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“From sweet potatoes to God Almighty”

Roy Rappaport on being a hedgehog

ABSTRACT

Recognized as a principal figure in ecological anthropology, Roy Rappaport is best known for his study *Pigs for the Ancestors* (1968). His work in the anthropology of religion has received less attention. Least acknowledged is Rappaport's role in defining an “engaged” anthropology. Drawn from interviews Tom Fricke conducted with Rappaport in the year before his death in October 1997, this article gives insight into these three facets of his professional life. Beginning with an account of Rappaport's fieldwork with the Tsembaga Maring, the discussion takes up his core themes, ideas that evolved out of his early field experience and with which he was engaged as he worked to finish his final book, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (1999). [Roy Rappaport, interview, biography, Maring fieldwork, ecological anthropology, anthropology of religion, engaged anthropology]

I've tried for unification with everything from weighing sweet potatoes to God Almighty . . . that's what I'm interested in.

—Roy A. Rappaport, conversation of December 1996

Ten years ago, Roy Abraham “Skip” Rappaport died at home in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 32 years after he joined the University of Michigan's Department of Anthropology at the age of 39.¹ Rappaport is widely recognized as a principal figure in the field of ecological anthropology. Less acknowledged are his contributions to the anthropology of religion and to the development of a publicly active, or “engaged,” anthropology (Rappaport 1994). This article draws on transcribed conversations between Rappaport and his close colleague at Michigan, Tom Fricke, during the year before Rappaport's death in October 1997.² As a candid snapshot of anthropological praxis, a narrative of one of the discipline's key figures, and an informal intellectual biography, it provides unique insight into the three facets of Rappaport's anthropology mentioned above.

In this article, we touch on the close relationship between personal history, motivation, and the accidents of fieldwork and how they bear on the construction of theory and on a researcher's overall orientation to the meaning and purpose of scholarship. In doing so, this article is as much about the metastory, the integrating and unifying narrative of self (MacIntyre 1984), that Rappaport made of his life and work as it is about the particular stories that he told. As in Richard Handler's conversations with David Murray Schneider in *Schneider on Schneider* (Schneider and Handler 1995), Fricke's conversations with Rappaport show how personal and professional experiences, together with historical context, can lead a scholar to a certain approach to ethnographic work, in particular, and scholarly work, in general.

We divide the conversation presented here into three parts that roughly correspond to the three aspects of Rappaport's anthropological work. The

first section deals with his formative 1960s fieldwork among the Tsembaga Maring in Papua New Guinea, his contributions to ecological anthropology, and his emerging interest in religion. The second section addresses his work in the anthropology of religion and ideas that evolved from his initial fieldwork experience to his work on his last book. The final section discusses Rappaport's commitment to a holistic, engaged anthropology as an essential approach to diagnosing and attempting to solve the complex problems faced by humanity.

The article sheds light on aspects of Rappaport's life and work in ways that are not apparent in his formal writing. For instance, although Rappaport's first book, *Pigs for the Ancestors* (1968), a detailed ethnography of the Tsembaga Maring, is the principal source to which nearly all his later work returned, it offers scant insight into the ethnographer himself. Coming at the end of Rappaport's life, the dialog with Fricke was one in which Rappaport often self-consciously pondered the long-term impact of his work. He offered intensely personal, at times painful, reflections on what he both did and did not do in his life.³

At an especially important point in Brian Hoey's graduate education—during the second and third years—he transcribed 21 taped conversations between Rappaport and Fricke that took place from May 1996 to February 1997. Although transcript material presented here is drawn from several conversations, the core originates in a single one from early December 1996. Hoey found that thoughts begun in one exchange were often finished in another. With this in mind, he selected verbatim material from several thematically connected conversations to enrich and complete points. We gathered these selections and put them together in a form that maintains the flow and feeling of the central narrative. Hoey then wrote an introduction, commentaries to the three sections, and closing remarks. Similar to Handler's treatment of his interviews of Schneider, we have removed broken sentences, redundancies, and artifacts of speaking such as pauses, stutters, and false starts. We have also attempted to preserve a sense of the spontaneity in the original conversations. Rappaport did not ask to see the transcripts and showed little concern for the direction of the conversations, either individually or collectively. Although Fricke framed many of the conversations with questions about Rappaport's life and career, the encounters were casual ones between well-acquainted colleagues. Thus, unlike an interview that follows a predetermined agenda, topics typically emerged out of the particular mood set by events in the department, the circumstances of Rappaport's declining health, and his sometimes self-consuming struggle to finish his final book, which was posthumously published.

While team teaching his last course at Michigan with Fricke in winter term of 1996, before his planned retirement, Rappaport was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. During late spring of that year, Fricke began stopping by Rappa-

port's home in the wooded hills west of Ann Arbor to check on his friend. At some point, they began to wade through Rappaport's collection of writings and unpublished manuscripts with an eye to possibly publishing an edited collection. One day when Fricke had been taping interviews for his own research, he arrived at Rappaport's home still carrying a tape recorder and cassette in his pack. Spotting the recorder, he pulled it out and unceremoniously turned it on. Fricke's visits to Rappaport continued with some regularity. He taped many, although not all, of their conversations.⁴

Rappaport's account of his life as an anthropologist begins with his days as proprietor of Avaloch, a country inn near the popular Tanglewood Music Center. Although generally successful, by 1955 he saw how increasingly inexpensive jet fares and the strength of the U.S. dollar were making international travel more attractive than the road trips that brought city guests to him in the rural Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. For a time, Rappaport considered selling Avaloch and opening a resort in Mexico to take advantage of jet-setting trends. During a trip there to look at potential properties, he began reading Eric Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* (1941), in which Fromm describes social isolation in modern, industrial societies and the conditions under which an unconscious search for unity with others can lead people to support fascist ideas. Speaking with Fricke in early June 1996, Rappaport described how, while reading Fromm, "I decided this was it; this was the moment to get out [of business]. I decided that I wanted to do something that would bear upon the problems of the world."

Rappaport explained that he felt increasingly alienated from "contemporary American Eisenhower society," which he found "bland, hypocritical, and racist." Looking to graduate studies in the social sciences as a way out of the business world, Rappaport first considered sociology, given his positive experience of a sociology course at Cornell University while studying hotel management there in 1949. A series of conversations on his return from Mexico, however, led Rappaport to anthropology. The conversations began with his cousin, Bob Levy, who was then a practicing psychiatrist—although he would himself later become an anthropologist. Conversations with Levy's acquaintances, including Pacific-island ethnologist and historian Douglas Oliver, and with guests at his inn, such as then graduate student Kai Erickson (who became a sociologist at Yale University), convinced Rappaport that he was better suited for anthropology. On their advice, Rappaport read Ralph Linton's *The Study of Man* (1936) and *The Science of Man in the World Crisis* (1945), in which Linton laments what he saw as increasing fragmentation in scientific inquiry, as well as works by Clyde Kluckhohn, a student of Linton's. Finding that he "had thoughts just like these," Rappaport was reassured by the readings that he was on the right path. Eventually, a conversation at Columbia University with Conrad Arensberg, coauthor of *Culture and Community* (1965), led Rappaport

to apply to Columbia's School of General Studies, which accepted him although he had no background in anthropology. He earned his Ph.D. degree in anthropology at Columbia in 1966 after working with such prominent figures as Morton Fried, Marvin Harris, Margaret Mead, and Eric Wolf. His first course in anthropology was a two-semester, four-field introduction with Fried that began in January 1959. He sold his inn business in March of that year.

As a student in 1960, Rappaport conducted his first empirical research in the Society Islands with Kenneth Emory, an ethnologist at Hawai'i's Bishop Museum, and Roger Green, a Harvard archaeologist (Green et al. 1967). This mostly archaeological work did not satisfy him, however. He once joked with Fricke about how unfortunate it was that working with the gritty, abrasive materials of middens made his hands swell up, precluding further archaeological study. Although the trip was ultimately unsatisfying, this fieldwork allowed Rappaport to begin conceptualizing a framework for relating and analyzing a human population, social and cultural structure, and the physical environment within a single study. While on the boat that carried him across the Pacific, Rappaport read Marshall Sahlins's *Social Stratification in Polynesia* (1958).⁵ Sahlins's book was an early source of Rappaport's interest in ecological science, which he developed further while reading zoologist and ecologist Eugene Odum's *Fundamentals of Ecology* (1953). Rappaport's interests became more broadly human ecological after he returned from Polynesia and began close work with Andrew Peter Vayda (1960), who joined Columbia's faculty in 1960. Rappaport ultimately conducted his dissertation fieldwork under the umbrella of Vayda's larger project on the human ecology of Papua New Guinea's highlands.

Fresh from the field, Rappaport presented a paper at the 1964 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association that introduced some of his career-defining themes, such as the place of religion and ritual in ordering human societies and structuring their relationship with the natural world, and the role of religious ritual in human evolution.⁶ The ideas in the paper were greatly expanded in *Pigs for the Ancestors*, Rappaport's highly influential book based on his dissertation. "Pigs," as he conversationally referred to it, helped define ecological anthropology and established Rappaport's reputation. First published in 1968, *Pigs* became a landmark ethnography of empirical methodology, employing systems theory to demonstrate the role of ritual practice in the management of resources. Rappaport released a second edition of *Pigs for the Ancestors* in 1984, responding to criticism with extensive comments that nearly doubled the size of the first edition. In his 1984 preface, considering the criticism that *Pigs* had received in the 15 years since its first publication, Rappaport wrote that he had been "struck by the wastefulness of our discipline . . . [we] are ever moving on to new approaches without having assimilated the lessons of older ones" (1984:xv). Reflecting this basic orientation, early

in the classes he taught, Rappaport informed his students that they had a vital role to play in academic life as "synthesizers." Accordingly, he encouraged them to "keep their minds open" and carefully explore areas of compatibility in the approaches of their professors, who were often fiercely loyal to different theoretical and methodological persuasions.

In one of his conversations with Fricke, Rappaport explained that his interest in cultivating a particular respect for earlier approaches and pioneering scholars came from his guilt at having participated in what he felt was an unfortunate disciplinary tendency to "kill the fathers." He once coauthored a publication highly critical of Julian Steward's insistence on separating a cultural ecology from biological ecology (Vayda and Rappaport 1968). Of this critique, Rappaport would later hold a graphic image of himself "standing on [Steward's] shoulders and pissing on his head." Rappaport felt that scholars throughout the ages have dealt with certain fundamental questions or problems that will likely never be solved to anybody's satisfaction. Given this, he believed that what scholars need to do is "attempt to deal with them in terms of the particular ways these problems are manifested in our age."

In the final year of Rappaport's life, Hoey, too, had the opportunity to spend time talking with him in his relaxing study. While Hoey helped sort out and verify references, Rappaport gave him a look into the manuscript he called "Holiness and Humanity." This became his final work, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Mankind* (1999), which summarizes the evolution of Rappaport's thinking on themes that were his intellectual preoccupation for some 30 years. Rappaport first conceived of the book in 1970 and was given a publication contract on the basis of five chapters in the mid-1970s by Cambridge University Press in New York. Although he submitted 12 chapters in 1981, he subsequently found too many faults with them and opted not to publish the work. In conversation, Rappaport recalled that this early manuscript was missing Charles Sanders Peirce's (1960) semiotics, something he found essential for talking about symbol and the two fundamental problems of humanity as set out by theologian Martin Buber (1952): lie and alternative. Peirce's understanding of symbol did make it into Rappaport's earlier published works, however, including "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual" (1974) and "Liturgies and Lies" (1976b), written in light of sabbatical experience at Cambridge University.

In his final book, the product of an admitted obsession, Rappaport had a goal of sweeping synthesis in the tradition of grand theory. He felt that trends in the field of anthropology had dictated severely limiting the scope of analysis to discrete bits of human experience. It was Rappaport's predilection, however, to consistently tackle a subject as utterly unwieldy as the "human condition." He once joked with Fricke that, in completing *Ritual and Religion*, he was not simply producing "some little ethnography," like *Pigs*, but, rather, was now "playing for big stakes."

Rappaport's big-stakes vision is a union between religious ideas and what philosopher Stephen Toulmin (1982) calls a "postmodern science." This is part and parcel of his attempt to reconcile the laws of nature with meaning, that is, cultural conceptions of those laws. In his reconciliation, ultimate sacred postulates stand to social systems in the same way that conservation laws stand to the physical processes on which the world is based. Here, he would say, the notion "The Lord our God, the Lord is one" stands to Jewish society in the same way that the first and second laws of thermodynamics stand to physics.

In later published work (Rappaport 1995, 1996, 1999), teaching, and public lecturing, Rappaport frequently cited Toulmin's (1990) critique that modern science and philosophy dwell too comfortably in the abstract and theoretical while ignoring tough practical issues. Toulmin's postmodern science calls for more humanistic approaches recovered from "premodern" ideas that had been relegated by Cartesian science to the sidelines. In a conversation with Fricke in August 1996, Rappaport explained that this approach to science entails returning "the scientist, the observer, to the system from which Cartesian dualism exiled him" and in which she or he cannot claim the distance required by an assertion of value neutrality. This was consistent with his strong belief that any attempt to be dispassionate and objective could "make a lot of trouble when you are part of the system yourself."

In this same conversation, Fricke observed that the way Rappaport approached problems was remarkably similar to the logical structure that he observed in the hierarchical laying out of ultimate sacred postulates on down to rules of everyday life. In response, Rappaport spoke of how, after certain initiation rituals, young male Australian Aborigines discover that the roaring sounds they had taken to be made by some kind of otherworldly monster were, in fact, made by men swinging a bullroarer. Although Western expectation is that this experience might be one of disillusionment for the boys, it is, instead, a kind of epiphany: The boys learn that "we are God" and that, if human beings do not keep doing certain rituals, the world is going to "fall apart." Rappaport often used this story to speak to how apparent fabrication can convey larger truth. He would then segue into explaining how, as human beings, we have choices concerning what we are going to make up about the nature of the world as well as our own nature. Thus, we can choose to construct a notion of ourselves as maximizers or one in which we have an ever-growing responsibility for maintenance of the world and fulfillment of its potential.

In his emphasis on the human condition, Rappaport looked to "the big things" in an effort to come to what he thought of as "some kind of rightness" for humanity. He was fond of saying that he was not so interested in abstract conceptions of culture, for example, but in "deeper things" that entail thinking about what theoretical and methodological

tools would enable people to do something right for the future of the world. For Rappaport, the question came down to "what is good to think," that is, what is the practical outcome, the consequences for the world, of thinking or seeing something in accordance with different models or interpretations. He felt his was partly an aesthetic argument in which certain ways of thinking, such as a hard-nosed realism, entailed "ugliness" and in which the choice of how to think or see the world was ultimately a moral question.

In illustration of this orienting concern, Rappaport was fond of using a notion he adopted from Isaiah Berlin. Borrowing from the Greek lyric poet Archilochus, Berlin employs a metaphor in *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (1953) meant to call attention to the tension between monist and pluralist visions of the world. He uses this metaphor to characterize different influential writers and thinkers. The "hedgehog" is a thinker with one big, systemizing idea. This idea becomes a unifying principle that directs his or her work and life. In Berlin's vision, Fyodor Dostoevsky is a hedgehog. Contrastingly, the "fox" is a thinker who is in it for the details, traveling many roads, focusing on particularity, with comparatively little concern for the big picture. Leo Tolstoy, thus, becomes a classic fox. For Rappaport, who would qualify as an überhedgehog in Berlin's scheme, anthropology should be defined as no less than the study of the totality of the human condition. Speaking of anything less, of a plurality of human conditions, bounds ethical concern, in his worldview. Not surprisingly, Rappaport tended to like hedgehogs and could be rather disdainful of many foxes. He held in particular contempt those who would divide and compartmentalize anthropology. In Rappaport's approach to research, writing, and teaching in anthropology, everything followed from developing the fundamentals—the biological, cultural, epistemological, and historical–archaeological—of what it was to be human.⁷

Conversation

"Here I was doing all of this neofunctional stuff"

As suggested earlier, Rappaport's decision to conduct dissertation fieldwork in Papua New Guinea was largely because Vayda, his professor at Columbia, considered the area an ideal laboratory for studies in human ecology.⁸ Rappaport's *Pigs for the Ancestors* is based on over 14 months of fieldwork conducted from 1962 to 1963 in the Bismarck Range of Papua New Guinea's Western Highlands among the Tsembaga of the Simbai River valley. The community of some 200 individuals in which he worked was one of 20 local communities within the Maring-speaking linguistic group occupying both the Simbai and Jimi River valleys. By all accounts, the Tsembaga first came into direct contact with Europeans when government patrols crossed their territory in the mid-1950s. By the early 1960s, an Anglican mission had been



Figure 1. Rappaport at home in his garden, Ann Arbor, Michigan, summer 1996. Photo by T. Fricke.

established in the Simbai Valley, but there had been no missionary work among the Tsembaga. Importantly, Rappaport made the claim that he could discern "no apparent European elements" (1968:9) in Tsembaga religious beliefs or practice.

Rappaport considered the Tsembaga "a population in the ecological sense, that is, as one of the components of a system of trophic exchanges taking place within a bounded area" (1967:18) such that their territory and the biotic community within it could be seen as an ecosystem. He recognized that the introduction of steel tools and new crops such as maize through networks of exchange, together with the national government's effort to suppress warfare in the region, had produced important changes. Nevertheless, he insisted that the impact of these changes was limited and

that they had not fundamentally altered the Tsembaga way of life. Rappaport's emphasis on equilibrium and stability, his rejection of the possible consequences of individual power and political economy, and his assumption that the Maring community functioned ecologically as a nearly closed system have been widely criticized (Anderson 1973; Ellen 1982; Foin and Davis 1987; Moran 1990; Netting 1986; Orlove 1980; Petersen 1980; Vayda 1986; Watson 1969).

Rappaport's early writings focused on what he asserted are the ways that Tsembaga religious rituals regulate social and ecological relationships in a complex system. In the following description of his fieldwork, he refers to specific elements in the ritual cycle that he held were no more or less than parts of the overall complex of behaviors "employed

by an aggregate of organisms in adjusting to its environment" (Rappaport 1967:18). Unlike Steward (1955), who attempted to explain how specific cultural forms emerged through adaptation to particular environmental conditions, Rappaport endeavored to show the function of different cultural forms, that is, their adaptive value, in maintaining an existing relationship with a particular environment. In his conversation with Fricke, one sees how, despite his original goal of challenging Steward by showing that it was possible to conduct a wholly ecological study of a human population, Rappaport was led to an engagement with the sacred.

The Tsembaga were swidden agriculturalists for whom pig husbandry was an essential component of agricultural and ritual cycles. Rappaport found that the ritual cycle helped the Maring, a highly egalitarian society without hereditary or elected chiefs or big men, maintain certain biotic communities within their territory and redistribute land, people, and local pig surpluses while limiting the overall frequency of fighting. He identified *rumbim* (a shrub species of the genus *Cordyline*) as an essential plant used ritually to mark the beginning and end of periodic warfare. The victorious Maring group would plant *rumbim* on a designated fighting ground at the end of hostilities and subsequently initiate a *kaiko* (pig festival) at which all adult pigs were slaughtered, cooked, and dedicated to ancestors, after which the meat was distributed to allied groups as compensation for their support. The *rumbim* remained until the next *kaiko* was "triggered," as the relationship between pigs and people changed from mutualism to competition for limited resources.

In this section, one sees how Rappaport's earliest attempts to understand the complex interrelationships of the ritual cycle and its varied roles in Maring society gradually developed into an interest in religious ritual for its own sake, but only after he returned from the field. One can begin to see how Rappaport's focus grew from a basic interest in how self-regulation might work in the relationship between a given human population and its environment to a broad interest in meaning. This instructive discussion of formative ethnographic fieldwork offers a revealing glimpse into important biographical influences. As in all of his work on the theory of ritual as a basic mechanism of human adaptation, Rappaport grounds the theoretical in the practical in two contexts. The first of these is the Maring case. The second is his scholarly understanding of Jewish history and religion as well as his own connection to this prophetic and mystical heritage.

Tom Fricke: I want to ask you about the growth of your interest in religion. We spoke about some of that coming from your experience with the Maring. I'd like you to elaborate on that.

Roy Rappaport: Right. I became interested in religion amongst the Maring. I mean, there I was initially interested in ecological relations, forced to pay attention to

their rituals because their rituals had to do with their ecological and political relations. Though, I really discovered my interest in the rituals themselves when I came back. That whole interest wasn't so manifest while I was still in the field. I came back, started to think about what I had been doing, was starting to write about it, and at that point I found myself getting more and more deeply interested. I was thanking God that I had paid as much attention to them as I had, because in the field I was saying, "Oh shit, they're having another ritual." So, I was thanking God I had paid as much attention as I had and rueing the fact that I hadn't paid more attention! I just found myself more interested, after I finished off *Pigs for the Ancestors*, in the ritual aspects themselves than in their functions.

Interest is not the word, though: There was some sort of deep connection, which I quickly decided, rightly or wrongly, was a function of my own spiritual deprivation from a religious training that had deprived me of meaningful religious or spiritual experience. And so this concern grew in me. Many, many years after the fact, I realized when it was that I had my first anthropological insight. It was a discussion I had at the age of about 14 with my cousin Bob [Levy] and my mother's younger brother. I remember where we were. I think it was a Friday evening. It came to me that the problem with Reformed Judaism is that in the process of reforming Judaism, they had not understood the importance of ritual. So it was more important for these people who were around—my folks, my uncles, my aunts, whoever was there—to have a good time on Friday night than it was to go to Sabbath services. That doesn't work. The religion had shortchanged, and simply not understood, ritual. And that was my first anthropological insight, one that I recalled when I was wondering why I was so taken by the religious aspects of the Maring and then, more generally, questions about religion. I think what further pushed me along was that some years later, I decided to teach a course in the anthropology of religion here at Michigan in 1970. I had to teach it myself. I found it difficult working a new course in a field in which I had more feeling for than knowledge of.

TF: I am especially interested in the relationship between the anthropologist and his or her fieldwork. We're probably rare in the social sciences in having this kind of transformative experience made possible through our key method.

RR: Well, our key method is so much more personal than anybody else's.

TF: Why don't we ease up to that transition to interests in ritual for its own sake. This connects us to an earlier conversation where we talked about the first few months of your fieldwork when you were single-mindedly trying to get nutritional data in gardens, input-output kinds of things.

RR: Well, for a good deal of that first trip of fairly hysterical fieldwork you just see sort of vast confusion in the sense of “My God, what am I doing here?” “Am I getting anything?” and “What does all of this mean?” I mean, what sort of enterprise is this where you’re going out and you’re trying to figure out what’s going on amongst 200 and some odd people. Even when they are coordinating their activities around a periodic ritual, what would it be like at any other time? A total buzzing confusion.

I had certain predilections about what I wanted to do. I wanted to get all of this input–output stuff and I tried to do it in several different kinds of ways. One way sort of worked: I got my house built in a location that was maybe 25, 30 feet from somebody’s house on one side and three women’s houses right above me maybe 35, 40 feet away on the other. So, there I was right in the middle of the Tomegai. In effect, it was structurally like a subclan of the Tsembaga clan. They claimed separate ancestry and all of that. So there I was. I made arrangements with the women from surrounding houses so that when they came back at night they’d yell out to me to come and bring the scales. I’d come down with the scales and they would have dropped everything and it was sort of a little happy hour. I mean, I’d come there and I would weigh the stuff by variety—not simply species by species, not simply sweet potatoes. So, I would weigh it all and we’d be chatting while I did this, you know? I would have a nice social time and I’d pick up some other gossip while this was happening and that worked for getting garden analysis.

I did this for ten and a half months. At any rate, I had almost a year of this thing and I had gardens from several years because each one had gardens that were this year’s, last year’s, and in some instances even the year before that. What they’d get out of the very old gardens were bananas and some sugar cane. It really worked out very well. From those measurements, I got garden yield data and I had all of those gardens measured so I knew how big those gardens were and how much was coming out of them. I knew how frequently they were being harvested and I knew how much food was coming into each household. I could see how frequently they’d go to each garden. Each woman had several gardens going—frequently with different partners—she’d be doing most of them with her husband but there was also maybe her single brother and her widowed father and, you know, all kinds of stuff like this. So, the gardening pairs, always a man and a woman, were overlapping. You could keep track of that because you knew for each garden who the man was and who the woman was on that garden. And then you knew how much food was coming into the household. So you had that as well as the gardening yields. The problem then was how to get that to individual intake, okay? Particularly when nobody is doing portions. They’re sitting around and everybody is . . . [gestures reaching inward]. So there’s no way. I finally used some formulas that I recognized were kinda

cockamamy. I mean, I was using them quite arbitrarily because I didn’t have anything else to go on. World Health Organization formulas for how much an adult male eats, how much an adult female eats, and how much an adolescent boy, and an adolescent girl, and so on. And I used the ratios in those and I said, “Okay, this is what came home. So we’ll divide it up amongst people this way.” Now, it turned out that Georgeda Buchbinder [1973; Buchbinder and Clarke 1971] in Tuguma [another Maring group] some years later did nutritional work. She had a Master’s in nutrition as well as Ph.D. in anthropology. She certainly did a better job than I did. She was sufficiently assertive that she got some things where she was sort of sticking a scale in between their hands and their mouths for a few days. It came out that I wasn’t that far off. It came out, you know, within a few percent. In fact, I don’t trust Georgeda’s figures any more than mine but they at least corroborated them.

Now, I mention this because I had this single-minded notion about doing this kind of stuff. I knew the objection would be that I was doing this all with people from one clan. I did get the most asinine objections from some nutritionists, particularly Margaret MacArthur [1974]. I started out by making arrangements on the basis of randomness with a number of women who had plots in various places. My other method was going to be to mark out thousand-square-foot plots in various gardens. I did that with my understanding that they were not going to harvest from those thousand-acre plots unless I was there with them. But (a) they didn’t understand and (b) that’s not the way people harvest, you know? They don’t do it that way [laughing]. The whole thing was nuts. There was no way that I could know whether they harvested or not. And I would then be at their mercy if they said, “I’m going to go down and harvest such and such a plot” and I had something else to do. So, I just abandoned that. I gave that up.

But the notion then of having a random sample—my response to that was: Look, this is better than any nutritionist ever got. These are the best data on stuff brought into the household than any nutritionist ever got. And my results, even my individual consumption results, make much more sense than those of any nutritionist who has worked in New Guinea—some of whom had people with diets of under a thousand calories a day! All they’d be doing would be to stretch out sort of trying to keep alive at 900 calories a day for an adult male. Those figures appeared in the literature without anybody yelling about them. That’s all in the second edition of *Pigs* [1984]. I had an appendix on those critiques.⁹ Okay, so that was what I was doing at first, single-mindedly. That was what I was there to do—to treat them like a population of animals.

TF: Well, you’re more or less an ecologist here. At best, behavioral, material information.

RR: That's right. I wanted to follow energy flows. The original way that I wanted to do ethnography was in terms of energy flows. As a matter of fact, there's a lot of it I never published and I should. I mean, one of the things that I should do is publish all of my garden information. I should do it in the *New Guinea Journal of Agriculture* or something like that because the original dissertation didn't get to the arguments that are in *Pigs for the Ancestors* until 600–700 pages into the thing.¹⁰

I still have this long description of Maring horticulture as it was practiced in the early 1960s, at the time of contact. If I have time, I will put that into decent enough shape to send off to the Papua New Guinea Department of Agriculture to do what they want to do with it. Its theoretical value is zilch. What it is useful for is an account of how a particular people did swidden agriculture at a particular time. Somebody's going to be interested in that, 100 years from now or 500 years from now. We have some accounts, but each account is somewhat different. It could be worth doing. So, I think—I mean, if I live—I'd like to get that done. That would be part of paying my debt off to the Maring.

I have a feeling of duty to Maring. If I possibly could, I would go back for a month. I've got lots and lots of notes and things from the last time but also a feeling of incompleteness. I want to bring it to closure. I also want to go through and line up a bunch of questions that I can get answers to quickly. So, you know, that's a kind of duty. It's not one that I think is deeply important theoretically or whatever, but I have the feeling that I owe it to them—not that they much care [laughs].¹¹

In the dissertation, at any rate, I started out with the first chapter as a description of the environment. Then a chapter on production in the ecological sense, of what was being produced, what was coming up on the land. Then there was one on extraction, which was all of the cultivation and harvesting.

TF: This is a Stewardian paradigm, beginning with the environment and through production to culture.

RR: Yeah, something like that . . . production, extraction, distribution, and consumption. Then after having done all of this background stuff, I was getting into what was finally in *Pigs*, the whole business of regulation and so on. I will never forget walking into Mort Fried's office, he was on my committee, and I had chapters about one through six, which were all these things each in a separate binding. I walked in, I left them on his desk, we chatted and he congratulated me on getting on with it, and so on. Then as I was leaving, he said, "Oh, you left some of the copies here." And I said, "No, Mort, those are all for you," and he blanched [laughs]. I left them off for Marvin Harris and so on. Harris told me, "I'm not going to read it." Everybody said they weren't going to read it, go home and bring back a 300-page dissertation.

I was under the impression in those days that a dissertation was a place to enshrine data [laughs]. I was going to generate the whole thing right out of the dirt, you know? It was going to be taro on up. Who was going to read it through? I mean it's boring to read how far apart they plant yams. I mean that's not fascinating reading, except to a few aficionados. Hal Conklin would have liked that.¹²

I brought them back a 500-page dissertation three months later. I took all of that stuff from all of those chapters and reduced it to about 20 pages, mostly tables and appendixes. That was wonderful. I didn't waste any time because I had to go through all of that tabulating. It was very comfortable. It's very easy to go out and do garden stuff and weigh this stuff. I mean, that's real dumb work and if you don't want to talk to people or you're scared to talk to people or can't figure out what the fuck is going on, at least you go out and measure a garden, you know? So I always found that a rather relaxing thing to be doing. So that fit in nicely as a foil to everything else. But then I discovered that what I was doing, out of ethnographic duty, was keeping track of what people were doing and as near as I could figure it out, how they were trading. I was spending a lot of time on who was trading what with whom and for what and watching what they were doing with the ritual cycle. You keep your daily diary and are getting more and more confused by that. But suddenly I had some notions, vague and unclear, about the relationship of the ritual cycle to the gardening and all of that stuff.

TF: Was there any kind of "Aha!" reaction? Was there a click or was it a dawning kind of awareness?

RR: Well, a couple of things that happened were important. I would have to reconstruct quite how it was, but one day I was having a conversation with an informant in front of me, a good friend whose picture is on the cover of *Pigs*. He's standing there with his foot on a pig. The pig was white. It was a pig with a lot of European blood, the biggest pig in the place. It weighed about 300 pounds. This was an early "aha" that got me onto what the ritual cycle was about. I said, "Why is that you guys are running a kaiko when the Kauwasi [another Maring group] come over here? They are sort of contemptuous of you because you're having a kaiko where people have three pigs, four pigs, and those guys over there have six, seven pigs." And he says because they don't have taro. Then he said, in effect, "Pigs are something that eats taro" and as a matter of fact, when they sacrificed the pigs they would say to the ancestor—for whoever they were doing it—"Take this pig. I'm giving you this good taro." This is what they would say. It's like "Give us this day our daily bread." Taro is the preferred food. Pigs go with sweet potatoes and the land is degraded with sweet potatoes. You get pigs, but what you really want—what is proper food—is taro. So at any rate that was something. I was confused about the rumbim. I had it backwards.

Then one day in casual conversation about six months after being there, it became clear to me that you could not fight when the rumbim was in the ground. When you took out the rumbim, you could fight. While the rumbim was in the ground, you could not fight. I had it backwards. It was noticing when they were pulling up the rumbim and so on that the whole thing began to make sense.

TF: How many actual pulling up of the rumbim did you witness?

RR: I witnessed, in a manner of speaking, two. I witnessed one in Tsembaga and another elsewhere just before I left. That was next door. Now, the one in Tsembaga took place three days after I got there. When I say I witnessed it, I kind of witnessed it. It was being uprooted in an enclosure. I did not push myself into that enclosure. I was not going to be that aggressively nosy at that point when it was quite clear to me that a lot of people wished that I'd drop dead or go someplace else. So I figured, okay, I'll try to find out about this later. But I saw them storming out of the enclosure carrying the rumbim. As a matter of fact, in the first printing of *Pigs* on the front cover there are people beating drums and so on. That was at this event. I could see then what they did with the rumbim but I did not see them pull it out of the ground. I did not see this happen at either time. So I was witness, but at some distance. I was there at the event and with the Tsembaga, there were three rumbim pulled up—there were three subterritories. When it was done, they would pull up the rumbim and carry it to the corner of their territory and say some incantations and so on—sorcery and the enemy—and then they plant these things at the borders along the stakes. So, at any rate, that's what happened and that's what I saw. I did not see them actually pull them out of the ground. Some anthropologists are pushier than others. I was as pushy as I could be. I mean, I have my limits.

TF: And on day three . . .

RR: Yeah [laughing]. You walk into the thing and this is what's happening right off the bat. It was wild.

TF: So you dutifully wrote down what you saw and said, “Oh great, a ritual is going on and I have no idea what it is.” You'd asked questions but at some point you made a connection.

RR: It was months and months before I made the connection. It was six months before I got a connection with the environmental stuff. I had a notion about the rumbim and warfare. I mean, that was patent. It was right off the bat that this has to do with war and fighting, this, that, and the other thing. But I didn't see that it had anything much to do with the ecology and that's what I was interested in. So, it was months and months later when I finally got glimmerings of the relationship to

environmental stuff and the environmental stuff to the relationship with intergroup relations and hostilities. It was much later that I got clued in to the cosmology. What warfare does is it tears the world apart and what you've got to do is put the world back together again. The whole ritual cycle is putting the world back together again. I've got a diagram of that in the second edition of *Pigs*. Uh, do I have a diagram of that?¹³ Anyhow, it tears the world apart. The extent to which the world is torn apart is indicated by taboos and to bring the world back together again—to mend the world, as it were—required sacrifice of pigs [the kaiko]. Those would abrogate taboos and as the taboos got abrogated the world was more mended or healed until everybody got paid off—all the spirits got paid off and the allies got paid off. Then you'd go do it again, tear the world apart again. That was amongst the last things to get to me. The last thing that I was interested in was anything cosmological. But then my real or deeper relationship to all of this took place after I left the field. When I was in the field and writing the dissertation, what I was trying to do was to make sense out of data. You've got all of these data and you're trying to figure them out and trying to make sense of them and you're doing it in a very situation-specific way. You don't give a shit about, for example, what this kind of ritual would mean in Amazonia. You are interested in this amongst the Tamang [with whom Fricke works in Nepal] or the Maring or whoever. So there you are and you're focused on it and you finally produce a dissertation and then you say, “What have I not got?” [laughs] And what I didn't have was anything specific about the ritual. I began, for reasons that we talked about earlier, feeling religiously deprived. I got interested in that, my relationship to it. My change in relationship to anthropology then was something that took place after the field.

TF: You present it as an intellectual path that you tread but at the same time, as you said before, there was something emotionally grabbing and satisfying.

RR: Here I was doing all of this neofunctional or systemic stuff which was totally intellectual and sometimes pushed to dubious lengths. When I talk about, okay, here's what they do with the pig and it provides protein when people need it most. Well, that didn't turn out to be true. I mean, when I went back the second time and made notes about what I actually saw in a nonkaiko year—and this is in the nutritional appendix to the second edition—it turned out that here were some guys who were malnourished and I thought those guys were going to get the main part of the pig. I mean, they were going to get a big shot of protein. And the sick guys got much less than I thought they would. So you finally say, “Look. Okay, that didn't work out.” I'd just gotten interested in the religious aspects and very quickly that led me out of Maring religion to just religion. Generally, I realized that I was connected to it in a different, deeper and personal way. I've been ever since.

People like the Maring don't have a particular creed, okay? There is no creed there that I can cite, but I can cite all kinds of other things taken from a whole bunch of rituals in which they are addressing red spirits. There is a postulation of red spirits and they live on top of the mountain and they take an interest in human affairs and they can get pretty nasty on you. I mean, all of that [laughing] . . . is there but there is nothing like the Shama [*Shama Israeli Adonai Ila Hayno Adonai Ikhad*, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4)] or the Nicene Creed or anything like that. There's an interesting thing about that, a bit of ethnography, field story or something. I've been bemused by it for over 30 years.

There I was trying to figure out what the hell is going on when they're killing pigs up here and killing pigs down there and all of this kind of stuff. Finally it came to me in sort of a revelation and I thought I figured it out, okay? I got one of my best occult informants and I said, look, I'm trying to understand what's going on and I think that I have it figured out. Let me give you a description. I said it's like the whole thing—you, the spirits, and the land—are like one big organism on the side of a mountain. Up there are the red spirits. They're like the head. Down there are the spirits of rot. They're like the legs. You sacrifice to red spirits and you call them "head pigs." You sacrifice pigs to the spirits of the low ground and you call them "leg pigs." You guys live in the middle. Everybody's living in between. You guys are like the gut and all. . . . So, I'm going along with this and he's saying, "True. Correct. Right. Wonderful," you know [laughing]? He keeps going on like this, but I suddenly get a little nervous. I said, don't you have anything to say to correct me? And he said, "Well, I never heard it like that before in my life, but it's good." Okay, now think about that! I mean, I was being—I think—a Maring theologian at the time. I was systematizing more than they did.

TF: But it was intuitively correct to them because they had never made it discursive.

RR: That's right, it was intuitively correct [laughing].

"Disorder, inversion, and maladaptation"

Although *Pigs* emphasizes the adaptive aspects of ritual life in regulating a host of social and ecological factors in a population's environment, Rappaport spent much of his career considering how culture could, in fact, be maladaptive within larger social and ecological systems. Shortly after *Pigs* was published, Rappaport took up the notion that "cultures sometimes serve their own components, such as economic or political institutions, at the expense of men and ecosystems [such that] . . . cultural adaptations, like all adaptations can, and perhaps usually eventually do, become maladaptive" (1971:249). In his discussion of maladaptation

in the following conversation excerpt, Rappaport considers large-scale, complex social systems. In these typically state systems, he finds that supralocal authorities are more likely to exceed the capacity of local systems than are regulations and requirements set up through local management. Rappaport felt that this was increasingly likely given greater problems of information transmission as the depth and complexity of the social and economic structures increased. Rappaport has referred to potential distortions in transmission as "cybernetic difficulties" or "structural problems" (1979a:161; cf. Rappaport 1976a, 1977). In later work, Rappaport (1994) emphasizes "disorders" or "inversions" in social systems. He discusses these disorders in the following exchange.¹⁴ In his discussion of maladaptation and disorder, Rappaport brings together three key strands of his professional life—ecological principles, the place of both science and religion in human evolution, and publicly engaged scholarship—into a kind of unity.

RR: Turning directly and personally to religious interests does not mean that I abandoned the environmental stuff because it turns out that I am some sort of an environmental mystic, I suppose. I mean, in recent work I've been saying, "Look, the ecosystem is a religious concept." It isn't, you know. You can take the same data and get different things. So, what you're making is some sort of moral-cum-adaptive decision to choose one rather than the other and to attempt to make it true. I see my later life as a kind of striving for unification. I mean, I take seriously Heraclitus [a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher credited with the idea of "logos"] when he says, "The wise will agree that all things are one." And the Jewish notion of "The Lord our God, the Lord is one," and so on. It seems all too clear to me. It should be clear to everybody. I mean, it's astonishing to me that there is any doubt that the world is a single system of some sort. Look out the window and see the birds sitting on the trees, trees rooted in the earth, and so on, and so on. The whole thing is a single system but a system that can be disrupted. This just seems to me to be so obviously the case that it is sort of a first principle. But to express that, theorize that, expound that, promulgate that [laughing] . . . is a little bit harder. The knowledge that you have that it is all one system is somehow tacit. I mean, to me it is obvious and maybe it is dangerously sentimental. In recent papers, I finally talk about the ecosystem as a sort of religious concept and bring my interest in religion and ecology together. That's trying to bring together strands of my life that have always seemed to me to be related, that it would seem important to be expressed in a relationship.

TF: Yeah, it's like tightening the loop. I mean, one can look at your professional life and see that there were periods when you focused on one thing or another. With this most recent period, you're actually circling back to the human condition.

RR: Sure. It seems to me to be important, to be worth doing. As I approach the end of this book [*Ritual and Religion*], I’m back to fiddling with footnotes. I do not like the chapter I’ve been working on recently. The problem with this chapter is that I have been trying extraordinarily hard, throughout this book, to make it a nice read, not a highly technical read. But a nice read that will carry anybody along and will require them to think. Many people just read things hastily. So, I’m trying very hard to make it a nice, clear read. But we get to chapter 11 [“The Numinous, the Holy and the Divine” in the draft manuscript] and the whole nature of the argument changes and I find myself getting more and more Latinate in it. I read a sentence and I say, “What the hell are the readers going to make out of that?” What about readers who don’t know anything much about adaptation and adaptiveness and stuff like that? I was getting more and more frustrated as I continued and I finally said, “Fuck it.” I mean, this is the best I think I can do. I hope that, although some of the central sections in this chapter are going to be really difficult for people, the last couple of sections where I finally propose what I call the “cybernetics of the holy,” will at least give them what they might regard as a kind of “Aha! Now I see what he’s been after.” But I don’t like it a hell of a lot, I just didn’t know how to do it

TF: The *cybernetics of the holy*, that’s your term—that’s very much you.

RR: Yeah. The whole thing, the cybernetics of the holy, is finally rather simple. What I am proposing is that there are these expressions called “ultimate sacred postulates” that are, themselves, very low in specificity. They are generally taken to be eternal but they are very low in specificity. They’re very low in social specificity. They don’t tell you how to run your society but they sanctify other sentences. I list them at one point in an earlier chapter. I call them “cosmological axioms,” things like high-order rules, lower-order rules, testimony, all kinds of sentences that together are statements establishing authorities by grace of God and King, which then sanctifies not only Henry but Henry’s directives, commandments, and the like. They are sentences that, in total, constitute a regulatory hierarchy. That includes both nondiscrete authorities like commandments that are located in texts as well as discrete authorities like chiefs and things which sanctify them and indirectly then sanctify their directives—lower authorities that they might themselves appoint so that not only are Henry’s dicta sanctified but the dicta of his officers and lieutenants are sanctified. Now, this is the regulatory hierarchy the operation of which cannot help but affect material and social conditions—that’s what it’s about. Material and social conditions affect the willingness of the members of the community to participate in, amongst other things, the rituals that establish or accept the ultimate sacred postulates. So, what you have is a loop. The regulatory hierarchy depends upon sanctifi-

cation but its sanctification, the continuation of its sanctification, is contingent upon the acceptance of those that are presumably subordinate to it. You have a closed loop and if the regulatory hierarchy doesn’t work very well there are things that happen. There are feedbacks that lead to its correction. Now, what you find in places like Polynesia is that here is a chief and if he gets a little too heavy handed, his people move out on him. They move to another district and the other district gets their manpower. You do not want your manpower to go down too much or you’re going to get eaten up by your neighbors. So, that is one. In pre-Christian Germany amongst pre-Christian German kings, if the king lost his luck—as they say, “There was a weak light”—and he got beaten in some battles, or there was a drought, sometimes it was your fault and sometimes it was not. But if the king lost his luck, it was not only the right but duty of the people to depose and replace him with another member of the royal clan. Whoever was running that hierarchy had to keep it in order. If they did not, there are a series of increasingly profound stages.

You have something like this fairly recently in the Catholic Church. [Pope] Paul VI comes out with “On Human Life” and 40 percent of American Catholics stop going to mass. Now, that is a very, very important message but it’s also easily reversible—you didn’t go to mass last week, okay, but you can come back to mass this week. You can go to confession and you can get back into shape. In fact, people did come back so that the Catholic Church did not suffer permanent defecation in the United States. I think it suffered from some other subtler things. Everybody comes back and doesn’t bother to confess birth control or anything like that. They just said, “Screw it.” That is a general undermining of authority. But at any rate, the thing at least continues to operate.

Now, more profound things like prophets arising and prophetic movements then do things like desanctify the connection of the existing regulatory hierarchy for the ultimate sacred postulates or, in extreme situations, attack the ultimate sacred postulates themselves. You don’t get that very often. What you do get are attempts to desanctify the relationship of the regulatory hierarchy, or parts of the regulatory hierarchy, with the ultimate sacred postulates. Thus, the 14th century is filled with peasant revolts that were religiously motivated. You have, for instance, what is called Wat Tyler’s Rebellion [also known as the English Peasant’s Revolt of 1381]. It’s aim was to disestablish the aristocracy—they weren’t after the king, who was about 11 years old at the time. Their motto came from a sermon by one of their leaders, John Ball. He was a sort of wandering priest. The motto was “When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman.” They almost did it. I mean, they had the king and his supporters locked up in the Tower of London and finally poor old John Ball got hanged, drawn, and quartered.

At any rate, that is what you get in prophetic movements. Prophetic movements start much lower down. I mean, they just sort of stand there and bay against the King: “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin,” which, I think, was interpreted as “Repent ye whose days are numbered” [from Dan. 5:1–31]. And sometimes they’d repent but if they don’t repent they are presumably in deep shit. In those kinds of situations, what you have is the Tahitians moving out of their chief’s territory or Catholics staying away from mass and, okay, they come back . . . but they come back a little different. They probably would have come back the same if Paul VI had said, “I’ve changed my mind. Birth control is okay.”

TF: Well, he created a problem by making the announcement in the encyclical “*Humanae Vitae*” [“On the Regulation of Birth,” promulgated by Pope Paul VI on July 25, 1968]. To rescind it now would possibly lead to losing 20 percent on the other side, another schismatic movement.

RR: You think so? I have a feeling that all the old Italian cardinals wouldn’t have given a damn. That would be a good thing. Ratzinger [then cardinal and prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and now Pope Benedict XVI] would leave.

TF: Do you put all revitalization movements into this kind of frame, though? What about Wovoka? [a late-18th-century Paiute mystic who created the millennial Ghost Dance religion that spread among many tribes in the U.S. West].

RR: No. I don’t. The cybernetics will only work in situations in which the prerogative of the authority is based upon sanctification from within the system in which they’re operating. But what you’ve got in Wovoka’s case is that against which he fought—namely the United States government—did not depend upon sanctification for its prerogatives or its authority or its legitimacy. That is, it was independent of the need for sanctification from within the system within which Wovoka was operating, okay?

TF: In other words, he’s at a subsystemic level.

RR: Well, here’s what he’s got. You’ve got foreign oppressors. I mean, he could care less whether they were being sanctified or legitimized by the people whom they were presiding over because they were standing on power from outside. This is not to account for those kinds of things in New Guinea. Melanesia was full of cargo cults and things. I make this very clear—I say this doesn’t count and I use, as one of the examples where it doesn’t, the Ghost Dance. The way I start chapter 12 [“Religion in Adaptation” in the *Ritual and Religion* draft manuscript] is to say that all of this might sound a little crazy, or a little unfamiliar or a little unrealistic to people in the modern world. The cybernetics of the holy has

been increasingly impeded since the emergence of the state. That which disrupts the cybernetics of the holy is power.

Now, what I mean by power is not what Foucault means by power. In my view, what Foucault means by power is a tautology. If somebody acquiesces to it, it’s power. That’s all. In my view, that’s next to useless. My definition of power depends upon a political scientist by the name of Richard Bierstadt [1950] who said that power is power, it’s physical power. Men times resources equals power. So, if you have 50 men with muskets, that equals a certain amount of power and if you have 50 men with machine guns it’s a different amount of power. He didn’t take into consideration that there are other elements in that. I would say that men times resources times organization equals power. You had, for instance, Roman legions that had 5,000 men and who were much more powerful with the same weapons than 5,000 naked Gaels running around painted blue, you know? I think that what happens with power is the ability or the authority to aggregate men and resources, to stand on muscle rather than on sanctity.

TF: Okay, you say the rise of the state. A lot of people would say that the disenchantment of the world, the desacralization of the world, occurs with the Enlightenment.

RR: I think this is long before that. I think you can look at ancient empires. Here are authorities who are able to put together large numbers of armed men, armed frequently with weapons that are not available to those subjected, and this sort of power becomes the ground of their prerogative, the ground of their authority and legitimacy. That they can accumulate or aggregate power does not mean that they dispense with their sanctification. They do not at this point. [The Roman emperor] Augustus declares himself a god, you know? He’s powerful enough to declare himself divine. So they are not dispensing with their sanctity when they are in power. But what happens is that there is an inversion of the relationship between authority and ultimate sacred postulates. Previously, amongst Polynesian chiefs and so on, chiefly authority is contingent upon his maintenance of sanctity. The Germanic kings are the same. But what finally happens is that here comes the powerful authority and he reduces the sacred to his instrument.

TF: The sacred becomes contingent then . . .

RR: . . . on him. That’s what finally happens. I mean, people still rebel against this.

TF: And this process is formally similar to your use of the “What is good for General Motors is good for the United States,” right?

RR: Well, it’s an inversion of proper relations, between levels.

TF: I’m still curious about what you see happening with the Enlightenment. Toulmin pulls a lot back to that.

RR: Well, with respect to the Enlightenment, in particular, Toulmin talks about “cosmos” and I talk about “logos.” I prefer the term *logos* to *cosmos* because the notion of “logos,” as I put it toward the end of a number of articles, proposes that the world’s order is partially constructed. The term *logos* in its guises, word as well as underlying order, proposes that it is partially constructed and that it can be violated and so on. So it has to be constructed. I think that there might be some of this in a chapter of my new book. It’s certainly in my article “Logos, Liturgy, and the Evolution of Humanity” [1995]. I argue that *logoi*, the Heraclitian *logoi*, and all of those structured sets of understandings that I have called “*logoi*,” have to do with world orders and they obliterate distinctions between the cultural, the noncultural, and so on.

The universality is at a higher level of abstraction or generalization. It isn’t that you’re going to get any specific universal doctrines. That’s not what’s going to be universal. What is going to be universal is that there are going to be such doctrines. Now, I’m not sure that’s true. I mean, I assert it and nobody has counter-asserted it. It’s slightly cheating. But I’m still amazed that I am finding examples all over the world, you know? There’s the Egyptian Maat, Zoroastrian Asha, Indian Rta, Chinese Tao . . . all of those things. I’ve argued that these things typically have a certain structure and the structure is like the structure of cognized models in my article “On Cognized Models” [1979b]. Ultimate knowledge is esoteric knowledge; it is knowledge of names of God. It is knowledge of ultimate sacred postulates. There are these sort of ultimate sacred postulates underneath in which there are cosmological axioms that are almost as fixed and this is how the universe is put together. Under those come rules of various levels—two, three levels of rules—and under that are other kinds of information.

So, you get a structure in which down at the bottom is information and facts. Maring are very interested in the characteristics of the new taro they planted; how it’s going to come up, how it’s going to taste, you know? All of this kind of stuff. But that’s ordinary, mundane stuff. It’s interesting and it’s important but everybody knows that stuff. What’s important is the stuff that only the wise men know and the others have ideas about. This is the stuff about spirits and rituals. It has to do with values of various sorts or what Toulmin would call, at least partly, “cosmos.” I prefer *logos* because I think it makes it clear that it’s partly constructed. It is not total. As in Heraclitus, it isn’t total. It’s partly the way the world is constituted, just the way things are, just the way the world is. But you can violate it.

What I think happens at the Enlightenment is that the structure of *logoi* is inverted so that ultimate knowledge

is no longer esoteric knowledge. As a matter of fact, ultimate knowledge is now not knowledge, it is belief: You have your opinion, I have mine. Ultimate knowledge, regnant knowledge is knowledge of fact. Now, facts are sometimes organized into larger bodies of discourse called theories, even if it’s only implicit. But theories don’t stand above facts—they yield to facts because you get a new anomalous fact and it blows the theory, okay? So, ultimate knowledge is knowledge of fact. Now, one problem with fact, of course, is that facts breed like rabbits and you can’t keep track of all the facts. The demands of a Cartesian science are such that they require different people to specialize in different facts so the knowledge of the world is fragmented. So what you have is fragmentation of knowledge of the world. And what had been ultimate knowledge is now mere belief and what had been highly sanctified values are now reduced to the status of mere preferences. That’s what I think happened at the Enlightenment.

TF: Have you written this in any article? I know that all the threads appear in various places.

RR: Yeah, I think so. I think that some of that is in the Borofsky [1994] volume and it will certainly be in the last chapter of this book [“The Breaking of the Holy and Its Salvation” in *Ritual and Religion*]. So, the question then is: How to put things back together again, you know? I think the way I had done this in several articles in the past is that I segue from something like this into Toulmin’s notion of “postmodern science.” That’s an easy way to get into his notion of the ecosystem concept as the basis for a new cosmos—astronomy doesn’t work, but ecosystems do. An ecosystem is something that’s not ineluctable.

TF: Your point being that you could have the same data and come up different.

RR: That’s exactly right. So, your justification for this is that it is better to think with than patch dynamics. If you think patch dynamics, you’re going to get patch dynamics. These things are partly performative. Not all of those ideas are good to think. Some models, some interpretations, will get you into deep shit [laughing]. The standard against which you finally judge it is not that the Indians think this and we think this. I mean, it’s not arbitrary. Somebody is fucking wrong! And wrongness is not necessarily an empirical matter. I mean, it’s not a question of who got the facts straight. The question is what is the outcome for the actor, the society, or the world, of taking one view rather than another. And if it leads to environmental destruction, that’s wrong. I don’t give a good fuck who thinks that they like that idea better—they’re doing something that’s wrong. That’s where I think evil lies. That’s what I have said about economics. So, this separates me, as far as I understand it, from most postmodernists who would simply say that there is no ground for judgment, that it is all relative.

TF: It's sort of a radical relativism; on what ground do you judge and why is your ground privileged?

RR: That's right. I am saying my ground is privileged. I am saying that there is one that would get better results for the world, for you and other. Some will get you dead and others will get you flourishing.

TF: It's interesting how the book [*Ritual and Ritual*] sort of maps out and becomes a *summa* of your career. The questions that arose as a result of your initial fieldwork, that is, the fieldwork that led to your dissertation research, led you into exploring ritual.

RR: That's right. Never forgetting where you began. It's a holistic anthropology. I feel somewhat contemptuous of those who would want to separate out one kind of anthropology from the rest; the cultural-studies kind of thing. It makes me contemptuous even of those who want to discard something like physical anthropology.

TF: Because you use it.

RR: Of course. It seems to me, for instance, when I'm talking about "the numinous," I do talk about people like D'Aquili and Laughlin [D'Aquili et al. 1979] and Barbara Lex [1978] and other people like that who talk about the physiology of participating in ritual. Now, physiology is hardly part of cultural studies. And if you were doing just cultural studies, you would miss all that.

TF: You're unusual. It's become unfashionable among anthropologists to talk of the human condition.

RR: I think that ever since Geertz [1973] you would find most anthropologists saying there is no human condition: There are only human *conditions*. I think that's vicious. It's vicious, illogical, and maybe stupid. I use the word *vicious* advisedly because I think that it is immoral. I mean, it bounds ethical concern. The contemporary problem is, on the one hand, that we can construct understandings of the world that we take to be accurate descriptions of the world. These are constructed meanings, they are things like economics, and we go impose that on a world that isn't built that way, whose structure has to be discovered.

TF: The paradox is that in an earlier condition logoi were people's representation of the world and they were in fact more true representations of the real structure of the world, which is unitary. Whereas, our more accurate grasping of facts is structurally a less accurate portrayal.

RR: I think structurally less accurate even though it checks out empirically.

TF: Exactly, that's the paradox.

RR: So the economists can go around talking about the world and acting in the world that doesn't correspond to the way the world is really structured. That's on the one hand. On the other hand, you can take these scientific epistemologies as we all attempt to do in sociology, and in some forms of anthropology and political science, and so on, and shine them on the grounds of social life and you find that it's all fabricated. It's all fabricated. It shows that it's a big fabrication. Now, Vico [Giambattista Vico, who, in *The New Science* (1968) attempts to define a comprehensive science of humanity] might have talked about fabricated truths, although he never used it quite this way. Well, I guess he did as "The true and the made are one and the same" [verum et factum convertuntur]. Vico can talk about that, but as far as contemporary thought and science and so on is concerned, fabrication and truth are making an oxymoron. So, you take this scientific epistemology and shine it on the roots of human social life and you threaten to destroy the grounds of human social life. It seems to me that we have that contradiction. Now, all of this is an oversimplification because, you know, the two kinds of discourse—the construction of meaning and the discovery of fact, as it were—do not describe pure discourses. I mean, they get a little mixed up. I take that to be the basic problem. As Frithjof [Bergmann, a University of Michigan philosopher] said in his lecture to our class, what social science according to Hegel should be about is searching out and doing whatever it could to make possible humanity's coming to some kind of rightness.

TF: "Rightness," the realization of potential. It's very Aristotelian. His notion of "the good."

RR: Yeah, exactly so. And so that's my feeling about where social science should go. I'm trying for some sort of unification. I've tried for unification with everything from weighing sweet potatoes to God Almighty. I mean, that's what I'm interested in. I am much less interested in, you know, sort of abstract conceptions of culture or whatever than I am in kinds of things that will [sighs] . . . help us understand the terrible plight that is, in my view, the human condition. It's easy enough to say, and I will agree, that late capitalism is horrendous. I mean, you know, the whole thing is just horrifying. But there are deeper things to say. Most anthropologists would agree that contemporary capitalism is full of all kinds of terrible problems and it doesn't seem very likely that anybody is going to do a hell of a lot about them.

"Theories of correction"

Rappaport's vision for a postmodern science advocates reintegrating the humanity and nature, the human meaning and natural law, split by Cartesian rationality. Rappaport was convinced that anthropology's holism positioned the discipline as the leading postmodern science in which ethnographic practice and data should support broad, macrolevel

assessments and diagnoses of adaptive and maladaptive forms and practices. Echoing Berlin's (1953) notion of the counter-Enlightenment, Rappaport argued for unifying scientific research with moral concern and action. He was certain that only through this unity could people collectively address the underlying causes of the manifold problems now troubling the world, develop “theories of correction,” and enact just, equitable, and lasting solutions. Rappaport also used Berlin's metaphor of the hedgehog and the fox to think about different styles in social science and their potential implication for arriving at solutions to the central problems facing humanity.

TF: You have been in this sustained process of constructing a cosmology in some sense, this idea of a postmodern science. What you do is continually circle around the same themes in ever broadening circles.

RR: That's absolutely right. I mean, if you were going to distinguish between Ray [Kelly] and Rob [Burling; fellow Michigan anthropology professors, Kelly especially well known for *The Nuer Conquest* (1985) and Burling for *Hill Farms and Padi Fields* (1965)] and me, it's hedgehogs and foxes. I'm a hedgehog. I have one big thing that I'm interested in and I circle it, I try to surround it. And they are foxes: political succession, hill farms and paddy fields, Nuer conquest, inequality, origins of war. I think, those are all important and fundamental things but they're not necessarily related to each other. And they [Kelly and Burling] are not concerned with how they are related to each other. When I do something in religion, I'm concerned with how this articulates to my ecology. So, I do think that I have tried to make my anthropology, somehow, of a piece. I do try to integrate things. I think I said it first in an article in Emilio Moran's [1990] last collection on the ecosystem: that the ecosystem concept is both discovered and constructed and sort of mediates between the discovered and the constructed. And that is something that I was pushing for, I mean, an integration. It's more a religious notion than a scientific notion.

TF: In the end, ecosystems are good to think.

RR: Exactly right.

TF: That's how you finished your last lecture [Anthropology 527: Traditions in Ethnology, winter term 1996], in fact. It's resounding.

RR: I've been thinking about that for some considerable time. I was thinking about all of the critiques of the ecosystem concept from both inside anthropology and, more tellingly, from outside anthropology. At which point, you ask about the nature of the thing. Now this is a whole set of relations that I have never tangled with in print and even avoided lecturing on, because it gets so twisted and so involuted that it becomes hard to make

yourself clear—it's hard to make yourself clear because you're not clear. At any rate, it's that, after all, even the models through which you discover the world, through which scientists discover the world, are themselves constructed. Epistemologies are constructed. So, you construct this epistemology to discover. But I am trying to propose that this is more than an epistemology or discovery. It is also an ontology of construction, you know? That it is a kind of integrating concept for me and everything I attempt to do. That's why I like Heraclitus more than I like Boas.

TF: You read a lot of stuff that is sort of hot right now and it strikes you as ephemera. It doesn't go back to basics. It doesn't go back to mapping fundamentals. Your stuff does.

RR: I tried to do that. I mean, I tried not to break that. I try to do that.

TF: And then what happened was that for a shining moment in the sixties and seventies, the swirl of the public happened to intersect with where you were and stayed. I think we're getting set to circle back.

RR: Yeah. *Pigs* came out and, the next thing, you had a big ecology movement. So, I was sort of a hero for about three years.

TF: In your last lecture, you spoke about your ideas for the discipline of anthropology. You spoke of how it should have characteristics of the species that constitutes its subject matter.

RR: That's right.

TF: You say that anthropology should be worthy of its subject and that its subject is humanity. It is so beautiful the way you do it. We get students marching off to take over the academic world [both laugh].

RR: That was the first time I think I said that it should be *worthy* of its subject matter. What I have said, in print, is in the Borofsky [1994] volume. I think I got that handy [finds a copy on the shelf]. Hmm . . . I said, “I'd like to think, however, that I'm trying to glimpse something toward which the field, as a whole, might be groping. It's not altogether clear to me what it is yet, but let's say it's become a discipline, a field, a science, a way of knowing the characteristics of which conform to those of the species that constitutes its subject.” Okay? We are alone among social scientists in attempting such a thing. Although it may be disciplinary chauvinism to say so, for the very reasons that anthropology has been rather backward as a modern science, it may well become preeminent as a postmodern science.

TF: We need to deal with both. That's what you mean by being worthy of the species.

RR: That's right. Any anthropology that drops either law or meaning from its consideration is a false anthropology. It is a bogus anthropology. It is a destructive anthropology. It is going to lead into trouble. I think there are two traditions in anthropology since its inception. One is objective in its aspirations and inspired by the biological sciences. It seeks explanation in its concern to discover causes or even, in the view of the ambitious, laws. The other is influenced by philosophy, linguistics, and the humanities. It is open to more subjectively derived knowledge and attempts interpretation as it seeks to elucidate meanings. Our ancestry as a discipline thus lies in *both* the Enlightenment and in what Isaiah Berlin calls the "counter-Enlightenment."

TF: And you argue that now some of this ancestry is being chipped away. The attempt to banish either one of these, that is, the notion of meaning or the notion of law, is the construction of a bad anthropology.

RR: Exactly right. This dissolves the central problem of our species, which is to reconcile these two, meaning and law.

Closing

Anthropology emerged out of the West, is historically situated in what the West did, but it is not simply a Western discourse; it is a discourse of humanity and about humanity.

—Roy A. Rappaport, conversation of June 1996

Rappaport (1984:310, 1994:292) believed that it was human responsibility not merely to think of the world but also to think on behalf of the world. Consistent with his assertion that anthropology stands as the preeminent postmodern science, he felt that the discipline is uniquely qualified to address disorders that threaten to destroy the world. These are violations of contingency relationships that create the inversions he speaks of in his conversation with Fricke. In these inversions, something contingent, like economics, a "pseudo religion" in Rappaport's understanding, usurps the position of biological and ecological principles that subordinate it. Together, disorders are the core concern of his "anthropology of trouble" (Rappaport 1993).¹⁵ Rappaport envisioned a perennially engaged anthropology. He was confident that his broad anthropological understanding of systemic disorder gave him privileged and "principled ground" for taking certain positions on important issues. As most clearly conveyed in the second conversational excerpt above, he insisted on the moral motivation of his systems thinking. His longtime interest in fostering and maintaining a holistic anthropology was part of his desire to shape critical public policy.¹⁶

At the end of his life, Rappaport joked that, after a few years of fame in the early 1970s, following publication of *Pigs*, people simply stopped reading him.¹⁷ Jokes aside, he

did appear to regret how the impact of *Pigs* may have blinded many to his subsequent work outside of ecological anthropology. The publication of *Ritual and Religion*, however, may yet reestablish Rappaport as a lasting voice in anthropological thought. Ellen Messer and Michael Lambek's festschrift volume *Ecology and the Sacred* (2001) is an indication of the breadth and depth of Rappaport's continuing influence.

Rappaport provided an interesting way to think about the nature of this influence that reflects his view of the world as numinous. At the end of June 1996, he told Fricke about an epiphany he had while on sabbatical in England. On a bright Sunday morning in 1972, Rappaport walked from his home in Cambridge. Realizing that he had not yet seen the famed stained glass of King's Chapel, he casually walked in on an Anglican high mass. He related how, as he stood at the back of the chapel, enveloped by the rich sounds of the organ and boys' choir, a graphic image of mountains and birds synaesthetically emerged within the great vault of the ceiling. Gazing at the brightly colored stained glass windows while in this altered state, Rappaport had what he described as a "mystical notion" that the men responsible for this remarkable creation hundreds of years ago could not be dead, because he was having a powerful reaction to their work here and now. "This was not like 'Aristotle lives,' " he explained, "because I didn't know their names. Yet they were more alive to me than Aristotle, or any famous person, was alive. In this was the conception [that] anything like fame is not what really counts." Drawing on his interpretation of Old Temple Judaism with respect to death and the afterlife, Rappaport came to an understanding that creations, specifically, the ideas and understanding that people get from engaging with them, are what keep people alive.

Rappaport's ideal of creating a holistic, engaged anthropology, both scientific and humanistic, committed to understanding and solving the problems that vex humanity, seems more important than ever in an increasingly discordant world. Reflecting passages in published works, in the course of conversations with Fricke, Rappaport often said that "humanity is a species living in terms of meaning in a world subject to law." Because of this, he insisted, anthropology must deal with both human meaning and laws of the natural world to be worthy of its subject and ultimately true to its disciplinary origins in both the Enlightenment and the counter-Enlightenment. Rappaport came to see his professional life as one of constant striving for this unity, from sweet potatoes to God Almighty.

Notes

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1. He would eventually serve as the department's chair for two terms and hold the title of Leslie A. White Professor of Anthropology. In addition, Rappaport became the Walgreen Professor for the Study of Human Understanding and director of the Program on Studies in Religion.

2. In 1985, the department paired Fricke, an incoming faculty member, with Rappaport to teach the second of two graduate-level "Traditions in Ethnology" (Anthropology 526 and 527) core courses in Michigan's four-field program. In addition to the core course in ethnology, Rappaport and Fricke also taught "Ecological Anthropology" (Anthropology 541) together on two occasions.

3. Although given his medical prognosis, Rappaport realized he was unlikely to fulfill many personal and professional desires, there were several things he wished he could do. Among these was return to the Maring. In addition to certain acts or deeds, Rappaport hoped to do more with ideas such as "adaptive structure." Like many of his interests, he realized, this one was, as he put it, "counter to just about everything that's going on in cultural anthropology." He wished that he could have the time to work with complexity and system theorists like Michigan psychology professor John Holland, author of *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity* (1995). Rappaport hoped that he might influence work by Holland and others who he felt often ignored human systems in favor of purely mathematical and physical modeling.

4. Although the plan to bring to light previously unpublished manuscripts from Rappaport's files did not materialize, his field notes, teaching materials, and correspondence in addition to photographs and audio recordings are accessible in several institutional holdings. The Mandeville Special Collections Library at the University of California, San Diego, contains 23 linear feet of material dating from 1961 to 1985 in its Melanesian Studies Resource Center (see <http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/testing/html/mss0516a.html>). The Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, has 17.5 linear feet of papers dating from 1959 to 1997, including biographical files, correspondence, writings, speeches, lectures, course materials, and files relating to various programs and projects for which Rappaport served as a consultant (see <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?c=bhlead&idno=umich-bhl-9932>). The Smithsonian National Anthropological Archives now hold Rappaport's American Anthropological Association presidential papers, dating from 1987 to 1991. Finally, the University of Washington houses the G. Rappaport Family Archives (established by Rappaport's daughter, Gina), which contain largely personal papers (see <http://staff.washington.edu/ger17/fp3.shtml>).

5. Finding that they did not work well empirically, Rappaport later criticized Sahlins's assertions in an article he cowrote with Andrew Vayda entitled "Island Cultures" (Vayda and Rappaport 1965). Rappaport felt that Sahlins was wrong to follow Julian Steward's notion of locating a culture in an ecological system in which the culture is a self-determining human product explicable in terms of its own principles rather than those of the physical and biological world. Rappaport's understanding was that this did not work empirically in that cultures do not have trophic demands. Rappaport intended to construct a model in which a human population was commensurable with all other units within a given ecosystem. The alternative ecological theory that Rappaport offered in his critique of Sahlins was first worked out in a term paper for a course he took in social organization at Columbia taught by the anthropologist Chuck Wagley. Rappaport later met and befriended Sahlins at the Pacific Science Congress in 1969. Shortly after this meeting, Rappaport joined Sahlins on the anthropology faculty at Michigan.

6. The journal *Ethnology* published his presentation in 1967.

7. From this perspective, Rappaport especially liked using Gregory Bateson's article "The Pattern which Connects" (1978) as a set

piece for giving students an understanding of what they were to be doing: looking for patterns across domains. For Rappaport, Bateson was a model hedgehog. While still a graduate student at Columbia in the late 1960s, Rappaport began developing his idea of what was essential to the sacred, that is, the "quality of unquestionableness imputed by congregations to certain postulates." Rappaport shared this idea with Eric Wolf. Wolf said that it sounded a lot like Bateson and recommended that Rappaport read *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (Ruesch and Bateson 1951), in which Bateson talks about various kinds of conventional truth, including the notion that what is taken as true is that which, through the structure of experience and learning in a particular community, community members agree to be true. Rappaport noted in his conversations with Fricke that this notion, elsewhere referred to as "deutero-truth" (Levy and Rappaport 1982), was much like Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) doxa, truths that one finally takes to be empirical because they accord with experience and become self-evident. Rappaport remembered, in particular, rereading chapter 8 of *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* numerous times before going back to Wolf. Following his discussion of the book with Wolf, Rappaport was amazed to find that, despite his certainty that he and Bateson were referring to the same thing, Bateson never used the word *sacred*. Years later, while spending an academic year at the East-West Center in Hawai'i, Rappaport presented a paper that his cousin, Bob Levy, brought Bateson to hear. Following the presentation, the audience looked to Bateson to pass judgment. Instead, Bateson apparently said simply, "I congratulate you, sir." At that time Bateson was working with porpoises at Hawai'i's Sea Life Park. He later said to Rappaport that he had almost given up on anthropology until hearing of work by scholars like Rappaport on problems of information transmission and the establishment of communication systems.

8. Following Vayda and Rappaport, several other studies of the Western Highlands have appeared by anthropologists, geographers, and other scientists, including William C. Clarke (1971), Georgeda Buchbinder (1973), C. J. Healey (1977), and Cherry Lowman (1980), all of whom conducted dissertation fieldwork among one or more Maring groups.

9. Much of Rappaport's response to MacArthur's criticisms is contained in a lengthy separate appendix (no. 11) to the second edition of *Pigs* (1984).

10. Rappaport's extensive collection of notes regarding the Maring is divided among several publicly accessible collections. See N. 4.

11. Rappaport's sense of "debt" to the Maring people and of what actions he might take to "repay" this debt reflect a simpler historical period for the discipline, before intense discussion of forms of collaboration with host communities as well as repatriation of materials gathered during fieldwork. Rappaport felt that further fieldwork to answer his own lingering questions and publication of languishing data gathered during prior trips to the field might somehow settle an outstanding obligation to the Maring by providing a final account in "closure." Rappaport's end-of-life reflection raises issues concerning a split between scholarly work and what may and may not be of interest to host communities. What the Maring want, if anything, from Rappaport, is unclear.

12. Conklin was on the anthropology faculty at Columbia until 1962. He conducted fieldwork in the Philippines for his dissertation in anthropology at Yale, entitled *The Relation of Hanunóo Culture to the Plant World* (Conklin 1954).

13. The diagram can be found in "Nature, Culture, and Ecological Anthropology," a chapter in Harry Shapiro's edited volume *Man, Culture, and Society* (1971).

14. In conversations with Fricke, Rappaport points to a seminar he taught at Michigan entitled "Cultural Pathology," which, although

unsuccessful as a course, helped shape his early understanding of maladaptation and, specifically, of disorders in regulatory hierarchies.

15. Rappaport took this up in the chapter "Disorders of Our Own: A Conclusion," published in Shepard Forman's edited volume entitled *Diagnosing America: Anthropology and Public Engagement* (1994). Forman's volume focused on social disorders of the United States that "impede the realization of democratic participation and cultural pluralism" (1994:3). The volume was a summary of a panel convened by the American Anthropological Association in 1988 on the impetus of Rappaport, then serving as president of the association.

16. In addition to serving in numerous leadership roles during his career, including president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Anthropological Association, he also served as distinguished consultant on many important social and environmental projects. These projects dealt with such matters as population increase, globalization, threats to cultural autonomy, and the loss of traditional systems of meaning.

17. Rappaport was especially sensitive to the impact of criticism of *Pigs* leveled by Jonathan Friedman (1974) and Sahlin (1976), who branded the ethnography "vulgar materialism" and "naive functionalism."

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