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Traversing the Great Divide: The Embodiment of Discourse
Between You and Me

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In considering how we, you and I, are, we must abandon the ancient dichotomy that would divide us separately into two geology layers, the bottom one labeled biology and the top one called culture. Instead, we must recognize that we need each other to be, and we must recognize also that we are what we are, creatures of flesh and blood who speak to one another and to others. Viewed thusly we, you and I, are never out of “culture” nor out of “biology.” We are whole, though unfinished, beings. With all due respect to Descartes, we are not I’s who think our separate selves into existence, but in order to be we must be you and I, with you primary. You are, consequently I am. The others outside of the we world are the mysterious they. The they are also evil. We ask at the end, what is the source of the they’s evil?

TRAVERSING THE GREAT DIVIDE

The following text comes largely from a manuscript, “Hominid Evolution: The Trajectory of You and Me.” We, Miles and Julia, intend that the larger manuscript will be a six-chapter attempt to lodge humans in the life process, destination Mars!

Thomas Huxley, known as “Darwin’s Bulldog” for his tenacious defense of Charles Darwin and a widely recognized comparative anatomist in his own right, published in 1902 Man’s Place in Nature.
On the very first page he posed “the question of questions” (1902, 77): What is our place in nature? Today at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the question of questions still haunts us. Despite insightful responses (Tomasello 1999; Shennan 2002; Janson and Smith 2003; Richerson and Boyd 2006; and especially Odling-Smee et al. 2003), the haunting continues, and, despite years of personal struggle, this effort here will surely not lay the ghost (the demon!) to rest.

In addressing such a question, we must **transcend** that hoary dichotomy that persists in speaking of us as a geological formation, with the culture stratum lying noncomformably atop and, consequently, independent of the underlying biological stratum. Addressed in the honesty of now, are we not two flesh and blood creatures speaking this text into being? I by writing and you by reading? If so, then we are not basically **god** (symbol) with a daub of embarrassing ape, nor essentially **ape** (DNA) dressed in an ephemeral gown of culture. We are whole (though unfinished!) creatures, engaged in the open struggle to be whatever and whoever we are.

A view of the evolutionary process from the origin of life on this planet until the now of you and me brings into view the intricate linkage through which we come about and by which we make our way. We, you and I, are emergent. We depend upon each other to be. True of us; true of life. Since its beginnings on this planet, some 3.5 billion years ago, life has implicated itself in its own development. True of life; true of us. Narrating the evolutionary process is the closest we anthropologists may ever come to a reckoning of what humans are about. This is especially the case as we now realize we are not the triumphal, final link in the “Great Chain of Being,” but instead, “a minor twig on a ragged old eucalyptus” (Graves 2003, 1621).

“Closest,” however, is nowhere near near. Yet “the evolutionary epic is … the best myth we will ever have,” [one that meets the]
“mythopoetic requirements of the mind” (Wilson 1978, 109); that is, one that grabs us. (See Figure 1.1.)

In his masterful *The Symbolic Species*, Terrence Deacon culminates his 452-page analysis with, “It is simply not possible to understand human anatomy, human neurobiology, or human psychology without recognizing they have been shaped by ... symbolic reference” (1997, 410). Consequently, symbol-communication stands not apart from nature and life processes but is intertwined within it.

To depict the intertwining challenges our metaphoric skills. The geological metaphor that anthropologists have developed has a cultural stratum sitting in geological language incongruously atop a biological stratum, as in Figure 1.2.
Figure 1.2. Culture sitting on top of nature

Figure 1.3 abandons the geological, horizontal metaphor for a more social, vertical aesthetic. It declares we are never all “Nature;” neither are we ever independent of “Culture.” The darker the black, the greater the intertwining between biology and culture. As we move toward the edges of the drawing, vertically or horizontally, the black lightens; however, nowhere are we out of the black. As Jacques Derrida would say, “There is nothing outside the text.” Similarly, Theodosius Dobzhansky might add, “There is nothing outside of evolution.” Nowhere in the figure are we less human or more human. We are equally human, top-to-bottom and side-to-side. Similarly, we are never frozen monads. Male and female, You–I, together, constitute us, basic humanity. Being bound to each, how is it that we figure what each is up to? Tricky business this bounding. In the sensory, mammalian sense, we are bound as penis is to vagina, as embryo to uterus, and as lip to nipple, but the symbol, semiotic sense, we are bound as You to Me, as one arbitrary, deictic sign to another. Thus, a
distance separates the two figures in figure 1.3, an arbitrary distance of impossible loneliness.

![Diagram of Culture-nature, you-I](image)

Figure 1.3. Culture-nature, you-I

Phenomenologically, we cross, or pretend to do so, the two figures through understanding. (For elegant interpretations, see Csordas 1993, Kerdeman 1998, and Macquarrie 1994.)

We must see understanding as action. As human action, understanding is “socioculturally mediated” (Ahearn 2001, 112; our emphasis). By understanding each other, we bring about a co-presence that transcends the dichotomy of raw experience and pure sign. In our everyday mode of being, understanding and sense perception go hand in hand. It is available to us through its materiality, in the materiality of intersubjective exchanges, out there, not in here.

To summarize: Culture is symbol-communication. It is not a thing located in our individual heads, but discourse in the widest
sense, including body movements and material objects crafted by the hand. These objects range from pebble tools to the space station; they are a part of the world we create, and whatever their function, they define our presence, our be-ing.

This brings us to you and me.

In considering the world that we construct with symbol-communication we must recall what we often even want to forget: that we, you and I, are embedded in that world. That world cannot exist apart from us, nor we apart from the world. As Tulane professor Arden King insisted years ago, “Miles, you must keep phenomena whole.” Now, finally, I understand what he meant. I suggest that the concept that best achieves the tie between our world and us is “being-in-the-world.” The concept comes from Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time (1996). The hyphens indicate that being-in-the-world is unitary. For us, for you and me, to exist, we must have a world to be in. The world that we are in is the world of symbol-communication. Nowhere today, and not since the emergence of the australopithecine grade, more than 2.5 million years ago, can you find a bipedal primate who does not communicate in symbols. The important “kicker” is that the world we must have in order to be, we create. The “being” in “being-in-the-world” is not a noun but a gerund, a verbal, a “be-ing."

As implied in the “we,” being-in-the-world is social. If I may be so bold to say, Descartes had it wrong when he famously said, “I think, therefore I am.” Correctly put, “You are, therefore so am I.” Thus we, you and I, are not only dialogically paired, but you are primary. Just as this text awaits your reading, without you I cannot be.

Guided by Heidegger and propelled by the desire to “keep phenomena whole,” this venture of replacing the individual organism with you and me also draws strong support from two major phenomenologists, Stephan Strasser and Alfred Schutz. Strasser wrote in The Idea of Dialogal (sic) Phenomenology. “The ‘you’ does not come
into my world; it is already there, for the ‘you’ is older than I. More precisely speaking, we should say that the “you” is already a “you” with respect to me before I am an Ego” (1969, 52 [emphasis added]). Schutz likewise argues that not only in our everyday world, the pared bond, you-I, is primary, but you-I, the we, precedes both the lonely I and the objective, mysterious they (Schutz 1966).

Mentioning the “lonely I and the objective, mysterious they” requires further elaboration. The lonely I is indeed a tragic figure. Despite his or her searches, neither can find a you that will bring them about. I need you to come about, to be. But what if I cannot find you? I cannot be myself without you, but you are nowhere around. I have searched without success. The world is full of yous: pretty ones, ugly ones, rich ones, poor ones, smart ones, dumb ones, refined ones, redneck ones. But you I cannot find. I’m lonely; “I’m so lonesome I could cry.” But what the hell? It’s not the first time you have disappeared on me. So here are two poems just for you.

**Ain’t It The Truth!**

You say that love multiplies,
that it doubles itself
every twenty years.

You say that love conquers,
that it triumphs in face
of overwhelming odds.

You say that love endures,
that it lasts forever,
and is, in fact, eternal.

You say … well, you say
a lot of things.
How Is It Where You Live?

I reach for you.
You reach for me.
We touch…
when it doesn’t rain,
and it’s not too hot.

Here, in Louisiana,
that ain’t often.

What about the “objective, mysterious they”? They are always over there, never here. They, like you and I, are devoid of gender. They, you, and I could be feminine or masculine. Nothing in their pronoun-hood gives you a hint. They, however, pack in the shes and hes. The partner to they, them, fills up with hers and hises. So they, the both of them, contain their gender within. Perhaps that explains the mystery of the mysterious they. You don’t know until it is too late, but whamo! a change in a verb and a she pops up, or a he unfurls. Much to the they’s disgust. He or she opens the possibility that one or the other is responsible to what transpires, as in “He hit the ball.” “She hit him.” The they can never be responsible, even if “They slaughter hundreds,” as in the holocaust. You never find a he who says, “I killed them all.” The they forever remain they. The real mystery of they is in “they say.” You don’t know who is saying. It could be anyone, but likely it is nobody. Heidegger calls that they the they-self, a self everyone recognizes but no one knows. In any discussion of death, a favorite expression is “They say we all have to go sometime.” How many times have I heard that? How many times have you said it?

The they remains anonymous, and perhaps that is the source of they’s power.
Have you ever thought that the they resembles Christ? 

No I have not, but I’m sure you have got to tell us.

In the common expression “Christ saves,” doesn’t that sound a lot like the they, an all encompassing endeavor?

Stop taking pot shots at Christians.

Let us continue our discussion of I, you, we, and they. Used as a throwaway word, “we” can assume some of the all encompassing features of they, as in “We Americans believe in liberty.” In that common statement, I and you can safely hide in the we’s anonymity. That is the reason I constantly insist that we are you and I. Since we always means you and I, we, you and I, assume responsibility for our actions.

We always stand in opposition to they. In that opposition, frequently they comes off worse. True we say they are a friendly group, but how much more common is it that we don’t like them? The reasons for our dislike run almost without end: They smell bad, they can’t be trusted, they steal anything that is not nailed down, they threaten our women, they scrimp on whatever job you give them, and in brief they are trifling and no good. If any one is foolish enough to defend them, we can always point to specific traits or even cases to support our argument. We become righteous in our condemnation, and so they take on evil into their makeup, in their character. We feel more and more the obligation to destroy them, so as to make the world safe and secure for all peace-loving people.

And then someone, you, asks us to examine our conscience. I may challenge your motives. But bless you, you are strong and persist.

Your courage will take us to the unbelievable question: Are we the source of the they’s evil?

And with that question ringing in our ears, yours and mine, I can do no more than stop. Thank you for your careful reading.
EDITOR’S NOTE

Miles Richardson (1932-2011) was one of the founding members of the Southern Anthropological Society (SAS). In developing this paper at the editor’s request, Miles wanted to note for the record that SAS was founded in a two-step process. First, in the spring of 1966, a group of anthropologists at the meeting of the Southern Sociological Society in New Orleans voted unanimously to form a separate society of anthropologists. Second, the first meeting of the society was held in Atlanta the following spring, 1967. The name Southern Anthropological Society was chosen to distinguish the group from the existing Southeast Archaeological Conference, but also with the intention that it would be inclusive of the traditional four-fields. As Miles put it, there was uniform consent that the acronym SAS “expressed well the feeling of this upstart society.”

REFERENCES


