CAPTURING IMAGINATION: A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO CULTURAL COMPLEXITY

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With few exceptions, it has been assumed that the production of a generalizing anthropological theory of human cognition must necessarily entail a reduction of ethnographic complexity. No case-centred analysis has been offered to show that a cognitive approach to cultural complexity is possible. In this article, I want to show that a different cognitive perspective can improve our understanding of ethnographic facts and help us critically to revise a number of traditional anthropological concepts. In order to do so, I will discuss the example of a messianistic religious movement born among the Western Apache of San Carlos and White Mountain (Arizona).

From a logical point of view, a theory can be either powerful (accounting for a limited number of features valid for a great number of cases) or expressive (accounting for a great number of features belonging to a limited number of cases). In other words, theories can be extensionally or intensionally orientated. Any case-centred inquiry (for instance, a clinical study) is in some measure intensional, while any comparative or statistical analysis tends to be extensional. With few exceptions, attempts to produce generalizing theories of human cognition have thus far been carried out primarily in extensional terms. Researchers have been looking for ever more ethnographic cases which may confirm the assumptions of the theory, and make it more powerful. It is generally admitted, in this perspective, that, in order to use an ethnographic case in this framework, a reduction of the ethnographic complexity is necessary.

The objection of many anthropologists to this approach is that complexity is precisely what characterizes ethnography. Those holding this view regard any attempt to reduce this complexity as something that must fundamentally alter the object of the analysis, creating such a reductionist outcome as to rule out the possibility of either confirmation or negation of the point at issue. In this article, I wish to show that a different cognitive perspective, developed in intensional terms, can enrich our ways of dealing with ethnographic complexity and help us to rethink a number of traditional anthropological concepts. In order to do so, I will discuss the example of a messianistic religious movement that came into being among the Western Apache of San Carlos and White Mountain Reservations around the year 1916.

Before I move on to the analysis of this case, let me state briefly the general hypotheses I have been developing in my recent work (Boyer & Severi 1997-9; Severi 2002) on the role of memory and pragmatics in cultural transmission.

On salience, counterintuitivity and tradition

Dan Sperber and Pascal Boyer have assumed that the success of an idea or a representation in a culture is essentially a consequence of its counterintuitivity (Boyer 1994; Sperber 1985; 1996). In their view, counterintuitivity – which Boyer has defined as the transgression of a number of ontological features rooted in human cognition – is what gives a representation its psychological salience. More precisely, Boyer has argued that the cognitive optimum resulting from a certain combination of counterintuitive and intuitive assumptions generates a specific kind of cultural salience. This type of salience, in turn, is supposed to account for the persistency in time and/or for the rapid propagation in a community of a given representation. There is no doubt that this new approach has given a strong impulse to research in this field, and it has also generated a new understanding of the relationship between cognition and culture. From the logical point of view, however, this approach is a paradigmatic case of a powerful theory that significantly lacks logical expressiveness. In many situations, to achieve a successful representation one needs more than simple salience (even when it appears, as Boyer has remarked, against a background of intuitive representations).

Actually, counterintuitive mental representations can be very fragile. Since the time of Freud (1991 [1899]), it has been widely recognized that the experience of dreaming is full of counterintuitive representations that do not last. While individual dreams can constitute the psychological basis of culturally successful narratives (see, for instance, Fausto 2002 or Stephen 1982), dreams are usually rapidly forgotten. Their content is consequently very difficult to propagate in a community. Conversely, culturally successful notions can be fully intuitive, in both religious and non-religious contexts. In fact, such notions can be neither intuitive nor counterintuitive, but simply meaningless. This is often the case for religious traditions implying the use of mana concepts, like shamanism. As I have tried to show elsewhere (Severi 1993a), in many American Indian shamanistic traditions a number of central concepts, usually translated as 'soul', 'shadow', 'double', and so on, possess no definite meaning, and are always surrounded by a halo of uncertainty. The semantic content of these concepts is never fully understood, or positively represented by people. This is why the semantic analysis, and *a fortiori* etymological speculations, are not sufficient for understanding the position they occupy in the tradition. To understand them it is not enough merely to reconstruct a network of related ideas, as 'mirror image', 'vital energy', 'character', and so on. We also need to reconstruct the pragmatic conditions that define the kind of 'language game' in which they are used.

In fact, the persistence in time, and success, of notions of this kind are not explained by their 'counterintuitive' content, but rather by their insertion within very precisely defined, and yet counterintuitive, contexts of ritual communication (Severi 1993a). A good example is offered by the Kuna ritual recitations of shamanistic chants, where the enunciation of 'obscure words' does not imply the intention to convey a meaningful message to the patient, but tends to construct an acoustic mask, indirectly defining the nature of the shaman–chanter (Houseman & Severi 1998). In these cases, one can fully account for the successful propagation of a representation by referring only to the nature of the context of communication in which these representa-

tions are propagated. This conclusion suggests that cultures make some representations more memorable than others by inserting them in counterintuitive contexts of propagation. In many important situations – and religion is one of them – a culturally successful representation is a counterintuitive representation formulated within counterintuitive conditions of communication (Severi in Boyer & Severi 1997-9).

From this hypothesis, it follows that, in order to achieve a better understanding of such cases, one needs to build a more expressive theory of cultural propagation. One needs to understand this process in positive terms, and in specific situations. Such an attempt is certainly at the heart of the theory of modes of religiosity, as proposed by Harvey Whitehouse in several books and articles (e.g. Whitehouse 1992; 2000).[1] His distinction between doctrinal and imagistic religious modes, which is obviously based on the distinction between semantic and episodic memory, has proven to be very useful in a number of cases. Like all useful distinctions, however, it invites one to think further, and it raises many questions. Since the efforts of generalizing the theory of religious modes have been – as in the case of other cognitive-based approaches – conducted only in extensional terms, one of these questions concerns the degree of complexity that can be accounted for by the theory that is based on this distinction. Consider, for instance, a situation characterized by the simultaneous presence of different modes of religiosity. On a number of occasions, Whitehouse has recognized that, in many cultural situations, we can see the two modes, imagistic and doctrinal, acting together or even merging in a single religion. However, what about the possible conflict between the two modes within a single tradition? Does the theory account for a contradictory situation where some aspects of the culture are 'laid down' in an imagistic mode, and others in a doctrinal mode? How could one interpret such a situation using the 'modes of religiosity' approach?

Before engaging in any empirical analysis, let us take a step further and ask whether (and how) this 'modes of religiosity' theory might be able to account for the relationship between different cultures, or between different religious traditions. Clearly, a specific form of complexity may result from the contact between different cultures where either of the two typical modes of religiosity is to be found. Can the theory help us in understanding the struggle between competing religions in a single society, or in a specific historical period? This case is obviously very frequent. Ethnography very often shows that no simple traditions exist, and that some kind of contact between competing religious approaches is the rule rather than the exception in many human societies. What happens then when we try to analyse in these terms not a single religion, but – as for instance in messianistic movements – the interaction between two different religious traditions?

I think that, even in this context, the distinction between imagistic and doctrinal modes of religiosity can be helpful. However, in order to understand cultural complexity, one has to take two further steps. First of all, one has to use the distinction within the context of a single culture in order to assess, and not to reduce, its specific complexity. Secondly, one has to take into account not only the kind of memory which is implied in the propagation of cultural representations, but also the pragmatics of cultural communication. An obvious case, in this perspective, is ritual communication, which is performed through both action and speech. In a book devoted to the study of

ritual action, Michael Houseman and I have claimed that one of the essen-
tial clues for understanding the context of ritual communication is the way
in which, through the establishment of a particular form of interaction, a
special identity of the participants is constructed (Houseman & Severi 1998).
In the example we have analysed, the Naven (a transvestite ritual of the Iatmul
of Sepik, Papua New Guinea), the study of a first interaction between a
mother's brother acting as a mother (and a wife), on the one hand, and a
sister's son acting as a son (and a husband), on the other, has led to the analy-
sis of a series of rites involving larger social groups, where competition
between men from Ego's maternal side and mothers from Ego's paternal side
plays a critical role. One of our conclusions has been that the identity of each
participant is built up, within the ritual context, from a series of contradic-
tory connotations (being, for instance, at once a mother and a child, a sister's
son and a wife, etc.). This process, of symbolic transformation realized through
action, which we have called ritual condensation, gives to the ritual context
of communication a particular form that distinguishes it from ordinary life
interactions. In this article, I wish to extend this approach to the case of the
paradoxical construction of the enunciator, which characterizes many syn-
cretistic (or nativistic) movements. In my brief analysis of the example of West
Apache messianism I will therefore try to keep an eye not only on the salience
of religious notions (or symbols, or ideas, etc.), but also on the contexts in
which these symbols are communicated. I will claim, in short, that in addi-
tion to the element of semantic counterintuitiveness which is present in these
situations, there is also a pragmatic counterintuitiveness, and that this is some-
thing which must be taken into account in the analysis of complex religious
traditions like messianism.

Messianism: intense propagation and paradoxical identification

Messianistic movements are particularly interesting for an anthropological
theory based on the propagation of representations, because they generally
show an extraordinary intensification of this process. These new religions,
which usually possess what appears to be a rather 'simple' body of doctrine,
spread very rapidly and tend to convert entire populations in a short period
of time. Why is this so? It is clear that prophetic movements are almost al-
ways linked to a situation of deep distress and intense political conflict. It has
been often remarked that in these cases religion becomes an instrument of
resistance – typically against colonialist domination. Classic cases include the
so-called cargo cults of Melanesia (Kaplan 1995; Worsley 1968), the Hauka
movements of the Songhay in Niger (Stoller 1989), the Ghost Dance of the
North Amerindians (La Barre 1972; Linton 1943; Mooney 1896), and the so-
called 'Ashaninka messianism' of the Peruvian Amazon (Veber 2003). Yet their
potential for inspiring or expressing resistance does not in itself explain their
extraordinary effectiveness. There is no very obvious reason why the estab-
lished traditional religions could not have been even more effective as a source
of inspiration for those seeking to resist the encroachment of white intrud-
ers. The rapid diffusion and enthusiastic response of new adherents that are so

widely said to typify prophet-led nativistic movements are clearly products of the novel forms of religious practice which arise in response to the new message or teachings proclaimed by the cult leader. Speaking of the Apache *nail'do* dances, one of the more striking Ghost Dance rituals of the Amerindians, Goodwin and Kaut have remarked that 'the religious movements seem to have been successful only when an important medicine-man has been able to *capture the imagination* of the Apache, and in each case some innovation was necessary to do this' [my emphasis] (1954: 386).

Why do prophetic movements so often generate a change in the field of religious practices, and what kind of change is generated in these situations? One interesting point concerns the content of these religious representations. In many messianistic movements, the contact between different sets of beliefs (for instance between Christianity and some other, usually traditional, religion) is obviously a central cultural theme. However, it is remarkable that, within the new messianistic doctrine, the combination of many different, or even antagonistic, cultural traits is almost without exception presented as forming a consistent and harmonious vision of the world. No contradiction is seen, for instance, between the Christian faith and the Voodoo rituals in Haitian syncretistic movements. As one of the informants of Alfred Métraux (1972) once said to him, 'one needs to be a good Christian to be a good voodooist'. This attitude is also very common among Amerindian Ghost Dance believers: it has been reported many times that Apache, Sioux, or Paiute believers saw no harm in simultaneously practising the nativistic, the Christian, and the traditional shamanistic religion. Actually, these 'newly founded' religions, though often described as 'cultural hybrids', are not characterized by dramatic changes in religious doctrine. They typically present another striking phenomenon, which does not belong to the semantics of the indigenous discourse, but instead affects the pragmatics of communication: the appearance of a paradoxical 'I', personified by the Prophet himself. Thus when an Amerindian Shaman-Messiah comes forth to proclaim her or his 'new' religion, he or she would typically declare to be not only 'comparable' or 'similar to' Jesus Christ, the son and the human incarnation of the God of the Christians; very often, he or she would claim to be the real 'Son of (the Christian) God', and sometimes even the only one. None the less, even though such new self-definitions may be expressed in Christian terms, they are still not seen as overriding or supplanting those previously accorded to the shaman-leader. On the contrary, they are often taken as a powerful, if paradoxical, confirmation of his prior identity, or even as an enhancement of it.

The most impressive case is that of the founder of all the North Amerindians' Ghost Dances movements, the Paiute prophet Wovoka, who spent his entire life in the Mason Valley of Western Nevada. From 1887 to 1889 he is reported to have experienced his first revelations, which were soon spread by a great number of disciples through all the Plains tribes. Most of the so-called 'nativistic' movements among the Amerindian populations of the western United States are thought to have originated from the teaching of Wovoka and his followers. As reported by the American ethnologist Mooney (1896: 771-4), Wovoka declared that he had been taken up into the spirit world, where God had given him a message to convey to all his people. He

taught that the day was at hand when the dead of all the Amerindian nations would live again on earth in the full flower of their youth. Their resurrection would be accompanied by the return of all the great game animals which had been wiped out since the advent of the whites, and he also pledged that a great cataclysm would obliterate the white invaders (Mooney 1896; Overholt 1974: 42). An important part of Wovoka's message concerned the nature of the Prophet himself. The document known as the 'Messiah letter' explicitly indicated that Wovoka and Jesus were to be regarded as the same person: 'Do not tell the white people – Wovoka is reported to say – But Jesus is now upon the earth. He appears like a cloud. The dead are all alive again . . . ' (Mooney 1896: 773). As Overholt has demonstrated, the subsequent denials offered by Wovoka to James Mooney (1896: 773) were only attempts to hide his new identity. Many of his Indian disciples continually referred to him as 'the Christ', and several of them mentioned having seen the marks of the cru- cifixion on Wovoka's hands and feet (Overholt 1974: 44). In a document reported by Mooney the new Christ is explicitly identified with the old one:

> In the beginning, after God made the earth, they sent me to teach the people, and when I came back on earth the people were afraid of me and treated me badly. I found my children were bad, so I went back to heaven and left them. I told them that in many hundred years I would come back to see my children … My father commanded me to visit the Indians on a purpose. I have come to the white people first, but they are not good. They killed me, and you can see the marks of my wounds on my feet, my hands, and my back (Mooney 1896: 796-7).

Assuming that Mooney has reported accurately on this, then Wovoka the mes- sianic prophet is being treated as 'the Christ'. Consequently, to become a believer in the new religious message is not, for instance from the point of view of someone recently converted to Christianity, a way to cease to be a 'good Christian'. On the contrary, it is to become a real (and often the only real) Christian. We shall see that this was the view of the many converted Indians who joined the nativistic movements at the end of the nineteenth century. However, it was then clear to everyone, as it is now, that in the context of the Ghost Dance a statement like 'I am a real Christian' (or even 'I am Jesus') does not mean 'I belong – in whatever position I find myself – to the religion preached by the Whites'. The meaning of such a statement is rather that 'it is because I claim that I am a real Christian that I am, more than ever, a member (or even a founder) of an anti-Western religion'. To be similar implies here, very specifically to be different, and even very different, from the traditional Christian religion. In other words this is a paradoxical situation where 'To be similar to you is to be me as opposed to you, and vice versa'.

   The transition from the traditional religion to the messianistic one actually entails a move from a situation in which the local non-Western medicine man opposes the shamanistic tradition to Christianity because he claims it to be different, to a situation in which he or she opposes the shamanistic tradition to Christianity because he or she claims it to be similar. The transformation that seems to be operated here, often loosely called by anthropologists a con- tradiction, or a symbolic 'inversion', may be more precisely described as a paradox. In fact, a contradiction is found in a statement where two contrary predicates are affirmed. A paradox emerges only when a logical link is estab- lished between two contradicting predicates. If the statement 'this box is black

and white' is a good example of contradiction, we are facing a paradox only when the statement takes the form: 'If this box is white, then it is black' (Sainsbury 1988; Tarski 1956 [1933]). A similar logical link between contradictory self-definitions lies at the heart of the Shaman-Messiah statement. In fact the 'new' prophet's message goes beyond the statement of a contradiction, and takes the form: 'If I am similar to you, then I am different'. The result is a characteristic way to define a new subject, the Messiah, who seems to possess contradictory features, and therefore to be able to enunciate paradoxical statements in the form 'To be me is to be you'. Anthropologists have generally oversimplified this process. Too often, it has been interpreted either as a simple 'imitation' of the Western religion, or as a non-authentic 'invention' of a new tradition. In such cases, anthropologists have generally been concerned to show that the new religious movement is lacking in authenticity, with much attention being paid to illustrating its non-traditional character. What a Shaman-Messiah such as Prophet Wovoka presents as 'truly traditional' is then easily recognized as a 'modern' (and thus non-authentic) invention.

My own view is precisely the reverse of this perspective. I seek to show that, in the case I explore here – but also in all the nativistic movements I can think of – to enunciate such paradoxical statements is to be perfectly faithful to the local, non-Christian tradition. We will have to conclude then that, at least in these cases, it is a mistake to look at these new religions as 'cultural hybrids'. But to reach this conclusion we must focus on the right level of abstraction, taking into account not just the semantics of the messianistic discourse, but also the pragmatic conditions of its propagation.

Our starting point will be the public pronouncement of a new religion by Silas John, an Apache Indian born in 1887 in the Fort Apache Reservation (Arizona). In 1916, Silas proclaimed himself a messiah and began to preach. Some years after, he

> attracted a sizeable crowd, and informed them that, although his rituals were to be performed on Sundays mornings, like the one of the local Lutheran Church, his religion did not require that he speak from the Bible. Holding up a cross on which was drawn the figure of a snake, he said that this was the image the Apache should follow (Kessel 1976: 167).

By 1920, it was apparent to him that his acceptance as religious prophet was assured, and he then selected twelve 'assistants' to circulate among the Apache people, pray for them, and encourage them to congregate (Basso & Anderson 1975: 29). At the final stage of his predication, following what I have called a process of paradoxical self-definition, Silas John told his Mescalero Apache disciples, who still called him 'Yusen' (the Creator in the Apache mythology, or Life Giver): '*You have to accept Jesus. Call me Jesus, not Yusen*' (MacDonald Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 294-5).

In these years, Silas John's movement proved extremely successful among the White Mountain and San Carlos Apache. After 1920, it spread to the Mescalero Apache of New Mexico, and led to the establishment of a new ritual, called 'Holy Ground prayer', which was rapidly adopted by members of the community, and became the signal of a general revolt against Christianity among the Western Apache. It was clear to everybody – including the military authorities of the reservation – that to produce such a

statement as 'Call me Jesus' was a particularly sacrilegious way to oppose Christianity, not a way to surrender to it. The Superintendent of the reservation forbade Silas John from 'attending dances or holding them', and clearly stated the reasons for this action: 'I have told Silas and all the Indians here that I do not object to them keeping up to some extent their ancient rites and tribal teachings but that I would not permit any of the young men to start new religions' (Davis cited in Kessel 1976: 157). The typical pattern of any nativistic movement – desperate trouble, political conflict, and the announcement of a 'new' religious message – are present in the Apache situation. The Teaching of John, as the movement has come to be called, is precisely what I mean by a case for which it is not sufficient to point to counterintuitive representations (as conventionally defined, that is, on a semantic basis) to account for the cultural propagation of ideas. To understand the propagation of Silas John's 'counterintuitive' message, it is necessary to identify the pragmatic conditions of communication in which it was communicated. As we will see, only an interpretation of his new ritual – involving a sequence of ritual actions and the recitation of a new 'prayer' – will account for the rapid spread and widespread acceptance of his teachings. For the moment, let us briefly recall the historical and ethnographic context of the Silas John message.

Apache nativistic movements: a brief description

Over a period of less than forty years, the sequence of prophet-led millenarian movements among the Apache shows a clear process of evolution from a situation in which opposition to Christianity took the form of conceptualizing Christianity as a different religion, to one in which we see the situation which I described earlier as opposition on the basis of similarity. In 1870, after a period of severe and prolonged warfare between Apache and US Cavalry forces, a number of Apache groups (White Mountain, San Carlos, Chiricahua, Cibecue) were confined to the White Mountain and San Carlos Reservations in Arizona. At least four new religious movements were reported among these groups, all of them led by so-called 'medicine men' (Apache warrior-shamans).

The first started in 1881, when a shaman named Noch–ay–del–klinne held a series of ceremonies 'to raise the dead and bring back the old leaders for a joint uprising with the Chiricahua against the US Army' (Goodwin & Kaut 1954: 387). This 'ascetic, slight medicine man, who was so pale as to seem almost white' (Thrapp 1988: 217), had some knowledge of Christianity, but, after a period of doubt, rejected it explicitly. In 1871, the authorities of the Reservation still described him as a 'kindly White Mountain herbal doctor of 26', a 'dreamer and a mystic, widely known as a healer, but not as a dangerous one' (Thrapp 1988: 217). Noch–ay–del–klinne was then sent to Santa Fe to attend school. There, writes Thrapp, 'he absorbed, but hardly understood the elements of the Christian religion … and was particularly impressed by the story of the Resurrection' (1988: 217). Soon after his return to the Apache reservation, this 'rustic dreamed his way into the subconscious of his people, arousing them to a fervour of devotion and trust' (1988: 217).

By June 1881 Noch–ay–del–klinne had become the centre of revival-type Apache gatherings. His message appears to have been much like those imparted by the leaders of other Ghost Dance movements, in particular its promise that the dead – meaning dead Apache warriors – soon would return. The meaning of this 'return' was by no means ambiguous. In order to establish his new religion, Noch–ay–del–klinne used a typical 'imagistic' method. He taught his followers a peculiar new dance, a variation of the traditional Wheel dance, 'in which all the performers face a central focus, aligned outward like the spokes of a wheel, and dance a forward-backward time step, irregularly, so that the wheel slowly revolves' (Haley 1981: 336). To perform that dance, promised Noch–ay–del–klinne, was an effective means to restore to life two Apache chiefs, and in particular one of them, a recently deceased chief known as Diablo (Haskedasila, or 'Constantly Angry', in Apache). He pledged that this would have the effect of driving out the Whites. In a vision, he had dreamed that 'the white-eyes would be gone when the corn was ripe' (Haley 1981: 337). As Kessel writes (1976: 63-4), a journalist named Connell was able to record his words:

> Are we not natives to the earth around us?
> Are we not part of the forest, the rocks, and the air?
> Do not the birds sing, for the Apache? Is not the deer part of our lives?
> …
> Do not the bodies of our ancestors lie beneath the earth that belongs to us?
> Why then do the Whites come hither? Why do they kill our game?
> There was only one brave among the Apache who could keep the whites back,
>   Diablo, and the chief.
> His spirit hovers amid the rustling pine; the fluttering leaves indicates his presence.
> The wail of the mountain-lion and the roar of the bear tell you that he is near. He
>   will come again, not in spirit, but in the flesh, to deliver us from the hated whites.
> Diablo guards our interests, Diablo seeks a remedy, and Diablo will live again. In the
>   dance we seek an inspiration.
> With rhythmical movements, we commune with the spirits. The dance inspires passion,
>   faith, fury, bravery and strength.
> Is it not I, who revives the message at the resting place of the bones of Diablo?

According to Kessel, after a certain number of attempts, Noch–ay–del–klinne did try to resurrect Diablo by dancing directly on his grave:

> One White Mountain Apache woman who was born in 1908 learned from an eyewitness that a dance was held over the grave of one of the dead chiefs. The chief had been buried in a shallow grave covered with a blanket and a piece of canvas on which he had placed his personal belongings and a covering of rocks. Noch–ay–del–klinne removed the rocks, grave goods, and canvas until the blanket was exposed. The burial then became the centre of the dance (Kessel 1976: 70).

Noch–ay–del–klinne's message had caused great excitement in the reservation, and the intense fervour that these ceremonies reportedly evoked among the Apache soon alarmed the local authorities. In fact, the new dance taught by Noch–ay–del–klinne was spreading very rapidly from one village to another, and it had the effect of establishing a new solidarity between the rival bands of Apache who were confined together within the same reservation. The local cavalry commanders recognized immediately that the new ritual was a

potential political threat. It was particularly worrying both to the civil and the military authorities that Apache who had been recruited as army scouts and Indian Agency policemen had allegedly been 'caught up' in the movement and were reported to have become 'uncooperative and sometimes belligerent, openly grumbling against white mastery of their homeland' (Haley 1981: 337).

We cannot follow the story of this first Apache movement in detail. It will suffice to say that the movement started by Noch-ay-del-klinne was seen as a serious threat, and was violently suppressed by the US Army, who killed Noch-ay-del-klinne and many of his followers. This is how John Bourke, who was at the same time an officer of the Army and an ethnographer working for the Department of Anthropology of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, describes the end of Noch-ay-del-klinne:

> This Apache medicine man … exercised great influence over his people at Camp Apache, in 1881. He boasted of his power to raise the dead, and predicted that the whites should soon be driven from the land. He also drilled the savages in a peculiar dance … This prophet or 'doctor' was killed in the engagement in the Cibecue canyon, August 30, 1881 (Bourke 1993 [1892]: 55).

It is clear that this first religious movement is still very chronologically close to the war between the Whites and the Apache, which had ended only a few years before, a cruel conflict that was far from being forgotten. The political content of the 'return of the dead' announced by Noch-ay-del-klinne was transparent to all the actors. To 'capture the imagination' of his followers (to use Goodwin and Kaut's [1954] expression), the first of the Apache prophets had only some vague references to the story of the Resurrection. He himself never imitated any Christian practices, and he operated as a medicine man. He possessed, in particular, the snake-lightning power (Goodwin 1969 [1938]: 35; Kessel 1976: 59), and the dance he taught was an unmistakable variant of a traditional Apache ritual. Noch-ay-del-klinne's movement, then, still expresses an unambiguous opposition to Christianity. When Noch-ay-del-klinne narrates his dreams or invites people to join in his new dance, he speaks in the name of the Apache shamanistic tradition.

Syncretism is virtually absent from his doctrine. After Noch-ay-del-klinne's death, a number of Apache medicine men – among them Big John (Ferg 1987; Goodwin & Kaut 1954) – tried to continue his movement and to follow his main teachings: the performance of a 'new' circular dance spread from village to village between 1903 and 1907. The search for a contact with the realm of the dead, under the form of the Sky and the People of the Lightning, was at the centre of this new ritual, called Dahgodia ('they will be raised up'). In the words of Big John to his followers: 'You will be raised up from the earth in a cloud, and while you are gone the earth will be changed. Then you will be lowered on to it again, and it will be all ready for you …' (Goodwin & Kaut 1954: 393).

The implication was, obviously, that the Whites would soon disappear from earth. The end of the Noch-ay-del-klinne movement, and of his attempt to 'resurrect' the old chiefs of the Apache war, had been tragic, but the death of the Prophet himself had been full of dignity. This time, the result of the attempt to make the Whites ritually disappear was to be crueller. Daslahdn,

one of the medicine men involved in the movement, claimed to be able to travel to the realm of the dead, and to come back alive three days later. A Resurrection from the dead, again, was to be performed. But, this time, it concerned the new Prophet himself. Neil Buck, an Apache believer in the movement of the 'Raising up' told the story of Daslahdn and the medicine men who were with him as follows:

> We must have danced four or five years in this new way, but finally we quit it because all the medicine men who ran it died. Daslahdn was the first to die: he felt that he could return from the dead and had his followers cut his head off so that he could prove it. But it never came true. They all died, so everybody got scared and quit. Big John was the only one left (cited in Goodwin and Kaut 1954: 393).

With Big John, some new customs are established. Some of them are characteristically paradoxical: the believers in the 'new dance' have to wear white garments, in a strictly traditional Apache manner. Among these dresses, a new symbol appears, which combines the cross with a form similar to a crescent. As Big John, like all his predecessors, possessed the 'snake-lightning power', it is highly probable that this form can be associated with one of the most important 'powers' of the Apache, the snake. Big John performed 'lightning song', which he taught to other medicine men (Goodwin & Kaut 1954: 399), and his dance was perceived as a 'snake-dance' (Goodwin & Kaut 1954: 400). In Apache symbolism, the power of the snake is obviously closely linked with the People of the Lightning, which is one of the ways to designate the realm of the Dead. It is not impossible that this association was already established at the time of Noch–ay–del–klinne. As early as 1884, Bourke himself had seen crosses associated with snakes:

> The sign of the cross appears in many places in Apache symbolism. This sign is related to the cardinal points and the four winds, and is painted by warriors … In October 1884, I saw a procession of Apache men and women, led by the medicine-men bearing two crosses … They were decorated with blue dots upon the unpainted surface, and a blue snake meandered down the longer arm … (Bourke 1933 [1892]: 29).

In these two new versions of the 'return of the dead' movement started by Noch–ay–del–klinne, some of the symbols have changed, but the identity of the prophets has not. Big John, like Daslahdn and all the other prophets, is a traditional medicine man. After the failed resurrection of Daslahdn, he retires to a remote village. Simply acknowledging the failure of his power, he surrenders his ambition to attain the Sky and lead the Apache there.

When Silas John appears, and announces his new prophetic message holding up a cross and snake, he is certainly referring to this recently established tradition of the Apache prophetic movements. His gesture refers, in particular, to the 'snake-dances' performed by Big John. Silas is also a medicine man, and he too possesses the 'snake-lightning'. In his teachings, he uses a range of features typical of the forty-year-old messianistic tradition started by Noch–ay–del–klinne: the snake, the cross, the return from the dead, the travel to the clouds, the white robes, and songs. For instance, the story of one of his 'miracles', involving the magical transformation of a drum into a living

being, was recounted to Ruth MacDonald Boyer as follows by his Mescalero
Apache followers:

'Silas converses with God'.
'He sees angels, angels with wings, dressed all in white'.
'Silas has thirty-two kinds of medicines'.
'Everything listens to Silas now, even the clouds'.
'He can bring a dead man back to life'.
'They say he has a drum. He just put this drum on the ground and it beats by itself
   when Silas talk to it' (MacDonald Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 152).

However, this time, things have changed radically. Far from trying to defend
the old tradition against the teaching of the missionaries, Silas John has begun
to act as a typical 'paradoxical I'. At the beginning of his career as a messiah,
he strictly follows the pattern of a shamanistic Apache initiation: he wanders
in the forest, eating no food, and looking for the vision of a *gan*, a traditional
Apache animal spirit. From 1904 until 1916, Silas learned all he could about
'the snake-lightning power'. His first vision involves the encounter with one
of these Spirits of the Mountain, the *gans*. And it is precisely a lightning that
teaches him his 'personal songs':

Silas John was carried to a place … where the earth was made, and where time began.
It was a white mountain with a black cloud over it. From the cloud a supernatural being
came to Silas John and informed him that he would become a prophet … This being
also taught him his prayers … (Kessel 1976: 163).

The supernatural lightning is obviously related to the snake. Silas sees snakes
in his vision, and establishes himself as a shaman possessing the snake power:

Silas John told me that a snake visited his house in 1913. It wouldn't go away. So Silas
decided to put some beads on its neck. He did that, and the fourth time he did that,
the snake left for good … When Silas was in heaven, the Spirit said: 'You had a visitor.
I am going to show you this visitor.' They went to a green spot where there were sixty-
four snakes. They all stood up. 'Pick out the one you put the beads on' – said the Spirit
(MacDonald Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 153-4).

The *gan* dances, where a significant sequence of symbolic relationships
between the snake and the lightning is ritually displayed, are one the most
important rituals in Apache society. These dances are a ritual way to establish
and keep alive the relationship with the animal spirits that provide for a
number of 'powers' needed by Apache men and women. *Gans* can appear in
dreams and visions, and teach people their power. As Basso has clearly stated,
this communication with the spirits has the effect of establishing a code of
behaviour between the animal and the person who is granted his power:

Apache say that the surest way to maintain effective contact with a power is to accord
it the same courtesies customarily extended to human beings. For instance … instruc-
tions given by a power, however onerous, should be carried out without complaint or
suppressed ill feeling. When making requests, a power should be addressed politely and
spoken to in a low tone. … (1970: 39).

However, when eventually Silas John experiences the vision of a powerful
spirit and is taught a number of shamanistic chants specifically related to the

power of snakes and lightning, he prohibits precisely the ritual devoted to the *gans*, and replaces it by his own 'prayer'. Old Man Arnold, one of his first Mescalero disciples, reported one of these prayers, where it was not the *gans* but Jesus himself who was remembered as one of the cosmological founders of the universe:

> When the earth was made, when the sky was made
> In the very beginning, they walk around with Jesus
> (MacDonald Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 149).

According to Old Man Arnold, this new way to describe the origin of the world caused perplexity among Silas's followers:

> It troubles me that Silas doesn't like the Crown [= *gan*] Dancers. He said their dances belong to the devil and do harm. That is hard to understand for me because I know their blessing have helped our people. But I guess we should follow the prophet (MacDonald Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 149).

As we have seen, when Silas decides to display a visual representation of his movement's supreme being, he exhibits a cross on which a snake is painted:

> The people from Campo Verde, Mescalero and both Arizona Apache Reservations gathered to be cured and to watch the much publicized snake medicine man at work. The dances were held on Sundays and between 500 and 600 Indians were in attendance. Silas John made a large cross from plywood, the vertical piece about five feet high. On this was painted a large serpent with its tail at the bottom and its head just below the point at which the crosspiece was attached … (Kessel 1976: 172).

In this representation, the snake is made to be Christ and Christ is identified with the snake. Both are Apache and Christian. Later, Silas also started to claim that God had chosen the Apache, not the Jews, as his 'elected people'. As Old Man Arnold stated: 'The Silas cult is better for the Apaches than the Dutch Reformed service. Since the Jews crucified Jesus, the Apache have become God's favoured people. That is what Silas has said' (MacDonald Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 295).

Finally, when his ritual − which one might think of as having been created as an act of resistance to the Christianity of the soldiers and missionaries − attracts a growing body of adherents, Silas enjoins his followers to call him Jesus. This series of apparent paradoxes leads to the same conclusion: Silas the shaman has become, for his disciples, Silas the (new) Christ:

> The prophet is Silas John … He started to preach about three years ago on the Fort Apache Indian reservation. Lots of those folks listen to him now. He is a great orator. He has power, just like the medicine men of the old times. And he tells the Indians to live good lives … he tells them to stop their fighting and gambling … He knows all about Christianity and says we should listen to what it says in the Bible. He says our medicine men are no longer enough. We should turn to Jesus (MacDonald Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 143; see also Henry n.d.).

From a superficial point of view, this 'careful blend of Apache and Christian belief and symbolism' (Goodwin & Kaut: 1954: 388) may seem to

be irretrievably disjointed and incoherent. Yet as we know, Silas's teachings became a widespread and enduring element of Apache belief and practice. In order to explain why this was so, we must reconstruct the shamanistic background of his training and then understand what changed in the process of contact with Christianity. Let us, then, recall some general notions of the Amerindian shamanistic tradition based on the ritual recitation of chants.

The plural enunciator: Kuna and Apache shamanisms

The Kuna tradition offers a particularly clear example of this kind of shamanistic recitation, which is widespread among the Amerindians. This tradition involves the recitation of chants which are used to treat illnesses, accompany rites of passage, and impart various kinds of magical power. In the anthropological study of ritual symbolism, much attention has been devoted to the various ways in which language, as it is used in ritual performances, transforms the usual representation of the world, and constructs its own truth-universe. A typical way to do this in Amerindian shamanism is to establish a metaphorical link, a set of analogies, or a group of 'mystical' relationships between ritual objects and living beings. A striking example of this is to be found in the Mu-Igala, a Kuna shamanistic chant devoted to the therapy of difficult childbirth (Holmer & Wassén 1953), where the baby 'coming out' from the body of the mother is progressively transformed into a hybrid being, called the 'bleeding pearl' (or 'bead').

Let us follow briefly the phases of this transformation, without referring in detail to the text of the chant (I have done this elsewhere – Severi 2002). We can say that the equivalence established between the pearl and the baby supposes a series of (implicit or explicit) statements such as these:

> The mother is a tree.
> The baby is a fruit.
> The body of the mother is bleeding.
> The tree is bleeding.
> The fruit of the tree is bleeding.
> The fruit is a ritual bead.
> The bead is bleeding.

By the progressive extension of this means of transferring analogical connotations to other objects and other beings, an entire transformation of the world, formulated in ritual terms, is symbolically achieved in this Kuna shamanistic tradition. Here, as elsewhere, the linguistic instrument of these metamorphoses is parallelism. This technique of 'threading' verbal images together (Townsley 1993: 457) is an all-pervasive feature of Amerindian shamanism, and Kuna shamans are particularly adept in its deployment. It must be stressed, however, that parallelism is not only a linguistic technique. When ritually applied to the description of the experience of an ill person, it becomes a way to construct a supernatural dimension which is thought of as a possible world, possessing an existence parallel to that of the ordinary world. In this context, for the shamanistic chant to refer to a 'bleeding fruit' is to

refer to the real experience of the woman giving birth to a child, and, simultaneously, to a mythical Tree-Mother bearing fruits.

In my earlier work (Severi 2002), I sought to show that the same instrument, parallelism, can also be used in a reflexive way to define not only the world described by the ritual language, but also the identity of the person enunciating it. It is in this way that Amerindian shamans establish the special context which characterizes ritual communication.

Let us return to our example of shamanistic chant, the Kuna Mu Igala. Like many other chants of the Kuna healing tradition, this begins with a sort of introductory section which contains an extensive and painstaking evocation of the ritual gestures and procedures necessary for enunciating the chant. In this 'introduction' we see how the shaman moves around the hut, asks his wife to prepare a meal of boiled plantains, goes and washes in the river, returns to the hut, sits next to the ceremonial brazier, starts in total silence to burn cocoa beans in the brazier, gathers the statuettes that will assist him in the rite, sits down again, and begins to sing. In the Mu Igala, this preliminary part takes up a considerable share of the transcription of the chant (Holmér & Wassén 1953) and periodically alternates with an account, of a type that will be comparatively familiar to anyone studying shamanism, of the ups and downs of the soul snatched away by the spirits, whose absence has triggered the illness. In order to understand the paradox implied by a description of this type, we must remember that what the shaman is describing in this passage (the dialogue with the midwife, the encounter with his wife, the recognition of the illness, the meeting with the sick woman, the preparation – fundamental for the rite – of the brazier) is always something that has already occurred by the time he starts chanting. In other words, if we go from a simple reading of the text to a description of the conditions of the rite, what we see is that on each occasion the chanter refers to himself in the third person. The result is a kind of *regressus ad infinitum*: a shaman, sitting next to his brazier, at the foot of the hammock where the woman about to go into childbirth is lying, is talking about a shaman who is sitting next to his brazier, at the foot of the hammock where the woman about to go into childbirth is lying, talking about a shaman … and so on. Before starting to sing the chant, the chanter describes himself. For a long time I saw this as a relatively simple mnemonic device: as an example of a special genre of the Kuna ritual 'ways of speaking' (Sherzer 1983), the Mu Igala possesses its own conditions of enunciation. It seems natural that tradition would need to preserve not only the text, but also its 'instructions for use'. And the more natural way to do so is, understandably enough, to verbalize them, and just store them in the chant, 'before it starts' (Severi 1993*b*). However, I have now come to see that this interpretation only accounts for a superficial aspect of the shamanistic ritual enunciation. We have already seen that the 'move' consisting in describing 'someone speaking about someone preparing to speak' has a first consequence: it short-cuts time. If we keep in mind that, with a few trivial exceptions, only the present tense is used in this part of the chant, this becomes very clear. We have seen that the enunciator says he is approaching the ritual seat, the hammock, the door, and so on, when he has already performed such things, and is seated, as is required, 'toward the East', and facing the sea. The immediate consequence is that what is formulated in the present tense refers here to the past. This has many effects,

but one of them is particularly relevant to the definition of the enunciator. When this present–meaning–past tense meets with the real present – in other terms, when the linguistic description of the situation becomes an accurate one ('the shaman is now seated there and is saying this') – we have a situation where 'someone is speaking about someone speaking (now)'. We should remember an essential point: in the Kuna perspective it is precisely this description of the position of the speaker that characterizes the 'special kind of communication' which is appropriate for ritual chanting. It is only when this part has been enunciated that the journey of the spirits into the supernatural world can begin, and the chant becomes ritually effective. The simple narration of a travel in the supernatural world would not be expected to have any therapeutic effect.

   Why is this so? What has changed here? Actually, this definition of a speaker 'speaking of himself speaking' appears to be paradoxical only to the extent that we do not understand that it illustrates another way of applying parallelism. The shaman is actually using the same technique that we have seen used in the text concerning the baby progressively constructed as a 'bleeding fruit'. That technique of transformation of a real body, or person, into a 'supernatural' presence described by the chant is here applied to the enunciator himself. This transformation is never explicitly described in the chant, as in the case of the mother 'becoming a tree', or of the baby being transformed into a fruit. However, from the moment the singer starts to mention a chanter who is about to begin to recite his chant, from the point of view of the definition of the enunciator (well before the beginning of the narration of the shamanistic journey), an entirely new situation is established: the enunciators have become two, one being the 'parallel' image of the other. There is the one who is said to be there (in the landscape described by the chant, preparing his travel to the underworld), and there is the one saying that he is here (in the hut, under the hammock where the ill person lies), chanting.

   This first, elementary pattern of the process of 'making the enunciator plural', attributing to the enunciator a plural nature, is not an episodic detail. On the contrary, this 'doubling' of the presence of the chanter is only a very simple example of the way in which a plural enunciator may be brought into being in shamanistic speech. This process of constructing a complex identity is a general phenomenon in Amerindian shamanism. As I have shown elsewhere (Houseman & Severi 1998), shamanistic ritual enunciation always involves the metamorphosis (or definition in ritual terms) of its enunciator. By chanting, a shaman becomes a novel sort of enunciator, constituted by a long series of connotations, including both the evil and the therapeutic spirits. The reflexive use of parallelism which characterizes the Mu Igala is only the first step in the same process by which it is possible to build up a set of images which ascribe plural and indeed contradictory identities to the enunciator. The shaman thus becomes a complex enunciator, a figure capable of lending his voice to different invisible beings. What in the relatively simple case of the Mu Igala is a simple way to 'double' the presence of the chanter can become – by a process that we could call cumulative inclusion – a way of imbuing the chanter with a whole series of divergent identities. Language is used in this context not only as a means of conveying meaning, and a magical way of performing a therapeutic act, but also as an acoustic mask: a reflexive means

to define the ritual identity of the speaker. Finally, let me underline that this definition is a parallelistic one: the enunciator becomes defined in the same terms as the supernatural beings are defined in the chants, that is, as being composed of 'canonical pairs' (Fox 1988) of opposed connotations.

This kind of formal analysis of the construction of the ritual enunciator, discussed thus far in relation to the Kuna example, may also prove useful in explaining important aspects of the Apache shamanistic tradition. For the Apache medicine man too, to sing a chant is a crucial way to display the power of an animal spirit through a special use of language. As Keith Basso has observed, the

> power of a spirit, in a sense, *is its* song. Chants are said to 'belong' to a power; they are also described as being part of it. In fact, the relationship between the two is so close that the term *diyi* may be used either in reference to a power itself, or to its associated chants … This is especially true of medicine men, whose effectiveness in ceremonials rests squarely on their ability to 'sing' (1970: 42).

Let us consider the example of the *gan* spirits, as impersonated by the Apache 'masked dancers'. The very rich documentation gathered by Ferg and Kessel about the collection of masks now in the Arizona State Museum (Ferg 1987: 117–25) shows that the spirit impersonated by a *gan* dancer (often called simply a 'Spirit of the Mountain') is a complex representation, which involves references to a sequence of supernatural beings. This sequence leads from the snake to the lightning, passing through a number of related creatures belonging both to the Earth and to the Sky. Among them, the cross – as a representation of the four cardinal points of the surface of the earth – and the bird – radiating rays related to the sun or to the lightning itself – play a central role (see Fig.).

Actually, the four cardinal points permeate all the shamanistic traditions of the Apache. The *gan* dance always takes place in an oriented space, where the 'cross' of the four cardinal points is clearly marked by special hoops painted with the corresponding colours (Opler 1941: 107). The dancers have to kneel in the four directions, and to 'gyrate clockwise' (Opler 1941: 108). The pollen, which accompanies their action, is also to be spread in the four directions. Opler meticulously describes this preparation of the ritual space in his monumental study (1941: 76-134), a process that John Bourke had observed as early as 1887:

> I have seen this dance a number of times, but will confine my description to one seen at Fort Marion, Florida, 1887, when the Chiricahua Apache were confined as prisoners … The masked medicine men advanced to where a squaw was holding up to them a little baby sick in its cradle … The baby was held so as to occupy each of the cardinal points and face each point directly opposite; first on the east side, facing the west; then the north side, facing the south; then the west side, facing the east, then the south side, facing the north … (Bourke 1993 [1892]: 133-4).

Let us now pass to the impersonators of the *gan* spirits. Among the Apache, it is a duty of the masked dancer to respect his ritual role. He must totally identify with the *gan* he represents. 'No one may address or call the name of the impersonator whom he recognizes' (Opler 1941: 112). Women were not

FIGURE 1. A Western Apache *gan* dance (Ferg 1987).

supposed to know that the impersonators of *gans* in the *gan* dances were 'mere men' (Goodwin 1969 [1938]: 535). The dancer must be a good receptacle for an image, which is utterly independent of his personal identity. If we take now the splendid description that Opler has given of a *gan* dance performed in the context of the female initiation ritual, we see that the entire ritual action is here founded on a connection between the movement of the dancers and the chant sung by the shaman who accompanies their movements. The shaman's song dictates the rhythm itself of the dance:

> The songs [sung during the therapeutic ritual] are classified in three groups, each related to one of three types of dance: the 'free step', the 'short step' and the 'high step'. The dancers, and especially their leader, must be able to recognize a song at once, and enter upon the proper step (Opler 1941: 114).

But the relationship between singer and dancer goes beyond this. In this context, the dancer is the image of the spirit, and the singing shaman is the voice of the dancer. Through the ritual action, identification is realized between the dancer and the spirit, and then between the singer and the dancer. When the shaman chants, for instance (Opler 1941: 108):

> In the middle of the Holy Mountain,
> In the middle of its body, stands a hut,
> Brush–built for the Black Mountain Spirit.
> White lightning flashes in these moccasins,
> White lightning streaks in angular path,
> I am the lightning flashing and streaking.

a complex identity is established both through the voice of the singer and the image of the dancer. A statement like 'I am the lightning flashing and streaking' supposes, in this context, a chain of identifications of the type presented in the following sequence:

> I am the lightning.
> I am the *gan*.
> I am the snake.
> I am the man possessing the snake power.
> I am the shaman.

Here too, the definition of the shaman is generated by what we have called a reflexive application of parallelism. An analysis of the process of ritual enunciation shows that the Apache and the Kuna shamanistic recitations are comparable. Among the Kuna, the complex identity of the enunciator is generated by a cumulative inclusion that is expressed only through words. In the Apache case, the complex identity of the ritual enunciator is constructed through the reference to the complex image of the *gan* dancer, which simultaneously refers to a sequence of related supernatural beings.

The Silas cult: the Four Crosses and the Holy Ground

Let us now come back to Silas John, and look closer at the new cult that he established: that of the Holy Ground prayer. We know that the doctrine preached by Silas John was very similar to Christianity. The memoirs published by a number of his followers provide valuable insights into the nature of this new 'prayer'. First of all, a particular space, called the Four Crosses Holy Ground, was to be marked. Within it, the four cardinal points were to be precisely fixed: 'The church consisted of a rectangle about six feet by four feet. Its sides faced the four sacred directions: the long sides were north and south, the short sides, east and west. *A five-foot Cross stood at each corner*' (MacDonald Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 150 [my emphasis]). There is an obvious analogy here between these crosses 'covered with black, white, yellow and blue symbols' (1992: 150), and the 'special hoops painted with the corresponding colours' mentioned by Opler (1941: 107) in his description of the *gan* dances. But there is more: according to the followers of Silas John's cult, the cross itself acted like *gans*: they 'talked to them in dreams' (MacDonald Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 150).

Once the orientated space was established, the 'prayer' was to be enunciated during the performance of a dance. Silas John himself was always the first to perform the ritual. The believer was to follow exactly what John did, slowly crossing the Holy Ground. Very precise instructions were given regarding the gestures to be performed while saying the prayer, the steps to be stamped on the floor while 'chanting', the part of the space to be reached, and finally the sequence of the cardinal points to be touched (or 'honoured') during the recitation. Four Crosses marked these points, following the instructions of Silas. The description of the slow dance performed during the recitation of the prayer and the 'blessing' made with pollen on the Four Crosses Holy Ground at the Mescalero reservation relates a sequence of prescribed gestures,

where the traditional gestures of the Apache tradition are systematically con-
nected with Christian liturgy: 'When the leader of the service approached the
Holy Ground, he removed his hat, placing it to the east side of the plot. Then
he walked to the west side of the rectangle and *knelt, facing east*' (MacDonald
Boyer & Duffy Gayton 1992: 150 [my emphasis]), just like the *gan* dancer
described by Opler (1941). After this, Silas performed a sort of synthesis
between the sign of the cross and the traditional manipulation of the pollen.
According to MacDonald Boyer and Duffy Gayton, he

> took a pinch of pollen in his right hand, holding it to the east while his left hand,
> palm in, lay across his breast. He touched his right shoulder, the top of his head and his
> breast with the yellow powder, finishing by making two clockwise circles over his head
> (1992: 151).

Then 'he blessed each Cross with pollen' (1992: 151). This sequence of ges-
tures was so important in the ritual that every attendant to the 'service' 'had
to repeat, in the same order and with the same gestures, the example of the
Prophet. Like the leader, he or she had to start from the east, turn in the same
manner, take a pinch of pollen, kneel to the Cross, turn clockwise etc.' (1992:
151).

Many commentators (e.g. Goodwin & Kaut 1954; Kessel 1976) have attrib-
uted the 'scandal' raised by the dances that Silas performed to the use that he
made of live snakes. That was also, for them, the main means used by Silas to
'capture the imagination' of his followers, and thereby gain authority over
them. However, it is easy to show that this was by no means a novelty in
Apache tradition: all his predecessors were medicine men specially trained in
the 'powers' and songs related to the snakes. The father of Silas had himself
been a specialist, and he had taught his son how to capture and use the rattle-
snakes. Regan (1930) – among many others – has mentioned the traditional
use of snakes in Apache shamanistic practices. Appearances not withstanding,
the real explanation for the success attributed to Silas and his rituals is to be
found elsewhere. A comparison of the ritual recitation and dance taught by
the Prophet with traditional Apache rituals shows that while reciting the glory
of the new Christ, the faithful follower of Silas John's cult was actually simul-
taneously performing something very similar to a *gan* dance – precisely the
dance that Silas had prohibited. When the believer, imitating the behaviour of
the Prophet, utters his prayer, he is behaving like a good Christian. But when
he uses the Apache sacred pollen, kneels to a painted cross representing the
East, or 'turns clockwise' to step outside the church, he performs the same
gestures made by a *gan* impersonator before his dance.

We have seen that the traditional dance involved a progressive identifica-
tion of the shaman singer with his animal spirit: the *gan*. Then the singer, as
gan, was identified with the dancer. During the recitation of the Four Crosses
prayer, a similar process occurs: the participant who prays like a Christian
becomes identified, by his dancing, with Silas John, the Prophet, and then
with the Apache Spirit of the Mountain, the *gan*. What the performer is doing
while performing the dance contradicts what he or she says while reciting
the prayer. In the space of the Holy Ground, the person praying becomes
simultaneously a person who dances to the *gans*.

The analysis of the ritual action, based on the identification of the pragmatic context of the enunciation of Silas John's prayer, shows that the transformation that gives birth to the messianistic religion here lies in an imagistic (iconical) use of a doctrinal (discursive) mode. The ritual actions taught by Silas contradict his teachings. The 'new' religion is, in fact the old one: the prayer is also the dance he has prohibited. However, if we use Whitehouse's distinction between the two modes, the imagistic mode for the action and the images, and the doctrinal mode for the prayers, we see that the Holy Ground prayer is neither absurd nor contradictory. Rather, if we use the distinction in an intensional way, to understand its contradictory aspects, it appears as a way to generate complexity through paradox. In fact, the most important consequence of the simultaneous use of these two different modes of communication (imagistic for the sequence of actions, doctrinal for the text) is the construction of a particular kind of ritual identity. Silas John speaks as a Christian and acts as a traditional shaman: once placed in the ritual context, he is both the one and the other.

We can conclude, then, that the analysis of the counterintuitive conditions of communication taught by Silas John to his followers to establish his new 'prayer' shows that the solution of the problem posed by the apparently absurd statement 'I am Jesus because I am a shaman' is to be looked for not in the contradiction between the two opposed predicates, but in the complexity, ritually realized, of the enunciating subject.

This conclusion has a general consequence regarding religious syncretism and cultural contact. Contrary to appearances, the ritual definition of Silas John as 'Jesus, the Apache Shaman founder of the Four Crosses Holy Ground' is not the result of a cultural exchange of beliefs; it is just a further application of the parallelistic logic that we have seen in the example of the Kuna chanter. Indeed, the fact of acquiring a complex identity, constructed by the accumulation of contradictory connotations, is a typical feature of Amerindian shamanism – not of Christianity. The consequence is that, in his claim that 'To become Jesus, not Yesun' was a way to oppose, and not to assimilate, Christianity, Silas John was right. The 'I' who says to his people 'call me Jesus' is not a product of the mixture of two religious traditions. This 'I' should instead be seen as a paradoxical, but still parallelistic, enunciator, made, like the Kuna chanter, of 'canonical pairs of connotations'. The analysis of the pragmatic conditions of the ritual propagation of Silas John's messianistic message, effectively supported in this case by the distinction between doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity, shows that there is no syncretism operating here. Since Christ had become a term of the series of parallelistic pairs that characterize shamans, to call Silas John, among other things, 'Jesus' was not a way to repudiate the shamanistic tradition, but a new way to be faithful to it.

Let us now try to explain, on this new basis, the intense propagation that characterizes the messianistic message. Following the Sperber-Boyer approach, both traditional shamanism and missionary Christianity had equal chances to prevail in this context: they both contained a significant number of counterintuitive representations. What we see in the history of the Silas John cult, however, is that the pre-existing religion was seriously weakened by the spread of the new one. It is the messianistic religion which has prevailed. However, this success is not due to the invention of new religious representations. From

the point of view of the semantic content, the religious message of Silas John and his followers conveys nothing that is really new. What is new, as we have seen, is the particular way in which the pragmatic context of the message is built. The 'new prayer' taught by Silas John establishes a logical link between two contradictory definitions of the Prophet. Silas is a powerful Apache shaman because he shows himself to be an incarnation of Christ, and vice versa. In this sense, the ritual action introduces paradox in the way the 'new religious message' is conveyed. The simultaneous use of the two modes of religiosity, imagistic (dance) and discursive ('prayer', or 'chant'), constitutes an effective means to construct a counterintuitive pragmatic context within which religious representations can be propagated. Messianistic religion prevails because of the paradoxical relationship that it establishes between the two existing religions. It is not an entirely new counterintuitive representation that accounts for the propagation of the new religion, but the unexpected relationship generated by Silas John's message between contradictory religious messages. The Christian cross exhibiting the Apache snake illustrates this process in a single, intense image. The conflict between two different cultures is here successfully interpreted by paradox, since, in the messianistic perspective, both represent God. We can conclude that paradoxical contexts of communication, as well as counterintuitive representations, make for successful cultural propagation.

NOTES

A previous version of this paper was presented at the Conference on 'Modes of Religiosity' organized by James Laidlaw and Harvey Whitehouse at King's College, Cambridge, in December 2001. I wish to thank all the participants for their comments as well as two anonymous *JRAI* readers; their suggestions were very helpful in clarifying the argument.

[1] According to Harvey Whitehouse, religious traditions can establish themselves following two modes, the doctrinal and the imagistic. Religions based on the doctrinal mode possess a discursive form and a stable body of knowledge. For its transmission, this mode needs frequent repetition of rituals and relies, from a cognitive point of view, on semantic memory. A typical example of a doctrinal mode of religiosity is to be found in modern Protestantism. The imagistic mode does not refer to an established body of knowledge. It is, rather, focused on intense personal experiences, like ecstatic visions, or initiation rituals. These experiences are transmitted as flashbulb memories and subsequently generate spontaneous exegesis. Whitehouse (1992; 2000) has argued that these two modes have a deep influence on the social structure and internal dynamics of religious movements. The doctrinal mode generally implies a stable hierarchy, the imagistic mode usually generates unstable, tendentially egalitarian social groups.

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Capturer l'imagination : une approche cognitive de la complexité culturelle

Résumé

À quelques exceptions près, l'élaboration d'une théorie de la cognition humaine ayant une portée anthropologique générale a été associée à une inévitable réduction de la complexité ethnographique. Aucune analyse de cas n'a encore montré la possibilité d'une approche cognitive de la complexité culturelle. L'auteur souhaite montrer ici qu'une approche cognitive différente peut améliorer notre compréhension des faits ethnographiques et nous aider considérablement à revoir plusieurs concepts anthropologiques traditionnels. Pour appuyer cette thèse, il présente une analyse du mouvement religieux messianiste des Apaches de l'Ouest à San Carlos et White Mountain, en Arizona.

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