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**ON EVENT, ONE OBSERVER, TWO TEXTS:  
ANALYZING THE RIO EARTH SUMMIT**

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## ONE EVENT, ONE OBSERVER, TWO TEXTS: ANALYZING THE RIO EARTH SUMMIT

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The recent interest within anthropology concerning the process of writing texts (Clifford and Marcus 1986) has led in many directions. One of these has been an examination of the polyvocal nature of ethnographic writing (Tyler 1986; Fischer 1986; Clifford 1988; Rosaldo 1989). Another path of inquiry has concerned itself with the historical and political positionality of the ethnographer which in turn has been led to an interest in reflexivity in anthropology (see Ortner 1984). In this article, I use a self-reflexive example of my writing to explore another aspect of the creation of texts: the polyphonic nature of the individual anthropologist. The setting for this exploration is Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The cultural event under analysis is the Earth Summit.

I start this exploration with a historical overview of the Earth Summit along with a general description of the event, both of which serve as the ethnographic core for the subsequent analyses. This is followed by a "first text" of the event: a journalistic article which I wrote about the Earth Summit for a newsmagazine in Chicago called In These Times (Little 1992: 8-9). My formal presence at the summit was as a journalist and this was one of the primary products of my participation.

A "second text" of the event offers an anthropological analysis of the Earth Summit as seen from the perspective of social ritual. Within this framework, I develop a performative approach to the analysis of ritual, using the work of Stanely Tambiah (1985) and John Austin (1975) as my basic theoretical and conceptual foundation.

The final part of this paper is a self-reflexive, comparative analysis of the production of the two texts. Here I discuss my role as the journalist/ethnographer, my positionality in the event and the content of these two separate, but interrelated, writings.

### **I: The Earth Summit in Historical Perspective**

The Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro during the first two weeks of June, 1992, was a major event in world politics. Thousands of people from all parts of the world gathered in this city to discuss, negotiate and plan the future development of the Earth and its peoples. The Earth Summit consisted of two different, but related, events. The first event was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), a special conference planned and executed by the United Nations (U.N.) as part of its programmatic responsibilities. The second event was the Global Forum which, though organized in coordination with the U.N., was the responsibility of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide. This forum was designed to provide a formal outlet for NGOs working in the area of environment and development to exchange information and to coordinate activities. My analysis in this essay will be limited to UNCED, which will also be referred to as the Earth Summit or the Rio Conference.

Within the U.N. framework, special conferences are reserved for issues of global import and serve to define the debate on these issues for the coming years. Prior to the Rio Conference, the U.N. had sponsored only one special conference solely dedicated to the environment, that being in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972. Within the intervening twenty

years, the problems of environment, not to mention those of development, had become increasingly acute. Thus in 1989, the General Assembly of the U.N. voted to convene a special conference on these two pressing issues to be held in Rio de Janeiro.

The principal goal of this conference was to be the signing of international documents which would orient and regulate the political actions of nation-states in the areas of environmental degradation and development policy. These documents are classified into three basic groupings: treaties, conventions and non-legally binding statements of principles. A treaty is the strongest of the three and formally and legally commits each signatory nation to fulfill its mandates. A non-legally binding statement of principles is simply a declaration of intent by governments geared to orient their actions toward the principles outlined in the document. A convention is an intermediary document, not as strong as a treaty but more committing than a mere statement of principles, which seeks to make its contents part of the conventional action of a given nation-state.

The Rio Conference dealt with two conventions--one on biodiversity and the other on global climate change--and three statements of principles. All of these documents were elaborated in advance during several preparatory committee sessions. The two conventions were final documents that could only be signed or rejected at UNCED whereas the three other documents were to be negotiated and signed during the 11-day long Earth Summit.

The Rio Conference was also preceded by the publication of Our Common Future (WCED 1987), a U.N.-commissioned report often referred to as the Brundtland Report, named after the Prime Minister of Norway who headed the investigative team which produced it. The key concept which informed this report was that of "sustainable development." This term was defined as the achievement of economic growth in a way that does not damage the capacity of future generations to live upon the Earth. This phrase was adopted by the Rio Conference as its leitmotif, even though it never had a clearly enunciated application.

UNCED began on June 3rd with a formal inauguration in the plenary hall of the newly renovated Rio-Center complex. The formal signing of the two conventions was initiated and continued until the last day of the conference. This was followed by seven days of plenary sessions and negotiating meetings. The plenary sessions were forums in which representatives of the participating national delegations made speeches outlining their country's official position at the conference.

Meanwhile, the negotiating sessions were held in a series of simultaneous, closed meetings in which the official delegates negotiated the final form of the three declaratory documents under consideration. The nature of these negotiations was to debate the content of "brackets" that the pre-elaborated documents contained. These brackets represented points of contention that had not been resolved in the preparatory conferences. On one occasion, an entire morning was spent on the elimination of one bracket. The tedious nature of these negotiations can be seen in the following extract from the Earth Summit Bulletin of June 4th:

As the Main Committee worked through the first eight chapters of Agenda 21, it became increasingly clear that the challenge of removing the remaining brackets would not be easy. Committee Chair Tommy Loh set out guidelines to facilitate the work of the Committee, including a prohibition on reopening unbracketed text. After a long procedural discussion, during which a number of delegations requested exceptions to this rule, Koh proposed that unbracketed text be opened only in the

following cases: 1) where the Secretariat has inadvertently left out brackets; 2) where a paragraph contains a footnote requesting reexamination; and 3) where certain delegations reserved the right to reexamine the text in Rio and the request had been acceded to at PrepCom IV (IISD 1992: 1).

The Earth Summit was capped by a three day "Summit of Heads of State and Government" attended by 117 world leaders. The first two days of plenary sessions of the summit segment were reserved for speeches by these leaders, though on the second day Brazilian President Fernando Collor hosted a luncheon for the leaders and held an official photography session of all the leaders gathered at Rio. In the evening of that same day a roundtable meeting of heads of state and government was convened. On the third day of the summit segment, and the last day of UNCED, a plenary and closing session was held during which the three non-legally binding statements of principles were formally adopted.

The entire event was held in the Rio-Center complex located 45 kilometers from downtown Rio de Janeiro. This structure consists of three spacious, interconnected two-story areas, each covered by a steel girded roof: the plenary hall section, the exhibition hall section and the meeting hall section. Although this center existed before the Rio Conference, it was completely refurbished by the United Nations for UNCED. The entire area was carpeted; air conditioning was installed in all closed-in areas; new, elegant restaurants were constructed; and a state-of-the-art information system, including closed-circuit television and international computer and FAX connections, was installed. After the conference, the U.N. was left with the task of removing US\$ 35 million in special equipment from the complex.

## **II: First text - The Earth Summit as Power Politics**

Rarely has the United States been so isolated in the international political arena than at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), commonly referred to as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from June 3-14. In addition to the traditional conflict between the rich and the poor nations, which was a constant element in the negotiations at the Earth Summit, the U.S. separated itself from the other industrialized nations by refusing to sign the Biodiversity Convention and by insisting on a weakened version of the Climate Change Convention over European objections. These two conventions were the only legally-binding documents signed at the summit.

Ten days of intense negotiations among the official national delegations were capped by a three-day summit meeting attended by 117 heads of state and government---a world record. In two days of plenary sessions, the world leaders gave 107 consecutive seven-minute speeches filled with superlative phraseology. In a dazzling display of pretentious discourse, various leaders claimed that the Rio Conference was the most important event in human history while others warned that it was the last chance to save humanity from destruction.

The two main themes in the conference--environment and development--where joined in a new concept: sustainable development. For many years economists and ecologists have understood that there exists a direct relationship between the industrial model of development and environmental destruction. This problem was wished away at

the Earth Summit by the adoption of the phrase sustainable development. Just about every economic activity--agriculture, mining, forestry, fishing, nuclear energy, urban growth--could be sustainable if it just had the political will and the financial resources to change the current course of events. In this regard, UNCED was a global magic act, in which the leaders of the world supposedly solved their problems through the evocation of discursive catchwords.

The event itself was far from being a model of sustainability. At the Rio-Center complex where the event was held, there was no recycling of the mountains of paper documents and fast-food plastic plates, paper wrappers and cans. The extravagance of the event, along with the enormous amount of money spent to stage it, stood in glaring contrast to the calls for more ecologically-based development models. A further irony was that thousands of delegates from all parts of the world converged upon the beautiful city of Rio de Janeiro, only to hold their national delegate meetings in small, plastic, air conditioned boxes without windows.

Meanwhile, the Biodiversity Convention was the most controversial topic of the two-week event. Biodiversity refers to the immensely complex genetic base of plants and animals throughout the world which is the unique result of millions of years of evolutionary change. The protection of this rich genetic heritage, the vast majority of which is located within the Third World, is seen as a safeguard for humankind's future needs, particularly in the areas of agriculture and medicine.

Biodiversity has been a heated topic of debate between rich and poor nations every since Mexico openly questioned the practice of patenting genetically-manipulated material collected in their country at a U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) meeting more than a decade ago. Third World nations claim that biotechnological firms have stolen genetic plant material from their countries, improved this material in their laboratories and patented the changes, only to then sell the new product back to them at enormous profits.

Apart from the knotty ethical issue of whether anyone should be able to patent living organisms, there is the social issue of whether genetic material and the information necessary to transform it should be private property or should be accessible to all humanity as part of the Earth's living heritage. President Bush isolated the U.S. from the rest of the world by siding with the interests of the transnational biotechnological firms which want to protect their patents and their profits. In his summit speech, Bush claimed that the convention would "retard the development of biotechnology" and "undermine the protection of ideas." Even the European countries, which have their own biotechnological firms to protect, saw the inequality in the current situation and signed the convention.

At the Convention on Climate Change there was a similar boycott by the U.S., the world's largest producer of greenhouse gases. The U.S. refused to accept stringent standards on the emission of these gases, claiming that it would hurt American firms. The treaty was watered down in a pre-conference meeting a month earlier in New York when emission quantities and timetables for implementation were placed in general rather than specific terms, thereby gutting the document of its strength. Europe's industrialized nations, which had initially agreed to adopt the more stringent standards, afterward reneged on their commitment, claiming that the U.S.' refusal to adhere to the tighter standards would put them at a competitive disadvantage.

These treaties were negotiated in advance and the leaders arrived at Rio with the option of signing or not. Three other documents, all of them non-binding declaratory statements, were negotiated and signed at the summit. The most important of these was the

Agenda 21 agreements, a 500-page, 40-chapter statement conceived as a platform for international environmental action for the 21st century. The key obstacle in the negotiations over this document concerned financing the implementation of these proposals which are estimated to cost approximately 625 billion dollars per year. The two issues that were stumbling blocks were who should pay and who should administer the funds. Predictably, the discussions divided along North/South lines.

While Third World nations are expected to put up \$500 billion of this amount in the restructuring of their economies, the \$125 billion annual shortfall was to be provided by the Northern industrial nations. The poor nations, which were led in the negotiations by the Group of 77, sought definite commitments from the Northern nations to give 0.7% of their GNP to development aid. While none of the European nations or Japan were willing to accept a timetable for achieving this goal, the U.S. refused even to participate in any of the discussions regarding the 0.7% goal.

Also troubling to the poor countries was the proposal to channel these funds through the World Bank, an institution that has a bad reputation in the Third World due to its practice of imposing heavy-handed agreements in return for the giving of loans. The Group of 77 nations proposed the creation of a new U.N.-administered "Green Fund" to deal strictly with environmental concerns. A compromise between these two proposals will need to be negotiated in one of the several post-conference meetings that are planned.

Other conflicts in the negotiations centered on the specific geopolitical environmental concerns of nations. The Arab nations, for example, adamantly opposed all references to petroleum as a polluting, non-sustainable form of energy, and feared that emission taxes on petroleum burning would hurt them economically. Meanwhile, Brazil and Malaysia fought against a world forest convention that would limit their plans to exploit their tropical lands in efforts to develop economically. The forest document that was signed had been previously downgraded from a convention to a "non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles" when it became clear that no substantive agreement was within reach.

All of these conflicts underlie a basic contradiction between environmental problems that are international in scope and a world political order that is still dominated by nation-states with specific economic and social interests. The negotiating process thus becomes one of constant compromises that end up with bland statements that sound nice but lack precision and political will. All of the five documents ratified at the summit are weak, especially the "Rio Declaration on Environment and Development" that was designed to be the environmental equivalent to the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The 27 principles in this manifesto rarely go beyond platitudes such as "States shall operate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem."

Perhaps more important than the content of the treaties and documents signed at UNCED is what was not said. Consumerism, along with the constant demands that an expanding consumer society places upon the environment, was one of several major themes that were barely touched upon by the official delegates. Nor was the enormous waste of goods and resources due to the proliferation of disposable products tackled in the discussions.

Another, yet related, non-theme of the conference was wasteful military spending. Talking about militarism and its blatant misuse of resources seemed to be taboo. Only Fidel Castro directly addressed the issue when he asked rhetorically in his official speech, "When the assumed threats of communism no longer exist and there are no pretexts for cold wars,

the arms race and military expenditures: What is it that prevents the immediate use of these resources to foster development in the Third World and to avert the threat of the planet's ecological destruction?" Prior to his speech, Brazilian President Fernando Collor, who chaired the meeting, reminded the leaders that their speeches must be limited to seven minutes, in a clear reference to Fidel. Castro surprised everyone when he delivered a stinging five-minute speech which received the loudest and longest applause of any speaker that day.

Bush, in his speech, claimed that growth was the key to sustainability of development and the environment, a notion popular in the '60s and '70s but which is increasingly dubitable. Meanwhile, in response to criticism of the U.S. at the conference, Bush went on the offensive by claiming that the environmental record of the United States was "second to none," bolstering his argument by citing stringent U.S. environmental laws that were not initiated by him and which his administration has actively undermined.

In speeches at the parallel Global Forum, members of the U.S. congressional delegation and U.S. non-governmental organizations openly criticized Bush while highlighting the positive environmental efforts being made in the U.S. There was also dissension within the official delegations that led to a brawl in the Rio-Center complex when 40 delegates from various nations held a protest after a Canadian youth delegate had his microphone shut off when he launched into a critique of Bush's position. The protesters, which included U.S. delegate Micheal Dorsey, were physically removed from the premises by U.N. Guards and stripped of their credentials. Meanwhile, in the streets of Rio there were several anti-Bush protests led by Brazilian unions during the course of the two-week conference.

Population control was yet another controversial topic which was essentially absent from conference negotiations. The Catholic Church used its influence among conservative Catholic nations to push for a removal of the population problem from the agenda. Since the topic also provokes passionate responses from Third World delegates who object to the rich industrial nations preaching to them that they need to have fewer children, it is not surprising that the issue was avoided.

The varied and contradictory nature of the Earth Summit makes it difficult to evaluate what UNCED might mean in the long run. It was certainly not the salvation of the world its promoters proclaimed it to be; nor can it be said that it was nothing more than an empty political show put on by world leaders. Gérard Onesta, a French Green party delegate from the European Parliament and one of the few ecologists that were official delegates to UNCED, viewed the results of the conference from a perspective that spans the 20 years that have occurred since the first U.N.-sponsored conference on the environment held in Stockholm in 1972.

"Since Stockholm," he said, "we (ecologists) have come half way in our struggle: we have made environmental problems part of the international consciousness. This is the victory that Rio represents. From here we have a second and far more difficult step: making the necessary changes to prevent global environmental destruction. In taking this step, we cannot afford to wait another 20 years."

### **III: Second text - The Earth Summit as Performative Ritual**

My intention in this text is to analyze the Earth Summit as ritual and, as a

consequence, view the participants as displaying human ritual behavior. Thus my first task is to establish if this seemingly political event can be reasonably defined as ritual. I will use the "working definition of ritual" as presented by Tambiah (1985) in the following terms:

Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition). Ritual action in its constitutive features is performative in these three senses: in the Austinian sense of performative, wherein saying something is also doing something as a conventional act; in the quite different sense of a staged performance that uses multiple media by which the participants experience the event intensively; and in the sense of indexical values--I derive this concept from Peirce--being attached to and inferred by actors during the performance (p. 128).

This definition provides a clear observational framework from which to view both the Earth Summit as a whole and the individual actions of the participants. From there, I seek to demonstrate not only the validity of analyzing UNCED as ritual, but also indicate the presence of all three types of performative ritual.

### The speech marathon

I will start at the end, with the three-day "Summit of Heads of State and Government" which concluded UNCED and which was considered to be its climax by almost all its participants. The centerpiece of this part of the conference was the 107 consecutive speeches given by the world leaders in the space of two days. First we will note the enormous rigidity of this act. Each leader was designated seven-minutes for his speech. The introduction of the speaker and the thanks offered to him afterword were given by hosting president Fernando Collor and he used the same phrasing for all of the speakers. The speakers were almost exclusively dressed in the traditional suit and tie, the only exceptions being the three women speakers wearing female attire and the military uniforms or traditional African garb worn by several male speakers. In this data we can see that the outward behavior expressed was highly formalized and stereotyped, placing it within in the realm of ritualized behavior.

This conventionalized action provides a perspective from which we can view the event and causes us to ask if the communicative import of the event is located not in the content of speech but rather in the behavior of speaking. No one present at the summit could intellectually process all of the words that were spoken in the eighteen hours of speeches. The placement of so many speeches in order produced a "content overload." Indeed no one was taking notes on all of the speeches for there was not interest in knowing everything that was being said. This lack of interest was compounded by the fact that all of the 107 speakers were obliged to address the twin themes of environment and development. The pronouncements they made were of necessity repetitive since they were talking about the same thing from the similar vantage points of political leaders.

We may tentatively conclude here that the information content of the speeches



was not of crucial importance. First, the speeches contained very little facts per se. The leaders were primarily concerned with expressing opinions or stating ideological or programmatic positions. Second, this forum did not offer an adequate means for the transmission of information which was achieved much more efficiently with fact sheets, computer networks and printed materials. Thus, the stereotypy and redundancy of these speeches is better understood in a performative sense which Tambiah calls "dramatic actualization" in which the ritual impact is to produce a "heightened and intensified and fused communication" (1985: 145). The grouping of so many speakers in so short a time period served to "create" an event of importance regardless of what the leaders said. From this perspective, the content of the speeches was secondary because the primary emphasis was on the performance.

The dramatic impact of this performance was heightened by the presence of different media through which access was gained to the speakers. Only a select group of people were allowed into the plenary hall where the speeches were held. These spectators had the additional input of simultaneous translation. Outside the hall, but within the Rio-Center complex, closed-circuit televisions were strategically placed in order to provide all the other less privileged participants access to the event as it was happening, although these participants had to listen to the speeches in their original languages without the benefit of the simultaneous translation. Yet another media outlet consisted of the printed texts of the speeches which were distributed about an hour later in the press center, these being offered in their original languages and/or in English, French and Portuguese translations. Yet another media access to the event was via photographic images which were taken on the spot, rapidly developed and then sent by satellite to all parts of the world. Finally there was radio and television coverage which was also used to reproduce this event in the form of radio news spots and video "clips" which would be presented to a worldwide audience as highlights of the event. The media here serve as mechanisms for heightening communication as well as giving the event a type of "collective representation" as a "single experience" with a "single message" (Tambiah 1985: 145).

If we focus upon the individual actors (heads of state and government), we can find another performative aspect to these speeches. We have seen that the content overload of the speeches made the assimilation of any content difficult. The world leaders who participated in this event surely were aware that their words would simply add to this overload. Why then did so many of them chose to participate? To answer this question we can employ Austin's concept of illocutionary which he defines succinctly as "performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance of an act of saying something (1975: 99-100). We have already established that what was being said was of secondary importance for a variety of reasons. We can now ask if the very act of giving a speech was communicative. Here we find a different and, in my opinion, more fruitful explanation of the communicative aspect of this speech marathon.

During the summit there was constant reference to the singular importance of the Rio Conference in the history of this century. One of the strongest arguments for this position was the fact that it had gathered in one place 117 heads of state and government, more than any other time the history of the world. The presence of these leaders was seen as an indication of the importance of the event, with the reasoning being that so many leaders would not have left their important duties and come so far if it was not for something of transcendental significance. Their presence thus completed this ritual logic, in that they made the event transcendent by coming. In this light, we can reinterpret the speeches given. In addition to the locutionary act (what was said), the leaders were giving

an illocutionary performance in which the message could be deciphered as something like: "I am concerned about the environment and development and I am actively involved in finding solutions to these problems."

In this framework, the participation of U.S. President Georg Bush becomes more understandable. His refusal to sign the Biodiversity Convention cast him as the "villain" of the event. One might ask then, why did he chose to come and expose hmself to such treatment when he could have easily stayed at home and given an excuse for not coming to Rio. If we see his presence in an illocutionary sense, Bush's participation makes sense. He too wanted to give his illocutionary performance in which he would demonstrate (as well as say) that the environment and development were so important to him that he came all this way just to give a seven-minute speech.

The importance of the illocutionary aspect of this segment of the summit was evidenced by the refusal of the United Nations to permit the Japanese prime minister, who was involved in a heated political battle with the Diet at home over the sending of Japanese troops abroad, to present his speech by instantaneous video transmission. To have allowed him to that would have disrupted the illocutionary foundation of the speech marathon. If leaders could have simply videotaped their message or sent it by satellite transmission as the Japanese prime minister asked to do, the importance of the physical presence of the leaders would have been greatly diminished and their illocutionary message diluted.

#### The conventions: political and behavioral

The key documents that were signed (or not signed) at UNCED were the two conventions--one on biodiversity and the other on global climate change. It is significant, for our purposes, that these documents are called conventions, for this term is a crucial element in the performative analysis of ritual. Tambiah indicates that one of the three senses in which ritual can be see as performative is as "conventionalized action" (1985: 132, emphasis in original). This concept is directly derived from Austin, who in defining the necessary conditions for the functioning of a performative lists as his first rule: "There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having certain conventional effect" (1975: 14, our emphasis). In what sense is the term convention as used in the political arena similar to its use in the performative sense? We wish to show that their indeed exist similarities.

The dictionary definition of the word clearly links these two meanings. Of the four usages offered for the word "convention" by Webster's New World Dictionary, the political and behavioral meanings are defined as two dimensions of the third usage:

3. a) an agreement between persons, nations, etc. [a copyright convention; the Geneva Convention] b) general agreement on the usages and practices of social life [bohemian revolt against convention] (Guralnik 1972: 310).

We have seen that conventions, in the political sense of this term, refer to the intermediary ground between formal treaties and mere statements of intention. We can begin to understand what these conventions mean if we look at the significance of conventions as the term is used in its behavioral sense. A behavioral convention is definitely not legally-bound action in the sense that a person who breaks an accepted

convention can be tried in a court of law (except in some extreme cases). Nor is it part of what we normally consider to be direct intentional action. When I extend my arm to shake hands with someone, I am not rationally calculating a response in the other person. Rather, I am participating in normal, accepted behavior that facilitates the creation of an open and trustful environment. In this respect, conventions are, as Austin says, conditions in which performatives can take place.

Returning now to the political conventions, we can interpret them as an intent to convert instrumental political behavior into performative conventional behavior. They are efforts to make their compliance part of a government's everyday habits. A key difference between political and behavioral conventions then, is that the former need to be explicitly arrived at whereas the latter tend to be implicit products of everyday interaction. Nevertheless, both are reinforced within the context of ritual.

The ritual aspect of the Rio Conference is a key element in the establishing of conventions which allow for the continued existence of a functioning international political system. In this context, the refusal of Bush to sign the Biodiversity Convention can be seen as a breach of confidence or a lack of tact, just as a person who enters a room but refuses to shake hands would be viewed with suspicion and/or contempt, depending upon the situation.

The establishment of these norms was more difficult in the case of the Earth Summit than in typical ritual settings due to the fact that the political cosmology which undergirded the ritual was in debate. Tambiah appeals to "the fact that cosmological constructs are embedded (of course not exclusively) in rites, and that rites in turn enact and incarnate cosmological conceptions" (1985: 130). The Rio Conference is unique in that it occurred at a moment of history when one of the key cosmological concepts of international development--constant economic growth--is being called into question. To perform a political ritual in this milieu makes the establishment of conventions all the more important and Bush's breach of that convention more telling.

Now we can see why so many leaders focused upon the term "sustainable development" at the conference. This term was meant to provide a foundation for the construction of a new political cosmology that would resolve the contradictions and anomalies that have emerged within the old one. The fact that this term had no precise definition was an obstacle to the effective realization of the event as ritual. We can conclude that the participants in the Rio Conference were trying to revitalize a long established ritual--United Nations Conferences--through the elaboration of new cosmological principles. The role of conventions is key because they provide the conditions by which the performance can take place and help guarantee that the results will be "happy" in the Austinian sense of the term. A final evaluation of UNCED in ritual terms would have to conclude that while it was not completely "happy," nor could it be categorized as an "Infelicity" (Austin 1975: 14).

### Power and indexicality

The effort at revitalization in political ritual that the Rio Conference represented leads us directly to the third sense of ritual as performance in what Tambiah (1985) calls indexicality. Here we will concentrate on two aspects. First, we will look at the way that important parts of the ritual enactment are "existentially or indexically related to participants in the ritual, creating, affirming, or legitimating their social positions and powers" (p. 156). Second, we will consider the:

variation in lexical usages, in the structure of the site aspersions, and in the scale of the ceremonies (pertaining to their magnificence, their duration, the number of officiants participating, the place of staging, and so on)--for it is these indexical features which directly show how interpersonal aspects of rank and privilege are validated and enacted by the symbolism and requirements of the ritual itself (p. 157 emphasis in original).

The relationships between participants in UNCED were clearly marked by an intricate system of credentials which had the dual function of introducing a hierarchical status system into the functioning of the event and demarcating access to physical space within the Rio-Center complex. The first and principal limiting aspect of the credential system was between those who were qualified (and able) to get a credential and those who were not. Thus from the very beginning there was a clear division between who could and who could not participate in the ritual. This distinction came to a head when a group of Kayapó leaders sought to hold a press conference in the Rio-Center complex but were not allowed into the press room because they did not possess credentials. They were finally granted access to the area around the outside entrance to Rio-Center.

Among those who did receive credentials there were at least six categories starting from (1) all area passes, the highest of the categories because one's movement within the complex was unlimited. This was followed by (2) security police and UN staff, another privileged category. Other credentials which had variable rank included (3) official national delegate, (4) NGO delegate, and (5) press. Finally there were the credentials for (6) maintenance and service staff. These credentials largely determined the type and scope of interpersonal relations that occurred within the event and as such imbued the ritual with a clear sense of rank and power.

Another indexical aspect of the Rio Conference was the scale of the ceremonies. Since this was an effort to revitalize a form of ritual that was commonplace within the U.N. framework (for reasons which we have already mentioned), there was the clear introduction of new measures of magnitude as a means of instilling into the event an importance that would serve as a symbolic referent for all future conferences. The number of participants at virtually all levels of rank and power--heads of state and government, official delegates, press, etc.--was higher than in any other previous conference of its type. This variation in the number of participants in the ritual performance gave the event a greater significance than previous events. The same could be said of its magnificence, which was also unequalled in terms of extravagance, luxury and cost.

Finally, the staging of the event was of crucial importance. The selection of Rio de Janeiro had several indexical clues: it is located in the Third World (thus demonstrating the important role of the South in this ritual); it is a city of spectacular natural beauty (thus demonstrating the need to maintain the environment as a resource for humanity); and it is a city which offered all of the luxuries that the leaders of the modern world system require (thus demonstrating that one need not lower living standards in order to hold such a ritual). The entire United Nations system was replicated and embellished in Rio, giving the event the sense of renewal, while at the same time maintaining a sense of continuity with previous conferences.

By now it should be clear that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development can not only be characterized as a ritual in the anthropological sense of

the term, but that this perspective provides a rich and largely untapped vein of understanding of seemingly strictly political events. By analyzing the Rio Conference from a performative approach, we have been able to uncover some explanations that had not been previously explored.

#### **IV: On Split-Self Anthropology**

The two accounts presented above are markedly different both in their content and style in spite of the fact that they were written by the same person about the same event on the basis of the same field experience. To understand this seeming anomaly, we must explore not only the nature of the production of texts but also the nature of the producer of those texts. If the same person can write two texts so different about the same event, we must begin by asking what is going on within the person who is observing and writing of the event. I am directly involved in this affair since I wrote both texts.

A minimal self-reflection regarding the internal constitution of my self is thus necessary. Other important aspects to be discussed here include my intention(s) in writing the texts, my observational position(s) at the event and my political interest(s) in the conference. This discussion, in turn, will provide the basis for a comparison of the content of the two texts. I wish to preface this analysis with a brief mention of the debates within anthropology concerning varying accounts of cultural events and locate the theoretical space in which we can better understand the particular case presented here.

The existence of differing accounts of the same event is an important topic of anthropological concern which grew out of the "debates" involving conflicting ethnographic descriptions of the same community. The classic debate between Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis concerning their divergent and conflicting descriptions of Tepoztlán, Mexico, has been followed by numerous re-analyses of ethnographic material. This phenomena has been characterized as the "Rashomon effect" (Heider 1988), a name derived from the 1950 film by Kurosawa in which a single event is described differently by four eyewitnesses.

Another approach towards the understanding of differing accounts of the same event is found in the more recent work concerning the polyphonic nature of ethnographic writing. In a seminal essay, Clifford (1986) draws our attention to the many "voices" present in any ethnographic text and the way in which the ethnographer hierarchically arranges the discourses in his/her text. He then argues for a new approach to ethnographic writing in which informants can be considered as co-authors of ethnographic texts.

Although the issues raised by the debates concerning the Rashomon effect and polyphony are relevant to our two analyses of the Earth Summit, they do not directly address the special case presented here in which one observer has produced two different texts about the same event. This could be considered as a type of inverse polyphony in that it demonstrates that within the ethnographer there are also different voices clamoring to be heard. Thus the creation of an ethnographic (or any other type of) text is also the product of an internal selection and hierarchical ordering of voices within the observer/anthropologist.

This calls into question the long cherished notion of the ethnographer as a totally coherent, indivisible unit. If a single observer is capable of expressing divergent interests, of containing many voices and of producing varied texts, then there must be a dualistic (or perhaps, multiplex) aspect of the constitution of his/her self. This theme has recently been explored by Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) in her treatment of feminists and halfies within the

discipline of anthropology. Feminist anthropologists have the dual task of dealing with the issues of gender and culture in their work while halfies, defined by Abu-Lughod as "people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage" (p. 137), live and work in the crossroads of what formerly was a well-demarcated line between the self and the other. I would like to add to these two forms of "split selfhood" the category of split occupational loyalties.

In the elaboration of these two texts, I drew upon a dual nature of my personal existence: first as a free lance journalist and second as a doctoral student in anthropology. The fact that I had two occupational identities increased my observational responsibilities at the Earth Summit because I had to observe, seek out and record events according to the dual interests and methods of these two professions. At the same time, I could strategically use one or the other of these identities in my fieldwork without being deceptive or resorting to trickery. For example, it was my status as a journalist which gave me access to the event and allowed me to view it in anthropological terms. My two occupational identities were not in conflict, for I was (and am) at ease with both of them. Thus they represent two sides of my self construction which have an outlet in two types of professional narrative production.

The implications of a dual occupation, in much the same way as Abu-Lughod makes clear for feminists and halfies, is that the split-self anthropologist has more than one audience. The creation of a text for a particular audience shapes the text in important ways. Here we must mention the indexical clues of time and readership. The journalistic article was severely restricted by the time deadline of the sponsoring newspaper, which required that the article be sent within two days after the end of the Earth Summit. The piece was also written with a definite audience in mind. The readership of *In These Times* is a left-oriented, critical group of people that are looking for something different from the traditional media treatment of the event. The article was written with this in mind, and is one of the reasons for its harsh treatment of Bush's position at the conference.

The anthropological analysis was not written under duress in the journalistic sense of a time deadline but rather a month later in the leisure of my personal study. (To be honest, I must mention that it was written under the different form of duress of a term paper deadline). The nature of the audience also changed the presentation of the article in that it conforms to the markedly different genre of anthropological exposition. Here the text is more analytic and is explicitly based upon a set of theoretical and conceptual propositions. It also recognizes intellectual authorship of these ideas, something the journalistic article does only for selected informants.

Split-self anthropology thus further problematizes the unity of the sequence: event/observer/text/audience. This process has long been understood in strictly linear terms in which one observer saw one event, and produced one text for one audience. This unity was broken when different anthropologists produced different texts about similar events. It was further questioned by the explicit recognition of the polyphonic nature of ethnographic writing. Now we must add yet another challenge, this time from split-self anthropology.

Another dimension of this debate deals with the situationality of the production of the texts. All writing takes place in a particular time and place and as such is an integral part of that historical moment. The observer/writer is not exempt from these exigencies, but rather is socially and temporally situated in the event he/she is studying. The Earth Summit was an event of global import with clear political, ecological and social referents. My writing of these two texts must be understood as one small part of this historical moment.

My participation in the event must also include, however, an acknowledgement of my personal political background. I am a member of two Latin American ecology groups, both of which have a social and political history of ecological action, and my presence and participation in the Earth Summit was also as an ecologist, thus complicating even further the dimensions of split-self anthropology. I most likely would not have chosen to go to the event and write about it if I did not have a previous interest in the topic. My ecological interests also provided me with contacts and literature which were helpful in the preparation of these texts. My participation in the event will also affect my future work in the ecology movement.

This raises the question of the "objectivity" of the two texts. Did my background as an ecologist affect my writing? Of course it did. All writing is "interested" in the fundamental sense that it expresses the existential interests of the writer. This does not mean that these texts are mere ecological propaganda. My status as an ecologist does not disqualify me from the adequate execution of my professional duties. To be a good journalist or a good anthropologist does not require the renouncement of personal politics, only the maintenance of high standards of production of one's profession.

This brief discussion of my professional self-constitution, the different genres I employed to write the texts, the audiences to whom they were directed and my observational and political positionality at the Earth Summit provides the context of the production of the two articles. With these factors in mind, we can now proceed with an analysis of their content.

The attention that the two analyses gives to the speeches during the summit of heads of state and government held at the end of the Rio Conference is strikingly different. In the journalistic piece the emphasis is decidedly upon their verbal content. On three occasions direct quotes are provided, two from Bush and one from Castro. In the anthropological analysis, the content of the speeches was barely touched upon in spite of the fact that the speeches were given a prominent role in the text. Emphasis was shifted to the performative side of these speeches, a rarely-considered aspect which revealed important.

This dichotomy between content and performance is also evident in the analyses of the conventions. The journalistic piece spends the entire middle section presenting the intricacies and meanings of the content of these conventions. Meanwhile, the anthropological piece starts from an etymological analysis of the term "convention" and from there moves to an interpretation of the behavioral role which these conventions played in the context of the entire event, while placing them within a cosmological analysis.

Thus the two analyses operate at different levels of significance. The presence of these levels is not unique to the Rio Conference but is to be found in any ethnographic situation. Cultural events contain multiple actors and relationships that create a complex layering of meanings, each with its own forms of expression and importance. One of the key functions of anthropological analysis is to mine these different levels, thereby providing a fuller, richer understanding of the event.

Given the multiplex nature of a cultural event, it is evident that any one event can be "explained" in more than one way depending upon a variety of factors that include the level of meaning selected, the interests of the observer who is recording the event, the methods he/she uses to study the event, the informants who provide the "information" of the final text, the way the anthropologist/observer structures the narratives in the text and the audience for which it is written. The two texts presented here offer differing explanations each with its own unique set of factors mentioned above.

The first text presents a straightforward instrumentalist vision of the events, typical of journalistic writing on politics, in which the play of power is the heuristic tool used to explain the events of the conference. This type of explanation is most clearly seen when President Bush's refusal to sign the Biodiversity Convention is explained as "siding with the interests of the transnational biotechnological firms." In the second text, a performative vantage point offered an explanation of the seemingly contradictory presence of Bush at the event. It also provided a different explanation of the nature of his isolation at the conference.

These two types of explanation are also evident in the way the phrase "sustainable development" was treated. This term was ridiculed in the journalistic piece and was even characterized by the phrase "magic," used here in its vulgar connotation as an act of trickery or charlatanism. But when placed in a ritualistic framework, the significance of sustainable development takes on new meaning. Here it is seen much more positively as part of the construction of a new political cosmology which, in turn, is a necessary part of the process of revitalizing a ritual.

Differing explanations are not necessarily mutually exclusive and are often complementary. Explanation is not an all or nothing game, but rather a complex and multiple human activity. We can mention an Earth Summit Rashomon effect by referring to the insightful anthropological analysis that Gustavo Ribeiro (1992) has made of the event, which differs in significant respects to what we have presented here, as just one other example of the richness of possibilities that an anthropological approach can offer. Ribeiro analyses the impact of technological apparatuses of time-space compression (jets, helicopters, cellular telephones, etc.) in the use of power among actors at the Earth Summit which allows them the simultaneous advantages of physical presence in important events and instantaneous long distance contacts with the rest of the world. He also makes a sustained analysis of the credential system which is only briefly mentioned in the performative analysis presented here.

The notion of a single, objectivist viewpoint is clearly no longer tenable within the practices of anthropology given the complexity and multiplicity of cultural events and anthropologists. This does not mean that we must slide into a self-reflexive solipsism where all writing is equally valid, though this is an ever-present danger. Descriptive writing, whether it be journalistic, anthropological, or some other form, can be judged according to standards of empirical rigor, conceptual coherence, intellectual honesty, clarity of exposition, breadth and profundity of vision, relevance, wit, insight, style and creativity. Contemporary anthropological writing has the additional rigor of being founded upon theoretical and paradigmatic statutes developed from over a century of disciplinary practice. Insistence on these and other standards offers an assurance that quality and integrity continue to be a part of the production of anthropological texts.

### **A musical postlude**

Though the notion of "text" has proven to be a powerful analogy for understanding the nature of ethnographic writing, I conclude this essay by appealing to a different expressive art: music. My ethnographic examples are taken from the rich compilation of jazz music contained in the "Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz" (Smithsonian Institution 1973).

The Rashomon effect finds its expression in this collection in the divergent



renditions of the same song by different musicians. Scott Joplin's 1916 piano rendition of his "Maple Leaf Rag" is a forceful expression of a hybrid musical genre, while Jelly Roll Morton's interpretation 22 years later adds important rhythmic elements from his native New Orleans. In a second Rashomon example, Benny Goodman's and Coleman Hawkins' interpretations of "Body and Soul" demonstrate the lyric and thematic diversity contained within this sensuous song.

The polyphonic nature of musical expression is evident in virtually all of the pieces in this collection, particularly those where soloists, often playing different instruments, offer their own musical "voices" as part of a single musical performance. On Miles Davis' "So What," solos by Davis (trumpet), John Coltrane (tenor sax), Cannonball Adderly (alto sax) and Bill Evans (piano) make diverse musical statements within the framework of an improvised musical whole.

Finally, split-self anthropology finds its musical counterpart in the Charlie Parker's two beautiful renditions of "Embraceable You." Taped as two takes during the same recording session, Parker explores different aspects of his creative self expression within the confines of this Gershwin composition. The result is that we not only get two representations of the song, but we get two representations of Parker.

Split selves can make a whole lot of sense.

## Notes

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