your endeavors, however. Your interpretations have tremendous *heuristic value*. They assist in discovery and exploration. They assist in arriving at more appropriate ways of learning about and describing the human condition. They assist in increasing your overall understanding and appreciation of yourself and others. Interpretation humanizes your experiences with others. Eye juggling is not a science; it is an art.

**Creativity.** Interpretation is ultimately a process of *creating symbolic meanings*. As previously discussed, if something is not symbolized, it is not readily recognizable and has no meaning. If the interpreter does not have a symbol of the other, the other has no meaning. A new symbol is needed. As further discussed, if the meaning of the symbols of the other is elusive, you cannot simply and automatically appropriate the symbols of the other. Simply presenting another's symbol does not mean you have presented the meaning of that symbol as understood by the other. A new symbol is needed. And if you impose your own symbols on the other, you only blind yourself from seeing the other. Your own symbols cannot convey the meaning of the other. A new symbol is needed.

It follows then that you must necessarily create new symbols of the other. As with any act of creativity, discovery or revelation, interpretation is the result of a *dialectic*. It is as if you are in conversation with someone else. You must attempt to clearly understand what is being voiced by the other person. Listen carefully. But if there is to be a conversation, your own voice must also be part of and contribute to the dialogue. A conversation is the collaboration of both voices. In like fashion, meaning is to be rendered out of the dialogue between symbolizer, i.e., the interpreter, and phenomena to be symbolized, i.e., the other, though we would hope the voice of the other to be significantly louder. A *synthesis*, nevertheless, takes place. As you approach the story texts, listen to the voice of the other, it must predominate; but also *acknowledge your own voice*, a process of reflexivity, and then let yourself imagine anew. Reflect on all these varied voices, symbols, images and meanings; re-arrange them in your head, and let them fall together in unforeseen ways. An interpretation is, after all, a *construction*, a coming together of something new – the resulting culmination of the predominate voices of the other, in consort with and acknowledgment of your voice.

And then apply your synthesis. Does it meet the criteria of *heuristic* validity, i.e., a more appropriate methodology of learning about the other, an increase in an overall understanding and appreciation of the other, and a humanizing of your relation with the other? If not, try again.



Eye juggling involves the coordinated juggling of the eyes of the other and the self, and of eyes that have not yet seen, but that are about to.

Eye juggling is a *social activity*. Eye Juggling is best approached in the context of collaborative group interactions. Find a partner. Form a discussion group. By so doing, not only can the story texts be heard read aloud, but each within the group can benefit from the ensuing spontaneous discussion and shared insights about the story texts. The eye of another may see what had been elusive to one's own. Also remember that there can be no "correct" answers, only your heuristic interpretations. Agreement may not result. *Differing* and *alternative* interpretations of the story texts, in fact, are encouraged. Through a dialogue of differing points of view, through the juggling of a multitude of eyes, new interpretations can emerge. In order to better see through the eyes of others as well as to see clearly through your own, a myriad of eyes, all of various shapes, sizes and colors, need to be juggled.

\* \* \* \* \*

Consider the application of the "eye juggling" method in the following two examples, that of the Crow Indian story of "Burnt Face," as told by Tom Yellowtail, and that of the Genesis story in the Bible. The text of the stories: [Burnt Face](#) and [Genesis](#). The interpretations of the texts: [Burnt Face](#) and [Genesis](#).

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