
Coming to Terms with Cultures

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GERRY PHILIPSEN was born in Portland, Oregon, graduated from high school there, and went to the University of Denver, earning BAs in Speech and in Social Science. In college he was an intercollegiate debater all four years and in 1966 was a member of the two-person international debate team that toured the British Isles speaking in parliamentary debates at thirty universities. He earned a Ph.D. in Communication Studies at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, in 1972. After graduate school, he spent six years as a faculty member at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and is now in his 31st year on the faculty at the University of Washington. At Washington he has won two teaching awards and, in the field of communication, has won several awards for research. Most of his teaching and research focus on cultural codes of communication—what they are, how to learn them, and how they shape communicative conduct and life in general. He also has strong interests in small group communication and in communication and conflict. Some of his most satisfying experiences have been to teach and work with people who have gone on to become successful teaching scholars or on to other life activities that have been satisfying to them. At the University he has been department chair, chair of the Faculty Senate, and Secretary of the Faculty, an administrative and advisory position.



Gerry Philipsen

*Coming to Terms with Cultures*¹

Gerry Philipsen
University of Washington

Forty years ago I tried to change a culture. I failed, but it led to a lifelong inquiry into the topic of today's lecture: *Coming to terms with cultures*.

The site of the failure was the Bridgeport neighborhood on the near south side of Chicago, a White urban enclave of invisible but locally known boundaries, sealed off from an African American neighborhood to the South and a Mexican American neighborhood to the North.²

I was the newly installed director of group work at a settlement house that provided character-building and recreational activities to young people who lived in the surrounding blocks. They came to use the gym, the craft room, and game rooms, or to take trips in the agency van.

The group workers on the staff were deeply concerned with the young peoples' frequent use of racial slurs and expressions of violent intent toward other racial groups, and we discussed ways we might change these practices and the attitudes behind them. A staff member mentioned a film on interracial understanding he had seen at his college, and after much discussion I decided to show it in our largest gathering room. So one night a hundred young people filled the room, watching quietly for thirty minutes, until Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., appeared on screen, delivering an impassioned appeal for an integrated America.

Two years before, I had heard King speak in the old field-house at the University of Denver, where, as a college senior, I sat in the bleachers and listened, transfixed by the great orator. He talked about race and the war, and in the question-time I stood and asked, "Dr. King, what would you advise a young Christian man soon to graduate and likely to face the military draft." He looked directly at me and said, "I commend to you the words of the Negro spiritual, 'I ain't gonna study war no more,'" and I left, believing.

So it was a shock to me that night in Bridgeport when, a few seconds after King began to speak, shouts and cries erupted, the language of which I won't repeat and the apparent hatred of which I can't forget.

As the older boys raised their voices even higher, the staff, concerned with safety, quickly conferred, then I stopped the projector. With no small struggle, we cleared the building, left only with ourselves and an unfinished reel of film on interracial understanding ready to be rewound, packed up, and sent back to the rental agency.

I had many other failures in Bridgeport, most of which I eventually traced to lack of knowledge—knowledge that there was a local culture there; knowledge of that culture; and knowledge that I, too, bear and use a culture. My early months led me to believe I had to leave and admit total defeat—or learn something. Determined to succeed and having recently taken a course on culture patterns of communication with Professor Ethel Albert at Northwestern University, I felt I was living with a culture I didn't know. So I set myself to learn its terms and tropes, its premises and rules, for locally appropriate and efficacious communication. And I changed my goal from trying to change a culture to working and living among people in a way that I might be useful to them, on their terms, yet without sacrificing altogether my ideals.

After two years in Bridgeport, I returned to graduate study, read widely and deeply, in anthropology, communication, linguistics, and rhetoric, and discovered the ethnography of speaking, a new field holding the hope that my Bridgeport lessons could be refined through systematic study.³ Since then, I have studied, practiced, and taught the art of learning culturally distinctive codes of communicative conduct, joined in the effort by my doctoral students at the University of Washington and now their doctoral students, my academic grandchildren, if you will. Together we have produced dozens of year-long and multi-year, field-based studies of culturally distinctive ways of communicating, in over 20 different language varieties and 20 different countries.⁴

Based on our wide, deep, and long collective experience, we can teach someone how to learn to communicate effectively and productively in cultural situations that are initially unfamiliar, even threatening, to them. We have a sophisticated theoretical account of how to do that, stated in published versions of speech codes theory.⁵ Our approach is the gold standard and the world beats a path to our door, but our claims are always open to revision in the light of informed critique.

The Key Concern of This Lecture

Although we have more to learn about learning cultural codes and how they work in human interaction, today I turn to a different aspect of my work, to the study of situations in which someone not only tries to learn, but tries to come to terms with, to contend with, as it were, the presence in their life world of two or more cultural codes.

In considering how to approach this phase of my work, I ask, “What would Carroll Arnold do?” and draw from him three things: (1) a focus on the person who seeks to shape social experience through discourse; (2) a commonsense empiricism that seeks to learn from case studies of rhe-

torical action some possibilities achievable with particular types of communicative acts and strategies; and (3) the idea that a speaker's success is always contingent upon the responses of others who are themselves purposive and strategic participants in the communication process.⁶

The dispositions I draw from Arnold characterize his work but also, taken together, formulate a paradigm of inquiry that, in retrospect, can be seen as the scholarly foundation that he and his generation had carefully laid for work in the discipline, by the second half of the twentieth century. That our fledgling discipline could, by then, even think of having a paradigmatic foundation for its scholarship is in no small measure a tribute to his intellectual, scholarly, and organizational leadership, at Cornell, Penn State, and in the discipline at large.

Carroll Arnold was born in 1912 in Clear Lake, Iowa, the same year my father was born in Broken Bow, Nebraska. Arnold earned his Ph.D. in 1942, two years before I was born. Standing on the disciplinary foundation that Arnold and his colleagues had laid, I saw matters to which they did not explicitly attend, most specifically, that all speaking is speaking culturally, and that in all times and places people communicate with each other in milieu infused with cultures.⁷ And just as the presence of another speaking person introduces into the communicative situation an element of contingency—Arnold's thesis, so too does the presence of cultures—the thesis I have for many years professed.⁸ Today I consider some ways in which people can come to terms with—can *contend* with—those cultures.

I tell four stories, each exemplifying a life circumstance in which any one of us might find our self, circumstances in which one seeks to:

1. accomplish something in interaction with others in a milieu in which a dominant culture works against one's purposes, or
2. challenge or undermine a dominant culture, or
3. integrate within one life two cultures that are crucial to one's identity, or
4. reconstruct one's life when a culture that has been a source of strength begins to crumble before one's eyes.

For my task I keep at hand, as inspiration, four books of practical advice: one, Nassim Nicholas Taleb's *Foiled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets*,⁹ which teaches us to be prudent when speculating about human affairs, because dealing with matters cultural is a precarious enterprise, rife with risks, both intellectual and practical; two, *The Call to Holiness*¹⁰ by the English cleric Frederic Coutts, a primer on righteousness in daily life, because the art of self-abasement is crucial to constructive participation in any human community; three, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*,¹¹ because the art of persuasion can make the difference in dealings with others when prudence and goodness are insufficient to the task; and four, a book on cookery, because such books model specificity and brevity I want to achieve in my practical system. In his *Politics*, Aristotle says "eat chicken," but my food writer is the contemporary Michael Pollan who says, in his *In Defense of Food*:

- Eat food (by which he means only that which your grandmother would recognize as food)
- Not very much
- Mostly plants¹²

My model for coming to terms with cultures also has only seven words. With these words I specify four modes of action, means through which an agent might fulfill a purpose. The modes of action in my system are not rules, principles, or dicta, but *means*, means that one might consider, turn to, contemplate, or deploy, singly or in combination, when trying to encompass a situation in which one seeks to contend with the cultures of one's life world. And like Pollan with his dietary dicta, my system boils matters down to only and all those modes of action that are the necessary and sufficient means for encompassing a situation in any given case of discursively coming to terms with cultures. The four are as follows:

- **Listen**, by which I mean attend to what people say about local codes of communicative conduct
- **Scour the text**, by which I mean search thoroughly through the communal conversation in all its modalities
- **Embrace nuance**, by which I mean submit to the complexities of cultures and of communal life
- **Talk**, by which I mean, first, what Carroll Arnold meant by "talk," the give and take of interaction between parties who take each other, and what they say, seriously, and, second, talk spoken in ways that engage artfully the idioms for talk of the cultures in play in the particular case, with "talk" serving here always as a figure of speech meant to represent all the means and modes of communicative conduct.

Four Stories of Coming to Terms with Cultures

Now, in each of four stories I feature and illustrate one of the four modes of action named in my model, "listen," "scour the text," "embrace nuance," and "talk," starting with story one, "Dr. Katherine Hendrix listening to those who went before."

1. Katherine Hendrix is a tenured professor of communication at the University of Memphis. In a published paper "‘Mama Told Me . . . ’: Exploring Lessons That Laid a Foundation for My ‘Endarkened’ Epistemology,"¹³ she tells of an effort to contend with the dominant culture of her life world. As a doctoral student at the University of Washington she set out to write a thesis examining the expectations that white and black students have of African American faculty members in American colleges and universities, a task that involved observing and interviewing white students receiving instruction from African-Americans. She knew these students had expectations that shaped their experience of African American professors, and that they would apply similar expectations to

her, an African American researcher studying them. And she knew she would face difficulties in dealing with the people she studied that a white researcher would not face.

Furthermore, she writes: “There was no-one in my department who could assist me with entering the field as an African-American woman.” She turned to her field methods professor, a white man, who advised her to “draw from the literature and find your own way,”¹⁴ advice that has the merit, I like to think, at least of doing no harm, and perhaps some little good, but it provided only a start. What, she asked herself, would her “own way” be? Then she remembered that as a child she had “listened to [her] parents’ lectures, watched their behavior in various situations, and internalized the rules” for interacting with others, and white people in particular, as follows:

1. “Don’t let them use you or they’ll use you up”
2. “Don’t let other people think for you, use your own head”
3. “Watch how you carry yourself”
4. “Be true to yourself; know how you want to be treated”
5. “Keep good records”

In these words Katherine found a code for how to comport herself as she went about her work. Some of her professors and fellow graduate students advised her to use white surrogates as interviewers. But following the advice of principle two, “Don’t let other people think for you, use your own head,” she did all observing and interviewing herself, because she decided that the unique communicative event created by her presence needed to be recognized and acknowledged rather than accounted for and balanced. Concerned about her credibility in the field, she drew from principle Three, “Watch how you carry yourself,” and used clothing, vocabulary, demeanor, logically organized materials, and linguistic formalities to conduct herself in a way that commanded respect. Later, when presenting her findings, she exceeded conventional standards for explication of field work research procedures, which she could do because she had followed principle 5, “Keep good records.”

Katherine’s goal was to walk through a series of encounters in which a dominant code makes the path treacherous and, while doing so, accomplish her task of gathering materials for what became a consequential doctoral thesis. To do this, she sought advice from people she trusts, listened to them for what she could use, then made a judicious selection and combination of means from among those she had heard. Finding useful but limited help from her teacher, she called on, then put to use, a code she heard in memories of parental speech, the speech of the people who had, perhaps more than any other she knew, walked the walk upon which she was embarking.

I celebrate Katherine for the clarity of her goal, the wisdom in her choice of a means for reaching it, skill in employing that means, and not least for the retrospective account of her actions from which we now can learn. To listen to, to call on, and to use the wisdom of the preceding generation is a profoundly *unconventional* move for an *American* to make,

and to make so deliberately, in figuring out how to come to terms with a culture of one's life world. And I celebrate the lesson in integrity she offers to us. The first entry for "integrity" in my dictionary is *rigid adherence to a code of behavior*. The second dictionary sense of "integrity" is *the state of being unimpaired*. I read Katherine as reporting that in implementing the first sense of integrity, *adhering to a code of conduct*, one judiciously selected and applied, she achieved the second, a sense of confidence to walk down some difficult streets, keeping high the head her mama had instructed her to use.

2. From the story of Dr. Katherine Hendrix listening to the words of those who went before, we turn to "Stephanie learning to scour the text." Stephanie is a fictional character I create based on my dealings with many students who have taken my course on culture. For thirty six years I have taught the art of learning cultural codes, always counseling students to approach the ways of others with an open mind, imploring them to withhold judgment as a necessary means to understanding something initially unfamiliar and always complex.

Stephanie has something else in mind: to undermine the dominant code of the world we share. That code is, she tells us, an instrument of oppression, something to be destroyed, in her lifetime, perhaps in mine. She sits over there, in the front row, to my far left. As I watch her look at me, I know what she sees:

- Male
- White
- Old
- Powerful

I am, for Stephanie, a specimen. Put me in a glass display case in the natural history museum with the label affixed: PATRIARCHUS AMERICANUS, ca Century 20, Middle Period.

I can't help but like Stephanie, though, seeing in her myself 40 years ago—passionate, indignant, confident—and when she examines the communal text, the speech of our common culture, she searches relentlessly in it for evidence of sexism, racism, or classism. And she gives her highest critical devotion to anything I write and say, convinced she has found in my words telling evidence of class and gender bias.

Stephanie has learned from her elders, critical theorists of various stripes, a code of inquiry, of which, it seems, the three *desiderata methodologica* are (1) search for evidence of power in everything you read, see, or hear, because it is always there, and the search for power should be privileged over all other matters; (2) trace the meaning of conduct to the nature of the person who produces it, using white, male, and powerful as likely indicators of the offending -isms in the speaker's speech; and (3) look for the oppression that ordinary language inevitably houses.¹⁵

Do I have anything to teach Stephanie? She comes to me already with sophistication, of a sort, in reading a cultural text. Through diligence in applying a fine-tooth comb to oral, written, and visual cultural texts, she finds things to which attention should be paid. And she can command

a room. I applaud Stephanie for her noble purpose, alertness in textual inspection, and eloquence. But to the degree she follows rigidly the principles that her elders, through their writing, have taught her, and I have read their writings, her interpretive and rhetorical claims fail to move me very far and, more importantly, fail so to move almost anyone else in the class. She scores high in purpose, effort, and the art of expression, low in the art of rhetoric.

Stephanie is the most *conventional* of the four people I consider today, in her adoption of the regnant dogma in US higher education of how to study culture. I think she can be a better critic than she is, and so put before her a code that opposes each of her three critical principles: (1) look and listen for the variety and particularity in what people do; it is not all, or only, power that energizes human action; (2) look at and listen to the concrete details of what people say before you interpret their conduct, even with those people whom you have been taught to think of as the usual suspects; (3) try to learn what words and other symbols mean, to those who use them, because sometimes such open inquiry will surprise you. There is not, I think, much uptake.

Stephanie graduates, with a well-deserved 4.0 in cultural codes. In August a letter arrives, the tone friendly but not conciliatory, the purpose advisory, even if in question form. Why, she asks, must you be so labored in your writing? Can't you come right out and say what you think? And when will you, with your position of power and privilege, speak the things that matter, the things that must be said?

I compose in my mind a reply to these dangled challenges. First, that carefulness has enabled me to move some students to a more enlightened position than they otherwise would have reached, a position that you, Stephanie, surely would approve. This success came, in part, because my cautious words did not inflame the students who read them. In part the success came because the words of others I have the students examine often contain their own undoing, and it proves not necessary to appeal to the fact that a man is a man to find that what he says is racist or sexist.¹⁶ Second, the things I say—my pleas for carefulness, my injunction not to judge too soon or with prejudice toward a person because of his complexion—are, for me, things that matter, and matter much.

What most captures my attention in Stephanie's letter is her telling of an event she attended just prior to graduation. In her time at the university, she quarreled in public with a faculty member whom she had accused of racist speech. Then, at a graduation week event, she found herself in a greeting line, at the end of which the man was shaking hands with the students walking through. She writes: "he said, as he shook my hand, 'leaving us so soon, Stephanie, good luck'" and, she continues, "I replied, 'and aren't you glad?' He gave me an icy but smug smile that I wondered about briefly . . . and now I know what the smile said: 'You think you won your petty battles, Stephanie, but now life will teach you the true meaning of power.'"

Having looked into this man's blue eyes, I don't presume to have seen his soul, though I have heard reports of his kindness when he might not have known that others were looking. But I have no refutation to

Stephanie's interpretation of his reception line words and smile. I do have questions I will ask in my epistolary reply: How do you know it was an "icy" smile? You say you wondered about it "briefly," and I ask, how long did you wonder before you arrived at your interpretation? And I wonder if what you saw and heard as the idiom of power is all that might be seen in a smile flashed quickly in a reception line or heard in "leaving us so soon, Stephanie, good luck." Stephanie is a good correspondent and I know that soon she will send her answers. Truly I am eager to see them.

Stephanie's goal is ambitious and admirable: to cleanse the communal text of its impurities. Scour the text, I say. The first sense for "scour" in my dictionary is *to clean, polish, or wash by scrubbing vigorously, usually with an abrasive*. Stephanie gets that. I too want to cleanse the communal text of all its impurities linked to the offending -isms. But my use of "scour" in "scour the text" relies more on another of its senses, *to search through or over thoroughly*. It is the "search," the "through," and the "thoroughly," I use for my second principle, "scour the text." If I have anything to teach Stephanie, this is a good place to start. And I would delete from my sense of "scour" the use of *an abrasive*, if that term is used as an adjective applied to speech and if one is trying to induce others to join one's cause.

For now the story ends of Stephanie learning to scour the text, and we turn to "Richard Rodriguez embracing nuance," our third story.

3. The parents of Richard Rodriguez emigrated from Mexico to the US, where he was born in 1944. He grew up in Sacramento, California, speaking Spanish and English, and living with two cultures—one of home, family, and heritage, and another to which his American school introduced him as a charter for his future. Living with these two cultures was a curriculum presenting to Richard a series of subjects, not of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but of identity, desire, and community, raising for him such questions as: Who is Richard Rodriguez? What does he want? Where does he belong? In his first book, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*,¹⁷ he writes of his effort to answer those questions, to negotiate what he later refers to as *the hold that the dead have on the living*, what I formulate as an effort to integrate in one life two diverging codes, each of which has existential force for the person who experiences them.

If someone asks how to resolve dilemmas about the significance to them of two or more answers to questions of the sort that Richard asks—questions of place, history, loyalties, belief, or persona—I say: read Richard Rodriguez. His books pose, as in a kaleidoscope, a series of such dilemmas, refracting them through vignettes, episodes, and stories, each bringing us to an intersection of cultures, communicative forms, and meanings. A story of an agonizing encounter with an uncle intersects with issues of language, loyalty, and place. A story of the Catholic church's change from the ancient Latin liturgy to a modern vernacular one raises matters of self, tradition, and modes of being and believing.

A story of Richard reading the story of another scholarship boy, from another time and place, shows us how he discovers that, and how, a life of reading, juxtaposed to memories and aspirations, can be not only a means to, but an end of, education.

Reading how Richard contends with his circumstances and experiences shows how one person deals with dilemmas of self, longing, and belonging. At each intersection the reader-as-searcher glimpses something new, hears a reverberating sound, and senses a way to feel. Hints for existential and practical conciliation come in the form of a nuance, a *subtle or slight variation, as in meaning, color, or quantity*. My third mode of action is to *embrace nuance*, that is, *to clasp nuance in the arms, to submit to it with dignity or fortitude*, for it is in our encounters with shades of memory, experience, and action that we might find an answer to questions of how to reconcile past with present, home with school, family with friends, or echoes from faraway with the cries and whispers of the place where now we stand.

The young Richard writes in *Hunger of Memory* of the Roman Catholic mass that, following Vatican II, church officials altered by replacing the use of Latin with compulsory vernacular languages, such as English, turning the priest around to face the people rather than the cross, the congregation saying “we believe” rather than the priest saying *Credo* (“I believe”) on behalf of the congregation; so as, in these and other ways, to make the mass more “communicative,” as an American might say. Richard laments the loss of the traditional way of speaking that was, as he experienced it early in life, something that (1) linked him to ancestors who once heard the same Latin words that he had heard, (2) linked him to worshippers in other places who heard on the very day that he did the recitation of the Latin words, and (3) enabled him to experience becoming of one body with other worshippers in the room at the moment of the priestly utterance of the *credo* said on their behalf.

In *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*,¹⁸ Richard reports speaking with a group of priests, in California, who ask him, how can people in my parish pray together if they speak and worship in different vernaculars, the priests framing this as their concern to honor multiculturalism. Now the middle aged Richard offers not a lament but a pithy recommendation, “have masses in Latin,” a suggestion as potentially efficacious as, it turns out, it was unthinkable to the priests who sought his counsel.

Fifteen years after the publication of *Days of Obligation* a new Pope decrees permission to use the older liturgy, to help, as he said, the modern worshipper experience the sacrality of the mass more powerfully than has lately been the case.¹⁹ I say that the decree affirms the nuanced over the merely new, making available again a form of shared experience that was once a resource for communal feeling in the lives of millions.

A Catholic friend, a faculty member at my university, has read Rodriguez in the way I recommend, most recently his *Harper's* essay “The God of the Desert,”²⁰ in which Richard reports his recent trip to Jerusalem, where he experienced the presence of God, not in the great temples, but in sites of absence, empty and silent places.

One day in March I see this friend on campus, a dark smudge on the forehead. I ask about it and learn it was made that morning at an Ash Wednesday service. The inspiration for attending the service and for wearing the smudge, even on the secular campus, was inspired, my friend says, by the *Harper's* essay and hearing Rodriguez speak about it. I don't presume to explain this action; here I follow the advice I give to Stephanie not to make facile interpretations. But this insertion—of a sacred symbolic act affixed to the body—into the verbal, secular, and computational world of the University, must, in some way, be an illustration of my third mode of action.

Rodriguez' third and latest book is *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*,²¹ in which, at every turn he illumines the notion of what in *Hunger* he referred to as "complexion." Here are dictionary senses 1 and 3 of the word "complexion":

1. *the natural color, texture, and appearance of the skin;*
3. *the combination of the four humors of cold, heat, moistness, and dryness in specific proportions thought to control the temperament and the constitution of the body;*

"Complexion" is a perfect resource for kaleidoscopic inspection. The word mingles *color, natural, appearance, and skin*, with *fluids, feelings, and disposition*, senses that complement the *subtlety, variations, meanings*, and, again, *color*, of "nuance."

In *Brown* the older Rodriguez returns full bore to "complexion," making the color in the title the ultimate nuance of conciliation—the color that issues from the *hot* embrace of black and white bodies, the "product of careless desire," he says, the color that cancels the antinomy of black and white. Carroll Arnold told his TA, Thomas Benson, that always on the first day teaching first-year students he wore a suit of "genial brown,"²² a way to dress for success, if the success you seek is a cheerful gesture across differences of age and position. Brown can express geniality, and induce congeniality, Richard might approve the notion, but for him brown is not only a term in the idiom of geniality, it is an instrument for modulating force and for bridging separation, a pivotal force in the long conversation, a force with the unbridling power of ambiguity, paradox, and nuance.

I thank Richard for tackling this, the most difficult of the contending exercises that I essay here, and with no easy answers that trivialize the power and the beauty of divergent longings not easily reconciled. He is concerned, as I am, with agonizing, costly choices, and I choose him as a guide to the making of those choices because the complexity of his approach matches the complexity of the task, from the beginning of the first book to the end of the last, from the youthful education in desire, through the middle argument, and to the last discovery, I would say ultimate tool, of invention, brown as nuance, nuance as brown.

I don't know whether Richard's lament, published in 1982, about the loss of the Latin mass, or his rejected recommendation to "have masses in Latin," published in 1992, ever reached the eyes and ears of the Vatican and shaped its decree in 2007. My evaluation of the efficacy of his

method, though, is not based on the effect his words have on others' actions so much as on the effect his method has on those who use it, and his own achievements are of particular evidentiary value to us.

For the record, prior to the Papal decree about the liturgy, Richard had decided to remain in the church, taking the mass in English. In the final page of *Brown* he tells us his love for a particular man is, on one hand, the fruit of the teachings of the church borne in him, and, on the other, something that the men in black and white robes condemn. Nonetheless he longs to stay with the people of faith.

It is just such a nuanced embrace of paradox—the decision to stay with the people of faith, living the tension that an instrument of the source of the love he feels condemns the earthly form that love takes for him—that allows me to record Richard himself as evidence of the efficacy of his method. But he provides his own statement of proof in his pronouncement on the last line of *Brown*, where he concludes with the words “of every hue and caste am I,” a statement that at once tells us he has completed the curriculum two cultures set for him some fifty years before: he has answered the questions of who he is, what he wants, and where he belongs. It is, we can note, a quintessentially American set of answers, in content (of every hue, of every caste), in provenance (the line is quoted from that most American of statements of self-assertion, Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself”), and in form (the valedictory utterance of an autodidact). And it is that this tension is, he says, something he has “come to depend on,” that I must refuse to place him somewhere on my axis of conventional/unconventional.

I ask his agent for a photograph. She gives me an email address and I send my request directly to him. Minutes later, “mail” pops up on the screen. “From: Richard Rodriguez.” Unexpectedly, this floods me with delight, which grows on finding a friendly reply. Until now it hadn’t sunk in to me that we were born in the same year. What if we had been in high school together, two boys, eager students of the art of language use, and I wonder, could we have been soul-mates? Or would our contact be shaped by the force of complexion in an American suburban high school, ca 1962? And could the white boy, whose best hope was Salieri-like mastery of the language arts, share the stage with a brown-skinned Mozart with a golden pen? Perhaps our final story offers something of use to such a boy or girl, woman or man.

4. We turn now to “A warrior turns to talk,” a turn I find in Homer’s epic poem, the *Iliad*, a story of the long war the Achaeans fought against the Trojans.²³ Within the larger war there is an agonizing personal conflict, from which was forged a separate peace, of sorts. The Achaeans’ fiercest warrior, Achilles, was given the prize-girl Briseis as a reward for valorous service. Although she came to him as a spoil of war, he came to love her, and when Agamemnon threatened to take her from him, to pay a debt he owed the gods, Achilles, enraged, refused to return to battle. The Achaeans needed Achilles, desperately, and so Agamemnon sent a series of emissaries to him, imploring him to rejoin his fellow warriors. These emissaries brought to bear all the persuasive resources that

the great warrior culture afforded them in their effort to win Achilles' assent, but Achilles resisted all their entreaties. This is a startling development in the poem, and in the history of Western literature, because for an Achaean warrior to resist such words and accompanying offers of recompense was theretofore unthinkable. Eventually Achilles returned to battle, but only once, and then only to avenge the killing by the Trojan Hector of his dear friend, Patroclus. Having fulfilled this limited and private mission, Achilles went off to his tent, taking with him the body of Hector, the Trojan man he had killed.

Hector's father, the old Trojan king, Priam, was deeply grieved by the loss of his favorite son Hector, and profoundly troubled in a way that we denizens of Century 21 can only partially grasp, for the enemy Achilles now has Hector's body, unwashed and never burned on the funeral pyre, and thus the mourning for Hector, and whatever relief it might provide for those who loved him, could not begin.

Priam sought the intercession of the gods, who implored Achilles to return Hector's corpse to the Trojans so that the proper funeral could be made. The transfer is arranged, and Priam comes to Achilles' tent to claim the corpse of his son. There the two aggrieved men, Priam and Achilles, once enemies, forge an intimate friendship that represents for Achilles a turn away from the warrior code and from the tribe of which he was so integral and celebrated a member. We can take from these events a simple lesson in how to reconstruct one's life when a culture that has been a source of strength crumbles before your eyes: Walk away, find solace in the friendship of another human being, even, perhaps especially, someone once an enemy of your tribe.

But befriending an enemy is not easy, not in life, and not, as it turns out, in the *Iliad*, where Homer makes Priam and Achilles do things that kings and warriors might not like to do—he makes them talk. As we will see and hear, this is not just happy talk. It is the talk of give and take, of interaction between parties who take each other, and what they say, very seriously.

Now Priam, Hector's grieving father, comes to Achilles' tent; Priam greets Achilles, kneels, takes Achilles' hands in his, kisses them, and asks to be taken to his son's body straightaway. Achilles stalls, saying first they must eat together, first they must talk, but Priam, eager to find the body, pleads, with what surely is one of the most heart-wrenching petitions in all of literature:

Priam I have endured what no one on earth has ever endured
before—put to my lips the hands of the man who
killed my son . . . give him back to me now, no more
delay . . .

At first Achilles responds gently to the old man, whose words call forth in him tender memories of his own father's love for him, and, as Homer writes, "overpowered by memory both men gave way to grief," gave way in tears and words, and it is here that I, a professor of human

communication, expect from Achilles a genial concession to the old man's plea, but no, Achilles answers:

Achilles Enough of endless tears . . . no more delay old man—
 don't tempt my wrath now . . .

words that, when I first read them, made this American boy gasp, and this professor of human communication wonder: Do we have here, for Achilles, a teachable moment? But there are two things, at my first reading of the poem, that I don't yet know.

One is that Achilles knows that Hector's body has been carelessly treated by his Achaean captors and if Priam saw it in such condition his sorrow and yearning would turn to rage that would unleash a new and powerful wave of violence between momentarily peaceful enemies.

And there is something more important for our purposes that we might not know. It exemplifies the general principle I announced toward the beginning of my remarks today, that all talk, all speaking, is speaking culturally, and what I don't know, upon first reading, is something that for centuries puzzled scholars of the text. Homer gives us the clues if we scour the text, but the clues have only recently been grasped and followed. It has to do with how Homer describes the seemingly bitter exchanges of words between Priam and Achilles. Homer calls them "winged words," and only recently in Homeric scholarship do we have a satisfying account of this way of speaking,²⁴ an account that shows us that by "winged words" Homer meant something, first, about the form of talk—winged words are the rapid exchange of intense, even harsh words, that have "a tautness, power, and movement that makes them whirl and beat, like the motion of a wing," as in the following reconstruction of an exchange between Priam and Achilles

Priam the man who killed my son . . .

Achilles enough of endless tears . . .

Priam give him back to me now . . .

Achilles no more old man don't tempt my wrath

Winged words, for the ancient Greeks who produced them, are speech acts that carry the situated meaning, "intimate directive," as with the speech between two sisters preparing an elaborate dinner in a tiny kitchen. Enemies would dare not speak them, except in a moment of utter recklessness. But between those whose feelings for each other are secure, winged words signify an intimate bond that permits such speech, such words reflecting, reinforcing, even celebrating, the depth and strength of affection for each other of those who exchange them. At the end of the *Iliad* such talk makes it possible for Priam and Achilles to create, and also to signify, a stunning dialogic achievement.

And when I refer to my fourth means of action, “talk,” I mean speech in which each interlocutor measures and contends with the meanings and intentions of the other, and, crucially, speech that is spoken with respect to the distinctive forms and meanings of particular ways of speaking in their particular cultural context.

The *Iliad* is powerfully *anti-conventional*, and I stand in awe of its creator. But I am not a literary critic, and so here appraise not the writer but the speakers—Priam and Achilles, almost as real for me as Katherine, Stephanie, and Richard. I praise Priam for showing us how to initiate conciliation between enemies: He engages mutual friends to help arrange a meeting, and, yes, there are preconditions. And then the mighty monarch goes to his enemy’s tent, greets him, bows before him, takes his hands, kisses them; then he petitions, he pleads, and through all of these actions teaches us by example. But the *Iliad* is Achilles’ poem and from him we learn its deepest truth. In 23 of the poem’s 24 books Achilles kills and complains, rages and refuses, suffers slights, mourns, preens, and pleads—poor Achilles! But in Book 24 Achilles is reborn. He doesn’t scour the text, and he is not a man disposed to nuance; but he listens to Priam’s spoken words and they arouse in him what Burke calls identification, as memories of Achilles’ own father infuse him with fellow-feeling for the man before him, a father who has lost a son. So Achilles speaks, fiercely at first, not with the ferocity of battle, but with a fierce determination to manage discourse so that he and his interlocutor might reach a desirable end, then speaks tenderly and, through it all submits, with dignity and fortitude, to the regimen of discourse, to the demands of talk.

Conclusion

The people who come to my door want help in coming to terms with cultures. They bring a sense of purpose, usually an inchoate one, and a means by which to satisfy the longings they express. When I talk with them, I want to have at hand a system that names such purposes and describes the means, the modes of personal action, through which those purposes might be fulfilled. I also want to be able to tell stories of people who had such purposes as theirs, who tried to serve those purposes discursively through some nameable means, and to be able to say something about the success or failure of their efforts.

In this talk I have presented the prototype of such a system of action and have illustrated some of its elements in the stories I have told, to wit:

- For a woman who wanted to walk down a path made treacherous by a dominant code, I observed that she was aided by listening to the guidance of those who had walked down such a path before;
- For a woman who wants to undermine the dominant code of her world, I observed her only limited success using an approach she had been taught to use, and recommended to

her that she start again by learning to read with a more open mind the communal text she seeks to alter;

- For a man who sought to reconcile within his life divergent desires for identity and community, I observed his success obtained through persistent, kaleidoscopic, and nuanced readings of memory and present experience, readings that strengthened his capacity and his commitment to live the tensions of his situation;
- And for a warrior who turned away from battle to befriend a former foe, I found a man who forged such a friendship in and through the disciplined use of culturally distinctive discourse.

Perhaps these lessons seem scant payment for nearly an hour of listening to (or reading) me. To use the language of finance, you might have hoped to hear about a new multinational hedge fund but got a talk on US Savings Bonds. Or to return to my dietary figure, perhaps you hoped for something more Vegan, South Beach, at least a new version of the Zone Diet, and I gave you the equivalent of Michael Pollan's second dictum, "not very much."

If so, I disagree with you about the potential value of the specific moves I have set before you, and point out in passing that in the past ten years US I Series Savings Bonds out-performed the Standard and Poor 500 US stock index, and the latest research on cookery demonstrates that radical caloric reduction lengthens life.

But as much as I recommend the specific moves I mention in my stories, at least in their particular context of use, what I advocate is not the meals but the menu, or rather the diet—that is, the system of modes, four modes, that one can consider when planning, and can deploy when implementing, a course of action designed to help you come to terms with cultures.

Perhaps my system can be improved. Professor Barbara Speicher and Dean Jacqueline Taylor of DePaul University, in separate conversations with me, after hearing an earlier version of the talk, said that the menu might only suffice when the parties are already disposed to break bread together. Professor John Gastil of the University of Washington thinks the menu needs more protein, for the red meat cases that might come my way. I am willing to impose scope conditions on my model and I have in mind elements to add to it that would beef it up by expanding its elements from four, to six, modes and from seven, to ten, words—but not yet.

Before I would change the model I would have to see some well-worked cases that compel modification to it. Here I make a formal call for such well-worked cases to be presented on a program to be scheduled for our annual meeting next year in Chicago, with papers providing a case that disconfirms, fails to disconfirm, expands, contracts, or otherwise suggests improvements in the model. In the meantime, I welcome self-nominations for such a panel, but also invite any reader to send me comments or suggestions. One way or another, send a story, a note, a recipe, perhaps a nuance.

Notes

1. I acknowledge with appreciation the suggestions for improvement by many friends and colleagues, and detailed commentaries by Lisa Coutu, John Gastil, Matt McGarrity, Susan Philipsen, and Carol Thomas, all of the University of Washington; Barbara Korner of The Pennsylvania State University; and Michaela Winchatz of DePaul University. I thank Thomas W. Benson of The Pennsylvania State University and Roderick P. Hart of the University of Texas-Austin for their valuable help with materials on Carroll Arnold; and Katherine Hendrix and Richard Rodriguez for readings of the sections on them. For nuanced listening across a range of circumstances during the preparation of the talk, I thank Marie Philipsen.

2. “Teamsterville” is a name I coined for the neighborhood and used in several publications. Most of what I have written about Teamsterville as a speech community can be found in Chapters Two, Three, and Six of my *Speaking Culturally: Explorations in Social Communication*. Albany: State University of New York Press at Albany, 1992.

3. An important influence on me at that time was Dell Hymes, “The Ethnography of Speaking,” in *Anthropology and Human Behavior*. Eds. T. Gladwin and W.C. Sturtevant. Washington, D.C.: Anthropological Society of Washington, 1962, 13–53; see also Gerry Philipsen, “Studying the Ethnography of Communication at Northwestern University, 1968–1972.” *A Social History of Research on Language and Social Interaction*. Ed. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 2009, 215–232 for a description of the resources and educational milieu available to me as a graduate student.

4. For comments and reports on the research of this group, see: Robert E. Smith III. “Hymes, Rorty, and the Social-Rhetorical Construction of Meaning,” *College English*, 54 (1992): 138–215; Stephen O. Murray. *Theory Groups and the Study of Language in North America: A Social History*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1993, esp. pp. 331, 484; Donal Carbaugh. “The Ethnographic Communication Theory of Philipsen and Associates.” *Watershed Research Traditions in Human Communication Theory*. Eds. Donald P. Cushman and Branislav Kovacic. Albany: State University of New York at Albany Press, 1995, 269–298; Gerry Philipsen, “Researching Culture in Contexts of Social Interaction: An Ethnographic Approach, a Network of Scholars, Illustrative Moves.” *Distinctive Qualities of Communication Research*. Eds. Donal Carbaugh and Patrice Buzzanell. New York: Routledge, forthcoming.

5. This approach is presented in the discussion of proposition four of speech codes theory in Gerry Philipsen. “A Theory of Speech Codes.” *Developing Theories of Communication*. Eds. Gerry Philipsen and Terrance L. Albrecht. Albany: State University of New York at Albany Press, 1997, 119–156. A new proposition in speech codes theory, presented as proposition two, as a crucial addition to the strategy for discovering codes, is presented in Gerry Philipsen, Lisa M. Coutu, and Patricia Covarrubias. “Speech Codes Theory: Restatement, Revisions, and Response to Criticisms.” *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication*. Ed. William B. Gudykunst. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005, 55–68.

6. For personal, scholarly, and institutional background on Carroll Arnold, I am indebted to Thomas W. Benson. "Carroll C. Arnold: Rhetorical Criticism at the Intersection of Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy." *Roots of Rhetorical Criticism*. Eds. Jim A. Kuypers and Andrew King. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001, 157–174; Thomas W. Benson, "The Cornell School of Rhetoric: Idiom and Institution." *Communication Quarterly* 51 (2003): 1–56; Lois J. Einhorn. "Carroll C. Arnold: Another Roar for the Lion." *Communication Quarterly* 34 (1986), 344–348; Roderick P. Hart, Ed. *Carroll Arnold as an Intellectual Force: Some Reflections*. Annandale, VA: National Communication Association, 1998.

7. Gerry Philipsen, *Speaking Culturally*.

8. The thesis that all speaking is speaking culturally is the central idea advanced and developed throughout *Speaking Culturally*. Arnold's thesis that the success of a rhetor is contingent upon the responses of others in the speech event is advanced and developed in Carroll C. Arnold, "Oral Rhetoric, Rhetoric, and Literature." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1(1968): 191–210.

9. Nassim Nicholas Taleb. *Fooled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets*. 2nd ed. New York: Random House, 2005.

10. Frederick L. Coutts. *The Call to Holiness*. London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1957. Although I keep at hand a treatise from a Christian tradition, I think works from other traditions, sacred or secular, could be equally pertinent to the purpose I have here, provided that the treatise emphasizes the importance of self-abasement or self-abnegation. As I suggest later in the talk, Homer's *Iliad* could serve well here, but perhaps the weaker souls among us require something more didactic, more direct, as instruction in these arts.

11. The edition I keep at hand is Lane Cooper's translation, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle: An Expanded Edition with Supplementary Examples for Students of Public Speaking*, which I purchased at the Portland State University bookstore in 1963, where it was on the course shelf as a required textbook for an undergraduate course in the Department of Speech. This edition was published in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey by Prentice-Hall in 1960.

12. Michael Pollan. "Unhappy Meals." *The New York Times*. January 28, 2007, is, I think, the first published use of the dicta; then came *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. New York: Penguin Press, 2008.

13. Katherine Grace Hendrix. "'Mama Told Me . . .': Exploring Childhood Lessons that Laid a Foundation for My 'Endarkened' Epistemology." *Qualitative Inquiry* 7 (2001): 559–577.

14. Hendrix, 562.

15. In a series of essays I have commented on some applications of various critical theories or their application, theories and applications of which I express criticisms of my own. These essays are my: "Some Initial Thoughts on the Perils of 'Critique' in the Ethnography of Communicative Practices." *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 23 (1989–1990); "Two Issues in the Evaluation of Ethnographic Studies of Communicative Practices." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 327–329; "The Coordinated Management of Meaning." *Watershed Research Traditions in Communication*. Eds. D. Cushman and B. Kovacic. Albany: State University of New York at Albany Press, 1995;

“Permission to Speak the Discourse of Difference: A Case Study.” *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 33 (2000): 213–234; with Lisa M. Coutu and Patricia Covarrubias. “Speech Codes Theory: Restatement, Revisions, and Response to Criticisms”; with James Leichter. “‘Tell’ in *After Mr. Sam*.” *Interacting and Organizing: Analyses of a Board Meeting*. Ed. Francis Cooren. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2006, 205–223.

16. Gerry Philipsen. “Permission to speak the discourse of difference: A case study.”

17. Richard Rodriguez. *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. Boston: David R. Godine, 1982.

18. Richard Rodriguez. 1992. *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*. New York: Viking, 1992.

19. Raymond Arroyo. “The Language of Tradition.” *The Wall Street Journal*. July 13, 2007.

20. Richard Rodriguez. “The God of the Desert.” *Harper’s Magazine*. January 2008: 35–46.

21. Richard Rodriguez. *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*. New York: Viking, 2002.

22. Tom Benson. “Remembering Carroll Arnold.” Annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association of Pennsylvania, State College, PA, September 20, 1997.

23. I use the translation by Robert Fagles. Homer. *The Iliad*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990. I also use as commentary James Boyd White. 1981. “Homer’s Argument with Culture.” *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1981): 707–725. White emphasizes Homer’s “argument with” culture in his treatment of Achilles in the *Iliad*. Homer is more charitable to culture as resource with which humans can endow their lives with meaning in the *Odyssey*, as can be seen in Roger Scruton, “The Significance of a Common Culture” *Philosophy* 54 (1981): 51–70. Culture gets a pretty good endorsement as well in Wendell Berry’s treatment of the *Odyssey* in his *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977.

24. Richard P. Martin. *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

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