Research on Language and Social Interaction
Vol. 22, 1988/89: 179-212

Deep Agony: "Self" vs. "Society" in *Donahue* Discourse

Donal Carbaugh
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

A recent publicly televised discussion about work and women's roles in contemporary America precipitated the following comments below by two women authors (WA1, WA2), and subsequently (Example 1c) an adult male (M), and adult female (F):

Example 1a

WA1: We found out for the first time some very interesting things about how work affects a women's attitude towards herself and the world around herself. . .

WA2: She is twice as likely to describe herself as ambitious and aggressive, and she is much more likely to set goals for herself. These are goals which are self-actualization goals. They're not necessarily goals which benefit others. Women who traditionally work in the home are more likely to be concerned about others' benefits. When she's in the work force she's asking, "What's in it for me?"

Following a discussion highlighting the perils of housework, of women working for "others' benefits" – women in the roles of "house-

Parts of this study were supported by a scholarship from the Graduate School of the University of Washington, a grant from the Office of Faculty Research of the University of Pittsburgh, and a fellowship from the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities. The author is grateful for this support. An earlier version of the essay was presented at the 1986 Conference on Culture and Communication.

wife" and "mother"—WA1 restated the shift that occurs when women work outside the home for themselves.

Example 1b

WA1: Women are . . . more likely to respond to their own needs and be perceived as more real people, rather than just in total responding to other people.

This employment trend was titled "the coming matriarchy" and hailed for increasing the power of women who work for economic capital, increasing their ability to exercise control over decisions at work and home. But the latter topic—alleged changes to the home—became entangled with another issue.

Example 1c

M: I don't think any society will prosper indefinitely without a strong male role in the family. The boys grow up to be wimps, and in the case of the Roman civilization it proved to be their downfall.

Audience: (Low applause). .

F: While we're talking about men and women, if people would just concentrate on themselves, and their goals, and being individuals. Society says that you have to earn money to be of any value. I feel that that's very ingrained in men right now. This is what women are fighting. I feel that I'm fighting that right now, myself

What is the nature of this "fight"? How is it that the last speaker can move this discussion from the gendered issues of "men and women" to unisexed issues of "selves . . . and being individuals"? From the institutions of "society" such as "work" and "home" to personal issues of "self"? Are these terminological shifts of significance to these speakers? If so, how so? And further, why is it that the more encompassing notions of "individual" and "self" are said to be "fighting" against "society"?

What follows is an ethnography of this kind of usage in American speech, with the main exemplar being the talk of the prominent American television program, *Donahue*. The materials providing both

the impetus and data for the study suggest that the terms "self" and "society" are deeply patterned and powerfully demonstrated in the conduct of some Americans' speech. The prominence of these terms, and the semantic forces with which they infuse communication, make them important in an American system of sayables, and partial constituents of its vocabulary of motives. I present a cultural interpretation of these terms within a field of discourse in which they are routinely expressed.

The basic purpose is to explore the meanings of "self" and "society" as they constitute an agonistic pattern within some American speech. For example, what was meant by a woman guest who said, "one of the things [the women's movement] would like to see more women do is make a decision *all by themselves* without regard to what *society or somebody else* says"; by an expert on ethics when he faced a national television audience and summarized his opinion saying, "it's a *rotten world* and people do lousy things to each other constantly, and you can choose to be a part of it or distance *your self* from it"; by a mother who explained her daughter's anorexia by saying, "*she* was reinforced by *our society* that says, boy, you look good if you don't have a little fat on you"; by a psychotherapist who said, "—in *our society* there is a conspiracy of silence around this whole area . . . so that very often the people who are experiencing these feelings feel isolated; they feel *alienated and alone*." Exploring instances such as these has led me to ask: what differentiates the potent term of "self" from "society"? To what uses are these cultural terms put in this discourse? What motivates these common sayings?

Responses to these questions are given by the major findings of the study, two interrelated and complex propositions about cultural communication heard on *Donahue*. First, a deep agony is enacted in this speech as cultural symbols of "self" are asserted against cultural symbols of "society." The conversational meanings that animate the agony can be summarized thus: the forces of the individual person in the present are praised while the problematic forces of the majority from the past are blamed. This proposition does not imply that these cultural symbols hold only these meanings. Both terms (and the clusters they entitle) are quite malleable and polysemic. What this proposition reflects are the semantic features highlighted when

those symbols are played dialectically against each other, intensively and frequently, as in the typical utterances that introduce this paper.

My second proposition demonstrates how four particular features of discourse enact the agony. Of concern are (1) utterances that contrast qualities of "self" with constraints of "society," (2) statements that blame explicitly "traditional social roles" (and praise implicitly "self"), (3) reflexive utterances that highlight "self" over "social roles," and (4) forms of address that enact "self" over "society." These enactments of the agony demonstrate a deep level in the cultural performance, unveiling several ironies. (1) The agonistic pattern, while placing "self" against "society" (in a cultural sense), makes of "self" a particular kind of social role (in an analytic sense). (2) As a symbolic form, the deep agony provides not only for the various motives and actions of "self," but also for collective enactment and cultural performance. (3) As the deep agony highlights the separating attributes of individuality and autonomy, it hides the more unifying features of connectedness and solidarity. In short, the deep agony is used to enact a semantic of individuality, but does so through an agonistic cultural form. With this discursive pattern, persons talk as self-motivated individuals who are uniquely independent, but overlook (talk over) the consensual forces, the communal motives, that motivate their cultural performance. The main argument can be summarized as follows: these discursive performances of deep agony constitute a sense of individuality *and a form of community*. Further, through comparative study, I will show how this agonistic discourse is not only a particular and historically grounded American expression, but also an instantiation of a universal linguistic form, one that displays and resolves fundamental tensions in human lives.

This ethnography is designed therefore to introduce deep agony as both a particular and a universal force in cultural communication systems;[1] to show how a study of agonistic discourse in communication can add to an understanding of its production, performance, and moral assessment; and to show how a single agonistic form constitutes a cultural communicative system of symbols and meanings.

The general claims about the pattern are qualified in two ways. First, the uses of the cultural terms are explored within the general

American discourses of persons and social relations where "self" and "society" co-occur. The terms may have other meanings in other discourses. Second, I do not claim that all Americans use the discourse pattern described herein. What I have uncovered is a prominent way of speaking that is used intelligibly by Americans in this scene. It is that pattern of cultural discourse, shown below to be displayed prominently, that holds our attention here.[2]

The perspective and method grounding the study is "the ethnography of communication" as a named program of research (Hymes, 1962, 1972; Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986). Within this tradition, the study qualifies as an ethnography of communication by meeting four defining criteria. (1) The study takes as its principal problematic a practice of communication, and describes it at least in part by using and developing the specialized Hymesian vocabulary. (2) The study first and foremost, but not exclusively, approaches communication on the cultural level, interpreting the patterned use of verbal symbols, the agonistic form and its meanings, from the native's point-of-view, from the standpoint of the common culture (Geertz, 1973; Schneider, 1976; Scruton, 1979). (3) The study uses existing ethnographic reports to gain perspective on the particulars of the present case, and as bases for cross-cultural comparisons. (4) The study investigates discourse *in situ*, with the analyst situated as a participant observer, consumer and user.

With regard to the latter to (4), when designing the present study I had to ask: where do I situate myself as ethnographer? The rationale for my choice is as follows: this study explores patterns of speaking more than personal histories of speakers, public contexts for speaking more than private industries of production, the "talk" that is "shown" more than the institutional constraints of its production, the common views of the many more than the specialized perceptions of the few. Thus, I situated myself initially but not exclusively with the millions, from the vantage point of a native viewer of *Donahue* discourse. Later on, because the study focuses on the nature and function of public "talk," I was able to collect many non-mediated instances of the agonistic pattern examined here. While most of my data are from *Donahue*, I situated myself as both a user and viewer of such talk, thus able to trace its use in various social situations.

Taken together, the combination of descriptive, cultural, and comparative study in public contets of use, makes of this an ethnography of communication.

THE METHOD

The following interpretations are based primarily on a three year exposure to over one hundred hours of *Donahue* shows spanning October 1982 through October 1985.

The inquiry proceeded in three general phases. During the first phase, my goal was to generate some initial hypotheses about cultural discourse used on *Donahue*. Data for this first phase consisted of field observations of sixty hours of *Donahue* shows, textual analyses of transcripts from twenty-eight of these shows, observations of language use in several everyday American contexts, readings of several commentaries on American speech and life including Phil Donahue's autobiography (Bellah, et al., 1985; Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1974; Davis, 1982; Donahue & Co., 1981; Lasch, 1979; Novak, 1982; Robertson, 1980; Schneider, 1980; Sennett, 1978; Tocqueville, 1838/1945; Vareene, 1977; Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981; Yankelovich, 1981) and several unstructured interviews of persons who watched, and appeared on, *Donahue*. This general phase of the study generated over four hundred pages of field notes. Based on this phase of data collection, I noted a prominent use of what I later came to call an agonistic pattern. Thus, a second phase of research was conducted that involved a more focused analysis, abstracting and testing only propositions about this agonistic discourse. During this phase, I collected additional data, including six audio-visual recordings of the *Donahue* show, to test my tentative formulations. I asked: are these propositions accurate descriptions of *this* communication system? If so, they were retained. If not, they were appropriately modified or discarded. This intensive phase of analysis combined with the above to constitute a form of hypothesis generation and testing (Bulmer, 1979; Robinson, 1951). During the final phase of research, I returned to all of the recorded data in search of conflicting and validating evidence. Likewise, I collected five

additional broadcasts of the *Donahue* show to test the pattern against other new data. This procedure was followed until the discourse pattern exhibited what was considered to be a high degree of validity. These discursive tests amounted to a type of triangulation among three primary sources of data: transcripts of the shows, field notes made from observing the agonistic pattern, and the audio-visual recordings of *Donahue* (Campbell, 1975; Smith, 1978).

In toto, 357 uses of the term "self" and related terms such as "the individual" and "the person," and 250 uses of the term "society" and related terms such as "this country," "this nation," and "America today" were analyzed. Each was described using the specialized vocabulary of the Hymesian framework for ethnographic studies of communication. The basic unit of observation was verbal discourses used on *Donahue*; the basic unit of analysis was a cultural code consisting of the agonistic form, two symbols and their meanings (Philipsen, 1987).[3]

"SELF" AND "SOCIETY"

Symbolic Foreground and Background

"Self" and "society" may be interpreted initially by exploring the folk uses that differentiate the two cultural symbols. The most prominent meaning expressed with "society" was a widely distributed problem, a massive state of troubling affairs that is getting worse and worse. This sense is expressed in various ways but each associates "society" with a common sense of pervasive problems that are indications of, or said to be movements toward, a social decay. As an audience member said, "we live in a society right now where everyone is in a state of panic and fear, and a lot of terrible things happen. A policeman guest, an upholder of the law, said, "In our society today people are afraid in their homes because they are burglarized, thefts, murders," and Donahue agreed saying, "You're right, they are." An audience member responded to erotic film stars saying, "Our

society is going much down the drain," and after some discussion about male prostitution, Donahue asked about "our values in this country," and an audience member quipped, "They've gone down the tubes" (audience laughter). Perhaps the most explicit use of this meaning appeared on one of the shows titled "America in Ruins," during which a viewer suggested a title for another show (on male strippers), "America At Its Worst." Folk exchanges as these demonstrate how the cultural term, "society," and associated terms such as "this country" and "America," are used to express a sense of problems that are widely distributed.

One may notice an interaction here between the topics of discussion and the symbols of "society" and wonder how all this talk about male strippers, erotic film stars, and so on could result in any other sense of "society" than that of a widely distributed problem. But that reading of this corpus would miss the more general point, which is that almost every topic discussed, from herpes to ethics, seniors' sex to gifted children, artificial insemination to parenting for peace, implies (to these interlocutors) a wide-scale, "societal" "problem". With herpes, the pervasive problem is said to be physical and perhaps moral; with ethics, the pervasive problem is the lack thereof; with seniors' sex, the problem involves widely-held and disadvantageous inhibitions; with gifted children, an inadequate educational system; and so on. Almost every topic of discussion is said to involve some widely distributed problem. And the most prominent cultural term through which this problematic sense is publicized is "society." In short, on *Donahue*, almost every theme is made problematic, and through the term "society" discourse interlocutors express the primary source, locus, and general distribution of the problem.

Where the above refers to a general use of "society" as problematic, related uses of "society" evoke a more specific problem of historical sense. For example, "society" was used plurivocally to refer to "our moral roots," "our amoral roots," "a Christian nation," "a nation that separates church from state," a "free country," "this country's constitution," a "mess," "the foundation of our country," a country founded on "individual rights," "a nation of lemmings," and so on. In such speech, although "society" was used to evoke a common sense of

a common history, the specific facts of history were not held in common. Persons spoke as if they shared a general sense of history, but each individual had his or her own unique opinion about what constitutes that history. Consequently, the individual statement of opinion in the present, about history or whatever, is accepted, foregrounded and elaborated over the impersonal "facts" of the past.[4]

Consider the following discussion about President Reagan's televised endorsement of National Bible Week that occurred among Donahue (D), an expert guest (EG) (the Director of Public Affairs, National Association of Evangelicals), and an audience member (AM):

Example 2a

EG: The president of the United States has every right as a man who has a physical being, an emotional being, a thinking being, to be a spiritual being as well and he has commitments shared by most of the people in this country. And he is urging people in this country to go back to the heritage of our country in terms of its moral values, and he has every right to be.

D: Yeah, but let's assume that there are some abuses around without naming names. The president is not guilty of those abuses with that spot [announcement] is he?

AM: Not really. It's the people that are backing him.

D: That's what worries you?

AM: That's what worries me. It's the backing of what's going on in this country today that worries me.

Notice how the expert guest labelled the president as "a man" who has a "right" – as do all Americans – to his "spiritual being" and its public expression. This view, from a person in the present about a person in the present, is articulated, understood, and accepted. Put this way, the president himself is not to blame for any "abuses." It is the impersonal people who are "backing" him that are the troublemakers. The person in the present is endorsed and understood; those impersonal people in the "back" are to be speculatively tailored and/or blamed. In such speech, whether it involves national "heritage" or

"people that are backing" a politician, the collective sense of the past or background—since not immediate in the present—is rendered problematic socially.[5]

The above discussion (Example 2a) elicited several individuals' opinions about their national heritage and the role of religion in it. Some opinions, from the expert guest (EG) and a gay Atheist (A) (Example 2b), and audience members (AM) (Example 2c), were stated as follows:

Example 2b

A: George Washington signed the treaty of Tripoli in the 1700's which declared that the country of the United States is not founded in any way on Christian religions. And this is because of his dealings with Moslem countries at that time.

EG: (quoting Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas) 'we are a religious people whose institutions presuppose belief in a Supreme Being.' That is a common understanding of the history of this country. Those are our foundations.

A: This is in violation of the early history of this country. It is not the history of this country.

Others said, "we are a Christian nation," "founded by Puritans," which elicited the comment, "our country separates church from state." Through this public discourse, one hears most easily a person's opinion as it is stated in the present. For example, we know the atheist's opinions on the relation between church and state, we know the "expert's" opinions, and so on. This sense of the conversation is relatively unproblematic because a personal discourse in the present is rightfully stated and respected. The sense that is relatively problematic and variously understood is "our heritage." For example, whether "the nation" is religious or not is never resolved. Of course, there are many ways one might privately *think of* resolving such diffuse and problematic issues, but their resolution is not commonly heard at this level (agreement about facts of heritage) in this public discourse.

To extend the general point on the agony between "self" and "society" we can include another prominent spoken meaning, that

of the minority and the majority. Speakers of this situation foreground and value the underdog, the under-represented, the least heard from, the novel, the uniquely and unabashedly few—especially as s/he confronts a (societal) majority. This general point is stated persistently and is also demonstrated in audience members' (AM) and the expert guest's (EG) various statements on the same topic:

Example 2c

AM: Maybe by some people's standards the majority of people in this country may be of a Christian faith or religion. But the fact is there are many different religions that are represented in this nation.

AM: I think that we have to remember that this is a nation founded by minorities, and the people that came here came here because they wanted religious freedom. .

EG: There is no freedom of religion unless there is freedom from religion. And in this country, we honor people as full citizens who have no faith at all religiously. [As the Atheist represents!]

AM: I think the country is in such a mess if we read the Bible and it helps so what? Read the Koran or whatever.

AM: Equal time for everything or perhaps we should have nothing.

In this discourse, the social entity that is foregrounded is the minority, the group or person that is presently struggling over, and against, the larger group or majority. The minority (in this case a shared history of minorities with the individual "self" as its extreme form) is emphasized over the majority. In this discourse, symbols of "society" often represent the majority, the antagonizing social forces. Such forces, when symbolized, display the general symbolic context against which the "self" is said to act.

The native semantic structure of the cultural discourse may be summarized as follows: symbols of "self" provide common senses of the person, the present, and/or the minority that are entangled in, and over, "society"; symbols of "society" provide senses of the impersonal, the past, and/or the majority against which "self" is said to act. Symbolic meanings that are valued, personal, and unique are

associated with "self"; symbolic meanings that are generally problematic, impersonal, and devalued are associated with "society." Because "society" is said to be "sick" or full of problems, assertive and redressive acts of the "self" against it are required.

One prominent class of terms activates the native semantics of "society" and is heard to involve impersonal, historical and majority forces. Such terms are "traditional social roles." As these "traditional" models for the person are spoken, "self" is motivated to act. In the following section, four routine discursive strategies will be described. Each displays a powerful moment[6] when the deep agony between "self" and "social role" is evident; each also demonstrates how the agony is resolved in favor of the assertive "self." Ultimately, I will show how these brief performances in routine discourse constitute a model for the person whose common sense is individual, but whose social actions are communal. Following this path, we can understand better not only how individualized terms and tropes are enactments of cultural symbols and forms, but also how such collective acts enable the simultaneous experiencing of division and unity, autonomy and compliance.

"Self" versus Social Role

> The generations of Americans who grew up after the Revolution were and are impatient with the remnants or existence of dependence, inequality, and restrictions on individual freedom which they found and find in their lives. Since the Revolution, Americans have not known the oppression of colonial life, but they intended and tend to destroy any structures within their society which try to teach people their place and keep them there. Americans do not believe that individuals ought to stay in one place. And they do not intend that their nation keep to its place, either; for individuals and for the nation, there is a manifest destiny to fulfill. (Robertson, 1980, p. 147)

Social roles may be defined as features in and of discourse that teach people their proper places; they define commonly recognized positions in the social scheme of things, what such positions are as well as what it means to be in such positions; they also impose a set of constraints on behaviors for the proper enactment of the posi-

tions. In other words, roles are constituted in discourse when social positions are defined by symbols and their meanings, with the positions including certain normative properties or constraints on behavior deemed proper for the enactment of the role (Schneider, 1976). For example, one interpretation of discourse might examine the role of "professor" as an enactment of a commonly recognized position in America's educational system. As a cultural symbol, "professor" may suggest a role with common meanings of "sophisticated, learned, reasonable, and intelligent." The normative properties of the role may prescribe certain behaviors like "researching, teaching, attending professional meetings, committee work, and community service." The use of such a discursive resource invokes a social role as a commonly recognizable social position, saying something about what it means to be in such a position, and the normative standards for its public enactment.[7]

In the discourses of *Donahue*, "society" (the impersonal past of the group) is heard to generate social roles which are said to be oppressive, inadequate, harmful, and which are therefore de-valued. For example, as women are highly visible in and to the audience, womens' traditional roles from "society," especially as homemaker, wife, mother, and sex object, are continually negotiated, criticized, and attacked. Audience members frequently refer to female images like "Marilyn Monroe" and "Mrs. Olsen" as embodiments of traditional roles for women. As these are discussed, their prominent features as sex-symbol and housewife, respectively, are criticized. Such images are said to "victimize" women as they confine their "self" enactments in de-valued ways. As an elderly woman stated, "I think society has programmed the female to accept the secondary role...as the decades went along there was progress made but I think we are the victims, the women, the female is the victim of society who has programmed us...to accept this role." Discourse of "society" such as this is said to "victimize" individuals—in this case women and in other cases men—by displaying "roles" which are said to be oppressive, inadequate, and harmful.

A parallel example referring to oppressive roles for men occurred in a show on wife-abuse. Several audience members wondered how any man could bring himself to beat his wife. A wife-abuser

explained his abusive behavior by referring to his past, his father's abuse of his mother, then went on to exclaim "it's society!" He referred to the common social role for men as "macho men." And the models which made him into such a man were evoked by referring to the media images of "John Wayne" and "Humphrey Bogart." On another show, the causes of violence and war were being discussed, with "men" being portrayed as "strong protectors" and "women" as "weak and defenseless." A male exclaimed, "the sooner we can recognize, me Tarzan, you Jane, and how it is affecting this society, the sooner we may get to the root of why we're going to senseless wars in the first place. It's a totally male exercise." In such discourse, "society" *en masse* is said to be the provider of, and in turn affected by, harmful gender roles. In these cases, "society" and "roles" ("Tarzan" and "Jane") provide linguistic resources that are used to explain problematic behavior like wife-abuse and war. As a result, problematic actions are said (and felt) to be motivated not solely by the person in the present, but by troubling impersonal forces in the back and past that individuals—like that wife-beater, and "we," the rest of us—constantly combat.

As interlocutors speak of "society" as the source of oppressive social roles, they are faced with the task of combatting it. This battle was fought in four distinctive ways. One involved an *utterance of contrasts*, a verbalization that contrasted societal roles with the more valued features of "self." Donahue, adept at this kind of thing, said, "the Marilyn Monroe figure, although we all know now what a very complicated and also talented, sightful [pleasing to the sight], and creative person that she was—her image was that of dumb, and empty, and blonde, and pretty." In this statement Donahue praises the "person" of Marilyn Monroe, her "self," while blaming the "image" or role that society gave to her—and which she now symbolizes. Her "complicated, talented, sightful, and creative" self is held over and against her—and all women's, especially blondes'—impersonal "image" as "dumb, empty, and pretty." And as "we all know now," Marilyn Monroe was a "person" whose tragic death symbolizes the fateful end of those who succumb to life in a social role.

A less subtle but just as effective way in which discourse combats "society's roles" is by an *explicit de-valuing* of such discourse.

For example, some utterances boldly criticize any type of conformity to shared social standards, as in this comment (quoted above): "One of the points that the women's movement makes is that for too long women have been too influenced by what other people think and one of the things they would like to see more women do is make a decision all by themselves without regard to what society or somebody else says." Displayed in such speech is a common disdain for doing things as most others might expect them to be done traditionally, through the enactment of some social role. Discursively celebrated is the ability of each person's "self" to act independently, to make their rightful "choices," "without regard to what society or somebody else says."

This point, so commonly made, uses the symbol "society" as a semantic locus of oppressive forces that are historically grounded and felt to be enforced by the majority. However, it is not that all societal roles are said to be harmful, oppressive, and so on. Rather, the oppressive forces over the individual, especially "traditional roles," are prominently stated through the cultural term, "society." Also, such oppressive roles are not only said and shed for persons as women and men, but also for any member of any group (or class) that risks being pre-judged within some common role. For example, children should be discussed not as "helpless" (nor with any such image that does not allow for their independent thinking and acting), politicians not as dishonest, erotic film stars not as sexually permissive, prostitutes not as unethical, and so on. In all such rejected discourse, invoking societal roles—or categorizing persons through common symbols, meanings, and expected behaviors—relies on a majority view that is somewhat impersonal and historically grounded, and is thus to be set aside so the unique person in the present can be displayed.[8]

A third pervasive way that "self" is highlighted over and against social roles occurs through a class of *reflexive utterances*. In these sayings, a statement of a general social role, as father, housewife, women, mothers, males, is followed by a derivative of "self" resulting in statements like "a father myself," "the housewife herself," "the women themselves," "working mothers themselves," and "males . . . themselves." Through this type of utterance, the "self" becomes

the figure of discursive concern with a diffuse social role as its symbolic ground.[9]

Fourth, this same semantic effect is achieved differently as individuals choose not to use social roles, or titles, when *addressing others*. Consider the popular introduction of persons by their first names, rather than by their titles and/or social roles. As a more specific example, since beginning this project I have witnessed several occasions where a person has introduced another saying, "Hello, this is Bob," and consciously not said, "Hello, this is my husband, Bob." I have heard the rule explicitly stated: "We do not refer to each other as 'my wife' or 'my husband'." Likewise, persons on *Donahue* address the host, Phil Donahue, as "Phil," and often address expert guests by their first names. Through addressing one another this way, persons highlight the equal, common "self" as something valued over the more distant and potentially stratifying societal roles. Similar preferences are demonstrated when family names are retained, and various hyphenated forms of names are created, to insure that "self" is not consumed by implicitly constraining societal roles. The same dynamic works in some family communication where parents prefer that their children address them by their first names, rather than as "mommy" or "daddy."[10] Said in Burkeian language, a grammar of "self" and "society" provides an epideictic rhetoric that motivates the voice of the personal minority in the present, over and against the impersonal majority from the past.

DEEP AGONY IN DEPTH

Is the "self-society" agon, this discursive form and its meanings, primarily an artifact of contemporary American mediated communication, or is it used in other American contexts? At other American times? At other (non-American) Western times? In non-Western scenes? In what sense is this linguistic form an American phenomenon and to what extent is it more general? By exploring elsewhere and elsewhen, we can discover which aspects of the agonistic pattern are culturally colored, and which are more general.[11]

Other American Situations

In telling her life's story, Cecilia Dougherty, a women in her forties, described a "critical event." She met

> a colleague of her husband, a woman of their age, who told Cecilia that having heard good things about her from her husband, she was eager to learn more about her. Cecilia says that she began, "I have four children . . . " but the woman persisted, saying, "wait just a minute. I didn't ask about your children, I asked about you. Where are *you* coming from?" At this Cecilia was stunned. "I mean, my role was a housewife and I didn't quite grasp what she was really talking about." But the woman told her: "I'm not talking about your identity as Greg's wife. I'm concerned with your identity as a human being, as a person, and as an individual, and as a woman." She invited Cecilia to join a consciousness-raising group, "a turning point in my life, a real change for me" (from Bellah, et al., 1985, p. 159).

The "critical" conversation, retold by Cecilia, involves the agonistic play between her "role"—invoking identities of a wife, mother, and institutions of marriage and family—and her "person" as something independent of these. This play of contrasts jolted Cecilia from her common senses (of roles) to those more "enlightened," raising her "consciousness," precipitating "a real change." That the agon can function to transform life from traditional roles into more contemporary terms, e.g., of "self," is testament to the great ideological force of the agon. Other examples, perhaps less popular, could be offered in the other direction as when a young woman said she "chose" her "family" over a "career," thus rendering her identity through the traditional roles of "wife and mother" and less (as was said in this case) "a full-fledged woman." In both cases, the discourse involves a deep agony between the individual "self" and the forces of society, its roles and institutions, be they more "traditional" (as for Cecilia) or more "liberated" (as for the younger woman).

The agon is especially prominent in discussions about, and in, American schools. Vareene (1977) describes in his classic study a high school sociology class:

> What was stressed was that action is shaped through the mental constitution of the individual and that this form of shaping is of overriding importance.

> Society is active only through a reinterpretation of its pressures by the individual. . . . The individual dominates society, and if he is weak, another individual (therapist, preacher) can help him (p. 48).

The sociology lesson teaches students to foreground the individual over society. From the point-of-view of this instructional communication, this is how "the individual" relates to "society."

Similarly, Lesko (1986) discovered how life in one parochial high school was expressed by students through a fundamental individual-communal tension. As one student put it: "There's groups, but if you need something, it doesn't matter if it's freshman, sophomore, junior, or whatever . . . people help each other" (p. 26). The students explained how, in this school, "each" person was highlighted and supported over "groups" and classes of people. Students claimed that the school's communication demonstrated "care" for "each," with each being valued, creating a unifying "feel" in the school. But when "groups" and "cliques" were mentioned, division (and a tone of disdain) was introduced. The symbols, "snobs," "rich people" and others, were used to account for exclusiveness and differentiation. Thus, students expressed school life through the agon, in this case placing symbols of "each" person (receiving equal treatment with care) against others, "snobs" or "cliques" (invoking meanings of unequal treatment and favoritism). In short, the agon in this school consists of these two clusters of symbols and their constrastive meanings such as the individual and collective, personal care versus social divisiveness, equality versus inequality. Lesko reports how ceremonies in the high school such as "all school mass" and the sports-oriented "spirit assembly" help resolve this tension through the themes of "love" and "fun."

The same agonistic form is apparently at the heart of valuative expression in filmic expositions of "the American Western myth" (Rushing, 1983). The rugged individual who is aggressive, anarchic, and a loner is played against communal standards of civility and sophistication. In short, one might say this filmic discourse is efficacious because of its deep play between symbols of the Western individualist and Eastern (establishment) society.

Other demonstrations of the agon in contemporary American discourse could be offered from its use in the key festival of a small

Montana town (Errington, 1987), to its force in institutional life (Carbaugh, 1988a), to its prevalence in the common culture (Lasch, 1979; Yankelovich, 1981). It seems, therefore, that the agon goes well beyond *Donahue* and mediated communication; it holds a wide force in contemporary American life.

Let me conclude discussion of the prevalence of the agon in contemporary America on a more personal note. After noticing this agonistic trend, I found in my own discussions that the agon was available as a very easy and quick comment when I spoke of "trouble." My fieldnotes include statements that I made in this general form: "the department" or "the university" was to blame for an immediate problem, be it lack of xeroxing paper, slow reimbursement of travel money, paper work, campus geography, or whatever. Somehow, in these troubled moments, I could blame an institution or society for getting in my way, with others quickly nodding in agreement. Like others whose speechways I have studied (Carbaugh, 1988a), I found myself (and colleagues) saying, "this place [department, university, nation] is crazy!" the implicature being, "the present people here are sane." It seems that the difficulties at hand are accounted for by appealing to a relatively broad level of social organization. And the audience smiles and agrees. Like Cecilia, I heard myself tell the story of how the role expected of me as "professor" by the "university" was not helping ME live MY life, nor was it helping my colleagues, or my students. The pressures I felt—like in Varenne's classroom—were said to derive from "society" (locally and/or generally), its roles and its institutions. My compatriots and I would have to figure our own ways out or get some help. Further, like the parochial school students, I heard myself at times convinced that other groups, whoever that might happen to be, had more and better than I. This form of discourse, again, portrays the persons in the present as relatively unproblematic, while blaming troubles on those non-persons out back or in the past. When structuring discourse this way, I heard the agon anew, constructing a sense of my own life, but doing so in a general way, like these others, by pitting "self" in and against "society," its groups and institutions.

In each such moment, discourse is structure through two classes of symbols and a system of contrastive meanings. In the

contemporary American case, the symbols of "self" ("each" person, "my own person," "the individual") and "society" ("traditional roles," "institutions," "groups") are used to invoke the contrastive meanings of an inner and outer world, personal/impersonal, present/past, minority/majority, equality/inequality, and are further associated with meanings of freedom/slavery, voluntary/obligation, and assertion/accomodation, respectively (Carbaugh, 1988b, pp. 94-107). Further, each contrastive meaning is resolved, through this discourse, in favor of "self." Thus, a moral ordering of contemporary American life is heard through the agon, from talk shows to class rooms, as "self" is placed against "society," its "institutions" and "roles," the latter being blamed for troubles. Or so the agony goes in contemporary American discourse.

Other American Times

A brief look at other American times demonstrates the agon similarly. A study of American mental health compared two populations, one in 1957 to one in 1976. The results based upon interview data indicate three changes: "1) the diminution of role standards as the basis for defining adjustment; 2) increased focus on self-expressiveness and self-direction in social life; 3) a shift in concern from social organizational integration to interpersonal intimacy" (Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka, 1981, p. 529). What the data (not represented here) display is a moral shift through the agon from a valuing of roles and social integration in 1957, to a valuing of self-expressiveness and personal growth in 1976. While the moral valence of the agonistic form has changed over these twenty years (from a valuing of "roles" to a greater valuing of "self"), its basic symbolic structure has remained the same (self vs. society, its institutions and roles).

Studying American soldiers during World War II, G. Spindler found that American GIs "persistently asserted their individualism and resisted submersion in the hierarchical order by rejecting authority and engaging in activities that were declared court-martial offenses," while "German soldiers were much more incorporated in the structure

and resisted authority less" (reported in Spindler and Spindler, 1983, p. 63). It seems that these Americans gave voice to a pervasive theme: the individual must resist the constraints of society's institutions (the military). Spindler and Spindler go on to claim that such an individual/community tension "has been surprisingly constant [in America] for about two centuries" (p. 64).

Writing over a century earlier about American life in the early 1800s, Tocqueville (1838/1945, p. 11) described the agonistic theme similarly:

> When the inhabitant of a democratic country . . . comes to survey the totality of his fellows and to place himself in contrast with so huge a body, he is instantly overwhelmed by the sense of his own insignificance and weakness. The same equality that renders him independent of each of his fellow citizens, taken severally, exposes him alone and unprotected to the influence of the greater number. The public, therefore, among a democratic people, has a singular power . . . a sort of enormous pressure of the mind of all upon the individual intelligence.

These few examples from America's past give linguistic evidence for the agonistic form at two levels, in the language used by the authors to report about American life, and in the lived pattern about which they report. In the American present and past, the agonistic form is expressed through two clusters of symbols: the self or individual versus society, group, the public, roles, and institutions; and its contrastive cultural meanings, such as person/group, present/past, minority/majority, inner/outer, equal/unequal, liberty/constraint, voluntarism/obligation, and so on. It appears through most of America's past, with the possible exception of the post-war era (circa 1950s), the moral ordering of the agon foregrounds the former symbols and meanings over the latter, but of course both poles are necessary for the agon to operate discursively (Robertson, 1980, p. 133).

Other Western Times

Is this agonistic form an artifact of American discourse? It seems not. The agonistic form is used and reported by two authors of Western intellectual history to capture some features of social life in earlier

Western times. Colin Morris (1972) traces the Romantic concept of the individual (the inner self) and its relation to outer societal acts back to twelfth-century medieval Europe:

> The discovery of the individual was one of the most important cultural developments in the years between 1050 and 1200. [The discovery consisted of] a concern with self-discovery; an interest in the relations between people, and in the role of the individual within society; an assessment of people by their inner intentions rather than by their external acts (p. 158).

It seems similar tensions ran through the discourse of Ancient Greece. A historian (Starr, 1986, p. vii) summarizes them as follows:

> During the three centuries from 800 to 500 B.C. . . . there was an enduring tension between the demands of the individual for his own glory and honor and the less vocally expressed needs of the community. At the beginning stands the Homeric world with self-willed heroes; at the end, the perfected *polis* of 500 B.C. . . . Despite open friction and at times a lack of balance, the Greeks hammered out a brilliant compromise to a problem which many societies have faced less successfully. By 500 the community had attained a political unity through which common ends could be achieved, and yet the human being who populated the *poleis* could feel themselves significant in their own right.

There are of course important differences between these times in what constitutes "individual," "self" and societal life. But for our purposes, the similarities are equally important. Each time pitched and combined the agon to construct a needed sense of persons, sociation, and their interrelatedness. Together, the cases of medieval Europe and Ancient Greece suggest that the discursive placing of the person or self in and against the broader group or society is not just a form of contemporary American discourse, but is rooted much more deeply. It is used and reported in Western intellectual history throughout its discourses.

Perhaps the agonistic form, associated cultural meanings and attendant strategies for enacting it, is peculiar to the Western world. Is the agon used outside the West? If so, does it have a similar shape, structure, and cultural currency?

Non-Western Scenes

Geertz (1976) discusses how a people of Indonesian, the Javanese, render life sensible in part through what he calls "lexical antithesis" (p. 135). The antithesis involves two sets of contrasts in the Javanese symbol system. One is "inside" (lair) and "outside" (batin) (p. 226 ff). The "inside" symbol evokes meanings of immediate and common subjective feeling. The "outside" symbol evokes meaning of outward actions such as smiles and apologies. According to Geertz, these cultural contrasts construct "independent realms of being" (p. 227). These realms are mediated through a second symbolic contrast, "alus" (civilized, refined) and "kasar" (uncivilized, vulgar) (p. 227). The goal in Javanese social life is to be civil and refined in feeling and action. Thus, when the Javanese act outwardly in ways civil but unfeeling, the unfelt gesture is properly displayed; and when aroused in feeling but constrained by standards for acting, properly felt is the ungestured feeling. Such are the agonistic dynamics for the Javanese, life made commonly sensible through the contrast of symbols and meanings, the "inside" and "outside," the "civil" and "uncivil," with conduct deemed proper when it conforms to the etiquette of the "alus" (refined) moral order, independent of its common subjective feeling.

Consider a second Eastern case, the Japanese. Kondo (1987) describes the discursive contruction of the person in a Japanese "Ethics Retreat." In this context, the Japanese "self" is built on a relational cultural premis rather than an individuated one. The person *is*, fundamentally, one and other. This model person is elaborated discursively through a system of contrastive meanings which distinguishes a "social self" from an "emotional self." These aspects of personhood draw attention to, on the one hand, a "social surface" and "front" ("tatemae" and "omote"), and on the other, to "true feeling" and "back" ("honne" and "ura") (pp. 245-246). Both meanings are equally valued and essential; neither can stand alone.

> A society of people freely expressing their feelings, giving in to their every individual whim, would be a monster of disorder and selfishness. Equally inconceivable is a society of perfectly programmed, exquisitely polite, but

> unfeeling automatons. That we are sentient beings imbued with emotion is never denied, but neither is the fact that obligation and abiding by social rules are necessary for the existence of human society (p. 246).

Kondo (p. 265) describes how the "ethics center's ideal self is *sunao na kokoro*, a gentle, sensitive heart . . . In order to realize this [goal], the [center's] pedagogies played on the social-emotional continuum, attempting to galvanize emotional energies while binding the self in rigid physical and social forms." Evidently such Japanese discourse seeks a balance between codes of inner feeling and outer surfaces, between the cultural symbols for true emotion and the social front. The agonistic form is evident here as these symbolic codes, these contrastive meanings for the person and social life, are culturally conceived, evaluated, and seeking balance.

Several Indologists report a similar discursive dynamic (Balagangadhara, 1988; Bharati, 1985; Marriott and Inden, 1977; Mines. 1988). Much Indology is written against the backdrop of the individual-collective and the autonomy-hierarchy tensions, with the Indian commonly portrayed as subordinating the former to the latter (Dumont 1970). Recently, however, claiming that such a portrait is more "ideological" than "behavioral," Mines (1988, p. 568) demonstrates how "when Indians talk privately about their lives they frequently depict themselves as active agents, pursuing private goals and making personal decisions that affect the outcome of their lives." Mines argues that the "hierarchical-collectivist view" overemphasizes ideational compliance to an "etiquette of hierarchy" without accounting for the autonomy that Indian persons live and express (p. 576). Mines displays through segments of 23 interviews how Indian lives are rendered meaningful as the contrastive themes of compliance and autonomy are used differently in different life stages (p. 572). The thrust of Mines' argument takes this form: knowledge of Indian social life is skewed unless interpreted within an agonistic form that exists discursively, and expresses tensions between autonomy and compliance, individualtion and sociation. Through these forces, persons – Indians and others – live and speak.

There is something apparently local and universal at play here. What is particular and what is more general in these discursive dialectics?

DEEP AGONY: SCOPE WITH DEPTH

The discourses of *Donahue*, of other American places and times, of other Western times, and of some non-Western places, all suggest a key focal phenomenon for the study of language in social interaction: deep agony. In concluding, I will discuss some possible universal aspects of the agonistic form. While it is still early to claim boldly that these aspects are indeed universal, in each case there is some cross-temporal and cross-cultural evidence to suggest such a possibility, even if the claim must be made tentatively. Hopefully, such discussion will help motivate and guide similar efforts about agonistic discursive forms. The following proposal of the agony as universal will treat, in turn, its functional accomplishments, its structural elements, and the nature of its meanings.

Deep agony is a complex form from the standpoint of its functions, for it brings together – at once – social and cultural foundations of language use. I use "social functions" here in a strict sense, referring to the interpersonal relations (and institutions) created among persons (from division to union); and by cultural, I mean the (re)creation of folk meanings about persons and their relations.[12] Socially, then, deep agony mediates a basic tension between what Burke has called "division" and "identification" (Burke, 1969, pp. 19-23). Others have written similarly of "the universal tendency of humans to divide from and identify with one another" (Rushing, 1983, p. 17); or of "the inevitable tension between the impulse of individuals to be free and the constraints of communal life" (Philipsen, 1987, p. 245). These social functions are elaborated variously in the foregoing from freedom and slavery in the American case, to autonomy and compliance in the Indian. To summarize the basic social outcomes of the agony, therefore, one can think of relatedness on a tensional base, in terms of *division and union, of separation and connection, autonomy and compliance*. On the cultural level, deep agony activates two cultural models, which might be called folk personology and a folk sociology – *symbols that create common senses of and for "being" (or personhood), and those that create common senses of and for "being with" (or sociation)*. Agonistic discourse thus

juxtaposes two cultural models and a set of social tensions, displaying moment-by-moment the relative valuing of each, including the possibility that each is equally balanced and elaborated. In these special senses, deep agony performs and momentarily resolves the fundamental social problem of division and union, through cultural models for the person and sociation.[13]

The American agon of "self" and "society" can be used to demonstrate these basic cultural and social functions: culturally, "self" is *a model of person* which separates one from others, foregrounding the unique and free acting person in the present. "Society" is *a model of sociation*, a common and constraining social background. In *Donahue* discourse, this model of person is valued over this level of sociation, creating a scene where "self" is asserted against "society." The *social functioning* of this agon is quite convoluted and complex, since each symbol simultaneously grants and takes away commonality (or identification) and individuality (or division). Consider the following: (1) "self" is divisible (unique) from others, yet in so being, enacts a cultural person, and thus enables identification with others; (2) "society" is unity (uniformity) with others, yet so bound, gives perspective to uniqueness and motivates "self" acts of extrication and separation. Treated together, the cultural and social functions may thus be summarized: "self" provides a cultural model for individuation and division, but is held in common, thus displaying a social outcome of unity; further, since "self" symbolizes division from others, acts seeking unity are motivated; "society" provides a cultural model of unity, but since it is de-valued, social outcomes of division are sought. With "self," a common sense of the divisible person motivates unity; with "society" a unified sense of sociation motivates division. Such is the complexity of the social and cultural tensions that are activated when American life is discoursed through a deep agony.

It is noteworthy that the Javanese cultural senses of person and sociation, yielding the independent realms of inner feeling and outer action, are both based upon—and aim toward—union and commonality. The refined/vulgar contrast, however, provides the cultural terms through which unity (through refinement) and division (through vulgarity) are distinguished. Thus, it is not the case that each cultural cluster in an agonistic form—whether a model for person or

sociation—is always linked to both social outcomes (of division and union), as in the American case. As is apparent among the Javanese, some base models of person or sociation upon senses of group identification, displaying at that moment not division but commonality of inner feeling and outward action.

In summary, when used discursively, deep agony activates universal cultural and social functions; with cultural models of personhood and sociation being pitched and combined to resolve the social tension between dividing and uniting.

Structural elements of the agony are both linguistic and semantic. Linguistically, the agony involves *two clusters of symbols that are played one against the other*. In the American case this involves playing one cluster of terms—like "self, the individual, the person" or images of this, e.g., born-again male go-go dancers—against another, like "society, American today, this country" or associated images, e.g., the Church. Put differently, two paradigmatic structures are played off one another. In the Javanese case, what Geertz calls "lexical antithesis" plays linguistic clusters against one another, symbols of "lair" (the inside) versus "batin" (the outside), "alus" (refined) versus "kasar" (vulgar). Or, in the Japanese case, symbols of emotional and inner feeling are played against the social and outer world. In each such case, cultural clusters of personhood and sociation are juxtaposed linguistically in order to say something about separating and connecting, autonomy and compliance. Thus is the linguistic structuring of the agony.

Resulting from this linguistic play is *a set of contrastive meanings, an interrelated semantic system*. Often the system can be summarized along dimensions of meanings, two valued sets which provide for the conception and evaluation of being and sociation (Seitel, 1974). In the American case, the contrasts could be summarized along the sematic dimensions of inner/outer, present/past, unique/common, freedom/slavery. For the Javanese, the dimensions seem to be inside/outside, refined/vulgar. For the Indian, autonomy/hierarchy, independence/dependence. While the cultural contents of the meanings vary in each case, there is across cases contrastive meanings that constitute an interrelated semantic system. This is how the agonistic form structures meanings.

Finally, a word about the agony and cultural meanings. While there is some basis for a general claim about the basic functions and structures of the agony, at the level of cultural meanings, the general claim is one of particularity. That is, in each case the cultural models of personhood and sociation vary; the value and elaboration of separating and connecting vary; the linguistic symbols and semantic systems vary. While the functions and structures of the agonistic form may be identifiable generally, its cultural contents – its local radiants of meaning – vary cross-culturally. Because the agony is so pliable, or polysemic in potential, it can be used discursively for diverse cultural tasks, such as identifying person as individuated (as "self"), or "divisible" (as the Hindu "dividual"); sociation as contractual, organic, egalitarian, or hierarchical (Shweder and Bourne, 1984; Mines, 1988). It can also be used to differently elaborate and value social outcomes, such as autonomy over compliance (American "self" over "society"), compliance over autonomy (Japanese social self over emotional self), or to balance autonomy and compliance, or identification (as Geertz, 1976, reports the Moroccan contextual self). The agonistic form is shaped by stable functions and structures, which are in each case infused with distinctive cultural meanings.

The American discourse of "self" versus "society," then, seems to instantiate a universal linguistic form, deep agony.[14] The three universal aspects of the form can be summarized as follows:

1. *The functional aspects*: deep agony functions culturally through models of personhood and sociation, which mediate (and momentarily resolve) the social tensions of autonomy and union.
2. *The structural aspects*: deep agony is structured linguistically through the juxtaposition of two clusters of symbols, which creates an interrelated semantic system of contrastive meanings.
3. *The cultural aspects*: the models of personhood and sociation, the valuing and elaboration of autonomy and union, the juxtaposed symbols and their meanings, vary from scene to scene, culture to culture, time to time.

These provide the tentative bases of the agonistic form, a potentially universal and fertile concern for students of language, culture, and social interaction.

NOTES

1 The term, "agony," may evoke for some readers a clash between characters in a drama. The focus in what follows is centered less on the "characters" in the drama and the conflicts among them, and more on the clash between cultural terms and the systems of meanings they contrastively construct. The locus of the agony is thus *in* the discourse, between the cultural terms "self" and "society." As Berthold (1976, p. 303) has put it, "an agon analysis reveals those terms which are in opposition to each other." The agonistic interplay, rather than creating conflict between actors, expresses oppositions in discursive meanings which penetrate deeply into what I will discuss later as impulses toward identification and division, and senses of personhood and sociality. So stipulated, perhaps others would prefer deep dialectic or deep polemic. However, to highlight the dynamic as a play *in* discourse of agonistic features, that enacts deeply conflicting yet regnantly coherent models of personhood and sociality, I will use the concept, 'deep agony'. This usage derives from Kenneth Burke's discussions of clusters and agons (1957, pp. 3-117; 1961, esp. pp. 232-233). For a review of the approach and its application to speeches made by former U.S. President John F. Kennedy, see Berthold (1976).

2 That there is probably a wide ecological distribution to the pattern is suggested in several reports noted below such as Bellah, et al., (1985), Yankelovich (1981), and Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka (1981).

3 All of the following words indented, and quoted, other than those referring to published sources, are native sayings. Note also that this report uses one type of structural analysis of agonistic discourse (as described by Hymes, 1962, p. 104). Of primary concern are semantic more than syntactic structures, paradigmatic more than syntagmatic relations.

4 For a related commentary on the absence of history in "mainstream" Americans' common sense see G. Trow (1980, pp. 63-171). Perhaps Tocqueville (1838/1945, p. 4) stated the point most forcefully: "every man there [in America] readily loses all trace of the ideas of his forefathers or takes no care about them."

5 This dynamic derives from a system of rules for public discourse that combines cultural premises about speaking (i.e., each person has the right and the obligation to speak his/her opinions) with premises about persons (i.e., each is a unique, different, and distinctive individual). People agree that they ought to speak, but—since unique—cannot agree on what to say. Resulting is general consensus about rights and means of speech, but personal twists on virtually any conversational topic. Thus, the present speaker's right to a personal opinion is figured over the communal grounds for its assessment. Resulting is both consensus (about every person's right to speak) and dissensus (about what to say): a communal form for speech which foregrounds variable personal contents (Carbaugh, 1987).

6 I use the term, "powerful," to indicate the capacity of cultural symbols to define reality for users, providing key concepts and premises for the order which is socially created and negotiated. I intend "powerful," like Khleif, as "the capacity to define reality" for oneself and others (Khleif, 1975, 1980). "Self" and "society," as powerful cultural terms, have realized this capacity for defining/ordering reality as they are invoked in response

to various problematic circumstances. When I write of "powerful" terms, I am thus writing about a defining functional capacity of cultural symbols and forms, rather than about "power" as a cultural term.

7 This definition of role adds a cultural dimension to that proposed by George Herbert Mead and adapted by Cushman and Craig (1976, pp. 49-54).

8 There is an important distinction to be made here between the cultural level of common meaning and the social level of unifying form. The cultural semantics of the discourse ignite meanings of unique qualities and psychological capacities. So sensed, speaking is most coherent, commonly, as a series of individualized act after individualized act. Conceiving and feeling speech this way renders the socially unifying *form* that animates the action as relatively unheard and unseen. In other words, the semantic level igniting the discourse is individualizing action, thus hiding its movement through a common form. It is also noteworthy that common linguistic forms (and meanings), such as those enacted in the agonistic discourse examined here, are always translatable into individualized acts since all such discourse, in this scene, assumes persons are, at base, "individuals" with a "self" (Varenne, 1977; Yankelovich, 1981). Such forces make the common modes and motives for human action difficult to hear, see, and feel. It is precisely this emphasis of individualized semantics over common forms that makes of "self" not a "social role" (in a native sense) of conformity and obligation but a social role (in the analyst's sense) of assertiveness and freedom.

9 For this reason, it is more sensible, through this discourse field, to talk about the "self" of a mother or the "mother herself" and less coherent to talk about the mother of a "self" or the "self hermother." The "self" requires social role as background, de-values the role, and is, therefore, motivated to act against it. Shweder and Bourne (1984) have argued that such reflexive utterances help constitute a more mechanical and egocentric premise for American persons that is unlike the more organic and sociocentric premises of the Oriyan, Zapotec, Indian, Ilongot, Balinese, and so on. A discussion of the constructions of personhood is taken up below.

10 This choice of address enacts a valuing of intimacy and equality, over that of distance and status difference. Yet, what sometimes occurs in such address is a verbal act of equality, accompanied by nonverbal acts of inequality: parents may talk equality and act inequality, just as Donahue and others may address equally, but enact relations of power more subtly. For a treatment of address forms in American discourse see Brown & Ford (1961), Brown & Gilman (1960), and Philipsen & Huspek (1985).

11 The following analyses are based on studies that display both discursive data and agonistic themes. As will be seen, the studies vary in the degree to which each is displayed.

12 This usage follows that of Basso (1979).

13 The nature of this fundamental tension is one between the impulses of persons to separate, and the restraints for compliance of sociality. (Note that impulses may not be individual but communal, just as constraints may be more individual than communal.) What is being suggested for future inquiry is a recasting of very old tangles, e.g., of self/society, of individual/community, and of liberty/equality, into social tensions between division and union, cultural notions of personhood and levels of sociality, discourses that enact each, and dimensions that inhere therein. Re-readings through these terms suggests a complexity of social tensions activated through cultural models of

personhood and sociation. Such an approach would help unveil the world's various cultural discourses in terms of personhood, sociation, and social tensions, with all intimately linked in discursive practice. So conceived, the inquiry applies equally well to democratic and non-democratic contexts, proposes a re-reading of communication systems along different but distinctive, inclusive, and complementary social/cultural factors, thus laying a better base for interpretive and comparative analyses of cultural communication. For examples of the self/society tension see McGee (1984) and Westen (in press). For examples of the individual/community tension see Rushing (1983) and Philipsen (1987). For examples of the liberty/equality tension see Dahrendorf (1968, pp. 179-214), Ebenstein (1969, pp. 532-546) and Rokeach (1973, pp. 165-188). A related commentary appears in Bakhtin (1981) where he explores the play of idiosyncratic and conventional forces in the social uses of language.

14 A few programs of communication research have suggested moves in this direction. As mentioned earlier, Rushing (1983) has explored "the paradoxical form of individualism vs. community" in films of the American West. Likewise, McGee (1984, p. 18) has written of "a contradiction between self and society, the impulse to anarchy and the impulse to gather a society to institute law and make it work." Philipsen (1987) has suggested such features are at the heart of any people's cultural communication. The former two examine a "clash" of contradictory or paradoxical forces. The latter suggests such clashes may be resolved through native enactments, if the analyst listens in a cultural way. A general question is raised as a result of these studies: which parts of the investigator's claims are culture specific and which are matters more of critical principles? Is there evidence *in the discourse itself* to support the claim that communication in contexts and communities is guided, in part, by these forces? Does the current formulation help unveil these forces? What revisions, and additions, are necessary to the analytic framework in order to describe and explain these important productions in various communication systems? To respond adequately to these questions requires ethnographic study of cultural communication patterns. As a result, we can understand more fully what in our statements about communication are interpretations of grounded culture patterns, and what results from more distant analytic principles. Without such a distinction, or in Geertz's (1976) terms by failing to distinguish between experience-near and experience-far renderings, we risk sounding like many of our contemporaries, criticizing individually the coercive institutions in and against which we live, without fully understanding from whence we speak.

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