

## **Song: A Methodology**

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 *interviewing* and *interpreting* skills. Together, they provide a method for better clarifying and appreciating the values of others as well as your own values.

### **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 clustering of symbols. Humanity is *homo symbolicus*.

## 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.

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<sup>1</sup>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.<sup>2</sup> These categories are not mutually exclusive. Any given value can be based on more than one of these criteria simultaneously, e.g., literal-denotative and anagogic-implicative. Furthermore, each category has validity, equally contributing to the human condition, although in differing ways. No one criteria, in and of itself, is more appropriate or morally superior than another. 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

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<sup>2</sup>This typology owes much to the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy 1934.

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 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.

## Interviewing

To enhance your skills in appreciating the values of another person, eye juggling involves your ability to go beyond the story texts of this workbook. You will be asked to conduct an interview of someone's life history or his or her oral traditions, and then to assemble that information as a "story text," as a "cultural story." In so doing, you will have a wonderful opportunity to come close to truly experiencing the richness and depth of meaning in the story of another human being. As with all our eye juggling endeavors, the overriding concern is to seek out, in the interview questions, and to convey, in the subsequent written narrative, the story *from the perspective* of the person interviewed.

Your first task will be to select someone to interview. Try to select an *interviewee* whose values are distinct from your own. It is much easier to come to understand a story whose territory is distinct from one's own. Perhaps the individual is of another ethnic or cultural group. Perhaps there is simply an occupational or generational difference. Most of all, select someone who sincerely wants to share

his or her story with you. In selecting someone to interview, you should not need to go beyond the members of your own local community. Wonderful stories are always to be found close to home.

Before you begin the actual interview, think about the information you hope to gather. What are the goals of your project? What sort of information are you seeking? Is it a *life history* of a particular individual (first-person, idiosyncratic experiences, i.e., "he/she did it", bound by a specific cultural and historical context)? Is it the *oral traditions* of another person that you seek (stories, traditions, historical information passed down through different people to your interviewee, remembrances not necessarily experienced by the interviewee, "he/she learned it from others")? Or is it possibly a person's *mythology* ("true stories" which are expressive of universal motifs and archetypes, and are considered "timeless")? What are the particular parameters of your research, e.g., a particular geographic area, historical period, economic way of life, educational or health care system, or governmental or religious structure? Who might best be able to offer you the information you seek? Is your interviewee a "willing" and enthusiastic participant? Does he/she have the time to work with you?

*Goal setting* is the single most important aspect of your project. Ask yourself where you are at now, where do you want to go and how are you going to get there? Clarify your goals and your means to get there. Fuzzy goals result in frustration and missing important information. Have a vision of what may await you, but also be willing to re-direct your goals as you grow in your project. Develop a list of potential interviewees. Make a topical outline, establishing your research parameters and goals. Don't go into the interview "cold." Gain an awareness of the cultural context and historical background of the particular information you seek. Research your topics. Consult with relatives and friends of your intended interviewee, local historians, libraries, newspapers, university resources. Learn the broad characteristics of the territory. What sorts of questions need to be asked?

Prepare *open-ended questions*. You may know the broad topics, but you do not know the specifics. You're as an "infant," learning someone else's cultural story for the first time. "You don't

know it." Use open-ended, evocative questions like: "Why did you...?" "How did you feel about...?" "What was it like...?" "Could you describe how...?" "What sort of person was he/she...?" Ask the who, what, when and most importantly, the why questions. Open-ended questions let your interviewee set the direction of information sharing and let him/her "lead." Ask questions that spark the imagination and focus the interview, that attempt to reveal the cultural story of the interviewee.

If you are seeking a person's life history, develop questions that chronicle a life-span, questions about birth place, parents and family, memories from infancy and adolescents, schooling, travel, employment, etc.

Avoid closed-ended questions that elicit "yes-no" answers like: "Did you like...?" "Were you affected by your teachers ...?" "Are the traditions still...?" They have their place, such as determining the date and place of birth, years in school, etc. But it is a limited place.

Avoid generalities like: "Tell me all about your childhood...?" which elicits nothing more than a list of names and dates, and a very bored interviewee. Ask instead, "What did you like to do when you were six or seven?"

Write down your questions. Know the questions you seek from your interviewee. But don't be rigid about your list. Questions will always be waiting for you once you are in the actual interview process.

To get shy people to open up to the interview, take along photos or objects (heirlooms or memorabilia, tools, maps, diagrams, etc.) and ask the interviewee to tell you about them. Props can also "draw out memories." Remember to number each prop and mention it in the tape recording.

In order to accurately record and, in turn, communicate another's cultural story, it is recommended that you use an audio or video *tape recorder*. It is preferable that your recorder has a detachable microphone in order to pick-up the best possible sound quality. Be familiar with your taping equipment. Experiment with mike placement, volume, brand of tape, etc. before you begin. Make sure the sound quality is good. Gather recording equipment: video

recorder and tripod or audio cassette recorder, blank tapes (unwrap tapes, advance lead of tape and always bring more blank tapes than you think you'll need), fresh batteries or extension cord and 3-prong adaptor, separate microphone and foam pad, pen and note pad.

It is critical that you first gain *permission* from your interviewee to use the obtained information. It is ethically essential that the interviewee fully understand the nature of the research procedures that he or she will be subjected, and to what end the research will be used. If someone else's cultural story is to be recorded and shared publicly (with fellow students, for example), an Informed Consent Form should be signed by the interviewee. Review with the interviewee the nine-point description of the purposes and procedures of the interviewee that are listed in the Consent Form. If there are any special conditions or if the interviewee wishes to remain anonymous, his or her wishes must be respected and indicated on the Consent Form. See the attached Informed Consent Form in the Appendix.

In addition to oral interview information, do not forget to gather other cultural artifacts such as family photographs, art work, etc. Copies may have to be made from them. As you collect these objects be sure to catalog them and record all information known about them.

To get started with the interview, make an appointment with your interviewee ahead of time (in person, phone or letter). Be sure that the location for the interview is at a site that minimizes interference by others. Be on time to your first interview session. Schedule the session around the interviewee's family needs. Clearly introduce yourself and your project intentions to your interviewee. Answer any questions about the project. Go over the Copyright Release Form and gain his or her signature. Clearly explain the procedures, and the focus and parameters of the interview. Interview only one person at a time. If you're talking to the interviewee and another person wants to put in his "two cents' worth," tell him you would love to interview him, but at another time soon. It's best to make this clear before you begin your interview. The best way to guarantee this is to have just you and your interviewee present in the room. Make sure there's no background noise (t.v., dishwasher, other

conversations) that may interfere with the quality of the tape. Make sure everyone is comfortable, with good seating and water. And always do a brief test of your audio/video equipment to be sure the mike is picking up both voices clearly.

Break the ice by chatting briefly about related topics before you start the tape recording. But don't turn the tape recorder off and on more than absolutely necessary once it's going. It's a good idea to tape a brief introductory lead-in before you ask your first question. Tell who is being interviewed, by whom, when, and the general subjects to be covered.

A key to a successful interview is in using good questioning and listening skills. Be honest and sincere, "be yourself." Interviewing is the art form of dialoguing with another human being; you are in conversation with someone else. It is a give-and-take situation. If you want honest and sincere information, you have to give it. Get acquainted. Establish your "kinship;" establish "*rapport*."

Begin by asking for a brief (2 or 3 minute) bit of background information about the interviewee: where and when born, parents, major places lived during life, careers or other important areas of personal experiences. Easy to answer and non-intimidating questions help relax the interviewee.

People can usually describe concrete things more easily than conceptual. Start with the concrete. You want answers that are descriptive as well as factual. "Can you describe your home outside and inside?" or "Would you explain to me what you did in a typical day's work?" are good examples.

Don't talk too much about yourself. Resist the impulse to contribute your own stories or information or to put words in the mouth of the person you're interviewing.

Don't talk to the recorder or the mike; talk to the person you're interviewing, with lots of direct eye contact (if appropriate, given the cultural considerations of your interviewee). If you act as if the mike isn't there, chances are your interviewee will soon forget about it, too.

Refer now and then to your general topical questions; keep your goals in mind. But don't let your specific questions and goals



become your "script." Let the interviewee set the direction and the lead; he/she is the one with the information. Be an *active listener*. Ask questions based upon your interviewee's responses. Be flexible. Don't be afraid of going off on a "tangent." Don't be so anxious about asking your next question that you fail to hear what your interviewee is saying.

Sometimes the best information comes up unexpectedly. If you're into something good, follow it up with appropriate, *follow-up questions*. Follow-up questions can also elicit more detailed information as well as to make sure your interviewee has had a chance to tell all he/she wants to tell. "What happened then?" "How did you feel about that?" "How did that turn out?" After pursuing this line of inquiry, guide the interviewee back to your original questions.

Try not to interrupt your interviewee. If your interviewee mentions something you'd like to follow up, wait for a natural pause in the conversation and then say something like: "A few minutes ago you were saying that..." Don't ask more than one question at a time.

Don't rush into every pause with a new question. Silences are natural, and they may give your interviewee a chance to think of additional materials on the subject. Silence is not wasted time. Take advantage of the "*silent probe*."

Show your interviewee that you're interested through nods and facial expressions. Express your appreciation with occasional responses like: "That's a great story!" or "That's really interesting!" The way you ask questions, your tone of voice, your body language, are all keys to the responses your questions will get.

Don't make irrelevant or distracting comments. And never contradict your interviewee, whether you agree with what the person is saying or not. Instead, ask further questions that shed light on the issue being discussed. It may help you determine the various versions to a given situation or event. There can be many differing accounts of the same event, all of which are "correct." Remember the difference between interviewing and cross-examining.

If your interviewee can't or won't give you an answer to a particular question, it's better to move on. You must acknowledge that there will be some information that you will not be able to gather.

Gaps will exist. Some of the story may not be meant to be shared publicly. It may be too personal or even sacred for your interviewee.

Establish a basic time frame by asking: "What year was that?" or "About how old were you when that happened?" If your interviewee doesn't know, try to get at least a rough idea by asking a further question like: "How long afterward was that, a month? a year?"

Try to establish what your interviewee's role was in the events he/she is describing--a participant, an observer, etc. Or, if he/she is passing on a story rather than describing a personal experience, try to determine who he/she heard it from or the original source of the story.

If your interviewee uses unusual words or linguistic terms that are unfamiliar to you, have the interviewee explain them and try to spell them out.

Adjust the length of the interview to your interviewee's comfort and attention span. Forty-five minutes to an hour is a good length. If it's too short it will probably be superficial, and if it's too long it will get uncomfortable. You can always take a break and resume later. Older folks tire more easily; cut the interview off at the first sign of fatigue.

It is likely that numerous sessions will be needed for some interviewees. Let the interviewee know ahead of time that there can be future sessions.

And always remember whose story you're trying to tell. Try not biasing your information with your own perspective. You want to present the story of your interviewee from *his/her own perspective*. Attempt to see the world through his/her eyes. You have the tremendous responsibility of continuing to speak your interviewee's voice for all the others, as well as the future generations, who will read your interview.

After the interview is completed, show your sincere appreciation by *thanking* your interviewee. Then follow-up with a formal letter of appreciation. Ask your interviewee if he/she is willing to sign the Informed Consent Form (if he/she has not already done so), allowing you to share his or her story publicly.

Label the tape clearly with the name of your interviewee, the date and your name. Break out the tabs on the tape so it doesn't get erased by accident.

*Indexing* the interview is the next essential step. Prepare a written index of the audio/video tape recording, using a stopwatch or clock. The purpose of the index is to summarize the contents of the interview and to indicate approximately where on the tape a certain subject is discussed.

Indexing by the minute is best since the meter number systems vary from machine to machine. Use a stopwatch or a clock. Divide the tape into approximately five-minute segments or by the obvious breaks in subjects.

Make your index fairly detailed--especially if you do not intend to transcribe the entire taped interview. A detailed index will make even a cassette that is not transcribed useful to other researchers. Index by names, dates, place names, processes, family names, customs, events, etc., indicated by the information in the interview. Do the index as soon as possible after the interview so the subjects are still fresh in your mind.

Using the index of the tape recording as your guide, next *transcribe* those selected portions of the text that you want to include in your written report. The goal in transcribing an interview is to provide an accurate, verbatim written record of the interview dialogue in a form which will best represent your interviewee's cultural story. Transcribe everything that is said by the interviewee, including colloquial pronunciations, "yeah" and "goin'," as well as indicate the pauses in the speech pattern, phrase repetitions, and voice inflections placed on specific words. Meaning is conveyed not only in the words spoken but also in the way those words are spoken.

There is an acknowledged relationship between *what* you present and *how* you present it. Given the nature of your information, be it oral history/life history or be it mythology, the style of presentation can enhance or detract from the intended meaning of the cultural story. For example, if you include mythological stories, should you not also include a copy of an audio presentation of that story by the narrator as part of the report? The form and style of your

finished product should be dictated by the type of information you collect.

It is strongly recommended that you show your written index and the story transcription to your interviewee and ask him/her to check it for accuracy. After all, your interviewee is the "authority." A review can also spark additional insights and memories by the interviewee. Be ready for another interview session.

It is most appropriate to leave a copy of the transcribed story text with your interviewee. There is no better way of saying *thank you* than by presenting your interviewee with a personal copy of his or her own story. You may also want to donate the cultural story (tape, index and transcription) to your local library or college oral history archive.

## 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 in this workbook, the transcribed pages of a life history interview, or more typically 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, and 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 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*. 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.<sup>3</sup> For Dundes, interpretation involves the clarification of the text, the texture and the context of the story. The *text* refers to the symbolic meanings of the actual text, e.g., what is 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

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<sup>3</sup>See Dundes 1966.

an understanding of the entire cultural configuration in 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. They should be applied to the interpretation of the story texts as found in this workbook, in the life history interview you just completed, or in that conversation you had with your next door neighbor.

As you approach a story text, first 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 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 will be reiterated throughout a text in a variety of ways in order to convey a specific meaning. Look for the repetitions.

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 context bound. 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? Ask yourself in what social context is the text usually presented. When and where is

it likely to be found? To whom is it usually directed? Attempt to ground the text in its cultural and historical context.

To assist you in placing each story text in its cultural and historical context, I have provided some selected background materials, placed in the sections marked, "Extensions." You will find them presented immediately after each of our primary stories. Review them carefully. As you engage the story, read these materials and reflect on their implications for and influence on the story. The background materials will help focus your interpretations and offer insights into the story texts. Also refer to the bibliography for additional background sources.

It is important to note that the "extension" texts are themselves "story texts," not unlike those which they frame. They are just as much a part of a particular historic and cultural fiber as the various primary story texts. As a consequence, the "legitimacy" and "truth" of a given background text is inexorably linked to and a function of the particular values and ways of knowing the world upon which it is based. As our purpose is to interpret and clarify values, as opposed to evaluate and judge them, any given background text can thus be of no more "legitimacy" and greater "truth" than another. In this sense the "extension" story texts should be interpreted along side our primary story texts. We must become cognizant of the values which spawn all our stories.

In addition, while each of the story texts of this workbook can be approached in isolation from the others, taken together they do provide a framework for better understanding each individual story. It is suggested that before interpreting any one story text you first do an initial "once-over" of all the story texts. As you do so, don't get bogged down in the detail or an unfamiliar term or concept. Try gaining a sense of the "*big picture*." It's easier to identify the trees if you know which forest you're in.

Ask yourself what sort of epistemological criteria are alluded to in the text, i.e., literal-denotative, metaphoric-connotative and/or anagogic-implicative. Ask yourself what sort of story text and thus value system you have before you.

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. Such texts are presented in this workbook in a "poetic style," and are to be found in "Soul Food," "A Flower," "The Quest," "Wise Use," and "Eye to Eye." 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.

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.

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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>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

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

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if such were the case.

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.

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.

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 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.

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, 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.

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*. This workbook 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.

A final consideration. To further assist you in your interpretation of a story text, a series of *discussion questions* are offered. The questions attempt to spawn additional reflection on the story texts by presenting perspectives and issues not readily apparent. It is as if you are in dialogue with another who is also eye juggling the same text. The questions are not to be answered as if for an "exam," with an expectation of eliciting comprehensive and "correct" responses. You simply do not have enough text materials presented to you in this workbook to even attempt such. And, more importantly, there can be no "correct" answers, only your heuristic

interpretations. The questions are intended to probe and stimulate your reflections.

As you undertake each story text, you are thus encouraged to refer to the appropriate discussion questions listed toward the back of this workbook. Using the interpretative method just outlined, venture responses to the questions. Write out your responses in a journal. The writing process can assist you in sorting out and clarifying your thoughts. Then, utilizing your own interpretations of the story texts along with your responses to the questions, make a comparison with the interpretations offered by others within your collaborative group. 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.