

PAUL RADIN: TRICKSTER IN ANTHROPOLOGY

By Christer Lindberg

An introduction to tracks of mobility

If we take into account the works of Paul Radin, we will soon be aware of quite a divergent line of thought in mainstream American anthropology. That the life and works of Radin (1883-1959) became a topic in a Trickster-symposium was, of course, inevitable. His influential study *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (1956) is one of the true classics in the field of Native American studies. Presenting forty-nine stories as a cycle of Winnebago Trickster myths, this work of Radin is highly suggestive, something that even Claude Lévi-Strauss, who clearly refutes Radin's interpretation, has acknowledged. The following, however, is not another discussion pertaining to this particular book, but a sketch of the very complex man behind it. Trickster takes the part of a ambiguous creater and destroyer, giver and negator, cheater and cheated, subhuman and superhuman:

He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being (Radin 1956:xxiii).

The life and works of Paul Radin can, of course, not be ascribed with such unpredictable traits. However, as a highly independent researcher – or plainly speaking an outsider – in the Boasian paradigm of American anthropology, Radin's fluctuating theoretical and methodological contributions symbolises something of the Trickster character. With Paul Radin anthropology and Native American studies found a creative, versatile and imaginative mind, but also a frequently misunderstood and underestimated researcher. As with the constantly wandering Trickster – whom he found so fascinating – Radin himself appears to have been on the move throughout his lifetime.

The trajectory of Paul Radinsky begins in Lodz, Russian Poland, in 1883. Hardly one year old, his family took him on a long journey – the first of many to come. The United States became his new homeland – a country where also his older brothers Herman and Max were destined for successful careers. The line of Radin's life through time and space continues through school and highschool to Columbia University in New York. After a session in zoology, long enough to write a thesis on the embryology of the shark, he turned up for lectures in history by James Harvey Robinson. Anthropology was just a hall away, but Radin never took shortcuts. Instead he went abroad, touring around Europe during 1905 to 1907. In Berlin and Munich, Germany, he came into contact with anthropology through famous South American specialists like Karl von den Steinen, Paul Ehrenreich and Eduard Seler. Back home, Radin began his studies in anthropology under Franz Boas. Together with Alfred Kroeber, Clark Wissler, Edward Sapir,

Robert Lowie, Frank Speck, Alexander Goldenweiser and Elliot Skinner, he took the famous course in statistics – the one that everybody took and nobody understood. Soon Boas persuaded him to do fieldwork, and already in 1908 he got into contact with the Winnebago Indians in Wisconsin and Nebraska.¹

The summer of 1908 was of more than usual significance to those Winnebago who still adhered to their old manner of living....In that year, a new religion, compounded of Christian and Indian elements, first began its triumphant sweep through the reservation” (Radin 1945:35).

It was a time of conflicts and dissensions at the reservation and the peyote religion, moving up from Oklahoma, could by its leader John Rave readily be incorporated into traditional Winnebago ceremonies and beliefs. Arriving with a letter of introduction, Radin was to record ”the customs and beliefs” of the tribe. ”My first task, of course, was to learn a little of the language and then to take down some texts phonetically. The recording of the texts had some important consequences for my work.”

There was mystic in the air – as if the meeting between Radin and the Winnebagos was predestined:

Very few, if any, of the white people living in the neighborhood, even when they could speak a little Winnebago, could pronounce any of the unusual sounds in their language correctly. That a complete stranger like myself should immediately, and without any difficulty, not only pronounce these sounds but be able to write down a whole story and then read it back to them – that partook of the unusual, and seemed to the highly excited imaginations of the peyote-eaters an omen that had to be properly interpreted....since I had come at this very opportune time and seemed to possess such unusual gifts, I must have been sent by God” (ibid:37).

With or without magic, a bond of respect and friendship had been settled. The strange white man – *Nianājinga*, Stands-on-the-water – would come back, again and again for the remaining years of his life. The texts he collected, many with secret and sacred contents, had in 1944 grown to some ten thousand pages (ibid:viii).

Following the concepts of professor Torsten Hägerstrand's time-geography, there is no doubt that the Winnebago reservation became the most important intersection of Radin's intellectual journey in space and time. He took his Ph.D. at Columbia in 1910, worked for the Bureau of American Ethnology in Washington during the following two years, and was involved in a joint Columbia-Harvard project in 1912-13. Radin went to Canada in company with Sapir in 1914, eventually drifting back across the border to find himself in California in the early twenties. Next destination was Europe – he spent time in Cambridge as well as with Carl Gustav Jung in Zürich. He got an appointment at University of Michigan in 1925 but moved to Berkeley and the University of California in 1932. For a while it seemed as the drifter within him had finally been laid to rest – years passed and Radin remained in Berkeley. He retired in 1949, at the age of sixty-six. Retirement did not, however, mean an easy and quiet life. On the contrary, Radin was as active and uneasy as ever. He took his silver-cane and made a grand tour of Europe, including Sweden where he visited his friend professor Åke Hultkrantz in Stockholm.² Radin was given an honorary position at the multidisciplinary department for History of Ideas at Brandeis University in New England in 1957, an engagement he enjoyed until his death in New York on February 21, 1959.

Reading tracks of mobility

The dates and places listed above provides us with more than a map of Paul Radin's movements in life: they rise the question of how we can understand his obvious restlessness. I will argue that we in those tracks will find the explanation to his diverse topics of interest, i.e. anthropology, psychology, philosophy and archaeology concentrating to various regions such as North America, South America, and Africa. Radin wrote everything from monographs and comparative studies of religion to prose and poetry. As for his intellectual pursuit, dates and places also provide a key to influences of German-Russian intellectualism, Marxist materialism, and Boasian relativism which can be found in his thinking. They resulted in such disparate work as: *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (1927), *Primitive Religion* (1937) and *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian* (1926). Finally, we find alienation in his mobility. It is a well known fact that he had turned away from the academic establishment – having problems with the daily university routine, his fellow researchers, and the campus prestige system. Thus, it is not so surprising to meet people who remember him as a quite unpleasant man, an unpredictable bohemian that could not be trusted, as well as people who speak of him as a highly sensitive, nice and gentle person.³

In spite of people's like or dislike of Radin's person, many scholars acknowledge that *The Winnebago Tribe* is one of the most remarkable monographs ever written about Native Americans. Already in the 1910's, Radin stood for a methodological sensitivity that few of his American colleagues could match, and certainly none in the contemporary British school of anthropology. Based upon Radin's initial fieldwork of 1908-1913, the manuscript was completed in 1916 but not published by the Bureau of American Ethnology until 1923. Working with key-informants – notable Jasper and Sam Blowsnake, Sam Carley, and John Rare – Radin collected information in text-form, i.e. recordings in Winnebago with English translations. With information written down in a syllabic alphabet borrowed from the Sauk & Fox, Radin produced phonetic transcriptions that were finally translated into English by his interpreter Oliver Lamere. By presenting lengthy extracts from his texts, Radin was able to produce a monograph where the Winnebagos presented information in their own way.:

It has been the aim of the author to separate as definitely as possible his own comments from the actual data obtained, and for that reason every chapter, with the exception of those on history, archaeology, and material culture, is divided into two parts, a discussion of the data and the data itself (Radin 1923:XV).

This way of presenting and looking at facts was, of course, in the Boasian tradition – a keen separation of native "facts" from the interpretations of a white scholar. "It is principally the raw material that is presented here. Throughout the work, the Indian has been allowed to tell the facts in his own way. For that reason no attempt has been made to change the English, except when it was ungrammatical or unintelligible. This will explain the simple and at times poor English of the accounts," he wrote in the preface to *The Winnebago Tribe* (ibid). For Radin, however, the text-based information provided more than merely a basic separation of objectivity and subjectivity. By comparing statements of informants belonging to different social groups or clans it soon became clear that their own recollections of the same cultural events differed blantly. Such a pattern of individuality was also (surprisingly) revealed as soon as two or more informants from the same clan provided accounts of a common experience. Suddenly, "objective" cultural

facts proved to be "subjective" individual experiences. For Radin it meant two things, first that culture could not be regarded as a homogeneous entity, and secondly, that in order to get a thorough knowledge of culture and history, one has to study individuals as creative cultural actors. Thus, the first field experience of Radin provides us with the key to early studies as *Personal Reminiscences of a Winnebago Indian* (1913) and *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian* (1920), as well as some unusual chapter headings such as "The role of the Religious Formulator" (*Primitive Religion*, 1937) and "The Man of Action and the Thinker" as well as "The Religious and the Non-religious man" (*The World of Primitive Man*, 1953) in his later comparative studies. (For most, if not all, of his colleagues it was simply impossible to speak of members of a traditional society as "non-religious".) This point of view, in addition to Radin's appearance as an extreme primitivist and a political ultra-radical anarchist, made him an outsider far away from the mainstream of anthropology in the US or elsewhere. Naturally, it was a position that colored his view of ethnology in general, his conception of history and culture, and his efforts to balance out idealism and materialism.

The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology

As pointed out above, my discussion was originally presented as a lecture at a Trickster-symposium held in Uppsala last year. Thus, it was reasonable to put focus on "Winnebago Hero Cycles" and *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. The fact that these and *Primitive Man as Philosopher* remain the most well-known of Radin's works, also suggest that it should have a central position in this biographical sketch.

The Winnebago name *Wakdjunkaga* (a name of unknown etymology) means "Trickster" or "cunning one". The Trickster is a mythological being with many faces who gives a concrete form to the principle of ambivalence. Coyote, Raven, Mink, Hare, Blue-Jay, Crow, Rabbit, Spider, Raccoon, Opossum, and many others who are anthropomorphic has been identified as Tricksters, a term deriving from Daniel G. Brinton's 1885 article "the Hero-God of the Algonkins as a Cheat and Liar" (Gill & Sullivan 1992:308). Radin discusses the Winnebago trickster-cycle in connection with Raven of the Northwest and the Assiniboine *Sitconski* (alternatively *Inktumni* or *Inktomi*). Furthermore, he points towards the folk tales of the Greeks: "Prometheus has affinities with the trickster because the cunning he practises on Zeus overreaches itself and turns into stupidity, personified by his own brother, Epimetheus" (Radin 1956:180). Emphasizing the universality of the trickster complex, outlining parallels in Tlingit, Blackfoot, and Assiniboine mythology, it is somewhat surprising that Radin did not extend his discussion to the Fox and other trickster characters in South American Indian mythology – a field that he obviously knew quite well. Introducing the Trickster, Radin states:

Laughter, humour and irony permeate everything Trickster does. The reaction of the audience in aboriginal societies to both him and his exploits is prevaingly one of laughter tempered by awe. There is no reason for believing this is secondary or a late development. Yet it is difficult to say whether the audience is laughing at him, at the tricks he plays on others, or at the implications his behaviour and activities have for them (ibid:xxiv).

Radin again makes it clear that this mythological complex can be discovered among the ancient Greeks, the Chinese, and the Japanese as well, and continues:

How shall we interpret this amazing figure? Are we dealing here with the workings of the mythopoetic imagination, common to all mankind, which, at a certain period in man's history, gives us his picture of the world and of himself? Is this a *speculum mentis* wherein is depicted man's struggle with himself and with a world into which he had been thrust without his volition and consent? Is this the answer, or the adumbration of an answer, to questions forced upon him, consciously or unconsciously, since his appearance on earth? (ibid:xxiv).

The Trickster is not able to discern good from bad – yet he is the creator of both. He has no set of values – neither social, nor moral – and still he provides mankind with cultural norms. The Trickster is simultaneously the creator and the destroyer, the giver and denier, the one who fools and the one who gets fooled.

We have a generalized and, if you will, a genitalized figure, completely controlled and dominated by his appetite and obsessively ego-centered. Throughout, he exhibits the mentality of an infant. In his comportment he is a grotesque mixture of infant and mature male. He has no purpose beyond that of gratifying his primary wants, hunger and sex; he is cruel, cynical and unfeeling. Yet as he passes from one exploit to another a change comes over him. The diffuseness of his behavior gradually disappears and, at what was undoubtedly the real of the myth, he emerges with the physical outlines of man (Radin 1953:313).

For Radin he symbolized the oldest expression of mankind – a tale of the subhuman and the superhuman still to be found in its archaic form in the American Indian mythology. He extended Franz Boas' earlier interpretation of the anomalous and contradictory transformer as reflecting a stage of development where these character traits were not separated (Boas 1940:474).

Four years after the original publication of "Winnebago Hero Cycles", Radin revisited the problem "with drastic changes and in a different perspective" in *The World of Primitive Man* (1953), a book completed in Lugano, Switzerland. This time he stressed the satire on man and the critique of Winnebago society involved in the amazing narrative. The Trickster cycle served as a mechanism for expressing all the irritations, dissatisfactions, the maladjustments, in short, the negativism and frustrations, of Winnebago society. "Their societal organization put many restraints on its members. The main prestige value for men, war, and a none too great economic security, produced many crises, internal and external. The ideological superstructure, in addition, possessed a basic contradiction which had to be somehow resolved." Trickster was, of course, symbolic. He resolved nothing, "...except in so far as he demonstrated what happens when man's instinctual side is given free reign" (Radin 1953:338). Assembling all the loose ends, Radin defined "the problem" as basically a "psychological one" in a final treatment of the subject a few years later. "In fact, only if we view it as primarily such, as an attempt by man to solve his problems inward and outward, does the figure of Trickster become intelligible and meaningful" (Radin 1956:xxiv). In an appendix to *The Trickster*, Jung interpreted the phenomenon as "a 'psychologem', an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity." Thus, it was a manifestation of "an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level" (ibid:200). For Karl Kerényi the function of the Trickster was "to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experiment of what is not permitted" (ibid:185).

Much later, a Freudian explanation has been developed by Michael Carroll in "Lévi-

Strauss, Freud, and the Trickster: A New Perspective upon an Old Problem” (1981). According to Freud, human beings desire both sexual satisfaction and the development of civilization. This is exactly, says Carroll, the dilemma of conflicting desires that these myths address. Expanding on Radin's original attention to the difference between the religious views of common people and those of religious specialists, Mac L. Ricketts argues that "...the trickster mythology reflects an alternative religious form held by common people – a godless humanism, a worldly religion, a religion of laughter – that celebrates human capabilities and responds to the gods by challenging them” (Gill & Sullivan 1992:309). Yet other theories have focused upon the distinction between "true" and "false" stories, or the function in trickster mythology as notions of change and self-reflection. Accordingly, Sam Gill and Irene Sullivan conclude that the Trickster can be made to fit any existing body of culture theory, and add that Radin with *Wakdjunkaga* presented a rather atypical story cycle (ibid:310-311). Thus, the world of science comes close to the world of mythology as Radin captured it in his conclusion:

The symbol which Trickster embodies is not a static one. It contains within itself the promise of differentiation, the promise of god and man. For this reason every generation occupies itself with interpreting Trickster anew. No generation understands him fully but no generation can do without him. Each had to include him in all its theologies, in all its cosmogonies, despite the fact that it realized that he did not fit properly into any of them, for he represents not only the undifferentiated and distant past, but likewise the undifferentiated present within every individual. This constitutes his universal and persistent attraction. And so he became and remained everything to every man – god, animal, human being, hero, buffoon, he was before good and evil, denier, affirmer, destroyer and creator. If we laugh at him, he grins at us. What happens to him happens to us (Radin 1956:168-169).

Obtaining the data: fieldwork, intensive study, or a give-and-take situation?

Leaving the contradictory interpretations behind, we can confidently conclude that *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* has taken a prominent position in studies of religion and mythology. Looking at the information given by Radin about the stories themselves and the people who tell them, *The Trickster* takes us even further. "The Winnebago Trickster myth (Part One) was obtained by one of my principal informants, Sam Blowsnake, in 1912, from an old Winnebago living near the village of Winnebago, Nebraska." Radin continues:

Since it is quite essential to be certain of the authenticity of the document I am presenting here, a few words about Blowsnake seems in place. Sam Blowsnake was a full-blood Winnebago belonging to the Thunderbird clan. His father was a prominent individual who, until his conversion to the Peyote religion around 1900-1910, had steadfastly adhered to every aspect of the old Winnebago culture. All his children were carefully taught this old way of life. They fasted at the proper time, were initiated into the ancient rites and were told the traditional myths, sacred and profane. The elder Blowsnake was a well-known raconteur, so his son, Sam, had ample

opportunity for becoming acquainted with most of the important myths of the tribe in authentic form. That the elder Blowsnake knew the Trickster myth is unquestioned. This does not mean, however, that he would narrate it, even to his children, unless, traditionally, he had the right to do so. He did not have this right apparently. Sam Blowsnake accordingly, at my suggestion, approached an older individual who did know it. Who this individual was I do not know. There were a number of reasons, into which I cannot enter here, why it was inadvisable for me to ask, the most important being that the myth was a sacred one and that I was a stranger and a white man (ibid:111).

From this passage, it is important to note Radin's concern regarding authenticity and, furthermore, the distinctions made between religious specialists and laymen, sacred and profane stories, and the knowing of a story and the right of telling it.

Paul Radin commenced his ethnographical *séjour* at the Nebraska reservation in a time of turmoil. The 'really old days' were long gone. As Lurie (1978:696) puts it: "In ethnographic terms much of 'traditional' Winnebago culture is the culture of the fur trade period, and while the term traditional suggests a predictable, established way of life, this was an era of revitalization and renewed optimism after the Winnebago's overwhelming defeats [against the Ottawa's and their allies] in the first half of the seventeenth century." Thus, "traditional" Winnebago culture was, as a matter of fact, a result of colonialism and global European conflicts incorporating inter-tribal warfare. Having a thorough knowledge of Winnebago history supplemented by his first-hand information on social organization, Radin (1948:5) concluded that the tribe derived from a society that had been stratified. His mass of data showed that the Winnebago had "exogamous moieties that regulated marriage, the differentiation of leadership roles and functions, and the selection of lacrosse teams. There were 12 patrilineal clans unevenly divided between the moieties. The origin story of each clan underlay that clan's list of personal names, obligations, prerogatives, taboos, reciprocal relationships regarding other clans, duties to the tribe as a whole" (Lurie 1978:694). Functions of war and peace were grouped on one side, while those relating to the policing and regulation of the hunt belonged to the other side of the twofold division (Radin 1923:135).

But, even when the 'old days' were gone, one could still find traces in the memories of the old folks. "The Winnebago social organization has long since broken down, but its details are still so well preserved in the minds of the older men, and particularly in the literature of the tribe, that no difficulty was experienced in reconstructing it" (ibid:136). Thus, Radin explained anomalies in the data as recent exceptions due to cultural deterioration. At the reservation log houses had replaced the wigwam and were in turn replaced by frame farm houses. As an island in a vast sea, the reservation was surrounded by white farmers – even connected to Sioux City in Iowa by railroad tracks. Winnebagos residing in Wisconsin were more independent (and more traditional), but still victims of displacements (the last major removal took place in 1874). Geographical confinement, breakdowns in the social system, and changes in subsistence patterns were the results of a reservation system forced upon the Winnebagos and other Indian tribes by US Indian policy. The establishment of a Dutch Reform Church mission in 1908 immediately led to fractions within the Nebraska community. It was not, however, the usual division between converts and non-converts, but a triangular formation made up by "modernists", "traditionalists", and followers of the "peyote-movement". In comparison with George Bird Grinnell's (otherwise excellent) studies of the Cheyenne, Radin is clear and honest in his account of such facts. Yet, the nature of things guided his research into mainstream anthropology of those days – the "salvage" mission of ethnography to save as much as possible of that which was doomed to disappear.

Nianājinga (Stands-on-the-water) developed his own style of fieldwork. It was

fieldwork in the sense that Radin stayed on the reservation for extended periods of research (usually during the summer months). It was also fieldwork in the Boasian sense of using key-informants and learning the language of the natives. As already stated, most data were gathered in text-form – again fitting well into the Boasian school of ethnographic research. Collaboration with educated Indians (or mixed-bloods) was the usual way of working, a tradition dating back to the early days of Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE). If anything can motivate the old English and Scandinavian notion of “intensive studies in limited areas”, it must be Radin's life-long Winnebago studies and the works of Curt (Unkel) Nimuendajú in South America. It does not seem, however, that Radin ever tried to “go native” in the way of his late BAE-colleague Frank Hamilton Cushing at Zuñi, or for that matter of Nimuendajú. Personally, I would even hesitate to label him as a “participant observer” in a general Malinowskian sense. He evidently succeeded in establishing fruitful social relations with his Winnebago informants, probably a much more easy task for him than the caretaking of academic relations. It appears, however, as Radin limited his “participation” to be that of a collector and observer of ethnographic situations – a scientist trying to provide an intimate (*emic*) picture of a foreign way of life. Perhaps, we can say that Radin came very close to what Clifford Geertz later proclaimed as “writing culture”. He was the observer, collector and writer of the words spoken by informants in a give-and-take situation. In view of recent discussions concerning ethnographical authority and early anthropology as a tool of imperialism, one has to ask the question of who was fooling who?

The main focus of Radin's research – native religion and ceremonies – is always a field of intensive debate concerning approaches, concepts and interpretations. Stern critics of his overall theoretical standpoint, as Evans-Pritchard, have pointed out that any attempt to define religion in terms of experience or feeling is vague and highly problematic (1965:38-39). From the opposite viewpoint, the phenomenological perspectives of Rudolph Otto and Mircea Eliade will always put into question Radin's notion of power and economics embedded in religion. For phenomenologists, religion “...can be understood only in its own terms, and its essence can be ascertained only by intuition” (Morris 1994:175). As we have seen, Radin's intellectual trajectory, his field experience and his fieldworking style could never lead him to such an approach. Thus, to a harsh critic of the phenomenological school, Radin could “not understand” the topic he was working on. Much more offensive than the ever-present scholarly criticism, however, was the resentment against him held by highly conservative Wisconsin Winnebagos for having published information about tribal religion. To quote Lurie (1988:550): “Radin had been downright devious in obtaining...sacred data. He explained candidly that there were old men in Nebraska who would not speak with him. Since it was vital to anthropology that their knowledge of myth and legend not die with them, he got their young kinsmen into his debts by gifts and favors. The payoff he wanted and got was the old men's stories.” Such was the case with the obtaining of the Origin Myth of the World – the most sacred of all the myths in the tribe.

It was Oliver Lamere's father – a blind old man – who made it possible to secure an account of the secret Medicine Rite. A meeting was set up with three of the elders who knew the Medicine Rite and, consequently, the origin myth:

Very dramatic circumstances attended the securing of this famous myth. The three old men who had agreed to tell it insisted that it would be too dangerous to do so on the reservation with so many of the pagans about and suggested that we all go to Sioux City, Iowa, about twenty-five miles away. Of the three men, only two were personally known to me. Of these two, one was famous throughout the Winnebago area for his sense of humor. He was not a truly religious man, according to some of the stories told about him, but he had, nevertheless, been a prominent member of the

Medicine Rite. The other was a quiet, self-contained individual who had joined the new religion essentially because he felt that the older religion had lost its meaning. He was a deeply religious person....As soon as we arrived in Sioux City we took rooms at the top floor of a little hotel. Although it was only early evening when we got there, the old men refused to make their preparations for the recounting of the myth until eleven-thirty. Then we all went to the room occupied by the Indians. Great care was taken to see there were no unwanted Indians about. When everyone was satisfied on that score the windows were firmly closed, the shades pulled down and the shutters fastened securely. The door was then locked and bolted. There was no interpreter, in fact no one who knew any English. The question of an interpreter had not even come up and it is very difficult for me to decide whether they thought I knew enough Winnebago to understand what was being said or whether they realized that I would at some future time read the account I had received in Winnebago to my interpreter, Oliver Lamere, who would then translate it for me. Precisely at midnight one of the three began the story. When it was about half finished, a second one continued it to the end. The third person said nothing except when some special point was discussed during the pauses. It had been agreed that, although they would not repeat anything, they would speak reasonably slowly so that I would have ample time to write down everything. The narration, including the interruptions, took five hours in all (Radin 1945:38-39)

It was the end of the summer of 1908 and Radin had to go back to New York – something that was rather fortunate: "...as time was thereby allowed for some of the antagonism toward my work to abate before I returned the following summer." News travelled fast at the reservation – in spite of all precautionary measures people knew about the gathering in Sioux City the day after. Radin was right, however. Stirred up feelings had calmed when he returned next summer, and he was instead introduced to his future key-informant Jasper Blowsnake who agreed to narrate the entire Medicine Rite (ibid 40-41). Performed by medicine men upon the initiation of a member to their cult, the rite recapitulated the mythic origins and heroes of the tribe. Radin possessed secret and sacred data pertaining to life, death and rebirth of man and society. He waited some thirty-five years before publishing it as *The Road of Life and Death: A Ritual Drama of the American Indians* (1945).

As we can see, the situation was far more complex than the usual outlining of "ethnographic authority". As Lurie suggest, it is quite possible that it was the Winnebago who used Radin, not the other way around. Everybody made "a good buck" as Radin had to pay twice, first to the young man who introduced him, and then to the old man for his story. Part from the pragmatics of every-day life, the situation also contained the consciousness of passing on a cultural heritage. "Salvage ethnography" is generally viewed from *our* perspective in the anthropological discourse, hardly ever in the eyes of the Other. Lurie suggest, and I think she is right, that the elders among the Winnebagos were looking for someone to preserve their cultural heritage in a period of change and instability. Days with new ways of living was becoming a reality and old knowledge was soon to be lost. It was into an "atmosphere of conflicts and dissensions" that the ethnographer stepped (Radin 1945:36). *They* chose Radin, as much as he chose the Winnebagos. The phrase "I must have been sent by God" did really mean something in a strange relation between a White man and an Indian people. Not everybody, however, particularly not the less pressured Wisconsin Winnebagos, could consent in making sacred knowledge public, but

most did.

The telling of a story

The thinkings and writings of Paul Radin took many unsuspected, sometimes even paradoxical, turns and shifts. But, his comprehension of society as an entity of individuals, and accordingly, culture as an abstraction of individual actions and ideas is the thread through all of his works. By regarding any myth as a drama in which the storyteller has the liberty to alter – to add or to disregard details to – the storyline, he could stress the importance of studying the narrator, his temperament, personality and literary talents. For Radin, primitive man was a man of reason and rationality (see for instance his famous critique of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*). By regarding religion as the human struggle to control external powers, he again could stress the individuality in primitive society, i.e. taking into account the differences between men of actions and men of thinking as well as religious and non-religious persons. To control gods or spirits was real power and a manifestation of human agency. This view, in accordance with Radin's humanistic marxism, places the formation of a class-structure before the rise of statehood, not the other way around as in Leninistic marxism. Thus, for Radin (as outlined in his discussions concerning the rise of the Maya, Mexican, and Peruvian civilizations) the "state" is only a transformation of an existing power-structure. From an evolutionary perspective spiritual power and economic power emerge:

Where the [economical] profits are greater, the numbers of the contenders for power will, very naturally, also be larger. Alliances consequently will take place between the civil and the religious competitors for control. Classes and castes arise and stratified societies appear. But the struggle for power between individuals or between groups and classes is only one aspect of the new conditions which this greater economic security and stability brings about. With agriculture, there are almost universally associated – Polynesia and Malaysia excepted – totemic clans and a type of society in which the activities of the individual become subordinated to highly integrated social units with mystical associations (Radin 1937:56-57).

Later, in *The World of Primitive Man*, Radin again stressed that basic human and economic elements are to be found, without exception, among all aboriginal tribes:

I realize that to speak of an economic structure basic to all primitive peoples seems on the face to it, preposterous, particularly if we visualize the fundamental differences which exist in the methods of exchange and the types of political organization which have arisen in connection with them (Radin 1953:105).

All aboriginal peoples accept the theory that every human being has the inalienable right to an irreducible right to an irreducible minimum, consisting of adequate food, shelter and clothing. We must, Radin argues, understand society from the point of view of its meaning to its participants. We must divorce our minds completely of the notion that primitive peoples are simple – mentally

and emotionally – and that their demands are modest (ibid:106-107). Moving from a micro- to a macro-perspective – from individuals to societies – Radin does not lose himself into a notion of anonymous power-structures – both spiritual and economical authority are concrete, in the hands of rational individuals which make them the determining forces in the struggle between cultural consistency and change. In a comprehensive introduction to the reprint of Radin's *The Method and Theory of Ethnology*, Arthur J. Vidich states: "To know the primitive world requires that the anthropologists be wholly aware of the historical context and the personal factors relevant to every observation he makes before he can be sure of its significance" (Radin 1933:xiv). In other words, history is the result of concrete events and individual actions.

Time after time, Radin returned to the distinction between men of action and men of thinking. Permanent was also his attempt to understand society from the point of view of its meaning to its participants. Throughout his life-time he studied the Winnebago, thus never assumed a final attitude toward his data. The more he learned from them, the more he changed his view on primitive society and anthropology in general. With this deep knowledge grounded in years of fieldwork he got the "capacity to project himself into and interpret primitive societies which he knew only through the work of others" (ibid:xix). Moving between macro- and micro-interpretations of cultural history, Radin obviously tried to keep his methodological rigidity. Still, we can find the unpredictable Trickster trait in his writing. It is puzzling to know that he – without acknowledging it – merged the Blowsnake brothers into a "fictional" Crashing Thunder in *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian*.

Prologue: A critical perspective on anthropology

Paul Radin put forward his view on anthropology in *The Method and Theory of Ethnology* and to some extent in *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (one of the neglected classics according to Clifford Geertz). This is not the place, however, to treat this subject in detail. Thus, I will just give some concluding remarks regarding the implications of Radin's deeply liberated intellect enforced by his field experiences among the Winnebago. As already pointed out, his understanding of society, and history differs radically from the Boasian mainstream. For Radin *society* was a cluster of individuals, *culture* not a key-concept but an abstraction of individual ideas, and *history* the description of a period with specific events. Thus, his understanding of anthropological phenomena was far from Alfred Kroeber who in "The Superorganic" (1917:192-193) stated that:

Mentality relates to the individual. The social or cultural, on the other hand is in its very essence non-individual. Civilization, as such, begins only where the individual ends; and whoever does not in some measure perceive this fact, though as a brute and rootless one, can find no meaning in civilization, and history for him must be only a wearying jumble, or an opportunity for the exercise of art.

Kroeber moved towards structuralistic interpretations of macro-history, while their mutual teacher Franz Boas remained extremely critical to all kind of (over)generalizations. For Boas, data spoke for themselves. Radin celebrated Boas' criticism of evolutionists like Tylor and Frazer, but was very critical of what he understood as a confusion of cultural facts with physical facts. Yet another example of Radin's distinct perspective on history is his response to Edward Sapir's "Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture". Sapir (1916:4) writes:

One of the characteristic traits of history is its emphasis on the individual and personal. While the importance of individual events and personalities for the progress of human affairs is not to be underestimated, the historical reconstructions of the cultural anthropologist can only deal, with comparatively few exceptions, with generalized events and individuals. Instead of speaking, for instance, of the specific influence exerted by a particular shaman of a tribe at an inaccessible period in the past, cultural anthropology will have to lump together a number of such phenomena and generalize as to the influence exerted by the class of shamans at a more or less well defined time and place. Or, if it is a question of the social relations between two tribes, say the Haida and Tsimshian, it may in a number of cases have to content itself with a broad definition of such relations, taking, for instance, the Haida and Tsimshian as such as the units directly involved, though perfectly aware that the actual mechanism of the relation is in every case borne by individuals, house-groups, or clans, that is, by subdivisions of the historical units ostensibly concerned. A great deal of such substitution of the whole for the part is unavoidable in ethnology. These...limitations must be frankly recognized, but they need not in the slightest obscure the application of historical methods to the field of cultural anthropology.

Radin's comment on his good friend's generalized events or generalized individual sounds:

If I follow Sapir's argument here, he first admits that history deals with specific individuals and events, that in the reconstruction of the history of aboriginal culture it is impossible to obtain the requisite information with regard to these individuals or events, and that therefore we must operate with generalized events and individualities! Since, however, the latter do not properly exist, we must, so to speak, re-endow them with as much reality as we can; and since we cannot give them a qualitative correction, we must give them a quantitative one! In other words, we are asked to devitalize something which we have never known and then to endow this unknown something with a new life and assume that what we have breathed into it is the life it originally possessed. This is certainly a most amazing type of procedure (Radin 1933:55-57).

"Pseudo-history" was the term he use for the works of Kroeber, Sapir, Wissler, Benedict, Meed, and others. In such a manner, Radin continued to evaluate his fellow anthropologists. He was certainly cruel towards Margaret Mead – labeling her standard one-year fieldworks as extremely superficial. Furthermore, he regarded her work as essentially unhistorical (ibid:178-179). Robert Lowie – his very best friend – escaped most of it, although Radin could never accept his definition of ethnology as the "science of culture". They were just "studying specific cultures" and Paul Radin "has left us with what is perhaps the most complete and detailed long-term record in monographs and field notes that we have of a primitive society as seen by a single observer through all the stages of his own intellectual history" (Vidich in Radin 1933:xviii-xix).

References

Boas, F.
–1940. *Race, Language, and Culture*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago & London (Midway

Reprising edition) 1988.

Carroll, M. P.

–1981. "Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and the Trickster: A New Perspective upon an Old Problem". *American Ethnologist*, Vol 8.

Diamond, S. (ed)

–1960. *Culture and History*. Columbia University Press. New York.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E.

–1965. *Theories of Primitive Religion*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Geertz, C.

–1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Fontana Press. London 1993.

Gill, S. D. & Sullivan, I. F.

–1992. *Dictionary of Native American Mythology*. Oxford University Press. New York & Oxford.

Kroeber, A. L.

–1917. "The Superorganic". *American Anthropologist*, Vol 19, No 2.

Lévy-Bruhl, L.

–1910. *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*. Authorized Translation by Lilian A. Clare, *How Natives Think*, Princeton University Press. Princeton 1985.

Lurie, N. O.

–1978. "Winnebago". In *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol 15. Washington.

–1988. "Relations Between Indians and Anthropologists". In *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol 4. Washington.

Morris, B.

–1994. *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Radin, Paul

–1913. "Personal Reminiscences of a Winnebago Indian". *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol 26.

–1920. *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian*. Dover Publications. New York 1963.

–1923. *The Winnebago Tribe*. University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln and London 1990.

–1926. *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian*. University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln and London 1983.

–1927a. *Primitive Man as Philosopher*. Dover Publications. New York 1957.

–1927b. *The Story of the American Indian*. Liveright Publishing Corporation. New York 1944.

–1933. *The Method and Theory of Ethnology*. Basic Books. New York 1966.

–1937. *Primitive Religion*. Dover Publications, Inc. New York 1957.

–1945. *The Road of Life and Death: A Ritual Drama of the American Indians*. Princeton University Press. Princeton 1991.

–1948. "Winnebago Hero Cycles: A Study in Aboriginal Literature." *Indiana University Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics*, Memoir 1. Bloomington.

- 1949. "The Culture of the Winnebago: As Described by Themselves. *Indiana University Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics*, Memoir 2. Bloomington.
- 1950. "The Origin Myth of the Medicine Rite: Three Versions. *Indiana University Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics*, Memoir 3. Bloomington.
- 1953. *The World of Primitive Man*. Henry Schuman. New York.
- 1956. *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. Schocken Books. New York 1972.

Sapir, E.

- 1916. "Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture: A Study in Method". Geological Survey of Canada, Anthropological Series, No 13.

1. Wisconsin was the traditional homeland of the Winnebago, but one division of the tribe resided in Nebraska.
2. I would like to thank my dear friends and colleagues professor emeritus Åke Hultkrantz and doctoral student Mikael Salomonsson who kindly have supported and commented my research.
3. Personal conversations with Åke Hultkrantz, John Rowe, and Eric Wolf.