Eye Juggling:
A Methodology for Interpreting Stories

Eye Juggling Outline

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 ways. 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
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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, value, 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. Value is 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, 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 observe. We’ll discuss this notion and its implications more fully later.
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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.

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

The particular cluster of symbols that is of concern to us is values. In your eye juggling, it will be the values embedded within the story texts that you will attempt to discover and interpret. I will define values as learned, relatively enduring, emotionally charged, epistemologically grounded and represented moral conceptualizations that assist us in making judgements and in preparing us to act. In other words, the priorities we set and the choices we make are significantly based upon the values we hold. My usage of the concept is inclusive of the personal values of an individual as well as the collective values of a community.

All values are learned values. 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 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 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 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 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 provide a code and form the basis for all moral judgments, whether directed at others, nature or the self. Values 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 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 are thus more than a code of conduct. By infusing judgements with passion, values 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 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 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
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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.

The ingrained values 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.

**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."

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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 spender of 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?

As we had mentioned previously, if behavior is not a direct corollary of values, 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 values?

As we have established, values are clustering of symbols. As such, the symbolic is indicative of values. 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 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, that 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.

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 appreciate of the perspective of the other, 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
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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 Hajj 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 can not 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 along side 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 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 can not 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 can not convey the meaning of the other. A new symbol is needed.
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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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